



Table basics

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Overview

If you come to Word from a typewriter background, you are probably used to setting up tabular material using tabs. The very word *tab* is short for “tabulator,” and “tabulator” stops on a typewriter are used in “tabulation,” that is, making tables. So your first impulse when you need to make a table in Word may be to use tabs.

Sometimes this is an acceptable (or occasionally, even the best) way to go. For a simple table with short entries, and very few rows, setting tab stops can be quick and easy, and Word allows you to drag them around until the text lines up where you want it. If you do use tabs to create a “table”, be sure you use them properly; in particular, **never** use the built-in tab stops; always create your own. For tips on this subject, see [Setting tabs \(Or how to prevent tabbed paragraphs from going all over the place when pasted between documents\)](#).

Like other word processors, however, Word offers a very easy way to create tables that use true rows and columns, as opposed to simply containing tabular text. Whenever your needs are less simple – for example, whenever the text in any column of your table might need to wrap to the next line, or you need vertical table borders, or your table might span more than one page and need a continuation header, or if you might ever conceivably need to change the column order – you should use Word’s built-in Table feature. Note that you can convert tabular text into a Word Table in one step, provided your tab stops were set properly, by selecting **Table | Convert Text to Table** and pressing **OK**. See also [Changing your mind](#).

Many people who are not familiar with using true Tables try to use text boxes to simulate the appearance of a table with borders; or sometimes even to draw their borders using horizontal and vertical drawing lines. As well as making life far more difficult than it need be during the design of the table, this also creates a maintenance nightmare, should anyone need ever need to add, delete or amend the data later, or to paste the table into another document. There is really **no** circumstance in which using text boxes or drawing lines to create tabular information is ever preferable to using a table.

Let’s look at what Word’s Table feature does.

What is a Table?

How is a Table different from a “table” of tabbed text? As you know, you can arrange tabular material using tabs. For example, you can use a combination of left-, center-, decimal-, and right-aligned tab stops, in combination with horizontal paragraph borders, to create a text-based “table” such as the following (shown with non-printing characters displayed, so you can see how it was created):

Orange County Business and Employment Categories¶				
	→	% of All	→	% of Total
	→	Businesses	→	Employment¶
Retail trade	→	21.3	→	17.3¶
Services	→	21.0	→	22.4¶
Finance, insurance, and real estate	→	10.7	→	7.1¶
Wholesale trade	→	10.6	→	5.6¶
Manufacturing	→	9.7	→	20.2¶
Construction	→	6.0	→	4.6¶
Professional, governmental, and miscellaneous	→	16.9	→	19.0¶
Transportation and utilities	→	2.4	→	2.9¶
Agriculture, mining, and fishing	→	1.4	→	0.9¶

Source: Orange County Chamber of Commerce¶

Figure 1

Notice (in Figure 2) what can happen when you add some text to one of the lines, because of the lack of support for word-wrapping:

Professional, governmental, and miscellaneous departments	→	16.9
→	19.0¶	

Figure 2

Selecting a single “column” is possible (hold the **Alt** key down while you drag with the mouse); but is much more difficult than if a Word Table had been used; and it is not possible to have a running header, should the table span two pages.

But suppose the tabular material is more complex. For instance, suppose you have paragraph text to be placed in side-by-side columns, as in the following example:

Comment, Statement, or Assertion	Response or Rebuttal
Mr. Doe accepts the appraisal as “conform[ing] in most categories to R41b and the Standards of Professional Practice in place at the date of the appraisal.	It is not adequate for an appraisal to conform “in most categories.” This is like saying that a driver generally follows traffic laws but will intentionally run a red light or stop sign.
The report states: “I cannot render an opinion as to the accuracy of the valuation,” and “there are indications that the value indicated in the report is reasonable.”	This implies both that Mr. Doe agrees with the value estimate and that there are or could be indications that the value indicated is <i>not</i> reasonable.

Figure 3

When you use tabs to create such a “table”, each “row” of the table (or sometimes the whole table) is a single paragraph. If you tried to type text such as the above using tabs (and I have actually seen this done!), you would have to break the paragraphs up into fragments that would fit on each line. If the text had to be edited, it would be a nightmare. But when you use Word’s Table feature to create a table, a table creates a “cell” for each intersection of a row and column. Each cell contains a separate paragraph (or can contain several paragraphs); and the text in the cell can wrap independently of the rest of the table. So whenever your tabular material contains text that must wrap to the next line a Word table is far more satisfactory than a tabbed table.

Inserting a table

Inserting a table is easy.

If you choose **Insert Table** from the **Table** menu (or in Word 97, select Insert from the Table menu), you can choose the number of rows and columns you want your table to

start with. (**Don't ever** select **Table | Draw Table**, for the reasons discussed below under **Drawing tables**.)

Or you can use the context-sensitive Table button on the Standard toolbar; when you click on this you will see a flyout table grid on which you can use your mouse to select the desired number of rows and columns.

Although the flyout (see Figure 5) shows five columns and four rows when you first click on it, you can drag to select more rows and columns; the maximum number depends on your window size, your screen resolution, and the relative placement of the button on your toolbar – that is, how far you can drag before reaching the side or bottom of the Word window.

The number of columns is all that really matters because you can add rows to the table as you go: whenever you press Tab at the end of the last row of the table a new row is created.

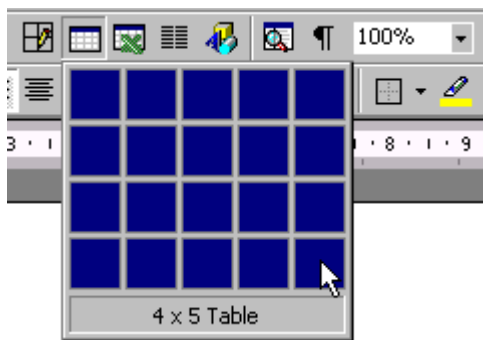


Figure 5: The Table button flyout

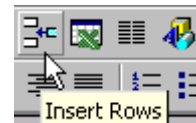


Figure 4: The Table button on the Standard toolbar is context-sensitive, its appearance and functionality being determined by what is selected

For this reason I usually just create two rows, one for the table headings and another for the first row of text. If applying grid borders, it's best to start with three rows, so that you can apply one grid to row 1 and a separate grid to rows 2-3; but you would almost never need to start with more than that.

When you first insert the table, it will have a ½-point border around the cells, creating a grid.

You can remove this, if desired, by selecting “None” in the Borders and Shading dialog, or using the Tables and Borders toolbar, or the Borders button on the Formatting toolbar.

You may also be able to remove the border by pressing **Ctrl+Alt+U**, although in some versions and languages of Word, this shortcut inserts a **ú** symbol instead (and there is no way of preventing this from happening – it seems to be a bug). But if your installation of Word suffers from this problem, you could get round this by assigning some other keyboard shortcut to the strangely named command “TableUpdateAutoFormat”, which removes the borders; and then use your own shortcut when you want to remove the borders.

In Word 2000 and above, you can also change Word's behaviour, so that when you first insert a table, it will always be borderless. To do this, select **Table | Insert Table**; select the checkbox that says “Set as default for new tables”; then click the **AutoFormat** button, de-select every checkbox you see in the AutoFormat dialog; and click **OK** twice. From now on, all new tables will be inserted without borders.

Even if you remove the border, you may still see faint lines between the table cells; these are *gridlines*; they are just a (very important) visual aid, and do not print. If you do not see them, select **Table | Gridlines** to turn their display on. For more on borders and gridlines see **Why don't my table borders print?** and **Run for the border: using borders in Word**.

Working in a table

You can put almost anything in a table that you can put in normal document text, and you can format table text the same way you would ordinary text paragraphs. The best way to do this, of course, is with styles (you may want to define special styles for use in tables, and Word 2002 even allow you to define special styles for an entire table), but you can apply font and paragraph formatting the same way you normally do. There are just a few things that work differently in tables.

Tabs

When you tab in a table, you go to the next cell (**Shift+Tab** takes you to the previous cell). This makes it easy to work in tables because you don't have to use the mouse to move your insertion point. But you can still set tab stops in table cells; the trick is that you have to use **Ctrl+Tab** to tab to them. The exception to this rule is the decimal tab. When you set a decimal tab stop in a cell, the text aligns on it automatically (provided it is left-aligned or justified to begin with; any other paragraph alignment gives very odd results).

Selecting text

If you're used to selecting a line of text by clicking to the left of it or a paragraph by double-clicking to the left of it, you'll find that you can't do this in a table. Whenever you point to a cell and click, you select the entire cell. But you can still select text by dragging, and you can select a sentence using **Ctrl+click** or a paragraph by triple-clicking in it. And if you normally select text using keyboard shortcuts, these will still work.

Margins and indents

If you have the horizontal ruler displayed, you will see that it looks very different when you are working in a table. Instead of seeing indent markers at the page margins, you will see them at the sides of the space representing the table cell you are currently in. You can drag these as you normally would to set paragraph indents. You will also see margin markers on the ruler, representing the edge of each column – more on this later.

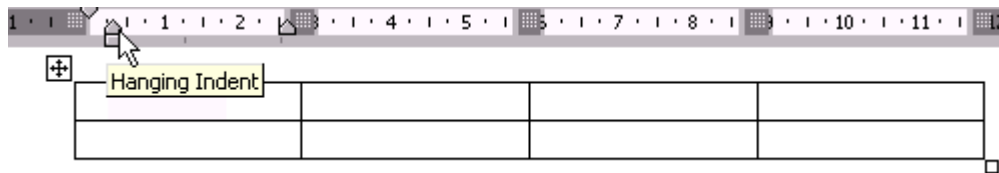



Figure 6: The ruler, when the selection is in a table

Selecting parts of a table

As mentioned earlier, if you point to a cell (the mouse pointer becomes a stubby black arrow pointing northeast: ) and click, the entire **cell** is selected.

To select an entire **row**, point to it as you would a line of text (position the mouse pointer in the left margin until it is a white arrow pointing northeast) and then click. Or point to any cell in the row and double-click.

To select a **column**, hover the mouse over the top of the column until it becomes a stubby black arrow pointing down. Click to select the column below; drag to select adjacent columns. You can also select a column by clicking while pressing **Alt** anywhere in the column, and in long tables this works much better, because you don't need to be at the top of the column to select it.

To select an **entire table**, with the insertion point anywhere in the table, press **Alt** and **double-click**.

You can also use the Select commands on the Table menu to select rows, columns, or the entire table.

In Word 2002 you can select noncontiguous rows and columns by pressing **Ctrl** while selecting rows or columns after the first.

Sizing rows and columns

When you first insert a table, all the columns are the same size, and all the rows are an "Auto" height that will accommodate the current text size. For example, if you are using the default Body Text style, which uses the Normal font and has 6 pts Spacing After, then the table row will be high enough for 10-pt (Word 97 and earlier) or 12-pt (Word 2000/2002) Times New Roman plus 6 pts space following. (It's a good idea to define specific paragraph styles for use in tables that have borders, with different spacing from your Normal style; such as 3 point before and after.)

Because the row height is automatic, it will adjust to fit the amount of text you put into it, so you will not ordinarily need to change this unless you need empty rows of a fixed height. But you probably will need to change the width of the columns to accommodate the text they contain. In Word 2000 and 2002, you can let Word resize the columns for you (“AutoFit to contents”), but this can be very disconcerting and not necessarily satisfactory. Furthermore, in Word 2000 and higher, the “Automatically resize to fit contents” option under **Table | Properties | Options** slows tables down dramatically, and it is a good idea to switch it off in **all** your tables (unfortunately, it is switched on whenever you create a new table).

Most likely you will want to adjust the column widths manually. There are several ways to do this.

Sizing columns using the ruler

If you click and drag the area on the ruler that represents the space between cells, you change the width of one or more of the cells. The way this change is made depends on how you drag, as follows:

Simple click and drag: The cell to the left of the dragged border is made wider or narrower, and the other cell widths are not changed (so the overall table width changes). Since the table is initially inserted at margin width, this means that if you make one of the cells wider, the table will extend beyond the right margin.

Ctrl+click and drag: The cell to the left is sized, and the difference is made up from the cells to the right uniformly. That is, if you make the cell to the left larger, all the cells to the right become proportionately smaller.

Shift+click and drag: The cell to the left is sized, and the difference in size is made up from the cell to the right. That is, if you make the cell to the left larger, the cell to the right becomes proportionately smaller.

Alt+click and drag: Same as simple click and drag except that the ruler displays the dimensions of the cells as you drag, permitting finer adjustments.

However, note that the measurements the ruler displays are somewhat misleading, in that they do not include the “Space between columns” (or cell margins).

For example, if you have a column of width 1" (2.54cm), and if the “Space between columns” is set to 0.15", or 0.38cm, (the default), then the column width displayed on the ruler when you hold the **Alt** key down will be 0.85" (2.16cm).

To find out the “Space between columns” setting using the Table Properties dialog in Word 2000 and higher, click the Options button on the Table tab, and add the Left and Right cell margin measurements – although that isn't always accurate, as it only displays to two decimal places. For instance, if the “Space between columns” is set to 0.15", the Left and Right cell margin measurements on the Table Properties dialog both display as 0.08" instead of 0.075". A better way of finding out the true measurements is covered at:

[How to sidestep the problems of the Word 2000 \(and higher\) Table Properties dialog.](#)

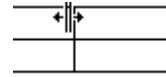
Alt+Ctrl+click and drag: Same as Ctrl+click and drag except that the ruler displays dimensions.

Alt+Shift+click and drag: Same as Shift+click and drag except that the ruler displays dimensions. (But see above rider.)

Sizing columns using the cell borders

You can also size the columns by dragging directly on the cell boundaries, and this is often much easier than using the ruler – partly because the indent markers on the ruler can make it difficult to get at the margin markers. Most people also find it more intuitive to drag the columns directly.

When you hover the mouse pointer over the gridline between two columns, it will change to a double arrow (pointing right and left) with two upright parallel lines between it. When it has this appearance, you can click and drag a column boundary.



You have the same six combinations as above, but, just to be *totally* confusing, simple click and drag and Shift+click and drag (and Alt+click and drag and Alt+Shift+click and drag) are reversed in their functionality.

It is possible that some users actually memorize or remember what these various combinations do, but I personally just keep trying one after the other (with Undo in between) until I get the one that does what I want!

Sizing rows

You can also adjust row height either using the vertical ruler or by dragging the cell boundaries, but only in Page/Print Layout view.

Pressing **Ctrl** while you drag sets the row to an “Exact”, or fixed, height, so that if there is too much text in the cell to fit, the surplus text will be hidden (setting exact row heights is particularly useful for forms). If you *don't* use the **Ctrl** key, the row height is set to “At least” the measurement you chose, so the row will expand in height if needed, to fit the text in the cell, but will not contract below the minimum height you set.

Pressing **Alt** while you drag causes the ruler to display dimensions – but prevents you from setting an Exact height, even with the **Ctrl** key held down.

Another way to size columns and rows

All versions of Word also have a dialog that allows you to set exact column widths and minimum or exact row heights. In Word 97 and earlier, this is the **Table | Cell Height and Width** dialog, which has Row and Column tabs. Row height is Auto by default but can also be set to “At least” or “Exactly” a certain amount. By default this measurement is displayed in points, but you can type in another measurement, followed by the measurement unit – such as 2" or 5 cm – and Word will convert it to points.

Word 2000 and 2002 have a Table Properties dialog (accessible via the right-click shortcut menu) that has Table, Row, Column, and Cell tabs. On the Table tab you can set a “preferred width” for the entire table; this can be set in your default measurement unit (inches, centimetres, or whatever else you have set on the General tab of Tools | Options), or you can set the “Measure in” drop-down to “percent”, and set it to any percentage of the editable page width you wish. If you set it to 100%, it will always maintain full margin width, no more and no less (for coverage of the nearest equivalent in Word 97, see: [How can I resize a table to fit the page's width?](#)).

On the Row tab of the Table Properties dialog, you can set “Auto,” “At least,” or “Exactly” heights. On the Column tab you can set a “preferred” width for the current column, although unfortunately, in Word 2000 and higher, “preferred” width does **not** mean actual width, and setting the column width using the dialog usually gives unexpected results; dragging the columns to set their widths is generally much more reliable. Fortunately, you can sidestep the unreliability of the Word 2000 and 2002 Table Properties dialog – see [How to sidestep the problems of the Word 2000 \(and higher\) Table Properties dialog](#) for details.

Even distribution

An extremely useful option introduced in Word 97 is the “Distribute columns evenly” command. If you select two or more adjacent columns, right-click, and choose this option, the total width of the combined columns will be divided equally among them so that they are the same width.

Adding rows or columns

As you have seen, adding new rows at the end of a table is easy and automatic. But what if you want to insert rows in the middle? Or what if you have gotten too far along in your table to start from scratch when you discover you need an additional column? No problem!

When you select a row or a column, one of the items on the right-click shortcut menu will be Insert Rows or Insert Columns. Or you can use the context-sensitive Table button

(see Figure 4). When you use one of these commands you will insert a row above the selected one or a column to the left of the selected one.

If you select more than one row or column, Word will insert the number of rows or columns selected. This is an easy way to insert a lot of rows at once, even at the bottom of the table. Select the last (still empty) row and choose Insert Rows; select that row and the new row and press F4 (Repeat) to insert two more rows; select the four rows and press F4 to insert four new rows; and so on.

In Word 2000 and higher, you can choose whether to insert new rows above or below the selected row or new columns to the left or right of the selected column. This can be important when you want to add a row that duplicates the formatting of the row above it rather than that of the one below (a row above a totals row, for example). On the Table menu, choose Insert, then Columns to the Left, Columns to the Right, Rows Above, or Rows Below.

Word 97 and earlier don't have these commands, but there are workarounds. To add a new row below an existing one, position the insertion point at the end of the text in the last cell in the row. Press the Right Arrow key (not Tab). This will position the insertion point just outside the cell, to the left of the end-of-row marker (which you can see if you have nonprinting characters displayed). Press Enter, and a new row will be inserted below the existing one. To insert a new column to the right of the farthest right one, select the end-of-row markers the same way you would select a column and choose Insert Columns.

Deleting rows, columns and tables

To delete a row or column, select it, right-click, and choose "Delete rows" or "Delete columns." (You can also use **Cut**.) To delete an entire table, select it and use either **Cut** or **Table | Delete Table**; in Word 2000 and higher, you can also delete a selected table by pressing Backspace.

Repeating headings

If your table is longer than one page (or continues onto a second page, regardless of length), you can make your headings automatically repeat on the following page(s). In Word 97 and earlier, select the row(s) you want to repeat and check "Headings" on the Table menu. You can repeat more than one row, but they must be the top rows of the table (you can't skip any rows).

In Word 2000 and higher, select the desired heading rows and check "Heading rows repeat" on the **Table** menu. (There is also a check box on the "Row" tab of the Table Properties dialog for "Repeat as header at the top of each page.")

Positioning the table

If your table is less than the full margin width, you may want to indent or center it. The **Row** tab of the **Table | Cell Height and Width** dialog (Word 97 and earlier) and the **Table** tab of the **Table Properties** dialog (Word 2000 and higher) allow you to specify Left, Center, or Right alignment for the entire table (you can also select the entire table and use the Left, Center, or Right alignment buttons on the Formatting toolbar). Both these dialog tabs also allow you to set a specific left indent if you choose.

Having used the **Cell Height and Width** dialog to set these properties for one table, you can apply the same properties to any other tables by clicking in them and pressing F4. If using Word 2000 or higher, see: [How to sidestep the problems of the Word 2000 \(and higher\) Table Properties dialog](#).

Controlling text flow

You may have already learned to control page breaks in Word by using a combination of the properties on the Line and Page Breaks tab of **Format | Paragraph**: "Widow/Orphan control," "Keep lines together," "Keep with next," and "Page break before." These work

if you don't have to. If you can achieve the same effect by omitting borders, do that instead. Merging cells makes a table more complex and susceptible to corruption, which is reason enough to avoid it except when absolutely necessary.

Vertical alignment

By default Word places text at the top of a table cell (subject to any "Spacing Before" you have applied to the paragraph). But sometimes, as in a price list, for example, you may want to align text at the bottom of the cells. In Word 97, you can choose Top, Center, or Bottom alignment for all the text in a given cell. This command is on the right-click shortcut menu when the insertion point is in a given cell. (By default it does not appear when you have an entire row selected, but you can add it through Customize.) It also appears on the Tables and Borders toolbar. (Although this feature is very useful, if you must share documents with users of versions earlier than Word 97, keep in mind that the alignment will not be retained because it is not supported in previous versions. In those versions you will need to use Spacing Before or line breaks to position text other than at the top of a cell.)

Word 2000 and higher have substituted a table alignment palette that displays nine combinations of vertical and horizontal alignment. If you have defined the horizontal alignment as part of your style, you will prefer the Word 97-style vertical alignment menu. You can restore it following the directions in [How to fix the Word 2000+ Cell Alignment buttons](#).

Text direction

In Word 97 and above, you can rotate text in a table cell 90 degrees right or left. The text rotation is displayed only in Page/Print Layout view and applies to all the text in the cell. This is useful when you have long headings for narrow columns. The Text Direction command is on the right-click shortcut menu when the insertion point is in a cell, as well as on the Format menu and the Tables and Borders toolbar. (Again, keep in mind that this feature is not supported in earlier versions.) When text is rotated, the "horizontal" and "vertical" alignment buttons are rotated accordingly, which can be a little disconcerting.

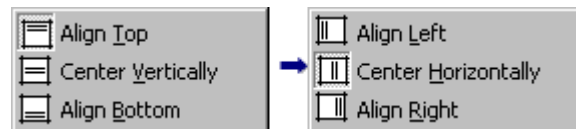


Figure 8: The Cell Alignment buttons when the selection is in a normal table cell (left), and in a cell in which the text has been rotated (right)

Cell margins

Space around the text in cells is achieved in several different ways.

In Word 97 and earlier, the left and right cell margins are determined by the "Space between columns" measurement on the Column tab of **Table | Cell Height and Width**.

Word 2000 and higher, instead of the "Space between columns" setting, have "Cell margins" settings that can be established as a default for the entire table or specified for individual cells. Set default cell margins for the entire table in the "Table Options" dialog accessed via the **Options...** button of the **Table** tab of **Table Properties**. Set margins for a specific cell (or selected cells) in the Cell Options dialog accessed via the **Options...** button on the **Cell** tab. You can also still use paragraph indents in cells, but this should not be necessary except when you want one paragraph indented more than the rest in a single cell.

The default setting for the "Space between columns" is 0.15", or .38cm, resulting in 0.08" left and right margins being displayed Under **Table | Properties | Options** in Word 2000 and above, if you use inches (although the true left and right margins are actually 0.075"); or 0.19cm being displayed if you use centimetres. It can be reduced to 0" (no space between columns) or increased as desired.

This setting applies to all cells in the table, but you can increase "cell padding" using paragraph indents. You can also reduce the effective cell margin in a given cell by setting negative paragraph indents; this technique should be used sparingly, however, since it can have very odd results when the column width is changed.

In Word 97, top and bottom margins (if any) must be created by applying Spacing Before and/or After to the paragraphs in the cell.

In Word 2000 and higher, you can set Top and Bottom cell margins by selecting **Table | Properties | Options** – but note that any such margins will disappear if a Word 97 user opens your document.

Word 2000 and above also support something quite different, rather confusingly called “Spacing between cells”, also accessible via **Table | Properties | Options**. This setting seems to be there for the sake of HTML compatibility (it is equivalent to HTML's “cellspacing”). It creates an ugly effect whereby, instead of adding cell margins, as the cell margins settings do, it adds white space in the middle of the cell **borders**, splitting each border in two:

This table has cellspacing applied	cellspacing is not really appropriate for use in Word.
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Figure 9

Graphics in tables

In Word 97 and earlier versions, floating graphics and tables are not compatible. You can insert pictures as “inline” objects (that is, objects in the text layer) in a table, but you can't wrap text around them. Sometimes you can fudge by splitting a cell and putting a graphic in part of it and text in the other (as has been done with many of the graphics in this article); but this is not always satisfactory. And you can't put Word's drawing objects (AutoShapes, text boxes) in Word 97 tables at all unless you first convert them to inline objects (using Copy, then Paste Special as Picture, with the “Float over text” check box cleared).

In Word 2000 and above, you **can** insert **floating images** in table cells. “Floating images” are those with a wrapping style other than “In line with text” (on the Layout tab of the Format Picture dialog). Images that have “Behind text” or “In front of text” wrapping can float freely over the table without being confined within a table cell. An image with “Square,” “Tight,” “Through” or “Top & bottom” wrapping will be confined to a cell. If the image is resized to a larger width, the table cell will adjust to accommodate it.

Having said that, though (and as discussed in the article **The draw layer: a metaphysical space**), it is best to use floating graphics only when they are *really* needed; and in long documents it is best to avoid them altogether, other than in Headers, Footers, and on the cover page. And if you *do* need to use floating graphics in a table, it is usually best to ensure that their anchors are placed *outside* the table – see, for example, the article: **Floating objects in Word 2000 table cells are vertically aligned wrongly**.

Nested tables

In Word 2000 and higher versions, you can embed (“nest”) a table within a cell of a larger table (for an example, imagine the thumbnails of the previous and following months that might appear in the unused day spaces of a monthly calendar). Nested tables make a document much more complex, can slow Word documents down dramatically; and the behavior of the tab key is changed.

The existence of nested tables also complicates working with ordinary tables: because now you can insert tables within one another, you may see new pasting behavior when you paste tables. There are specific rules for this behavior, but in general they are pretty logical, though usually irritating in practice. To summarize, you can paste equal numbers of cells as cells, but if you try to paste several cells into a single cell, they will be pasted as a nested table. To prevent this from happening, drag and drop your cells instead of pasting them; or select **Edit | Paste Special** as **Formatted Text** (which is the only workaround when pasting from Excel into a Word table).

Well-designed web pages would be impossible to create without nested tables, because the only way to set the width of a web “page” is to put all your text (and any tables within the text) inside a fixed width table cell; but nested tables are rarely either appropriate or useful in Word: avoid them when you can.

If you do use nested tables, you will get unpredictable results if the documents are ever opened in Word 97 or earlier.

“Text-wrapped” tables and frames

You can also turn “text wrapping” on, for Word 2000+ tables, by selecting **Table |**

Properties, and setting the “Text Wrapping” to “Around”. This means you can wrap text around tables, or put two independent tables side by side. Despite appearances, such tables are **not** “floating” (that is, they are *not* in the drawing layer, and they can be seen in Normal View). In fact, they are in a **frame**, (although in the case of Word 2002, a frame with a difference; as you see will see shortly); but the frame borders are hidden when the document is open in Word 2000 and higher. If you open the same document in Word 97, the frame borders become visible.

So in case you hadn't already realised this, you can wrap text around Word 97 tables, or put two independent Word 97 tables side by side, by putting the tables into frames.

☞ It is all too easy to switch a table's “text-wrapping” on inadvertently. When you are working in a table in Word 2000 and above, you may see a four-headed arrow in a box at the top left corner of the table (like the one on the left). This “table handle” appears only in Print Layout view. If you click on it, you can drag the table anywhere on the page. It then becomes “text-wrapped”. Even if you drag it just ever so slightly, the table becomes text-wrapped. Needless to say, you must be careful **not** to drag the table accidentally when selecting text in the first cell.

The lack of visibility of the frame borders in text-wrapped tables, combined with the ease with which you can accidentally turn text-wrapping on, makes for a maintenance nightmare, as it is often difficult to tell whether a table has wrapping switched on or not.

In Word 2000, text-wrapped tables cannot span multiple pages – but *can* overlap both the footer area and the non-printing area at the bottom of a page – so you can imagine the problems this causes people!

In Word 2002, text-wrapped tables **can** span multiple pages – and they do so by default, which makes it even more difficult than in Word 2000 to tell whether a given table is text-wrapped or not! The wrapping of text around Word 2002 tables that span multiple pages behaves very strangely indeed; for example, If you insert a table in the middle of text and wrap text around it, as soon as the table breaks to the next page, all the wrapped text goes with it. Although some of the table stays on the first page, the text breaks off above it, giving an ugly effect.

Fortunately, you can switch off the ability to span multiple pages by selecting **Tools | Options | Compatibility**, and selecting “Don't break wrapped tables across pages.” If you do that in your templates, your new documents will pick up that setting. Or clearing the “Move with text” box in the “Table Positioning” dialog under Table Properties also switches off the ability of a text-wrapped table to span multiple pages.

If you send a Word 2002 document containing a text-wrapped table that spans more than one page to a Word 2000 or Word 97 user, it will all be on one page when they open it; it may well overlap the Header and Footer; and some of the table may be off the page completely.

Text-wrapped tables, like frames and floating objects, also add a memory overhead, slow your documents down, and increase the risk of **document corruption**. Using text-wrapping when it's needed is one thing, but it should never be used if not needed, and therefore the ease with which wrapping can be accidentally applied is very unfortunate.

So it is usually much better to do things the old-fashioned way, even in Word 2000 and above, and insert a “proper” frame (just select the table and click the **Insert Frame** button), rather than using the invisible frame that gets inserted when you turn text-wrapping on. The functionality is identical, but a visible frame makes it far easier to see what's going on than an invisible one does; and makes for far more maintainable documents. See also: **[How can I add the Insert Frame command to the Insert menu?](#)**

Tables and HTML

Most of the changes in table formatting that were introduced in Word 2000 are intended to make Word more compatible with web documents (so that, for instance, you can paste web documents into Word without losing any formatting); and also – a much more minority taste – to make Word more suitable for creating Web pages. Nested tables, for example, are widely used in HTML, and they persist when documents are round-tripped (saved back and forth) between document to HTML file format.

Drawing tables

The Tables and Borders toolbar has a Pencil tool that allows you to draw a table (also accessible via **Table | Draw Table**). The premise is that you can easily create custom-sized cells without the bother of merging or splitting. The reality is that you can easily get yourself into a whole pile of trouble, especially when you start trying to size the cells or use the Eraser; and also, if you use this tool you will *inevitably* make your tables unnecessarily complex without realising it. It actually takes a great deal of skill *not* to make a mess of your tables, if you use the pencil tool. I have had to sort out the mess made by many users who have used it, and my advice about drawing tables therefore is: **Don't**.

Changing your mind

Suppose you start making a simple table using tabs and are pretty far along when you realize you really need to use a Word table. You could insert a table and drag the bits of text into the cells, but Word provides an easier way: **Convert Text to Table**. If you already have a table set up with tabbed columns, you can select it and choose this command from the Table menu. In the resulting dialog, make sure that Word is planning to separate the text at the tabs and that the number of rows and columns it expects to make is correct. When you press OK, your tabbed table will be converted to a Word table; Word even does a pretty good job of setting column widths. You'll still have some formatting to do (beginning with removing the automatic grid border), but it's sure quicker than starting from scratch!