

May 2013

How to use the MS Word Thesaurus to Improve Word Usage



Have you ever been in that situation where you're writing a simple email to your co-worker, client or vendor, and the word you want to describe the idea or situation is hidden behind a mental wall? Oh, the word is there! On the tip of your fingers that won't type it out. Why not? Because you can't quite think of it. You substitute some lesser word that comes to mind, but you know there's a better, more accurate arrow that would fly to the heart of the matter.

Microsoft Word has always been the preferred word processing application for those who take their words seriously. Almost thirty years ago on, May 30, 1983, came the official release of **Multi-Tool Word**, which was soon simplified to **Microsoft Word**. It had the distinction of being the first word processing program to be issued needing a mouse. Imagine! Needing a mouse to write. But it was full of rich features that helped writers to be better at writing. One of the tools a writer leans heavily on, especially to find just the right word for that elusive thought, is the Thesaurus. Here's how to use it.

First, let's go back to that elusive word. Maybe you have a sentence like this –

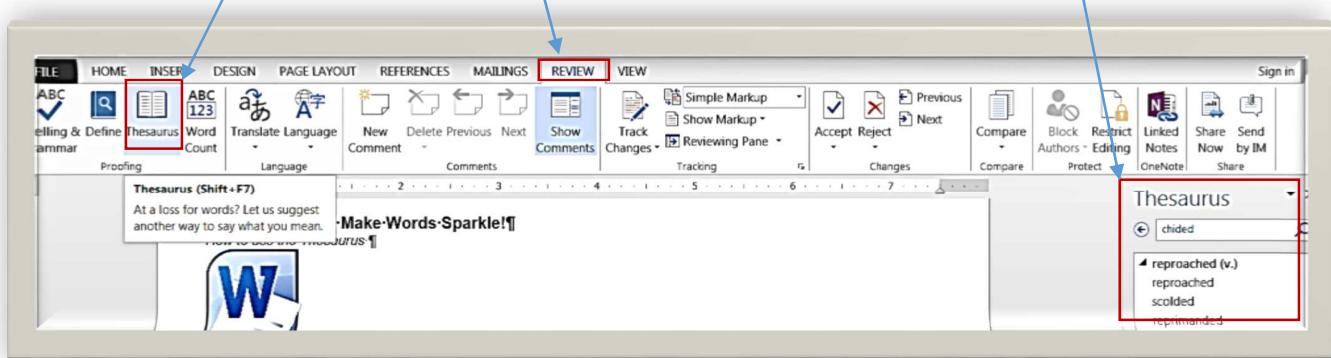
If you have yet to explore all the features in Microsoft Word, then you are missing out on producing some *opulent prose* with the aid of Word's standard thesaurus.

The poor substitute, "opulent prose," is all you could think of while writing the sentence. But your mind scolded, "Surely there's a better way to say it." There is! But where to start?

If you have kept to the Home Tab, the default that Word opens up to and which contains the most commonly used features, then you probably don't know where to find the Thesaurus because it is not on the Home Tab.

Word's Thesaurus can be found under the **Review Tab**.

Click on the icon of an *open book labeled Thesaurus* to bring up a *thesaurus menu to the right of your document*. If



you want to take advantage of the thesaurus as you write, then you can keep this menu open. This way you can come up with inventive claims as you write.

Back to our example sentence: *Opulent* is not a common word. Looking it up in the Thesaurus provides *wealthy, lavish, luxurious, rich, magnificent* and others as potential synonyms. Mentally I make note of *magnificent* which has a strong feel. What about *prose*? All we get in the list is *style* and *text*. Clicking on *style* produces a huge list mostly of words that miss the definition of the idea. What about *text*? Much better! The list includes, *writing, script, and copy*, among others. I like the simple word *writing* in this case. So, combining with *magnificent* from our previous look up, the sentence reads like this:

If you have yet to explore all the features in Microsoft Word, then you are missing out on producing some magnificent writing-with the aid of Word's standard thesaurus.

Much better!

With the thesaurus menu open, you can enter your word in the search form at the top of the menu and then click the green button to research your word. The thesaurus menu will now be populated with multiple words that have the same meaning with the word that you are looking up. You can then use your discretion to substitute your original word for a better one provided by the thesaurus. Remember to be careful not to pick out a new word that is too obscure or you might irritate your audience--while sounding like a genius!

Another way to use your thesaurus in Word is to double-click the word you want researched and then hit the Thesaurus icon under the Review Tab. You can also right-click the word that you want to research and then go to Synonyms. Right-clicking will provide you with a handy short list of alternative words that you can use to switch out your original word with. If you desire to view a more extensive list of words, then you will want to click on the shortcut to Thesaurus located at the bottom of this list. Both of these thesaurus workflows are quicker than having to type the word in the thesaurus menu.

Try out the thesaurus the next time you use Microsoft Word and turn your boring document into a piece of literature that is sure to make an illustrious impression!