

JSON Formatting

“JavaScript Object Notation” is widely used. It is used as a data interchange standard and is also human-readable. One thing I dislike about it, is the way it’s usually formatted.

jq

`jq` is the most popular tool to format and query JSON.

When formatting, it puts commas at the end of a line. Brackets (`[,]`) and curly braces (`{,}`) are on their own lines (line 1) or together with a field key (line 4).

jq formatting

```
1 {  
2   "credits": {  
3     "director": "Steven Spielberg",  
4     "starring": [  
5       "Sam Neill",  
6       "Laura Dern",  
7       "Jeff Goldblum"  
8     ]  
9   },  
10  "released": 1993,  
11  "title": "Jurassic Park"  
12 }
```

my Preference

I personally prefer the formatting to be similar to Haskell lists. The opening bracket (`[`) / curly brace (`{`) is on the same line as the first element of the starting object / array. Leading Commas are indented the same as the opening bracket / curly brace.

my preferred formatting

```
1 { "credits":  
2   { "director": "Steven Spielberg"  
3   , "starring":  
4     [ "Sam Neill"  
5     , "Laura Dern"  
6     , "Jeff Goldblum"  
7     ]  
8   }  
9   , "released": 1993  
10  , "title": "Jurassic Park"
```

```
11 }
```

Why do I like this better?

- The structural components (object, array) can always be recognized on the left, while the content (string, number, boolean) is always on the right.
- Single line JSON values are on the same line as their key.
- Multi line JSON values are on their own lines. Compare line 4-8 by jq and line 4-7 by me.
- Line based diffs are slightly more efficient.
- There are shorter and fewer lines overall.
- Trailing commas are easily forgotten.

Last note

I can totally understand, if you call this article nit-picking. It's definitely more important to agree on one kind of formatting, than to use the optimal kind of formatting. It's just a minor thing that has bugged me before.