

Newsletter

Issue #5: December 2002

Welcome!

Welcome to the fifth issue of the quarterly CyberText Newsletter.

Our aim is to help make you more proficient by sharing some productivity hints and tips, and to let you know about some of our services. If you'd like me to address a particular aspect of productivity, let me know.

You have received this newsletter because you are one of our current or previous clients, or because you're a friend/colleague. If you don't want to receive notification of any further issues let me know and I'll remove you from the mailing list.

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I can't live without...

The internet contains a wealth of information—here are some tutorial sites to get those brain cells firing.

- www.soyouwanna.com (anything and everything you wanted to know how to do!; free)
- www.tutorialfind.com (lists free tutorials found all over the internet, on all sorts of subjects)
- www.findtutorials.com and www.tutorials.com (mostly IT tutorials; some free)
- www.ehow.com (15,000 step-by-step "how to" instructions)

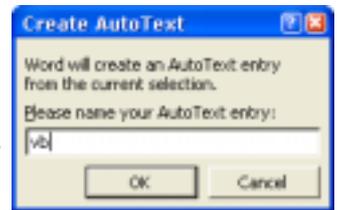
Word: Automating your work with AutoText

One of Word's most useful features is text automation. This issue, we'll look at AutoText and some of the ways you can use it to save yourself lots of time when writing documents that have a lot of repetitive text, images, or tables.

Microsoft *Word* has some in-built AutoText entries, but the real value comes in creating your own. Let's say you work for **VeryBig Corporation, Inc.**, and you are responsible for creating a lot of documents that include the company's name. Notice that this company name has title capitals (as most do) as well as a capital B in the first word, and that it also has a comma after the name and a period after the "Inc". Every time you type the name you have to type around 25 characters, as well as remember to press the SHIFT key four times to get the capitals correct. How would you like to just press two or three keys, and get the company name correctly typed, in full, EVERY TIME? Interested? Let's go...

Creating an AutoText entry

1. Type the words, in full, with correct punctuation and case anywhere in a Word document. In the example, you would type **VeryBig Corporation, Inc.**
2. Select all the words for the AutoText entry.
3. Select **Insert > AutoText > New** from the menu. (**Note: New** is only available if you have selected some text.) The Create AutoText window is displayed.
4. Type one or two letters to represent this AutoText entry, then click **OK**. In this example, you would type **vb**.
5. The AutoText entry is now created and is ready to be inserted.



Inserting an AutoText entry

1. Type the AutoText entry code (for example, **vb**) where you want to insert the full details.
2. Press **F3**. Like magic, the words you originally typed are inserted into your document.

AutoText works wonderfully well with single words and phrases. But don't stop there—you can also use it for entire paragraphs, images (such as logos), and tables formatted just the way you want. In fact, AutoText can be used for almost anything you can select in Word, and should be used for anything you do repetitively in Word.

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Copying Images from a PDF document

- Did you know that you can copy images from a PDF document displayed in Acrobat Reader? Most people think you can't unless you purchase full Acrobat, so here's how. Click  then select the image to copy from the PDF file. Once selected, press CTRL+C to copy it to the clipboard where it's ready for pasting into another application (such as Word). That's it!



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Standard for Date Formats

Do you get annoyed with the various ways that dates can be written? Is it **dd mmm yyyy**, or **mmm dd yyyy**? Perhaps it is **dd/mm/yy**, or maybe **mm/dd/yy**? Does it depend on whether you live in the US or in Australia? Does it depend on whether or not you have changed the date settings on your computer?

Well, despite common convention in your country, and despite the way we may say the date, there is actually an international standard for date formats—and it is none of the above!

ISO 8601:2000 specifies that the date format should be written as **yyyy mmm dd** (as does the Australian standard AS 3802:1997, the Canadian standard CSA/CAN3 Z234.4, and the US standard ANSI X3.30).

For ease of use in sorting, filing and retrieving computer documents, this is a preferred method. It is also simpler for calculating elapsed time, and combines naturally with the big-to-small convention used for **hh mm ss** when you need to be more specific about a date/time.

Because we should be writing in such a way that we don't exclude parts of our audience, we should be using a date convention that is globally acceptable—we don't have to say our dates this way, but we should be using this format in our professional communications, such as letters, faxes, and the like.

Ten things NOT to say to a Technical Writer!

1. It's okay - the programmers are writing the user documentation.
2. I've scribbled down the specs on these bits of paper, discarded napkins and the back of my hand. Just put it together in a nice document by Friday. If you have any questions, none of the development team will be around so you'll have to talk to the Manager.
3. The printer has just delivered all 200 copies and wants to know what a *User Manua* is.
4. The documentation is fine - I ran it through the spellchecker.
5. Why do we need you? Anybody can write as good as anybody else.
6. Can you type up these notes from our last meeting? Ohhh... I thought you were a secretary...
7. You get paid less than the programmers because writing is so easy anyone can do it.
8. Geez—It's only typing.
9. But your job description says 'Other duties as assigned.'
10. You mean you actually chose this career?

Clear instructions

Check out the 2002 winner of the "Worst Manual Contest" at: www.tecstandards.com/2002winner.htm

Contributions to "Clear Instructions" welcome! If you find a terrific or horrendous piece of technical writing, send the details to info@cybertext.com.au

Is telecommuting for you?

If you haven't tried telecommuting and aren't sure if it's for you, then try a couple of tests to check your compatibility for this sort of work:

- www.att.com/telework/get_started/gs_perscr.html
- www.langhoff.com/test.html

For a complete rundown on the benefits of telecommuting and implementing a telecommuting option, check out:

- www.cisco.com/warp/public/779/smbiz/netsolutions/find/telecommuting/

(URLs from Heikes, Peter "Managing the Virtual Worker/Telecommuter", *Intercom*, July/August 2002)

News!

- I had the privilege of attending two wonderful days of seminars held in Perth in September: Tony Self's *Hypertext Document Design*, and Dave Gash's *JavaScript for Writers*. Lots of fun, and lots of learning.
- In October, I traveled to Darwin to become familiar with a new piece of software that I am documenting. PQF Author is an excellent product that allows you to create surveys, questionnaires, in fact any sort data collection that you would normally do via paper forms, then email those surveys to a few or thousands of respondents. The PQF Collator part of the software automatically processes the responses as they arrive in your Inbox, and puts the data into a spreadsheet or database—on the fly! You can find out more about this great software from www.email-surveys.com.
- **Late News:** I have just received notification that I will be presenting a paper at the 50th Annual STC Conference, to be held in Dallas, Texas, in May 2003. Now, where did I put those cowboy boots?

Official And Ominous-Looking Small Print

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