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10 annoying Word features (and how to turn them off)

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Author: Jody Gilbert

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Word can be a little unruly sometimes, making inexplicable changes, inserting text you didn't ask for, and hijacking your formatting. Here are some common stunts that Word tries to pull on unwary users, along with a cure for each one.

One of the most common complaints about Microsoft Word is its insistence on taking control of the wheel. Many users get completely blindsided by some of Word's automatic changes, and even the more experienced among them often just live with Word's shenanigans because they don't know how to disable them.

If you've gotten more than your share of support calls from users trying to wrestle Word into submission (or pulled out your own hair on a few occasions), the list below will help you quickly cut Word down to size.

A few things to keep in mind: First, many of the options you need are located in the AutoFormat As You Type tab. A similar set of options exists in the AutoFormat tab — but disabling those won't do you any good with Word's on-the-fly changes. Users sometimes don't make that distinction and can't understand why the changes are still happening after they thought they'd turned off the necessary settings.

Second, some of these options may actually sound appealing to your users but might currently be disabled. You can use this list to help them selectively *activate* the features they want, not just to turn things off. It's not always the features themselves that are annoying — it's just not knowing how to control them.

And finally, Word 2007 offers the same feature set described here, but accessing the options is a little different. The section at the bottom explains how to find them in that version.

This information is also available as a PDF download.

Cheap solution: Undo

If you haven't had a chance to disable an automatic feature (or you want to leave it enabled and override it only occasionally), remember that pressing Ctrl+Z or clicking the Undo button right after Word makes a change will undo that action. So, for instance, if Word inserts a smart apostrophe where you want to retain the straight character to denote measurement, just hit Undo to straighten it back out.

The annoyances

Behavior	How to turn it off
#1: Word creates a hyperlink when you type a Web page address.	Go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and select the AutoFormat As You Type tab. Under Replace As You Type, deselect the Internet And Network Paths With Hyperlinks check box and click OK.
#2: Word changes capitalization of text as you type it.	A host of settings can trigger this behavior. Go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and select the AutoCorrect tab. Here, you can deselect whichever check boxes govern the unwanted actions: Correct Two Initial Capitals Capitalize First Letter Of Sentences Capitalize First Letter Of Table Cells Capitalize Names Of Days Correct Accidental Use Of Caps Lock Key
#3: Word inserts symbols unexpectedly, such as trademark or copyright characters or even inserts an entire passage of text.	Go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and select the AutoCorrect tab. This time, find the Replace Text As You Type check box. Either deselect it to suppress all replacements or select and delete individual items in the list below it. It might make sense to keep the feature enabled and selectively remove items, since the list includes scores of common misspellings that are actually nice to have corrected for you.
#4: Word superscripts your ordinal numbers, such as 1st and 2nd.	Go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and click the AutoFormat As You Type

	tab. Deselect the Ordinals (1st) With Superscript check box and click OK.
#5: Word converts fractions into formatted versions.	Go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and click the AutoFormat As You Type tab. Deselect the Fractions (1/2) With Fraction Character option.
#6: Word turns straight apostrophes and quote marks into curly characters.	Go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and click the AutoFormat As You Type tab. Deselect the Straight Quotes With Smart Quotes check box and click OK.
#7: When you try to select a few characters within a word, the highlight jumps to select the entire word.	Go to Tools Options and click the Edit tab. In the right column under Editing Options, deselect the When Selecting, Automatically Select Entire Word check box and click OK.
#8: When you type three or more hyphens and press Enter, Word inserts a border line.	Go to Tools AutoFormat and select the AutoFormat As You Type tab. Deselect the Border Lines check box and click OK. A similar option exists for inserting a table, but it's generally not going to sneak up on you: When the Tables check box is selected, typing a series of hyphens and plus marks before pressing Enter will insert a table (with the hyphens representing cells). You can turn off that option if you think you might stumble into an unwanted table insertion.
#9: Word automatically adds numbers or bullets at the beginning of lines as you type them.	There are two flavors of this potential annoyance. First, if you start to type something Word thinks is a bulleted list (using asterisks, say) or type 1, a period, and some text, it

	<p>may convert what you type to bulleted or numbered list format when you press Enter. To prevent this, go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and select the AutoFormat As You Type tab. Then, deselect the Automatic Bulleted List and/or Automatic Numbered list check boxes and click OK. A related aspect of this behavior is that once you're entering automatic list items, pressing Enter will perpetuate it — Word will keep inserting bullets or numbers on each new line. To free yourself from this formatting frenzy, just press Enter a second time, and Word will knock it off.</p>	
<p>#10: When you type hyphens, Word inserts an em dash or an en dash.</p>	<p>If you type a word, two hyphens, and another word (no spaces), Word will convert the hyphens to an em dash. If you type a space before and after the hyphens, it will convert them to an en dash. To disable this feature, Go to Tools AutoCorrect Options and select the AutoFormat As You Type tab. Deselect the Hyphens (-) With Dash (-) check box and click OK.</p>	

Bonus fixes

Word may cause your users some additional grief in various other ways besides automatic behaviors. It goes a little something like this:

User: My document is full of weird code stuff and my pictures are gone.

Culprit: Field code display has been toggled on.

Solution: Suggest that the user press Alt+F9 to restore the display of field code results.

User: I'm seeing gray brackets around a bunch of my text.

Culprit: Bookmark display has been enabled.

Solution: Go to Tools | Options and select the View tab. Then, under the Show options, deselect the Bookmarks check box and click OK.

User: I'm typing and everything in front of the cursor is disappearing.

Culprit: The evil Overtyping mode has been activated.

Solution: Go to Tools | Options and select the Edit tab. Then, under Editing Options, deselect the Overtyping Mode check box and click OK. (It might be quicker to double-click OVR on the status bar, if you can point the user to it.)

User: Everything's gone, all my toolbars and menus and everything — there's nothing here but text.

Culprit: The user has landed in Full Screen view.

Solution: Direct the user's attention to the Close Full Screen View button at the bottom of the window (depending on the version) or tell them to press Alt+V to display the View menu. They can then select Full Screen to turn off that view mode and return to familiar territory.

Accessing the options in Word 2007

All the settings we've discussed here are accessible via the Office button in Word 2007:

To get to the AutoCorrect dialog box, click the Office button, select Word Options at the bottom of the menu, and choose Proofing from the pane on the left. In the pane on the right, click the AutoCorrect Options button, and Word will display the AutoCorrect dialog box containing the AutoCorrect and AutoFormat As You Type tabs.

To get to editing options, click the Office button, select Word Options at the bottom of the menu, and choose Advanced from the pane on the left. Word will display Editing Options at the top of the pane on the right. In that section, you'll find the When Selecting, Automatically Select Entire Word check box and the Use Overtyping Mode option. If you scroll down to the Show Document Content section, you'll find the Show Bookmarks check box.

The successor to Full Screen view in Word 2007 is Full Screen Reading view. Users shouldn't get stuck there, but if they do, the Close button in the upper-right corner of the window will take them back to Print Layout view.

What inscrutable Word behaviors top your list of annoyances? Do you have to address the same points of confusion over and over with your users?

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Jody Gilbert has been writing and editing technical articles for the past 20 years, including a stint with The Cobb Group/ZD Journals. She's been with TechRepublic since Day One. Read her full bio and profile.

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BTW, what the heck does "RTFM" mean? B.Balvocius | 07/31/07

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└─ Annoying and processor consuming- Word 2003 d.feder@... | 07/18/07

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└─ Solution ssharkins@... | 07/18/07

└─ Easier Solution n4aof@... | 07/19/07

└─ Good point ssharkins@... | 07/20/07

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└─ And Where Is The Configuration Wizard? raisch@... | 07/18/07

└─ Configuration Wizbang n4aof@... | 07/19/07

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Default Style n4aof@... | 07/19/07

Possible solutions JodyGilbert ☺ | 07/19/07

Please help me with this "feature" jrhengst@... | 07/20/07

Stop style automatic updates martin.tech@... | 07/21/07

Thank you! jrhengst@... | 07/21/07

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Paste Special - mouselessly Larry3500 | 07/15/09

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Don't delete the 2003 stuff though... ThumbsUp2 | 07/15/09

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