

The manual form had been created by typing standard inline text and drawing boxes with the Rectangle tool on the Drawing toolbar for data entry. Hidden text (Format, Font, Hidden) was used to incorporate instructions for completing the form and made visible by switching on Tools, Options, View, Hidden text. The hidden text was not printed (File, Print, Options, Hidden text switched off).

Aligning the boxes

The response boxes on the form were not accurately aligned. We corrected this by selecting the boxes with the Select Objects tool (Drawing toolbar) and using the Draw, Align or Distribute command, also on the Drawing toolbar, to line them up and distribute them evenly.

Modifying the form

When the form was edited it was difficult to control the interaction between the inline text and drawn boxes. We demonstrated how the Draw Table tool and Eraser tool on the Tables and Borders toolbar could be used to create a complex form within a table. Text was positioned accurately by placing it within table cells and user response boxes were created either by switching on and off table borders as appropriate or by using the Draw Table tool to draw a single cell table within a table cell.

The online form

The online form had been created by using Text and Drop Down form fields from the Forms toolbar, however the cursor was not moving automatically between fields when the form was completed. We corrected this by using the Protect Form tool to protect the form and then saving the form as a template. When a new document was created using the template the cursor correctly moved from field to field.

The user also wanted to enter inline text to part of the form, without compromising the ability to move between fields in the protected area. This was achieved by inserting continuous section breaks above and below the inline text area and then using the Tools, Protect Document command. In the Protect Document task pane, Editing restrictions was set to Allow only Filling in forms and the Select Sections link (which miraculously appears at this point) clicked to switch off protection in the appropriate section.

It is possible to save only the data from a completed online form by choosing File, Save As, Tools, Save Options, Save data only for forms. The data is saved as a comma delimited text file that can be imported into Excel. We do not recommend this as it is hopelessly clunky if there are many forms to process.

The bottom line

Word's forms feature is appropriate for forms that are to be completed online and then printed, saved or emailed as separate items. Microsoft Access is a vastly superior tool if data is to be collected from multiple forms.

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