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3 Word Tools That Provide Quick Help

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It doesn’t matter how much experience you have with Microsoft Word, at times you run into little problems that need solving immediately. Here are three tools in Word that have helped me get out of some frustrating situations.

**1. Show/Hide:**

Located in the Paragraph group on the Home tab in Word, the Show/Hide tool looks like a paragraph symbol. Its primary purpose is to assist you in proofreading a document, but it has other uses, too. When turned on by clicking, it displays a variety of otherwise hidden formatting marks which are only visible on the screen, not in the printed document. These marks give you basic formatting information, such as a dot for each space, a paragraph sign to show a new paragraph, and a right-pointing arrow where words are aligned to tabs on the ruler. Reading through a document with the tool enabled will help you find spots where you accidentally double-spaced between words or pressed Enter unnecessarily, adding extra space between lines. In longer documents, being able to see the dotted section break line can make it easier to position both a full page heading and a two column article on the same page.

With all these marks visible on the screen, the document looks cluttered. For this reason, the Show/Hide tool has a bad reputation with some Word users. On the other hand, some users want certain marks to be visible all the time, not just when the Show/Hide tool is enabled. This can be set up in Word Options (File – Word Options or Options – Display – “Always show these formatting marks on the screen”) by checking the marks you want to see all the time. I choose not to do this, but the list is a good place to view what the formatting marks mean.

The Show/Hide tool can be handy in several ways besides proofing. Let’s say you have completed a one page document, but find when you print it, a blank page comes out of the printer along with the document. If you turn on the Show/Hide tool, scroll down to the blank page, and delete any formatting marks that appear there, the blank page will disappear. Another special use of Show/Hide is controlling the spaces between paragraphs by changing the size of the paragraph marks between them. If you want to decrease the space, select the Paragraph mark between the paragraphs and click a smaller font size.

**2. Margins:**

All documents have margins around the outside of the page. Each new version of Word seems to have different default margin sizes. In Word 2003, top and bottom margins are 1”; the two sides are 1.25”. In Word 2010/13, the default margins are 1” on all four sides. Recent Word versions also have a Margins gallery. On the Page Layout tab in the Page Setup group, click Margins to see the choices. If none of these dimensions fits your needs, you can create your own custom margins using the command at the bottom of the gallery.

One kind of problem this tool solves is similar to one addressed by Show/Hide. Assume you’ve typed a document that is a bit longer than one page. Your choices are to revise the text, use a smaller font size, or reduce the size of the page margins. I often click the Narrow margins choice (.5” on all sides) to eliminate spillover text. That’s about the smallest margin setting possible to ensure all the text will print.

Another problem which margin changes can solve is the need to put a document into a ring notebook or bind it in book form. In this case you want the inside margin wider than the outside. Here’s where the

Mirrored option comes in handy, as shown.

**3. Format Painter:**

I wrote about this tool a couple of years ago, but it’s so useful, it needs another mention. For those who are new to it, Format Painter copies text formats, like fonts, font effects (bold, italics), and font colors; and paragraph formats, like indents, line spacing, and bulleting from one place to another within a document.

Here’s how it works. You are in the middle of a document and find you want to copy a paragraph into this one from another document saved on your computer. You open the second document, highlight the paragraph, and click Copy or press Ctrl+C. Click in the first document where the copied selection will go, and click Paste or press Ctrl+V. Now you notice that the new paragraph is in a different font and font size from the rest of the text. Instead of manually making these format changes, click anywhere in the original section of the document, and then click the Format Painter icon (Home tab – Clipboard group). Select the new paragraph (You can select a whole paragraph with a triple click.) and it will change to match the rest of the document. This works especially well to match the indenting pattern when using bullets or automatic numbering.

Sometimes you need to copy a format to more than one place in a document. Format Painter makes it easy. Pretend you have created a document with six sub-heads scattered throughout. After you finish, you decide to emphasize the sub-heads by changing the font, adding boldface, and making the text blue. You select the first sub-head and manually make these changes to it. Then you click inside this newly-formatted heading, and double click the Format Painter icon. Double clicking keeps Format Painter active until you click its icon to close it. Drag over each of the other sub-heads one by one, and each will take on the format of the first one. Then click Format Painter again to turn it off. You’ll be surprised how often Format Painter can help you fix mismatched formats in an instant. That’s why I put it on my Quick Access toolbar. Little tools can cure big headaches.