# Having a field day

Tim Nott proves that it's possible to take control of your documents by ploughing the right fields.

Recently I've had a lot of enquiries about fields. Not the agrarian sort, but those that generally lie fallow on most Word users' Insert menus. Fields are little bits of code that can be located anywhere in the text of a document and do things automatically – a sort of kid brother to macros. To take an example, when you insert a page number, you're not just inserting dumb digits, but a field that will keep track of what the page number should be as the document changes. You can switch between viewing the result of a field, and viewing the code that creates that result, in Tools, Options, View – simply tick or untick the Field Codes box. Fortunately there is a shortcut: typing Alt & F9 toggles between viewing results and codes. Keep that F9 key handy, as you'll be seeing a lot of it.

If you look through the names in the Insert Field dialog, you'll see there are a lot of tasks that they can perform. Fields can be used to insert information about the document – such as the file size, author or number of words. They can be used to cross-reference documents, create indexes, mail-merge letters or prompt the user to enter information. They can even perform mathematical calculations on tables of figures, like a simple spreadsheet. Unlike Excel, fields don't update themselves continuously – although on opening the document they should update certain aspects, such as printing, repagination and dates and
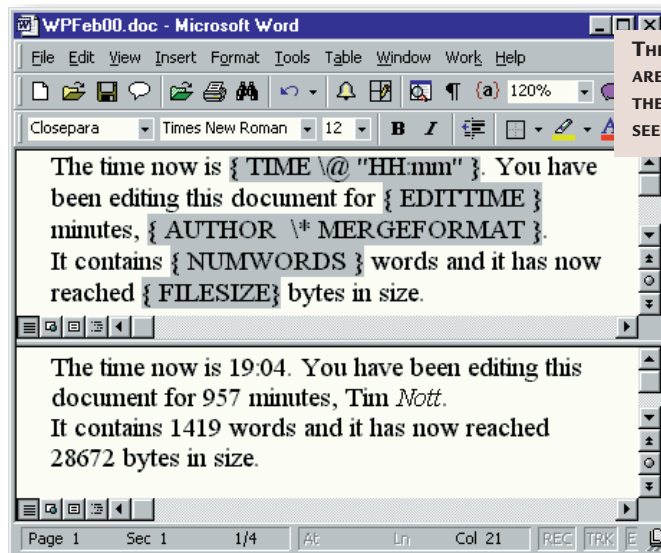
times. To update a field manually, press F9 while the cursor is in the appropriate field or while the field is selected.

Fields can consist of several parts, but usually you have a name, some arguments and a switch. Arguments are what you want the field to work with – a set of numbers to be added or a bookmark to reference. Switches are used for formatting. The most common one you'll see is the *mergeformat switch, which stops any of the character formatting you've made to a field result being changed when that field is updated. Other common switches include numeric and date 'pictures' – \@ "dd MMMM yyyy", presents a date in the format 25 December 1999, for example.

Fields can also be nested, so you can, for example, perform calculations based on IF statements. When you come to create nested fields, the going can get thorny. For a start, it's annoying to keep opening and closing the dialog box – it's actually easier to type in the code. However, you rapidly find out that typing curly braces from the keyboard, or copying and pasting from a help file, doesn't actually work, as they don't possess the magical qualities of those inserted from the dialog. The secret is to press Control & F9. This not only inserts the proper magic braces, but does so in pairs, which saves much debugging. Another tip is to turn off smart quotes in Autoformat As You Type. Word 2000 appears to have an ambivalent attitude within fields: it sometimes inserts curly quotes (which don't work), and sometimes inserts straight ones (which do).

■ Putting it into practice

Now that we have fields under control, it's time to put them to some real-world uses. First, a really simple one: Joan Carey wanted to find a way of creating Click Here blocks in Word templates, similar to those found in Word Pro SmartMasters. These are blocks of text, usually offering some instructions, such as Click Here and Type The Address. When the user clicks and starts to type, the prompt text disappears.

To do this in Word takes a little cunning. First you need to create a macro. From Tools, Macro, Macros type in a name: I use Dummy. Make sure the Macros In box shows the template you are editing. The VBA editor will appear in all its glory, and
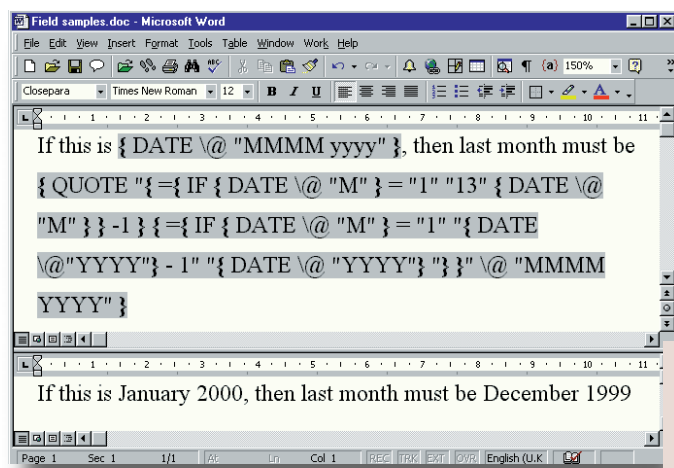
Questions & answers

Q How can I get Word 97 to open and automatically load the last document I've been working on, without using the Windows recent documents list?
**MALCOLM ELMS**

a First of all you need to create a macro to open the most recent document, as follows:

```
Sub Resumework()
RecentFiles(1).Open
End Sub
```

Make sure this is stored in Normal.dot. Now create a new shortcut to Word in the usual way. Edit the shortcut properties and add a space after everything in the Target box, followed by /mResumework. This will load Word, and run the macro which you have just created.

Q I have acquired a number of Word documents that use a variety of fonts, and need to standardise these to use only those fonts that are installed on our systems. How can I get a list of fonts used, or convert these, other than by scrolling right through each document?
GREGORY MANSER

THE FONT SUBSTITUTION MENU CAN PERMANENTLY REPLACE ANY FONTS THAT ARE NOT INSTALLED
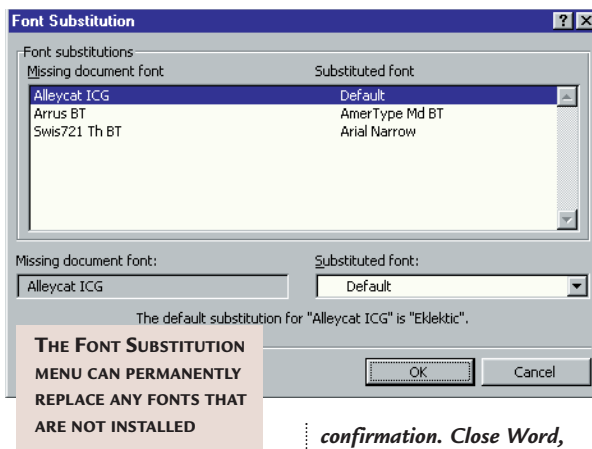
a *Tools, Options, Compatibility, Font Substitution should do exactly what you want. It lists all the fonts that are used in the document but not installed on the PC. You can then permanently convert all references to these to point to any installed font.*

Q Is it possible to change the font that Word automatically provides for me in the first blank page (which I assume is produced from Normal.dot)? I want to open Word and find the font as Arial 10pt.
DAVID GLASS

a *Start a blank document. Go to Format, Font. Change to Arial 10pt, hit the Default button, then Yes the confirmation. Close Word, and reply Yes to confirm the Changes to Normal.dot. That's all there is to it.*

Q Is it possible to get rid of all the phantom templates and tabs on the Word 2000 File, New dialog box? I'm never, ever, going to want to create Legal Pleadings or Elegant Faxes, and I can't find the .dot files anywhere on my PC.
HARRY BOSTON

a *This is all part of the Install-on-Demand feature of Office 2000. As* you surmise, the templates aren't on your hard disk at all, but if you go to use one of these templates or wizards you get prompted to insert the CD-ROM, and they are then copied over.

Although I have rather a soft spot for the Pleading Wizard, which sounds like a Terry Pratchett character, it is possible to get rid of these. You need to go to Control Panel, Add/Remove Programs, Microsoft Office 2000, and hit the Add/Remove button. This will start the Office Setup in maintenance mode. Navigate your way from Add and Remove Features down to
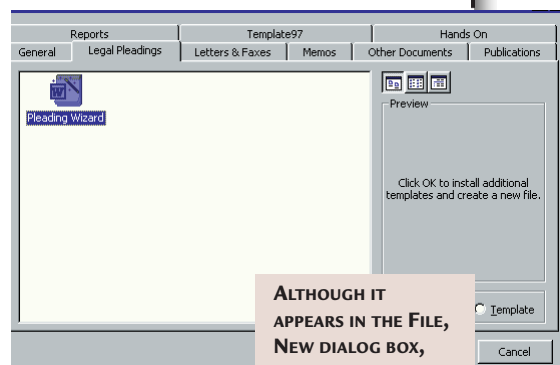
ALTHOUGH IT APPEARS IN THE FILE, NEW DIALOG BOX, THIS WIZARD ISN'T REALLY THERE

Word templates and change the settings from Install on First-Time Use to Not Available. This will remove the Pleading Wizard and his phantom friends.

you can close it straight away, as you now have a macro that does nothing except exist, which is all we ask of it. Now Insert, Field, MacroButton with the arguments Dummy Click Here and Type The Address. You don't need any quotes or delimiters – the field treats the text before the first space as the macro name and the rest as the prompt text. Save this template. What you'll see in documents based on the template is just the prompt. One click selects the field – ie all the prompt text – and the next keystroke replaces the text and removes the field.

The other request came from Padraig McCarthy, and was deceptively simple. 'Each month I prepare a report requiring the previous month to be inserted a number of times. Is there a way to set up the template so that it will insert a field for the previous month rather than the current one?

Indeed there is, and my hearty thanks go to Dave Robb, Mike 'Seethru' Strong and the mysterious Mr Path for helping with this one. The trick is to use a QUOTE field, which simply displays quoted text. This may seem utterly pointless, but it allows you to include other fields and do formatting tricks that would otherwise be impossible. So, without going through the gory details, the hideously complex field (see screenshot, bottom left on opening page) works out the previous month, with IF fields taking the special case of January into account. This returns two numbers, which the date picture switches in the Quote field formats to suit.

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