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From the moment you launch any of the applications in the 2007 Microsoft Office system, you will notice a dramatic difference. The entire user interface has been redesigned to be more intuitive, easier to navigate, and better suited to the task at hand. When the developers of the 2007 Office release began brainstorming about the new user interface, they decided to go back to the drawing board and create an interface based on the way people use their computers today. The result is a simplified, smart system that brings you just the tools you need, when you need them. No more clicking through menus, submenus, and nested dialog boxes. Now the commands you need come to you, depending on the type of object you select and the application you are using. This article introduces the new elements in the Microsoft Office Fluent user interface so that you'll recognize the features as you begin to use the applications.

**Using the Ribbon**

The 2007 Office Ribbon is the dramatic new replacement for the customary menu system in previous versions of Microsoft Office. The Ribbon stretches across the top of the work area in Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Access. It also appears in selected windows in Outlook, giving you tabs, contextual commands, and more that are related to the current operation you are performing (see Figure 1).

The Ribbon is actually a collection of several components:

- The Quick Access Toolbar (appears in the top left of the window and contains the Microsoft Office Button, which opens what was the File menu), and the Save, Undo,
and Redo icons. (You can customize the Quick Access Toolbar to add tools you use frequently.)

- Command tabs such as Home, Insert, Page Layout, References, Mailings, Review, and View in Microsoft Office Word 2007 stretch across the screen just below the window title bar.
- Command sets are the commands available for the selected tab that relate to what you're trying to do. The name of the command set appears below the commands. For example, the command set might be Clipboard, Font, and Paragraph as shown in Figure 1.
- Contextual commands appear only when an object (a table, chart, etc.) is selected.

Figure 1  When you click a command tab, the command sets that relate to that tab are displayed in the Ribbon.

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Command Tabs

The command tabs relate directly to the stages of the process you're likely to follow as you create a project in an application. For example, in Microsoft Office Excel 2007, the command tabs are Home, Insert, Page Layout, Formulas, Data, Review, and View. When you're creating a worksheet, you first need commands related to data entry (Home), editing (Insert), and formatting (Page Layout). Later on in the process, you will want to work with the information on the worksheet by analyzing (Formulas), sorting, filtering, consolidating, and validating it (Data). If you're working as part of a team, you'll want to be able to review the worksheet and share it with others (Review). Along the way, you'll need to be able to modify the ways in which the worksheet is displayed (View).
Command Sets

Different commands appear in the Ribbon depending on the tab you've selected. If you click the **Home** tab in Microsoft Office PowerPoint 2007, one set of commands appears in the Ribbon; if you click the **Review** tab, a different set is displayed. This approach cuts down on the number of menus, commands, and dialog boxes you have to sort through in order to find the items you want. Each command set is grouped according to its function. In Figure 2, the **Page Setup**, **Themes**, **Background**, and **Arrange** command sets appear when the **Design** tab is selected in PowerPoint 2007.

![Figure 2](image)

*Figure 2* The set of commands displayed in the Ribbon varies depending on the command tab you select.

Contextual Tools

Contextual tools are different from command sets in that they appear only when you select a specific object in your document. For example, when you create a table in Word 2007, the **Table Tools** contextual tools appear above the Ribbon. The tool set includes two tabs specific to the selected table: **Design** and **Layout** (see Figure 3). The **Design** tab includes a variety of command sets that enable you to format a table the way you want it to appear. The **Layout** tab in the **Table Tools** contextual commands enables you to choose the way you want data to be positioned and organized in the cells.
Figure 3 Contextual tools provide you with additional options related to the selected object.

Dialog Box Launchers

Some command sets on the Ribbon are also available in traditional style dialog boxes. The presence of a small arrow in the lower right corner of a command set indicates that you can click that "launcher" to display a dialog box containing those commands. For example, if you click the Dialog Box Launcher in the Font command set on the Home tab in Excel 2007, the Format Cells dialog box appears with the Font tab selected, as shown in Figure 4.
Figure 4 Dialog Box Launchers display some command sets in traditional dialog boxes.

Tip  You also will find a Dialog Box Launcher available at the bottom of any gallery that shows advanced options. For example, in Word 2007, when you choose the Page Layout command tab and click the Columns arrow in the Page Setup command set, a gallery of column settings appears. Click the More Columns option at the bottom of the gallery to launch the Columns dialog box (see Figure 5).
Galleries

Galleries are one of the great additions to the design of the new user interface since they make finding the look you want as simple as point-and-click. The 2007 Office release includes two types of galleries.

Galleries with only a few selections are typically shown as part of a command set in the Ribbon.

Galleries with multiple selections (such as the Styles, Themes, and Margins in Word 2007) appear as drop-down galleries so that you can make your selection from the displayed group.

When you select a command that has an arrow next to it (which means additional choices are available), the gallery appears (see Figure 6). You can see at a glance which color combination, format, color scheme, transition, or chart type you want. Just click your choice (or point to it, if you want to use the Live Preview feature) and the setting is applied to the current document or selected object.
Figure 6 Galleries enable you to easily find and select the choice that's right for your project.

Tip The new Live Preview feature in the 2007 Office release enables you to see how a style will look before you select it. Simply point to a selection you're considering, and the application will show the effect of the item in the work area. When you find the one you like, click to apply it to your document.

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New File Menu

The File menu has had a major makeover. Instead of the word "File," the Microsoft Office Button now marks the spot where the File menu resides. The changes in the File menu aren't only cosmetic — functional changes help you focus on the file-related tasks you need. The new File menu includes two panels. On the left, you see the major file tasks; on the right, the choices related to those tasks appear when you point to one of the commands on the left. For example, when you position the mouse over Prepare, the options shown in Figure 7 appear.
Figure 7 The new File menu includes a new design, new organization, and additional commands to expand the way you work with files.

Quick Access Toolbar

To the right of the Microsoft Office Button at the top of the Ribbon you see three familiar tools: Save, Undo, and Redo. These tools are part of the Quick Access Toolbar, which travels with you from application to application. These tools are available in the same spot in all the 2007 Office release core applications that have the new user interface. You can customize the Quick Access Toolbar to add other tools you use regularly. For example, you might want to add the Hyperlink tool to the Quick Access Toolbar so it is available in all your applications.

Tip If you put a number of tools on the Quick Access Toolbar, you may want to display it in its own row along the Ribbon. Right-click anywhere on the Ribbon and choose Place Quick Access Toolbar below the Ribbon. To return the display of the toolbar to its original state, right-click the Ribbon a second time and choose Place Quick Access Toolbar above the Ribbon.
New View Controls

The 2007 Office release moves the **View** tab to organize the controls you need for viewing your documents. Everything you formerly found in the **Window** or **View** menus, you'll now find by clicking the **View** tab (see Figure 8). The familiar View tools appear in the lower right corner of the document window, to the left of a handy Zoom tool that enables you to enlarge or reduce the display of your document incrementally while you work.

*Figure 8* Switch between windows and change the view by using the commands in the **View** tab.