

Random Thoughts

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Word 2010 Offers Powerful Improvements

Microsoft Word has, for more than a decade, been the world's primary word processor program. Where Word 2007 was revolutionary, Word 2010 is evolutionary. The most significant change for power users is the ability to modify the Ribbon, but security features and the ability to recover a document you neglected to save are also welcome improvements. Word's developers continue to push the application down the path of being a publishing application, though, and I'm not as happy about that.

Word Takes Security Seriously

If you attempt to open a Word document that you've received as an e-mail attachment or otherwise obtained from the Internet, or if the document you're attempting to open contains macros, Word will warn you about the potential for unsafe content. This isn't new; the feature was added in Word 2007. Unlike with Word 2007, though, now you are able to read the document without opening it. All macros are disabled, so you can review the document to confirm that it's safe, not just have to guess that it's safe.

This security feature can be disabled, but I can't recommend doing that. Disabling the feature could save a few seconds each week, but at considerable risk.

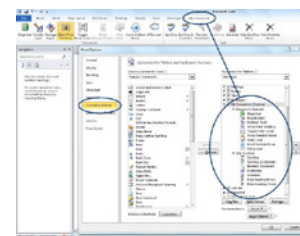
Access users will recognize the Trust Center and the Trusted Locations Panel. It is here that you can tell Word which locations you consider to be safe. In other words, documents stored in these specific locations will always be considered safe and you won't see the security warning.

Wear a Ribbon in Your Hair

The Ribbon, which was new in Word 2007, continues in 2010, but now you can modify the Ribbon's contents. Microsoft thought that the Quick-Access component of the 2007 applications would be sufficient, but power users quickly told them that they were wrong.

As a result, the Ribbon can be configured by the user. You can add any of the hundreds of commands that are not on any Ribbon component (or your own macros) to new tabs on the Ribbon.

To illustrate the process, I created a new tab called My Commands (Clever, eh!) on the Ribbon and set up 2 new groups within the tab, *Document* and *Text*. Then I added several commands to each of the groups. These aren't necessarily commands that I would use, but they illustrate how easy it is to modify the user interface.



Follow Me Backstage

What used to be the File menu or, in 2007, the screen that appeared when you clicked the Orb, is now "Backstage". This is an area that power users will instinctively gravitate to.

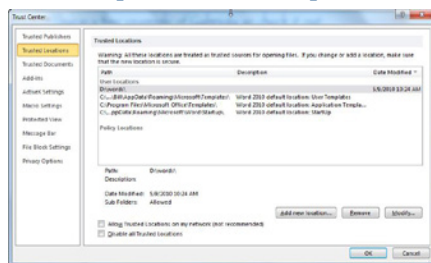
The ability to pin documents to the File menu has been enhanced to allow pinning directories or other file locations. While this might seem to be a minor feature, it makes accessing obscure locations fast and easy.

This is also where you can view information about the document you're currently editing and set properties that control who has access to the document and what they can do with it.

Be Stylish!

Styles are not new to Word, but some people still don't use them. Instead of creating a "Subhead" style, for example, they individually hand-code each and every subhead in the document to be "Frutiger Bold, 14 points, with 6 points of space before and 3 points of space after". What happens when you decide that the subheads should really be "Futura Ultra Bold, 16 points, with 12 points of space before and 3 points after"? If you have a document that has 751 subheads, you'll spend the next day or two making 751 changes.

If, instead, you have used styles, you'll spend about 30 seconds making one change that will apply to 751 paragraphs.



Starting with Office 2010, more reasons exist to use styles: The Navigation Window gives you an overview of the document and a quick way to move from where you are in the document to where you need to be, but only if you have used styles.

You Can Count on Word

Word 2003 and Word 2007 didn't always count all the words in a document, but Word 2010 offers the option of counting all the text in the base document, in text boxes, and in footnotes and end notes. I ran a small test to confirm this claim.



- Body text only: 58 words (Word counts 58.)
 - Body text and text box (box contains 34 words): 92 words (Word counts 92.)
 - Body text, text box, and footnote (footnote contains 14 words): 106 words (Word counts 106.)
 - Body text, text box, footnote, header, and footer (header/footer each contain 7 words, 14 total): 120 words (Word counts 106, as expected; headers and footers are not included.)
 - Body text, text box, footnote, header, and footer, and Word Art (with 6 words): 126 words (Word counts 112, which is correct by my count because it omits the header/footer text but includes the Word Art text, which is part of the document's body.)
- The counts are exactly what I would have expected.

Macro Economics

If you use your own or commercial macros, they may not work with the 2010 versions of the Office applications. It's not uncommon for code that works properly in one version of Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) to fail in other versions, either older or newer. In some cases, minor application changes within the same version of a program cause VBA macros to break.

So be sure to check with the provider of your macros to ensure that a new version will be available for Office 2010 and what the cost of upgrading will be.

On the other hand, if you use templates provided by third parties, you should find that they still work even if embedded macros don't. Documents based on older templates will probably create "compatibility mode" documents, but in most cases you'll be able to resolve that by saving the template in Word 2010 format.

Word as a Design Program

Although I still resist using a word processor as a design program, I have to admit that Word 2010 will be more than adequate for basic publishing and design. I don't consider Word to be a reasonable stand-in for an application such as InDesign or even Microsoft Publisher, but I understand the desire of some managers to turn secretaries into publication designers.

Word 2010 offers a wide variety of functions that will appeal to people who are forced into design roles without the benefit of any design training. Unfortunately, Word makes it easy to create some abominable designs. But in the hands of a sensitive person, even if that person has no design training, Word 2010 might be an adequate tool for basic design needs.

Word now fully supports Open Type, which means that ligatures and improved kerning are supported if these features are built in to the typeface. Ligatures are combinations of 2 or more letters into a single component (or glyph).

One of the more common ligatures combines the characters "f" and "i".

Up to 20 stylistic sets can be embedded in a given typeface. Gabriola is a typeface that's included with Office 2010 and with Windows 7. It includes good kerning tables, ligatures, and 7 stylistic sets.

These features are useful and, in the hands of someone who understands typography, welcome additions. But Word 2010 also makes hideous options available. With very little effort (or thought) it's possible to create a headline like this one:

Do We Really Need Headlines Like This?

Challenges in an Office Divided

Many of Word 2010's new features don't translate well if someone who is using Word 2007 or Word 2003 needs to open the document. In 2007, some of Word 2010's advanced features will be invisible, some will be converted, and some will be lost. In 2003, it's even worse: Most advanced features will be lost.

What this means is that a 2010 document edited in one of the earlier versions of Word will return to the originator with dynamic features that have been converted to static features or with features missing. The Options panel allows you to turn off most of Word 2010's new features, but if you've paid for the upgrade, why would you do that?

You won't lose text but if the originator has made heavy use of Word 2010's new capabilities, that person is going to be sorely disappointed when the document comes back with many of the features ripped out. In an office with mixed versions of Word, one option is to run Word in compatibility mode, but then you can't use the new features. A better option is upgrading all users to the current version, but that's expensive.

It's a Worthwhile Upgrade

Although Word 2010 makes it easy to create truly terrible designs, the application earns my respect for its improved security, the ability to modify the Ribbon, and a wealth of other features.

And I haven't even mentioned the collaboration tools, which are quite impressive. **B**