A Macro to View and Insert Variables 0-9
WordPerfect Magazine
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WordPerfect has the ability to memorize the words and phrases you need. You can then put that text in your document on demand, with a single keystroke combination. This ability comes from the macro feature called variables.

What Is a Variable Anyway?

There are hundreds of lengthy, technical treatises that explain computer variables. I'm not going to bore you with any of them. Think of a variable as a manila folder. Just like you can write something on paper and put that paper in a folder, you can put words or numbers in a variable.

Just like you put labels on your folders so you can tell them apart, you give each variable a name.

Finally, any time you want to see what's in a particular folder, you just look for the label and open it up. Similarly, any time you want to see what's in a computer variable, you just use its name.

The concept of variables may still be a little hazy, so maybe some hands-on experience will clear things up. Here's how you can use variables to get around the tedium of having to type and retype words you use frequently.

1. In a document screen with text in it, move your cursor to the beginning of a word or phrase you use frequently, such as "inter-deity intrigue." By the way, variables can't use attributes like bold and italics, so your word or phrase must be plain text.

2. Press Block (Alt-F4), then use the arrow keys to highlight the word or phrase. This is the text that will be put in (or "assigned to," as computer nerds like to say) the variable. Variables can only hold 128 characters, though, so don't highlight an entire page of text. Highlighting the text is comparable to writing something on paper that you plan to put in the folder.

3. Press Macro Commands (Ctrl-Page Up). At the bottom of the screen, the prompt Variable: appears. Here's where you give the variable a name, like you'd put a label on a folder.

4. Press 1 for the variable name, then press (Enter). You can actually use either numbers or words for variable names, but it's easier to get at variables that are named with the numbers 0-9.

There. You've done it. You've created a variable named 1, and it contains text you've specified. So, how do you use the variable? Well, simply move your cursor to where you want that text to go. (Just in case, you may want to be at a blank document screen.) Now, hold down the (Alt) key and press the number that goes with the variable name. Since you named this variable "1," you press (Alt-1). Your word or phrase zips onto the screen in nothing flat. Note: The number you press while holding down the (Alt) key must be a number from the top of the keyboard, *not* the numeric keypad.

You can use steps 1-4 to assign different text to other variables, 0-9. You can then put the text in those variables on-screen by pressing the (Alt) key and that number. You should keep a few things in mind about variables:

- Variables only last until you exit WP. All variables are erased when you exit WordPerfect.

- A variable can hold only one item at a time. If you assign variable 6 the word "Apollo," you cannot also assign it the phrase "Jupiter is a wimp." If you do, "Jupiter is a wimp" will replace "Apollo," and not be added to it.

The great thing about variables is they're reusable. Just because you used the variable to put the text on the screen once doesn't mean you can't do it again. As many times as you press (Alt-1), that text will be inserted.

Variables are also recyclable. If you decide that you want variable 1 to contain different text, just follow steps 1-4 again, highlighting something different.

Using Variables In Macros

So far, you've been using variables outside of the Macro feature. This is fine for doing things like avoiding extra typing. The real power of variables, however, is when you use them inside macros. For example, you can create a macro that shows a menu of the text you've assigned to variables 0-9. The macro is included here as VARMENU.WPM. This menu is helpful to remind you which variables hold what. You can then press the number of the variable you want, and it's inserted into the document at your cursor.

Begin the process by pressing (Home), Macro Define (Ctrl-F10). At the Define macro: prompt, type varmenu, then press (Enter). At the Description: prompt, type Menu of variables 0-9. Press (Enter).

Using the Macro

Use this macro as a way to remind yourself which of the variables 0-9 have values, and what these values are. From a document screen, press Macro (Alt-F10), type "varmenu" and press (Enter). A menu appears that lists all your variables 0-9.

If you just needed a reminder, you can then press Cancel (F1) to make the menu disappear. If, however, you want to insert one of the words or phrases, press the number corresponding to the variable. That's all there is to this macro. Continue to assign values to these variables in the way described earlier in this article.

If there aren't any variables assigned, nothing will appear next to the variable on the menu.

Understanding the Macro

The first line of the macro means that if you press Cancel (F1) while the macro is playing, the macro will skip down to line 15, and then end. This is just a tricky way of making sure that the Cancel (F1) key works normally while the macro is running.

Line 2 begins one of the longest commands you'll ever see in your life – it goes all the way to line 13! Yep, all of those lines are part of the {CHAR} command.

It's a good idea to become acquainted with the {CHAR} command, since it plays such a big part in this macro. You use the command when you want the macro to show a message, wait for you to press a key, then remember that key. This is the command you would use when you want your macro to ask a "Yes" or "No" question, then remember whether "Y" or "N" was pressed.

Now, let's take a look at the {CHAR} command's anatomy. When you press MacroCommands (Ctrl-Page Up) and look at the {CHAR} command, it reads {CHAR}var~message~. "Var" and "message" are the command's two "parameters" (parts); the tildes (~) are used to show where one parameter ends and the next begins.

The first parameter, var, is where you put the name of the variable that will contain the key you press. The word "var" means that a variable name always comes right after the {CHAR} command. On line 2 of Figure 2, you can see that the variable name being used by this {CHAR} command is "Key." This means that when you play the macro, whatever number you press will be contained in variable Key. If you press 6, variable Key will have a 6 in it. If you press 9, variable Key will contain a 9.

The second part of the {CHAR} command is its message. In this case the message part of the command goes all the way to the end of line 13. It's a menu that lists what words and phrases variables 0-9 contain. The tilde at the end of line 13 tells the macro that the {CHAR} command is over.

Like the {CHAR} command, other commands collect information and store that information in a variable. For instance, the {TEXT} command works much like the {CHAR} command, except it lets you type in whole words instead of a single character. You'll learn more of these commands in future episodes of this column.

Lines 3-12, the lines that create the menu shown in Figure 1, are quite a bit alike. Let's look at line 3. The first part, Variable 1:, is just text telling you what variable is coming up.

Next comes {VARIABLE}1~. This is simply WP's way of saying "variable 1," which is the same thing as when you pressed (Alt-1) earlier. So, the menu will show whatever is contained inside variable 1. The {Enter} command then makes room for the next line of the menu.

After you've made a line like this for each variable from 0-9, line 13 instructs you to press a number for the variable to insert. The {CHAR} command then makes the macro pause until you press one of those numbers. Line 14 then uses variables in a very tricky way to put the contents of that variable in your document. Line 16 then uses a {DISPLAY OFF} and {DISPLAY ON} command side by side in order to clear the menu off your screen.