

Stupid and Useful Microsoft Word Tricks

You should be aware that MS Word has several built-in features designed to “autocorrect” the text. This is because the program is designed for business users (for the most part), and often these corrections will not be appropriate for academic papers. However, you should realize that this feature is a problem. Here is a partial list of stupid “auto-corrections” that you might encounter:

1. The computer might try to turn prose text into outline format. You will suddenly observe your work as a numbered list.
2. In a similar fashion, the computer might take an outline and change the format – including its font, indentation, and text size.
3. The computer might try to change URLs into web addresses (highlighted in blue) which can be linked if the computer is online all the time. This is prohibited in MLA format. For example, a web address should read < http://www.mla.org> rather than <http://www.mla.org>.
4. The computer may convert ordinal numbers (such as 1st) to superscripted text (such as 1st). Most documentation styles do not allow superscripted text.
5. Initially, MS Word sets margins at 1.25 inches. MLA requires 1-inch margins. Consequently, you must correct this manually. To do so, the Mac user must click on the *Format* option of the menu bar (at the top of the screen), and select *Document*. Next, select *Margins* and adjust them to 1 inch. PC users should manually adjust the margin-ruler near the top of the screen.
6. Word users should also be aware that font changes take effect for text immediately following the changed word. Often students will change the font (for various reasons) and find that surrounding text incorrectly changes to that font.
7. Similarly, when you are cutting and pasting from web pages, you may accidentally insert new fonts or mistakenly apply this font to surrounding text.
8. Note that computer keyboards (unlike typewriters) do not actually have a dash key *per se*. You must use the *Insert* option on the menu bar and then choose *Symbol*. In MLA format, type two hyphens--like this--with no space before or after each hyphen to indicate a dash.
9. When typing ellipses, MS word will try to “correct” your spacing. MLA requires a space before and after each period (like this . . .) but MS word will try to remove the spaces.
10. Finally, superscripts and subscripts can be problematic. As is the case with font changes, superscript and subscript changes will also affect all text immediately following the changed text.

Many other useful tricks are actually beneficial and are good to know.

1. The *most* important trick is **Ctrl Z**. If you hit simultaneously the Control and Z keys, the computer will undo the previous auto-correction. Often the program will make a “clicking” sound when it engages the auto-correction function. Listen for this sound, and be ready to hit **Ctrl Z**. If the **Ctrl Z** is used once too often, **Ctrl Y** is the restore option.
2. If you are in a foreign language class and you need to use a diacritical mark (such as a tilde or an umlaut), you can insert these by selecting *Insert* on the menu bar and then

choosing *Symbol*. Then hunt for the diacritical mark you need. Additionally, science students can change quickly to a Greek font by highlighting the corresponding Roman letter, and then clicking on *Symbol* in the font window. Roman-alphabet users wanting to quickly insert international characters can find a list of keyboard shortcuts in the Foreign Language section of *Writing at Carson-Newman College*, 4th edition.

3. Typesetters traditionally have frowned on “widow” and “orphan” lines. These are single lines of text separated from the rest of a paragraph by a page break. Computer users, however, can quickly correct widows and orphans by turning on “widow/orphan protection.” You can find this option under *Format* in the menu bar. Then select *Paragraph* and click on *Line and Page Breaks*. A box called *Widow/orphan protection* is available. If clicked, this function will automatically adjust your spacing appropriately.
4. If you are prudent, you know how to save (**Ctrl S**) on a regular basis. However, MS-Word has an “Auto-Save” function to save automatically at timed intervals. Paranoid students can turn on this function by going to the *Tools* option on the menu bar, selecting *Options*, and then selecting *Save*. They will be able to set the *Save Auto-Recover* for any interval that seems appropriate.
5. Many formats require students to include page numbers and a header on every page of an essay. To do this quickly, select *View* on the menu bar. Then select *Header and footer*. A new box of options will appear. Here, you can type material that will appear on every page. You can also hit the tiny number key (#) which will automatically insert the correct page number on each page. Experiment with the alignment to make the header match the right format required for your class.
6. Sometimes you may need to insert a non-breaking space in order to keep two words together on the same line or to keep the periods of an ellipsis together on the same line. To do this, rather than simply hitting the space bar, you can go to the *Insert* option in the menu bar and select *Symbol*. Choose *Special Characters*. Then choose *Non-breaking space*. Alternatively, a fast way to create a non-breaking space is to simultaneously hit the control button, shift button, and the space bar (**Ctrl Shift space**).
7. Science students should know that superscripts and subscripts are done easily in MS Word. The superscript is done by placing the cursor at the right end of the word and hitting simultaneously **Ctrl Shift +**. This places the cursor in a higher position. You can at this point simply type in the superscripted material, and then repeat the **Ctrl Shift +** keystrokes to return to the normal height. Subscripts are done similarly, except that the defining keystroke is **Ctrl +**. Again, to counteract the problems mentioned above in #10, make sure there is at least one blank space to the right of the affected term.
8. Cutting and pasting text is also easy in MS Word. Simply highlight the appropriate text, hit **Ctrl X**, place the cursor in the desired location, strike simultaneously **Ctrl V**, and the text will be put there. Copying information to another location is done similarly. Instead of **Ctrl X**, use **Ctrl C**. This action is especially useful for presenting a similar list of equations.
9. The **Bold**, *Italicize*, and Underline options on the menu bar can also be done quickly by highlighting the desired text (as before) and using the **Ctrl B**, **Ctrl I**, and **Ctrl U** simultaneous keystrokes respectively.
10. Finally, if you desire to avoid all of the “auto-corrections” completely, MS Word provides a pleasant alternative. Simply go to the *Tools* option on the menu bar, click on *AutoCorrect Options*, and eliminate all of the green check marks.

MS Word is a valuable tool for the modern student. These lists above are certainly not exhaustive, but the student who is wary of these pitfalls and knowledgeable about these advantages will at least have a “leg up” on the writing process at C-N.