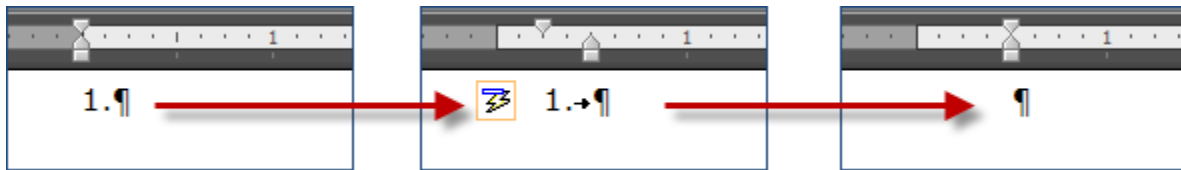# Word's Aaarrgh Features

### by
### Kim Murdock

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I am often asked why Word seems to format on its own, without concern for the wishes of the author.  The question is most often accompanied by an angry exclamation, followed by an inarticulate exclamation…
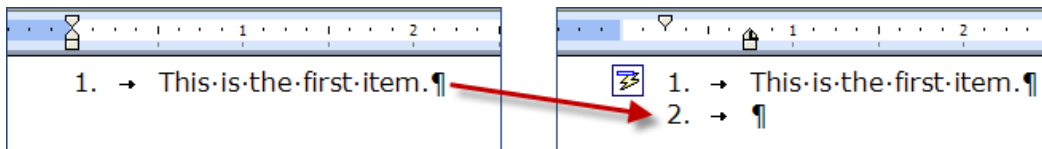
## Things That Make You Go Aaarrgh!

Let's say I want to type a simple list in Word 2007 – three items, no need for anything fancy.  So I type the "1." and the moment I hit the Tab key, Word changes my text to an autonumber.  And indents it for me.

Well gee, thanks!  Never mind that it isn't what I wanted.  If I backspace, the number goes away, but Word leaves me stranded in an indent I don't want!

For folks using Word 2003 or before – you get to type your entire first item before it shifts under your feet.

What do you do?  Besides knocking your monitor to the floor, I mean.

Fortunately, you can undo this with Ctrl-Z or the Undo arrow on the Quick Access Toolbar (2007) or the Standard toolbar (2003 and before).  Unfortunately, the next time you try it, you'll get the same result.

## And Another Aaarrgh!

You're typing a sentence which refers to section (c).  But when you type (c) – *bam!* – suddenly you have ©.  Backspace and try again and – well, you get the © again.
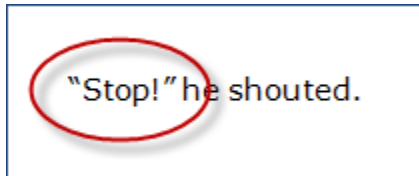
## What's Going On?

These are what I call the Aaarrgh Features, and unfortunately, they're working as designed.  If you can't live with 'em, let me show you how to live without 'em.

(Notice the lightning bolts in the graphics, above?  Later I'll show you a quick way to deal with Aaarrgh situations on-the-fly.)

## You've Been AutoCorrected

Microsoft has continually tinkered with Word, trying to make it more powerful and more useful. Somewhere along the way, in a meeting with too much coffee and too little food, they decided to have Word help format documents with a couple of features called *"AutoCorrect"* and *"AutoFormat As You Type."*

For example, when your straight quotes turn into curly quotes – that's AutoFormat As You Type at work for you.
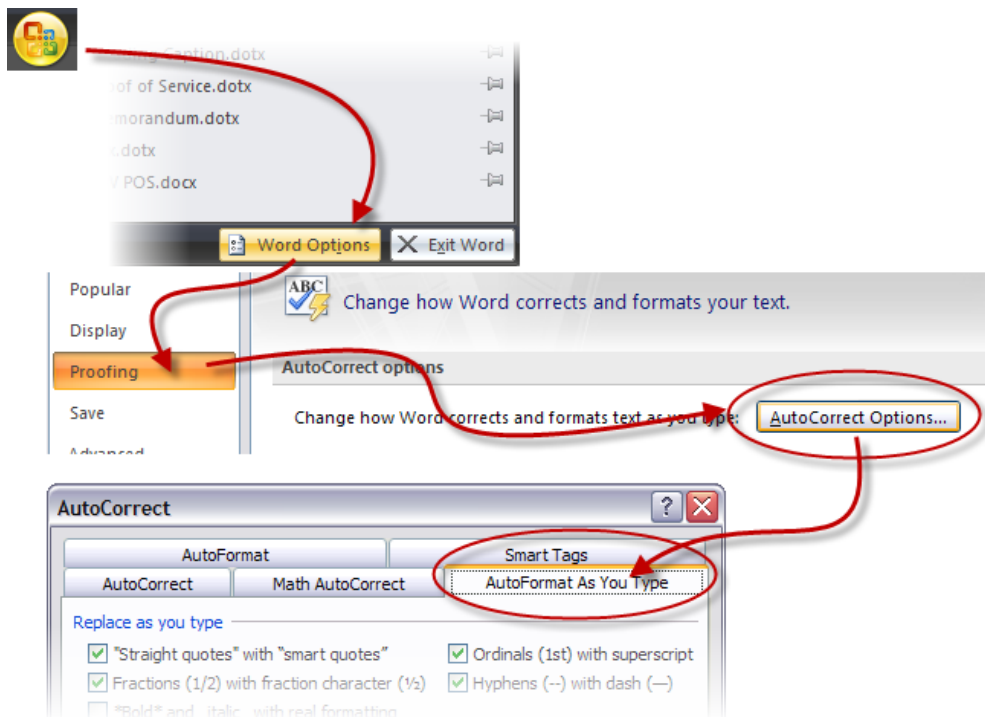


These features are really not evil, but they're definitely misguided. Word turns on most of the *AutoFormat As You Type* settings by default. And *that's* the problem.

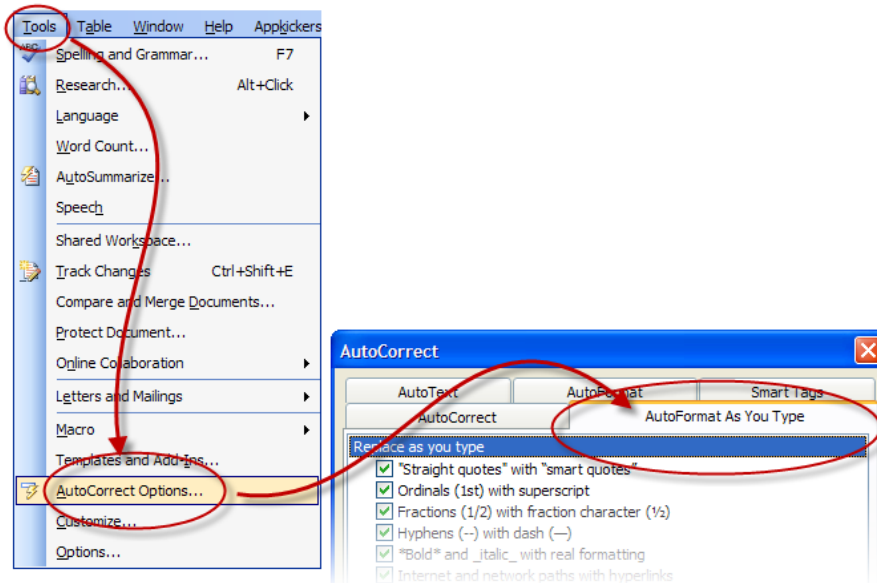## Just Say No!

Since The Aaarrgh Features often prove to be much more frustrating than helpful, I recommend turning a bunch of them off. Here's how you do it.

In Word 2007, click the *Microsoft Office Button > Word Options > Proofing > AutoCorrect Options > AutoFormat As You Type* tab.
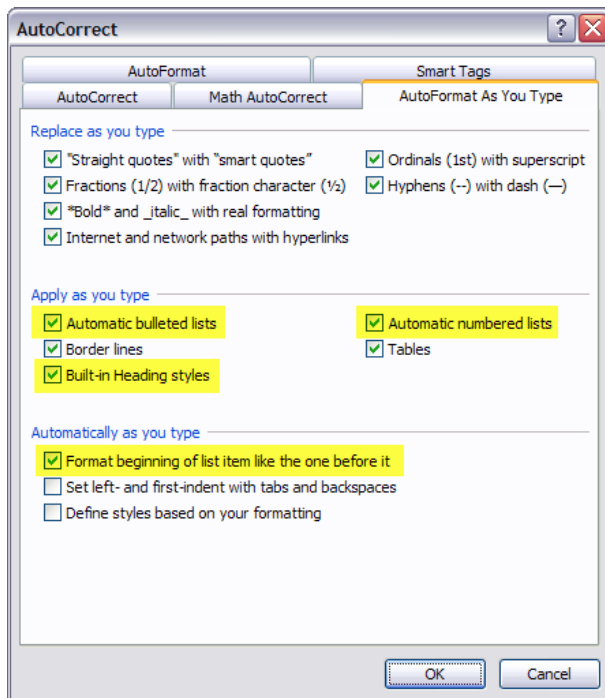
In Word 2003 and before, click *Tools > AutoCorrect Options > AutoFormat As You Type* tab.



## Good Riddance To Bad Formatting! (Part I)

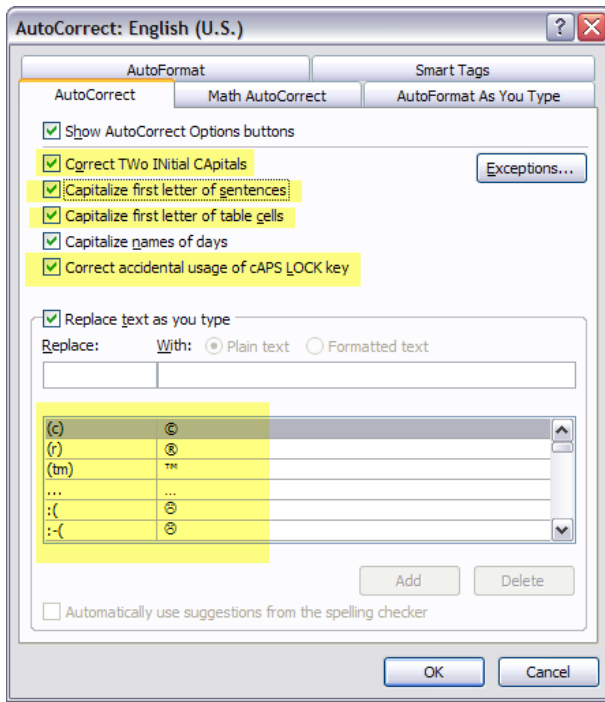These are the features I turn off (they are the same for 2003 and 2007):



☐ Automatic bulleted lists
☐ Automatic numbered lists
☐ Built-in headings
☐ Format beginning of list item like the one before it

Once you've unchecked those boxes, click OK and try typing a simple list.

Word is now much better behaved. But we haven't addressed all it's bad habits. What about that persistent copyright symbol?

## Good Riddance To Bad Formatting! (Part II)

Open the *AutoCorrect* dialog again, and this time take a look at the options on the *AutoCorrect* tab. These settings autmatically format, but in a much less rambunctious way than the *AutoFormat As You Type* options.

If you ever wondered why a word capitalized itself – it's right here.

At the top is a checkbox labelled *"Show AutoCorrect Options buttons."* This controls whether or not the lightning bolt appears in your document. Leave it checked for now.
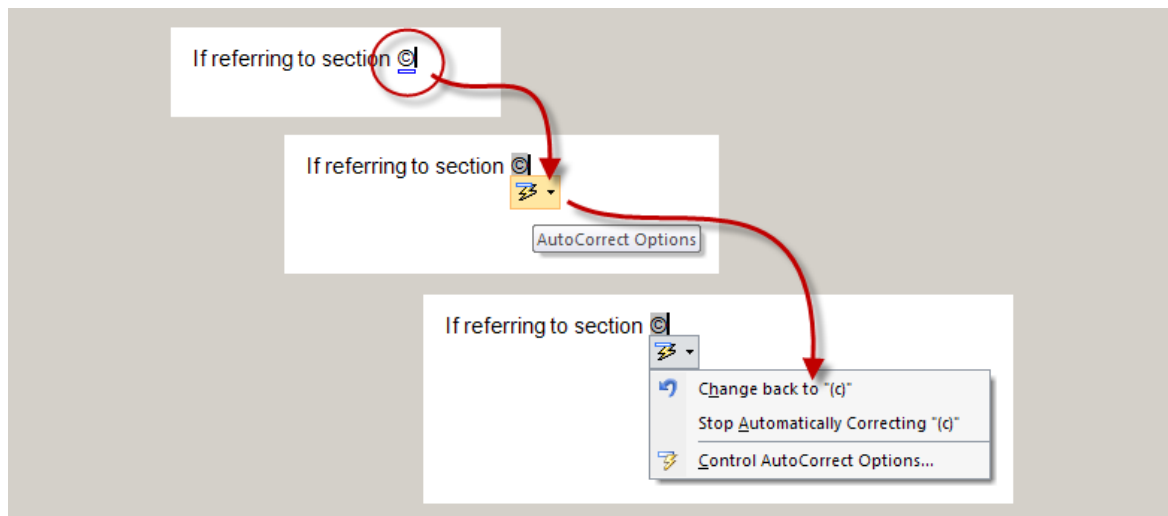
At the bottom are *Replace text as you type* shortcuts that insert common symbols and phrases quickly and easily. Sometimes too quickly and easily.

What happens when you actually *want* "(c)" to appear in your document? Well, first and foremost, you can remove the entries you don't need from the list. Just highlight and click Delete.

Or you can turn off *Replace text as you type*. Only then you can't use it at all, and that's too bad because it can be a very useful tool. Hmm….

## Your Word Dollars At Work

Before turning *Replace text as you type* off, here's the tip I hinted at in the beginning of this article. When you type "(c)" and it turns into ©, hover your cursor over the symbol until the box with the lightning bolt appears. Click the down arrow next to it.



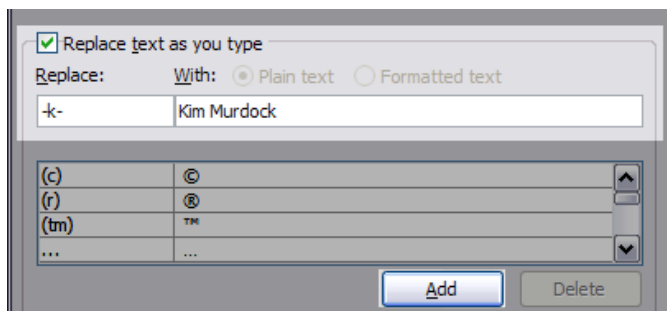Now click *Change back to "(c)"* (something that I did *many* times while typing this article).

Note that you can *Stop Automatically Correcting "(c)"* – if you do, it's removed from the *Replace text as you type* list. You can also open the AutoCorrect dialog and tweak your settings from there.

This tip also works on the Aaarrgh lists described at the beginning of this article. Just click the lightning bolt to choose *Undo Automatic Numbering* and you'll be able to make your list unfettered by Word's formatting choices.

## But Wait, There's More!

If you decide that *Replace text as you type* can save you time and typos, you might want to start adding your own – your firm's name, phone number, whatever.  When the text is inserted into the document, it takes on the formatting around it.
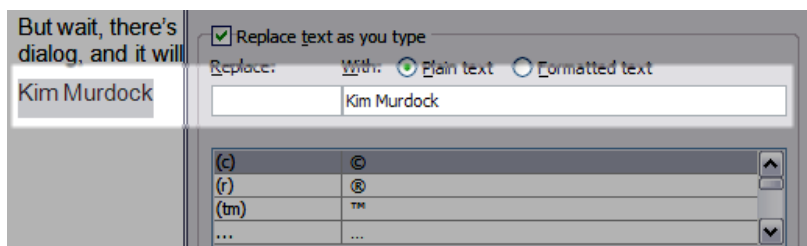
Adding symbols and phrases to the *Replace text as you type* list is pretty simple.  Just open the dialog, type the shortcut text in the *Replace:* field, and the text you want inserted into your document in the *With:* field.

Make your shortcut easy to type, but *not* something you're likely to normally find in your document.

## Bonus Tip

Highlight a symbol or phrase in your document before opening the dialog, and it will appear in the *With:* field for you:

Add your shortcut and you're ready to go.

## In Conclusion

No more Aaarrgh!  We've tamed the rampaging lists and quieted the willful symbols.  And you know more about what Word is doing, and how to use it to your advantage.

So save your sanity!  Make these few simple adjustments and take control of your life… or at least your document.

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