

Word processing for writers



By Amanda Greenslade

If you want your manuscript to be taken seriously by professionals in the publishing industry, then it pays to get on top of some of the basic technology being used. There are a variety of word processing programs available on computers including Microsoft Word, Open Office and Star Office (PC & Mac); iWork Pages, Apple Works and TextEdit (Mac). Because Microsoft Word has set the benchmark on both PC and Mac and tends to be the most common, with similar features in other software, this article focuses on the use of MS Word.

Learning how to format manuscripts properly in Word and making them typography-friendly may enhance your chances of being published. Whilst magazine editors and publishers are not necessarily looking for someone who knows how to use tabulation, indentation and symbols properly in Word, doing so will make your writing much easier for them to work with. This ultimately makes your work more practical and professional.

Using the reviewing features in Word and mastering how to name your files properly in your operating system could save hours of work and prevent an organisational-meltdown, if, for example, you forget which version of your document is the most recent.

To some, this advice may seem very basic, but I am frequently surprised by the lack of basic computer-skills, even in adults who use them every day of their lives. Like most things, if we have found a way of doing something that seems to work, we often don't look any further to see if there is a better and/or quicker

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way. With the release of Microsoft Office 2007, it is no longer possible to give specific instructions that would apply to both old and new versions of Word, so I've written ‘03’ in front of the instructions for Word 2003 and ‘07’ for the new. The arrow symbol ‘→’ is sometimes used instead of ‘go to the following menu/drop-down list’ or ‘then click’ etc. A bold ellipsis (...) indicates I haven't finished giving instructions for that version and to read on to the end where the instructions are the same for both versions. Keyboard

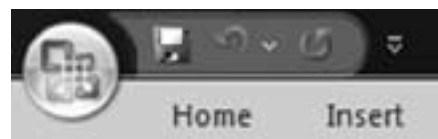
shortcuts are shown in brackets and the ‘+’ symbol means to press down the first key, hold it and then also press the next key.

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Basics in Microsoft Word

The importance of a writer learning to use Microsoft Word is just like an electrician becoming intimately familiar with the way a house is wired, using a megger, power tools, turbo torch and so on. As with most things on the computer, there is often ‘more than one way to skin a cat’. What follows are some of the best ways for a writer to use Microsoft Word. For example, instead of manually typing in your page numbers and lining them up and having to re-do them every time you change enough words to shift a page down, simply **03** → ‘View’ → ‘Header and footer’ → ‘Insert Page Number’ (icon of a page with a hash on it) or **07** → ‘Insert’ → ‘Page Number’ and Word will take care of it for you.

If you discover you've been spelling a certain place-name incorrectly throughout your article or story, instead of manually scanning through and changing every occurrence, use the find and replace tool: **03** → ‘Edit’ → ‘Find’ (**CTRL+F**) ... , **07** → ‘Home’ → ‘Replace’. Don't be afraid of the power of this tool, but do think about whether the word you're replacing could be an embedded part of other words. Click on ‘More’ and read all the settings and options. Ticking ‘whole words only’ will protect other words that contain the word you're replacing, but it will mean that pluralised versions of it, etc., will not get changed and you'll have to think of these and do a second ‘Find/Replace’. If in doubt, simply make a backup copy of your document before doing the Find/Replace. Or you can always use **03** → ‘Edit’ → ‘Undo’, **07** → left-pointing arrow in the top left corner (see image), to undo a mistake you've just made (**CTRL+Z**).



Clockwise from left: The new Microsoft Office Button, Save icon, Undo icon, Re-do icon, Quick Access Toolbar, Insert menu, Home menu (Word 2007)

To determine the number of words in your document **03** → 'Tools' → 'Word Count' (**ALT+T+W**), **07** just look in the lower left corner—the word count is always there. You can also view the number of words in a selection (click and drag the paragraph or line then do the above, or **CTRL+click** and drag to select paragraphs or lines that aren't next to each other). The **CTRL+click** feature is also useful when you want to apply certain formatting to several elements on the page that aren't side by side.

Formatting in Microsoft Word

Do not use spaces or returns to format. Can't get your heading or list where you want it? Using spaces and other incorrect formatting is the bane of a typographer's job. Whilst you have painstakingly inserted enough spaces to make your headings or lists line up the way you want them to in Word, doing them with spaces

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means they are not scalable. The second the document's fonts, alignment, indents, paragraph spacing etc. is changed, they all go 'out of whack'. Also, when a typographer 'places' your document into their layout software (eg. Adobe InDesign or

Quark Express), perhaps it is going into columns or a narrower page size than your Word document. If you have used spaces to format your document, then all the formatting will have to be re-done by the typographer.

One good way to format paragraphs is with indentation (using the little grey arrows on the ruler at the top of the screen—if it is not visible then **03/07** → 'View' → tick 'Ruler'). Move the little arrow at the top to indent the first line only, move the bottom one (which will also move the top one) to indent entire paragraphs, eg. for large citations. If you want a hanging paragraph, first indent the entire paragraph, then move the top arrow back, which affects only the first line. Use consistent indents throughout your document. Do not use both block paragraphs and indented paragraphs in one document; rather use one or the other (this article uses block paragraphs).

When considering whether a citation is big enough to warrant being indented, make sure you read samples from or, better yet, the style guide for, the publisher or magazine you are writing for. Some magazines, for example, want any quotes that are more than three or four lines indented so that they stand out as a quote. Bear in mind that three or four lines in your Word document are probably more like 6 or 7 in a novel-sized book or even more in a magazine layout with columns. It will not be possible for you to predict exactly how many citations the typographer will want indented (sometimes this depends on how well the article is

fitting on the allotted pages), but you can get close.

Traditional publishers (eg. of books) prefer to receive hard-copy manuscripts that are double-spaced with 'generous' margins around the edges in case they want to write on it. Keep your 'master' document in normal, single-spacing so that you can visualise, as you're writing, how it will look. When sending it to a publisher, save a new copy of it specifically for that publisher and apply the double-spacing as follows: **03** → 'Format' → 'Paragraph' ... , **07** → 'Page Layout' → In the 'Paragraph' section, click the little arrow, in the lower-left corner, to show the 'Paragraph' dialog box → **03/07** under 'Line Spacing' tick 'Double'.

For lists, use the numbered or bulleted list feature in Word. Just type an asterisk and some words, press enter and Word will 'autoformat' it for you. While it may seem frustrating at first—the way Word will 'autoformat' things you don't want it to—once you are used to it, it is a great time-saver. If Word has 'autoformatted' something you don't want it to, just go to Undo (**CTRL+Z**). This will undo the auto-format not the last key-press or mouse-click made by you.

Do not use tabs unless you have to. In most cases, simply using left-, centre- and right-align is sufficient. For tables, it is less work to use the table feature in Word than to use tabs: **03** → 'Table' → 'Insert Table', **07** → 'Insert' → 'Table'. Getting fed up with Word not letting you move your table widths the way you want? Try selecting the entire table first (click and drag with the mouse) then move your mouse over the vertical line you're trying to move until it turns into two little arrows with two lines. If you want to narrow the entire width of your table without making the columns uneven, just resize, select the whole table, right-click and go to 'Distribute Columns Evenly'. Don't spend too much time on tables as no matter what you do they will probably have to be tweaked a fair bit at the layout stage anyway.

Something that drives editors or layout designers bonkers is having to re-number references when changes are made (if there are any in your article). If using footnotes or endnotes, don't just type them in manually. Instead, use the 'referencing' feature in Word. That way, if you remove one of your references from the body of the document, it will automatically re-order all subsequent references, including the numbers in your footnote or endnote list. If referring to the same reference number a second time, be sure to use a 'cross-reference' in Word, which will also stay 'relative' if you make changes to the order of previous numbers, **03** 'Insert' → 'Reference' → 'Cross-reference', **07** 'Insert' → 'Cross-reference'.

Symbols are another feature that all writers would be wise to master in Word. **03/07** → 'Insert' → 'Symbol' → pick from what's available in the font of your choice. Go to the 'Special Characters' tab to find em-dash (—), en-dash (–), copyright (©), registered (®) and trademark (™) symbols etc. Em-dash is a dash the width of a capital 'M' and is usually used to denote a pause in a

sentence or to break up a heading. En-dash is a dash the width of a capital 'N' and usually means 'to' or 'then'. Hyphens should only be used for hyphenated words (leave the paragraph hyphenation for fitting in columns and around pictures to the typographers; most will use these sparingly as they tend to interrupt reading-flow).

Find out whether your target-editor or publisher prefers spaces on either side of em-dashes or not (usually so for Australia, usually not for USA, UK) and adjust your manuscript accordingly. Ensure that when you type a quote-mark in Word (') it is slanted or curly, not straight. If it's straight, you need to **03** → 'Format' → Auto Format → Options → Tick to replace straight quotes with smart quotes or **07** → Microsoft Office Button (top left colourful logo) → Word Options → Proofing → AutoCorrect Options → Autoformat as you type → Tick to replace straight quotes with smart quotes. Straight quotes generally shouldn't have a place in any published work and are even avoided by websites. In HTML there are special 'entity codes'—like **‘** or **’**—to ensure that curly quotes are displayed properly in a myriad of browsers and email software. Straight quotes are used within the HTML tags as part of that language. If your quote marks are not 'typographer's (smart/curly) quotes' in Word, then most WYSIWYG web-page software will not convert them to entity codes. Using these symbols instead of ordinary hyphens, straight quotes, and so forth, may reduce the work required by your editor or their typographer. In a busy world, editors appreciate working with writers that share their attention to detail.

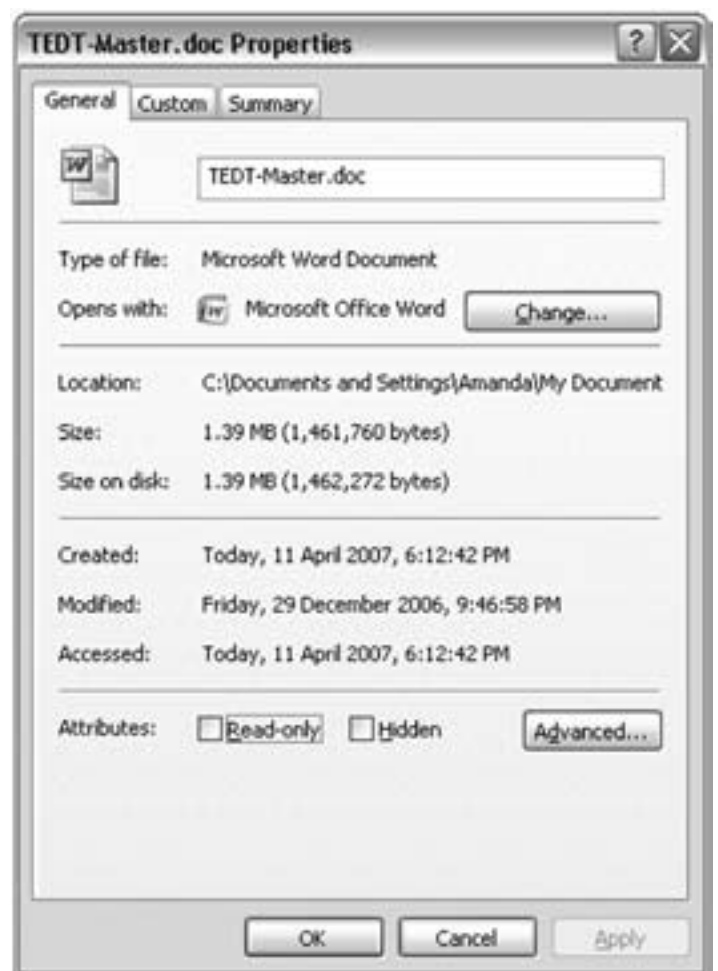
Reviewing tools in Microsoft Word

Ever been to a writers' group to have your work critiqued only to come home with 20 printed copies all with copious notations and corrections written all over them? Not many things can be quite as daunting as having to go through and analyse the constructive (or otherwise) criticism of 20 different people and somehow decide which person's responses to accept and which to reject. Writers' group critiques can be among the most valuable editing you can get for your writing. Nevertheless it can be a discouragement to doing further work on your manuscript. In this day and age of electronic communication, where some writers' groups don't even meet face-to-face, but contact each other primarily over the Internet, there are some tools you can use to make the proofing and editing workflow much smoother.

Instead of printing copies of your manuscript for your proof-readers or writing buddies to work on, convince them that doing it on the computer will be much easier for them and you. Doing it one at a time, tag-team style will also ultimately save time. To try out the reviewing tools in Microsoft Word (tracked changes) for yourself, simply **03** go to the 'Tools' menu, then turn 'Track Changes' on, **07** go to the 'Review' menu and turn 'Track Changes' on. Now every edit you make will appear in red and formatting changes will be noted on

the right in 'comment' balloons. If your proof-reader wants to make a comment about something for you to work on more, they can go to **03** the 'Insert Comment' icon which looks like a yellow post-it (if this is not visible, turn on the 'Reviewing' toolbar by going to View → Toolbars → Reviewing), **07** 'Review' menu, then 'New Comment'. When the manuscript comes back to you full of lines and red text, don't be afraid. All you have to do then is right click on each edit and either 'Accept' or 'Reject'. Once you've read the comments and actioned them, just right-click and 'delete comment'. Alternatively, **03/07** you can click the drop-down arrow under 'Accept' and then 'Accept all changes in document'.

You can even make your document ready for tracked changes before you send it to your proof-reader. Just **03** → Tools → Protect Document → Tick 'Allow only this type of editing ...' and select 'Tracked Changes' from the drop-down, **07** go to the 'Review' menu and click on 'Protect Document', then under '2. Editing restrictions' tick 'Allow only this type of editing in the document' and select 'Tracked Changes' from the drop-down menu, then click the 'Yes, Start Enforcing Protection' button.



I recommend not putting in a password, unless your proof-reader is likely to turn off tracked changes AND you have somewhere to write it down. For an editor at a publishing house or magazine, leave it up to them if they wish to use tracked changes.

Organising Files

This segment will focus on Windows, the operating system on most PCs, but you could apply the same principles to any operating system. Windows has a handy feature called 'My Documents', which is a folder Windows and many other programs use to save documents, images and music files. The easiest way to get to it is from the desktop. The 'real' location is usually in C:\Documents and Settings\[Your User Name]\, but you can actually point your 'My Documents' folder to any folder on your computer (just right-click on 'My Documents' and then 'Move' the target folder). Depending on what else you use your computer for, you may find it useful to have a 'writing' folder so you can keep these files separated from your personal or other files. In the 'writing' folder, create sub-folders for other categories of writing, eg. poetry, articles, novels, novellas, essays etc.—break it down however it suits you.

When it comes to the naming of files, just use the title or working title followed by the date in the format YYYYMMDD. This will keep all versions of your files in actual date order. While you may just use the one file and save over it again and again, if you have a long-term project or if you are transferring Word files from your laptop to your computer or on a flash drive to other people or by email, then having the date in the filename can make it faster to determine which file is the most recent.

Another way to check the dates of the documents you've created, in Windows, is to go to the 'View' menu,

then 'Details'. Or right-click on a particular file and go to 'Properties' (**ALT+Enter**). If the 'Last modified' date is older than the 'Created date' then go by that because it reflects the last time you actually saved the file in Word. The created date changes when you move a file in Windows (see image on previous page). If you have a long-term project like a novel, I would also recommend adding the word 'master' to your main working file.

One way to backup your master file(s) is to right-click and copy and paste it to a new folder called 'backups'. Then rename the file to replace the word 'master' with 'backup'. The frequency you should backup files depends on your own workflow and the length of time you're working on a project. Try daily, weekly or every time you've made major changes or spent more than a few hours writing or editing your file.

Actually saving a file as you're working on it is another important backup lesson I learned the hard way. Computers do crash and sometimes a power failure or PEBKAC is to blame for closing Word without saving your work properly (PEBKAC = Problem Exists Between Keyboard And Chair ☺). The auto-save feature in Word is useful in some of these situations, but I would not rely on it alone. Save every five to ten minutes, or every time your fingers pause on the keyboard. You cannot save often enough. Learn the keyboard shortcut (**CTRL+S**) and use it often!

Hopefully some of these tips will be useful to both you and your proof-readers and editors as you go about your 'real' work which is simply to write.

Amanda Greenslade

Amanda Greenslade is a B.comm graduate who majored in writing and screen production. Although her focus is on novel-writing, she is a multi-skilled communicator and designer, with experience in writing, editing, web design and graphic design. She is the webmaster for *The Specusphere* (www.specusphere.com), an Australian speculative fiction industries website, which is currently seeking submissions and collaborators.

Amanda has recently finished a high fantasy novel of ten years work entitled *Tiger Eyes & Dragon Teeth*. Book one of a seven-part series called *The Astor Chronicles*, this novel has been Amanda's chance to write the novel she always dreamed of reading. It features talking dragons, telepathy with animals, bonded weapons, sky kingdoms and plenty of action. She is currently having it edited and seeking a suitable publisher.



For more about Amanda see:

www.specusphere.com/amanda

www.myspace.com/amandagreenslade

www.tigerace.com