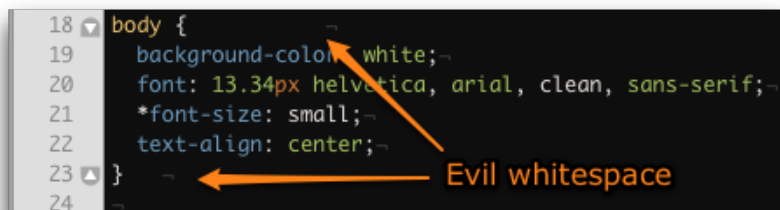# Waging War on Whitespace (using TextMate)

March 31, 2009 – Leesburg, VA

If you've ever written code on a team, you've likely encountered what I call *diff cruft*. Diff cruft is what happens when a developer commits a change to some code that has trailing whitespace (either tabs or spaces) at the end of a line. When viewing the code changes in a diff, this extraneous whitespace stands out and often distracts from what is important.
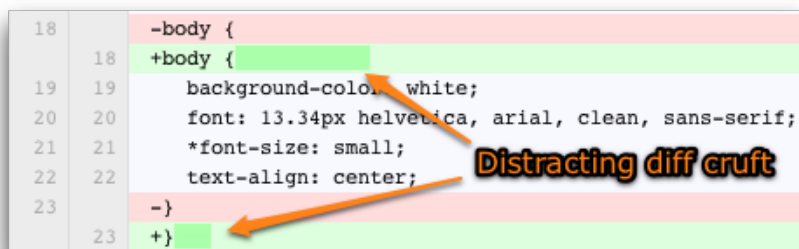
For example:

will look like this in a diff (GitHub's diff in this case)…

To avoid diff cruft you'll need to instruct your text editor to remove trailing whitespace, preferably *every time you save* so you don't have to remember to do it. If this is a built-in feature, great; if not, hopefully your editor empowers you to emulate this functionality yourself[1].

My preferred editor on Mac OS X is TextMate[2]. While it ships with a "Remove Trailing Spaces in Document / Selection"[3] command it does not run it on save. Here is how I created a macro to do just that:

- Create a command called "Save Document" as follows:
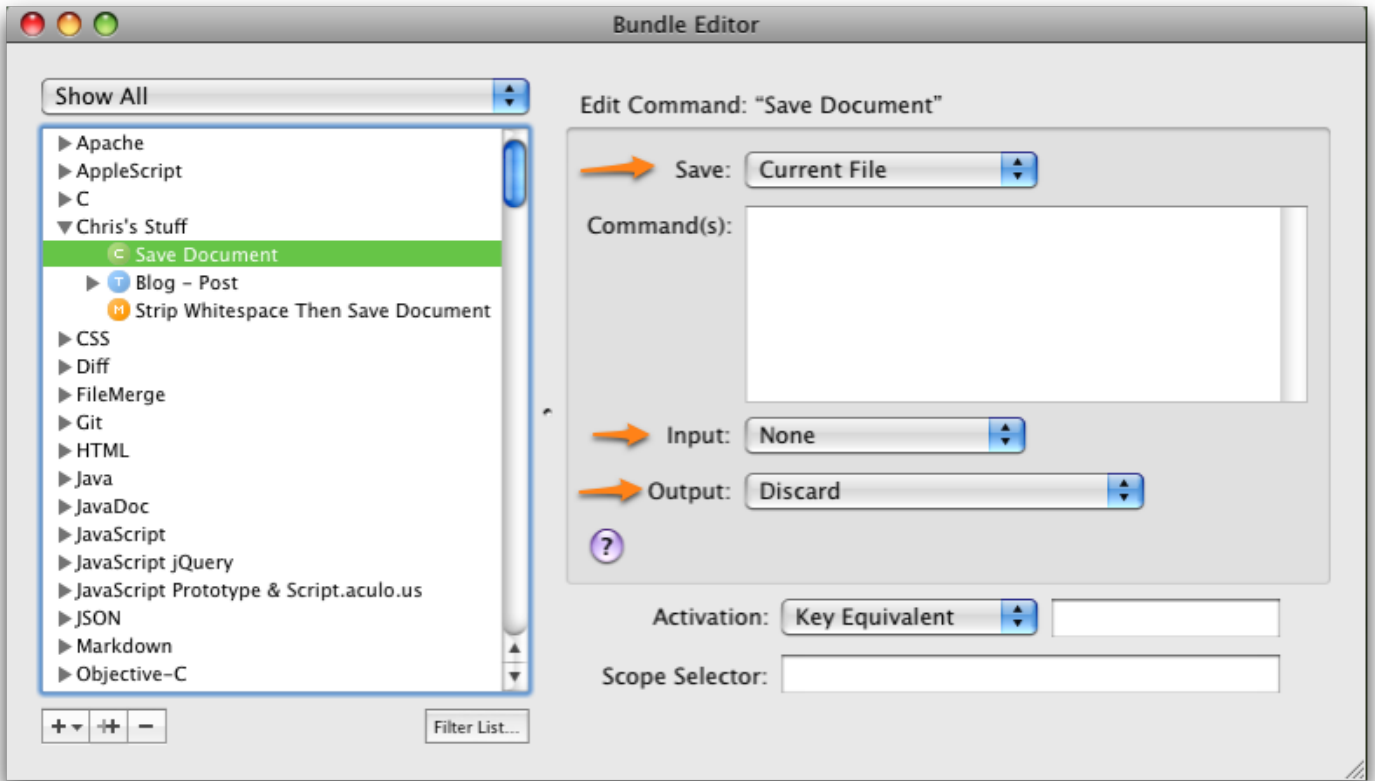
- Record a macro where you run the "Remove Trailing Spaces" command.
- Then run your "Save Document" command.
- Save the macro as something like "Strip Whitespace Then Save Document."
- Assign it to the ⌘S key equivalent.
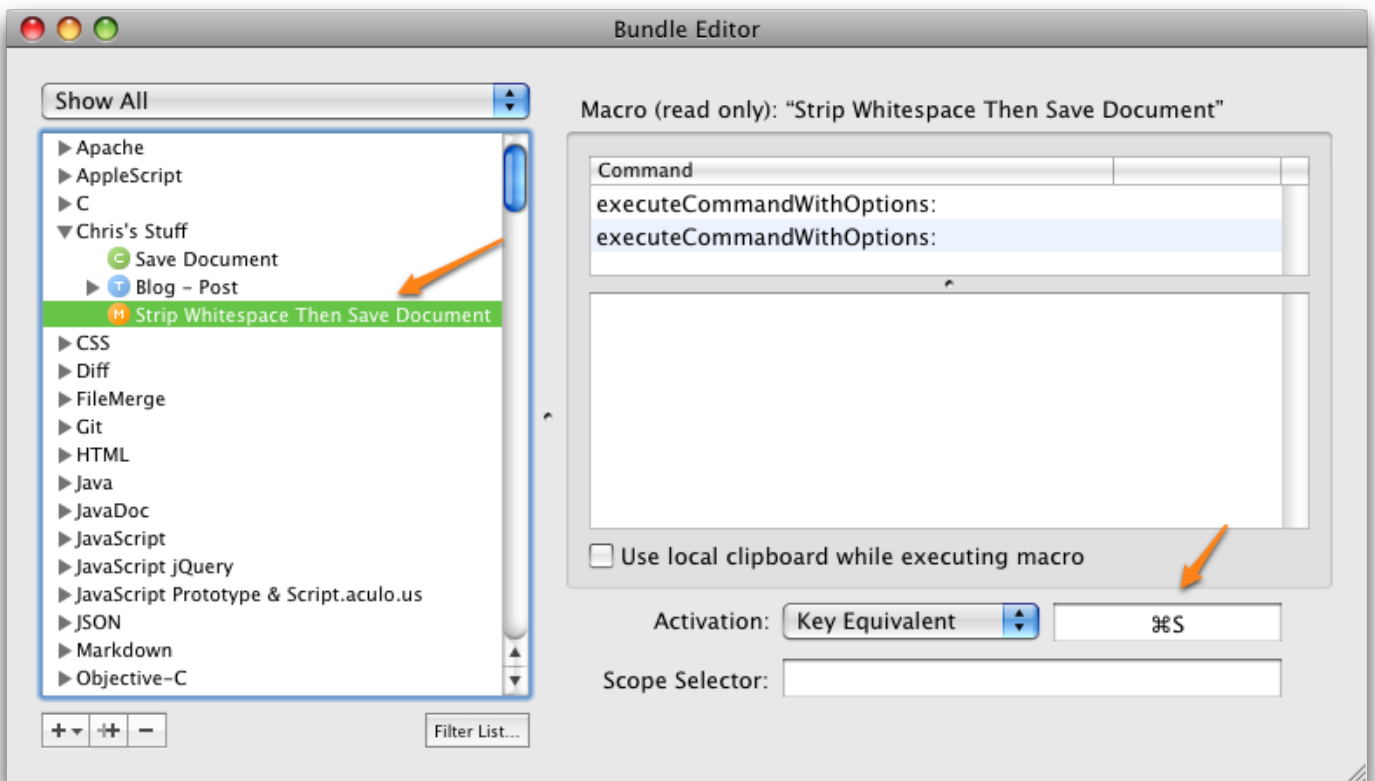
- Reload your bundles and any document you save will strip trailing whitespace.[4]

So, along with its unruly cousin, the tab[5], trailing whitespace is evil. Avoiding both, your peers will (or should) thank you for it.