



Introduction

Microsoft Word has established itself as an essential tool for preparing documents. Usually it is well behaved but when the vital document you have been slaving for hours over appears to be gone forever it becomes the object of immense frustration. In this Technology Briefing we look at the most common problems encountered with lost, missing or corrupt Word documents and what you can do to get yourself back up and running again.

Before you do anything else

Please read the guidance in this briefing thoroughly before diving in to fix a problem. Should you have any doubts, we are always happy to assist.

First, stop, take stock of the situation and try and remember what you were doing immediately before things went pear-shaped - it is very easy to make matters far worse than they appear to be.

The following lists the most common problems encountered with lost, missing or corrupt Word documents. For each, we have outlined the solutions to such problems along with an explanation and guidance.

Note - If you are not sure what happened and need to sort something out immediately, follow the guidance in the order given.

What happened?	What should you do now?	See Tip
You accidentally clicked No when prompted to save your document.	If the document is vital, do not use the PC - call us.	1
	Start WordPad and use the Paste option.	2
	Convert a printed copy back into a Word document.	3
Word is still open but your document has vanished.	Check for a new Window.	4
	Use the UNDO command.	5
An error message appeared and Word has closed taking the document with it.	Restart Word to see if your document is "recovered".	6
	Search for autorecovery documents that Word missed.	7
	Search for your document in the temporary files.	8
You cannot find a document you were working on previously.	Check your Offline folders.	9
You cannot find an E-mail attachment you worked on previously.	Check your Outlook temporary files for your lost document.	10
You cannot open an attachment to an E-mail message.	Save and rename the attachment.	11
Word reports an error whenever you try and open a particular document.	Open the document using WordPad.	12

The guidance assumes you have Windows XP (either Home or Professional) and that we have provided your PC for you. If your set up is different, not all the guidance may work for you. See Tip 1 and contact your local IT support if in doubt.

Tip 1 - If the lost document is absolutely vital - call us

Clicking in the wrong place or pressing a certain combination keys will instruct Word to close itself and choosing "No" at the wrong time could see your document and almost any hope of recovering it disappear.

All is not lost though. Providing you realise the mistake, do nothing on the PC and contact us immediately we should be able to get significant portion of the document back.

In such circumstances we will ask you if you have a printed copy of the document at any point – if so we can convert it back into a Word for you. We will also ask you how long you spent working on the document - the process of recovering your document could take several hours. It may be quicker for you to recreate the document again. As a rule of thumb, it takes about 75% of the original time to re-do a document. We will advise you to get started on a new version if we are also attempting to recover it.

Tip 2 - Use WordPad to check for accidentally removed text

Although unlikely, it is possible that your document or a significant portion of it has been copied to the clipboard (the mechanism for copying and moving information between different applications).

A quick check using the basic word-processor bundled with Windows will determine if this is the case.

1. Click the Start button and choose Run...
2. Type "wordpad" in the box provided and click OK.
3. From the Edit menu, choose "Paste"

If your document or enough of your document is retrieved this way, save the document and then close WordPad. Start Word and use the Paste option again to get your document back.

Tip 3 - Get your printed document converted back into Word

A printed copy of a lost document can be converted back into a Word document by using a scanner and OCR (optical character recognition) software. Although the process isn't 100% accurate and doesn't work as well on faxed documents, it only takes a few minutes and can save hours of work by getting the bulk of the text back for you.

We have the software and equipment to convert a paper document into Word format for you and if you find OCR is something that may be useful for other tasks we can recommend a suitable set up.

Tip 4 - Check for a new document Window

If you accidentally pressed the CTRL and N keys together, this instructs Word to open a new blank document. The new document may appear on top of your original document giving the impression that your document has gone when in fact it is simply hidden from view.

To see if this is the problem in your case, move your pointer over the Window menu in Word and choose each of the numbered entries in turn. Each represents a separate Word document and yours may be one of those listed.

Tip 5 - Use the UNDO command to recover lost text

Accidentally pressing the ALT and A keys together and then typing will cause existing text to disappear. This combination of actions selects everything in your document and as Word automatically overwrites any selected text, it gives the impression that your work has gone.

To see if this is the problem in your case, move your pointer over the Edit menu and select the Undo Typing options (or press CTRL and Z) and word undoes the previous action. Keep "undoing" until either your document appears or the Undo option is no longer available.

If existing text is disappearing as you type, press the INS key – this toggles Word between inserting and overtyping text into a document.

Tip 6 - Restart Word after it crashes to see if your document is automatically "recovered"

Word normally creates a temporary backup (called an AutoRecovery file. See Tools...Options...Save) of your document every 5-10 minutes as you are working. If Word or your PC "crashes" the AutoRecovery file remains and so you lose 10 minutes work at most.

Follow these steps to recover the lost document:

1. Restart Word.
2. Word should prompt you asking whether or not you would like to recover an unsaved document (all recoverable documents are listed and include the details of when the each was last modified).
3. Select the document that matches the one you are looking for.
4. Go to "File" menu and choose "Save As".
5. Give the document a new name (so that you don't get it confused with any existing document) and continue working on it as normal.

Tip 7 - Search for Autorecovery documents

If you when you restart Word you do not get the autorecovery option, you can manually check for autorecovery files. You must be confident with using Windows XP to do this – if you need help, please ask us.

1. Ensure Word is closed.
2. Click the Start button and choose Search.
3. Choose "All files and folders" from the list of search types.
4. Type "*.asd" in the "All or part of the file name" box.
5. Click the "More advanced options" item.
6. Ensure that "Search system folders" and "Search hidden files and folders" and "Search subfolders" are all checked.
7. Click the "Search" button.

Your PC will now be searched for any autorecovery files. Depending on how much information is stored on your PC this may take a while - be patient.

When the search is complete, your document will hopefully be listed. Right-click on its name and choose Rename from the shortcut menu. Replace ".asd" at the end of its name with ".doc". Now double-click on the document to open it in Word and then save it in your usual place.

Tip 8 - Search your temporary files to find a lost document

In addition to AutoRecovery files, Word also creates "temporary" files for its own purposes. These temporary files, whose names typically start with the "~wr" characters and end with ".tmp", may also contain a copy of your lost document.

Repeat the search described previously (see Tip 7) using "~wr*.tmp" as the file name to search for.

When the search is complete, it is likely a number of temporary files will be listed. Narrow down the range of possibilities by examining the time, date and size of the files. Right-click on a filename and choose Rename from the shortcut menu. Replace ".tmp" at the end of the name with ".doc" and then you should now be able to double-click on the document to open it. If rename is not available as an option, copy the file elsewhere and then rename it.

Tip 9 - Check your offline folders for a lost or later version of your document

If your PC "synchronises" with the network whenever you log on and log off you may find that a document is missing or has gone back to an earlier version. Occasionally the synchronisation does not start or complete properly and so you have an out-of-date view of your files.

Try the following steps to get an up to date version of the document:

1. Shutdown your PC.
2. Plug in the network cable if not plugged in already.
3. Switch on your the PC and log in.
4. Allow the synchronization process to complete.
5. Re-open the document and you should now have most recent version.

If you still cannot find the document you created or can only get an older version, locate the "Shortcut to offline files" icon on your desktop, browse the list of documents from the shortcut to see if your missing document is shown. Note you should also contact us so that the problem with synchronisation can be resolved for you.

Tip 10 - Search your Outlook temporary files for the amended version of an E-mail attachment

When you open an attachment to a mail message you are really working on a copy of the attachment that Outlook has saved in a hidden folder on your PC. If you open an attachment, make a few changes and then save the document, these changes are saved in the copy and not in the original attachment. This gives the impression that any changes have disappeared when you next re-open the attachment.

1. Ensure Word is closed.
2. Click the Start button and choose Search.
3. Choose "All files and folders" from the list of search types.
4. Type the first few letters from the filename of the attachment in the "All or part of the file name" box.
5. Click the "More advanced options" item.
6. Ensure that "Search system folders" and "Search hidden files and folders" and "Search subfolders" are all checked.
7. Click the "Search" button.

Your PC will now be searched for saved attachments. Depending on how much information is stored on your PC this may take a while - be patient.

Once the search is complete, one or more matching documents will hopefully be listed. Open each in turn until you find the right one.

Tip 11 - Save and rename an E-mail attachment that Windows cannot open

Windows identifies what type of item a document is (e.g. a Word document, an Excel spreadsheet etc.) by a three character code (usually hidden from view) that is automatically added to the name of something when it is first saved.

When you double-click an attachment to a mail message, this is an instruction for Windows to identify the type of attachment and open it using the corresponding application. If the three character extension is missing, Windows cannot work out which application should be used and so you need to step in and give it a hand.

1. Move your pointer over the problem attachment and press the right-mouse button (a "right-click")
2. From the shortcut menu, choose "Save As".
3. Append to the document name or replace an existing extension with ".doc" (for Word documents).
4. Save the attachment in a location you can easily find it.
5. Start Microsoft Word and attempt to open the attachment.

If the attachment still does not load, it may be an Excel spreadsheet (.xls) or an Adobe PDF document (.pdf). Repeat the same process using these extensions. If none of these work, forward the attachment to us and we will look into it for you.

Tip 12 - Use WordPad to open a corrupt Word document

If Word crashes whenever you try to open a particular document or soon afterwards, it is possible that the file containing the document has become corrupted. In this situation you can try using WordPad to open the document.

WordPad is a basic word-processing application that is bundled with all versions of Microsoft Windows. It doesn't have all the bells and whistles that Word has and so isn't as easily tripped up with corrupt documents.

1. Click the Start button and choose Run...
2. Type "wordpad" in the box provided and click OK.
3. Find and open the document that is causing the problem.

If your document opens successfully from the File menu, choose "Save As..." and then select "Rich Text Format (RTF)" from the list of "Save as type" options. Once saved, try opening the RTF version using Word.

Important

We have worked hard to ensure the information provided here is both comprehensive and accurate however every situation is different and if you have any doubts, you should contact us or your local IT support for assistance.