**Controlling Date Formats in a Mail Merge**

There is a way you can get the date format you want without worrying about any method of data transfer in a merged document. You can add a formatting switch to the merge field used in your document. If you display the field codes (instead of their results), the field usually looks similar to this:

{ mergefield MyDate }

This presumes that the name of the data field, from Excel, is MyDate. You can modify the merge field so that it includes a formatting switch, in this manner:

{ mergefield MyDate \@ "dddd, dd MMMM yyyy" }

The use of the \@ characters indicate that what follows is a pattern for how the date should be formatted. In this case, the date will show similar to "Wednesday, 26 September 2012." Full information on how to put together the date patterns can be found at the [Word MVP site](http://word.mvps.org/), here:

<http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFields.htm>

**Note:** Here is the information from that site. You don’t have to read it all unless you want to. The above information let you have the date the way you want it.

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| Making a date |

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| Or: | I put the date at the top of my letter using Insert Date. Why doesn't the date update to the current date when I later print the letter? |
| Or: | I don't want the date on my letter to change every time I print a copy. How can I make it stay the same? |

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There are various ways to get a date into a document. Obviously, the most  straightforward is to just type it in. If you have AutoComplete enabled on the AutoText tab of **Tools | AutoCorrect**, you'll even find that Word tries to help you do this (though you may not always find this “help” very helpful; and if you live outside the US, you will *never* find it helpful, because all language versions of Word use US date format! Unfortunately, there is no way of turning this feature off unless you turn AutoComplete off completely).

This articles discusses options for inserting dates beyond just typing them in.

## Insert | Date

The method that most users discover first is the Date and Time command on the Insert menu. If you insert a date using the **Insert | Date and Time** command, you have two options:

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| **1.** | The default is to enter plain text. This is the same as typing the date into the document yourself, just a little quicker if you're a poor typist or don't know the date. |
| **2.** | If you check the check box for “Update automatically,” Word will insert a **{** DATE **}** field, which will always reflect the current system date. It may not be updated when you open a document, but if you have the “Update fields” option checked on the Print tab of **Tools | Options**, it will be updated when you print. You can lock the field by selecting it and pressing **Ctrl+F11** (unlock it with **Ctrl+Shift+F11**), or you can unlink it (convert it to ordinary text) with **Ctrl+Shift+F9**, but it's easier just to insert the date as plain text in the first place if that's what you want. The keyboard shortcut for inserting a **{** DATE **}** field is **Alt+Shift+D**; it always inserts a date in the format you have chosen as the default in the **Insert | Date and Time** dialog. |

## Other Date Fields

In addition to the **{** DATE **}** field that can be inserted using **Insert | Date and Time**, Word has several other date fields. You can either insert these using **Insert | Field** (this is the easiest option for novices) or create the fields “by hand” by pressing **Ctrl+F9** to insert the field delimiters (which look like braces but cannot be entered from the keyboard) and then typing the text between them..

**CreateDate**Perhaps the most useful date field is the **{** CREATEDATE **}** field, which permanently records the date a document was created. At first glance this might not seem very different from plain text, but if you put this field in a template, each document based on it will automatically have the date it was created. Or, if you sometimes copy an old letter to form the basis for a new one (in effect using it as a template), the same will apply.

**SaveDate**Another useful field is the **{** SAVEDATE **}** field, which records when the document was last saved. If your document contains information that is frequently updated and you want it to carry a revision date, this is the one to use.

One caveat: Whenever you print a document containing fields, they will be updated. This action causes Word to regard the document as having changed, so when you close it, even if you have just opened it and printed it and not made any (to your mind) changes, you will be asked if you want to save it. Just say no! Otherwise you'll have invalidated the revision date.

**PrintDate**The **{** PRINTDATE **}** field is another one with some usefulness. Since it is updated only when the document is printed, you will be able to open a document and tell from this date when it was last printed. In this case, however, you must save the document after the field is updated (that is, after printing).

## Formatting Date Fields

All the above fields can be formatted as you choose. In the Field dialog, select one of the Date and Time fields and press the “Options...” button. You will see various “switches” that can be added to the field to make it print anything from “12/31/99” to [“](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm#Fnote1)[Friday, December 31, 1999, 11:59:59 PM.”](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "Fnote1" \t "_self) [1](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "Fnote1" \t "_self)

Although Word makes it relatively easy to format date fields by choosing a variety of built-in switches, sometimes you'll need to customize your own. The following instructions are therefore offered to help you (all these instructions and more can be found in Word's Help file under “switches, reference”).

**Date instructions**

**Month (M)**The letter “M” must be uppercase to distinguish months from minutes.

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| Picture item | Displays the month as |
| **M** | A number without a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit months. For example, July is “7”. |
| **MM** | A number with a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit months. For example, July is “07”. |
| **MMM** | A three-letter abbreviation. For example, July is “Jul”. |
| **MMMM** | The full name of the month. For example, “July”. |

**Day (d)**Displays the day of the month or the day of the week. The letter “d” can be either uppercase or lowercase.

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| Picture item | Displays the month as |
| **d** | A number without a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit days. For example, the sixth day of the month is displayed as “6”. |
| **dd** | A number with a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit days. For example, the sixth day of the month is displayed as “06”. |
| **ddd** | A three-letter abbreviation. For example, Tuesday is displayed as “Tue”. |
| **dddd** | The full name of the day of the week. For example, “Tuesday”. |

**Year (y)**Displays the year as two or four digits. The letter “y” can be either uppercase or lowercase.

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| Picture item | Displays the month as |
| **yy** | Two digits with a leading 0 (zero) for years 01 through 09. For example, 1995 is displayed as “95”, and 2006 is displayed as “06”. |
| **yyyy** | Four digits. |

**Time instructions**

**Hours (h)**A lowercase “h” bases time on the 12-hour clock. An uppercase “H” bases time on the 24-hour, or military, clock; for example, 5 P.M. is displayed as “17”.

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| Picture item | Displays the hour |
| **h or H** | Without a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit hours. For example, the hour of 9 A.M. is displayed as “9”. |
| **hh or HH** | With a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit hours. For example, the hour of 9 A.M. is displayed as “09”. |

**Minutes (m)**The letter “m” **must** be lowercase to distinguish minutes from months.

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| Picture item | Displays minutes |
| **m** | Without a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit minutes. For example,  **{** TIME \@ "m" **}**  displays “2”. |
| **mm** | With a leading 0 (zero) for single-digit minutes. For example,  **{** TIME \@ "mm" **}**  displays “02”. |

**AM/PM**Displays AM and PM in the format you have selected as the [Windows defaults.](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "Fnote2" \t "_self)[2](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "Fnote2" \t "_self)

Note that the Help topic on this switch is incorrect. Regardless of whether you insert  “AM/PM”, “am/pm”, “A/P”, or “a/p”, ithe Windows default format will be displayed (usually AM or PM). So the following fields give identical results:

**{** TIME \@ "h A/P" **}  
{** DATE \@ "h am/pm" **}** [3](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "Fnote3" \t "_self)

**Ordinal numbers in dates**Occasionally a user wants to format a date as, say, December 31st, 1999, or 31st December 1999. Although these formats are not regarded as correct by most U.S. style manuals, they are prescribed (or at least accepted) in some European countries, and are in very common use in the UK (reflecting spoken English, in which dates are *always* pronounced with ordinals).

To achieve this in Word you will need a combination of either two or three date fields. The reason you need more than one is that you will need to add the \\* Ordinal switch to just the day part of the field. To achieve the two dates given above, you would need:

**{** DATE \@ "MMMM" **} {** DATE \@ "d" \\* Ordinal **}**, **{** DATE \@ "yyyy" **}**  
**{** DATE \@ "d" \\* Ordinal **} {** DATE \@ " MMMM yyyy" **}**

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| [1.](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "FnoteRef1" \t "_self) | You'll actually have to do a little surgery to achieve this one. You'll need to select both the "dddd, MMMM d, yyyy" and the "h:mm:ss am/pm" options and add both to the field. If you then press OK, you'll get an error message (“too many picture switches”). What you must therefore do (in the text entry box on the Options tab of the Insert Field dialog) is take out the second \@ and the quotes on either side of it and put a comma after "yyyy." This should give you the result illustrated. |
| [2.](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "FnoteRef2" \t "_self) | To change the AM and PM symbols for Windows, change the settings in the **Regional Settings** dialog box in the Windows Control Panel: Click the **Start** button, point to **Settings**, and then **Control Panel**. Double-click the **Regional Settings icon**, and then click the Time tab. Enter the formats you want in the AM symbol and PM symbol boxes. |
| [3.](http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/TblsFldsFms/DateFieldsContent.htm" \l "FnoteRef3" \t "_self) | Notice that it really makes no difference whether you use the **{** DATE **}** or **{** TIME **}** field; the result will depend on the numeric formatting “picture” switch you add. |