

Deal with Large, Troublesome Word Files and Fix Document Faults

Using the information given in this article you will be able to:

- ✓ Split a large master document into subdocuments,
- ✓ Reduce the file size of Word documents by linking images rather than inserting them,
- ✓ Repair damaged Word files using secret tools and techniques.

Creating a one or two page letter every so often won't really tax Word's true capabilities. But, when you start producing very large documents, such as manuals or even whole books, you do reach the limits of what Word is capable of.

If you save a large document as a single Word file, you are living dangerously: a Word crash could leave you without months or even years of work. It isn't just lots of text that can cause problems in Word. Documents that contain objects, such as images, are also at risk from corruption and data loss.

In this article, we'll show you how to safely manage large Word documents and where the limits of Word lie.

Working with very large Word documents is like playing with fire - the longer you work with the document, and the larger it grows, the greater the risk that Word will crash and corrupt your document, meaning that you lose your work.

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Beware of Word's Limitations

Short documents don't cause problems

If you're writing a club newsletter or an advert for a lost toy, you don't need to worry about Word's limitations. However, when you start working on large documents with lots of pictures, embedded spreadsheets or cross-references, then the limitations of Word will quickly come to the fore.

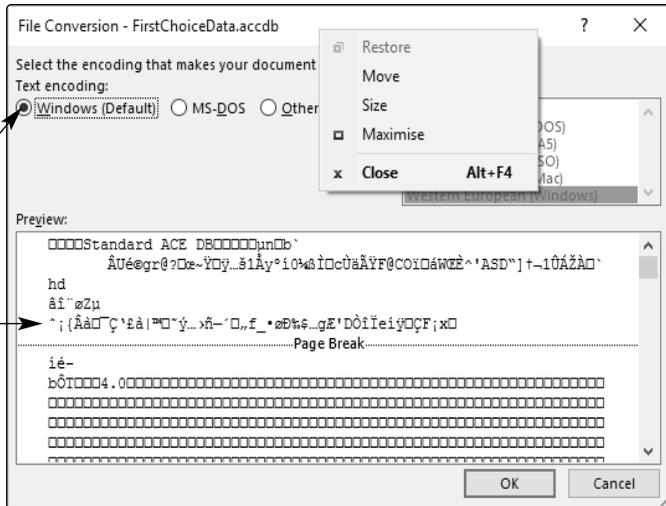
You'll come up against Word's limitations quickly

Unfortunately, these limitations often crop up much quicker than you would like. If you have a large document, Word can start to behave badly and Windows may display an error message telling you that **This application is not responding**.

If you are then forced to restart Word and open the problem document again, you may find that you have lost all of the changes you recently made, or you cannot even open the document at all.

Word tries to convert the format of a corrupted document

You can see a preview of the text it has found here



Faulty Word files can no longer be opened. Try to repair them with the rescue tips on page W 350/11

In larger documents, the following problems can cause errors in the file:

- Graphics that are embedded within the document.
- Charts, tables and forms that are embedded within the document.
- Extensive text formatting and faulty format templates.

Possible causes of Word crashes

Unfortunately, there is no rule of thumb or limit to tell you when Word will become unstable. There are many factors that can play a part, such as your hardware configuration. To avoid problems caused by hardware as far as possible, you should have a PC with a recent CPU and 4 GB or 8 GB of RAM. If you have a 64-bit version of Windows installed on your PC, you can edit considerably larger Word files than you could with a 32-bit Windows version and just 2 GB of RAM.



But, there are ways you can get around these limitations by keeping an eye on the size of your Word files before they get out of hand.



Perfectly Manage Large Word Documents

Documents that contain nothing but pages and pages of text and no images, you can probably get to several hundred pages before you come across any problems. However, if you create a document that has a few hundred pages of text and images, either by yourself or as part of a team, then things can get critical. If you are using a single file that contains all of your text, you will notice that it takes a long time to open, save and browse through the text.

Manage large documents

When you also make use of some of Word's automatic functions, such as page numbering, automatic chapter numbering, indexing, contents pages or cross-referencing, then Word really starts to be pushed to the limits. This is when there is a very real threat of data loss and crashes start mounting up.

Automatic features increase the chance of risk



Tip: Safe file management for large Word documents

If you have to work with lots of pages of text in a single Word file, then you should save it regularly and add a new version number to the end of each filename. This will allow you to be able to quickly switch back to a previous version of the document should you need to. However, it is much better to create multiple smaller files containing different sections of the document with, at most, 30 pages each. So, if you are writing a book, you should put each chapter into a separate document. If each separate document uses the same document template, you can be sure that the formatting will be consistent throughout.

Make Large Documents Easier to Manage by Restructuring Them

Create a master document to make management easier

In order to be able to create cross-references between the different documents containing the chapters of your larger document, you should use Word's master document function. The master document provides an outline that can glue together the separate documents containing your different sections of text, without actually putting all of the text into a single file.

The structure of the master documents

There is a quick way, built into Word, which you can use to split a document into a master document and subdocuments. In the master document, also known as the central document, you integrate the Word files containing your different text sections. In this way, your master document can be used to easily organise a large document that consists of multiple chapters. Each chapter contains its own subdocument and can be worked on independently of the other subdocuments.

Small files = easier to recover from problems

In the master document there are only shortcuts to the different subdocuments. Splitting a large document in this way reduces the risk of a Word crash and the associated loss of data that it entails.

In order to be able to work with a master document without any problems, you should first create the chapter files from the master document, then split the master into individual files. Then you work on your text in the individual files, rather than the master document. Don't group the files together as a single document until you've finished making all of your changes to the single document.

Easy setup

Organise a master document using the outline view

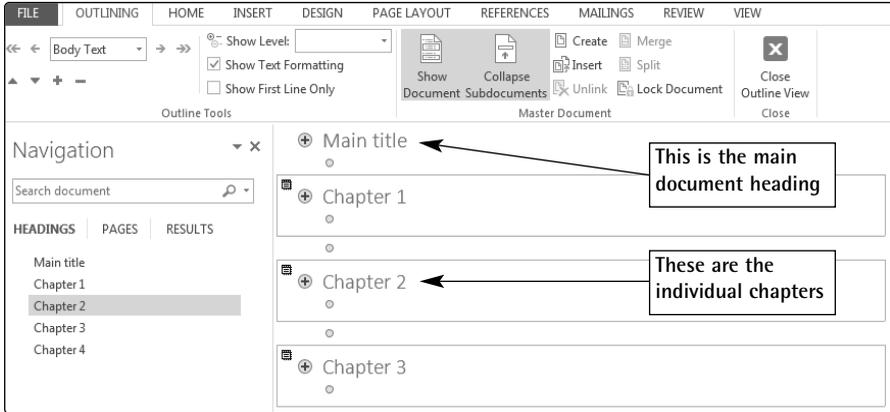
The outline view in Word is the basis for creating a new master document. The outline view shows you the structure of your document. By dragging around the headings, you can move and restructure the text within the subdocuments. The outline view can also be collapsed, so that you only see the main document headings.

Create a structure for your document

To create a new document composed of subdocuments:

1. Open a new document, then switch to the outline view. To do so, click on **View > Outline**.
2. First, write the main heading for your document, such as the chapter of your book, then the document subheading underneath that, with one for each chapter, for example. Press **(Enter)** after each heading and make sure they have the **Level 1** format assigned.
3. Use the toolbar to indent text and apply sub-headings as required.
4. Once you are happy with the structure of the master document, select the headings that you want to use to create your subdocuments. On the **Outlining** tab, click on the **Create** button. All of the **Level 1** headings that you have selected will be created as subdocuments. Note, if the **Create** button isn't available, you need to first click **Show Document**.

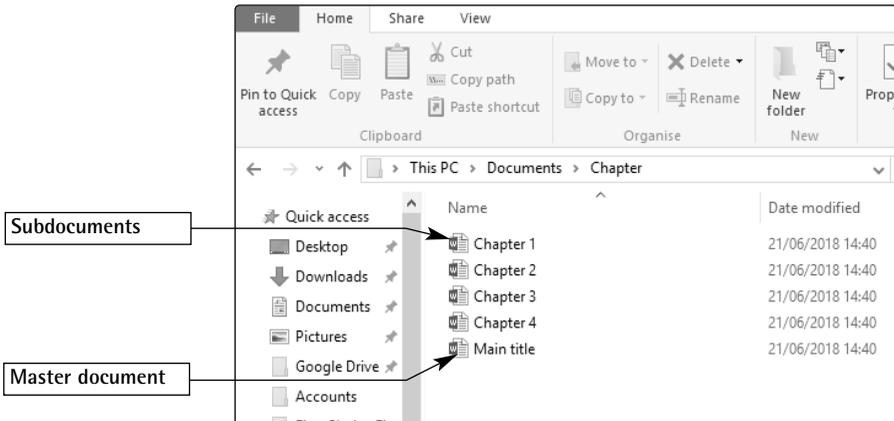




*By clicking on **Create**, the document is transformed into a master document*

Save the master document

You can now save the master document. It is best to save it to a new, empty folder. Word will automatically create files within that folder for each of the subdocuments you have specified in the master document.



Your master document and subdocuments will all be saved together

Insert Images in Your Document without Problems

Large images embedded in your document can lead to problems. The number of pictures you use does matter too: if you only use a couple of images, Word will not have any problems but if you have two images per page in a 100-page document, you'll soon find that Word starts to misbehave. If an image has been inserted into your document from the clipboard using the paste command, you will find that it significantly increases the size of your document.

How to include graphics

Graphics require much more memory than text alone, with one A4 page containing a 300 DPI image in a compressed format needing 1 MB, compared to a typical page of A4 text needing just 7 KB. Adding pictures will soon increase the size of your Word file.

Text + graphics = large file

Graphics formats, such as JPEG, which are compressed when stored on your hard drive can cause considerable problems. For example, a JPEG image that uses about 150 KB of hard drive space in Explorer can expand the size of the Word document it is embedded in by as much as 4 MB!

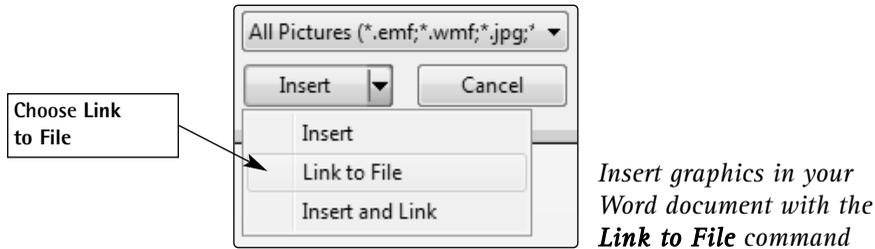
Avoid JPEG format images

Large graphics will greatly slow down Word, not only when saving your document but also when trying to perform other tasks too. That is why it is a good idea to only use graphics in a format that Word is optimised to process, such as PNG, TIF and BMP.

Word is slower

Don't save graphics within your document

To avoid problems caused by large graphics files, you should not save images inside your Word document. Save them to separate files instead and link them to your Word document. You should take care to do this when pasting a file into your document and ensure that you use the **Link to File** option provided by the paste command.



How files are linked

Word will add a field to your document with a reference to the image file. Since the complete path is listed in the field, you should not move the image. However, if the image is in the same directory as your Word document you can move both files to another directory on your hard drive at the same time.

Easily work with links

If your pictures are linked to external files, Word has to constantly reload the images as you browse through your document's pages. That is why you should insert the pictures after you have completed your text, or select the menu option to show picture placeholders. To do so, click **File > Options > Advanced** (Word 2016/2013/2010), or **Office button > Word Options > Advanced** (Word 2007), then tick the option **Show picture placeholders**.

The images are then displayed as a frame and don't have to be reloaded constantly.

Problem-free Formatting for Large Word Documents

As well as dealing with the images in your large documents, there are several other things that you need to take into account when working with large files.

Use a template for consistent formatting

If you have lots of large documents (a set of reports, for example), create your own document template that contains just the formatting options you need for your documents.

This will speed up the formatting process and ensure that only the formatting options required by the document are included. It will also reduce the amount of work Word has to do to manage the formatting applied to your text.

Word allows you to include special diagrams and image formats, such as WordArt and clipart. You should avoid these formats if possible, since they use valuable computing resources and degrade performance. If you really need to use them, you should convert any image you need to use into a bitmap graphics format, such as BMP or PNG.

Don't use clipart or WordArt

If you have other field functions or OLE components integrated into your documents, as well as embedded graphics, it will take a long time to update your documents. If the external graphics haven't yet been created but links to them are already included in your document, then Word will warn you that there are incorrect references in your document and may even replace details of the images in your document fields with error messages.

Avoid slow document updates

Activate the Autosave Feature in Word

You can configure file-saving options in Word so that a backup copy of your document is automatically created.

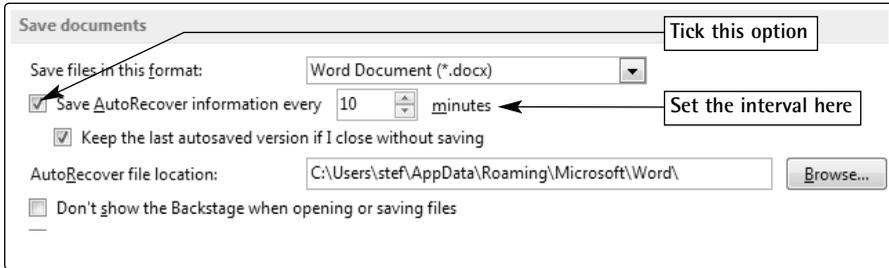
More security when saving

The AutoRecover feature is activated by default. With this in place, Word will automatically create a backup of your document at regular intervals, so if the program crashes you can recover a corrupt document from your backup. When you open the backup you should see the last document you had open, along with the changes you made up to the point that the backup was saved.

Safety step 1: AutoRecover

You can configure the intervals between automatic backups being created by clicking **File > Options (Word 2016/2013)**, or **Office button > Word Options (Word 2007)**. Click **Save**, then set the AutoRecover interval and click **OK**.

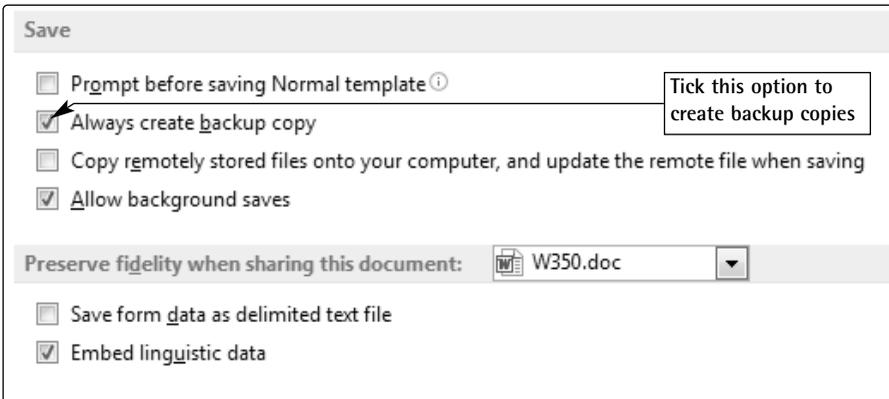
Activate automatic backups



Saving every 5 or 10 minutes should be sufficient

Safety step 2: create backup copies

Word provides even greater safety by creating further backup copies of your document each time you save the file. Click **File > Options** (Word 2016/2013/2010), or **Office button > Word Options** (Word 2007), then click on **Advanced** and under **Save**, select the option **Always create backup copy**.



If necessary you can always fall back on the last backup copy

This will create a complete backup copy of your text. The backup, which has the file extension **.WBK**, can be opened in Word simply by double-clicking on it as if it were a normal document.

Steps to Repair Your Damaged Word Documents

There are various ways to repair faulty Word documents. Of course, it's best to try to avoid getting into a situation where a document becomes faulty, by regularly saving and backing up the file. This means that if problems do occur and you can no longer open a document, you can still switch back to a recent version of the file. If this doesn't work and your file is corrupt, use the following methods to recover the text.

Secret tips to repair your Word documents

Use Word's own built-in repair function

Word provides you with an automated repair function to deal with damaged documents. This feature can attempt to extract raw text from any kind of document, not just a damaged Word file.

Rescue a faulty document

However, you should be aware that the formatting of the document and non-text elements, such as embedded images, will be lost. Unfortunately, it is usually not possible to recover graphics and other embedded content, although some elements, such as tables, can be recovered as plain text. Proceed as follows to recover text from a damaged Word document:

Formatting will be lost

1. In Word 2016/2013, go to **File > Open**, or in Word 2007 go to **Office button > Open**, and then select the document that you would like to restore (click **Computer** or **This PC > Browse** to select the document in Word 2013/2016).
2. In the file type drop-down list, select **Recover Text from Any File (*.*)** in Word 2016/2013/2010, or in Word 2007 click on the **down arrow** on the **Open** button, and then click **Open and Repair**.



3. Click **Open** and Word will recover whatever text it can from the file but without the usual formatting.

Change the format of the faulty Word file

Rename .DOC
to .RTF



A quick and simple way to restore a damaged document that you can no longer open is to change its file extension:

1. In Explorer, right-click on the damaged Word document and select **Rename** from the pop-up menu. Change the file extension to .RTF so, for example, **letter.docx** will become **letter.rtf**. This will lead Windows to assume the document is in Rich Text Format.
2. Double-click on the .RTF file to open it. If Word manages to open the file, save it straightaway with a different filename, as a normal Word document.

Copy undamaged parts of the documents into a new document

Parts of a
document can
be damaged



It is possible for only part of a Word document to become damaged. If you open the document but some passages are corrupt and include odd symbols, then you should proceed as follows:

1. Open the damaged document in Word then create a new, blank document. Copy the undamaged sections from the problem file to the new document, then save the new document.
2. Next, save the damaged document with a different filename. To do so, press **(F12)** to open the Save As

dialogue box and then set the file type to **Plain Text (*.txt)**.

3. Close the file. If asked which format to save it in, choose plain text again.
4. Open the file you just closed and check if you can now read the damaged parts of the text. If you can, copy the damaged parts from this document to the new document you created in step 1.
5. Reapply the formatting in the old document to the new document by making the headings bold, for example.

Load the faulty file into WordPad

The WordPad tool, included as part of Windows, can read Word formatted documents and save them to a simplified format. Unfortunately, WordPad doesn't understand all of the Word formatting options, so a Word document loaded in WordPad will not look entirely correct. WordPad will not display tables properly and will instead transform them into text separated with tab spaces. But, this means that opening Word files in WordPad then saving them again can remove formatting problems caused by Word itself.

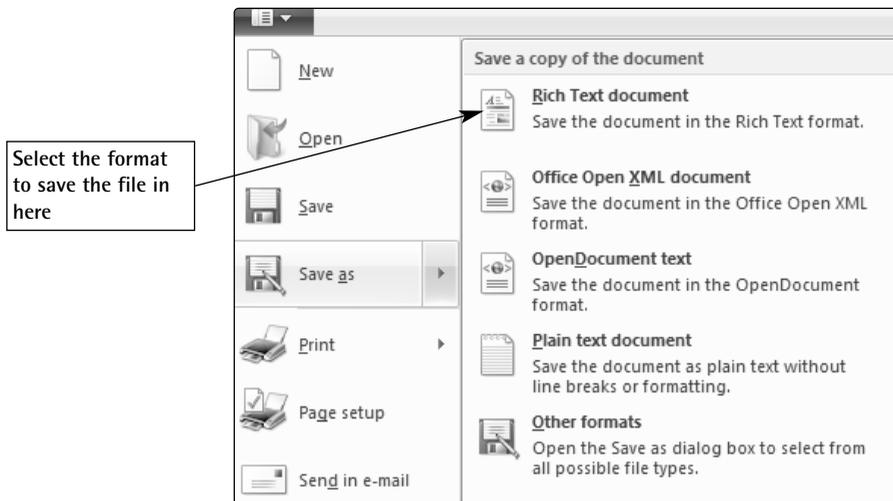
WordPad can open .DOC files

Follow these steps to fix a broken Word file in WordPad:

1. On Windows 10/8, press  + **R**, type **word-pad** then click **OK**. On Windows, click **Start > All Programs > Accessories > WordPad**.
2. Open the damaged file in WordPad by pressing **Ctrl** + **O**.



3. Save it with a different filename by clicking File > Save As.
4. Close WordPad.
5. Open the file saved in step 3 using Word and see if the problems have gone away.



WordPad allows you to save files in various formats

Summary

If you save large passages of text in a single Word file, you are living very dangerously. A Windows or Word crash could be enough to lose months or even years of work. Fortunately, you can prevent that from happening by taking advantage of the little-known features that Word provides to help you deal with large documents. Then, if a crash does occur and you can no longer open a document, all will not be lost and you should be able to recover your work.