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A Bit Of Privacy In Word

You've written a document in Word but you don't want anyone else who uses the same computer to know that you wrote the document - let alone to see what you wrote. Maybe it's 'Job Application.doc' where the title alone would be a giveaway. How can you ensure your privacy? Word leaves little traces of its work all around your computer; most of the time that's handy for finding or recovering a document but a pain when you're trying to be covert.

Deleting the document isn't enough, for you also have to remove the backup document (assuming that option is selected). Look for the matching document with a .WBK extension. Make sure you empty the recycle bin after deletion.

The MRU 'Most Recently Used' list at the bottom of the File menu will show the last n documents you opened. To remove an entry from that list press Alt+Ctrl+Hyphen (Command+Option+Hyphen on the Mac) and use the minus-sign cursor to select the item you want to remove from the MRU list. Use the hyphen key on the main keyboard not the numeric pad. Word's name for this shortcut is ToolsCustomizeRemoveMenuShortcut .

In Word 2000 there's the History list in the File | Open menu that's an extended MRU list going back for a long time. This list is made up of shortcut files in the History folder so you can delete the shortcut using Windows Explorer. An easier way is to use the File | Open dialog itself, click on History and right mouse click on the shortcut you want to remove and select Delete (remember to empty the Windows Recycle Bin).

Another shortcut to a recently opened document is in the Windows Start | Documents menu. In recent versions of Windows you can just right mouse click on the shortcut entry and choose Delete. For Windows 95 you can clear the contents of the Documents menu from Start | Settings | Taskbar | Start Menu Programs | Clear.

If you emailed the document, remember to remove the sent message with attachment from the 'Send Items' folder of your mail program.

That should be enough for most people, for these methods remove the mentions of the document that will be seen by the idly curious. If you want to be complete then delete files from the /Windows/Temp folder which may have a temporary file created by Word that has parts of the document. The folder where you saved the original document may also have a temporary file (it depends on your version of Word) so look for anything there that has a similar name to your secret document. The AutoRecover file folder (check in Tools | Options | File Locations) may have something.

There's also the possibility that fragments of your document are stored in the Windows virtual memory system. It's theoretically possible to recover information from the paging file but we don't know of anyone who's managed it. They'd have to be very determined and capable.

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