4. Basic Syntax

Nearly all Markdown applications support the basic syntax outlined in John Gruber's original design document. There are minor variations and discrepancies between Markdown processors — those are noted inline wherever possible.

Headings

To create a heading, add number signs (#) in front of a word or phrase. The number of number signs you use should correspond to the heading level. For example, to create a heading level three (<h3>), use three number signs (e.g., ### My Header).

Markdown	HTML
`# Heading level 1`	`<h1>Heading level 1</h1>`
`## Heading level 2`	`<h2>Heading level 2</h2>`
`### Heading level 3`	`<h3>Heading level 3</h3>`
`#### Heading level 4`	`<h4>Heading level 4</h4>`
`##### Heading level 5`	`<h5>Heading level 5</h5>`
`###### Heading level 6`	`<h6>Heading level 6</h6>`

Alternate Syntax

Alternatively, on the line below the text, add any number of == characters for heading level 1 or -- characters for heading level 2.

Markdown	HTML
`Heading level 1` `===============`	`<h1>Heading level 1</h1>`
`Heading level 2` `---------------`	`<h2>Heading level 2</h2>`

Heading Best Practices

Markdown applications don't agree on how to handle a missing space between the number signs (#) and the heading name. For compatibility, always put a space between the number signs and the heading name.

Do this	Don't do this
`# Here's a Heading`	`#Here's a Heading`

You should also put blank lines before and after a heading for compatibility.

Do this	Don't do this
`Try to put a blank line`	`Without blank lines, this`
`before...`	`might not look right.`
	`# Heading`
`# Heading`	`Don't do this!`
`...and after a heading.`	

Paragraphs

To create paragraphs, use a blank line to separate one or more lines of text.

Markdown

```
1  I really like using Markdown.
2
3  I think I'll use it from now on.
```

HTML

```
1  <p>I really like using Markdown.</p>
2
3  <p>I think I'll use it from now on.</p>
```

The rendered output looks like this:

I really like using Markdown.

I think I'll use it from now on.

Paragraph Best Practices

Unless the paragraph is in a list, don't indent paragraphs with spaces or tabs.

Do this	Don't do this
Don't put tabs or spaces in front of your paragraphs.	This can result in unexpected formatting problems.
Keep lines left-aligned like this.	Don't add tabs or spaces in front of paragraphs.

Line Breaks

To create a line break (`<br>`), end a line with two or more spaces, and then type return.

Markdown

```
1  This is the first line.
2  And this is the second line.
```

HTML

```
1  <p>This is the first line.<br />
2  And this is the second line.</p>
```

The rendered output looks like this:

This is the first line.
And this is the second line.

Line Break Best Practices

You can use two or more spaces (commonly referred to as "trailing whitespace") for line breaks in nearly every Markdown application, but it's controversial. It's hard to

see trailing whitespace in an editor, and many people accidentally or intentionally put two spaces after every sentence. For this reason, you may want to use something other than trailing whitespace for line breaks. If your Markdown application supports HTML, you can use the ‹br› HTML tag.

For compatibility, use trailing white space or the ‹br› HTML tag at the end of the line.

There are two other options I don't recommend using. CommonMark and a few other lightweight markup languages let you type a backslash (\) at the end of the line, but not all Markdown applications support this, so it isn't a great option from a compatibility perspective. And at least a couple lightweight markup languages don't require anything at the end of the line — just type return and they'll create a line break.

Do this	Don't do this
| ```
First line with two spaces
after.
And the next line.
``` | ```
First line with a backslash
after.\
And the next line.
``` |
| ```
With the HTML tag after.<br>
And the next line.
``` | ```
With nothing after.
And the next line.
``` |

Emphasis

You can add emphasis by making text bold or italic.

Bold

To bold text, add two asterisks or underscores before and after a word or phrase. To bold the middle of a word for emphasis, add two asterisks without spaces around the letters.

Markdown

```
1  I love **bold text**.
2
3  I love __bold text__.
4
5  Love**is**bold
```

The HTML output of the first two examples is the same.

HTML

```
1  I love <strong>bold text</strong>.
2
3  Love<strong>is</strong>bold
```

The rendered output looks like this:

I love **bold text**.

Love**is**bold

Bold Best Practices

Markdown applications don't agree on how to handle underscores in the middle of a word. For compatibility, use asterisks to bold the middle of a word for emphasis.

Do this	Don't do this
Love**is**bold	Love__is__bold

Italic

To italicize text, add one asterisk or underscore before and after a word or phrase. To italicize the middle of a word for emphasis, add one asterisk without spaces around the letters.

Markdown

```
1  The *cat's meow*.
2
3  The _cat's meow_.
4
5  A*cat*meow
```

The HTML output of the first two examples is the same.

HTML

```
1  The <em>cat's meow</em>.
2
3  A<em>cat</em>meow
```

The rendered output looks like this:

The *cat's meow.*

A*cat*meow

Italic Best Practices

Markdown applications don't agree on how to handle underscores in the middle of a word. For compatibility, use asterisks to italicize the middle of a word for emphasis.

Do this	Don't do this
A*cat*meow	A_cat_meow

Bold and Italic

To emphasize text with bold and italics at the same time, add three asterisks or underscores before and after a word or phrase. To bold and italicize the middle of a word for emphasis, add three asterisks without spaces around the letters.

Markdown

```
1  ***Important*** text.
2
3  ___Important___ text.
4
5  __*Important*__ text.
6
7  **_Important_** text.
8
9  Really***very***important text.
```

The HTML output of the first four examples is the same.

HTML

```
1  <strong><em>Important</em></strong> text.
2
3  Really<strong><em>very</em></strong>important text.
```

The rendered output looks like this:

Important text.

Really***very***important text.

Bold and Italic Best Practices

Markdown applications don't agree on how to handle underscores in the middle of a word. For compatibility, use asterisks to bold and italicize the middle of a word for emphasis.

Do this	Don't do this
Really***very***important text.	Really___very___important text.

Blockquotes

To create a blockquote, add a › in front of a paragraph.

Markdown

```
1   > Dorothy followed her through many rooms.
```

HTML

```
1   <blockquote>
2     <p>Dorothy followed her through many rooms.</p>
3   </blockquote>
```

The rendered output looks like this:

> Dorothy followed her through many rooms.

Blockquotes with Multiple Paragraphs

Blockquotes can contain multiple paragraphs. Add a › on the blank lines between the paragraphs.

Markdown

```
1   > This the first paragraph.
2   >
3   > And this is the second paragraph.
```

HTML

```
1  <blockquote>
2    <p>This the first paragraph.</p>
3    <p>And this is the second paragraph.</p>
4  </blockquote>
```

The rendered output looks like this:

> This the first paragraph.
>
> And this is the second paragraph.

Nested Blockquotes

Blockquotes can be nested. Add a ›› in front of the paragraph you want to nest.

Markdown

```
1  > This the first paragraph.
2  >
3  >> And this is the nested paragraph.
```

HTML

```
1  <blockquote>
2    <p>This the first paragraph.</p>
3    <blockquote>
4      <p>And this is the nested paragraph.</p>
5    </blockquote>
6  </blockquote>
```

The rendered output looks like this:

> This the first paragraph.
>
> > And this is the nested paragraph.

Blockquotes with Other Elements

Blockquotes can contain other Markdown formatted elements. Not all elements can be used — you'll need to experiment to see which ones work.

Markdown

```
1  > ##### The quarterly results look great!
2  >
3  > - Revenue was off the chart.
4  > - Profits were higher than ever.
5  >
6  >  *Everything* is going **well**.
```

HTML

```
1  <blockquote>
2    <h5>The quarterly results look great!</h5>
3    <ul>
4      <li>Revenue was off the chart.</li>
5      <li>Profits were higher than ever.</li>
6    </ul>
7    <p><em>Everything</em> is going <strong>well</strong>.</p>
8  </blockquote>
```

The rendered output looks like this:

> ### The quarterly results look great!
>
> - Revenue was off the chart.
> - Profits were higher than ever.
>
> *Everything* is going **well**.

Blockquotes Best Practices

For compatibility, put blank lines before and after blockquotes.