

Customizing Word's toolbars

Don't like the Word toolbar? Then don't settle for it! Here's a simple, step-by-step guide to customizing the Word toolbars – and creating your own.

Toolbars are the handiest thing since the invention of the RotoRooter. With a single click of a toolbar icon you can accomplish a task that might take you two, three or four clicks via the menus. Three clicks here or there may sound like a small thing, but over time those clicks add up into a mountain of extra effort.

As handy as they are, there's no toolbar extant that couldn't do with some improvement, and that's certainly the case with the toolbars in Microsoft Office. Microsoft has been tinkering with the Office toolbars for a long time and it still hasn't got some of the basics right. Why, for instance, is there no Close button on the Standard toolbar? In Word 2000 there are New, Open and Save buttons, and then, right where you'd expect a Close button, there's an E-mail button instead. It seems Microsoft's attitude is, "Never was, never will be a Close button."

Roll your own

The neat thing is, you don't have to put up with Microsoft's decisions. You can customize the Office toolbars to your heart's content. Which, after all, is the sensible solution. No two people use Office in quite the same way, so a one-size-fits-all toolbar is going to please very few people.

I'm going to show you how to tweak the Office toolbars to suit your own desires. I'll focus on Word 2000; you'll find most of the techniques work in the other Office programs (with the exception of Publisher) and in Office 97 as well.

Some basic shifts

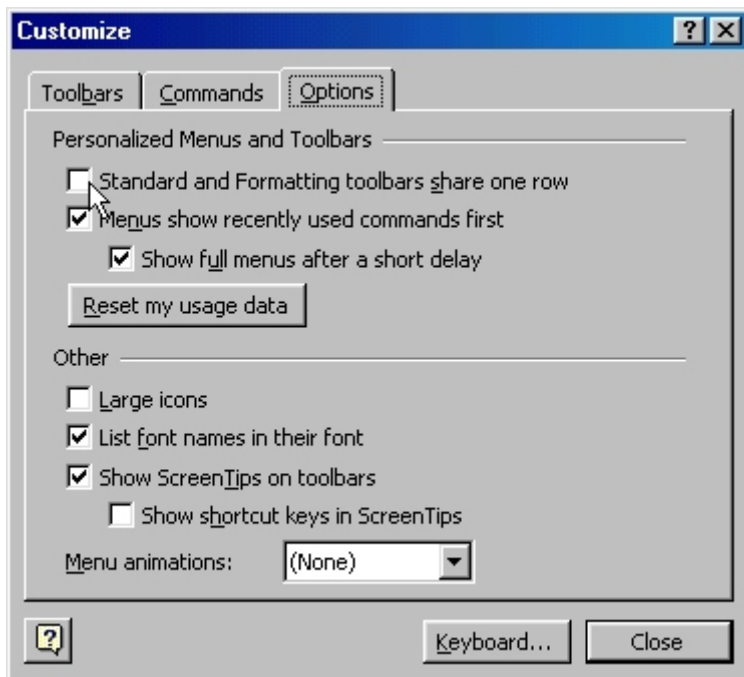
Word has two default toolbars – the Standard toolbar and the Formatting toolbar – which display when you first install it. In Word 2000, Microsoft crams these two toolbars onto the same row, making it impossible to see the complete contents. Instead, you'll find a More Buttons icon at the far-right, which you press to see the buttons that don't fit.

It's a dumb arrangement, which you can easily correct:

From the Tools Menu, select Customize.

Click the Options tab.

Click to remove the checkmark beside the Standard And Formatting Toolbars Share One Row option, and click Close.



Display Word 2000's two default toolbars in their entirety by adjusting this Customize setting. Now you'll see the two toolbars one above the other, as in Word 97.



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Word's default Standard and Formatting toolbars (click the image to see more details and a full-size screenshot).

If you don't like having the toolbars at the top of the screen, you can move them elsewhere. Notice how each toolbar has a little handle at its left end. To move a toolbar, grab its handle and drag it to a new position. You can make it 'float' over the document window, or you can drag it to any edge of the Word window to make it 'dock' there. When you make a toolbar float, it loses its handle and gains its own title bar instead – drag it by that title bar to move it into a new position.

You can also use the handle to resize a toolbar. That's handy when you want to place a couple of toolbars side-by-side on the same row (or one above the other).

Try to avoid placing toolbars that include drop-down lists (such as the font-picker on the Formatting toolbar) to the sides of the screen: Those drop-down lists don't function well when the toolbar is docked vertically and, in fact, you lose some toolbar buttons when you do this.

A cornucopia of toolbars

The Standard and Formatting toolbars are the tip of the iceberg. Right-click anywhere on one of these toolbars and you'll be presented with a long list of toolbars that usually remain hidden. Select a toolbar that isn't checked to display it; select a checked toolbar to hide it.

This list isn't the whole story. If you right-click a toolbar and choose Customize from the pop-up menu, then click the Toolbars tab, you'll see there are even more toolbars tucked away in the closet. There's also a New button in the Customize dialog. This button is the route to complete toolbar freedom: Click it, and in the New Toolbar dialog give your new toolbar a name, make your toolbar available within all your documents by choosing Normal.dot in the Make Toolbar Available To box, and click OK.

Hey presto! You'll see a new blank toolbar appear. Drag it to a convenient location (perhaps underneath your Formatting toolbar).

Populating a new toolbar

In its virgin state, your new toolbar isn't worth the real estate it occupies. What you need to do is stock it with the commands you use most which don't get a look in on the other toolbars. Why not stick a Close option on this toolbar, for starters? Here's how:

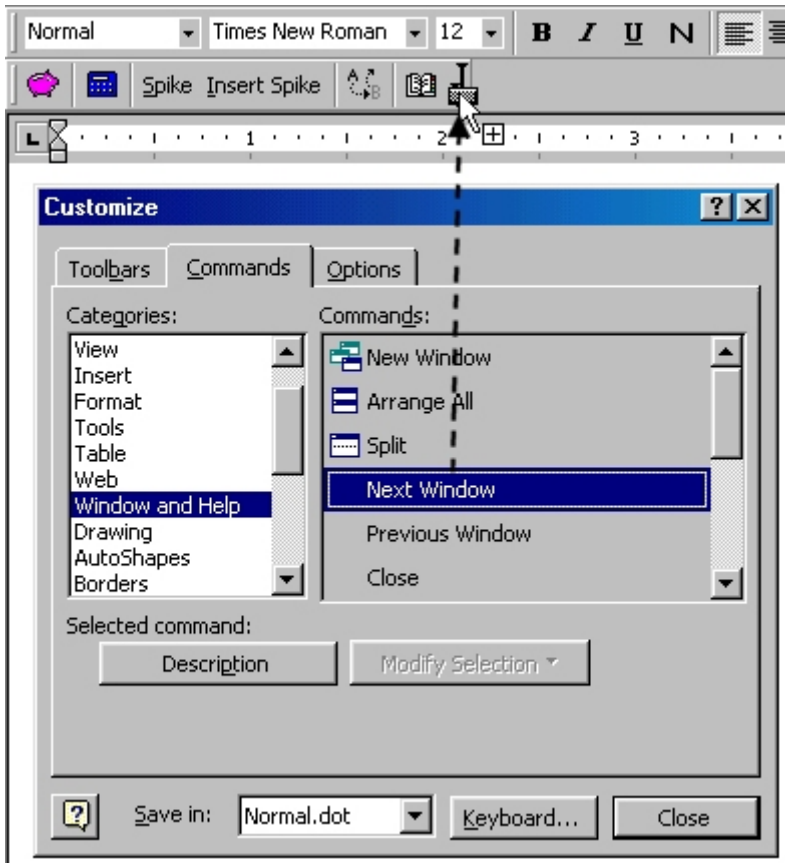
Right-click a toolbar and choose Customize from the pop-up menu.

Click the Commands tab.

In the Categories list on the left, choose File. The Commands list on the right now shows all the File Menu commands. In fact, it contains a whole lot more commands than you'll find if you open the File Menu. That's because your screen just isn't long enough to accommodate a fully stocked File Menu. (In true Microsoft hide-the-tools-in-case-the-kids-hurt-themselves fashion, this list of File Menu commands isn't exhaustive, either. If you want to see the full list, scroll down the Categories list and select All Commands, then scroll through the Commands list to find all commands beginning with File. That, it seems, is the full list. Now, reselect the File Menu from the Categories list before you continue.)

Locate the Close command and drag-and-drop it onto your newly created Toolbar.

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From the Customize dialog, drag the desired toolbar command onto your newly created toolbar. The result, as can be seen below, is a new command on the toolbar:



Voila! Your toolbar is now functional. You could click Close now, and start to make use of it. But before you do that, why not add some more buttons to make it more useful? Here are some I find useful:

Edit -> Select All

Edit -> Find

Edit -> Replace

Window & Help -> Next Window (for quickly moving between multiple documents)

Window & Help -> Previous Window

Tools -> Word Count

Tools -> Tools Calculate

That last command is great for turning Word into a quick calculator. Just type an equation – such as $(85*11+746/12)*19\%$ – then select it and click your Calculate button to display the answer in the status bar at the bottom of the window and copy it to the clipboard. It's handy for doing quick column totals in tables, too.

If you're not sure what one of the commands does, select it, then click the Description button to see a pop-up info box. Click Close once you're done.

Altering existing toolbar buttons

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Just as you can create your own toolbar full of icons, you can also create, move and delete icons on any of the existing toolbars. When you have the Customize box displayed, all the toolbars become morphable. In this state, you can:

Click-and-drag an icon to move it from one toolbar to another.

Click-and-drag an icon into the document window to delete it from a toolbar.

Click-and-drag an icon slightly to the right to create a divider between it and the icon to its left.

Right-click an icon to change its looks and name or to attach a hyperlink to it.

If you don't like the way Microsoft has grouped its icons, you can rearrange them. For instance, that Close button that you put on your newly minted toolbar might go better next to the Open and Save buttons on the Standard toolbar. Drag it up there, if you like.

Similarly, you may never use some of the options that make it onto the Standard and Formatting toolbars. Why not delete them, or create a new "Infrequently used" toolbar, drag-and-drop them there, then hide that toolbar away until you need it.

Prettying up your toolbar

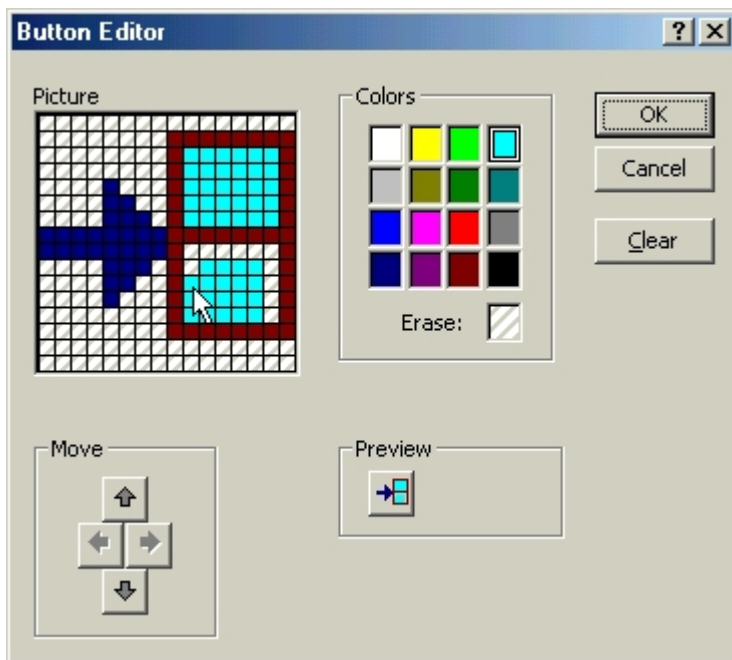
You'll find that not all commands have their own icon. When you add such a command to a toolbar, the command name is displayed, instead of an icon. For instance, if you add the Select All command to a toolbar, you'll see the words Select All displayed instead of an icon. If you prefer icons to command labels – after all, they take up much less space – you can edit the toolbar button to give it a new face. (Of course, you can also do the reverse, if you find labels more useful than indecipherable icons.) To edit a toolbar button to display an icon instead of a label:

Display the Customize dialog box by right-clicking a toolbar and choosing Customize from the pop-up menu.

Right click the button you wish to change and choose Default Style. The label will disappear and in its place will be a blank button.

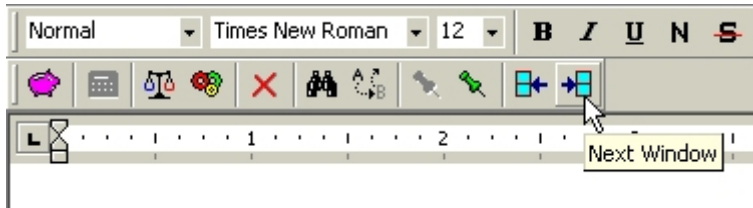
Right-click the button once more, choose Change Button Image and select one of the pre-fab button images. If you don't like any of the choices, click the Edit Button Image option instead to load the button editor. You can then design your own button from scratch. If you, like me, have little artistic bent, you can always select one of the default images and then use the Edit Button Image option to tailor it to your liking.

Click Close when you're done.



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Word's Button Editor in action and, below, the results.



Restoring the defaults

What happens if you completely muck things up? Never fear, you can reset individual buttons to their original state and you can also reset entire toolbars to the default settings.

To reset a button:

Display the Customize dialog box by right-clicking a toolbar and choosing Customize from the pop-up menu.

Right click the button in question and choose Reset from the pop-up menu.

To reset an entire toolbar:

Display the Customize dialog box by right-clicking a toolbar and choosing Customize from the pop-up menu.

Select the toolbar in the list then click the Reset button.

In the Reset Toolbar dialog, select Normal.dot and click OK.

If you make lots of changes to your own toolbars, consider making a copy of Normal.dot and storing it somewhere safe. That way, if you have to format and reinstall, you can recover your new settings by copying Normal.dot back into the Templates folder.