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If You Type at the Head of a Heading, and Other Verses about Word Cross-References

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If you type at the head of a heading,
Word stretches the bookmarks and reffing.
If you type at the tail
The crossrefs will fail
To show the new text you've been editing.

Have you encountered the scenario described in the poem? In a Microsoft Word document, you insert a cross-reference reading:

After a couple days, the reference spontaneously changes to:

The reference has been stretched. It now contains extraneous text that comes from the preceding section of the document, followed by a paragraph mark and the correct referenced heading. In this example, the extraneous text is a single line, and it looks like a typo. I have seen examples where the extraneous text was 10 pages. The reader is confused by pages of text that are totally unrelated to the context.

Here is what happened:

1. You inserted a reference to the heading.

   Word placed a hidden bookmark on the heading, and it inserted a REF field that points to the bookmark:

2. You inserted some text—perhaps a single paragraph, perhaps several pages—immediately before the heading.

    To do this, you clicked at the start of the heading, and you pressed Enter. That is the intuitive way to insert a paragraph, but it was a mistake!

3. You typed before the paragraph mark. Another mistake!

4. You updated the REF field.

    You might have pressed F9 and updated the field deliberately. Or you might have generated a PDF or online help, and the generation tool updated the field. In the latter case, the original document might look fine. The reference is stretched only in the PDF or the online help.

The problem is that you typed at the start of a bookmarked heading. The new text and the paragraph mark are now part of the bookmark. The bookmark originally covered the heading between the brackets:

Now it covers the preceding text, too:

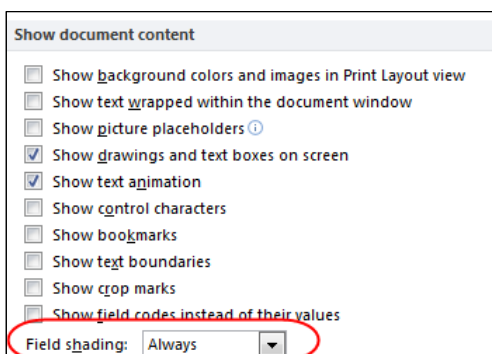When you update the bookmark, the REF field displays the complete bookmarked text. It does not know that you stretched the bookmark inadvertently.
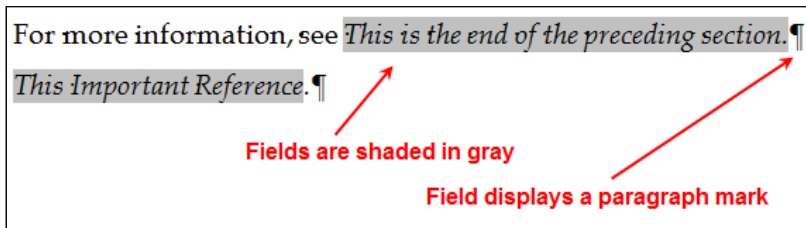
Detecting Stretched References

To detect the extraneous text in existing cross-references:

1. Open File > Options > Advanced. About halfway down the page, set Field Shading = Always.

2. Select the entire document and press F9.

    This updates the fields throughout the document.

3. Scroll through the document quickly, and view the gray-shaded fields.

4. If a field displays a paragraph mark or it spans several lines, it is probably a stretched cross-reference. Delete and re-create the reference.

> For more information, see *This is the end of the preceding section.¶*
> *This Important Reference.¶*
>
> **Fields are shaded in gray**
>
> **Field displays a paragraph mark**

Preventing Stretched References

Don't type at the head of a heading
If you're on the way to a wedding.
    You will not have time
    Before the deadline
To fix the bad bookmarks and reffing.

As the poem says, never type at the start of a heading. Do not even press the Enter key. Otherwise, if the document contains a reference to the heading, you will stretch the reference. Instead, go to the end of the preceding body paragraph, and press Enter there.

Here is another version of the poem, describing the right place to insert the new paragraph:

Para before a heading?
Stop! You'll corrupt the reffing.
    In the previous section
    Do the Press-Enter action
So your xrefs will keep on behaving.

What About Typing at the Tail of a Heading?

If you type at the end of a bookmark, Word does not stretch the bookmark. The references do not display extraneous text. However, the references might be truncated.

For example, you change the bookmarked heading from

> This·Important· Reference¶

to

> An·Important· Referenced· Heading¶

When you type *An*, Word includes it in the bookmark. When you type *d Heading*, Word does not extend the bookmark. After updating fields, the reference displays:

> For more information, see *An Important Reference.¶*

Preventing Truncated References

To edit a heading throw darts.
Aim for the middle — it's smart.
   Then delete the start
   And the finishing part,
Update fields and admire your art.

So how do you edit a heading safely? Edit in the middle. Then delete the start and finish. For example, change

[This·Important· Reference¶

to

[This·An·Important· Referenced· Heading· Reference¶

Now delete the start and finish:

[~~This~~·An·Important·Referenced·Heading·~~Reference~~]¶

The bookmark contains the remaining text:

[An·Important· Referenced· Heading]¶

When you update the REF field, it displays the reference correctly:

For more information, see *An Important Referenced Heading.*¶

Where to Put Fields in a Heading

Argh! A field in a bookmark
Makes the light in your xref go dark
   If you want to write clear
   Press End, then Insert Here
Else dogs at your error will bark.

A heading might contain one or more Word field codes, such as an index entry (an XE field) or a WebWorks TopicAlias marker (a PRIVATE field, used to generate context-sensitive online help). To avoid bookmark and reference errors, insert the fields at the end of the heading, not at the start or in the middle. Here's an example showing why.

As in the previous examples, the document contains a reference to a heading:

> For more information, see *This Important Reference.*¶

After you create the reference, you insert fields at the start of the heading. (To view these fields in a Word document, you must display hidden text. Click File > Options > Display > Hidden Text.)

> **{·XE·"Important·Reference"·}{·PRIVATE·WWF·TopicAlias!ImpRef·}This· Important·Reference¶**

The insertion causes Word to extend the bookmark on the heading. The bookmark now includes the XE and PRIVATE fields. If you update the reference, you discover that it contains duplicate copies of the fields.

> For more information, see *{ XE "Important Reference" }{ PRIVATE WWF TopicAlias!ImpRef }This Important Reference.*¶

The duplicate field codes cause at least two problem with the behavior of the document. As the poem says, the *light in your xref* has gone dark.

- The index at the end of the Word document should contain a single entry that points to the original heading. Instead, it contains two entries. One entry is correct. The other points incorrectly to the reference.

- If you use WebWorks ePublisher to transform the Word document to online help, the topic alias should uniquely identify the help topic that contains the original heading. Instead, it might identify the help topic that contains the reference. When a user clicks a Help button in your company's software application, it might open the wrong help topic.

To fix the problem, cut the field codes from the start of the heading, and paste them at the end:

> **This·Important·Reference{·XE·"Important·Reference"·}{·PRIVATE·WWF· TopicAlias!ImpRef·}¶**

Word does not extend the bookmark at the end of the heading. The resulting reference excludes the fields. The index and the online help are now generated correctly.

> For more information, see *This Important Reference.*¶

David Shaked is the director of AlmondWeb Ltd., a documentation company. Among other services, David supports and customizes Word and WebWorks for technical writing departments. And he enjoys writing poetry (mostly in Hebrew, and more artistic than the jingles in this article).