Microsoft Office 2003 and 2007 File Compatibility

Office 2007 introduced many new features, including new file types for Excel, PowerPoint, Word, and Access. However, these file types are not compatible with each other. Extra steps will need to be taken to use a 2007 file on a computer that runs Office 2003. Extra steps will also need to be taken to get the full functionality of Office 2007 when you have a file saved in a 2003 file format.

Using a 2003 File on a Computer with Office 2007 or 2010

How do I know if my document is saved in the 2003 or 2007 file format?

Look at the file extension

Office 2003

Word - .doc

Excel - .xls

PowerPoint - .ppt
Access - .mdb

Office 2007

Word - .docx

Excel - .xlsx

PowerPoint - .pptx

Access - .accdb

Check for Compatibility Mode

If you open a 2003 file in Office 2007, you will see Compatibility Mode in brackets at the top of your file.
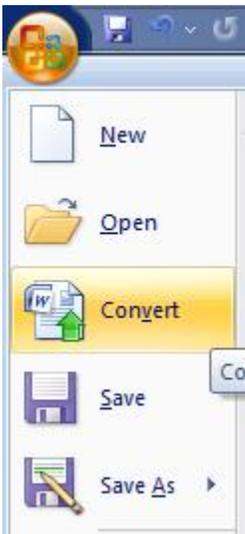

Complications

Occasionally when you are working on a 2003 file in Office 2007 you may find that a feature is not working properly. Recently I helped someone who was doing a mail merge in Word 2007. Everything worked fine until she tried to complete the merge. Then she got an error message. This was because the file was in Compatibility Mode (i.e. saved as a 2003 file type). Another person called because they were using a Word document with a table in it, and could not make a row in the table break across two pages. Again, this is because the file was in Compatibility Mode. Changing the files to a 2007 file format fixed both problems.

When working in Compatibility Mode, you will notice that many options are grayed out on the Ribbon. When your document is in Compatibility Mode, you cannot use a few of the features that are new to Office 2007. The most noticeable of these are the document Themes and Smart Art.
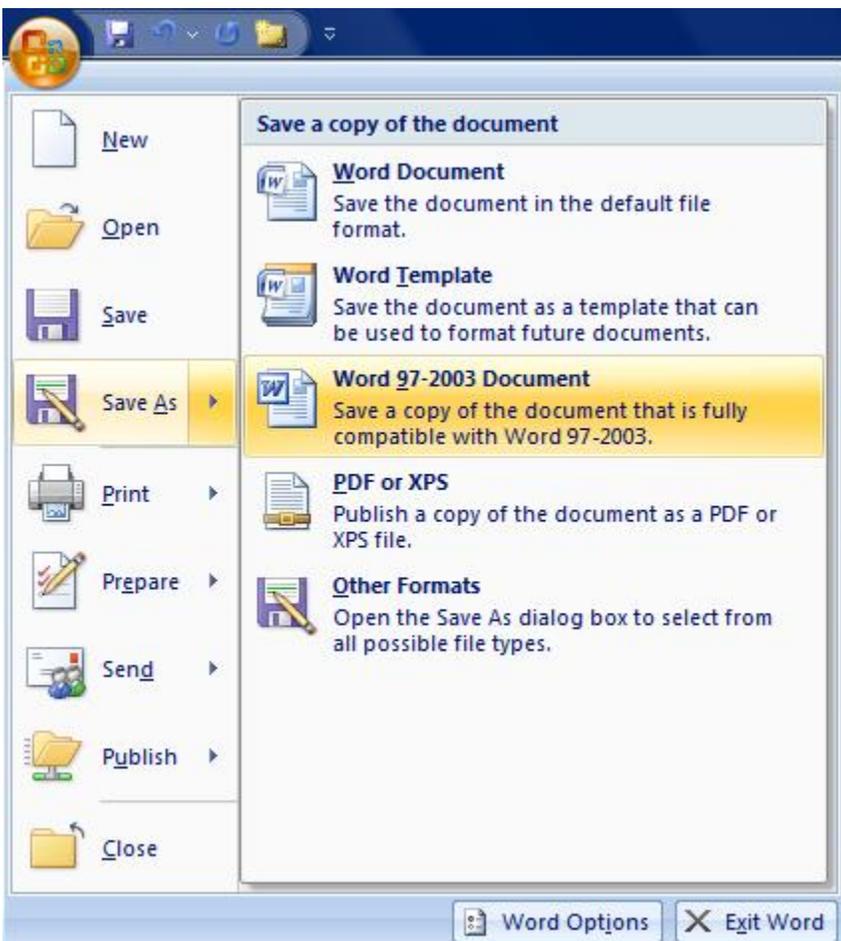
Converting from 2003 to 2007

If you are using Office 2007, and have a 2003 file open (in Compatibility Mode), you can Convert the file to 2007. Just click on the Office button in the top left corner and select Convert from the menu. It will be converted to a 2007 file format, and will stay in the 2007 format when you change it.

Saving as a 2003 File Type

If you have a file in a 2007 format that you would like to share with someone who may use Office 2003, you can save it with a 2003 file type. Click on the Office button in the top left corner, hover over the words Save As, and select Word 97 – 2003 Document.

Using a 2007 File on a Computer with Office 2003

If you have Office 2003 on your computer, and you want to open a file saved in an Office 2007 format, the only option you have is to download the compatibility tool. This will allow you to open a 2007 file in Office 2003.