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1 Word

1.1 Avoid Master Documents

Tempting though they may be, there have been many reports of lost or corrupted data when using master documents. If you want to split a document into chapters - possibly with chapter/page numbering so you don't have to reprint the entire document when one chapter is edited use section breaks instead, or split the document up into separate, independent files.

1.2 Updating Hyperlinks

By default, Word 2000 turns anything it thinks is an email address or a URL into a live, working hyperlink. There is a snag to this: if you mis-type the address, and then correct it by using the cursor keys to 'get in' and edit it, the underlying hyperlink won't update. You need to right-click on the link, then Edit Hyperlink.

1.3 Getting rid of Hyperlinks

If you find this auto-hyperlink feature irritating - after all, it's not much use in a printed document - you can turn it off from Tools, Autocorrect, Autoformat As You Type. You will still be able to create hyperlinks by highlighting text or graphics, then pressing Ctrl & K. Although Word will fill in anything that looks as though it's a valid address as the link, you can override this manually and have, say, 'Visit my website' or click 'Email me' as the visible title of the link.

1.4 Getting to know Autocorrect

This is one of the most useful, and most frustrating, features of Word. If you frequently mis-type a word, e.g. Internet or Reboot for Internet and Reboot, then right-click on the re-underlined word, but instead of clicking the relevant suggestion, go to the Autocorrect option on the context menu. You'll see the same suggestions, but your mistake will get added to the Autocorrect list. You can also remove entries (Tools, Autocorrect...) and make exceptions, so PCs, for instance, doesn't get changed to Pcs.

1.5 Easy Column Selection

You probably know that you can select columns in a table by clicking at the top of them. But do you also know that you can do this for ordinary tabbed text? Alt & drag selects a rectangle of text anywhere on the page.

1.6 Selecting lots of Text

Trying to select more than a window-full of text can be frustrating, especially with a fast display card, as the highlight tends to shoot back and forth past the intended selection. Left-click once where you want to start, use the scroll bar to navigate until the end of the intended selection is visible, and Shift & click again.

1.7 Saving Grace

Despite Word 2000's single document interface, there is a way to save all open documents, or close them, without closing Word. Hold down the shift key as you drop down the file menu and you'll see two new commands, Save All and Close All.

1.8 Keeping tabs on the File, New Dialog

If you want to create your own custom tabs on the File, New dialog, it's easy. Just navigate to your main template folder in Windows Explorer, and create a new folder within it.

1.9 Careful Formatting

It's a good rule to use paragraph or character styles to format text, rather than applying formatting directly. This saves time in the long run and keeps documents consistent. However, rules were made to be broken, and there may be times when you've created some custom formatting that you'd like to repeat. If you click the Format Painter button (it looks like a brush) then `dip' it in the formatted text you want to copy, you can then `paint' other text by dragging the brush through it.

1.10 What's it all about?

On a related note you can see a list of the paragraph, character and direct formatting of any character by clicking on the `What's this' button (arrow & question mark) then clicking in the text. Click on the button again (or just resume typing) when you've finished.

2 Powerpoint

2.1 Get Organised

If you're used to organising your presentations in PowerPoint's outliner, then remember that you can also use Word's rather more powerful equivalent. Each top-level entry denotes a new slide, with lower levels forming nested, bulleted lists. 'Normal' text is ignored. A tip-within-a-tip: don't bother trying to import the Word file into PowerPoint, instead, while still in Word, go to File, Send To, PowerPoint.

2.2 Phototastic

The free Photo Album add-in is available from

<http://officeupdate.microsoft.com/2000/downloaddetails/album.htm>

This lets you create a photo album from images on disk, a scanner or a digital camera. You have a choice of the number of pictures per page, frame style, backgrounds and captions: the last are generated from the image file name. The whole business takes just a few mouse clicks.

2.3 Pack up and off you go

Having done this, you can use the Pack and Go Wizard to send the entire presentation or album to someone else (File, Pack and Go). If they don't have PowerPoint, you can include the PowerPoint standalone viewer. There is an option to span multiple floppy disks: this takes time as the files involved are large, but the process just involves inserting new disks when prompted.

2.4 Make it simple for the recipient

Unpacking the viewer and presentation is not granny-proof, so it would be wise to include instructions. Two files need to be sent - the ppz file itself and pngsetup.exe. The recipient needs to run the latter, which will ask for a destination folder. This has to be typed in as there's no Browse button, and the folder name must be no longer than eight letters, without spaces: one for nostalgia fans. This will decompress the various files needed (again with prompts to change floppies, if applicable), and the recipient can then run ppview32.exe from the aforementioned destination folder. This will produce a standard File Open dialog with a ppt file visible in the contents. Select this, click Show, and the full-screen slideshow will begin.

2.5 Standalone toolbars

When you use the drawing toolbar, you can drag the nested palettes off the AutoShapes menu to create standalone toolbars. This tip (and the next two) work in all Office situations where the drawing toolbar is visible.

2.6 Getting sticky with it

If you double-click instead of single-clicking on a shape tool, it becomes 'sticky': you can continue to use the tool to create further shapes without having to select it each time. Click the tool again, (or any other tool) to un-stick it.

2.7 Inherently stylish

Having chosen fill and line styles and colours for a drawing object, you can right-click and Set AutoShape Defaults and all new shapes will inherit these styles, except for text boxes. Note that this last exception doesn't work for Word and Excel.

2.8 Useful shortcuts

In addition to the standard Office keyboard shortcuts, PowerPoint has a few that are all its own. Ctrl & M inserts a new slide, Ctrl & D duplicates the current slide, Ctrl & G toggles the guides on and off, and F5 starts a slide show.

2.9 Pause in black and white

If you're giving a slide show on screen, you can pause the show by pressing the full-stop key (or b). The screen will go black. Press the key again when you are ready to continue. If you'd prefer a white screen, press the comma (or w) instead.

2.10 The Office Assistant maybe useful after all

Designing a good presentation takes special skills. As well as being a good communicator, you need a modicum of artistic talent if you plan to stray from the predefined templates. The much-maligned Office Assistant can be quite useful here, with the 'light bulb' suggestions offering useful advice on layout and spotting potential problems. You can fine tune the rules from Tools, Options, Spelling and Style.

3 Outlook

3.1 Taking care of the journal

Among Outlook's many talents is the ability to keep a journal' of meetings and task requests, emails, and all the Excel and Word files you work with, noting the time and date of opening, saving and closing. Unless you really need this facility we recommend that you turn it off (Tools, Options, Preferences, journal Options). It can add substantially to the time taken to open, close, and save files: as the journal grows, so does the delay.

3.2 Erase your history

Even with all the journalling options turned off, you can still see a history of mail sent and received on a per-contact basis: go to the Activities tab on the contact's details.

3.3 Updating the date

Don't go trawling Tools, options if you want to show the days of the week in the Calendar weekly view: this option is set outside Outlook. Go to Windows Control Panel, Regional Settings, Date and set the Long Date style to 'dddd MMMM yyyy'. The change will be reflected in Outlook immediately.

3.4 Plain text makes sense

Keep your emails lean: plain text messages are less than a third of the size of HTML or Outlook Rich Text. Hence you'll be saving both yourself and the recipient storage space and connect time: in addition HTML and Rich Text messages may contain information that is unreadable by non Outlook users. You can set this globally in Tools, Options, Mail Format; for individual recipients it is set in the General tab of their Contacts entry, or for individual messages from the Format menu in the message window.

3.5 Composing offline

If you're working from a dial-up connection, then it makes sense to read and compose your messages offline. You can set this from the File menu. Messages you compose will be stored in the Outbox until you click the Send/Receive button: this will instigate a dialup connection. You should also check the Tools, Options, Mail Delivery dialog: in particular, clearing the 'Check for new messages every...' and setting the 'Hang up when finished...' options will reduce your online costs.

3.6 Adding addresses to the toolbar

If you frequently mail some of your contacts, they can each have their own toolbar button. From Tools, Customise, select the Mail Message command in the File category. Drag this on to a toolbar and release. Right-click and from the context menu, first type a name for the contact, then make sure Image and Text or Text only is selected. Finally, from the same context menu, Assign Hyperlink, Open... Fill in the email address and, optionally, a default subject. Close the Customize dialog, and your new button will be ready to instantly launch a pre-addressed message.

3.7 Getting rid of Spam

You can opt to delete certain types of message without reading them. This can be useful, say, if there's a known virus going around, or you are being spammed with junk email. Run the Rules Wizard from the Tools menu and follow the prompts. There are too many options to go into detail, but it's all self-explanatory. One point to watch is that if you tick more than one filtering criterion, such as 'Specific words in the subject' and 'Specific words in the body, both conditions must be met. If you want either to apply, make separate rules.

3.8 Building your contacts

When you receive an email from someone, it is easy to quickly add their details to your contacts list. Double-click the message title in the In Box to expand it to a full window, though this won't work in the multipane preview mode. Right-click on the sender's address at the top, and choose 'Add to contacts'.

3.9 Highlighting spam

Another way to deal with spammers is to hit the Organize button while viewing the inbox, then turn on the junk email feature. This gives you the option to either colour suspected junk messages, or move them to a specified folder. Having turned this feature on, you can right-click on message headers in the Inbox, and add the sender to the junk list. The same applies to 'Adult' mailings.

3.10 Get to know the shortcuts

Finally, Outlook also has some handy keyboard shortcuts. When you're looking at the calendar, Alt & Up Arrow takes you back a week, Alt & Down, forward a week; Alt & Home goes to the beginning of the week, Alt & End to the end; Alt & Page Up goes to the start of the month, Alt & Page Down to the end.

4 Access

4.1 Discover the Zoom key

Access has a habit of presenting information in grids that only show part of each Field. Of course, you can fiddle with font sizes and column widths, but a handy tip is to press Shift-F2 to zoom into a field. What really happens is that the field contents open in a separate window, making it much easier for serious editing. This also works in the Query designer, for example to save you typing long expressions into a tiny Criteria field.

4.2 Don't store images as OLE objects

The official way to store images in Access databases is by using OLE (object linking and embedding) objects. Although this is easy to do, there are many disadvantages, including a bloated database size, unpredictable behaviour on different systems, and problems accessing the graphic through code. One better way is to keep the images as external files, storing just a path name in the database, and using the Image control to display the graphic on a form. If you need to store the image itself within the database, save it as a BLOB (Binary Large Object) rather than an OLE object. You can display it by writing code that saves the image to a temporary file before showing it on a form. Example code is in Microsoft's KnowledgeBase or is widely available on the web. In this case, you can get better performance by keeping images in a separate Microsoft database (MDB) and linking the table.

4.3 Avoiding nulls

Null values are in theory a 'good thing', because they let you distinguish between unknown and empty values. In many cases, though, null values are a nuisance. To prevent null values in a field, open the table designer. For text and memo fields, set Allow Zero Length to True and the Default Value to "" (two double quotes). For other field types, ensure that there is a Default Value. Note that this will not affect existing records. If you have to work with null values, use the IsNull function or the special criteria IS NULL and IS NOT NULL in the query designer. In general, if you are getting unexpected query results, null values are often the cause. Fields with null values will never be selected by a query unless you specifically ask for them.

4.4 Do case-sensitive searches

Access is generally regarded as case-insensitive. However, you can do case-sensitive queries using the StrComp() and InStr functions. Use StrComp to match a whole field, and InStr to match any part of the field.

For example, here's how to search for `van` but not `Van` in an Artist field. Open up a query in design mode, add the required fields to the grid, and then enter the following at the top of a blank column: **InStr(1,[Artist],"van",0)**

Access will prefix it with "Expr1:", but don't let that worry you. Now enter: >0 in the Criteria row and run the query. This will return `van Eyck` but not `Van Gogh`.

4.5 Control start-up macros

In an Access database, if you name a macro AutoExec it will run automatically when the database is opened. If you press Shift, the macro will not run. If you are really insistent, you can prevent Shift from bypassing the startup code by setting the AllowBypassKey property to False. Unfortunately you have to do this using Visual Basic code, but a full example can be found in online help. Search for AllowBypassKey.

4.6 Use sub-queries in SQL

SQL sub-queries are a powerful technique for data manipulation. For example, imagine you have two versions of the same table, and you want to append rows from one to the other, but

only where they do not already exist. Assuming a primary key field called ID, here is the SQL:

```
INSERT INTO artists
SELECT NewArtists.* FROM NewArtists
WHERE NewArtists.id Not In (select Artists.id from Artists);
```

4.7 Decompile mode - an undocumented recovery technique

Stuck with a corrupt MDB? According to Microsoft, the undocumented decompile mode for Access 2000 can fix corruption that the ordinary repair utility cannot manage. To use it, run Access with the command-line argument: **/decompile "dbname"** where dbname is the full path to your database. You can do this by editing a shortcut. This tricks Access into thinking it must change the binary format. Note: before trying this or other repair attempts, make a backup of the errant MDB.

4.8 Split data and code

If you share an Access database over a network, consider using one MDB for all the forms, reports, macros and VBA code, and another for the data. Use the Link table feature to attach the database tables to the application MDB. Now you have the option to store the application MDB on workstations while keeping the data in a shared location, speeding performance. The downside is that if you update the application, you must take care to replace all the copies, perhaps using a login script.

4.9 Defrag before compact

Two ways to improve performance are to defragment your hard disk and to use the Compact and Repair utility in Access to optimise an MDB. When you do this, it is best to defragment first. If you Compact first, the MDB is likely to be surrounded by used disk space, slowing access when data is added. Defragment followed by Compact is likely to leave the MDB with adjacent free space, which is the ideal scenario.

4.10 Use indexes with care

Indexing a column in a table speeds searches on that column, but every index you add slows down database updates. The value of an index therefore depends on how the data is used. If you have lengthy update routines on a large database, you can often improve performance by removing indexes other than the primary key before the update, and rebuilding them later, using VBA code to automate the process.

5 Excel

5.1 Getting columns in shape

To quickly adjust the width of various chosen columns, hold down Ctrl as you click the column heading letters, then drag a heading boundary of any of the columns. A tip box will display the column width. To adjust the width of adjacent columns, hold down Shift as you click the first and last columns then drag the right hand boundary. These tips apply similarly to rows.

5.2 Formula creation

To create a formula, click the often neglected Paste Function tool (marked fx) on the Standard toolbar. Select a function and a description appears in the Paste Function dialog box. The Help button leads to examples of use of the function. As an alternative to this tool, click the equals sign in the Formula Bar and the Name Box on the left will list the most recently used functions.

5.3 Autocalculation

For quick calculations on a worksheet, use the AutoCalculate feature. Select a range of figures and a total of them will appear in the Status Bar. Right-click on this total and you can change it to an average or a count of the numbers in the range. AutoCalculate can also show you the biggest or smallest number in the range. If the Status Bar isn't displayed, select it on the View menu.

5.4 Organising drawn objects

To line up drawn objects, like rectangles, with worksheet cells first click Draw, on the far left of the Drawing toolbar, then Snap, then To Grid. To line up drawn objects with each other click Draw, Snap, To Shape. To line up two different sized drawing objects with each other select them (by holding Shift as you click them both) then choose Draw, Align, Align Bottom.

5.5 Quick charts

The fastest way to create a chart is to select the full range of a table (including labels) and press F11. Excel will draw a column chart on a new interactive chart sheet, with the x and y axes labelled, colours chosen for the data series, and a legend box in place. You can right-click on any part of the chart to change any aspect of it.

5.6 Sorting out problems with links

You can often solve problems with links to other workbooks or Office applications under Workbook Options. Find this under Options on the Tools menu. Make sure the Update Remote References box is checked. If you check the Save External Link Values box you won't have to worry about maintaining links. However, if the link is to a large range it will greatly increase the size of your workbook file.

5.7 Simple sub-totals

To create sub-totals in accounts, use the function = SUBTOTAL(9,B4:B9). The 9 is a function number and represents SUM. The range to sub-total in cell B 10 is B4 to B9. You could repeat this for, say, B 11 to B 16 with another sub-total in B17. Then if you click on cell B 18 and the AutoSum tool it will display the total of cells B10 and B17 only.

5.8 Getting decimal

To convert pounds and ounces to kilograms, use the CONVERT function found in the Analysis ToolPak. Enable it by using Add-Ins on the Tools menu. If the pounds are entered in cell A2 and the ounces in B2 then the formula would be

=(CONVERT(A2,"lbm","g")+CONVERT (B2,"ozm","g"))/ 1000 Here lbm and ozm, entered in quotes, mean convert from pounds and ounces to g for grams.

5.9 Deleting versus clearing

Confused about the difference between deleting a cell and clearing a cell? If you click a cell and then press Delete or the Backspace key, the cell's stored value is removed but its formatting and comments remain. If you clear a cell, everything goes and it's as blank as a cell on a new worksheet. To do this press Alt & e then a, a (the Alt key with 'e', then 'a' twice).

5.10 Perfect printing

If you have a multi-page worksheet to print and you want the column titles or list field names to print on every page, click the worksheet and choose File, Page Setup, and then the Sheet tab. Click the red arrow in the 'Rows to repeat at top:' box, then click then on row number 1 (or hold Shift and click on 1 and 2). Then click OK.