

Creating a Smarter Interface

When we first began to get to know version 2007 several years ago, we were disappointed in the program's apparent lack of support for customization. Using version 2003, we learned some amazing techniques for fine-tuning menus and toolbars, only to discover that almost all of it was removed from the then-new interface of version 2007.

We advanced users were initially dismayed with the bone that it seemed Microsoft was throwing us with the so-called Quick Access Toolbar. And there are still times when we long for the methods by which we could completely rearrange the version 2003 tools. That said, we have discovered just enough cool things with the modern interface to assuage our pain somewhat. This chapter shares those discoveries.

The Version 2007 Downgrade

While PowerPoint 2007 reflected improvements in many areas over older versions, interface customization was not one of them. Program developers were so enthused about the Ribbon and the way it was designed, they did not want us tinkering with it. The list was depressingly long of what we could not do:

- Add to or rearrange the commands on the Ribbon.
- Change or remove a command or group on the Ribbon.
- Add tabs to the Ribbon without programming code.
- Use toolbars and menus from earlier versions of PowerPoint.
- Change the font or font size used on the Ribbon.
- Replace seldom-used commands with ones used more often.
- Save, swap, and migrate your customized interface to other places and to other people

Version 2007 debuted a much-improved look and accessibility for all of the settings within the PowerPoint Options dialog, including the Advanced tab shown in Figure 24.1—sort of a one-stop shop for all geeky stuff across the application. You access these options from the Office Button, the round icon at the top-left of the PowerPoint 2007 screen, or from File | Options in 2010.

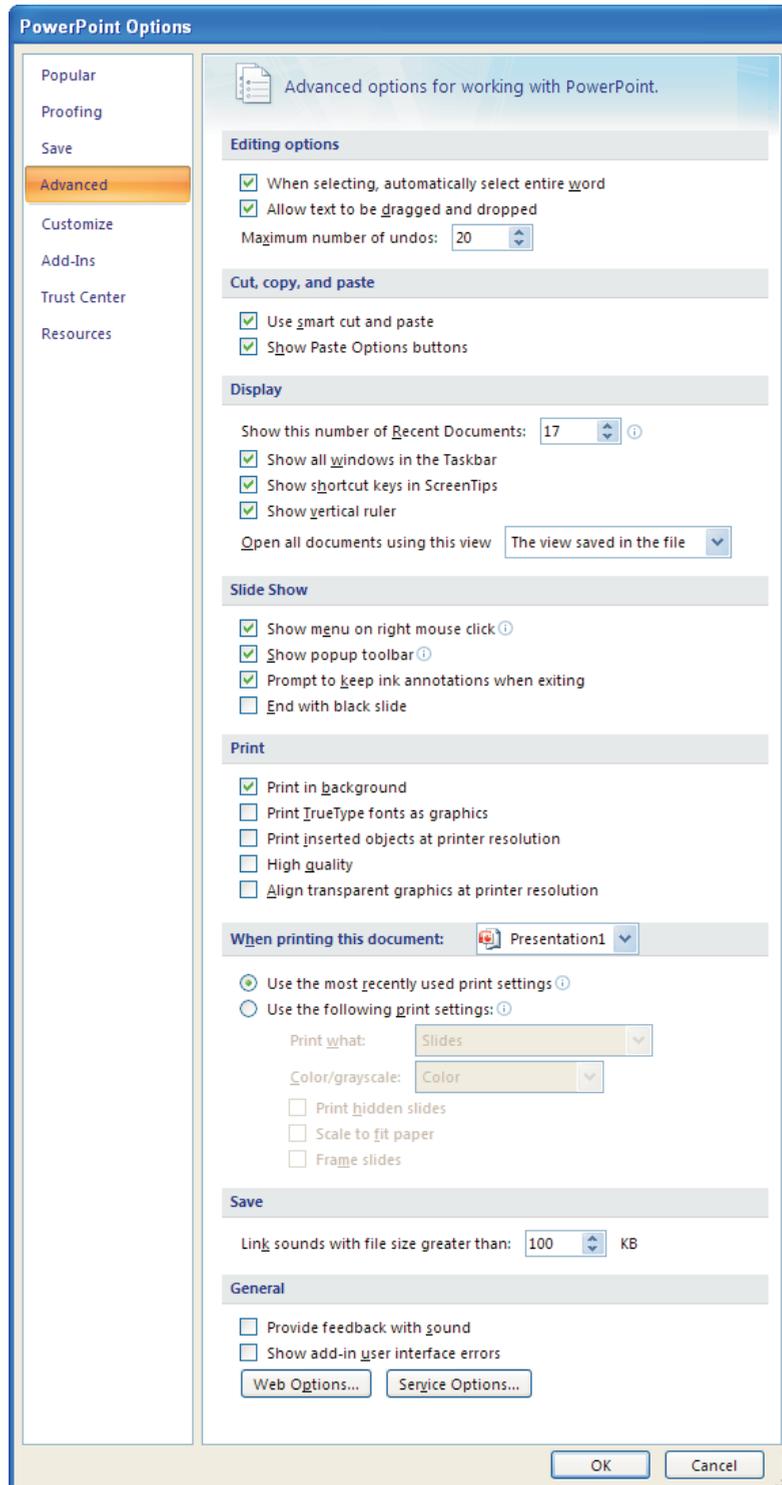
The other significant interface change introduced with 2007 was the Quick Access Toolbar (QAT), a row of icons across the top of the interface. You can place any command you want there and it will hold many. But you cannot change them from icon to text and the QAT can only live in one of two locations: above the Ribbon or below it.

This seemed meager compared to the extraordinary customization capabilities in version 2003, but again, a few factoids mitigate this.

If You Know It, Type It!

If you're like me, one of the more frustrating aspects of modern versions of PowerPoint is the where-did-they-put-it syndrome that has us searching every ribbon for a function that we used to access in our sleep. For instance, in V03, I would type Alt+D | S to reach the Set Up Show dialog box in about less than one second. I could pull down the Slide Show menu and then click Set Up Show, but the keystrokes are faster and seem easier to me.

Figure 24.1
Version 2007
enjoys a
redesigned and
much more
accessible set of
options.



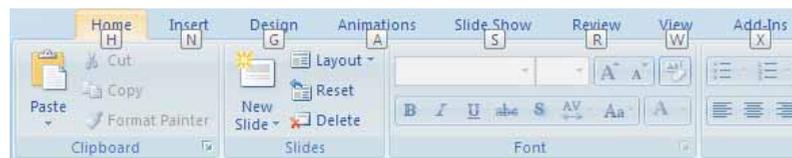
So imagine my pleasant surprise to discover that modern versions honor V03 keystroke access. Alt + D by itself doesn't mean anything to V07, but if you just keep going and complete the sequence, the software figures out what you mean and executes the command for you. So...

| In order to | I press |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Invoke Paste Special | Alt + E S |
| Switch to the Notes page | Alt + V P |
| Insert a photo | Alt + I P F |
| Open Replace Fonts | Alt + O R |

All of these keystrokes work in modern versions. There are no cues on the interface—you just type them blind, as if you were in V03.

When in Doubt, Press Alt

While learning your way around might be a chore for months to come, there is an easy way to embark on that journey, and once you find what you're looking for, an easy way to access it. Just press Alt once and note the keys that promptly appear under the main menu:

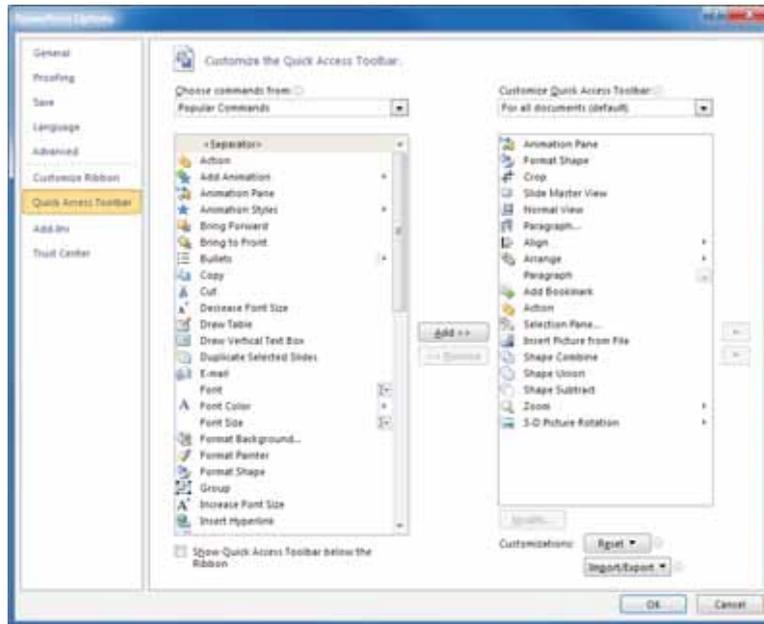


From here, press the corresponding letter to activate the desired ribbon. Once you learn the key designations, you won't have to wait for them to appear: press Alt+N to go immediately to the Insert menu. And once there, note all of the keystrokes that appear:



This becomes a handy cheat sheet as well as the door to fast access.

Figure 24.4
Adding
commands to
the QAT is
powerful and
easy.

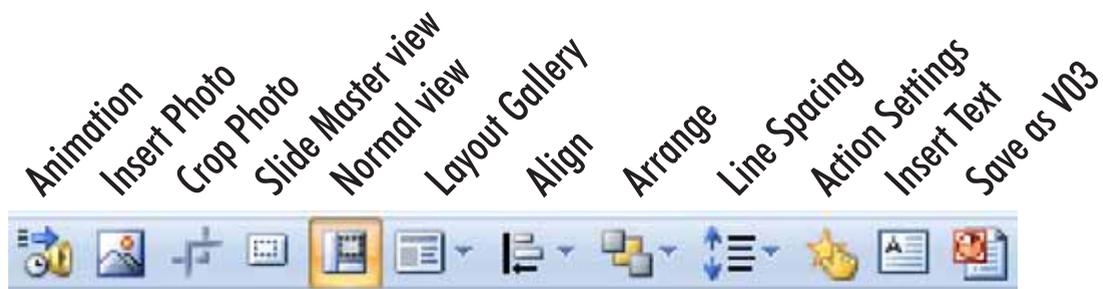


The QAT: Blunt but Effective

Because I'm a keyboard-aholic, these two techniques were tremendously gratifying for me to discover. Mouse-centric users might not have as much cause for celebration, but still the QAT is an important resource to leverage for economy of motion.

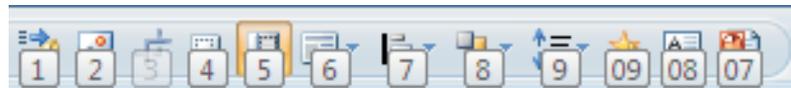
The QAT's qualities begin with the ease with which you can place onto it any command you can find. And as you can see in Figure 24.4, it's simple to do: browse the commands on the left and add any you want to the list on the right. The Choose Commands From dropdown includes sets of

Figure 24.5
The author's QAT



commands based on category as well as a vast master list of every command that exists within the application, including a few dozen that do not live on any ribbon and would therefore never be found except via a trip to this dialog.

Figure 24.5 shows the 12 commands that I have placed on my QAT. I will no doubt continue to grow this list as I discover more and more commands that I would prefer to access with one click instead of a hunt across the menus and then a dive into a particular ribbon. But the first nine are essential and I chose them carefully. This is because the Alt key works on the QAT, also. Press it and you'll see this:



This brings an unprecedented level of access to my most-used commands, well beyond what I had with version 2003:

| In order to | I press |
|--------------------------------|---------|
| Invoke the Animation task pane | Alt+1 |
| Crop a photo | Alt+3 |
| Switch to Slide Master view | Alt+4 |
| Change a Layout | Alt+6 |
| Adjust Line Spacing | Alt+9 |

As you can see from the image above, once you get past nine, you need to press two keys along with Alt. As the list grows, it will reach 01 and then begin counting up from 0A through 0Z. We haven't gotten past 0Z to see what happens next—our video card runs out of resolution...

Thanks to the QAT and these Alt-key tricks, my creative workflow is exceptionally high when working with my bread-and-butter commands, and then it falls off markedly when I have to hunt through the Ribbon tabs to find an uncommon command. Many years after the debut of Office 2007, I know that this remains true for many of you, as well.

Customizing the Ribbon

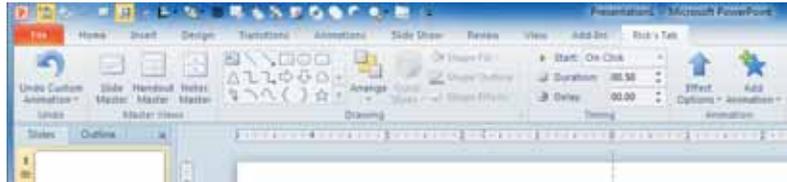
Version 2010 users can go one step further: you can add your own tabs to the ribbon and your own groups of commands to tabs. This helps those of

us suffering from customization withdrawal, and while it has its limitations, it also has its power.

To customize ribbons, you head to File | Options | Customize Ribbon and work a dialog box similar to the one for the QAT. There, you will see the same list of available commands on the left and a schematic on the right detailing the current tabs and groups.



From here you can create and remove tabs and groups, rearrange them, rename them, and add commands to them. In about 10 minutes, you can create your own ribbon like this one:



▼ Version 2007 users can customize ribbons with the help of an add-on. Visit pschmid.net/office2007

On this custom ribbon, there is a big Undo button, access to the three Master views, the standard drawing tools, and animation timing and other controls. I would create this in order to have better access to the commands that I use most often, but here is where theory and reality don't meet so well; I have two prevailing objections to ribbon customization:

- You cannot customize with individual commands, only command groups. In the image above, I might only want the Arrange drop-down, but I have to accept the entire Drawing group. I wish I didn't.
- You cannot turn off context-switching. One of the reasons I would want to create my own tab on the Ribbon is to ensure that my preferred com-

mands were always available. However, PowerPoint will persist in switching to whichever tab it thinks most suits the task. I wish context switching were an option that I could disable.

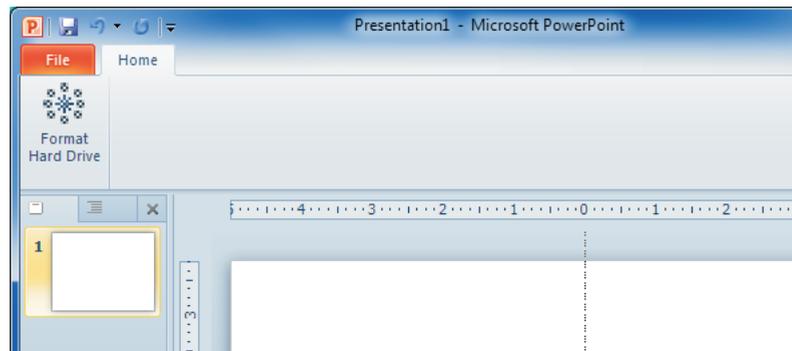
Sharing Settings

QAT and Ribbon custom settings are stored in a file called PowerPoint.officeUI, buried deep in the Users folder:

C:\Users\[username]\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Office

By accessing this file, you can back it up, use it on a second computer, give it to a colleague, and even create variations for different users or projects. If you would prefer to not have to go backstage, there are Import/Export commands on both Customize dialogs.

You can use these controls to play killer pranks on co-workers. How would you like to come in one morning and have PowerPoint greet you with only the Home tab and only one command on it:



We'll let you figure that one out for yourself...