

Table manners

This column is now under the sterling stewardship of Tim Nott, who in his time has probably used every word processor ever produced. He kicks off with some tips for tables in Word.

No, it's not a misprint, or a failure of the PCW Tim Discrimination Algorithm. The Hands On cabinet has been reshuffled — Gabriel Jacobs and Panicos Georghiades are the new ministers for Windows 3.1 and DOS, and I've wound up here, while continuing with the Windows 95 portfolio. So, well, hello, all you word processing folk.

I'll start by declaring interests. It will probably come as no surprise that, like 80 percent of the market, I use Word for Windows for my daily needs. Well, actually, that 80 percent figure is a tad misleading: Word accounts for 80 percent of new sales but there must be many users who haven't bought a new word processor recently. So while, inevitably, Word will figure frequently in this column, all the rest of you must stand up and be counted.

Having done a few word processing group tests, I think I can say I've used every package currently available, and a few that aren't. So bring me your WordStar, WordPerfect and WordPro queries. Bring me your Accent, Universal Word, Toplevel, Word Express, Q & A, and Professional Write problems. Bombard me with questions on LocoScript and Protex. I probably won't have a clue, but what the hell, it's worth a try. And if you're using CA-Text, please consider upgrading.

Turning the tables

One thing I really missed when I abandoned the joys of LocoScript on the Amstrad PCW was that you could type +rj to right-align the rest of a line so that, for example, you could have a letter with a right-aligned date on the same line as other, left-aligned text.

Strangely enough (as I've just discovered) you can do this in Windows

Write by right-aligning the line and inserting a tab where you want the break. WordPerfect users can still do this with an Alt+F7. With Word, however, the equivalent Control + R affects the entire line, and you have to faff about creating a right-aligned tab stop at the right-hand margin. This is a fiddly business: first you have to click through the varieties of tab stop at the left of the ruler until you find the correct one (a reversed L) then click just inside the right margin on the ruler (Word won't let you click dead on) then drag it into place. There must be an easier way.

There is an easier way — tables. Before you run and hide, bear in mind that the tab function, like the QWERTY keyboard, is a piece of low-tech inherited from typewriting although it has been enhanced by the provision of right-aligned, centred and decimal point-aligned variations. Save the Tab key for getting around dialogue boxes. One advantage of a table is that you can justify each cell separately. So a two-column, one-row table can hold a left-aligned date and a right-aligned "Our ref.". Add another column, and you can have a piece of centred text as well. It's much more powerful than conventional tabs. Although Word has a

Fig 1 Don't use tabs, use tables

variety of bullet and numbered list formats if, for instance, you want to set up a list with each keyword in a separate column to several lines of explanatory text, it still takes much messing about with styles, paragraph indents, tabs or the tiny ruler buttons. With tables, it's easy.

To take a more sophisticated example, consider creating a cast list for a play. You want the character names in bold, on the left, right-aligned, with a small gap between these and the players' names, left-aligned and in italics. As Fig 1 shows, it's easy: select each column, either by clicking when the cursor changes into a vertical arrow at the top of the table, or from the Table/Select column menu command. You can then format wholesale and drop back into individual cells for individual treatment.

Note that the dotted grid lines don't print but you can drag the vertical ones around to change the size or position of columns, which is easier than messing with the ruler. If you do want printed gridlines, use the Format/Borders and Shading

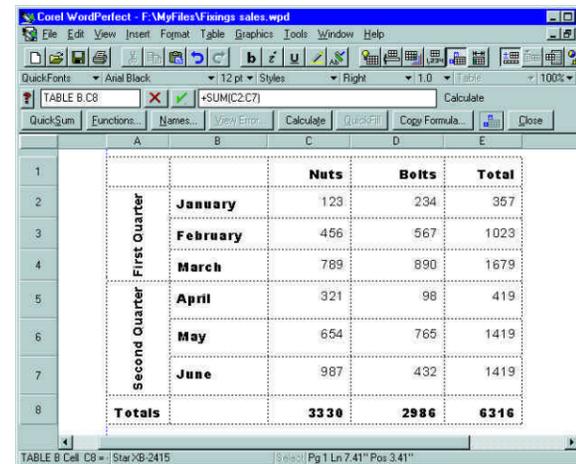
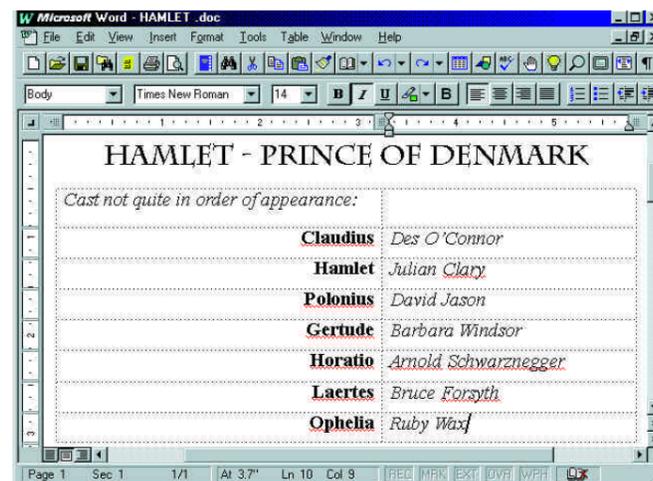


Fig 2 A few of the things you can't do in Word

command or toolbar. If you find the grid lines distracting, you can turn them off from the Table menu.

The procedures in WordPro and WordPerfect are almost identical. All three have a miniature grid which drops from a tool button in which you drag out the initial number of rows and columns. All have commands for inserting extra rows and columns should you change your mind. All use the Tab key for moving to the next cell: if you reach the end of the table, this will create a new row. With WordPerfect, selecting columns is a little different as you have to double-click with the vertical arrow to select an entire column.

There's a lot more formatting you can do with tables, and this is where Word starts to look very much the poor relation. You can't vertically-align text to the bottom or centre of a cell, nor rotate it. Someone asked recently, on CIX, how to include a landscape table in a portrait document, while retaining the portrait positioning of the headers and footers. You can't do this in Word — not without inserting the contents of each cell as a WordArt object. And believe me, you really don't want to do that. Also, unlike the others, you can only split or merge cells horizontally if, say, you wanted to subdivide "First Quarter" into "January", "February", "March".

There's a lot more you can do with tables besides laying-out text. Word Pro, for example, lets you enter 1-2-3 style formulae in a cell, which update automatically, just like a spreadsheet. There are buttons to "Smart Sum" a row or column, and optional spreadsheet-style row and column headings. WordPerfect does even better with a spreadsheet-style formula entry bar. By comparison, Word again fares badly.

Though you can insert formulae as "fields" it's horribly difficult to use and buggy in operation. If, for example, you use the SUM(ABOVE) function and then delete one of the values in the column, it will ignore all entries above the deletion. Worse, it doesn't update the fields automatically; you have to do this manually with the F9 key. It may be that Microsoft

cannot bear the thought of anyone not buying Excel and not using the wonders of OLE 2 to create in-place-editable spreadsheets.

Despite the lacklustre performance of Word's tables, they can nevertheless be a very powerful automation feature. I use a Word table to keep track of each article I write and to generate invoices. Though real men would use Excel or Access for this, I find it's quick, it works, and it only took me a week or so to set up.

By next month's column I will have the final release version of Office 97, so I'll report back on if and how things have improved.

Quick FAQs

Q. How can I get Word to automatically insert the date in a letter?

A. The simplest way in Word 6 or 7 is to create a bookmark called "date" (or whatever) where you want the date to appear in the letter template. Then create the following (or add to the existing) Autonew macro:

```
Edi tGoTo "date"
InsertDateTime . InsertAsField = 0,
.DateTimePic = "d MMMM, yyyy"
```

The "InsertAsField = 0" ensures the date is entered as plain text, rather than being recalculated each time you open the document. The "DateTimePic =" determines the appearance of the date; in this case "1 February, 1997".

Q. How can I get rid of the "shadow cursor" in WordPerfect 7? It's driving me mad!

A. Me too. When I first saw this, you couldn't. But in the version I've got now (7.0.1.9), you can go to Edit/Preferences/Display and turn the thing off (Fig 3).

Macro of the month

Have you ever wondered why your prose lacks that technical authority seen, for instance, in corporate press releases? It's because you're not availing yourself of the specialised language invented for the sole purpose of sounding important. I bet you still call a spade a spade, rather than a fully-mobile personal earth-moving solution.

Smarten your act up with this — the Real-time Bovine Excrement Generator. It's in WordBasic, but it's a very simple piece of code and should be easy enough to translate into other macro languages.

Sub MAIN

Dim adjective1\$(10)

Dim adjective2\$(10)

Dim noun\$(10)

adjective1\$(0) = "fourth
generation"

adjective1\$(1) = "real-time"

adjective1\$(2) = "autonomous"

adjective1\$(3) = "extended"

adjective1\$(4) = "leveraged"

adjective1\$(5) = "synchronised"

adjective1\$(6) = "logistic"

adjective1\$(7) = "integrated"

adjective1\$(8) = "optimal"

adjective1\$(9) = "32-bit"

adjective2\$(0) = "parallel"

adjective2\$(1) = "reciprocal"

adjective2\$(2) = "intranet-enabled"

adjective2\$(3) = "wide-band"

adjective2\$(4) = "upsized"

adjective2\$(5) = "client-server"

adjective2\$(6) = "synergistic"

adjective2\$(7) = "floating-point"

adjective2\$(8) = "multipatform"

adjective2\$(9) = "networked"

noun\$(0) = "paradigm-shift"

noun\$(1) = "localisation"

noun\$(2) = "lead-time"

noun\$(3) = "monitoring"

noun\$(4) = "solution"

noun\$(5) = "interface"

noun\$(6) = "stratification"

noun\$(7) = "understructure"

noun\$(8) = "overview"

noun\$(9) = "time-frame"

x = Int(Rnd() * (10))

y = Int(Rnd() * (10))

z = Int(Rnd() * (10))

waffle\$ = adjective1\$(x) + " " +
adjective2\$(y) + " " + noun\$(z)

Insert waffle\$

End Sub

What this does is set up three "arrays" (the DIM statements) to hold the data. The next 30 lines assign strings to those arrays — the first item in an array always occupies the zero slot. Next, it generates three random integers between 0 and 9, stores the corresponding adjectives and nouns in waffle\$, with spaces in between, and inserts this into the document. You can add more words; just make sure that the numbers tally in the DIM and RND statements. If you don't fancy typing all that in, look for WAFFLE.TXT on our cover-mounted CD-ROM. I hope that this will bring that badly-needed element of fourth-generation client-server overview to your writing.

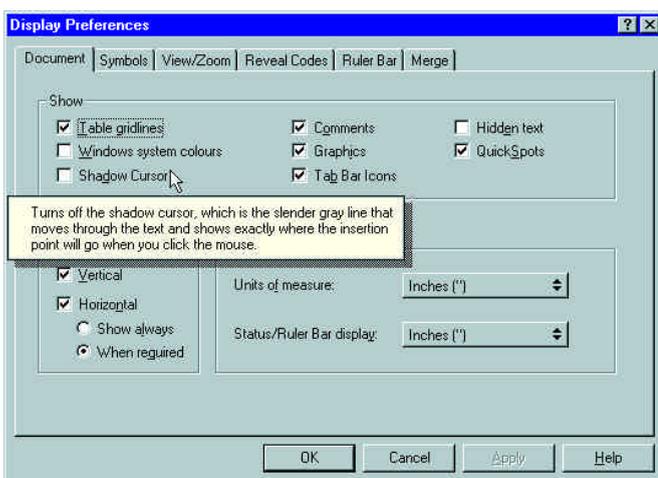


Fig 3 How to turn off that pesky shadow cursor

kept the Windows 3.1 Write. Oh, and don't bother attempting to go via the RTF format, because it buggers that up as well.

Q. How do I get a tab into a table cell?

A. Why bother? Just create another column or split the cell. But if you must, Control + Tab is the way forward in Word and WordPerfect. WordPro users need Shift + Control + Tab.

Q. How can I set up a style in Word that can be applied to a single word or phrase? Whenever I try this it changes the entire paragraph.

A. Go to the "Format/Style menu". Hit the "New" button, then select "Character" from the "Style type" drop-down list. You will be

able to define all the font properties — name, size, emphasis, spacing, raised/lowered and colour — but not background shading. You can also define the proofing language so if, say, you are using Greek or Russian words, the appropriate spelling-check dictionary will apply. Even if you don't have these, it can be worth doing, as they will not get flagged as errors in English. Character styles get flagged with an "a" in the drop-down list instead of the usual paragraph marker (¶) symbol.

Q. In WordPerfect 7, I want to create double-spaced text. But I only want three, not four, blank lines between paragraphs.

A. Easy. Set the line spacing of the style (or selection) to 2, but set the paragraph spacing to 1.5. The latter is a function of the former, rather than the standard spacing.

PCW Contact

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