

Getting a word count for Translations from MS Word

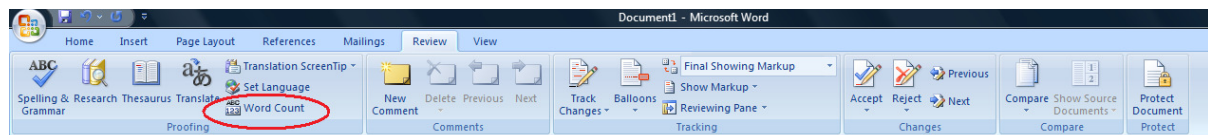
Why word counts?

Most of the translation industry calculates their charges and lead times based on the number of words they have to process. For example, a translation agency may quote for an English to French translation at £90 per 1000 words. If the document is 7,343 words in length the agency will know it will take one translator around 4 days to complete and cost their client £660.87. It makes life simple plus the alternatives to calculating translation charges are not as easily defined, for example charging per line, character, page or hour.



How to get a word count from a Word file?

Getting a word count from a Word file is simple. You simply click on “Review” in the panel at the top of the screen and then “Word Count”.



This is the word count that you would give to the translation agency.

Watch out!

Although it is simple to get a word count, it does not mean it is accurate. There are a few flaws with Microsoft Word that can lead to you underestimating the word count. Chances are that the translation agency will pick this up but it is best to be aware yourself. The following flaws also contribute to why word counts may differ between agencies; some will only use the Word tool (as above), others will use TRADOS and others may have their own word count tools.

Microsoft Word assumes that everything between spaces is a word. This means that it will count numbers and symbols. Translation tools on the other hand, will not include these characters when generating a word count, since it is assumed that they do not actually require translation. There is disagreement on whether numbers or symbols should be counted. Since they do not require translation, some think that they should not be included. Others argue that the translator still has to check and revise each number and symbol, which would warrant them to be included in the count, especially with documents containing a lot of data.

For example, ‘7 2 3 @ + 4’ would be considered six words by Microsoft Word and maybe zero words by another piece of software.

One of the above mentioned flaws with MS Word is that it does not include text from text boxes, auto-shapes, headers, footers and comments.

So MS Word when calculating this document would not count the words in this text box meaning it misses off 22 words.

Again here it would miss 7 words

And do not forget to check whether your document has footers¹

For a document containing only a few text boxes this is not a great issue but there are occasions when a file has been written almost entirely in text boxes. Some people also convert PDF files to Word resulting in many text boxes that are not picked up by MS Word.

Another thing to remember is that any text in images will not be read by Word as they are simply not text at all in its eyes. So although the text below in this image may be crucial to the translation, the text would not be calculated as it is an image.

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¹ For example here MS Word would have missed out 15 words on its word count

MS Word also does not include text in embedded objects (also called OLE: Object Linking and Embedding) such as an Excel worksheet embedded in a Word document, or diagrams with text. Just like text boxes, or a longer document with a lot of data containing many embedded complex Excel sheets, the low word count numbers you would generate from MS Word would be significant. So for example, the two embedded files below (which could potentially have another 10,000 words would not be incorporated in the word count from Word)



EXCEL EMBED.xlsx WORD EMBED.docx

Translation Word Count Tools

There are many tools on the market now which produce word counts. *Wordfast* is a translation tool that counts footnotes, endnotes, headers, and footers. *Trados* goes one step further and also counts non-grouped text fields. If looking for some software it is worth asking for a free trial and seeing which one produces the best results.

Ask the Agency

If unsure about your word count, the easiest solution is to ask the translation agency carrying out the assignment!