



An Extended Guide · No. 1924

# Mailing Labels & Envelopes — Mail Merge for Holiday Cards and Club Lists

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Turn an address list into printed labels or envelopes, start to finish

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**★ Mail merge sounds scary — it's really just three pieces**

A list of addresses, a label or envelope layout, and the button that pours one into the other. That's the whole trick. Do it once for your holiday cards or club roster and you'll never hand-address envelopes again.

## Turn a list into labels, the easy way

If you address a stack of holiday cards each December, or send newsletters to a club, 'mail merge' is the feature that does it for you. It takes your list of names and prints them onto labels or envelopes automatically. This guide makes it genuinely simple.

I'm Bill, from Bill's Home Tech in Portage County. Mail merge has a fearsome reputation it doesn't deserve. Once you've seen the three pieces fit together, you'll wonder why you ever addressed envelopes by hand.

We'll build your address list, set up the labels or envelopes, and print them — step by calm step. Keep this guide beside you and go at your own pace.

## The whole guide, on one page

Mail merge is three pieces working together. Remember these and the rest is detail.

- ❑ Piece one: a list of addresses, usually kept in Excel (one row per person).
- ❑ Piece two: the layout — a sheet of labels, or an envelope.
- ❑ Piece three: Word's Mailings tab, which merges the list into the layout.
- ❑ You build the list once and reuse it every year.
- ❑ Buy label sheets by their number (like 'Avery 5160') and match that number in Word.
- ❑ Always print one test page on plain paper before using your real labels.

### ✓ Build the list once, reuse forever

The real payoff is the list. Type everyone's address once, and every future mailing — cards, newsletters, invitations — is just a few clicks.

## Piece one: your address list

Everything starts with a tidy list of names and addresses. Excel is the natural home for it, but it's simpler than it sounds.

Open Excel and make a simple table: put a heading in the top row of each column — First Name, Last Name, Address, City, State, ZIP — then type one person per row beneath. Keep each piece of the address in its own column; that's what lets Word slot them into the right spots later.

Save this file with a clear name like 'Christmas Card List' in your Documents folder. This one file becomes the master you reuse every year — just update it when someone moves or a new grandbaby arrives.

### ✓ One piece of address per column

The secret to smooth merging is keeping first name, last name, street, city, and so on in separate columns. It feels fussy, but it's what makes the magic work.

## Keeping your list clean and reusable

A few good habits now make every future mailing effortless. These are worth the small effort.

- Use clear column headings in the top row — Word reads those to know what goes where.
- Keep one person (or one household) per row, with no blank rows in the middle.
- Put apartment or unit numbers in the address column with the street.
- Double-check ZIP codes — a wrong one is the most common cause of returned mail.
- Save it where you'll find it, and back it up so years of addresses aren't lost.

Think of this list as a little address book that happens to live in Excel. The tidier you keep it, the less work every mailing becomes — and the fewer cards come back marked 'return to sender.'

### ★ I'll help you build the list from your old cards

If your addresses live in a shoebox of old envelopes, I can help you turn them into a clean reusable list once — and then mailings are easy forever. Call (330) 200-8042.

## Piece two: labels or envelopes?

You can merge your list onto peel-and-stick labels or print straight onto envelopes. Here's how to choose.

### Labels

Sheets of peel-off labels run through your printer, then you stick them on. Great for larger mailings — holiday cards, a club newsletter — because you print many at once. You buy them by a number (like Avery 5160), which you tell Word so it lines everything up perfectly.

### Envelopes

You can also print the address directly onto each envelope. This looks a touch more personal and skips the labels, but you feed envelopes one at a time, so it suits smaller batches. Printers vary in how happily they take envelopes.

#### ✓ Labels for many, envelopes for few

A rough rule: dozens of holiday cards favor labels (fast, batch printing); a handful of nicer letters can go on printed envelopes. Either works — pick what suits your printer and patience.

## Setting up labels in Word

Here's the heart of it. Word's Mailings tab walks you through, and it's more guided than you'd expect.

- ❑ In Word, click the Mailings tab, then 'Start Mail Merge,' then 'Labels.'
- ❑ Choose your label product by its number (for example, Avery 5160) and click OK.
- ❑ Click 'Select Recipients,' then 'Use an Existing List,' and pick your Excel file.
- ❑ Click 'Insert Merge Field' to place First Name, Last Name, Address, and so on, arranging them like an address.
- ❑ Click 'Update Labels' so every label copies that arrangement.
- ❑ Click 'Preview Results' to see real names fill in.

That 'Insert Merge Field' step is where you build the address template once — name on top, street below, city/state/ZIP on the last line, with spaces and commas just like you'd write it. Word then repeats it for everyone.

### ★ The first merge is the hump

The very first time through, this is fiddly — after that it's second nature. If you'd like, I'll sit with you for your first merge and you'll have it for good. Call (330) 200-8042.

## Setting up envelopes in Word

Printing onto envelopes follows the same path, with a couple of envelope-specific steps.

On the Mailings tab, choose 'Start Mail Merge,' then 'Envelopes.' Word asks for your envelope size (a standard #10 is the common business size) and lets you set a return address. Then you select your Excel list and insert the merge fields where the recipient's address goes, just as with labels.

The trickiest part of envelopes is physical: feeding them into your printer the right way. Your printer usually has a little diagram showing which way the envelope faces. A test on one envelope saves a jam and wasted stationery.

### **! Mind which way the envelope feeds**

Printers are picky about envelope direction. Check the little icon on the paper tray, and print one test envelope before running the whole batch.

## Always print a test page first

This one habit saves more wasted labels and envelopes than anything else. Never skip it.

Before you load your real label sheets, print your merge onto a plain sheet of paper. Hold it up against a real label sheet to the light: do the addresses land inside the label rectangles? If yes, swap in the real labels and print for keeps.

For envelopes, print one test envelope first. Check the address sits straight and in the right place, and that it fed correctly. A single test beats discovering a problem after you've ruined ten envelopes.

### ✓ Plain paper is free; labels aren't

A sheet of scrap paper costs nothing; a sheet of labels doesn't. Always do the plain-paper check first — it's the cheapest insurance in this whole project.

## Printing the whole batch

Once your test looks right, printing everyone is the easy, satisfying finish.

- ❑ On the Mailings tab, click 'Finish & Merge,' then 'Print Documents.'
- ❑ Choose All to print every label or envelope (or a range for part).
- ❑ Load your real labels or envelopes, facing the way your test confirmed.
- ❑ Click Print and let it run.
- ❑ Save your Word merge setup too, so next year is even quicker.

And that's the whole job done — a stack of addressed labels or envelopes, in the time it used to take to hand-write a handful. Next year, you just update the list and reprint.

### ✓ Save the merge for next time

Keep the Word file you built, linked to your Excel list. Next season, open it, refresh, and print — most of the work is already done.

## Two kinds of readers, two sets of needs

How much setup is worth it depends on how many you're sending. Find yourself below.

### If you send a short list

A dozen holiday cards, a few thank-you notes. The list is small enough that the full merge might be more setup than it saves.

- For just a few, printing one envelope at a time may be simplest.
- Or keep a short label sheet and merge — still quick to set up.
- A small list is a gentle way to learn the steps without pressure.
- Either way, build the list once so next time is faster.

### If you send a long list

Fifty holiday cards, a whole club roster, a church newsletter. Here mail merge truly earns its keep, saving hours.

- Labels are ideal — you print many per sheet in one run.
- A clean Excel list is well worth the one-time effort.
- Save the merge setup to reuse every year.
- A test page is essential before committing all those labels.

#### ★ Big list or small, I'll get you set up

Whether it's twelve cards or two hundred, I'll help you build the list and run the merge once, so it's easy every year after. Call (330) 200-8042.

## Buying the right labels

A little know-how at the store prevents the most common label frustration: a layout that won't line up.

Label sheets come in standard layouts, each with a product number printed on the box — Avery 5160 (a common address-label size) is the classic. Word knows these numbers and lays out your addresses to match exactly. So the one thing to note when buying is that number.

When you set up the merge, you pick that same number in Word. Match them and everything lines up; mismatch them and addresses drift off the labels. Store-brand labels usually list which Avery number they're equivalent to.

### ✓ Write the label number down

Jot the label product number (like 5160) on your shopping list and in your Word file. It's the single detail that makes labels line up perfectly.

## When labels don't line up

If addresses print a little off the labels, don't despair — it's almost always one of a few simple causes.

- **Wrong label number:** the number in Word must match the box. This is the top cause.
- **Printer scaling:** make sure the print setting is 100% or 'actual size,' not 'fit to page,' which shrinks everything.
- **Labels loaded crooked:** square them up in the tray and try again.
- **Wrong paper size:** confirm it's set to Letter (8.5 by 11).

Fix the mismatch, run another plain-paper test, and you'll be back on track. This is exactly why we test on plain paper first — so a little drift costs nothing to catch.

### ! Turn off 'fit to page' for labels

The sneaky culprit is a printer set to shrink pages to fit. For labels, you want 100% actual size, or every address creeps off its label.

## Other things mail merge is great for

Once you've got a list and the knack, mail merge helps with far more than December cards.

- **Club and church mailings:** newsletters, dues reminders, event invitations to the whole roster.
- **Return-address labels:** a sheet of your own address to stick on outgoing mail.
- **Party or reunion invitations:** address a big batch in one go.
- **Personalized letters:** the same letter to many people, each with their own name and details filled in.

That last one is the hidden gem: mail merge can put each person's name right into the body of a letter ('Dear Mary,') across a whole list. It's how organizations send friendly, personal-looking letters in bulk.

### ★ Running a club or church mailing?

Big recurring mailings are exactly where a good setup saves real hours. I'm glad to build yours so volunteers can run it easily each time. Call (330) 200-8042.

## Common mistakes, and how to dodge them

A handful of slip-ups cause nearly all mail-merge grief. Know them and sidestep them.

- **Jamming the whole address in one column** — keep each part separate so Word can place them.
- **Skipping the test page** and wasting real labels on a misalignment.
- **Mismatching the label number** between the box and Word.
- **Leaving 'fit to page' on**, which shrinks labels out of alignment.
- **Forgetting to save the list and setup**, so you redo it all next year.

### ✓ Test, match, save

Three words prevent most trouble: test on plain paper, match the label number, and save your list and setup. Do those and merges go smoothly.

## If the full merge feels like too much

Mail merge is powerful, but it isn't the only way. For small jobs, simpler paths are perfectly fine.

For just a few envelopes, Word's Envelopes button (on the Mailings tab) lets you type one address and print one envelope, no list required. For a short run of labels, you can even type directly onto a label template. There's no shame in the simple route for small jobs.

Save the full merge for when the numbers make it worth it. For twelve cards, typing a dozen envelopes may genuinely be faster than setting up a merge. Use the tool that fits the size of the task.

### ✓ Match the method to the pile

A few: type them directly. A big stack: merge from a list. Choosing the right approach for the size is itself a little bit of mastery.

## You can master this

Mail merge intimidates almost everyone at first, and almost everyone gets it with one patient run-through.

The reason it feels hard is only that it has several steps the first time. None of them is difficult — they just need to go in order. Once you've watched real names flow onto a sheet of labels, the mystery vanishes and it becomes one of your favorite time-savers.

Take it slowly, keep this guide open, and do a small list first. By your second mailing you'll feel like an old hand, and you'll have bought yourself hours every holiday season.

### ★ Let's do your first one together

A single guided run-through is usually all it takes for mail merge to 'click.' I'd be glad to walk you through your first real mailing. Call (330) 200-8042.

## Questions to ask yourself

A few answers point you to the right approach.

### **Q: How many am I sending?**

A few favors typing envelopes directly; dozens or more favors a full merge onto labels.

### **Q: Do I have my addresses in one place?**

If not, building a clean Excel list is step one — and the part that pays off every future mailing.

### **Q: Labels or envelopes?**

Labels for big batches and speed; printed envelopes for a more personal touch on smaller runs.

### **Q: Will I do this again next year?**

If yes, save the list and merge setup — next time becomes a few clicks.

#### **✓ Let the numbers decide**

The size of the mailing answers most of these. Big list, merge to labels, save everything. Small list, keep it simple.

## A few more worth answering

These come up once you start your first merge.

### **Q: Can I use a list I already keep in Excel?**

Yes — that's ideal. As long as each part of the address is in its own column with a heading, Word can merge straight from it.

### **Q: What if someone's address changes?**

Update that one row in your Excel list. Next time you merge, the new address flows through automatically.

### **Q: My addresses print off the labels — why?**

Usually a mismatched label number or a printer set to shrink to fit. Match the number and set printing to 100% actual size.

### **Q: Can mail merge put names inside a letter too?**

Yes. The same feature can insert each person's name into the body ('Dear John,') across a whole list — great for club letters.

#### **★ Stuck on a step?**

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll get you past whichever step has you stuck. Mail merge is very teachable once someone shows you.

## The whole job, recapped

Here's the entire process as a short, repeatable routine.

- ❑ Build a clean address list in Excel — one part of the address per column.
- ❑ In Word's Mailings tab, start the merge and choose labels or envelopes.
- ❑ Pick your label number, select your list, and arrange the merge fields.
- ❑ Preview, then print one plain-paper test and check the alignment.
- ❑ Load real labels or envelopes and finish the merge to print.
- ❑ Save the list and setup for next time.

Follow that once and you've turned an afternoon of hand-addressing into a few minutes of clicks — this year and every year after.

### ✓ The list is the treasure

Guard that address list and keep it current. It's the thing that makes every future mailing nearly instant.

## Common Questions

The questions I hear most about labels, envelopes, and mail merge.

### **Q: What exactly is mail merge?**

It's a feature that takes a list of addresses and automatically prints them onto labels, envelopes, or into letters — so you don't address each one by hand.

### **Q: Where do I keep my address list?**

Usually in Excel, with one person per row and each part of the address (name, street, city, state, ZIP) in its own column with a heading.

### **Q: How do I keep addresses from printing off the labels?**

Match the label product number (like Avery 5160) in Word to the box, set printing to 100% actual size, and always test on plain paper first.

### **Q: Can I reuse my setup next year?**

Yes. Save both the Excel list and the Word merge file. Next season you update the list and reprint — most of the work is already done.

### **★ Want a hand with your holiday cards?**

Setting folks up so their December card-addressing takes minutes is a happy little job. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and we'll get you sorted.

## The bottom line

Here's mail merge in a nutshell.

Keep a tidy address list in Excel, use Word's Mailings tab to pour it onto labels or envelopes, test on plain paper, then print the batch. The first run takes patience; every run after is quick, because you reuse the list and setup.

For a few pieces, typing them directly is fine. For a big stack — holiday cards, a club roster — mail merge turns an afternoon's chore into a few minutes. Either way, you're in control, and your mail goes out looking neat and professional.

### ✓ Learn it once, save hours forever

Mail merge is one of those skills that pays you back for years. One patient learning session, and every future mailing is easy.

## You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made printing mailing labels and envelopes feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site — installing Office, sorting out a sign-in, setting up a document — I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee.

### ★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

# The Three Pieces of a Merge

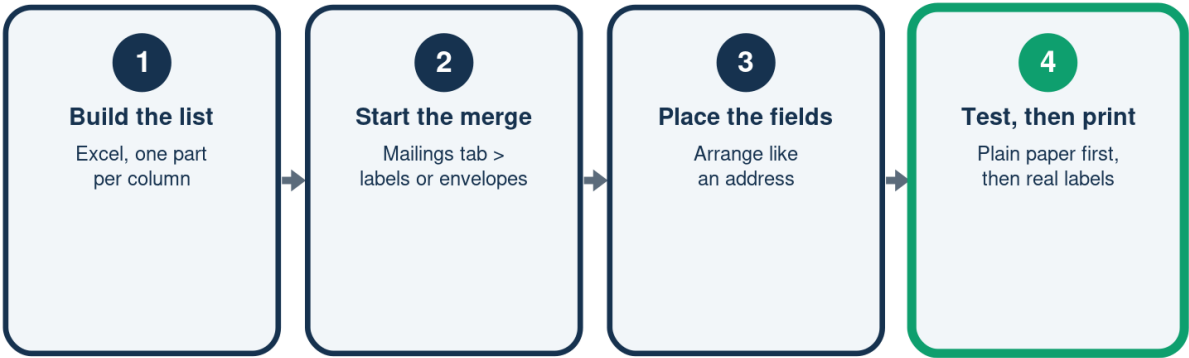
How they fit together

|            | The piece         | What it is          |
|------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| The list   | In Excel          | Names & addresses   |
| The layout | Labels or         | envelopes           |
| The merge  | Word Mailings tab | Pours one in other  |
| The test   | Plain paper       | Check before labels |

A list, a layout, and the merge button -- that's the whole trick.

## A Merge in Four Steps

The calm order to follow



Fiddly the first time, second nature after that.

# Labels vs. Envelopes

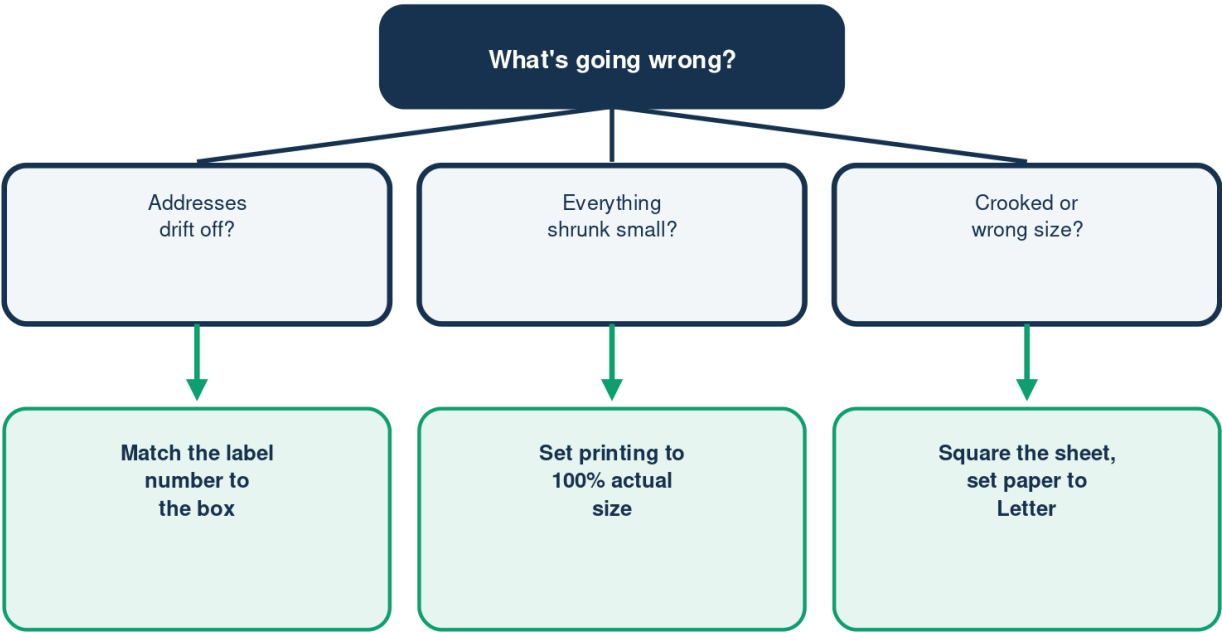
Which suits your mailing

|              | Labels         | Envelopes       |
|--------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Best for     | Big batches    | Smaller runs    |
| Speed        | Many per sheet | One at a time   |
| Look         | Neat, quick    | More personal   |
| Printer fuss | Low            | Pickier feeding |

Labels for many; printed envelopes for a personal touch on few.

# Labels Won't Line Up?

Match the cause to the fix



Always test on plain paper first -- a misalignment then costs nothing.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



## Need a Real Person?

You do not have to remember all of it.  
You just have to remember you can call.  
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— Bill

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### Prefer help without a visit?

Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



## A Note From Bill

### A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

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