

A solution for Word worries

Over the past 10 years, I've spent most of my work time at the keyboard, so I think of myself as someone who is quite confident with MS Word—I know how to use templates and apply styles, and I'm familiar with a few keyboard shortcuts. However, I have some blank spots; for example, I've always had difficulty with macros and bookmarks (I never quite grasped what these were) and with headers and footers (which seem to take on a mind of their own).

When I worked in a small business, I could usually find a bright young person to help me out when I hit problems with Word; however, as a freelancer, I've had to become much more self-reliant. Luckily, one of my young colleagues passed on a wonderful piece of advice that has made this transition to independence much easier.

She explained that the way to find an answer to a problem is NOT to access the Word 'Help' function, because this rarely helps. Instead, the solution is to type the question into a search engine, which will then throw up a range of responses, at least one of which is likely to contain the answer to the problem. The idea is that someone out there will already have had the same problem, and it will have been answered by someone (apparently there are people out there who love to spend their time providing solutions to Word problems, just for the fun of it).

The box below gives an example of how searching can provide answers when 'Help' is no help.

Comparison of 'Help' and 'Search'

Imagine that you want to know how to insert a nonbreaking space (the one that glues together the text on either side of the space; for example, between the title and the name in 'Dr Spock'). Typing '*nonbreaking space*' into Word's Help function first causes it to stop and think for a minute or two, after which it brings up four different topics, none of which are relevant. Using the term '*inserting a nonbreaking space*' is no better; it narrows the answer to just one topic, but that's about hyphens, not nonbreaking spaces.

Google, on the other hand, does a much better job. In response to the phrase '*inserting a nonbreaking space*', in 0.3 seconds it comes up with up 28,300 results, and the first three hits all provide the right answer (i.e. to hit ctrl + shift + spacebar).

Internet searching for answers to my Word problems has been a lifesaver for me in moving from Word 2003 to Word 2007; in particular, because it led me to the Wordtips website, which provides 'tips, tricks and ideas' for users of Word. There are two versions of the website:

- <http://word.tips.net> for those using Word 2003 or earlier versions
- <http://wordribbon.tips.net> for those using Word 2007.

On both websites, users can sign up to receive a weekly newsletter. The newsletters contain a selection of tips on a particular topic, advertisements for books that amalgamate sets of tips, and a link for submitting a question about a problem with Word (or answering someone else's question).

I like the newsletters because they have introduced me to parts of Word I didn't know existed. For example, I didn't realise that Word 2007 has some ready-made templates, with matching covers, headers, footers and text boxes (they're called building blocks).

Searching within the Wordtips website not only helped me to sort out my issues with macros, bookmarks and headers and footers, but also showed me how to:

- customise the ribbon in Word 2007 (The ribbon is a new way to access frequently used commands and options; it replaces the drop-down menus from previous versions of Word.)
- create my own keyboard shortcuts for tasks such as inserting a row in a table or applying a particular style
- select nonsequential blocks of text or select text vertically rather than horizontally (useful for fixing the initial capitalisation in a bulleted list, when you don't want to mess with the capitalisation in the text of the bullet points)
- create a form in Word, where some cells are locked and others can be completed by the user, either as free text or from a drop-down list.

I now apply the 'just Google it' approach to all my technical problems—not just those with Word—and find that it saves a lot of time and frustration. Now, if it could just sort out my teenager...

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