

Acrobat Forms Tips and Techniques

2 Making a Table

Many forms use tables or arrays of similar fields for adding numbers or detailing items. Purchase orders, expense reports, and bills of lading are just some examples of how groups of fields are used in this manner. Unfortunately, Acrobat Forms Maker version 3.5 doesn't include the ability to create arrays in an automatic manner. But with a little knowledge about accurate placement of fields, multiple selection and alignment, and the new grid feature, this can be a much less painful authoring procedure.

Movement/Re-sizing Using Arrow Keys

Acrobat forms allows you to precisely move and re-size your form fields which can be important if you have a background for your form that requires exact placement of fields.

- 1) Open this [sample file](#) (FrmTnT02.pdf). We will use this sample in this and some of the following sections and create a complete working invoice for Select the form tool so that you can edit the form fields on the page.
- 2) Create a text field in the top-left cell in the table (the spot that is marked "Create your table here"). Don't worry if it doesn't sit exactly in the right place or is exactly the right size. Name the field **Item.0** and make sure it has no border/background, is set to single-line, 12pt Helvetica in blue with left alignment.
- 3) Select the field and using the arrow keys move the field to the upper left-hand corner of the top-left field in the table. The arrow keys allow for precise placement of the field.
- 4) Select the field and holding down the *Control* key use the arrows to resize the field to exactly fit the top-left cell of the table. The arrow keys in combination with the control key allow for precise sizing of the field.

Automatic Renaming

Acrobat Forms has the ability to automatically increment/decrement field names if they conform to a certain style. This feature helps to quickly copy and rename fields in a table.

- 1) *Control Drag-Copy* the previously created field to the cell just below it. Use the *Shift* key to constrain your movement in the vertical direction. Use the arrow keys to get the field placed correctly.
- 2) It is typical for cells in a table to be named with a numeric suffix (e.g. .0, .1, etc.). Acrobat Forms recognizes this type of numeric suffix and allows you to rename fields using the plus ('+') and minus ('-') keys. Hit the plus key to rename your new field to **Item.1**.
- 3) Create the additional fields in the table: **Item.2** and **Item.3** using the aforementioned technique.

Alignment

There is a simple method for making sure that all fields are the same size and aligned correctly. This speeds up creation of columns and rows of fields.

- 1) Select all of the fields you have created so far using marquee select or shift-click.
- 2) Drag-copy the fields to the right of the existing fields and re-name them to **Price.0**, **Price.1**, etc. Ensure that the text alignment is set to right align (see the Options tab).
- 3) Click outside of your selection (the selection disappears) and then click on **Price.0**. Resize this field to match the background lines.
- 4) Select all of the **Price** fields using marquee select or shift-click.
- 5) Notice that one of the fields is red and that the rest of the fields are colored blue. The red field is your "anchor" field. You can change your anchor field by clicking on other fields in the selection.
- 6) Select the menu item **Edit⇒Fields⇒Size⇒Both**. This will ensure that all fields in your selection are exactly the same size as the anchor field.
- 7) Select the menu item **Edit⇒Fields⇒Align⇒Left**. This will ensure that all fields in your selection are aligned on their left edges.

Using the Grid

All of the precise movement and alignment of fields techniques that you have learned so far can be greatly enhanced through the use of the grid.

- 1) Select the **View⇒Snap to Grid** and **View⇒Show Grid** menu items if they haven't already been selected. Notice that a grid is overlaid on top of the form.
- 2) Using the **File⇒Preferences⇒Grid...** dialog you can change the color, offset, and shape of the grid. For our purposes, set the width to 72, the height to 72, the number of subdivisions to 12, the horizontal offset to 0, the vertical offset to 8 and then click OK. Notice how the grid now neatly aligns to our background.
- 3) Make two more columns (**Quantity.#** and **SubTotal.#**) using the snap-to-grid feature, copy-drag, or any of the other techniques discussed so far. These fields should be text fields with right alignment.
- 4) Make a **SalesTax**, a **Shipping**, and a **GrandTotal** field and save your work. This completes our invoice. In subsequent sections, you'll learn how to add calculations and formatting to fields.

Summary

You've learned to make tables of fields by precisely positioning fields using the arrow keys and renaming those fields quickly using the plus and minus keys. You've also learned to align fields and use the grid to make drawing easier. You should experiment with these techniques and those discussed in the previous lesson: pretty soon form authoring will be second nature and you can concentrate on more advanced problems like calculations, formatting and validation of field data.