

Take shelter in Office with Crabby's tax-time tips

Applies to: Microsoft Office Excel 2007, Word 2007, Excel 2003, Word 2003, Excel 2002, Word 2002

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Crabby Office Lady

This column is not devoted to how you can dodge tax time; no, my goal is to help you with the taxes you have this year and to get you organized so you're not looking for tax answers from an Office columnist next year.

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Yes, it's that time of year. Then again, doesn't it seem like it's always that time of year? I mean, most of us are paying taxes (or sweating about not paying taxes) all year long. But from January to April, the dreaded "T" word just feels particularly rotten on the tongue.

Well, I'm not going to pretend that I'm a tax specialist. I don't even try to convince myself of that. No, I, like many others, send my taxes off to someone who knows how to untangle my yearly wad of receipts, W2s, 1099s, and whatnot. But that doesn't mean that I can't take steps to 1) Educate myself about the process, 2) Follow what's going on in the world of finance and tax law (as distasteful as *that* has become), and 3) Keep track of expenses during the next year. So, with that in mind, the rest of this column is devoted to the work that others have done for you (and me). Read, practice, and learn.

Get (and stay) organized

I keep seeing all these commercials on TV for tax preparers that talk about how they'll go over your previous years' tax returns and usually find money that you didn't even know was there. I'll bet you could have used that money last year or the year before, right? Well, if so, maybe your personal financial organization skills need some overhauling so that you can be sure you get what's coming to you.

- [Tax advice and finance templates](#)
Wow! Forget about having to search through templates and articles to find what you're looking for. This site is a repository of all things money: There are templates specifically for tax-related tasks; templates for business and personal finances; advice from MSN Money; articles ranging from how to use a function to get a stock quote in Excel to how to manage a personal budget.
- [Microsoft Money](#) (the software, not the green stuff)
Take a look at what this product offers, and download a full version of Money 2007 Essentials or Deluxe and try it for free for 90 days.
- [Stock investment performance](#)
Here's a really cool template that lets you see, at a glance, all your investments and the total cost versus the total value. It's a good way to help you decide what stays and what gets sold away this year.
- [Donation receipt](#)
As you know, if you itemize your donations, it can add up at the end of the year and give you a little money back. (So, is it really a donation if you get money back? Just an ethical question to ponder.) This template is designed for companies who want to give a receipt to the person donating, but you can also use it to track the donations you gave during the year. It has space for you to add your personal information (name, address, pledge amount, and so on) as well as the type, description, and value of the donation.

Work with the experts

Thankfully, scads of really knowledgeable people who understand the ins and outs of taxes are out there to help you. (And for those of you who are experts, you can jump ahead to **When you ARE the expert** to read up on the resources available to you on Office Online.) However, if you're not an expert, but are curious and want to know how to work your taxes yourself, take a gander at some of the articles I've called out below.

- [Cut your income tax bill](#)
Tips on how to find savings...if you just know where to look.

- [How to avoid an audit](#)
This article provides simple steps for staying under the IRS radar. And, as a bonus, read about the nine weirdest tax write-offs.
- [Deduct your home office](#)
It seems that the more people work from a home office, the more complicated the tax code becomes. This article gives you insight into who can deduct, what they can deduct, and how much they can deduct. Ka-ching!
- [MSN Money Community](#)
Got questions? You'll get answers. Need ideas? You'll find plenty. Find out what other investors are saying about money, the market, and your stocks. Access message boards, newsletters, live chats, and experts who write articles about stock-investing strategies. (I highly recommend "Supermodels" by Jon Markman.)
- [Tax breaks for the not-so-rich](#)
Making loopholes — I mean tax shelters — and other breaks work for you.
- [Tax preparation tips](#)
Get tips about refunds, tax extensions, preparation checklists, and more. Also, learn about the 10 tax goofs that many of us keep making.

When you ARE the expert

For those of you already in the business of advising folks like me at tax time, Office Online has a bevy of resources for you, too.

- [Help clients with year-end tax planning](#)
Cheryl Evans has been a CPA for more than 20 years and specializes in individual income tax. Cheryl also designed and programmed parts of SCS/Compute's Tax Machine software for professionals and Microsoft TaxSaver software for individuals. Yep, this lady knows what she is talking about.

After you read Cheryl's article, sit back, relax, and [view the demo about year-end tax planning](#). Learn how an Excel template can help you quickly forecast a client's annual federal income tax. Then use a Word meeting invitation template to invite your clients to end-of-year planning sessions and to inform them about their estimated taxes and the new tax laws that may affect their individual financial situations. (Then either accept their hugs...or prepare to duck.)

- [Instant payroll totals for quarterly tax reporting](#)
This demo, about dealing with those 941 quarterly tax forms, shows you how to get accurate payroll report summaries in less time than it takes to ask "is the end of the quarter is here again?" If you want a more in-depth, step-by-step look at how to do this with the list feature in Excel 2003, read the article of the same name: [Instant payroll totals for quarterly tax reporting](#).
- [IRS audit information tracker](#)
The IRS Audit Information Tracker template helps financial officers respond to audit-related communications and document requests. The template also helps financial officers manage questions or issues that arise from an auditor analysis.

(Now you math types can just scram because I have just a bit more unfinished business with the rest of the crowd.)

Good luck to you in your pursuit of a refund, dearie. And if you do get it, don't forget who helped you in your quest. (I can accept small gifts that will fit in my mail slot.)

"You don't pay taxes; they take taxes." — Chris Rock

About the author

[Annik Stahl](#), the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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