

Using Microsoft Word's "track changes" feature: a guide for authors

This guide provides a brief overview of how to review edits performed by an editor who has used Microsoft Word's "track changes" feature to edit your document. It includes the following sections:

- Edits: how edits are inserted and how to customize how they appear on your computer
- Comments: how to view comments, insert your own, and delete comments that you have responded to.
- Viewing or concealing edits: how to display the edits, or just the results of the edits
- Accepting or rejecting edits: how to quickly incorporate the changes into your document.

For more details on each of these functions, please consult Microsoft Word's online help.

Edits

Most edits are small insertions or deletions, but others may involve more extensive rewriting of sentences or parts of sentences. These changes to your manuscript are displayed using Word's **Track Changes** feature.

Inserting your own edits

To insert your own edits so the editor can quickly find and review them:

- Open the **Tools** menu.
- Select **Track Changes**.
- Select **Highlight Changes**.
- Select **Track Changes While Editing** if this choice does not have a checkmark beside it.

Customizing how edits appear on your screen

To customize how these changes appear on your computer:

- Open the **Tools** menu. (On Macintosh computers running OS-X, open the **Word** menu instead.)
- Select **Options**. (On a Macintosh, select **Preferences** instead.)
- Select the **Track Changes** tab.
- For each of the three main types of edit—insertions, deletions, and format changes—choose the color (for example, red) and the style (for example, boldface) that Word should use to display the changes. Experiment with these settings until you find a combination that pleases you.

Comments

Where the editor is uncertain how to revise the text and wants to ask you a question or explain a problem and propose a solution, the editor can insert "comments". These comments appear as highlighted (generally yellow) areas of text: the highlighting defines what words the comment refers to, and a comment marker follows the highlighted text.

Comment markers resemble "[GH1]": the editor's initials followed by a number. The text of each comment is just like any other text: you can copy it and paste it into the main document if that would be helpful (for example, to avoid having to retype a sentence suggested by the editor).

Viewing comments

No matter how Word has been set up, you can display comments by opening the **View** menu and selecting **Comments**. If you want to see the comment markers but they are not currently visible:

- Open the **Tools** menu. (On Macintosh computers using OS-X, open the **Word** menu instead.)
- Select **Options**. (On Macintosh computers, select **Preferences** instead.)
- Select the **View** tab.
- If **Hidden text** (towards the middle of this tab along the right side) does not have a checkmark beside it, click in the box to select this option.
- Click **OK** to close the dialog box.

The numbers in this Comments window match the numbers of the markers that you'll see in your text. Once you can see the highlighted text or the comment markers that represent the editor's comments—the [GH1] and so on—you can display the comment text itself. There are three ways to do so:

- Hold the cursor over the highlighted text until a small window appears that displays the comment text. (In some versions of Word, you may have to click the cursor inside the highlighted text, move the mouse outside this area, then move the mouse back over the highlighted text.)
- Open the **View** menu and select **Comments**. This opens a small window below the main part of the screen that contains your text. Clicking in this smaller window to position the cursor inside the comments lets you scroll through the comments and through the document. Clicking once on the comment number in this window will ensure that the text referred to by the comment appears in the main text area at the top of the screen.
- Double-click the mouse on any comment marker. This accomplishes the same thing as the previous option, but is easier if you prefer working directly with the mouse.

Inserting comments

You can insert your own comments to respond to the editor's questions, and you should certainly do so if you plan to reject any proposed changes and want the editor to understand why. To insert your own comments:

- Drag the cursor across the text that the comment refers to. This selects the text and highlights it as if you had used a Hi-Liter pen.
- Open the **Insert** menu.
- Select **Comment**. If you accidentally deleted your text by pressing the wrong key, immediately press **Control-Z** (**Command-Z** on the Macintosh) to restore your text, then try again.
- Word inserts a comment marker immediately after the text that you selected, then opens the Comments window below your text. Type your comments here.
- When you have finished typing your comment, click the **Close** button at the top of the Comments window.

Deleting comments

WARNING: Never delete comment markers in the Comments window at the bottom of the screen. This can cause serious problems, including possible corruption of the document. Newer versions of Word won't let you delete these markers.

There are two ways to delete a comment after you have reviewed its contents and have responded to it:

- Click to position the cursor *in front of* the comment marker ([GH1] etc.) in the main text window at the top of the screen, then press **Del** to select it. (Alternatively, click to position the cursor *after* the comment marker and press **Backspace** to select it.) Press either key *a second time* to delete the comment.
- Click once directly on the comment marker to select it, then press either the **Del** or the **Backspace** key.

If revision tracking is still turned on, the comments won't actually disappear. Instead, Word will mark them as deleted, just like it would do with any other text you delete. To permanently remove the comment, you must accept each of these deletions to. (See the section "Accepting or rejecting edits" for details.)

Viewing or concealing edits

Viewing edits

To see *all edits* made using revision tracking:

- Open the **Tools** menu.
- Select **Track Changes**.
- Select **Highlight Changes**.
- Select **Highlight changes on screen** if there isn't already a checkmark beside this option.

Concealing edits

To display *only the results* of the edits:

- Open the **Tools** menu.
- Select **Track Changes**.
- Select **Highlight Changes**.
- Deselect **Highlight changes on screen**.

The changes are still present, but Word won't display them until you select **Highlight changes on screen** again.

Accepting and rejecting edits

If there are many edits, it can take considerable time to accept each one individually. Fortunately, there's a faster way:

- Move through the document one line at a time, reviewing each edit and responding to each comment (e.g., by inserting new text or changing the wording). Make any corrections suggested by the editor that you agree with.
- If you disagree with a change, reject the edit (see the next item in this list) and insert a comment that informs the editor what you have done and why. (See the section "Inserting comments" for details on how to insert your own comments.)
- To reject an edit, select the inserted or deleted text by dragging the cursor across it. Next, click the righthand mouse button (on a Macintosh, hold down the **Control** key and click on the selected text) and select **Reject Change** from the popup menu.
- Continue reviewing each edit or comment until you reach the end of the document.

To accept all the remaining edits, including your own additions:

- Open the **Tools** menu.
- Select **Track Changes**.
- Select **Accept or Reject Changes**.
- Click the **Accept All** button.
- Word will ask whether you want to accept all the changes without reviewing them. Click **OK** to do so.

If you intend to make any additional changes that you want the editor to review, make sure that "track changes" is enabled so that the editor will see what you have done. This is faster than forcing the editor to re-edit the entire document just to find the few changes you have made, so working in this way will save you time and money.