What You WILL Miss When You Proofread

Tips and Tricks Using Find/Replace to Catch Those Invisible Mistakes

The Things You WILL Miss When You Proofread

Easy Tricks to Find and Correct Hard-to-Catch Punctuation Errors

by
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PART 1: SECRETS OF FIND/REPLACE

Fact: You *will* miss things when you proofread your manuscript. Your eyes see what they expect to see.
Fact: A little creative use of Find/Replace, in Word or your preferred program, can find many of these hard-to-spot slips for you—and fix them with a keystroke.

I've split this post into three parts, so you can use what you need when and if you need it:

- Part 1: The Secrets of Find/Replace
- Part 2: Easy Fixes you can do in minutes
- Part 3: Fixes that take a little more effort but are still faster than reading the whole darn book for the 1000th time.

These posts are based on Word, but a lot of the concepts and notations are universal. You should be able to adjust them for any program you use. Note that you do NOT have to type in elaborate code to make these corrections. The necessary commands are all available in Word.

Part 1: Find/Replace has been hiding things from you!

I've been surprised to learn that some people who are quite good with word-processing programs don't know all the tools the Find/Replace box has to offer. Part 1 gives you a quick tour and provides you with the shortcuts you'll need to fix almost-invisible slips in your text.

Pre-tour step:

Find your **Preferences/Word Options** settings. Mine are under "Word>Preferences>View." Check the boxes so you can see Paragraph marks, Tabs, and spaces:
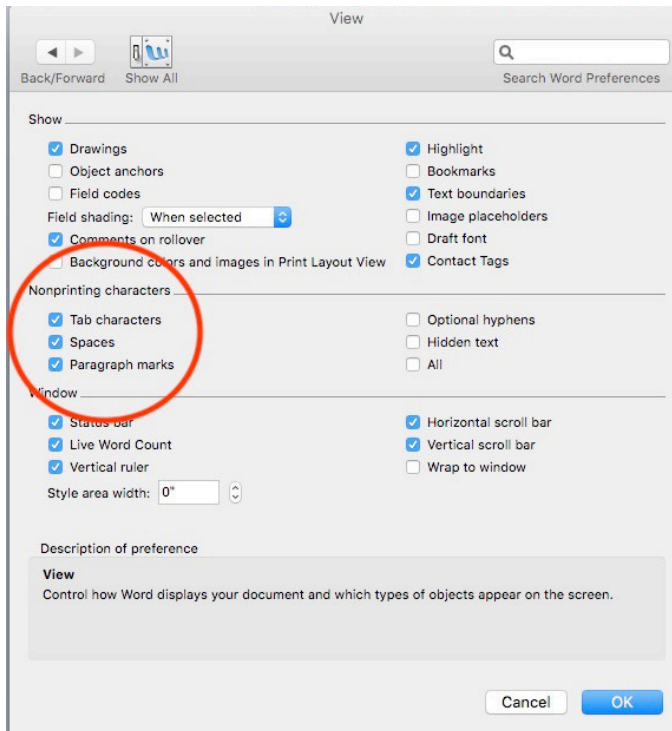

You will need to be able to see these formatting marks in order to understand what's happening when you make changes to your text. You can turn them off when you're done.

Step One: The "More" Arrow

Open the Find dialogue box with CTRL-F (PC) or COMMAND-F (Mac). You may have to click Advanced Find to see the dialogue box:
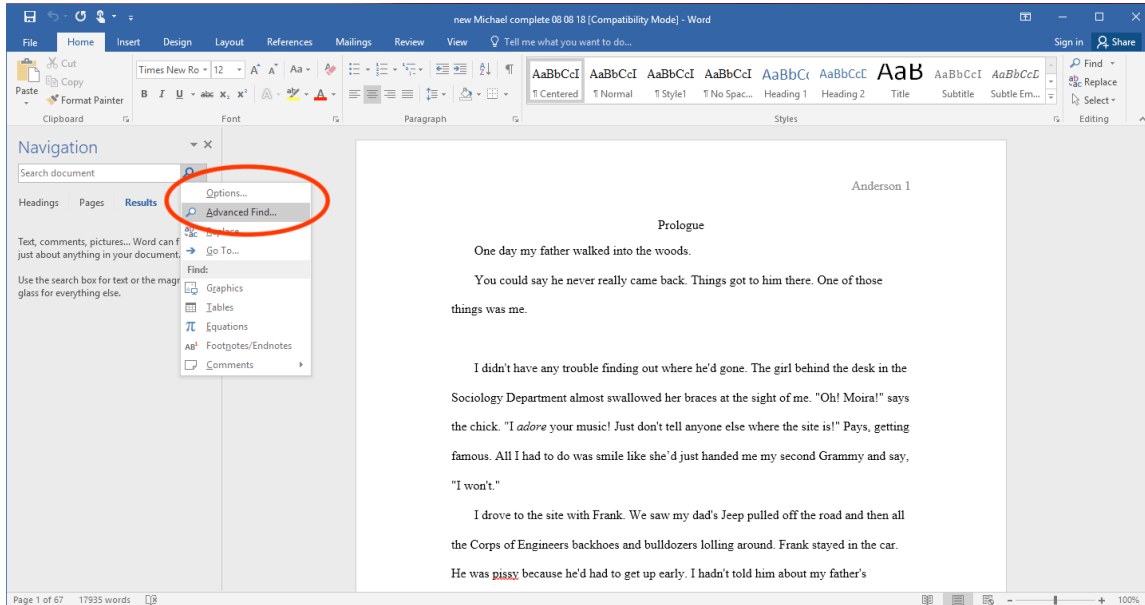
In the lower right hand corner, you'll see either a small arrow or a box marked "More."
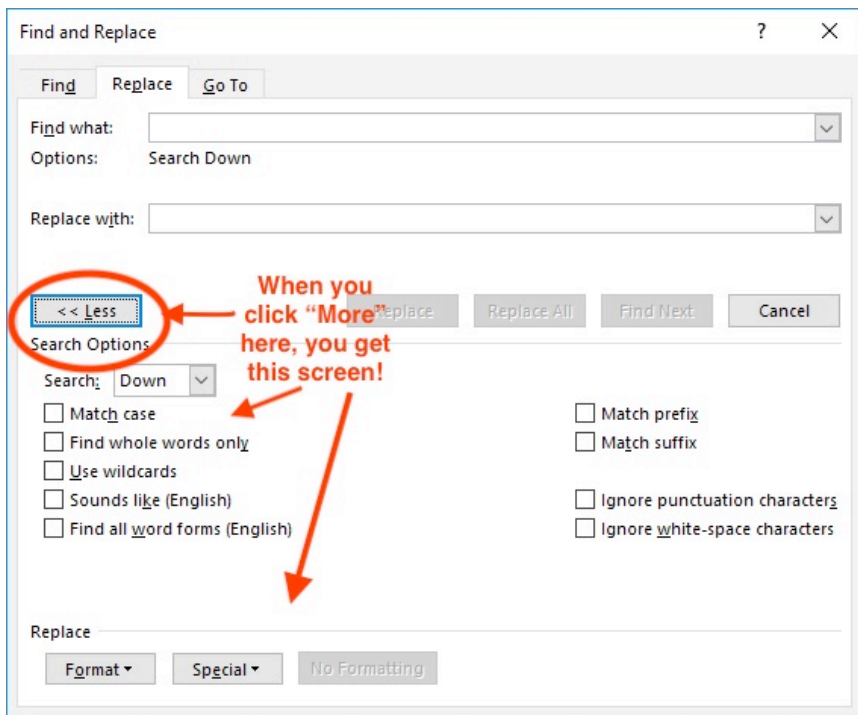
The real power is in the two little boxes at the bottom, Format and Special.

Step Two: The Format Tab

Format gives you the familiar options you used to set up your Style.

Secret: you can use these tools to **search for styles within your text, say for italics**. Just look under "Format>Paragraph." Click on "Italics," and the program will add "Italics" under the Find bar.
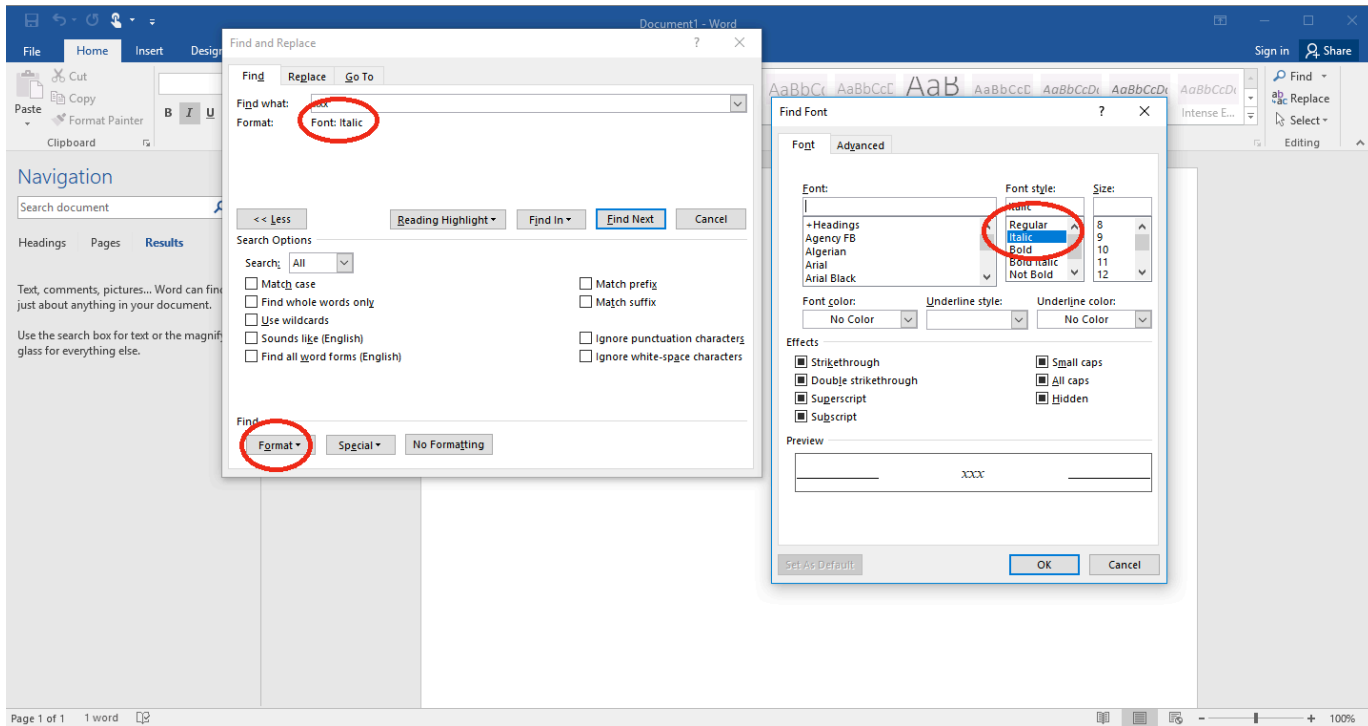
Step Three: The Special Tab

In these posts, we'll mostly work with "Special." This tab opens **a list of formatting features you can search for** within your text.
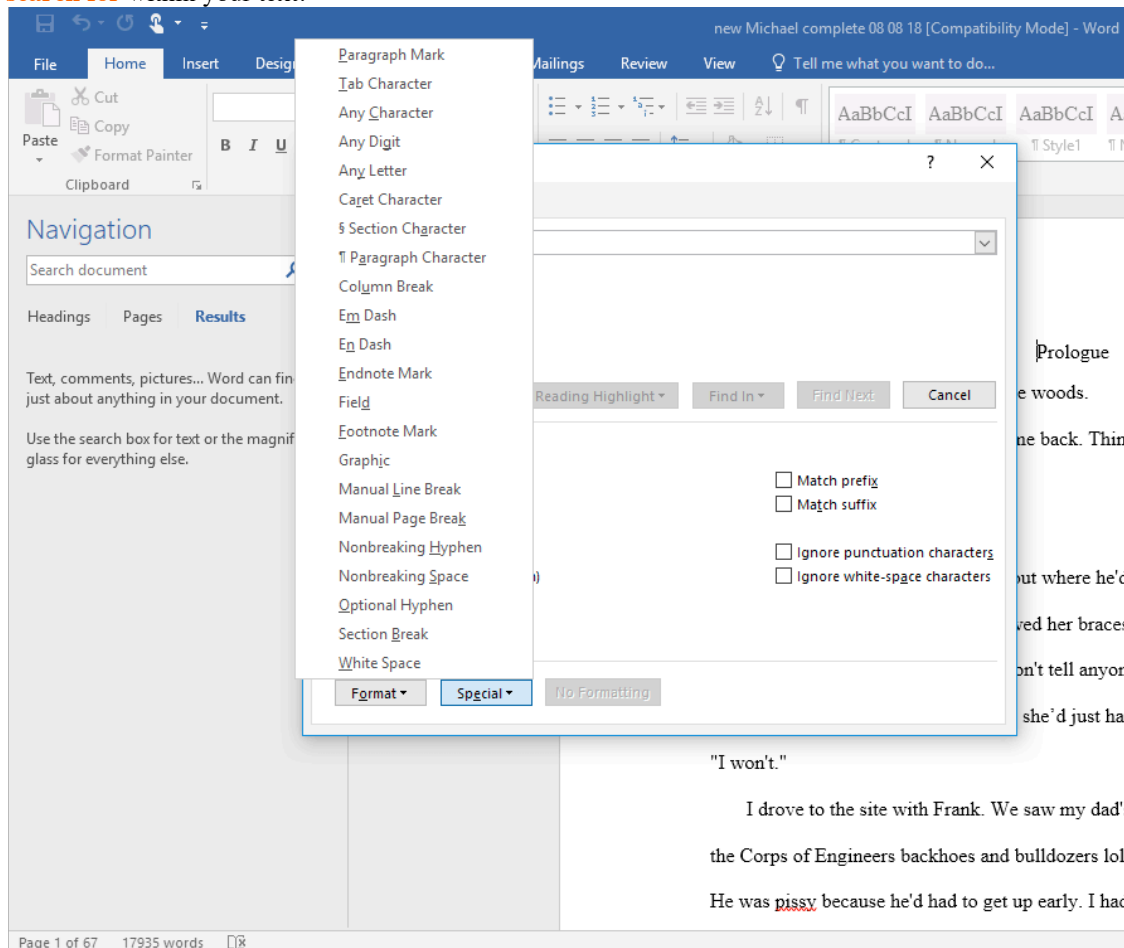
Clicking on any of these will place the notation for that feature in the Find bar in the Find box. For example, if you position your cursor in the Find bar and click on "Paragraph Mark," Word will place **^p** in the Find bar.

(The symbol **^** is a "caret"; it lives above the numeral "6")

You should learn the ones you'll most commonly use. They are:

- **Paragraph Mark = ^p**
- **Tab Character = ^t**
- **Manual Line Break = ^l (lower-case L)**
-

You can type these right into the bars in the box yourself. They are always lower-case.

Check it out: Type ^p in the Find bar, then "Find next." Your program will highlight the first paragraph mark it finds. If you've set your Preferences so you can see these marks, you will be able to see how the Find function moves through the designated marks.

Now that you've taken a look at options you may have missed in Find/Replace, we'll move on to Part 2 and put these tools to use.

Part 2: Proofreading Slips You Can Find and Fix in Minutes

Again, these are problems that are easy to miss if you're eyeballing. **Find** has much better eyesight than you do!

In each case below, I will
- List the problem,
- Show you what to type in the **Find** bar in the Find dialogue box
- Show you when to **eyeball** if context is important
- Show you what to type in the **Replace** bar
- Tell you when to **click** "Replace all" or when to eyeball before clicking Replace
-

Do NOT type "+" in the Find or Replace bars unless you are actually searching for the "plus" sign. I am using it below to indicate "then type." There should be no spaces between symbols in the bars unless you are specifically searching for a space.

Also, don't type the parentheses in my examples. These are meant to set off exactly what you should type.

Problem: Double periods
- **Find**: period + period (..)
- **Replace**: a single period (.)
- **Click**: Replace all

Problem: Comma + period or period + comma
- **Find**: Either ., or ,. (Do one at a time)
- **Eyeball**: The punctuation you need depends on the context
- **Replace**: Minimize key strokes by doing all the ones that can be replaced with a period, then coming back and doing all the ones that can be replaced with a comma. Type either a period (.) or a comma (,).
- **Click**: Replace

Problem: Extra spaces
Used to typing a double space after periods, and HATE being told that's no longer preferred? You don't need to remember to single-space. Do what you like. Then:
- **Find**: Tap the space bar on your keyboard twice. (You will see nothing in the bar but the cursor will move.)
- **Replace**: Tap the space bar once.
- **Click**: Replace All.

Do this twice just in case you accidentally typed in three spaces here and there.

Problem: Tabs
If you've posted to Kindle or Smashwords, you know that tabs are NOT allowed. You're encouraged to do all your formatting, including first-line indents, with Styles. But even if you apply a perfect Style throughout your manuscript, any tabs you haven't removed will still be there, creating all sorts of formatting glitches.
- **Find**: ^t (the ^ mark lives above the numeral 6)
- **Replace**: leave blank
- **Click**: Replace All.

Problem: Extra Returns

Make sure you didn't accidentally insert a space between paragraphs.
- **Find**: ^p^p
- **Replace**: ^p
- **Eyeball**, since some of your double returns will be deliberate, for example, to mark a scene break.
- **Click**: Replace when appropriate.

Problem: Manual Line Breaks

These are those funny little arrows that sometimes show up when you've copied and pasted from an odd source, like an email. They won't format properly when you upload.

Do you want the lines to combine into a single paragraph, or do you want a paragraph break?

Paragraph break: Do this first, then do each affected paragraph as a separate chunk (see "Single paragraph" below)
- **Find**: ^l (lower-case L)
- **Eyeball**: Locate places where you want a paragraph break; select only those.
- **Replace**: ^p.

Single paragraph:
- **Find**: ^l
- Select the lines you want to combine.
- **Replace**: space (tap space bar once)
- **Eyeball**: Have you created double spaces? If so, replace double spaces with singles (see above).

Problem: Double hyphens to em dashes

Double hyphens (–) are a clumsy substitute for the more elegant and correct em dash (a long dash). On a Mac, you can create an em dash in your text by typing **Shift + Option + hyphen**. On a PC, Word may convert double hyphens to em dashes for you as you type, or you may have to "insert" the special character. So being able to type double hyphens and replace them with em dashes in one fell swoop can save a lot of time (you could actually program Autocorrect to do this if you want).
- **Find**: -- (2 hyphens)
- **Replace**: Open "More," then "Special" in the Find box and click on "Em Dash." The appropriate notation will appear in the bar. (The notation for an em dash appears to be different depending on your version of Word.)*
- **Click**: Replace all.

*If any of the notations I've given you don't work properly, use the Special list to figure out the correct one for your program or computer.

Part 3: Proofreading Slips You Can Find and Fix with Creative Tricks

These hard-to-see slips take a little more creativity to find and address than those in Part 2, but most of these searches will return "Not Found," so you just move on to the next.

Again, I will
- List the problem,
- Show you what to type in the **Find** bar in the Find dialogue box
- Show you when to **eyeball** if context is important
- Show you what to type in the **Replace** bar
- Tell you when to **click** "Replace all" or when to click Replace

In some cases below, I tell you that you can click "Replace all" after eyeballing to check that you're finding the right combination. However, I generally eyeball each instance (there won't be that many) and click "Replace."

Do NOT type "+" in the Find or Replace bars unless you are actually searching for the "plus" sign. I am using it below to indicate "then type." There should be no spaces between symbols in the bars unless you are specifically searching for a space. Also, do not type the parentheses; I use these to set off the specific examples.

For example, the first direction below would look like ^p' in your Find bar (except that it won't look like a smart quote).

Problem: Single quote marks
These are almost invisible! Apply several formulas to find them, since they can occur in different situations.

Formula 1: Single quotes at the beginning of a paragraph of dialogue
- **Find**: ^p and a single quote mark ('). (The ^ lives above the numeral 6.)
- **Eyeball** one or two to make sure you're finding the right combination.
- **Replace**: ^p + a double quote mark ("). (This will look like ^p")
- **Click**: Replace all

Formula 2: Single quotes at the beginning of a line of dialogue that's not at the beginning of a paragraph
- **Find**: one space (tap space bar) + a single quote mark ('). (When you tap the space bar, you won't see anything in the Find bar, but the cursor will move.)
- **Eyeball** to check that you have not found dialogue within dialogue, which takes a single quote mark.
- **Replace**: space + double quote (")
- **Click**: Replace.

Formula 3: Single quote marks at the end of line of dialogue within a longer paragraph
- **Find**: a single quote mark ('), then space (tap the space key).
- **Eyeball** to check that you have not found dialogue within dialogue, which takes a single quote mark.
- **Replace**: double quote marks ("), then space
- **Click**: Replace.

Formula 4: Single quotes at the end of a line of dialogue that ends the paragraph.
- **Find**: a single quote + ^p. (You might also run a check with single quote, then space, then ^p , since you may have typed a space after the quote mark.)
- **Eyeball** to check.
- **Replace**: double quote + ^p
- **Click**: Replace all.

Problem: An extra space before or after a quote mark.
These can cause your smart quote marks to "turn around," since Word decides which direction they should face depending on whether they come before or after a line of type.

- **Find**: space + quote marks + space. (Finds extra spaces at both the beginning or end of a line of dialogue).
- **Eyeball** each instance.
- **Replace**: Same as above with incorrect space eliminated.
- **Click**: Replace.

OR

- **Find**: ^p + quote marks + space bar.(Finds this problem at the beginning of a paragraph).
- **Eyeball** each instance.
- **Replace**: ^p + quote marks
- **Click**: Replace.

Problem: An extra space at the beginning of a paragraph.

These create a ragged indent line that you may not spot by eyeballing.
- **Find**: ^p + space
- **Replace**: ^p
- **Click**: Replace all

<p style="text-align:center">*******</p>

Completely missing quotes like those illustrated in the next section are the most challenging to find. This section suggests a couple of Find tricks you can try—and maybe you can invent your own.

Problem: Missing quotes at the end of a line of dialogue. Example: "It's cold in here, said Tom.
- **Find**: comma + space + s. (Make sure you've already eliminated double spaces!)
- **Eyeball** each instance.
- **Replace**: comma + quote marks + space + s
- **Click**: Replace.

Repeat with question marks as well as exclamation marks if you use them.

Repeat with the first letter of characters' names, so you will also catch "It's cold in here, Tom said.

Repeat with "asked," "replied," "demanded," or whatever dialogue tags you often use.

(You can also use whole words, of course.)

Problem: Missing quotes at the beginning of a line of dialogue
I haven't devised a foolproof way of finding these. Here's one trick that will find some. Examples: X said, It's warm in here." OR "Boy," X said, it's warm in here."
- **Find**: said + comma+ space + ^$ (for "any letter") (Check "More," then "Special" to make sure this is the correct notation for "any letter" in your version of Word.)
- **Replace**: said + comma+ space + quote marks + ^$
- **Click**: Replace
- **Repeat** with other dialogue tags you commonly use.

If you can think of a way to find missing quote marks at the beginning of a paragraph or before and after random narrative/actions rather than dialogue tags, please let me know!

These errors result when you have Autocorrect turned on, using its default settings. It may be set to capitalize letters after periods, question marks, and exclamation points. Example: "Is it warm in here to you?" Asked Tom.

- **Find**: relevant punctuation mark + quote marks + A (or S for "said" or R for "replied" or whatever), and then **check "Match case**."
- **Replace**: relevant punctuation mark + quote marks + a (or s for "said" or r for "replied" or whatever)
- **Click**: Replace

(You can prevent this by adjusting your settings in Autocorrect.)

I hope these ideas have been helpful. They've definitely helped me.

If you have questions, or ideas for other micro-error fixes, please don't hesitate to let me know! I'll put them on the blog.