

Word Techniques - Text Boxes

This applies to Word 2003. I have no idea what later versions do.

Text boxes are containers for text that can be positioned on a page and sized. They can be placed anywhere in a document and formatted with shading and borders.

You can link text boxes so that the contents flow between the boxes automatically. This is detailed in a lower section.

There are a number of things that affect the visibility of text boxes. They should be placed on top of text in the drawing layer. Drawings need to be flagged as visible in Options. The document view needs to be Print Layout. Text boxes placed on top of text are considered “floating” and have an anchor whose visibility is controlled by Tools, Options, View. The anchor indicates a point in the document with which the picture is associated—a paragraph.

Let me admit that text boxes are a pain. Apparently they were never intended to be placed one underneath another. Certainly that is difficult to achieve. Or perhaps the problem is with the position of the regular document column. See section Positioning Options for details.

Note that Word has trouble rendering boxes that are moved or pasted to a different page. And sometimes even when a box is moved on the same page. Experiment with changing the document’s view format and zoom until the box is visible.

When more control is desired, you may be tempted to resort to VBA code. A text box is a *shape* and is located in the drawing layer. A shape is anchored to a range of text and will always remain on the same page as its anchor. *Object anchors* can be made visible with the “Options” dialog box (menu Tools, Options), this seems to be specific to the active document.

Place a Text Box

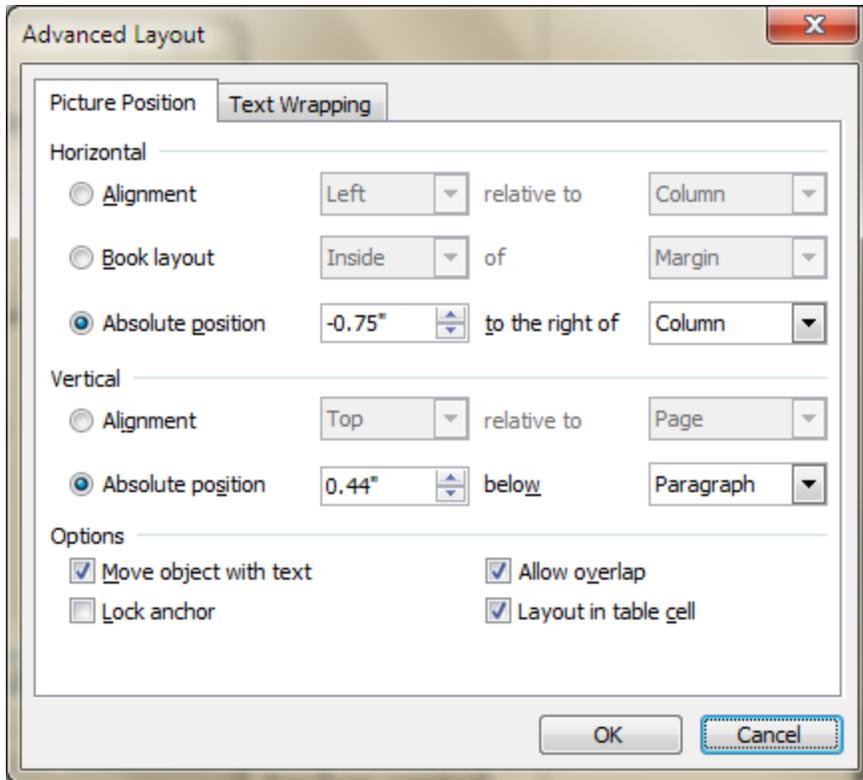
Use menu Insert, Text Box to insert a rectangular area and opens two toolbars: Drawing Canvas and Drawing. Click someplace to place the actual text box. Click the rectangle in the Drawing toolbar to place another text box. You can close the toolbars.

And
then
you

Positioning Options

The “Advanced Layout” dialog box can be accessed from the Format AutoShape menu item.

Objects like text boxes will move seemingly on their own when you edit a document’s content. Understanding the positioning options will make the movement more predictable and hopefully controllable.



Move object with text. You can specify whether the text box moves as the text to which it is anchored moves. If a text box is flagged to move with its anchored text and you insert text before the anchored paragraph, the text box is moved down as the paragraph—and its associated anchor—moves down the page. If the Move object with text box is cleared, then the anchor moves, but the picture stays put where you placed it.

If the anchor is locked, the anchor can't be moved but the text box can be positioned anywhere on the same 'page' as the paragraph to which it is anchored.

Lock anchor. The second option that affects whether a text box moves on its own is the Lock Anchor control, also on the “Advanced Layout” dialog box. When the text box's anchor is locked, the anchor stays put when you move the text box. When the text box's anchor is not locked, if you drag the text box to a new location, its anchor is moved to the paragraph nearest the new location for the text box.

Layout in table cell. This control affects the positioning of the text box when it has some positioning on a table; it has no effect if there is no associated table. If the text box is even partially positioned on a table the control will 'force' the text box into the nearest cell and is not allowed to overlap a cell divider. With the setting OFF the object *is* allowed to span 2 or more cells—if the Text Wrapping is set to In Front of or Behind Text—and the setting will stay in place if you move the object. If any other Text Wrapping is applied the ON setting will automatically restore when the object is moved.

This setting only pertains to objects dragged to a table — *then* it determines whether the object gets inserted into a cell or is allowed to float atop / behind the table.

Word deficiencies. Given all that above, objects in a Word document have been a problem for everyone since Day One. The more objects there are and the closer they are to one another, the more problematic. Those features you need to focus on in order to exercise as much control as possible are:

1. Text Wrapping - especially for objects close to each other
2. The Move Object with Text checkbox
3. Allow Overlap
4. Consider using Frames rather than Text Boxes
5. The Drawing Canvas

Resources: <http://word.mvps.org/FAQs/DrawingGraphics.htm>

“Floating objects (even frames) can be a maintenance nightmare in any document that will ever need to be amended or pasted from.”

Add Content to a Text Box

Right click inside the text box to open a context menu, select Add text. And then you can type inside the box.

Move and Resize

Move the text box by clicking the border until the pointer becomes a 4-headed arrow, then drag—with the [Alt] key depressed (this works so much better with the Alt key!); using the Alt key temporarily turns off “snap to grid”. It is also possible to use the keyboard arrow keys to move the box. However, you do not have a fine control with this. The most precise way to position it is to use the Format AutoShape dialog box: on the Layout tab select [Advanced], then set the desired properties. Trial-and-error are likely your best friends in figuring out what gives the desired results. Caution: when you replicate an existing box, you are also copying its layout settings, so be sure to change them immediately.

Resize the box by dragging its edges in and out. An anchor image appears suggesting a frame.

There is a Word tool that automatically aligns things, but it does not seem to work on text boxes. Open the Drawing toolbar. Select the menu item Draw, Align or Distribute and choose the appropriate command to align/space the selected objects relative to one another.

The difficulty with dragging or another method of moving a text box from one page to another is exacerbated with the reality that Word does not recognize physical pages. Objects are attached to text but not, necessarily, pages.

To turn off "snap to grid" permanently, select menu View, Toolbars, Drawing to open that toolbar. On the Drawing toolbar, click Draw, Grid to open the “Drawing Grid” dialog box. Uncheck the "Snap objects to grid" and "Snap objects to other objects" boxes, then select [OK] to close the box. Close the toolbar.

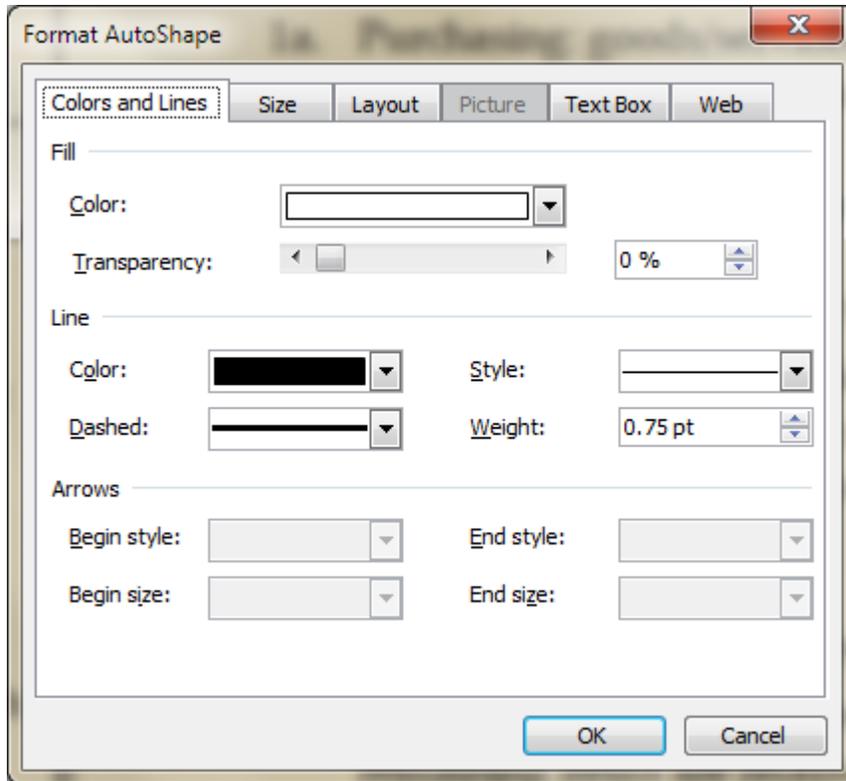
Create a New Text Box by Copying an Existing One

You can copy a text box into a different location. This is an “easy” way to create a new box.

Select the existing box and copy it to the Clipboard, then position the cursor on the page where you want the new box to be located and paste it there. You will then have to adjust the new box’s position with its layout settings. And change the content.

Formatting the Border and Fill

How to control the border of the text box? The Borders and Shading dialog box can apply a border to the text inside the box, but the box border is still there. Right click the border to open the context menu, select [Format AutoShape](#).



Linked Text Boxes

Starting from scratch:

1. Insert two text boxes, the first where you want the sidebar to start, the second in the next location.
2. Click the border of the first text box to open its context menu, select [Create Text Box Link](#). The cursor changes to a pitcher.
3. Click in the second (empty) text box that you want the text to flow to. The cursor image reverts to regular.

You can add an “overflow” linked text box to an existing one:

1. Insert the second text box.
2. In the first text box, click the border of the first text box to open its context menu, select [Create Text Box Link](#).
3. Click in the second (empty) text box that you want the text to flow into.
4. Now, when you shorten the first text box, the text that cannot be presented in it will automatically be moved to the second text box.

If you click Create Text Box Link Button image, and then decide you don't want to link to another text box, press ESC to cancel the linking process.

Find/Go To a Text Box

This is hard to do. Word's Go to tool does not address text boxes, neither Graphic or Object accesses a text box.

One suggestion I found is to change the background color of the document, use menu Format, Background to do this. So far I have not found this to be useful.

The Text Box toolbar has next and previous buttons. But I have yet to find a reliable way to show the toolbar.

Disappearing Text Boxes

I began using text boxes in the left margin of a document styled with a single column having a left margin of 3.5". I find that editing the contents of the column can cause one or more text boxes to disappear. I have yet to find an explanation or a solution. I spend a lot of time putting the text boxes back (after saving them in a separate document), only to repeat myself. Once I get the document "done" and then find a need to revise it, the text boxes go walkabout all over again, and I am left wrangling them back into position. This is not a task I can leave to someone else after I am gone.

I found on <http://en.allexperts.com/q/Microsoft-Word-1058/2008/5/Disappearing-Text-Microsoft-Word.htm> :

As for ordinary text, if you can see it in Normal view but not in Print Layout view, the problem may be related to **an odd Columns bug** that occasionally occurs (for reasons yet to be determined). If so, you can correct it by going to Format | Columns and clicking on the One preset picture (even if 1 column is already selected). This checks the "Equal column width" box (otherwise inaccessible) and solves the problem (sometimes Word gets the idea you have more than one column and the first one is margin width, so there's no room for the second one, which vanishes).

This did not help me.

Perhaps my problem is that the contents of the doc are placed in one-celled tables—perhaps it is the table that is part of the problem. This is definitely grasping at straws, but what else do I have?