

## **Setting IDE or Editor Tabs to 4 Whitespaces**

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# 1 Introduction

The goal of this document is to show how to set tabs to four whitespaces for various editors and IDE's. Through extensive use of SVN, it has been noted that tabs cause a lot of problems when trying to compare between two versions of a file. This is because a tab is seen as a `\t` while spaces are seen as `' '` to the comparison tool. It is easier to explain the problems caused by tabs with the following anecdote:

A file `DB.php` was written two months ago using an editor that implemented tabs as `\t`. The software developer `hai_ng` has been assigned the task of fixing a bug and needs to modify the file `DB.php` and does so using an editor that sets tabs to 4 whitespaces. The fix turned out to be only 1 line of code. He performs a commit and fixed his assigned bug.

His fix however results in a new bug which has been assigned to the developer who wrote the file two months ago. The developer first needs to see what changes `hai_ng` made to try and get clues on what the problem could be. The developer opens a comparison tool, and is told that EVERY 2500 lines of code (instead of 1) have been modified and does not know where to start to investigate the problem.

A solution to this would be for everyone to set their editor to implement tabs as `\t`. However, developers may sometimes use space bar to make code look aligned... so it's better to simply set everything to whitespaces.

## 2 Editor's and IDE's Covered

The following are covered in this document:

- Windows Notepad++
  - Note: Please **do not** use Notepad. Download Notepad++.
- Linux Gedit
- Eclipse
- Netbeans

## **3 Instructions**

### **3.1 Windows Notepad++**

- Settings -> Preferences -> Language Menu/Tab Settings
- Set Tab Size to 4
- Check the box “Replace by space”

### **3.2 Linux Gedit**

- Edit -> Preferences -> Editor
- Under “Tab Stops”:
  - Set “Tab width” to 4
  - Check the box “Insert spaces instead of tabs”

### **3.3 Eclipse**

- Windows -> Preferences -> PHP -> Code Style -> Formatter
- Set “Tab policy” to “Spaces”
- Set “Indentation size” to 4

### **3.4 Netbeans**

- Tools -> Options -> Editor -> Formatting
- Check the box “Expand tabs to spaces”
- Set “Number of Spaces per indent” to 4
- Set “Tab size” to 4