

# The Office Help System

Don't go it alone. If you need help, get it—and with Office's Help screens it's only a click or two away. Of course, the help system can't a substitute for a good book, but it can get you out of a jam, show you different—and often faster—ways of doing things, and reveal Office features you never knew existed.

Part of Office 2004's help system is always with you, like a friend tapping your shoulder with the occasional unsolicited hint. Screen tips often pop up to reveal, say, the names of toolbar buttons or AutoText suggestions. The often-ignored Description panels of dialog boxes clarify what you're looking at. (Open Preferences and watch what happens at the bottom of the box when you pass the cursor over the various options.)

But if you're really having trouble figuring out how to make an Office program do what you want, you can turn to Office's online help screens. There are two ways to access them: the main Help index window and the more interactive (if somewhat goofy) animated Assistant.

## The Assistant

When you first launch Office and open a document, a little window pops up alongside your document window, showcasing a little Mac Plus with feet and a repertoire of cutesy mannerisms. This is Max, the Assistant.

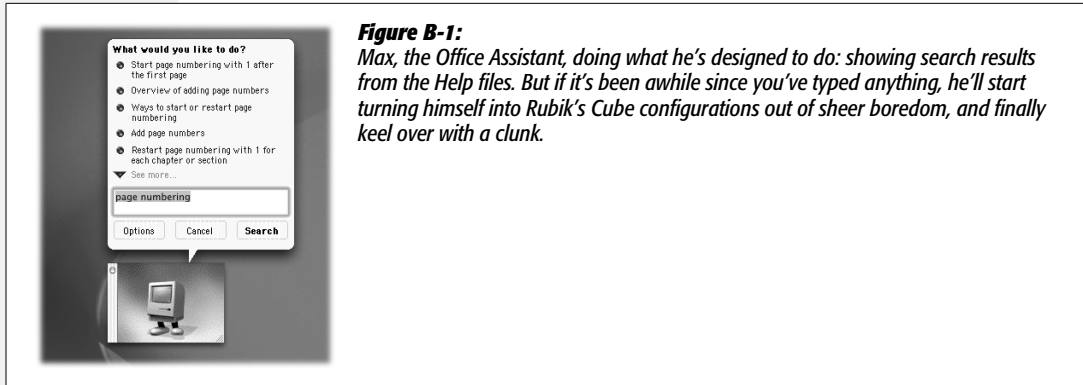
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**Tip:** To witness all of Max's moves, Control-click him and choose Animate! from the shortcut menu. Max performs a different animation each time.

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## The Assistant

You can make Max's window smaller by dragging the lower-right corner, and close his window using the button in the textured bar at the left side. And of course, as with any Office toolbar, you can move Max around on the screen by dragging the bar.



To the surprise of many, Max was not, in fact, designed purely to annoy you. His primary function is to provide access to Office's help screens, like this:

1. Click the Max window, or choose **Help** → [Program Name] **Help**, click the **Help** icon on the Standard toolbar, or press the **Help** key.

Max's speech balloon opens, asking, "What would you like to do?"

2. Type a question, or a few key words, into the balloon window and click **Search** (or press **Return**).

For example, you might type *page margins* or *How do I make a table?* Office searches the Help system and displays a list of topics in Max's speech balloon that more or less match your query.

3. Click the blue button beside a promising-looking topic.

A Microsoft Office Help window opens to the selected topic. (See "The Help Index" on page 748 for more detail on navigating this window.)

To look at a different topic, click Max again to bring back the search balloon and list of topics; when you click another blue button, the next topic appears in the Help window. The Help window has **Forward** and **Back** buttons to navigate among the help screens you've seen thus far.

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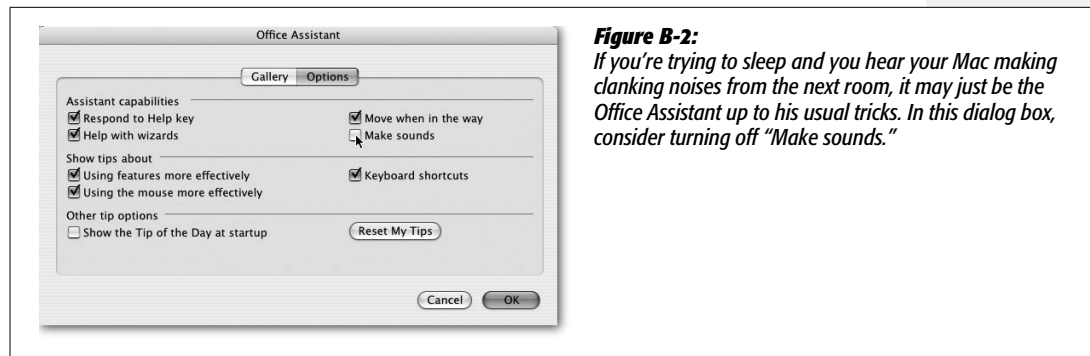
**Tip:** You can work in your document with the Help window open. If it covers part of your document, just move it out of the way. When you're done, click its **Close** button to dismiss it.

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## Assistant Options

Sometimes, as you're working along, the Assistant chimes and displays a light bulb icon. Clicking the light bulb displays a tip about the Office feature that you appear to be stumbling with. Other times, the Assistant offers to launch a Help topic, such as when you start to draw a table, open a wizard, or start to format a letter.

You can always ignore the tip, or click Cancel if you don't want to use the Letter Wizard, but it's possible to prevent the Assistant from even suggesting such a thing. The place to control the Assistant's behavior is the Office Assistant dialog box (Figure B-2). To open it, click Options in the Assistant's speech balloon. You can always open this dialog box by control-clicking the Assistant and choosing Options from the contextual menu.



Some of the options are self-explanatory; here are a few that may not be:

- **Respond to Help key.** If you uncheck this box, pressing Help will open the Office Help system window (see "The Help Index" on the next page) instead of opening the Assistant's balloon.
- **Help with wizards.** When you use a wizard in Office (as when opening a template, for example), the Assistant can offer additional tips as you work. Clearing this box turns this feature off.
- **Move when in the way.** This option makes the Assistant's window hop around so as not to block open dialog boxes. It also shrinks it to a smaller size if you haven't used the Assistant for five minutes.
- **Make Sounds.** A check here activates the Assistant's sounds. In general it's a fairly annoying lot of bleeps, clinks, and bleeps.
- **Show tips about.** The three checkboxes on this panel control what kinds of tips the Assistant offers while you're working. If you're new to Office, you may want to turn on all three to make sure you don't overlook any potentially useful features. On the other hand, once you've used Office for a week or so, tips like "Word can automatically convert your paragraph to a heading" start to get old.

## The Help Index

- **Show the Tip of the Day at startup.** Office can show a different learning-this-program tip each time you launch any Office program. Usually, they contain useful information (“To repeat most commands and actions, press Command-Y”). Occasionally, Microsoft’s programmers throw in attempts at humor (“You can hurt yourself if you run with scissors.”)

Clicking “Reset My Tips” reshuffles startup tips you’ve already seen into the pile. Office warns you that you may see repeat tips when you click this button.

Click OK to position your new settings, or click Cancel to exit the Office Assistant dialog box without changing any settings.

### Turning the Assistant Off

Just clicking the Assistant window’s Close box makes Max wave goodbye and vanish, but he may still reappear now and then. If you’d rather not include him in your Office experience *ever*, use the Office 2004 Help → Turn Assistant Off, to eradicate him.

For help after turning the Assistant off, choose Help → Office Help Contents, click Help on the Standard toolbar, or press the Help key. All of these methods open the Help Contents window (see below). Tips are still available when the Assistant is turned off; a light bulb appears next to the Help button on the Standard toolbar when Office is offering a tip.

## The Help Index

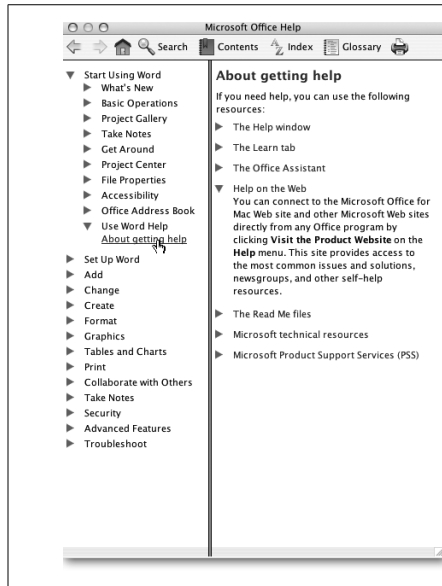
The Office Assistant has its charms, but the help screens give you the lowdown without all the frills. These screens—which are supposed to take the place of a hard-copy manual in Office 2004—appear when you use one of these methods:

- Do a search using the Office Assistant, as described on page 746.
- Choose Help → [Program Name] Help.
- Turn the Assistant off (as described above), and click the Help button on the Standard toolbar or press the Help key.

The Help window opens, as shown in Figure B-3. The buttons at the top of this window offer a variety of approaches to finding information in the Help system:

- Clicking **Home** (the house button) returns you to the Home window from wherever you are in the help system. From here you can click the What’s New Link to discover new features of your current program; click the Read Me link to get the absolute last minute, up-to-date information about Office 2004; click Discovering Microsoft Office to open a great PDF manual describing Office 2004’s capabilities. You can also open sample documents, click a link that whisks you away to the Office 2004 home page, and more.

**Tip:** The two arrows to the left of the Home button are Back and Forward buttons that work just like the buttons in a Web browser to let you navigate the Help window.



**Figure B-3:**

*Click flippy triangles or the links in the Help window to burrow your way through the help topics. If you can't find the information that you need in the Help window, choose one of the links to Microsoft's Mac Web site, such as "Getting Help on the Web" shown here, where you might have better luck.*

- Clicking **Search** opens a text box and a Search button in the left pane. Type a few key words into the box and click Search—this approach works the same way and produces the same results as typing into Max's search window. The topics found by the search are listed below the Search button in the left pane. As always, these topics are links that open the corresponding help screens.
- The **Contents** button displays the master list of topics in the left pane of the Help screen. Click one of these topics (you don't need to click the flippy triangle) for a list of subtopics, as shown in Figure B-3. Each subtopic is a hyperlink that opens the topic's help screen in the right pane.
- Clicking the **A-Z Index** button changes the contents of the left pane to a list of hyperlinks, one for each letter of the alphabet. Clicking a letter shows a list of topics that begin with that letter. Click a topic name to see a list of subtopics, which are once again links to pertinent help screens. This method may be the quickest when you know exactly what you want to look up.
- Clicking **Glossary** displays a glossary of common Office commands and terms in the left-hand panel. Click any letter to see the entries under that letter, then click a term to see its definition in a pop-up window.
- Clicking **Print** prints the contents of the right window.

## Web-Based Help

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Microsoft does a fine job of keeping you updated about what's happening in the world of Office for the Mac. The Microsoft Office for the Mac Web site (called Mactopia.com) contains online tutorials, instructional articles, software updates and bug fixes, and, when all else fails, a gateway to Microsoft's technical support department.

To go directly to Microsoft's Mac Web site, choose Help → Visit the Product Web site. Office launches your Web browser and displays an introductory page. Click the Office 2004 link at the top left to get to the main page where all kinds of goodies await, like an online tour and email newsletter sign-up.

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**Tip:** If you have yet to make the big purchase, there's a link to the free Test Drive (a 30-day trial version).

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The links in the left panel of the Office 2004 home page are the important ones for folks looking to learn more about the program.

- The **Highlights** link takes you to a page listing Office 2004's new features. It's a great place to start if you're updating from Office X.
- **Using Office** opens a gem of a page that includes how-to articles, downloads of updates and free software, tips and tricks, and a host of other information.
- The **Support** link takes you to a no-nonsense page listing all Office 2004 online support options. Here you can read the latest news on potential Office problems (and their fixes), search newsgroups for answers to your questions, or find instructions for contacting Microsoft by email or phone. (You're free to browse help articles or to post to a newsgroup; individual assistance by email or phone can cost you.)
- The **Community** page lets you reach out and touch fellow Office for the Mac fans with listings of user groups, newsgroups, and mailing lists. This page also has unexpected pleasures like Microsoft's Macintosh software history and a place to sign up to participate in a Usability Study (that is, potentially get to test new software and receive an unspecified "free gift" for your efforts).