

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"
```

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.