

11 Tips for Creating Tables in Word

Microsoft Word tables may be the unsung hero of the document formatting world. Simple and straightforward or slick and sophisticated, Word tables let you arrange your thoughts and data in ways that make sense to the people you're trying to reach.

A table's function is to convey—in as few words as possible—the important points your readers are looking for. The key objectives of your proposal will look great in a table; your entire Web page can be built in a table; your sales projections for 2003 can be prettied up; and your primary research factors can be introduced in a table.

Use these 11 tips—ranging from simple to sophisticated—to help get started showing off your data in a new, tabular way.

Create a simple table

Never created a table before? The process is as easy as they come. In the **Standard** toolbar, click **Insert Table**. A grid will appear. Next, just highlight the number of columns and rows you want. For example, if you want a three-by-three table, highlight a segment of the grid that is three squares deep and three squares wide. The table is inserted at the cursor position in your document.

Another option is in the **Table** menu click **Draw Table** to display the **Tables and Borders** toolbar, as shown in Figure 1. You can then use either the **Draw Table** or **Insert Tables** options to create the basic table, and then spruce it up with all the various table features available. You might want to change the line style or thickness, modify the color of the border or background, apply an AutoFormat, or rearrange the data in ascending or descending order.



Figure 1

Add labels and headings to your table

In some cases, simply entering a few columns of numbers or text is enough to convey your message, but generally you'll need to add at least a couple of items to help people reading the table know what the data means. Here are a few tips for making your data understandable.

- **Column headings** appear at the top of each column of data. Make your column headings descriptive but short and if possible, use familiar phrases (such as Jan, Feb, Mar or Qtr 1, Qtr 2, Qtr 3).

- **Row labels** are the text tags in the left column of the table. Not every table will need row labels; this will depend on the data you're showing. If you use row labels, be sure they also are descriptive enough that readers understand what the data represents but short enough that they don't take up too much valuable space in your table.
- **Comments** can help you annotate the table to provide curious readers with more information. You can add a comment by highlighting the data in a table cell and in the **Insert** menu, click **Comment**. The Reviewing Pane will open. Type your comment and then close the Reviewing Pane.

Region 1	Region 3																		
400 units	248 units																		
14 regional salespeople	8 regional salespeople; 4 contract sales																		
On-site system design	Internet <small>Comment: The office space has been leased and we are in process of hiring in-house staff. Estimate that on-site system design will be functional on Mar 1, 2003.</small>																		
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Figure 2: Table with comment included

Enter your information into the table

You've created a table, now you need to enter the data. Click in the top square (this is called a *cell* in table talk), type your information, and press the <Tab> key to move to the next cell. (See the next tip if you're baffled by why pressing <Enter> doesn't work.) Remember that you don't have to type your data if you have it saved elsewhere—that's one of the great things about Office applications. If you've saved it somewhere else, select it, copy it, and paste it into your table.

Here's a trick to save you some reformatting time: Highlight all the cells in which you want to place the incoming data; then press <Ctrl>V to paste. Or, in the **Edit** menu click **Paste**. The data items are placed in each cell, just the way you want it. If instead you click in a cell and press <Ctrl>V, all the cells you copied are placed in that single cell, creating a nested table.

One other option: If the table you're creating is part of a Microsoft Excel worksheet that gets updated regularly and you want to make sure your table is as current as possible, you can use **Paste Special** (on the **Edit** menu click **Paste Special**) to add the cells as a

Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Object. You'll then be able to edit the Excel table as needed by simply clicking on it in your Word document. The only drawback, however, is that you can't spread out the data into cells of an existing Word table; instead, you'll need to format the cells the way you want them in Excel and then paste them already formatted into your Word document.

Keystrokes to help you move around your table freely

Certain keys won't work the way you expect them to when you're working with tables. For example, pressing <Enter> doesn't take you to the next column or row; instead, it adds a new blank line in the current cell. Here are the keystrokes you need to remember to move from cell to cell in your Word tables:

To move	Press
To the next column (on the right)	The <Tab> key
To the previous column (on the left)	<Shift><Tab>
To the cell in the next row (one row down)	The <Down arrow> key
To the cell in the previous row (one row up)	The <Up arrow> key
To the beginning of a cell entry	<Home> (or <Ctrl><Left arrow>)
To the end of a cell entry	<End> (or <Ctrl><Right arrow>)

Use space wisely

White space is an important design element, whether you're designing Web pages, documents, brochures, or tables. In a table, giving the data room to breathe makes the table more appealing.

To adjust the space in your table, select the entire table (click the selector tag that appears in the top left corner of the table when you position the pointer over it) and then:

1. In the **Format** menu click **Paragraph**. The **Paragraph** dialog box will appear. You can then add consistent spacing to give some cushion between the text and the cell boundaries.
2. Under **Spacing**, in the **Before** box, type "4 pt."

This will be easier on the eye and makes it more likely that your readers will stick around long enough to understand what you are trying to show them.

Apply or create a Web style

If you want to turn an existing table into a table that looks great on the Web, you can add three dimensional (3-D) borders and more by choosing one of the formats for Web tables. Start by selecting the table you want to change; then in the **Table** menu click **Table AutoFormat**. (The **Table AutoFormat** option is also in the **Table and Borders** toolbar.) In the **Table AutoFormat** dialog box, scroll through the list of table formats until you reach Table Web 1, Table Web 2, or Table Web 3. Select the style you want; the preview window shows you how your table will look. Click Apply to apply the selected style to your table.

Note: If you don't see exactly what you want, you can create your own Web table style. In the **Table AutoFormat** dialog box, click **Modify**. You can then change the font, color, border, and more and enter a new name for your custom style.

Put tables inside of tables

Depending on the types of tables you are creating, you might need to nest one table inside another. Sound complicated? It's really not—in fact, it's almost as easy as creating a standalone table.

To create a nested table, click the cell in which you want to add the nested table. On the **Standard** toolbar click **Insert Table**. Then click in the grid to show the number of columns and rows you want in the new table. The table is added inside the current cell. See Figure 3.

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Figure 3: Tables nested inside other tables

If you want to remove the borders of the cells in the nested table, select the table and click the **Border** tool arrow. Choose **No Border** and the table borders are removed. (While you are working in Word, you will see gray grid lines indicating the table cells, but when you print the file no grid will appear.)

Make your column headings vertical

Suppose you have columns headings that just *can't* be shortened. You can turn the headings to run vertically on the page, which allows you to keep your columns narrow and still display the entire heading. See Figure 4. Here's how to do it:

1. Create your table as normal.
2. Select the row containing the column headings.
3. In the **Format** menu, click **Text Direction**. In the **Text Direction** dialog box, choose the example showing the format you want to use.
4. Click **OK**. The column headings are changed according to your selection. Now you can drag the column separators to make the columns smaller so the table takes up less space on your page.

Testing/ Year	Brand name graphics cards	Generic graphics cards	Brand name sound cards	Generic sound cards
1998	12%	67%	13%	58%
1999	18%	65%	18%	60%
2000	25%	62%	28%	55%
2001	32%	50%	40%	51%

Figure 4: Table with vertical headings

Wrap text around a graphic

Tables are as much a design element as any image you put on your document page. A table gives readers information quickly and can also break up long pages of text to give the reader's eye a rest. Did you know that you can wrap text around tables in the same way you can wrap it around graphics? See Figure 5. Here's how.

Begin by selecting the table you want to use. Then in the **Table** menu, click **Table Properties**. In the **Table Properties** dialog box, click the **Tables** tab. By default, in the Table wrapping section, Word sets text wrapping to **None**, which means that any tables you create are set off in a space by themselves. If you want to wrap text around the table, click **Around**. Now text will flow around the selected table.

If you want to control the amount of space between the table and the surrounding text, in the **Table Properties** dialog box click **Positioning**. In the **Positioning** dialog box, you can specify the amount of space you want to leave around the table and anchor the table to the paragraph, page, margin, or column.

Hardware Evaluations (1998 – 2001)

A four-year study reveals steady changes in the types of hardware visitors use when viewing multimedia presentations online with Contoso, Ltd. One interesting finding showed that although the number of users who did

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not know the manufacturer of their graphics cards stayed fairly consistent, users grew more likely to know the name of the sound card included in their systems.

Table 4 Hardware evaluations (Contoso, Ltd.)

Figure 5: Table with text wrapping around it

Add a caption to your table

If you want to give your readers a little more information by providing a table caption, select the table, right-click, and choose **Caption**. In the **Caption** dialog box, choose the type of label you want to use (Table, Figure, or Equation) and the position of the label (either before or after the selected item). Click **OK**.

If you want to change the label to something other than one of the choices Word gives you, click **New Label** and enter the new label. Word will add the new label in the Caption line at the top of the dialog box.

You also can use the Caption feature to have Word automatically add and number specific objects you place in your Word documents. This is great for documents that incorporate many graphics or Microsoft PowerPoint® slides.

Completely delete a table

How many times have you selected a table and tried to delete it by pressing <Delete>, only to find the data erased and the shell of the table sitting there staring at you? There's

an easy way to get rid of a table you no longer need. Select the table, right-click, and click **Cut**. The table is whisked away to Clipboard land, where it will eventually get bumped off by other things.

But if you want to do the delete by the book, select the table in the **Table** menu, point to **Delete** and click **Table**. That takes care of it, and you don't have to worry about it hogging your Clipboard space.