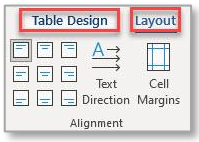
MS Word – Troublesome Tables and how to fix them

Working with tables can be frustrating: for example, your table might extend over the edge of the page; or a table row might split over two pages, even when there appears to be lots of space! Here are some tips to help you tame your tables.

What can I do if my table extends over page edge?

Use the Ruler to adjust column width

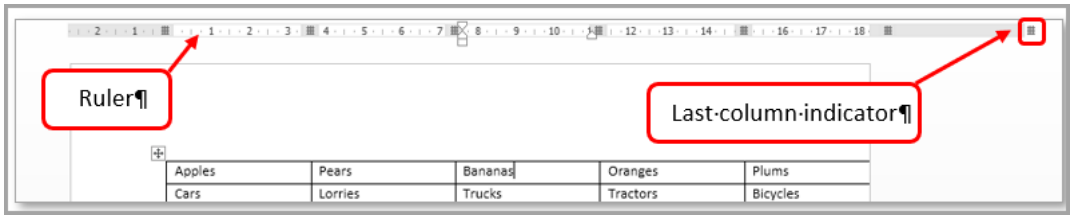


- Make sure your cursor is inside the table so you can see the **Table Design** & **Layout** tabs on the ribbon, and the column indicators on the Ruler.

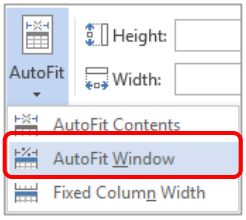
Don't see the ruler? Go to the **View** tab and click the **Ruler** check box.

- You may have to use the **Zoom Slider** at the bottom of the screen to zoom out in order to see the right-hand edge of the table.
- Once you can see the edge of the table, hover over the last column indicator until your mouse pointer changes to a resizing tool.
- Click on the column indicator and drag to the left until you see it reappearing on the page.

  Note: You may first need to move the column indicator – or indicators – to the left of the last column indicator, before you are able to drag it onto the page.



Use the Table Tools tab



- Make sure your cursor is inside the table so you can see the **Table Tools** tab on the ribbon.
- Click the **Layout** tab and select the **AutoFit** icon from the **Cell Size** group.
- Select **AutoFit Window** from the drop down menu. Your table will fit on the page between the left and right margins.

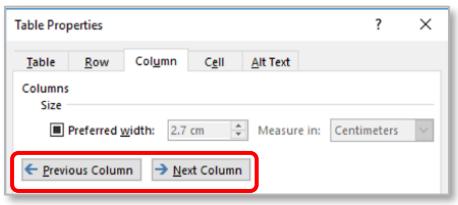
How do I set exact measurements?

Use the Ruler to set column widths

- Hover the mouse over a column indicator until the double-arrow pointer appears.
- Click the border and hold down the **Alt** key. Word will display specific measurements. If you need to resize the column, drag the column indicator to the required size.

Use Table Properties to set all measurements

Remember to position your cursor inside the table or you won't see **Table Tools** on the Ribbon!



- Click **Table Tools**, **Layout** and select **Properties** from the **Table** group on the left of the ribbon (or right-click the table and select **Table Properties** from the shortcut menu).
- From the Table Properties dialog, you can set a specific size for the table or for individual column(s), row(s) or cell(s).
- Use the **Previous** or **Next** buttons to see the size of column, row or cell next to the one your cursor is on.
- Click **OK** to save any changes.

What's the best way to resize columns to fit the longest item?

The best way to make a column width fit the longest item is by **double clicking the column's right border**.

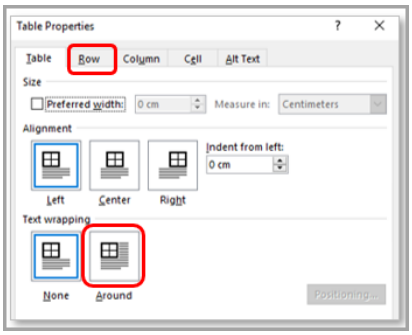
- Select the table by clicking on the **table selector** at the top left hand corner of the table.
- Hover the cursor over the over the right border of the column containing the longest item, making sure that Word displays the double-arrow pointer.
- **Double click** the border.

My table has split over pages. Help!

There could be two reasons for this:

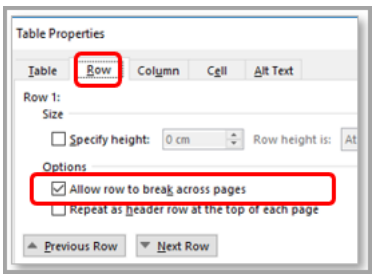
– the **Text wrapping** setting or the **Row Properties** setting

Text wrapping



- Place your cursor anywhere in the table to display **Table Tools** on the ribbon.
- Click the **Layout** tab and select **Properties** from the **Table** group on the left of the ribbon.
- Select the **Table** tab, and click on **Around** under the **Text wrapping** section.

Row Properties



- Place your cursor in the row that has split its content over pages.
- Click **Table Tools**, **Layout** and select **Properties** from the **Table** group on the left of the ribbon.
- Select the **Row** tab and clear the check box for **Allow Row to Break Across Pages**. This will keep the row on the same page.

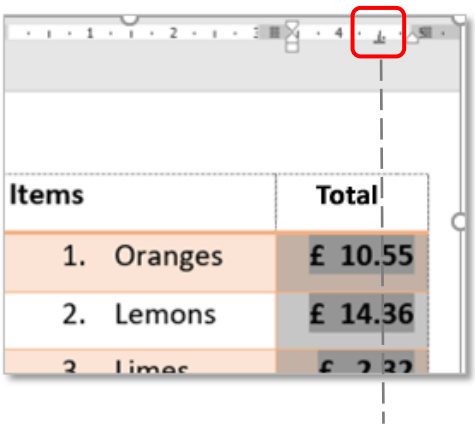
Can I repeat the table header row on multiple pages?

Yes! If you are working with a large table that runs across multiple pages, you can set up a header row (or rows) to appear automatically on each page.

- Select the header row or rows that you want to repeat on each page (the selection must include the first row of the table).
- Place your cursor in the header row, then click **Table Tools**, **Layout** and select **Repeat Header Rows** from the **Data** group.

Can I use tabs in a table?

Yes you can! In this example, we show you how to use tabs to align column numerals by decimal point, but the process is similar for other tab alignments.



- Select the column(s) or cell(s) where you want to set the tab.

  Note: If you are setting a decimal tab, as we are here, make sure you *don't select the column header*; you only want the figures to align to the decimal point.
- Click the **Tab** selector (the square at the top of the vertical ruler on the left of the screen).
- Click the **Tab** selector until it shows the type of tab you want to insert, e.g.
  - Left aligned
  - Centre
  - Right aligned
  - Decimal

  In our example, we will select the decimal point tab to align the numbers by decimal point.
- Click on the ruler where you want to add the tab. Word will temporarily display a vertical guideline showing the tab position in the document. Your selection will now be aligned to the tab stop.
- Any new rows will have the tab decimal in place.

When moving around the table, pressing the **Tab** key will move the cursor to the next cell.
To move the cursor to a tab stop within a cell, press **Ctrl+Tab**.

Why can't I delete my table?

When you select a table and press the **Delete** key, only the content is deleted; the table outline is still displayed. If you want to delete the entire table:

- Select the table by clicking on the **table selector** at the top left hand corner of the table, then press the **Backspace** key.
- Alternatively, go to **Table Tools**, **Layout** tab, then from the **Rows & Columns** group, select select **Delete Table** from the **Delete** options.

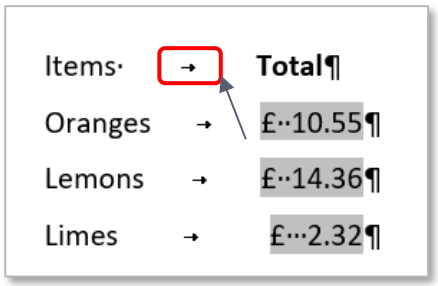
How do I move a table row?

If you need to move a row (or rows) of data, simply select the row (or rows) you want to move then press **Shift+Alt+Down Arrow** or **Shift+Alt+Up Arrow** as appropriate.

How do I switch off all table formatting?

Select the table, or place your cursor anywhere inside it, then press **Ctrl+Alt+U.** All formatting, with the exception of any tabs you set, is removed.

Can I turn text into a table?

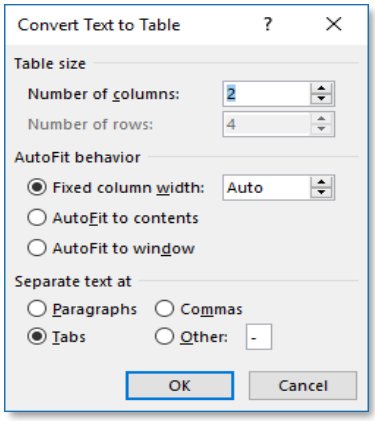


Yes. If you have text that's already separated into rows and columns – using tabs (as illustrated opposite), commas, paragraphs, or some other consistent character – then you can convert that text into a table.

- Select the text and click on the **Insert** tab.
- Click the **Table** icon, and select **Convert Text to Table** from the drop down menu.

  In our example, 2 columns are required and the text is separated by tabs.

  Note: You don't have to specify the number of rows as Word creates a row for every paragraph mark or line break selected.
- To add a new row, move your cursor to the end of the table and press the **Tab** key. Word will automatically add the new row at the end of the table.



How can I prevent my table extending over the page edge when I adjust columns widths on the ruler?

- Select the table by clicking on the **table selector** at the top left hand corner of the table.
- On the **Ruler**, hover the cursor over a column indicator until the double-arrow pointer appears.
- Hold down the **Ctrl** key, then click and drag the column indicator to resize the column.

  The column width resizes but the table width doesn't change.

  Note however, in order to keep the table on the page, Word has to reduce the width of all other columns.

Further information and help

Use MyIT to log a call with the IT Service Desk: myit.abdn.ac.uk/