10 Underused Office Features

By Susan Harkins

Microsoft Office is so feature-packed; most users barely scratch the surface of its functionality. See if you're using Office apps to their full potential.

There's a saying that 80 per cent of users will use only 20 per cent of an application's features. This is probably true of most Office users because they don't know the features exist. Once they see the features in action, they put them to use. Here are 10 features that are among the most underused but easy-to-implement features in the Office suite. Most applications share many of these features; I've noted those that are application-specific.

1. **Paste**
   Older versions had limited paste options. Now there are several, and they go well beyond simple pasting. They're available via the Paste option in the Clipboard group on the Home tab. Paste is in all of the applications, but options are application-specific and contextual, as you can see in **Figure A**.
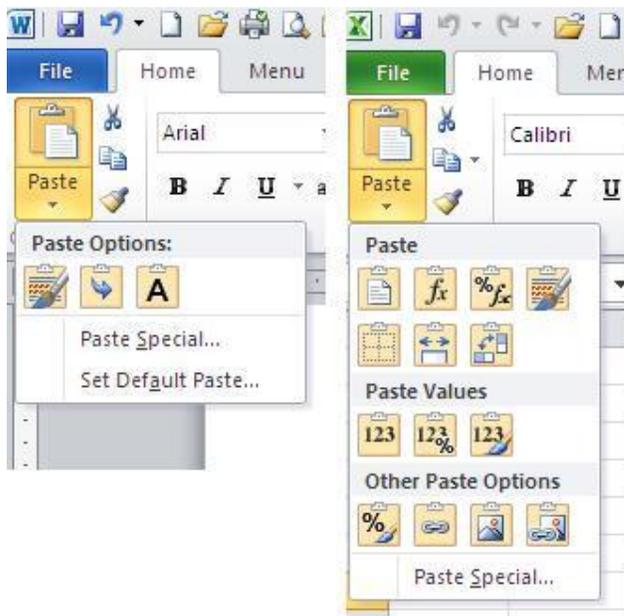

Figure A

The options are different, but Paste is available in all Office applications.

Perhaps the most helpful step you can take is to change the feature's default. Office retains the source formatting when pasting content. To disable this behaviour or customise it to suit your working style, access the settings as follows:

- Office 2010: Click the File tab, choose Options, and select Advanced in the left pane.

- Office 2007: Click the Office button, click *application* Options, and select Advanced in the left pane.

- Office 2003: Choose Options from the Tools menu and click the Edit tab.

In addition, Paste is a versatile feature that can perform calculations, transpose text, and much more. To learn a few advanced Paste techniques, read 10 powerful ways to use Excel's paste features (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-powerful-ways-to-use-excels-paste-features/2902).

2. **Recent**
   Finding a file when it's not where you *know* you put it is frustrating. You can use Windows Search feature, but that route can be hit or miss, and it's slow. A quicker and easier way to find a lost file is to use the Recent option, shown in **Figure B**. Click the File tab and choose Recent in the left pane to view a list of recently used files. In 2007, click the Office button.
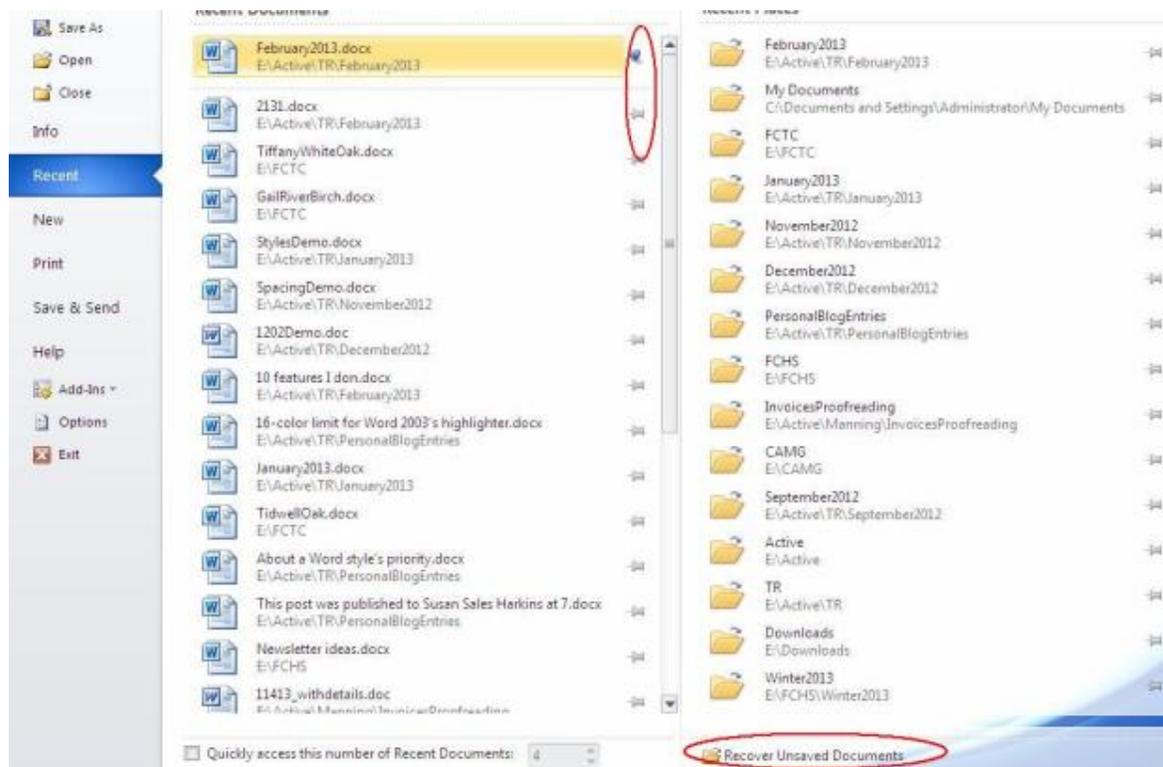

Figure B

Quickly access files using the Recent feature.

This area is enhanced in 2010:

- Click the Recover Unsaved Documents link at the bottom of the screen to recover recently unsaved files. It doesn't always work, but it can be a lifesaver when it does.

- Don't ignore the little pushpin icons next to the files. Use these to pin a file to the list and keep it there until you unpin it.

- To the right are recent places you've visited.

To learn more about this feature, read Put Word's recent documents list to work for you (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/window-on-windows/put-words-recent-documents-list-to-work-for-you/6712).

3. **Templates**
   Some users revamp similar settings every time they create a new document. In the moment, it's only a few clicks; over time, it adds up. When new files share common properties and formats, it's efficient to create a custom template (or adjust the default template). Most users know about templates, but they find them a bit confusing, so they avoid them. To learn more about using templates, read The right way to create a Word template (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/the-right-way-to-create-a-word-template/8335) and Modify Excel's default sheet to fit your needs (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/modify-excels-default-sheet-to-fit-your-needs/2672).

4. **AutoCorrect**
   AutoCorrect automatically corrects common typos, such as replacing *teh* with *the*. But there's more to this feature than just fixing a few typos. You can use it to enter repetitive text, symbols, and more. To learn how to apply AutoCorrect in unusual ways, read How to enter symbols using Office AutoCorrect (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/how-to-enter-symbols-using-office-autocorrect/491), Five keyboard shortcuts for inserting arrows into a Word document (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/five-keyboard-shortcuts-for-inserting-arrows-into-a-word-document/5901) and Tweak an annoying AutoCorrect entry instead of deleting it outright (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/tweak-an-annoying-autocorrect-entry-instead-of-deleting-it-outright/8251).

5. **Replace**
   Most users know how to use Replace, but they don't realise how versatile and powerful the feature is. For instance, you can replace multiple spaces with a tab, append text to an existing phrase, change all instances of italicised text to bold, and much more. To move beyond this feature's basic use, read 10 cool ways to get more from Word's Find and Replace feature (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/10things/10-cool-ways-to-get-more-from-words-find-and-replace-feature/3368). Excel's Replace feature is more limited than Word's, but some of these tips will also work in Excel.

6. **Word styles**
   Using styles can save a lot of time and ensure consistency throughout an organisation. Although styles are the most efficient way to tame formats, most users hate them because they're a bit unruly. To learn more about styles, read Microsoft Word 101: A quick look at formatting styles (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/microsoft-word-101-a-quick-look-at-formatting-styles/6680).

   Excel has cell styles. They're less complex to implement and manage but still underused. The article Use an Excel style to identify data input cells (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/use-an-excel-style-to-identify-data-input-cells/5275) explains an interesting use of cell styles.

7. **Word's Document Map**
   Document Map is part of Word 2010's Navigation Pane. **Figure C** shows a simple document's outline. This feature reduces a document to heading nodes. That means you must employ the built-in heading styles for this feature to be of use. Clicking a node takes you to that heading in the document, so it's a quick way to navigate a complex or long document. The map also highlights where you are in a long document. In addition, you can drag a heading in the map to move that heading *and* its text in the document. If you forget about this feature, open the Navigation Pane and leave it open so you'll remember to use it.
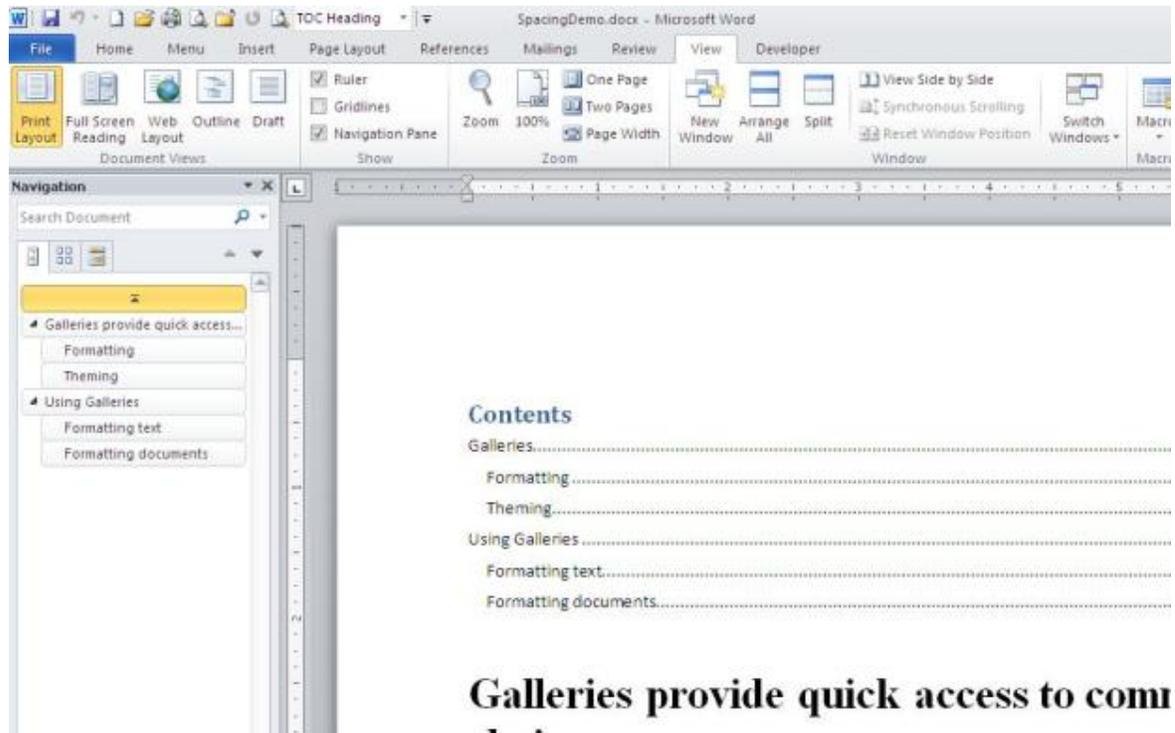

Figure C

Use the heading nodes to navigate and manipulate a document.

Although the Navigation Pane was introduced with Word 2010, the Document Map is available in earlier versions – it's just not quite as feature-rich. To display it in Word 2007, click the View tab and choose Document Map in the Show/Hide group. To display it in Word 2003, choose Document Map from the View menu.

8. **PowerPoint's Set As Default**
   Formatting a shape or text box can take a bit of time. To apply the same formats to subsequent objects, you can set the formatted object as the default for that type of object. Simply right-click the formatted object and choose Set As Default *object*. PowerPoint will remember the formatting defaults until you change them or close the presentation.

9. **Outlook's search folders**
   One of Outlook's most underused features is the search folder. Using this folder, you can set search criteria and then quickly access the filtered mail in one spot. Doing so allows you to view all the filtered messages as a whole, instead of rooting through different folders. Search folders continue to group the filtered mail until you delete the folder. To learn how to use this feature, read Find Outlook messages quickly with an All Mail search folder (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/find-outlook-messages-quickly-with-an-all-mail-search-folder/2280).

10. **Excel tables**

Excel tables are new to 2007 and they've yet to catch on with users, despite their advantages. With a few quick clicks, you can turn any data range into a table, making the data easier to manipulate and manage:

- Format using AutoFormat.

- Insert a new row and the table extends formulas and formatting.

- Apply AutoFilter instantly.

- Add totalling rows with a quick click.

- Use table nomenclature to reduce errors in formulas.

Tables do have limitations, but if you can live with those limitations, tables make most everything you do a little easier. To learn more about Excel's table feature, read Put Excel 2007's new Table feature to work for you (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/put-excel-2007s-new-table-feature-to-work-for-you/3285), Use Excel tables for quick formula auto-fill (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/use-excel-tables-for-quick-formula-auto-fill/4882) and Use Excel's table nomenclature to quickly create dynamic formulas (http://www.techrepublic.com/blog/msoffice/use-excels-table-nomenclature-to-quickly-create-dynamic-formulas/5467).

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