

Compare Two Documents in Microsoft Word

What You Will Learn

- Use Word's Compare feature when Track Changes was not previously enabled.
- Select an original document and a revised document.
- Choose comparison options and create a separate comparison document.
- Interpret inserted and deleted material.
- Accept or reject revisions to create the version you want to keep.

Why Use Document Compare?

Word's Document Compare feature identifies differences between two versions of the same document. It is especially useful when revisions were made without Track Changes turned on. Word can create a third document that marks the differences for review.

Track Changes vs. Document Compare

Track Changes records revisions while editing occurs. **Document Compare** can identify revisions afterward by comparing an original file with a revised file.

Step-by-Step: Compare Two Documents

1. Identify the two versions.

Know which file is the earlier original and which is the revised copy. Clear filenames such as Original and Revised help prevent mistakes.

2. Open the Review tab.

Choose **Review** on the Ribbon, select **Compare**, and then choose **Compare** again.

3. Select the Original document.

Choose the earlier version in the Original document area.

4. Select the Revised document.

Choose the later edited version in the Revised document area.

5. Review the comparison options.

Choose the kinds of changes Word should compare. Character-level comparison can help reveal small edits such as corrected typos.

6. Show changes in a New document.

Choose **New document** so the comparison appears in a third file and the source documents remain unchanged.

7. Choose OK.

Word creates the comparison document and displays differences using revision markup similar to Track Changes.

Understanding the Comparison Result

The comparison document shows material that was inserted, deleted, or otherwise changed. In the video demonstration, deleted material appears with strikethrough markup and inserted material appears as added text. The exact display can vary with your Word markup settings.

Accepting and Rejecting Changes

Use the Review tab to move to the previous or next change. Choose **Accept** when you want to keep a revision and **Reject** when you prefer the original wording or content.

The Three Documents

Document	Purpose
Original	The earlier version used as the starting point.
Revised	The later version containing edits or changes.
Comparison	A separate document Word can create to show the differences.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- Reversing the original and revised files.
- Using vague filenames and losing track of which version is which.
- Assuming Track Changes had to be enabled before revisions were made.
- Putting comparison markup into a source document when you meant to preserve both source files.
- Accepting every change before reviewing it.
- Forgetting to save the reviewed result as a meaningful final version.

Suggested Practice

Create a short two- or three-paragraph document and save it as an original version. Save a second copy as a revised version. Change a heading, delete a sentence, add a few words, and replace at least one word. Use **Review > Compare > Compare** to create a new comparison document. Accept some changes, reject others, and save the result as your final version.

Quick Review

- When is Document Compare especially useful?
- Which file belongs in the Original document box?
- Why might character-level comparison be useful?
- What is the advantage of showing changes in a new document?
- What is the difference between Accept and Reject?