

10 Things

10+ tips for working with Word tables

By [Susan Harkins](#)

February 12, 2013, 11:14 AM PST

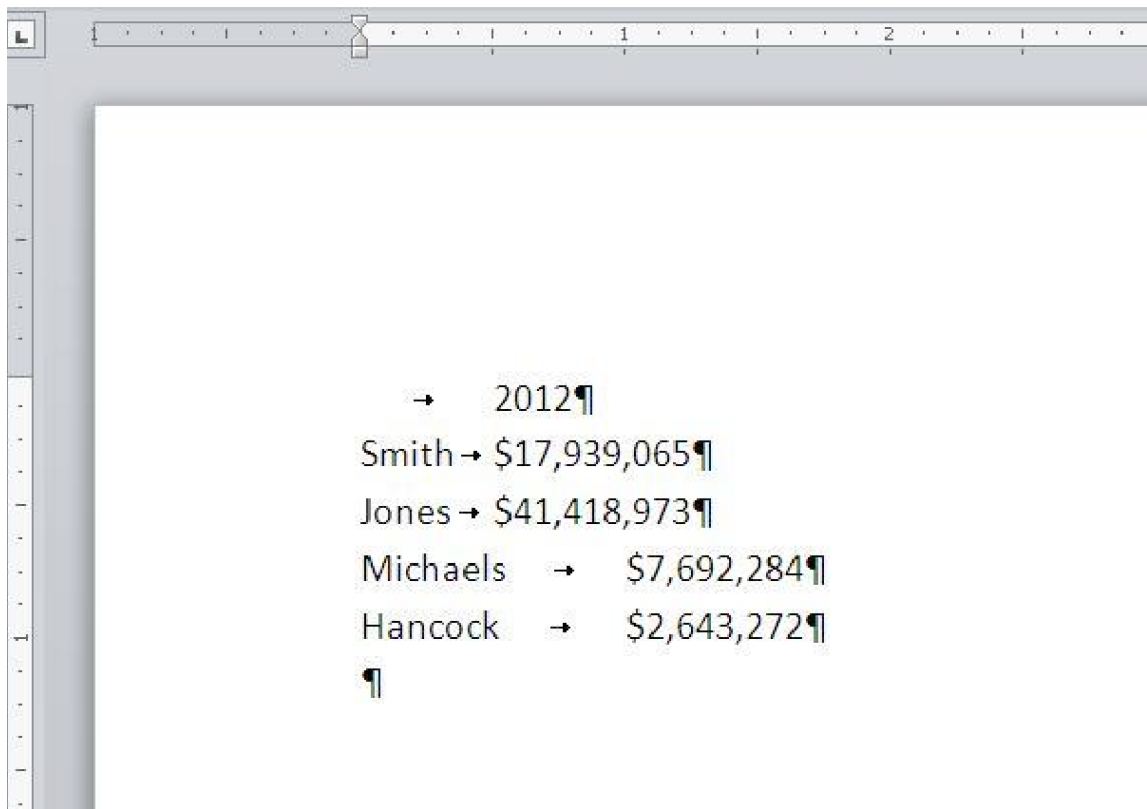
Takeaway: Word's table tools are fairly straightforward, but there are a few tricks to using them efficiently.

Turning data into a table is a task most Word users learn right away. But although tables are easy to implement and format, not all table tasks are obvious. These tips will help you work more efficiently with most any table.

1: Use consistent delimiters

Perhaps the simplest way to generate a table is to select text and convert it. Word does a great job of interpreting the data and defaulting to the right settings if you're consistent during data entry. Specifically, insert one delimiting character between each item, and enter a single paragraph return (press Enter) between each row, as shown in **Figure A**.

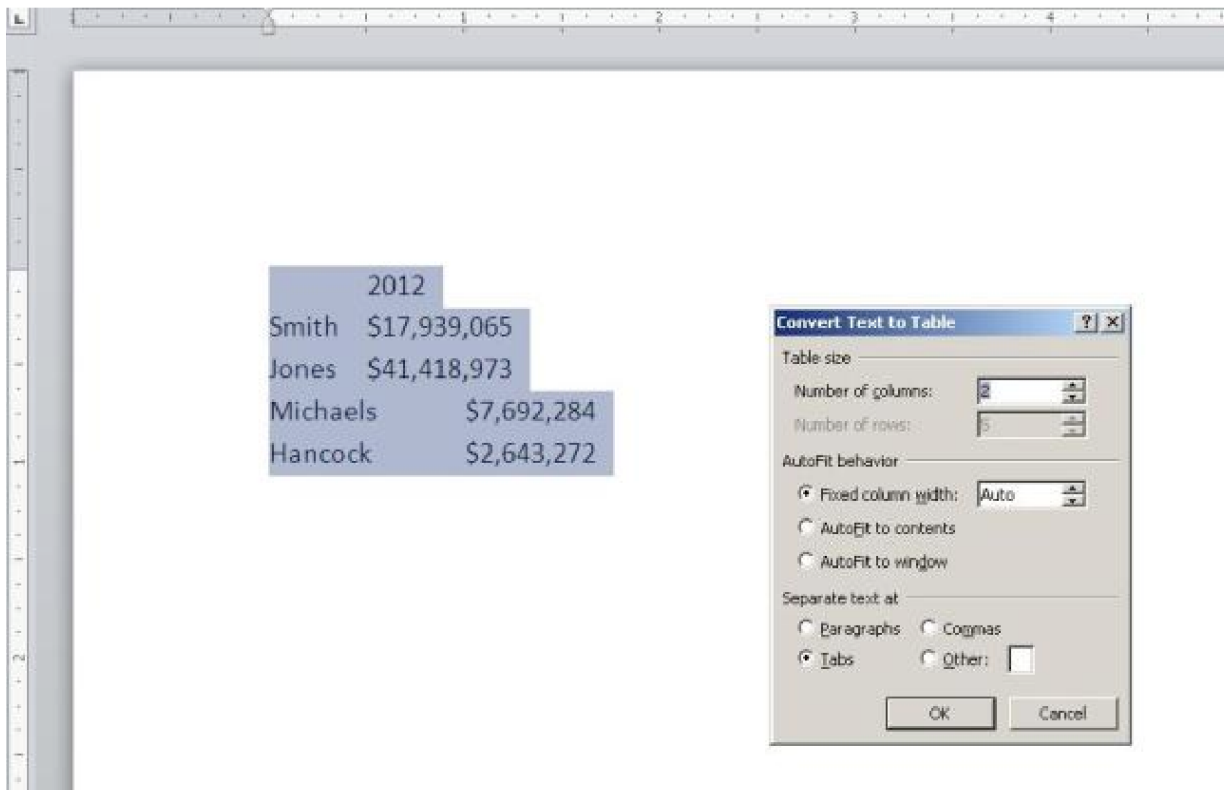
Figure A



There's only one tab character between each item and a single paragraph return separates the rows.

To convert a list, select the text. Then, click the Insert tab and click the Table drop-down (in the Tables group). From the resulting list, choose Convert Text To Table. In Word 2003, choose Convert from the Table menu and then select Text To Table. You shouldn't have to adjust the default settings (**Figure B**) much *if* you use delimiters consistently. Interpreting the tabs and returns, Word can detect that there are two columns and five rows, as shown in **Figure C**.

Figure B



Word uses the delimiting characters to align columnar data.

Figure C

The image shows the resulting table in Microsoft Word. The table is as follows:

	2012
Smith	\$17,939,065
Jones	\$41,418,973
Michaels	\$7,692,284
Hancock	\$2,643,272

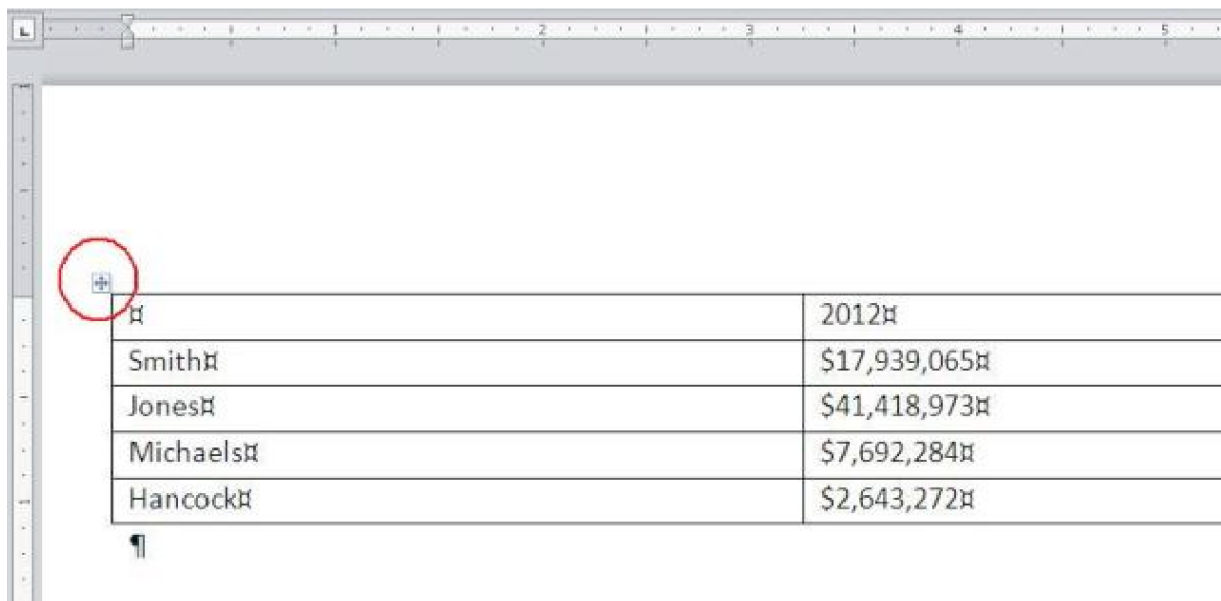
Plan ahead for easy-to-implement table conversion.

2: Select a table quickly

The quickest way to select a table is to click its Move handle. Click anywhere in the table to display this handle — the small square icon at the top-left corner, shown in **Figure D**. A single click of the Move handle will select the entire table, so you can do the following:

- Format it.
- Move it.
- Delete it.

Figure D



	2012
Smith	\$17,939,065
Jones	\$41,418,973
Michaels	\$7,692,284
Hancock	\$2,643,272

Click the table's Move handle to select the entire table.

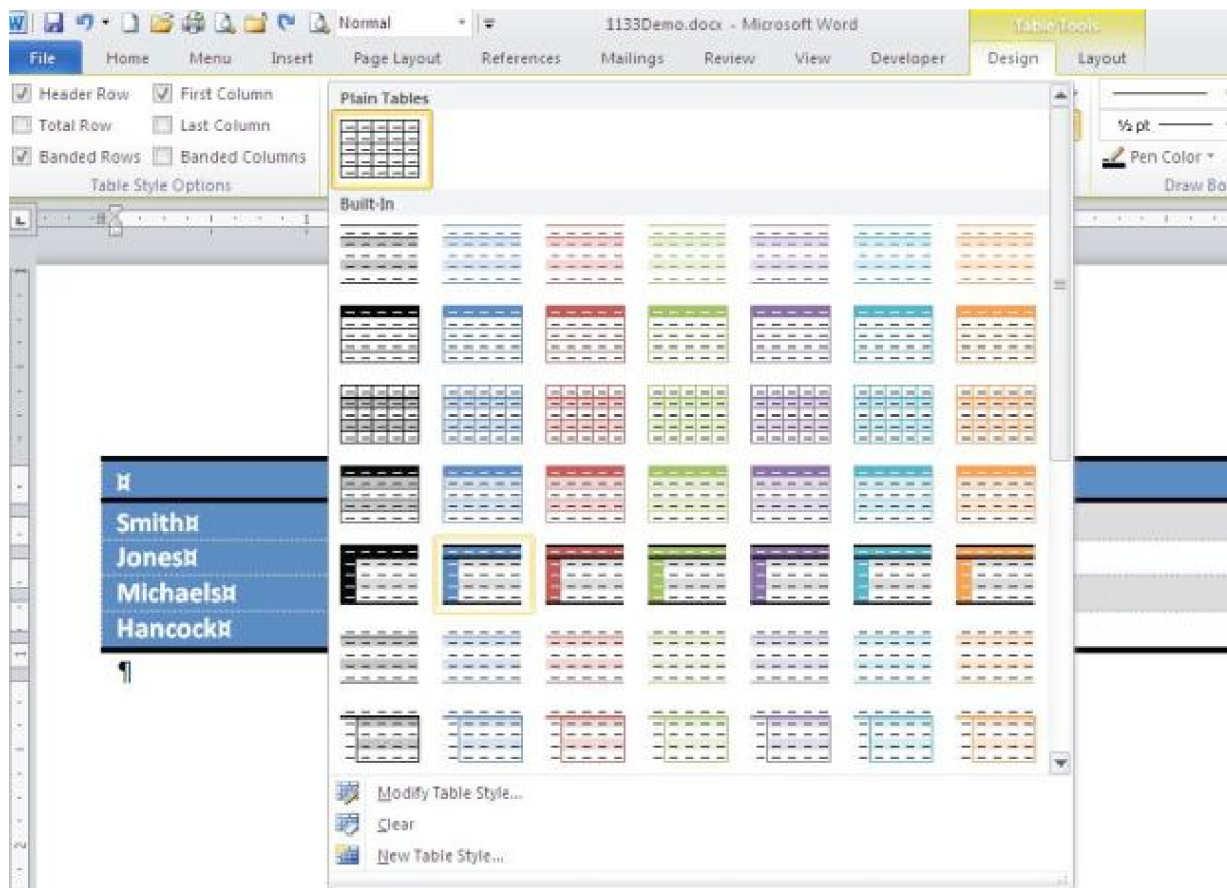
3: Delete it

If you select a table and press Delete, you might be surprised to find the table remains. Pressing Delete removes only the data. To delete the entire table, select it and then press Backspace.

4: Format quickly

Word defaults to the Table Grid format (Figure C), which applies almost no formatting. But using Word's Tables Styles gallery, you can quickly format those results. Select the entire table and then click the contextual Design tab and hover over the many styles in the gallery (in the Tables Styles group). Click the gallery's down arrow to see the full gallery, shown in **Figure E**. When you find a style that meets your needs (or that's close), click it. In Word 2003, choose Table AutoFormat from the Table menu. If the resulting table isn't exactly what you want, continue to tweak it.

Figure E



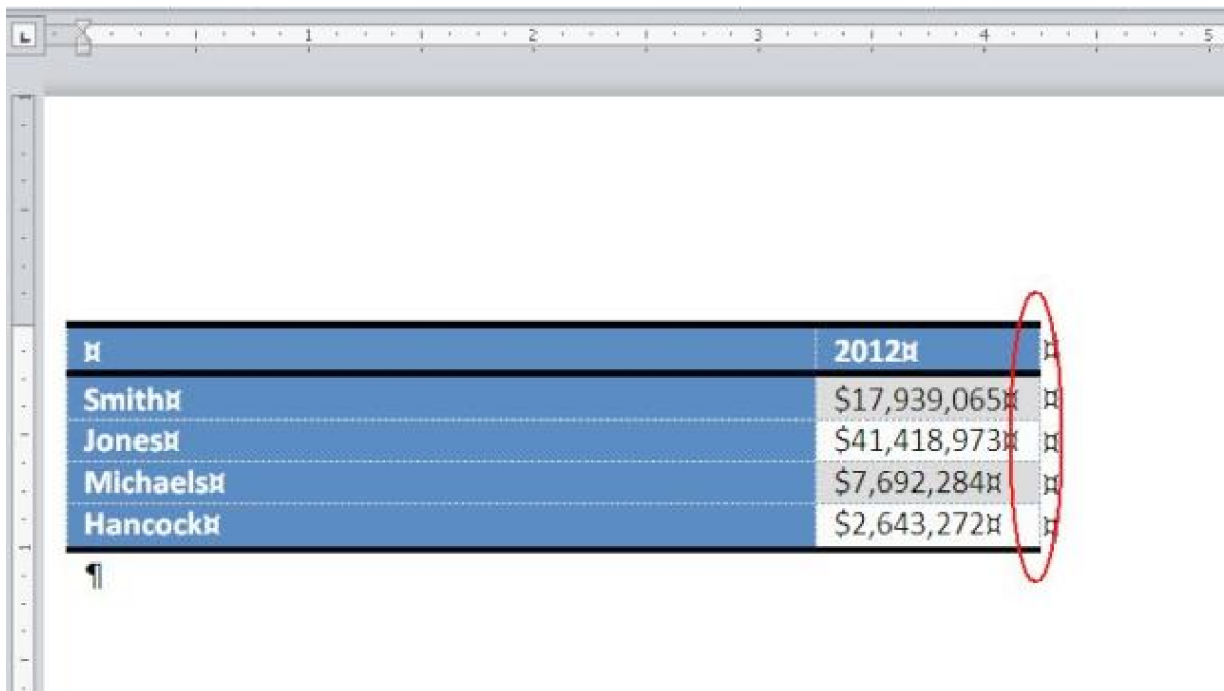
Use styles to quickly format tables.

5: Resize columns quickly

You can adjust a table's column widths with a few quick clicks:

- Double-click a column's right border to fit the largest item in that column, as shown in **Figure F**. Be sure Word displays the double-arrow pointer; otherwise, you might not get the desired results.
- To adjust all of the columns, select the table and then double-click any column's border. **Figure G** shows the results. This trick adjusted both columns.

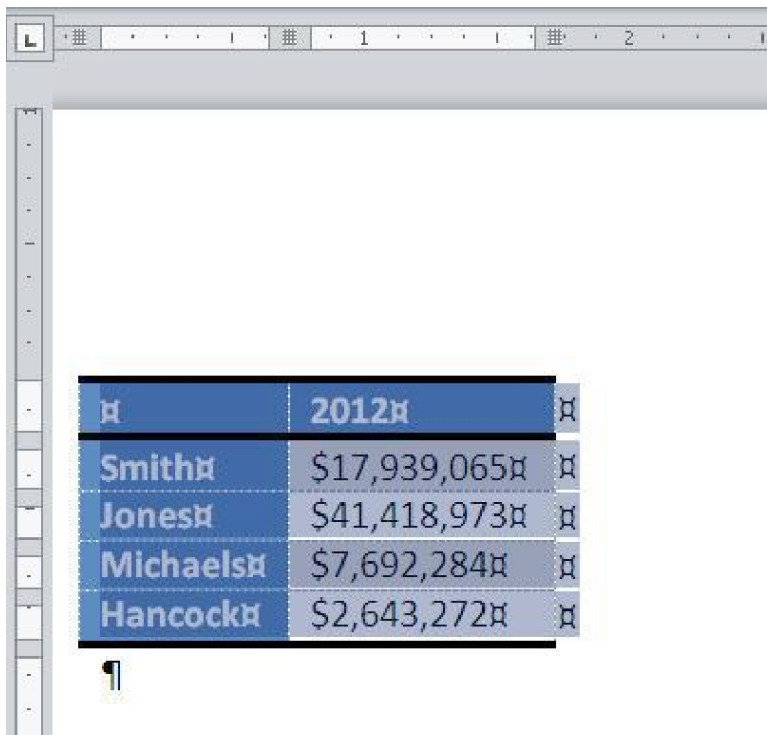
Figure F



	2012
Smith	\$17,939,065
Jones	\$41,418,973
Michaels	\$7,692,284
Hancock	\$2,643,272

Adjust the width of a single column by double-clicking its right border.

Figure G



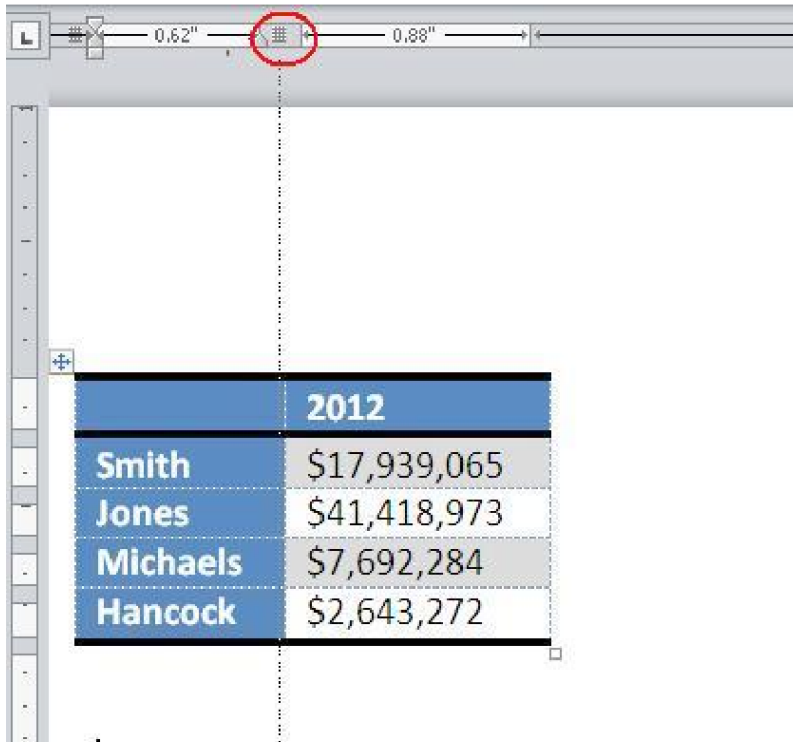
	2012
Smith	\$17,939,065
Jones	\$41,418,973
Michaels	\$7,692,284
Hancock	\$2,643,272

Select the entire table before double-clicking a column border to resize all of the columns.

6: Get more precise

If you need exact measurements, use the ruler. Hover the mouse over a border until the double-arrow pointer appears. Then, click the border and hold down the Alt key. Word will display specific measurements, as shown in **Figure H**. If you need to resize the column, drag the gray square.

Figure H



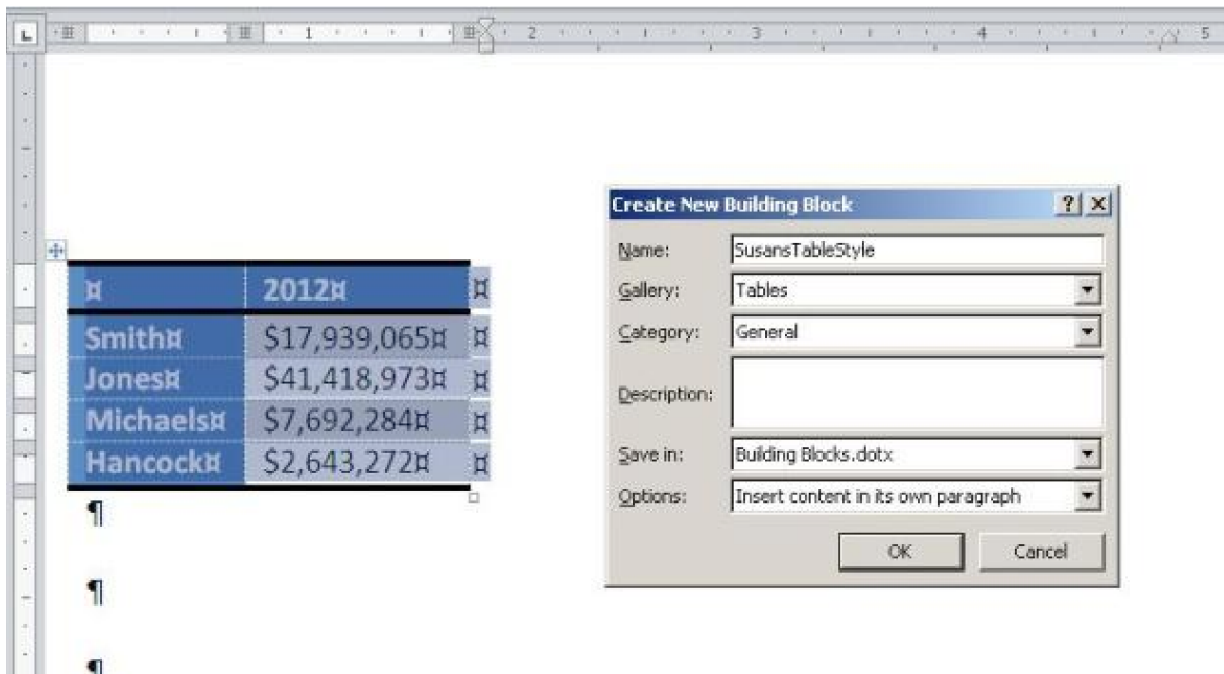
Display or set the widths of a table's columns.

7: Use Quick Tables

If you frequently use the same table in many documents, create a Quick Table (not available in Word 2003). First, create and format the table. Then, add the table to the Quick Tables gallery as follows:

1. Select the table.
2. Click the Insert tab.
3. Click the Table drop-down in the Tables group and choose Quick Tables to open the Quick Tables Gallery.
4. At the bottom of the gallery, select the Save Selection To Quick Tables Gallery option.
5. Name the new table, as shown in **Figure I**, and click OK. Usually, the other settings will be adequate.

Figure I

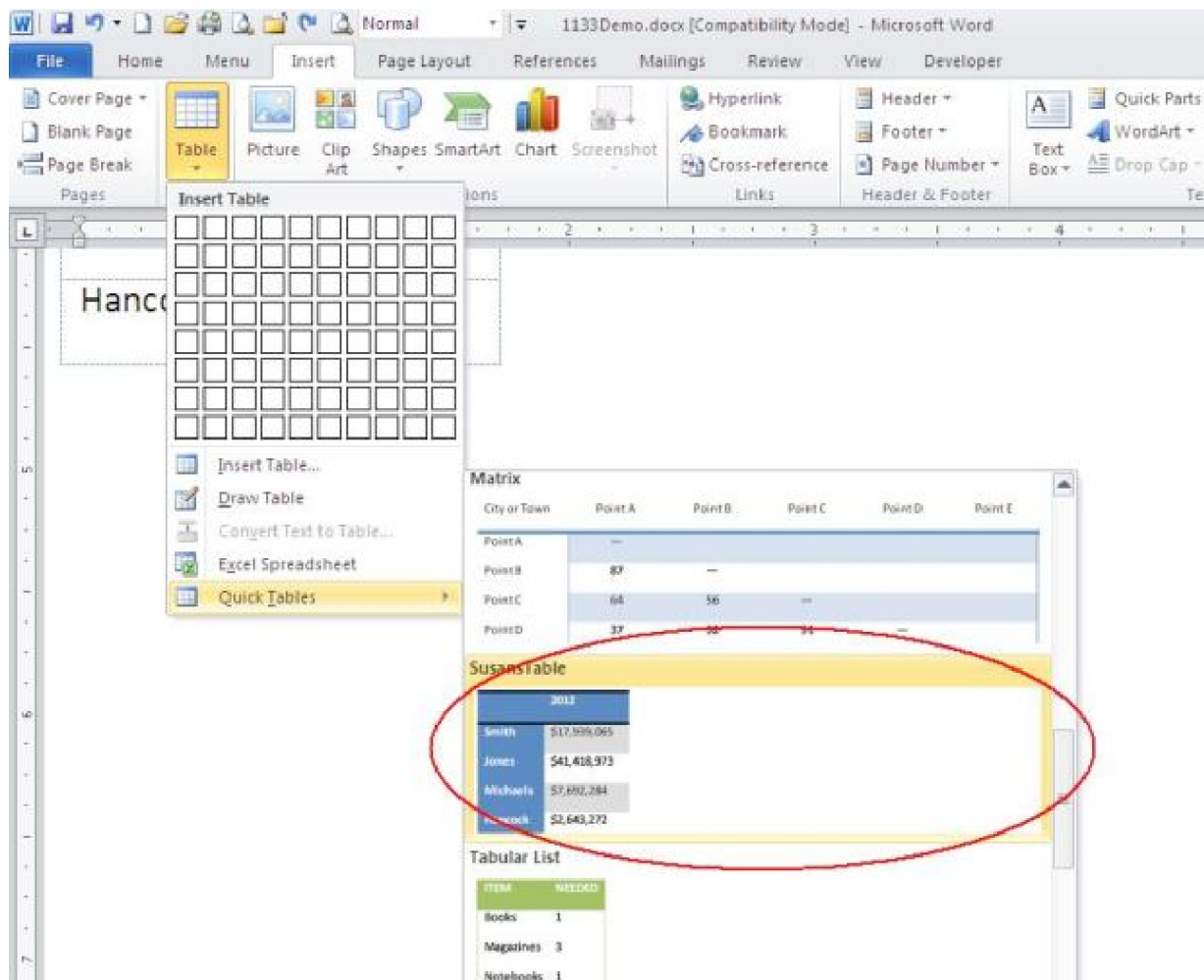


Create a Quick Table.

When you need the table again, just insert it from the Quick Tables gallery:

1. Click the Insert tab and choose Quick Tables from the Table drop-down (in the Tables group).
2. Find the table in the gallery, as shown in **Figure J**, and then click it to add it to the document.

Figure J



This feature treats the table as a building block, not a style.

8: Move a row quickly

If you need to move a row of data, you don't have to delete and reenter anything. You can quickly move a row of data by selecting it and then pressing Shift+Alt+Down Arrow (or Up Arrow). Continue to hold down Shift and Alt while pressing an arrow key as many times as needed.

9: Create pseudo columns

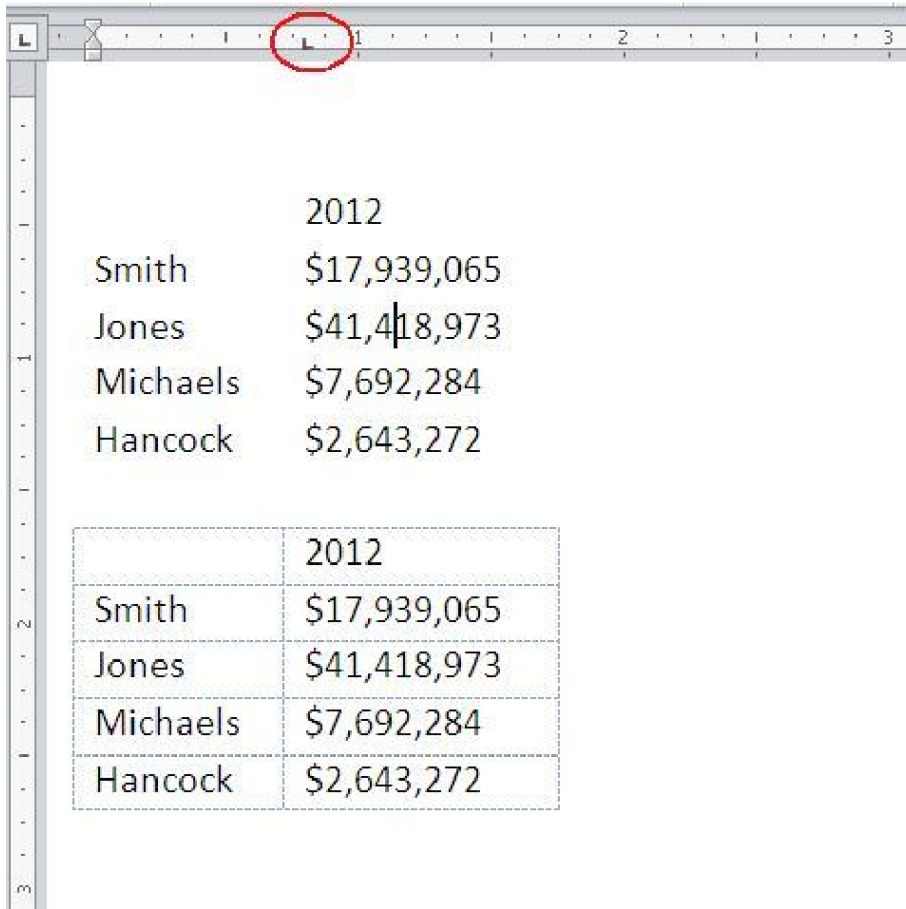
Tables are the easiest way to align columns, but you won't always want the data to appear with borders. In those cases, use a table to align the data and then get rid of the borders. There are two ways to do so.

Perhaps the easiest way is to convert the table to text by selecting the table and then clicking the contextual Layout tab. In the Data group, click Convert To Text. In the resulting dialog, change the delimiting character, if necessary, and click OK. In Word 2003, choose Convert from the Table menu and then choose Table To Text. This method is good for a one-time fix as it retains the table's column tabs. You can insert and delete rows easily, but that's about all you can do.

If you want the table's bells and whistles, just turn off the borders. After selecting the table, pressing Ctrl+Alt+U. Or click the contextual Design tab and choose No from the Borders drop-down in the Tables Styles group. In Word 2003, you can use the Border control on the Formatting toolbar. Word will display the

grid lines, but won't print borders, as shown in **Figure K**. If you don't want to see even the grid lines, click View Gridlines in the Table group on the contextual Layout tab. In Word 2003, choose Hide Gridlines from the Table menu.

Figure K



	2012
Smith	\$17,939,065
Jones	\$41,418,973
Michaels	\$7,692,284
Hancock	\$2,643,272

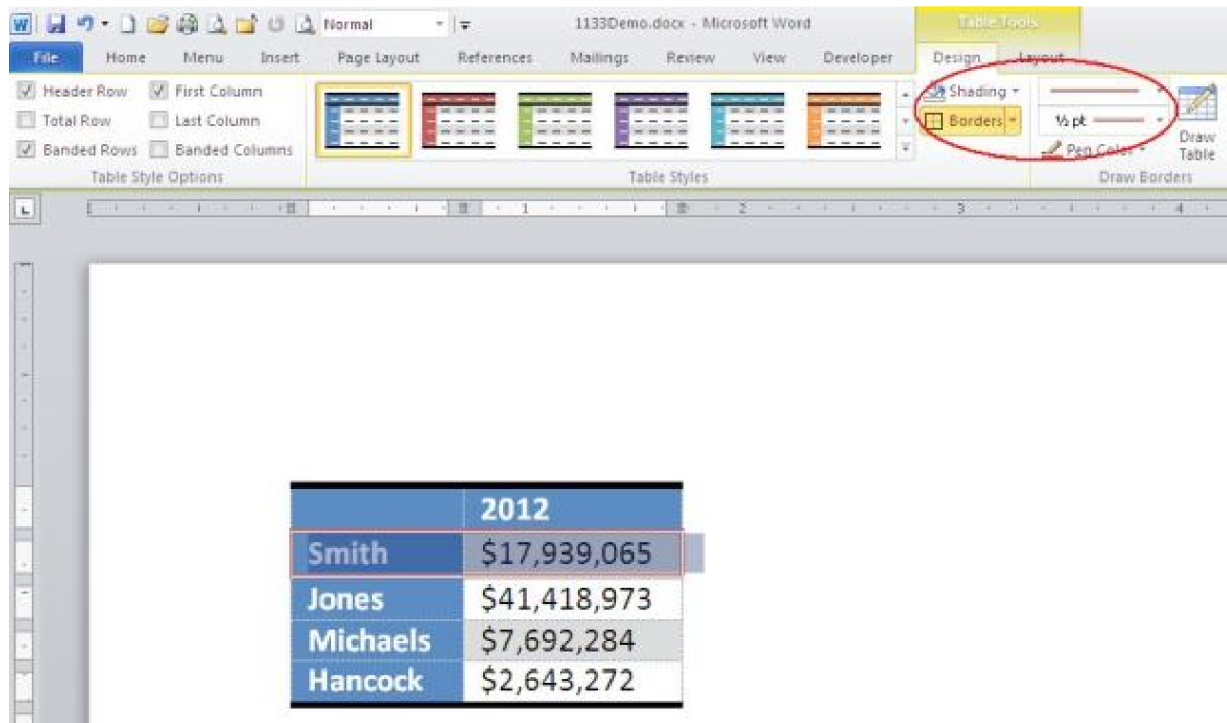
	2012
Smith	\$17,939,065
Jones	\$41,418,973
Michaels	\$7,692,284
Hancock	\$2,643,272

You don't have to display table borders to use table behaviors and properties.

10: Highlight specific data

You'll apply most formats to an entire table, but you can spotlight specific rows, columns, or even cells. For instance, the table in **Figure L** uses a different border to highlight Smith's row. To apply this border format, select the cells and then click the contextual Design tab. In the Tables Styles group, choose the appropriate border from the Borders drop-down. Then, choose a style, weight, and color from the options in the Draw Borders group. In Word 2003, right-click the selection and choose Borders And Shading. You could also change the background or font colors — most formats you can apply to the table you can also apply to specific cells.

Figure L



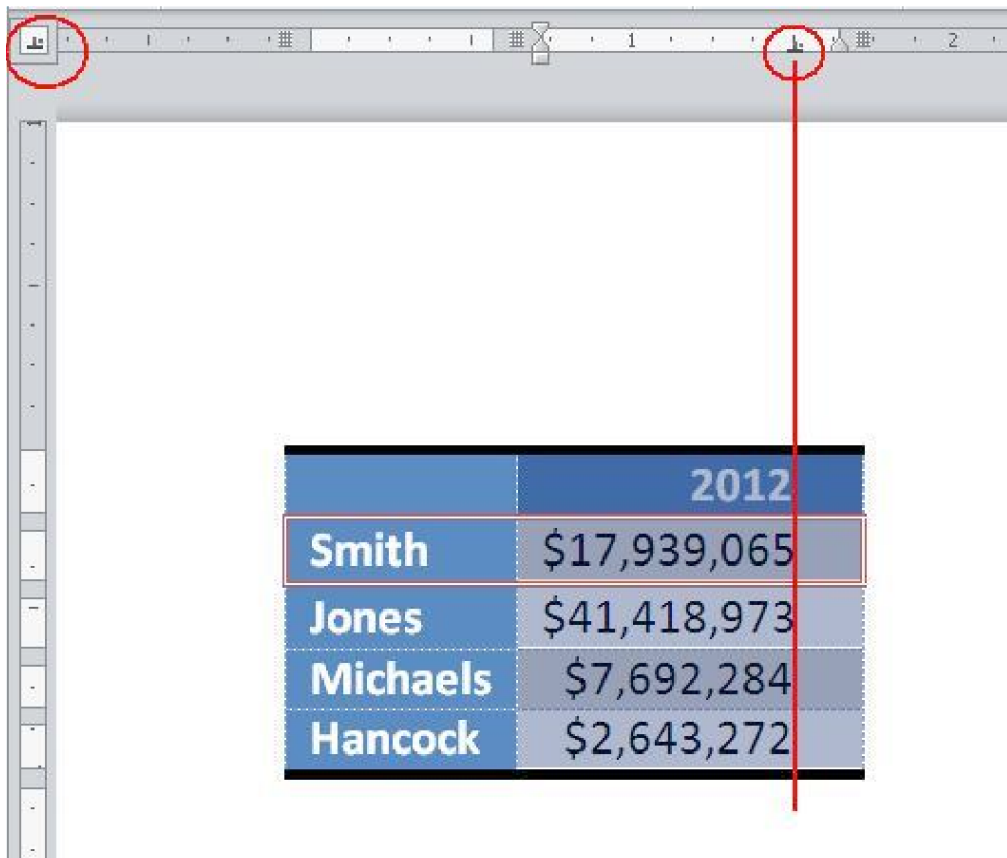
This border highlights Smith's yearly total.

11: Change the tab

You might have noticed that the table aligned the currency values to the left. That's the default, but you'll probably want to use a decimal tab, as follows:

1. With the horizontal ruler visible, click the Tab selector (the white square at the intersection of the two rulers) until you display the tab decimal (an upside down T with a decimal to the right).
2. Select the cells (or column) you want to reformat.
3. Click on the ruler where you want to add the new tab decimal. Word will temporarily display a vertical guideline showing the position in the document. After clicking, Word will realign the selected values, as shown in **Figure M**.

Figure M



Assign a decimal tab to align values in a table's column.

In this case, selecting the entire column also aligned the column's header, 2012. Select it and reformat it separately — it's a small tradeoff. By selecting the whole column, all new records will have the tab decimal in place.

Tips and questions

What other tricks do you use when working with Word tables? Have you ever been stumped by a table task? Share your advice and questions with fellow TechRepublic members.

[Automatically sign up for TechRepublic's 10 Things newsletter!](#)

You May Also Like

- [Add frequently used tables to Word's Quick Tables gallery](#)TechRepublic
- [Five tips that will increase your Word productivity](#)TechRepublic
- [Why Mobile Will Transform Learning: The Classroom of the Future](#)Qualcomm
- [Best Photo Stitching Software: Combine 2 Pictures for a Panoramic View](#)thedigitalcameraexperts.com

about these links