

Improving Writing Before Typing a Single Word: Setting Word's Grammar Preferences

It's fairly simple to edit Microsoft Word's preferences to check documents for a whole series of grammatical, spelling, and other types of writing errors. If you are working on a PC, edit preferences by going to *Tools* in the Menu bar and selecting *Options*. If you are using Word 2001 or 2004 on a Mac, click on *Word* in the Menu bar and select *Preferences*.

You'll notice that there are many categories that you can customize to suit your writing requirements. For instance, under the *Spelling and Grammar* tab you can opt to check spelling as you type and have Microsoft Word suggest corrections. Mind you, the more interesting and varied options are found in the *Grammar* section of the *Spelling and Grammar* tab.

To take full advantage of Microsoft Word's grammar checking abilities, make sure the following boxes are selected: *Check grammar as you type*, *Check grammar with spelling*, and *Show readability statistics*. Word's readability statistics provide the approximate grade level of the writing and the relative ease in which it can be read.

Next to the *Show Readability Statistics* option is a *Settings* tab. Select it. Choose *Grammar & Style (Formal in Word for Mac)* and you'll notice that you can check a document not only for just capitalization, punctuation, and spelling errors, but also for a whole series of writing conventions. Scroll down the list and you'll see that Microsoft Word can check documents for clichés, subject-verb agreement, colloquialisms, contractions, unclear phrasing, wordiness, and much more. Moreover, you can help students learn to place punctuation inside quotation marks (as per the American system) and commas before the last list in an item. After making your choices click *OK*. You may also have to click a *recheck this document* button.

Once you have set these options, the next time you check the document with the *Spelling and Grammar* tool (under the *Tools* option in the menu bar), the document will be much more thoroughly examined.

