"Columnbo" v2.1
Column formatting utility.
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Introduction

Columnbo is an easy to use utility for formatting plain text files into columns of information, allowing them to be read by a spreadsheet program such as Excel™. This simply involves inserting tabs at fixed positions within each line of text. But the real beauty of Columnbo is that you needn't worry about remembering column positions. Columnbo gives you the control to place column positions where you want, intuitively and easily. Simply click in the ruler to drag column markers where you wish.

What's it good for?

Many popular spreadsheet, database, and graphing programs allow you to import text files from various sources, but depend on information being formatted into tab separated columns. Columnbo was originally conceived to allow importing columns of accounting figures from a large computer into Excel™. This computer generated fixed columns of text and figures separated by spaces. Without embedded tabs separating the columns, entire lines of text would be read into the first cell of each row. A convenient solution for this apparently simple task was elusive, and nobody wanted to type in the tabs!

Using Columnbo

To use Columnbo, choose "Open..." from the File menu to read in your text file. Then, click in the ruler at the top of the window to insert a *column marker* where you'd like the tab to go. The column marker may then be dragged to any visible column in the window, or removed by dragging it outside the window. Dragging one column marker over another results in that column being marked only once.

Once you've positioned all your columns, choosing the "Save as..." command from the File menu brings up a standard dialog box with the filename filled in for you. Columnbo creates a new file with tabs inserted at the marked positions for each line. Columnbo does not alter the original file in any way.

The Columnbo Edit menu supports standard editing commands for use with desk accessories, and a "Clear columns" command which clears all marked columns of the front window.

From the Options menu, Columnbo offers several choices to make your column formatting easier. First, by selecting the "Show tabs as ◊", you can see if there are any spurious tabs already in the file. The "Output options..." dialog box gives you the ability to filter certain characters from the output file. Choose "Convert pre-existing tabs to spaces" to ensure your file only contains tabs at the column positions you have marked. This feature also serves as a convenient way to *kill* tabs in a file instead of inserting them. The "Remove leading spaces" option helps clean up the output columns. This removes spaces between a column marker and the first character of the next column.

Column templates

Columnbo allows you to save lists of *column templates* in the templates menu. This is invaluable for working on similarly formatted files. Select the "Add..." command from the Templates menu to add the columns list of the active window to the Templates menu. Then, when you're working with a new file, selecting a template from the menu will automatically set the columns markers of the active window for you, which you may modify further if desired. Templates can be removed from the Templates menu with the "Remove..." command.

Settings file

Column templates are saved in the default settings file named "Columnbo settings". This file is created for you automatically in the system folder. You may keep several versions of this if you wish by simply dragging the settings file from the system folder and renaming it. Then, start Columnbo by opening one of these instead of Columnbo itself. You may also load a new settings file "on the fly" with the "Open..." command.

Acknowledgments

This program was conceived by Dave Astolfi who needed to load accounting information into Excel™. For me, it's been great working on a practical application while learning how to program my Macintosh in C. Special thanks to Dave for all his encouragement, and to Ray Uttaro, who has been very helpful in catching the bugs that got away!

Limitations

Columnbo expects text files to have line breaks (a return) at the end of each line, and Lines may be no longer than 256 characters in length.

Columnbo can only handle files of up to 32K in length since it uses the built-in toolbox TextEdit routines to display and scroll text. However, registered users will receive the latest version of Columnbo which removes this limitation and adds other features, such as adjustable delimiter and line break characters, tab expansion, etc.

Motivation fund

This program is distributed as Shareware, so please pass it along to your friends or upload it to your favorite BBS. If you use it, please send $15 or what you think it's worth (or even a few comments on a postcard) to:

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Also, please jot down where you came across Columnbo. Thanks!