How I learned to stop worrying and love the Ribbon

Applies to: Microsoft Office Access 2007, Excel 2007, Outlook 2007, PowerPoint 2007, Word 2007

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Crabby Office Lady

I recognize resistance when I see it because it's like looking into a mirror. I, too, was hesitant to jump in and start frolicking in the newness of Office 2007. I mean, it looked completely different and well, can you really teach an old dog new tricks? Turns out you can.

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When Office 2007 first came out, what everyone noticed first was the Microsoft Office Fluent user interface, especially the Ribbon. This Ribbon replaced the menus and toolbars — yes, the self-same menus and toolbars that you constantly griped about and yet were suddenly so attached to. You cannot imagine how much whiny feedback I received about the change:

- "I can't find anything!" you grumped.
- "Why do YOU get to decide where my most useful features are?" you groused.
- "This Ribbon takes up way too much space!" you grumbled.

(And so on and so forth until my eyes rolled up into my head, my mouth went slack, and I wondered if it's too late to become a ballerina after all.)

Expand your mind, dude

Turns out, even after reading through all of your complaints (and I do sympathize, I've been there myself), I still do feel that I have a mission, and I choose to accept it: to forcibly tug the great lot of you into the next phase of productivity software. Consequently, this week's column will help you deal with your problems: how to gain space, how to find things, how to concoct a little toolbar of your own with all your favorite features, how to move that little toolbar around, and how you, too, can learn to stop worrying and love the Ribbon.

NOTE And oh yes, five programs (Access, Excel, PowerPoint, Word, and certain parts of Outlook), have the Ribbon. So if you're looking for it in Publisher, you need to get in touch with reality.

One size may not fit all

Here is a picture of the Ribbon:
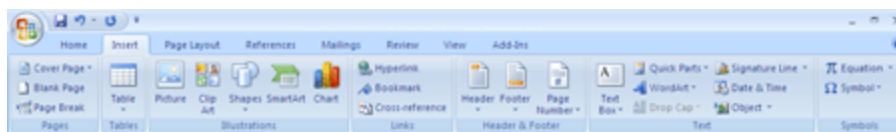
Nice, isn't it? This happens to be the Word Ribbon with the **Insert** tab selected. As you can see, each tab relates to a specific activity and the commands under each tab are organized into logical groups.

Yes, the Ribbon does drop down farther onto your page than the previous menus and toolbars did. It's designed that way so that you can see what you need at all times. No need to go hunting and pecking through who knows how many menus to find the command you're looking for.

Now, some of you may think that this Ribbon and all its tabs and commands are crowding you, and man, you need your space. So go ahead, make the Ribbon smaller. There are three ways you can do this. Here's one:

- Click **Customize Quick Access Toolbar** (It's either above or below the Ribbon.) Click **Minimize the Ribbon**.

  You can also do it this way:

- Double-click the name of the active tab. The Ribbon will appear minimized. Double-click any tab to restore the Ribbon. Like a switch: On. Off. On. Off.

  But my favorite way of all is:

- Press CTRL+F1 (to minimize or restore the Ribbon).

  See? If it's taking up too much space, you are not at its mercy; just make it smaller. And when you miss it, just restore it.

Where'd everybody go?

Sometimes, you're merrily going through the steps of a remarkably well-written Help topic that has just made your day (simply by being there when you need it) and WHOMP — you're stuck. An icon or some text that is described in the formerly-known-as-useful Help topic does not seem to appear anywhere on your Ribbon! Your blood starts to boil and the plaque starts building up in your arteries. Well, simmer down, hothead, there's a way to deal with this.

See, the Ribbon is optimized for a screen resolution of 1024 × 768 pixels. That means that if your resolution is 800 x 600, for example, the groups on the open tab will shrink horizontally and show only a single icon.

Here's an example: If you have your display settings at 800 x 600, the **Text** group on the **Insert** tab (normally a list of several options) is reduced to one tiny icon, the solitary
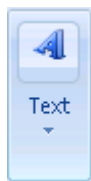
Sad and lonely.

Now, if you click the arrow under the **Text** group icon, everybody else in the group shows up:
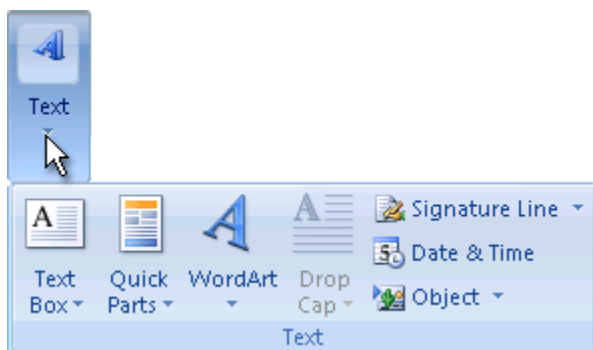
If this is just too much work for you, change your screen resolution, take a deep breath, and get on with your work.
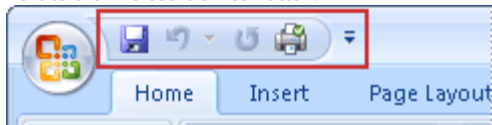
Make a friend: Customize the Quick Access Toolbar

Read that heading again. Yes, it says "customize" but note that it does NOT say anything about customizing the *Ribbon*. That's because you can't customize the Ribbon (unless you use code, XML, and other forms of digital voodoo). Let me be more specific here: You can't add or rearrange commands, you can't move or remove a group, you can't insert tabs hither and yon, and you certainly cannot switch to toolbars and menus from a previous version of Office (as if).

That being said, there is something you can do to make the Ribbon feel more ... *homey*: Create a Quick Access Toolbar, to which you can add any available command and which you can, hmmm ... access ... quickly.

What's in this for you?

1. **You can get up close and personal with the Ribbon.** Sure, we created tabs that we thought would contain the features, commands, and tools that you would most likely use but what the heck do we know about you, as an individual? It's not that we don't care; we do. It's just that there are so many of you unique snowflakes out there that we can't possibly anticipate what everyone is going to need all the time.
2. **Commands that you add to your Quick Access Toolbar are visible all the time — no matter what Ribbon tab you're on.** Say you're busily working on the **Data** tab in Excel 2007 and you need to filter a set of data but you don't want to have to change tabs (the **Sort & Filter** command is on the **Home** tab — you knew that). If you have already added the **Sort & Filter** command to your Quick Access Toolbar, you just need to reach up to it, click the little arrow next to it, and tell Excel what you want to do.
3. **You can add your favorite commands with just two clicks.** If you notice that you're using a particular command over and over, and you want to add it to the Quick Access Toolbar, all you need to do is right-click that command and then click **Add to Quick Access Toolbar**. The other way to add commands to your Quick Access Toolbar is to right-click anyplace in the Ribbon, click **Customize Quick Access Toolbar**, and then go find what you want.
4. **You can put the Quick Access Toolbar wherever you want it.** The default location for the Quick Access Toolbar is in the upper-left corner, next to the Microsoft Office Button.

But if your eye naturally falls a bit farther down (like me wearing my bifocals which I despise), you can move the Quick Access Toolbar below the Ribbon. Click **Customize Quick Access Toolbar**, then click **Show Below the Ribbon**.

Will you just show me?!?!

Oh ... I see you're asking for directions, are you? Haven't got a built-in GPS? Frankly, you're not alone. Many people let me know that using this Ribbon involves a steep learning curve in low gear, and so we created a few roadmaps to make it easier on you. These are great because they let you find where your favorite command used to be and then tell you where it is now. And, since you've read this far, as a bonus I will also link off to some demos and training courses that will set you on your way to Ribbon nirvana. I have to say that these resources helped me tremendously when I was first learning about the Ribbon and close to throwing a tantrum at least five times a day.

The guides

- Interactive: Access 2003 to Access 2007 command reference guide
- Interactive: Excel 2003 to Excel 2007 command reference guide
- Interactive: PowerPoint 2003 to PowerPoint 2007 command reference guide
- Interactive: Word 2003 to Word 2007 command reference guide
- Interactive: Outlook 2003 to Outlook 2007 command reference guide

Demos, training, and more information

- Microsoft Office Fluent user interface video
- The new Microsoft Office Fluent user interface frequently asked questions
- Training: Up to speed with the 2007 Office system
- Download get-started training for the 2007 Microsoft Office system

Breathe

That's it, in... and out. This Ribbon thing may be a new trick but I'm pretty sure that you can learn it quickly. I know you don't really care (nor should you) about how many people spent how many hours thinking about how to make your lives easier by putting commands and features where they're easier to find ... so I am not asking for thanks. All I'm asking is that you TRY. I think you'll be happy that you did.

"You can't always get what you want, but if you try sometimes, you might find, you get what you need." — The Rolling Stones

About the author

Annik Stahl, the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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