

USING THE COMPUTER TO WRITE UP DISPLAYS OR A COLLECTION

By Jim Wigmore

For many years the Computer has been available to write up either our displays or collections but few are proficient in this task. The aim of this article is to help overcome this issue and give all who have access to a Computer enough information to be an able user and make the best possible use of this very useful tool.

This process is for users who have MS Word installed on their computers. The following assumes a basic knowledge of the computer and familiarity with its accessories such as the mouse.

In starting such a task careful preparation is the key.

Plan the work and work to the plan. - If you are writing up a display keep all the pages in the same folder. If you are writing up a collection you may wish to divide the collection into defined groups of pages and hold in separate folders.

Your First Task - is to define where you are going to place your finished work.

The suggested holding space is in the area called **My Documents** in a folder called **Write Ups**, you may even wish to create other folders within Write Ups for specific works. To create the folder Write Ups, select the START button in the bottom LH area of your screen, then My Documents in the menu shown, then create a new folder using the on screen instructions.

A new folder will appear with the name highlighted, delete the name and enter the name Write Ups, with the mouse left click away from the new folder, your new folder should remain with the name you have just given it. To add additional folders within Write Ups, follow the above procedure until you have all the folders you are going to need.

Task Two – create a blank page with all the key features you will use throughout.

With your mouse select the START button in the lower LH area of the screen and from the menu offered select MS Word. A blank document will be showing. This needs to be prepared for your use.

You will need to ensure you have certain toolbars available for use, go to the View button (*near the top LH corner of the screen*), in the drop down menu select Toolbars. Ensure the following toolbars are ticked, STANDARD, FORMATTING, DRAWING and REVIEWING.

Select the View button again and select Print Layout if this is not the current default.

Select the View button again and select Header/Footer, close the displayed box. Your displayed page will now show the areas at the top and bottom of the page where the header and footer would appear.

Select the File button (*near the top LH corner of the screen*), select Page Layout, you will see this has three options Margins, Paper and Layout. Select Margins and set the Top, Bottom, Left and Right margins to the smallest size your printer can work with probably in the order of ½ inch or 12 mm depending upon the grid your computer is set to. Select Paper and select A4 or the size of paper you intend to work with.

If the Office Outline box is showing down the RH side of your screen, close it by left clicking with your mouse on the X in the top right corner to close it. Your page will now occupy the full screen width and will appear as it will be printed.

The final part of this task is to set the text you will be using, in the top toolbar you will see a box defining the text, with the size box to the right, to the left is another box defining the text format being used. Set format box to Normal (*using the on screen down arrow*) and then scroll down with the mouse and select Normal, Set the text box to the type of text you will be using e.g. Arial, Times New Roman, etc. using the same principle, set the size of text to a nominal value e.g. 10 point.

You have now created your Basic Page. This page should be saved to your Write Ups folder as follows, select the File button, select Save As, direct the page you are saving to My Documents/Write Ups and save as file name "basicpage"

You now have a basic page that contains all your settings and font you intend to use throughout your write ups, this page can be selected and used many times in the creation of your subsequent write ups for display or your collection.

Actually Writing Up a Page – In order to get the most from the computer and obtain both an eye catching and effective way of displaying your philatelic material or telling your story, you will need to master a few key skills.

These skills can be summarised as :-

- Page Layout.
- Inserting Shapes.
- Inserting Graphics.
- Inserting Text.
- Saving your Work.

Each is a relatively simple task once the rudimentary skills are appreciated and an understanding has been gained into what can be achieved.

Page Layout – The most important task of all is to plan what you wish to include on a page and to understand how it can be placed and moved around to get the layout and effect you wish to create. Remember nearly all is possible, providing what you are trying to get on the page is not larger than the page itself. Understanding the following techniques will help in this process.

Inserting Shapes – Every Stamp, Cover, or piece of Postal History has a shape, those shapes are squares, rectangles, circles or triangular. We can position shapes on our page to both accept our item and enhance its appearance on the page while at the same time matching the shape size to our item. In order to do this we need to become familiar with the AutoShapes toolbar which should be positioned at the lower edge of your screen (*providing you have carried out task 2 successfully*).



To insert a shape on the page, select in the page with your mouse, then click on the desired shape on the AutoShape toolbar and insert it on the page. The page will display a box with the title “Create your drawing here”, **DO NOT INSERT YOUR SHAPE IN THIS AREA**, insert the shape away from this area, otherwise your shape will be locked and unable to be adjusted and moved around the page later.

Click on the Shape you have inserted and Right Click, from the Drop Down menu select Format Auto Shape. You will now have a box displayed that will allow you to set the properties of the shape.

Select the Layout tab and select the Square shape, select the Advanced setting and confirm the Square setting is still selected, if not re-select, click OK.

Select the Size tab, measure your item and set the height and width dimensions to your required size (*for borders you may need to add 2mm*).

Select the Colors & Lines tab, at the Style box set the line style to solid and the width you wish to use (*suggest 4pt*), now select Color from the menu select the colour you wish to use (*25% Grey is an effective and neutral setting*). You can now select your shape and move it around the page and position it at will.

If you are using further examples of the same shape, select the shape with the mouse, then select the Edit button top left on the screen and from the drop down menu select Copy. Select back in the page, then once again select the Edit button and from the menu select Paste. A copy of your shape will be inserted for you to pick up and position on the page. This process can be repeated as many times as you like until you have all the copies you require. You can also draw lines such as that shown below, don't forget to change the properties.

Inserting Graphics – The ability to incorporate a scanned image is very useful and can be carried out as follows. You need to know where your scanned image is being held on your computer and its file name.

Click on the page and then click the Insert button on the top toolbar and select Picture on the drop down menu, select From File on the second drop down menu. Navigate to the folder where your image is held and select it, then click on the Insert button.

Select the picture using right click and select Format Picture. Select the Layout tab and select the Square shape, select the Advanced setting and confirm the Square setting is still selected, if not re-select, click OK. You will now be able to move your picture around the page and alter the size by selecting one corner and adjusting the size to your requirements.



Inserting Text – The ability to insert text and control its appearance and where it is placed is perhaps one of the most difficult of all to master, but once mastered very simple. There are two ways in which text can be inserted, directly onto the page or using text boxes.

Directly onto the page would be used for Page Titles and introduction text, start at the top of the page and insert the text you require, move any graphics or pictures into this area and the text will auto wrap around (providing you have set the parameters according to the rules above).

As most of the text will be associated with either the graphic boxes or shapes, the use of Text Boxes will be more efficient and easier to control and manage.

This is some text inserted so you can see what it looks like justified left only.

This is more text that has been justified left and right, it looks better.

Note – NO BOX

To insert a text box go to the AutoShapes menu and select the text box symbol.

This is some text inserted so you can see what it looks like justified left only.

This is more text that has been justified left and right, it looks better.

Right click on the text box and select Format Text Box from the drop down menu. Select the Layout tab and select the "In line with text" symbol, select the Advanced setting and select the Square setting, click OK. You will now have a box like that shown left. Select Format Text Box this time select Colors & Lines go to Color and select No Line select OK and the box will appear as that right and above.

It is still in a text box and you can still move around the page like all the other images. One more trick to learn is text justification. To justify text highlight the text you wish to justify and then select one of the options in the top menu bar,

left, centre or justified left and right.

The use of font size, colour and weight are also useful tools to master. Font can be changed in size by highlighting and then adjusting the size using the font size down arrow, while highlighted, font can be made **bold** by selecting the **BOLD Button** next to the font size box and colour can be altered by selecting the down arrow next to the large **A** at the top RH of the menu bar.

You may for instance wish to draw attention to your *research by using a different colour or italics* note how this information immediately stands out.

Save your Work – Care should be taken when saving your work, as you will be working initially with your "basicpage", you will need to save your new page with a different name. You will need to select a naming policy that will allow you to keep your pages in the correct sequence and make finding them again simple. If you have set up the folders as suggested at the beginning the naming of pages can be as "Page001, Page002, etc.", DO NOT MAKE THE MISTAKE OF STARTING AT 1, 2, 3 etc., if your total number of pages exceeds 10 your pages will be stored based upon the first digit and they will be stored out of sequence.

To store your new page select the File button and select Save AS in the drop down menu, define the file you wish the page to be stored in and alter the file name to your new page title, then press OK.

Summary – The above skills need to be worked through several times, experiment as you go, you will become more confident with each success. It is important to be disciplined in your planning and work, diligence pays dividends. I have learnt through experimentation, you can start your learning process based upon the knowledge I am now passing on.

I am aware that others may adopt other principles even using a spreadsheet such as MS Excel, if you can get good results using simple tools such as MS Word why complicate the situation. I am a firm believer in the KISS principle (*Keep It Simple Stupid*). Advanced users may already be familiar with many of the points identified, there are however many more skills that can be added. I feel sure that once you have mastered the above, your own lateral thinking will allow you to work out some of the other things that can be achieved.

GOOD LUCK IN PRODUCING YOUR WRITE UPS – MAY THEY CONTINUE TO IMPROVE