

# The secrets of Microsoft Word®.

## Part I – ‘Find and Replace’ and en-dashes

Alistair Reeves

*Ascribe Medical Writing and Translation, Wiesbaden, Germany*

### Correspondence to:

Alistair Reeves  
Schäferweg 10, 65207  
Wiesbaden, Germany  
a.reeves@ascribe.de

### Abstract

Almost everyone uses Microsoft Word® – but do you use its standard functions to the full to make your job easier? It is worth spending a little time getting to know how you can exploit functions like ‘Find and Replace’ or change or understand some of the ‘factory settings’ that can sometimes be annoying.

**Keywords:** Microsoft Word, Word processing, Software

Many years ago, in the mid-1980s, when electronic word processing was first introduced, most people working for companies had courses which gave them a comprehensive grounding in the basics and a few special uses. This was followed by a half-day course or a couple of hours each time a new version of the respective software was issued. Nowadays, people are just expected to be able to use word processing (rather like being able to drive). The result is that word processors are used like a glorified typewriter by many, as is confirmed by not just a few of the articles I receive every year.

Many large companies send just a few administrative assistants to receive training on Microsoft Word®. These people are then expected to pass on the knowledge gained to the rest of their colleagues. This means that really useful things that you can do with Microsoft Word do not filter through to those who need them most – authors and editors.

### The hidden secrets of ‘Find and Replace’

I am often surprised at my courses that the delegates’ attention has never been drawn to simple things you can do to help yourself such as using ‘Find and Replace’ for checking and not just doing simple searching and replacing. If you start digging deeper into what you can do with the ‘Find and Replace’ function, I am sure you will

make much greater use of it, as it eases some of the thankless tasks of writing and editing. The main thing to remember is to think hard before you press the ‘Replace all’ button. It is almost always better to replace items individually.

Many people are not aware that you can search spaces, punctuation, strings, and codes in the ‘Find what:’ field, and that there are entries you can make for ‘any character’, ‘any digit’, and ‘any letter’, for example. At the bottom of the ‘Find and Replace’ dialogue box is a button that says ‘Special’. Open this up, and you will see some of the ‘special’ things you can search and replace (Figure 1). The list is longer for the ‘Find what:’ field than for the ‘Replace with:’ field.

‘Any letter’ is useful if you are dealing with text from different authors who have used one or two spaces after a full stop. If you want to check that you always have one space after a full stop, for example, and not a mixture of one and two, you type ‘^\$.[space][space]^\$’ in the ‘Find what:’ field. ^\$ is the entry for ‘any letter’ and is followed by the full stop and two spaces with the space bar (Figure 2). You then search with ‘Find next’ and can delete one space each time you have typed two (automatic replacement does not work with ‘any letter’). Adjust the number of spaces you enter to the number you want to find.

‘Any digit’ is useful when checking for the comma used as a decimal point in texts from Continental European authors. Enter ‘^#,^#’ into the ‘Find what:’ field and start searching. Again, you have to replace here manually, but at least you find all the instances.

The list under the ‘Special’ button also includes the paragraph mark. You may think you would never need to search for the paragraph mark, but I am sure that you deal with text (sometimes pages of it) copied into Word from PDF documents, emails, or other unformatted sources with paragraph signs at the end of each line and no space

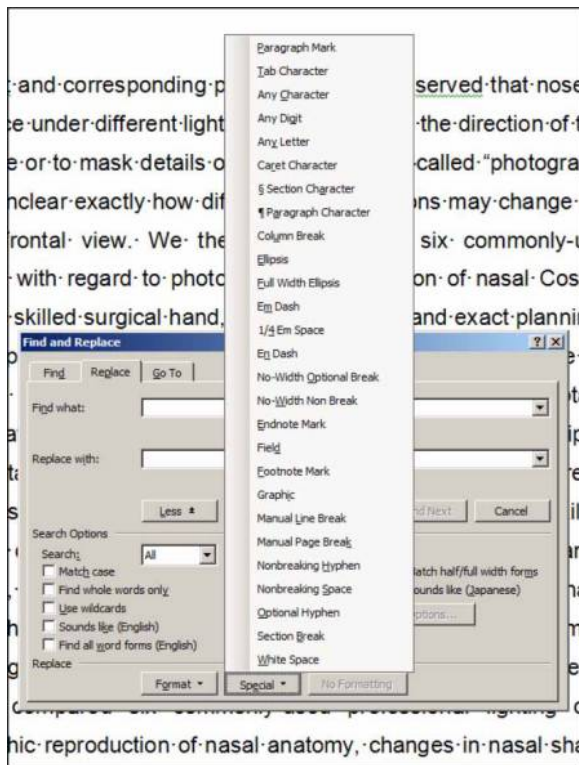


Figure 1: This list opens in 'Find and Replace' after you click on the 'Special' button with the cursor in the 'Find what:' field. To review the list for 'Replace with:', click on the 'Special' button with the cursor in the 'Replace with:' field. The list for 'Replace:' is much shorter because the elements that can be replaced are limited.

between the last letter and the paragraph sign. Enter '^p' into the 'Find what:' field and a space into the 'Replace with:' field. This will inevitably mean that you will have some instances of two spaces in your text, but nevertheless you can probably afford to click on 'Replace all' in this instance to get rid of all paragraph signs and insert spaces instead because you are likely to be heavily editing this sort of text anyway. And depending on the length of the text, you could search for two spaces and replace with one.

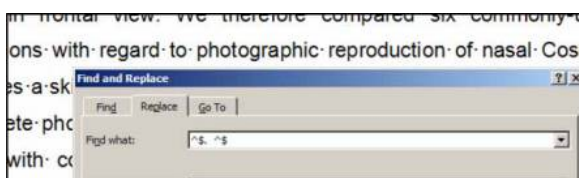


Figure 2: Finding full stops with two spaces after them: with the cursor in the 'Find what:' field, click on the 'Special' button and then on 'any letter'. '^\$' appears in the 'Find what:' field. Type a full stop after this and then two spaces, then click on the 'Special' button again and click on 'any letter' again. The full entry in the field is '^\$. ^\$'. You can, of course, also type in this string instead of using the 'Special' list. This function (like searching for the full stops with 'any letter') can be done with either the 'Find' or 'Replace' tab activated.

Explore what else you can do with the items under the 'Special' button as they really do allow you to cut some corners and save time.

Enter 'space comma' into the 'Find what:' field and a comma into the 'Replace with:' field to search for commas that still have spaces before them, because the text was so messy with track changes that you could not see the spaces before the commas. Do the same for opening and closing brackets, semi-colons, and full stops. The list of checks you can do is endless.

If you want to bind units to values so they are not separated over and automatic line break, enter a space followed by 'mg' (or the unit concerned) into the 'Find what:' field and a non-breaking space in the 'Replace with:' field (^s, or via the 'Special' list) followed by mg, and search. This catches all units starting with 'mg', such as mg/dl. Brave souls will do this with 'Replace All'; I still prefer to do this individually, or enter the non-breaking space while typing via <CTRL + shift + spacebar>.

However, this is not all you can do with Find and Replace. Lots of other strings can be entered in the 'Find what:' field to make your job easier. For example, James Visanji of Trilogy Writing showed me how to highlight all capital letter abbreviations in your text that have at least two letters by:

- In Word 2003, entering '[A-Z]{2}' into the 'Find what:' field under the 'Find' tab, selecting 'Use wildcards', selecting 'Highlight all items found in: Main Document', and clicking 'Find all' (Figure 3).

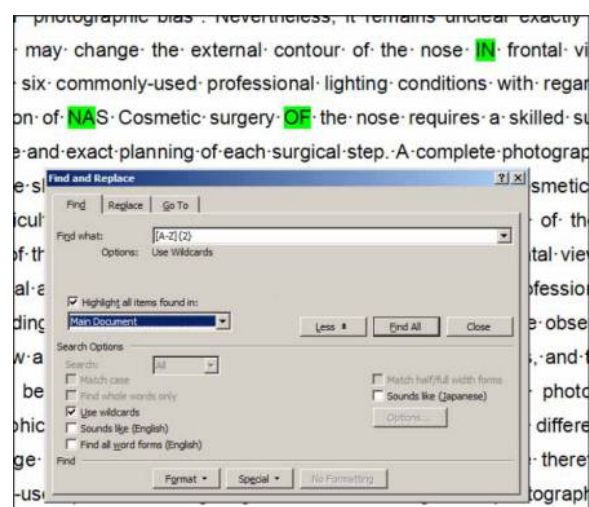


Figure 3: Finding and marking capital letter abbreviations with at least two letters using Word 2003. This can only be done with the 'Find' tab activated. Enter the string shown in the 'Find what:' field, activate the required settings, and click 'Find all'.

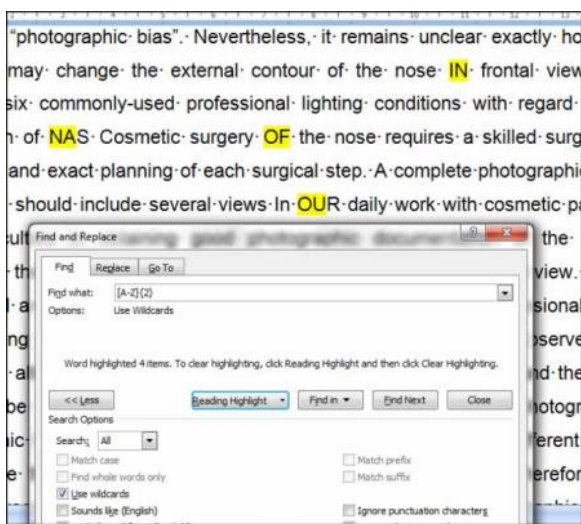


Figure 4: Finding and marking capital letter abbreviations with at least two letters using Word 2007. This can only be done with the 'Find' tab activated. Enter the string shown in the 'Find what:' field and activate the required settings. As soon as you choose 'Highlight All' (not displayed after you choose it!) from the Reading Highlight box, the abbreviations are highlighted.

- In Word 2007, entering '[A-Z]{2}' into the 'Find what:' field under the 'Find' tab, selecting 'Use wildcards', and selecting 'Highlight all' under 'Reading highlight' (Figure 4).

This can only be done with the 'Find' tab activated. All instances in the document are highlighted. In Word 2003, change the highlighting colour and print your document with all abbreviations marked. In Word 2007, you have to review them on the screen (I have not found a way of printing with highlighting, so it would be good to know

## Author information

Alistair Reeves has worked in the pharmaceutical industry for almost 40 years as a translator, writer, editor, and trainer, and for the last 12 years as a freelance trainer and editor. He is a regular contributor on language issues to *Medical Writing*, an honorary member of EMWA, and EMWA Conference Director.

if this is possible.). This is nowhere near automatic preparation of your list of abbreviations, but is a great help in a document with more than a few tens of pages.

It is well worth printing out the online help for 'Find and Replace' as it offers a wide range of possibilities for finding and checking many other things. As you try things out, you will learn which functions have to have the 'Find' tab activated and which have to have the 'Replace' tab activated.

## Those tricky en-dashes

An en-dash is the symbol that should be used for ranges, for example, 17–25 pg/ml. The 'factory setting' in Microsoft Word automatically changes hyphens into an en-dash. Unlike several other preset functions such as 'drag and drop' and 'smart cursoring', I have not switched this one off. Again, many people in my courses see this happen but do not realise what is happening. When Word thinks you are typing a range such as '... 17–25 pg/ml ...', you type '17-space-hyphen-space-25' and as soon as you type the space after the 25, it converts the hyphen you typed into an 'en-dash'. It does not remove the spaces, but in traditional typesetting the en-dash has no spaces. I think we will have to bow to Word and realise that very soon the en-dash will usually have spaces. I have already given up taking them out! The way to insert an en-dash manually is <CTRL + -> on the numeric keypad.

Word has many other 'factory settings', and I shall be telling you why I have rejected some of them in a future issue.