

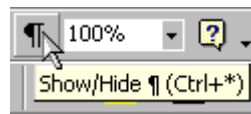
What do all those funny marks, like the dots between the words in my document, and the square bullets in the left margin, mean?

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Occasionally a new user of Word is alarmed to discover that his previously pristine document is full of strange symbols – dots, arrows, paragraph marks, and the like. For experienced users, the usual reaction of such a user seems almost comical because experienced users know how invaluable the display of nonprinting characters can be both in formatting and in troubleshooting documents.

“Nonprinting characters” is Word's term for anything that takes up space or has a formatting function but does not appear on the printed page: spaces, tabs, paragraph breaks, and the like. Even if you prefer to work most of the time without seeing them, you should know how to display them and what they mean.

By default, the Formatting toolbar in Word has a button with the ¶ icon. If you hover your mouse over it, the ScreenTip says “Show/Hide ¶ (Ctrl+*)”.



This button toggles between display of all nonprinting characters and whatever specific nonprinting characters you have chosen to display as an alternative. This requires a little explanation. If you look at the View tab of Tools | Options, you will see six check boxes under “Nonprinting characters ” (“Formatting marks ” in Word 2000 and above). The last one of these is “All. ” When you toggle the toolbar button on and off, this box is checked and unchecked. When it is unchecked, all you will see will be the nonprinting characters represented by whichever of the other check boxes you have checked. Usually this is none, but there might be times when, for example, you would want to see just Hidden text or just paragraph marks and none of the others. (Note that “Paragraph marks ” includes line breaks and text-wrapping breaks, discussed below).

The shortcut key for “ShowAll” is Ctrl+* (Ctrl+Shift+8). If you've ever turned on display of nonprinting characters unintentionally, it may have been by accidentally pressing this key combination when you were trying to type an asterisk. The same key combination will also toggle the display off.

So what do all these marks represent?

The paragraph mark or pilcrow (¶) represents a paragraph break. You should see one at the end of each paragraph (if there is not one, you'll likely find that you have a problem). Ordinarily you should not see one anywhere else. By this I mean that you should not be ending lines with paragraph breaks, nor should you be using “empty paragraphs” to create “blank lines” between paragraphs (in most cases this is better accomplished with Space Before or After).¶

The ¶ contains all the paragraph formatting. You can select it, copy it, and paste it onto another paragraph to copy and paste formatting (though there are other ways to do this as well). The last ¶ in the document contains formatting for the entire document (header/footer and margin information, for example) or for the last section if there are more than one.¶

In most fonts, and certainly all Windows “core fonts”, a small raised dot represents an ordinary space (some fonts, such as Arial Special G1, *don't* include a character to represent a space; and some use a large square, which can be very distracting).

Be sure you don't have space characters where they are not needed. If you are tidy-minded, for example, you won't want a string of them at the end of a paragraph where your thumbs relaxed on the spacebar while you stopped to think.

An arrow pointing to the right represents a tab character, where you have pressed the Tab key. → As explained in the article on [setting tabs](#), in a well-formatted document you should not see more than one of these in a row. → →

A right-angle arrow pointing to the left represents a line break, inserted with ↵ Shift+Enter. You can use a line break to start a new line ↵ without starting a new paragraph.

A right-angle arrow between two vertical lines ⌞ represents a text-wrapping break. This new break type, introduced in Word 2000 and intended primarily for Web pages, is used to force subsequent text below an adjacent text-wrapped object. For example, if you have a caption beside a picture and end it with a text-wrapping break, the text following the caption will start below the picture regardless of how long or short the caption is.

A degree symbol ° represents a nonbreaking space (Ctrl+Shift+Spacebar), which you can use to prevent words from being separated at the end of a line.

This is useful for keeping dates together (so you don't end up with September 5, 2000), as well as initials such as J.°P.°V.°D. Balsdon.

En ° and em ° spaces (Insert + Symbol, Special Characters tab) are also represented by the degree symbol, but there is extra space to the left of the symbol for an en space and extra space both left and right for an em space.

A conditional hyphen (one that is printed only if it falls at a line break, entered with Ctrl+Hyphen) is shown as ⁀.

A nonbreaking hyphen (Ctrl+Shift+Hyphen), which is useful for phone numbers and any hyphenated compound you don't want to break at the end of a line, is displayed as a dash—whose length is intermediate between an en (–) dash and an em (—) dash. This is one of the most confusing symbols because it is very difficult to tell, with nonprinting characters displayed, whether you have actually entered a nonbreaking hyphen or a dash.

In tables you will see one additional character, the universal monetary symbol (¤), which displays variously at various point sizes and magnifications but upon close inspection is seen to be a circle with four lines radiating from the corners. This is the end-of-cell marker. It is a little like the paragraph mark in that it contains paragraph formatting for the last (or only) paragraph in the cell, but it also holds formatting for the cell. The same mark at the end of each row is the (wait for it) end-of-row marker, which serves a similar purpose with regard to row formatting. ¤

One other type of “nonprinting character” that is toggled by the Show/Hide ¶ button is Hidden text.

This is signalled by a dotted underline.

Even when it is displayed, Hidden text is not printed unless you check the box for it on the Print tab of Tools | Options. There are a number of clever formatting tricks you can do by formatting text (especially paragraph breaks) as Hidden, but you must hide it in order to see how the document will look when printed. It is especially important to hide it before generating a table of contents or index; if there is enough of it to affect the pagination, then the page numbers in your TOC or index may be incorrect.

In addition to the dotted underline indicating hidden text, Word uses a variety of different types of colored underlines—solid, dotted, and wavy—to give information about the text. For an explanation of the meaning of these various underlines, see the Help topic “What do the underlines in my document mean?” or the Microsoft Knowledge Base article “[Unusual marks that may appear in a Word document.](#)”

Another very important nonprinting character is the [anchor](#) symbol – when working with [floating objects](#) it's often crucial to know where these are



More obvious in their meaning are manual column, page, and Section Breaks. To delete these, you can simply select them and press the delete key (or you can use **Find and Replace**).

.....Column Break.....
.....Page Break.....
.....Section Break (Continuous).....

- Finally, you will sometimes see a small black bullet in the margin next to a paragraph. This indicates that the paragraph is formatted with the “Keep with next,” “Keep lines together,” “Page break before,” or “Suppress line numbers” property. These settings are found on the Line and Page Breaks tab of the Format Paragraph dialog; if you double-click on the “bullet” itself, you will bring up this dialog with the Line and Page Breaks tab selected. Word’s built-in Heading styles by default are formatted as “Keep with next,” so you will always see these bullets next to them.

There are two other types of nonprinting characters that are **not** (usually) toggled with the Show/Hide ¶ button:

- **Field codes.** A field is a set of codes that instructs Microsoft Word to insert text, graphics, page numbers, and other material into a document automatically. For example, the **DATE field** inserts the current date. Ordinarily Word displays the **result** of a field (the date, page number, number of pages, number of words, etc.), but if you press Alt+F9 or select Toggle Fields on the shortcut menu, you will see the code itself, enclosed in curly braces, such as { DATE \@ "dddd, MMMM d" }.

There are two types of field codes that **are** toggled with the Show/Hide ¶ button rather than the Toggle Codes command. Both TC (table of contents entry) and XE (index entry) fields are formatted as Hidden text; when you insert either type of field, the display of nonprinting characters is toggled on by default so that you can see these codes.

Bookmarks. When the box for “Bookmarks ” is checked on the View tab of Tools | Options, user-defined bookmarks are indicated by heavy square gray brackets. A single-point bookmark has the brackets reversed so that it looks like a capital I.

A bookmark can be inserted at a single point or may enclose one or more words of text.

Even if you choose to keep nonprinting characters hidden most of the time, displaying them can be very helpful in **troubleshooting obstreperous documents**. If your pages are not breaking as you like, perhaps it is because you have too many (or the wrong) paragraphs set as “Keep with next.” If your printer is **adding a blank page** at the end of your document, it could be that you have a string of empty paragraphs at the end that are forcing an extra page. Accidentally deleting the paragraph break before a manual page break or Section Break can cause very peculiar problems. And if an automatic number insists on being bold even though you have applied bold formatting to only a part of the numbered paragraph, it could be that you need to select the paragraph mark and unbold it, since automatic bullets and numbering take on the formatting of the paragraph mark. All of these problems are much easier to diagnose if you can see what you’re dealing with.

In general, it’s best to proofread your documents twice; once for content, with nonprinting characters off (as they can be distracting when reading); and a second time with nonprinting characters visible, so that you can check for redundant line breaks, space characters and the like.