

Re: IT Tip-Microsoft Word
From: Mr Sou Chai Yap Steven 12-09-11

Avoid a Word Find and Replace gotcha that could prove catastrophic

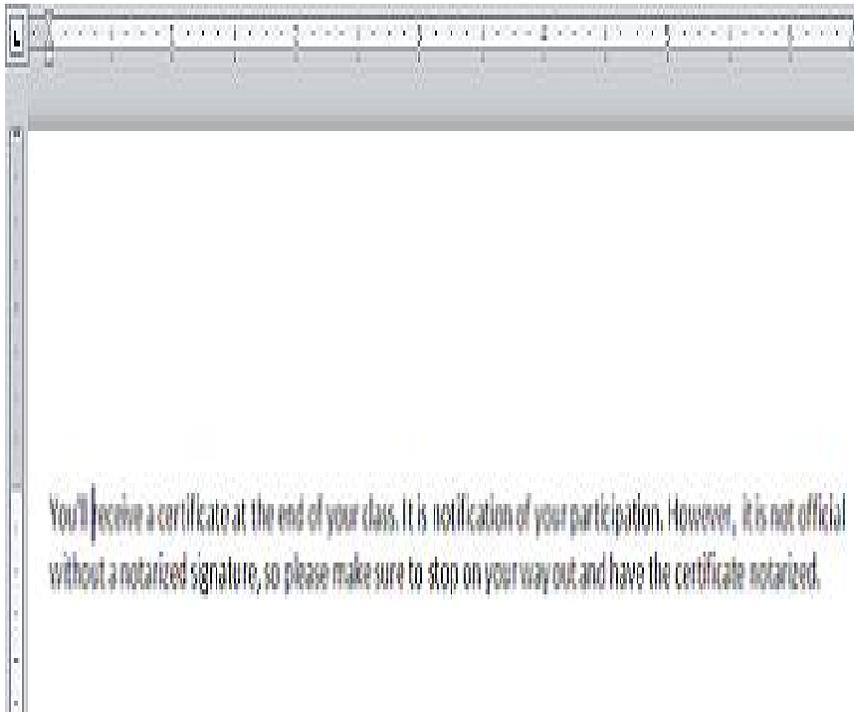
Microsoft Word

Avoid a Word Find and Replace gotcha that could prove catastrophic

Word's Find and Replace feature lets you alter multiple instances of a word or phrase at the same time. However, one thing you might not consider is space characters--and they matter.

Let's look at a quick example. In the document below, I have two short sentences. If you can't read the figures, the sentences follow:

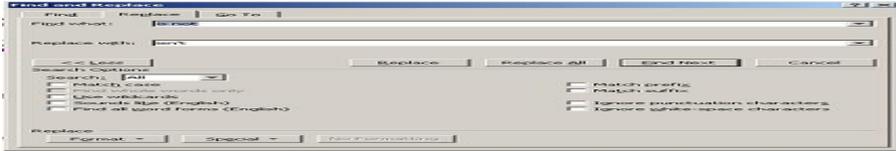
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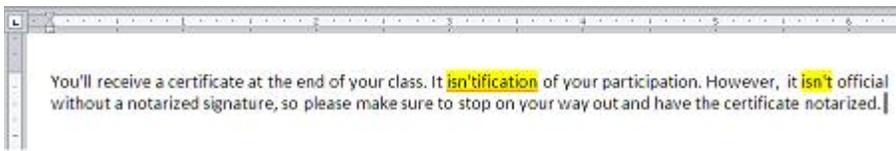
Now, let's change all occurrences of *is not* to *isn't*. A quick find and replace should do the trick, right? Let's see what happens when we ignore spaces:

1. Click the Home tab and then click Replace in the Editing group. In Word 2003, choose Find and Replace from the Edit menu.

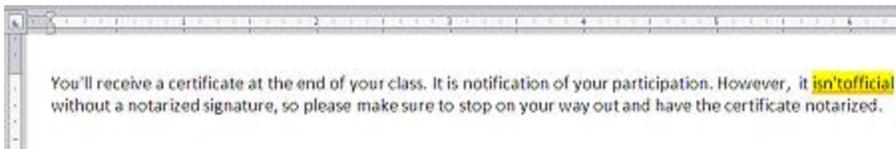
2. In the Find What control, enter *is not*.
3. In the Replace With control, enter *isn't*.
4. Click Replace All and then OK. The results might not be what you expected.



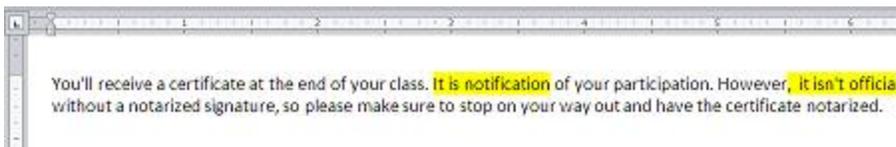
The replace task found one occurrence of is not and replaced it with isn't, correctly. However, it also found *is notification* and changed it to *isn'tification*--that's a mistake.



Being mindful of space characters will eliminate these types of unexpected errors. In this case, following the search string (in the Find What control) with a space character will eliminate the inappropriate find, but be careful because doing so will introduce a new error as shown below.



You must enter a space character after *is not* in the Find What control *and* after *isn't* in the Replace With control to get the desired results.



When this happens, there's no warning that the feature hasn't understood your intentions. The only way to avoid this behavior is awareness. Running a spell check will find most errors of this type, but you can't depend on that. To the feature, a space character is another valid character. Including them in your search and replace strings is the best way to avoid trouble.

Keep in mind that the space characters that occur before the find and replace strings are just as important