

Sometimes it is forgotten that computers are not at all bright. They are only capable of doing precisely what they are instructed to do. But they do it without question; with infinite patience and until they are given new instructions. They are not awkward, irritable or uncooperative because they do not know how to be. As long as anyone thinks that they incorporate such human frailties a problem is harder to understand and to solve.

A friend rang with a printing problem. For some reason a list he normally produced without difficulty suddenly went haywire. It was an address list on a spreadsheet. It had columns for name; address and telephone number and ran for about five pages. Suddenly it would print only the names. He looked at adjusting the Print Area, but that was already correct.

When looking at the print preview before actually instructing the print, the first page showed only the names alongside the row number. Not at all satisfactory.

Bearing in mind the situation explained at the start [dumb machine; strict obedience] it was discovered by scrolling down the Print Preview, that the 'missing' information was previewed on pages 6 to 10 and would have been obediently printed – just not where it was wanted.

When setting the print area my friend had selected File>Page Setup>Sheet. On the Sheet Tab he had set the correct print area.

Further investigation revealed that he had instructed the computer to print the row numbers and column headers by accidentally ticking the box that triggered the printing. The computer dutifully added a column on the left-hand side for the row numbers. The effect was to push the address column to the right just enough to make it too wide to fit within the remaining width of the page.

Un-ticking the box and saying OK changed the overall printing instruction to its original condition and the problem went away.

Another solution would have been to select File>Page Setup>Page and adjust the scaling to, say, 95% and say OK, but that would have left the row and column headers in place.

Or, within the same Tab, he could have selected 'Fit to:' 1Page wide by 6 pages tall and let the computer decide what the scaling percent would need to be.

The address column was so wide only because the occasional address was international and consequently longer than most.

It was a simple matter to format such a cell to allow automatic wrapping of the long addresses onto a second line by right-clicking on the cell>Format cells>Alignment. On the alignment Tab tick the Wrap Text box and in the Text Alignment section select Vertical>Top.

Once one cell has been so formatted the format Painter can be used to 'paint' the format into any others.

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In Brief

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