May 2008

Comp-U-Tips
… a little help from your friends.

Summertime

It's that time of year—time to get outdoors and get the exercise you promised yourself when you made that New Year's resolution.

If you run, walk, or bike, you may want to track your distances. Mapping programs don't work well for this; the Web-based maps don't allow you to plot an exact route, map programs won't let you go the wrong way on a one-way street (even if you were really walking on the sidewalk), and they don't include off-road trails. A new Google Maps mashup has fixed that.

The site is www.gmap-pedometer.com. It is based on Google Maps, but it allows you to mark every turn on your route, even off road. It tracks miles and calories burned while walking, it will store your route for you and if your trip was an out-and-back one, taking the same route, it will complete the return trip for you. On the site, enter the town you were in and zoom to it. Find your starting point, click the *Start Recording* button, and double-click at each turn. Your route will be drawn on the map, mileage calculated, and the map automatically centers on your latest marker.

If you were off-roading, the trails won't show on the map. To see them, click on the *Hybrid* button in the upper right. This overlays satellite photos of the area with map details. You can follow the marked roads on the map and the photos of the trails through the wilderness. The site will calculate your distance wherever you go.

Whoops!

What would we do without the handy Undo function? Oh, yeah, Wite-Out.

Use it much? Probably. In average computer usage, Undo is the fourth most commonly used command. In order, the top five are:

1. Paste
2. Save
3. Copy
4. Undo
5. Bold.

You may use the Undo arrow on the toolbar or use the *Edit, Undo* commands on the menu bar. If you use it a lot (and apparently we all do), you should familiarize yourself with the *Ctrl-Z* shortcut key combination. Hold down the *Ctrl* key and tap the letter *Z*. If you tap the *Z* key multiple times, you'll keep going back, undoing more and more steps, as long as the program you are working in supports multiple undos (MS Office programs do).

If you step too far back through the corrections, *Ctrl-Y* is Redo.

Word allows 100 or more undos, depending on the version. Excel allows fewer. But there are also things you can do that force the programs to discard all stored undo steps. In Excel, sorting data or saving a spreadsheet both discard the undo history (you'll see the undo arrow turn gray). However, Word does allow you to save a document and keep the undo history, but cutting a block of text instead of copying it before pasting sometimes destroys the undo list.

What the programs count as an undo step varies. If you type part of a word, undo might let you step back letter by letter. But once the word is complete, undo might treat the whole sentence or paragraph as a block to be undone. Don't panic, remember *Ctrl-Y*.

Websites of Interest

www.download.com
freeware and shareware

www.loc.gov
Library of Congress

www.factcheck.org
fact-checking political ads

F.Y.I.

For improved security and functionality, check for updates to your software every once in a while.

In most programs, find the update function by clicking *Help* on the menu bar. There should be an option to check for updates. If not, check the Tools menu or items labeled *Options* or *Preferences*. To see what version of a program you are running, click *Help, About*.

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How Do I...

Clean up this Mess

It happens quite a lot; someone sends you a list of contacts and it's not in a format you can use. Maybe you need to do a mail merge, or add contacts to a database, and the list of names and addresses just doesn't work for what you need. You could fix it the hard way—enter the data correctly but manually, or use some of Excel's and Word's tools.

Here's a sample of a list you might get:

Peter Griffin, 31 Spooner St., Quahog, R.I. 02840
Ward Cleaver, 211 Pine Street, Mayfield, OH 44143
Edith A. Bunker, 704 Hauser St., Queens, NY 11427

If you want to break this into fields for a database or to put in a spreadsheet, there are a few problems that need to be cleaned up first. All contact information should be similar in form. But, one of these names has a middle initial, one address spells out *Street*, one state name has periods in the abbreviation, and you can't sort alphabetically by last name. First, let's get rid of all the middle initials. You could search for all the *A.*'s (then the *B.*'s, etc.), but when you get to *I.* you'll screw up *R.I.* However, look at the pattern; middle initials have a space on each side, and you can search using codes for letters. What you want to search for is: a space, any letter, a period, a space. Open the *Replace* dialog box in Word; in the *Find What:* dialog box, press the space bar (you won't see anything, but the cursor will move). Then, click the button labeled *More>>*, then the one marked *Special* and click *Any Letter*. A code (*^$*) will be inserted. Then type the period and another space. In the *Replace with:* box, press the spacebar once. Click *Replace All*. Presto, all the middle initials are gone, yet *R.I.* is preserved.

Use Replace to clean up the Street/St. problem and anything that isn't standard. Now, save your work.

Highlight the list, and click *Table*, *Convert Text to Table...* You will be shown a new dialog box that you can probably accept the defaults in (just make sure that for this list the *Separate Text at...*shows *Commas* as chosen). Click OK.

The resulting table looks pretty good, just two more things to fix. You need to get the first and last names into their own cells as well as the state and zip code so that you can sort your data properly. Highlight the table and copy it into a new Excel workbook.

Peter Griffin	31 Spooner St.	Quahog	R.I. 02840
Ward Cleaver	211 Pine St.	Mayfield	OH 44143
Edith Bunker	704 Hauser St.	Queens	NY 11427

Insert a column between the name and the address; this will hold the last name field. Now, highlight all the names in the first column and from the menu, choose *Data*, *Text to Columns.* A 3-step wizard will open; in Step 2, make sure the delimiter (the character where the division will occur) is set to *Space.* Finish the wizard, and the names will split into columns. If you hadn't standardized the names by deleting the middle initial, the result here would have been messed up since some cells would have had 2 spaces in them. Repeat for the state and zip code. If you see the leading *0* missing in the zip code, click *Format*, *Cells*, *Number*, *Special*, *Zip codes.*

Peter Griffin		31 Spooner St.
Ward Cleaver		211 Pine St.
Edith Bunker		704 Hauser St.

In the process described at right, the Search and Replace function is used.

When you use Replace, there is a button marked *More>>*, then one marked *Special*. You can perform very powerful searches to clean up text, especially text copied from the Web or text entered by someone who doesn't know how to format properly (especially using the Tab function).

Explore those codes and see all the things you can search for. Those codes can be entered from your keyboard, you don't need to click through the buttons.

Some handy search/replace tasks include removing multiple tabs. Search for ^t^t and replace with ^t. This will remove pairs of tabs and replace them with one. Repeat the search until the Results dialog box shows that no more pairs were found.

This is also handy to remove carriage returns (¶) at the end of every line of some cut-and-pasted Web text. Find ^p and replace with a space (you'll probably want to use *Find Next/Replace* rather than *Replace All* for this). Once you have replaced all the unwanted pilcrows, you may have a lot of extra spaces in the text. Search for two spaces and replace with one.