20 Microsoft 365 Productivity Tips…

…You NEED to Know!

Tom Duff &
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Twin Cities
September 19th, 2025

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Some of my community activities:

- Weekly interviews on technology, business productivity, and collaboration culture (#CollabTalk Podcast)
- Weekly livestream on project management best-practices (#ProjectFailureFiles)
- Weekly interviews with Microsoft MVPs (#MVPbuzzChat)
- Monthly livestream of the Guardians of M365 Governance (#GoM365gov) covering all-things governance
- Multiple posts each month with a panel of experts answering community questions (#M365AMA)
- Monthly tweetjams & livestreams via X (#CollabTalk)

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Let's get started!

1. Instantly Make the Settings Gear Icon Appear in SharePoint

One of my colleagues in the Microsoft 365 world posted this on his blog today, and it makes me so happy… When you are going to a SharePoint site, often the ***Settings Gear icon*** in the upper-right corner takes 5 to 10 seconds to load. That is a pain when you really just want to get to permissions or site contents. But with this little hack, you can get the gear to show up instantly with a single click. Here's how that works…

When you first go to a SharePoint site, you'll often see this… your profile icon, but nothing else for 5 to 10 seconds:

However, if you click on your profile icon, the ***Settings Gear icon*** shows up immediately:

If you're spending a lot of time navigating SharePoint sites and you need to go to Settings, this little hack will save you a lot of time and frustration!

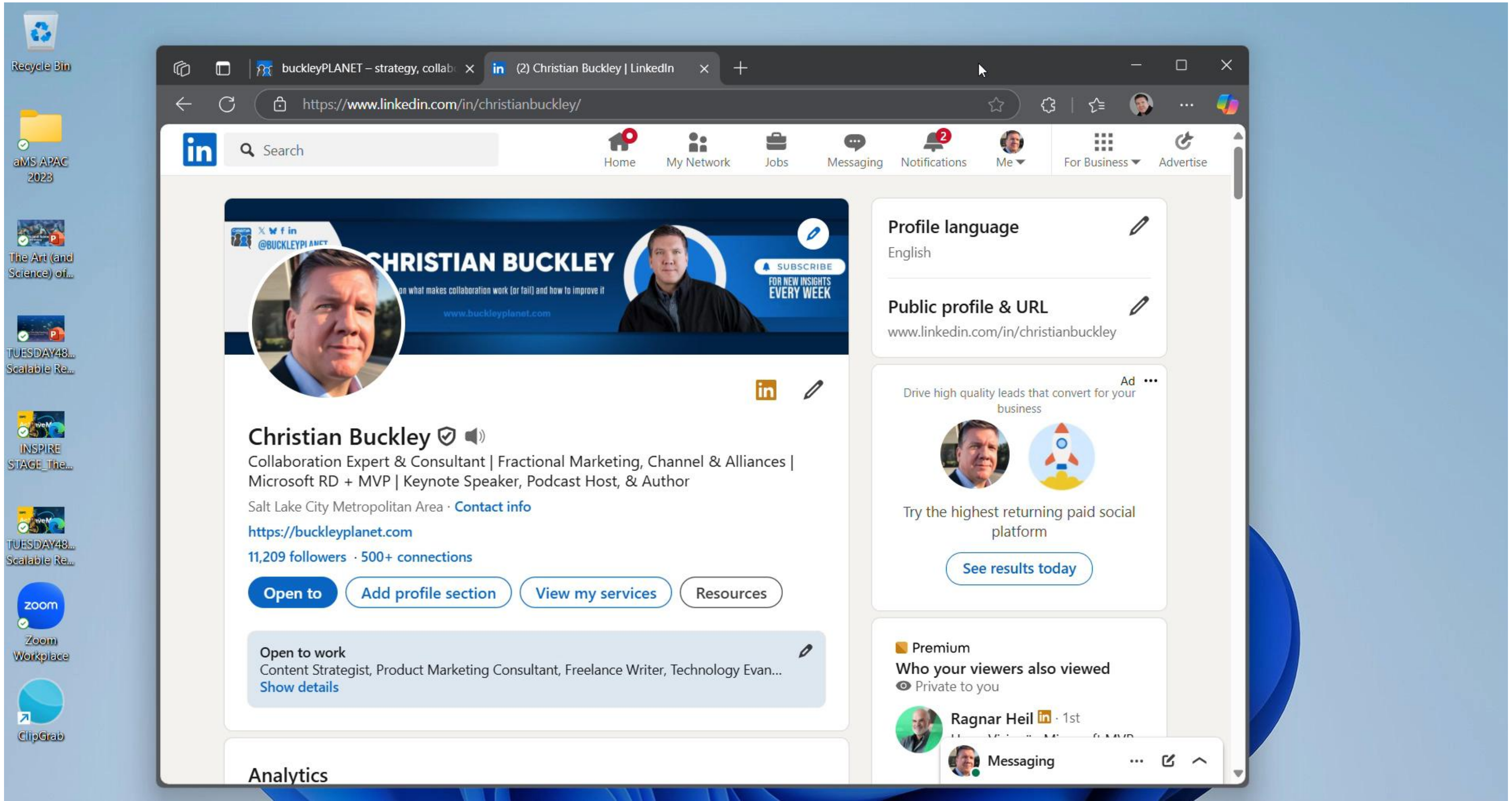
To be clear, Microsoft really needs to fix the issue with that loading so slowly. But until then, this will allow you to keep working without getting irritated… at least for that reason. :)

[Instantly Make the Gear Appear In SharePoint]() from Marc Anderson

2. Split Screen like a pro…in Windows *and* Edge

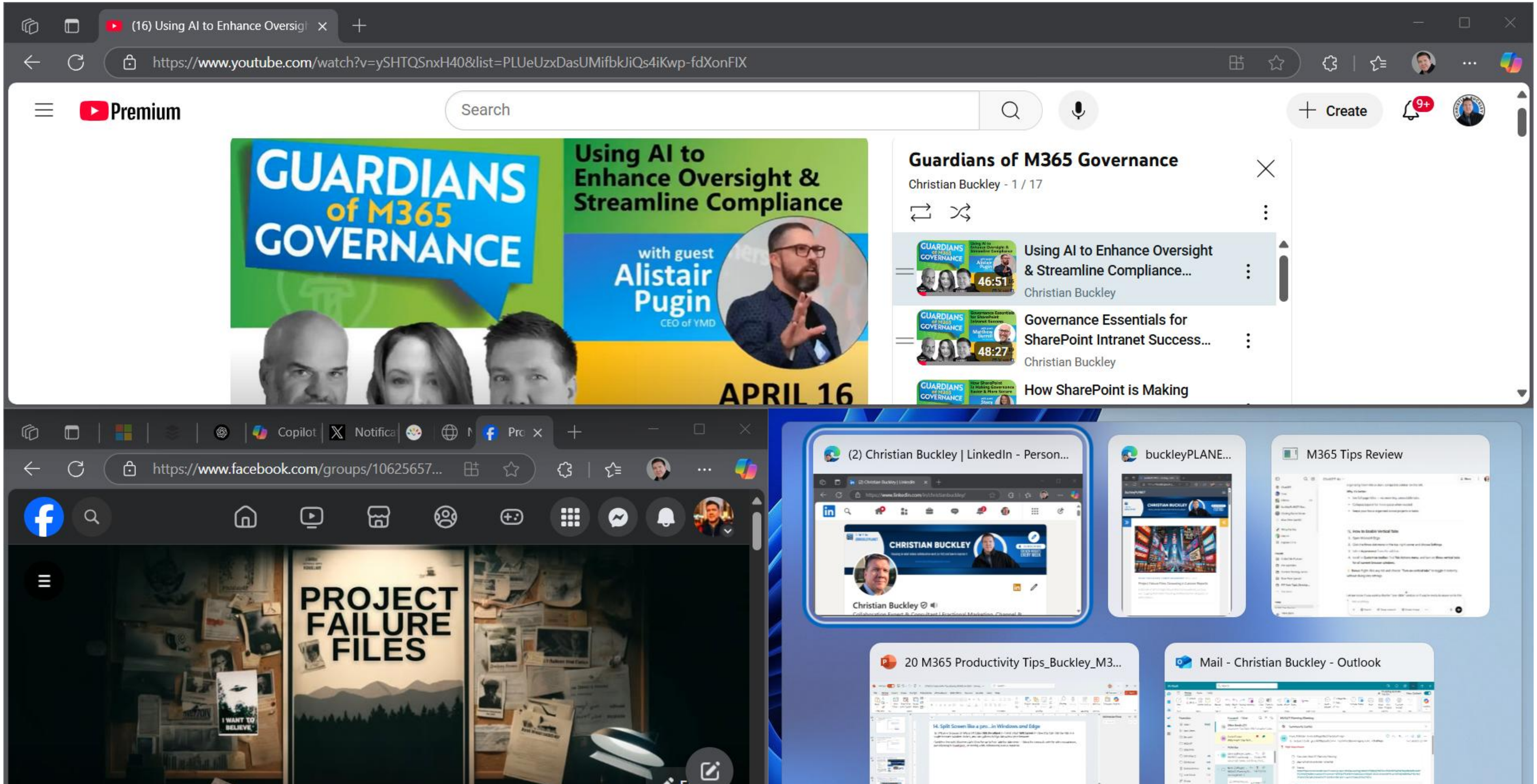
If you're juggling multiple apps or browser tabs, Split Screen is your best friend for staying productive.

To split your screen in Windows, press **Windows Key + Left/Right Arrow** to snap the active window to one half of the screen. You'll see thumbnails of your other open apps — click one to fill the other side. Use the divider bar to adjust the width of each pane. And it works across multiple monitors!



2. Split Screen like a pro…in Windows *and* Edge

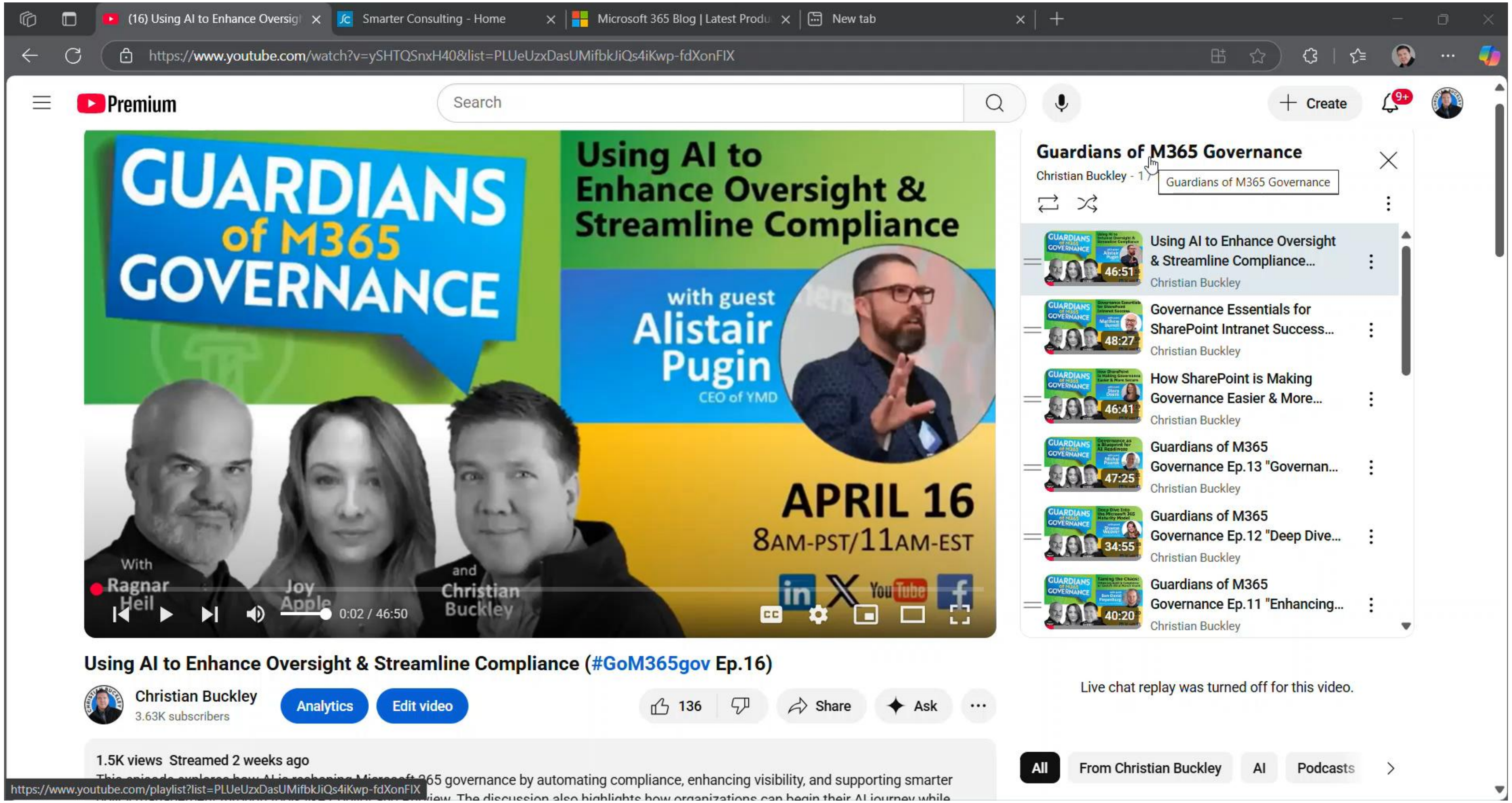
In fact, you can split your screen into quads, split two screens horizontally, or have one screen horizontal with two quads.



2. Split Screen like a pro…in Windows *and* Edge

To split your browser, in Microsoft Edge **click the ellipsis** (···) and select **Split Screen** to view two tabs side-by-side in a single browser window. In fact, you can split each Edge tab within your browser.

Combine this with Windows Split View for up to four side-by-side views — ideal for research, side-by-side comparisons, participating in tweetjams, or writing while referencing source material.



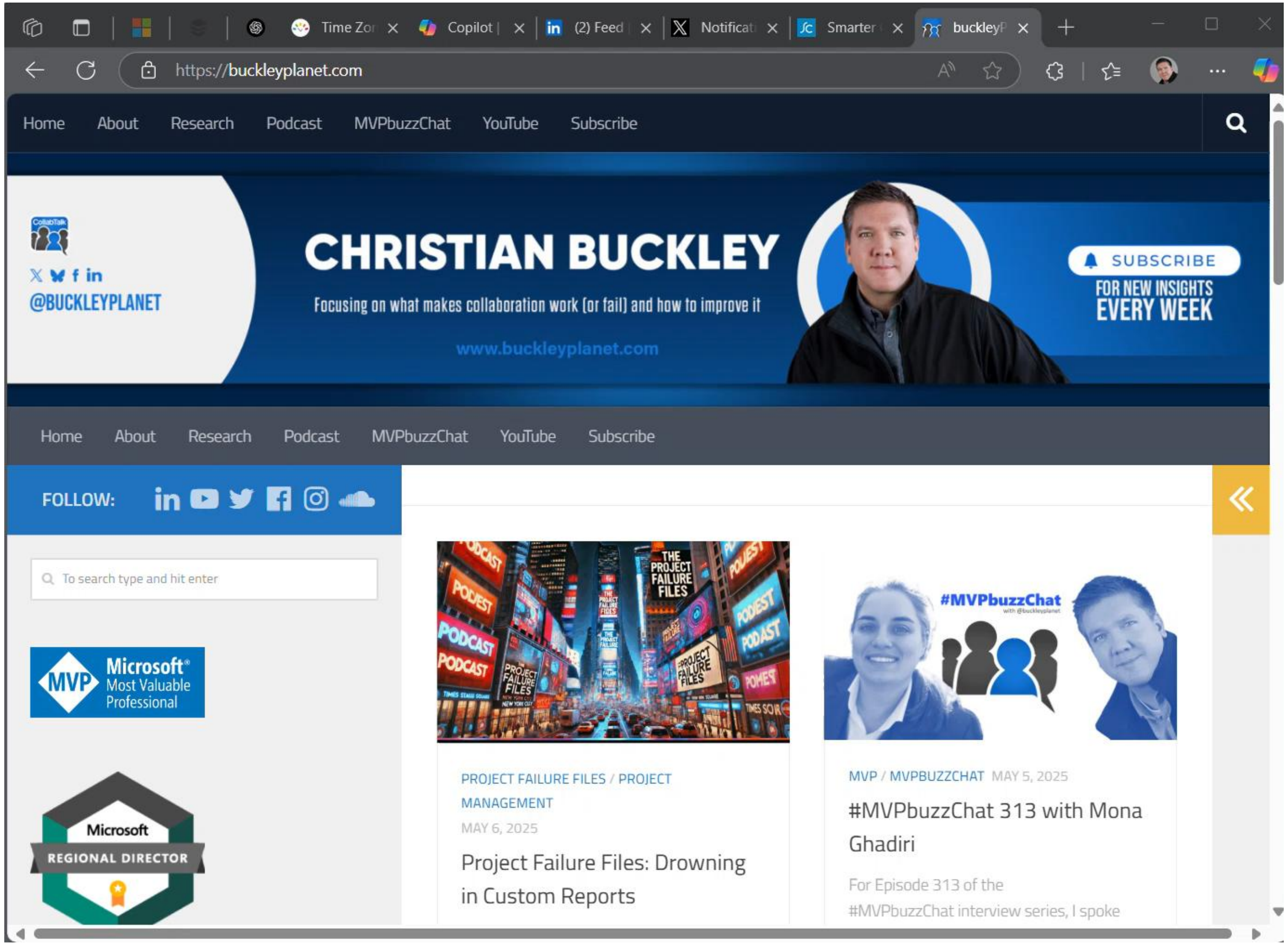
2.5 Battle "tab fatigue" with Vertical Tabs in Edge

If you've ever had 20+ tabs open and couldn't find what you were looking for — you're not alone. Edge's Vertical Tabs feature helps you manage tab overload by organizing them into a clean, collapsible sidebar on the left.

Why it's better:

- See full page titles — no more tiny, unreadable tabs.
- Collapse/expand for more space when needed.
- Keeps your focus organized across projects or tasks.

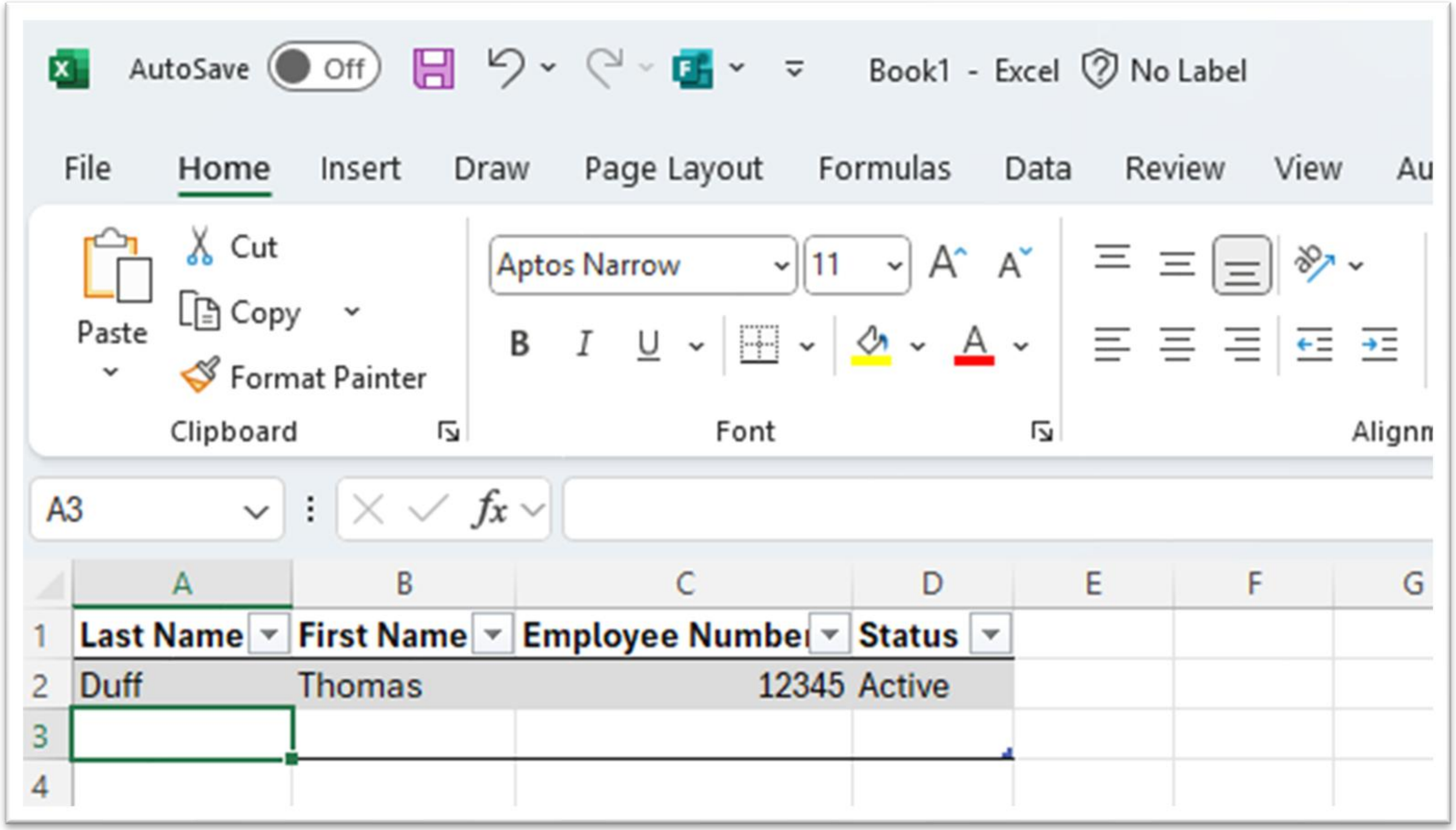
You can enable the side tabs by **clicking the ellipsis** (…) and going to the **Settings** menu, where you'll select **Appearance** and go into the **Tab Action** menu. From there, "turn on" **Show vertical tabs for all current browser windows.**



3. Using a Data Entry Form in Microsoft Excel

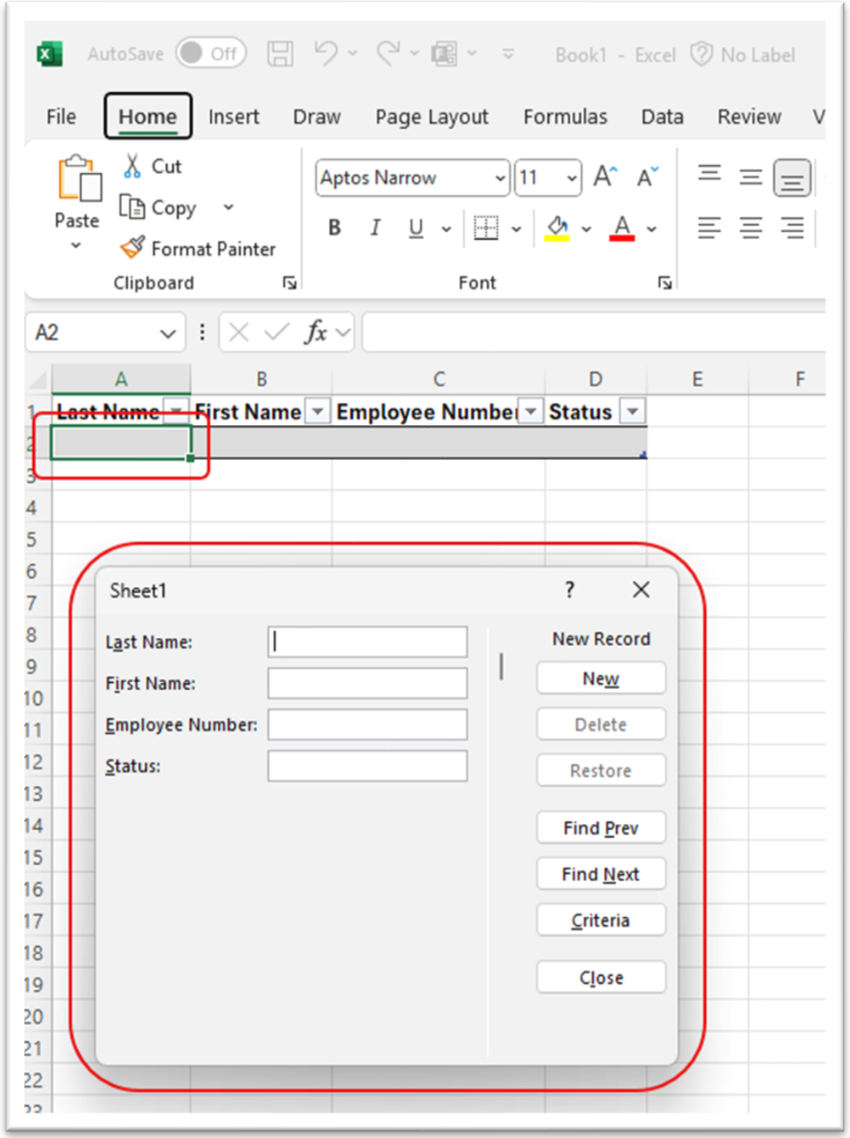
Here's a new one I just learned about today... When entering data into an Excel table, I was used to just adding data to the cell, tabbing to the next cell, and repeating until I was done. If the table required horizontal scrolling, it could get a bit cumbersome. But then I learned you can use the built-in ***Data Entry Form*** in Excel to enter that data. Here's how that works...

Here I have my table and what it would look like if I were entering the data directly into the rows:



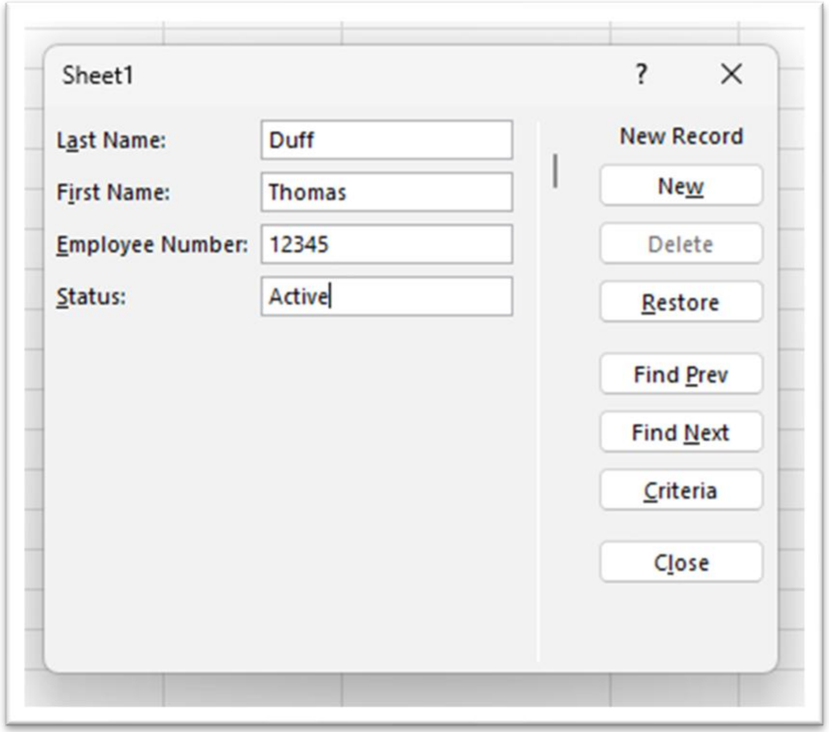
3. Using a Data Entry Form in Microsoft Excel

Instead, I created my table, put my cursor in the first empty cell of the table, and used the keyboard shortcut of ***ALT + D + O***. Up pops the data entry form for the table:



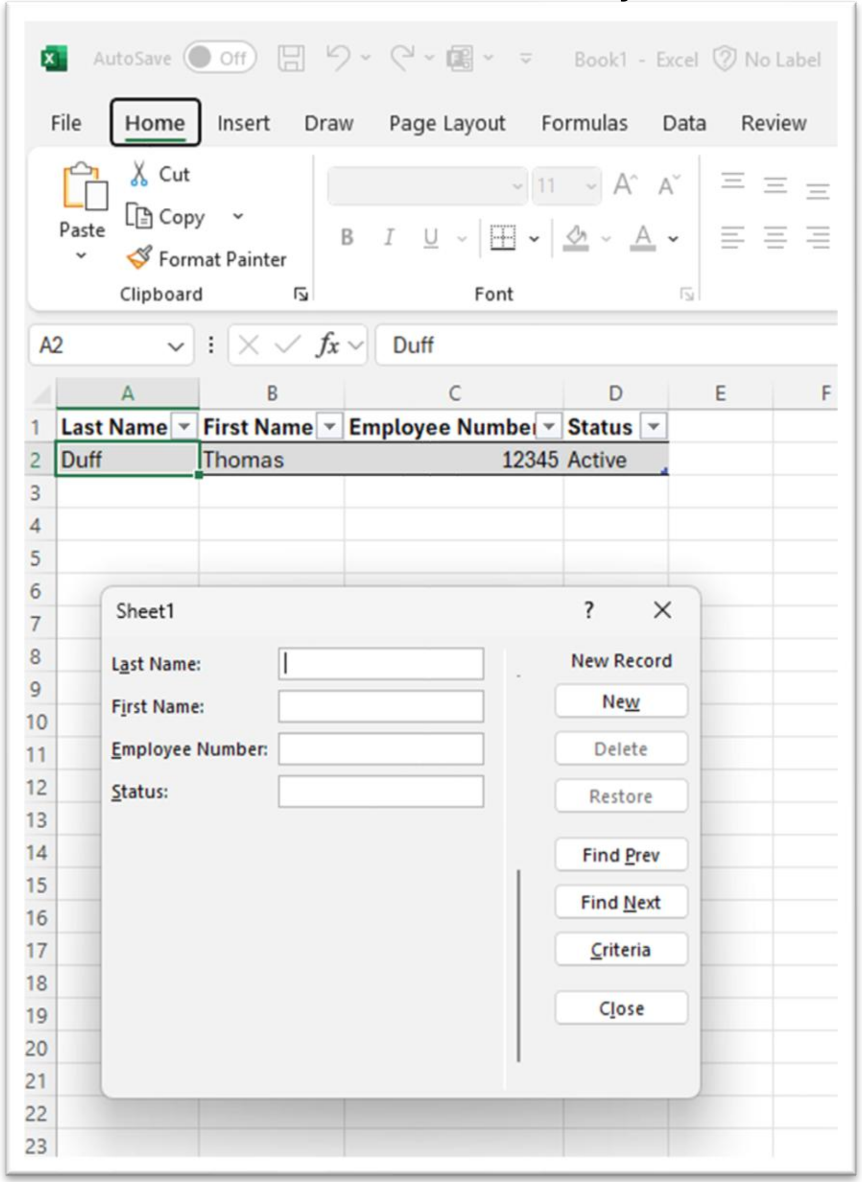
3. Using a Data Entry Form in Microsoft Excel

Now I can enter the data in a form format, and press ***Enter*** when I fill in the last field:



3. Using a Data Entry Form in Microsoft Excel

The row in the table is filled in with the form data, and I'm ready to enter the next row of data:



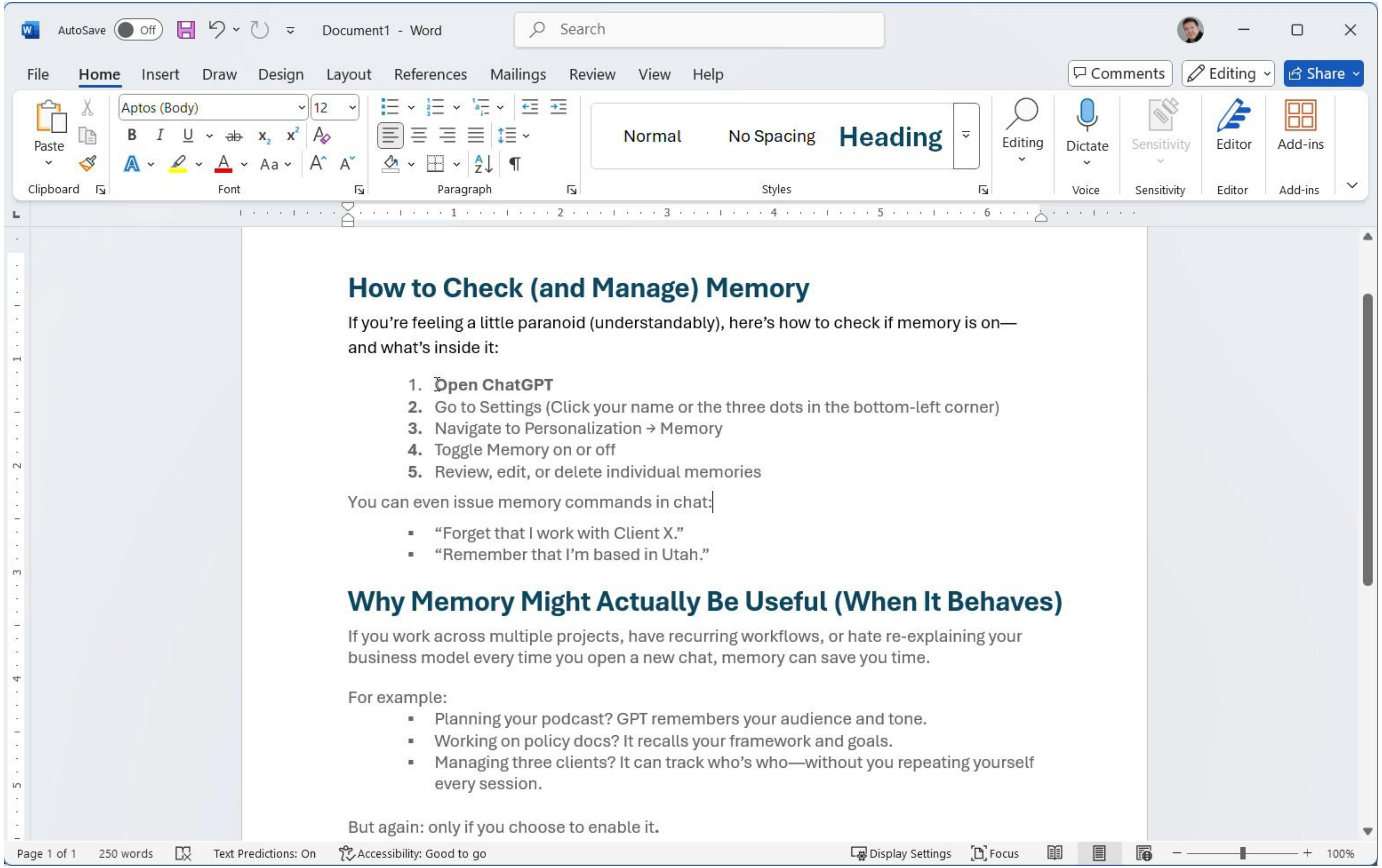
Give this approach a try next time you're finding the data entry process in an Excel table to be a bit cumbersome…

4. ‘Pin’ the Format Brush

We are all familiar with the **format brush**. Highlight the format you wish to duplicate, click on the format brush, and add that format to any other area.

Need to format multiple items? **Double-click** on the format brush to hold onto that format and change as many items as you’d like.

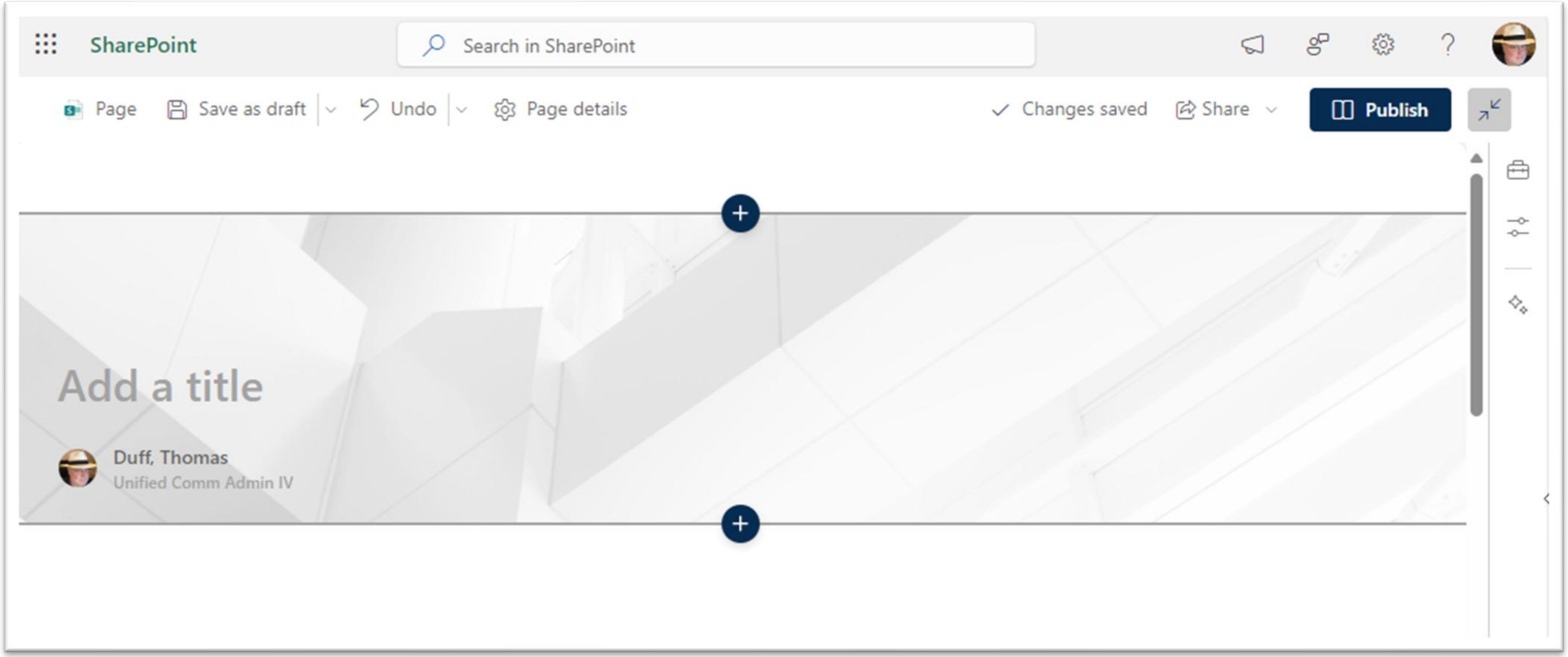
To turn it off, click on the format brush one last time.



5. Removing the Header section from a SharePoint page

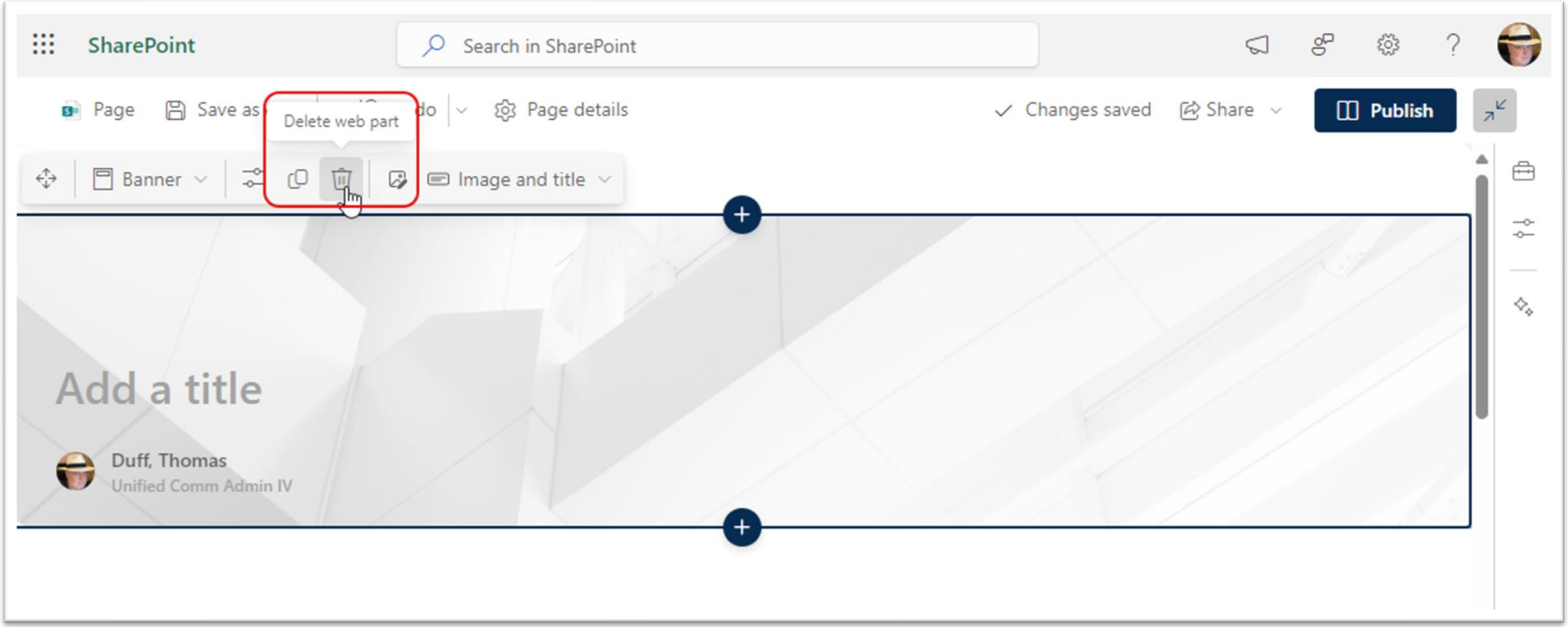
This is a good tip that Sandra sent my way… Have you ever wanted to create a SharePoint page that didn't have the normal page header at the top? It had been possible with using some hacks and workarounds, but now you can do it as part of editing your page in the browser. Here's how that works…

Here's a normal starting point for a page in SharePoint. At the top, you have the Title section of the page, and that's what we want to get rid of:



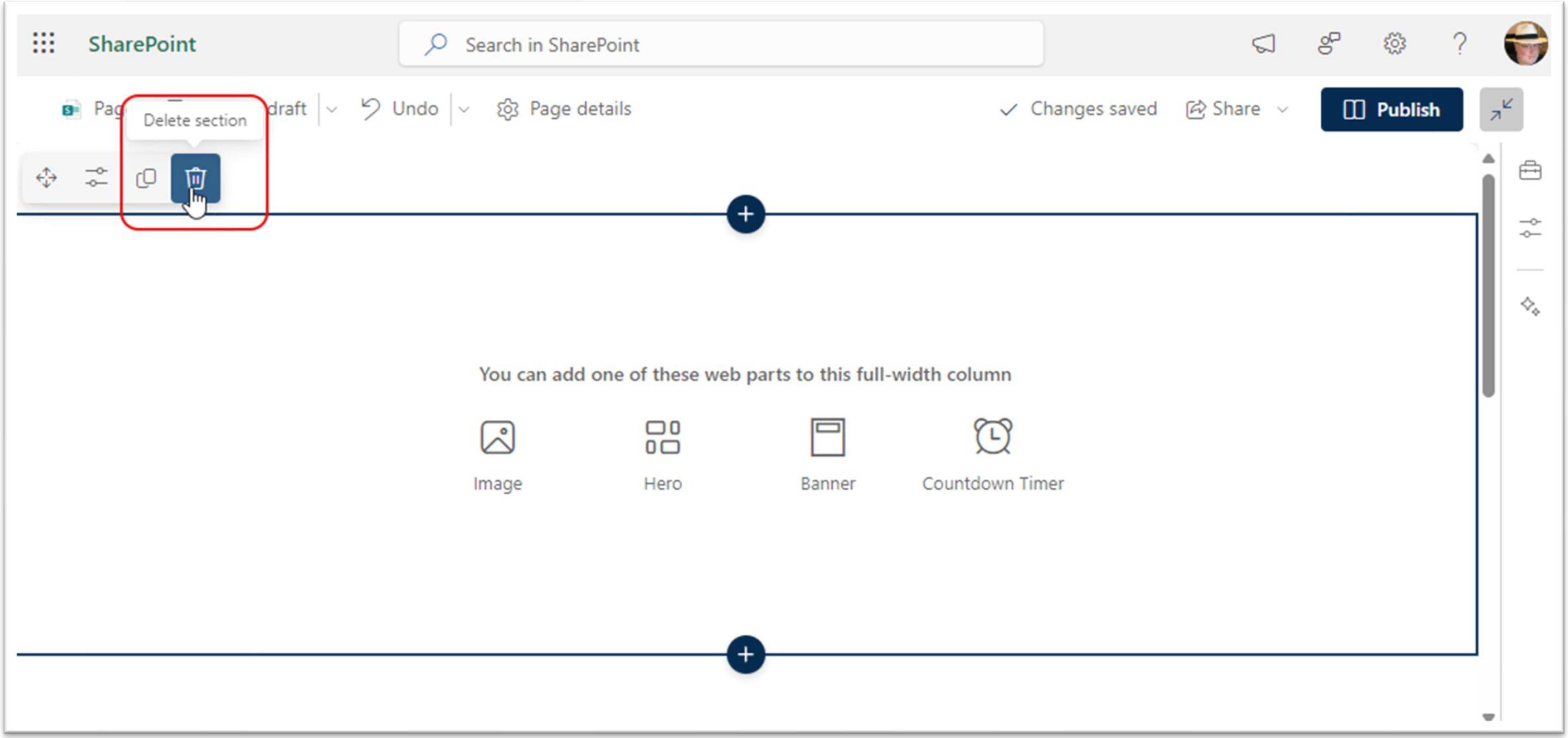
5. Removing the Header section from a SharePoint page

Click within the web part and click the ***Delete*** icon:



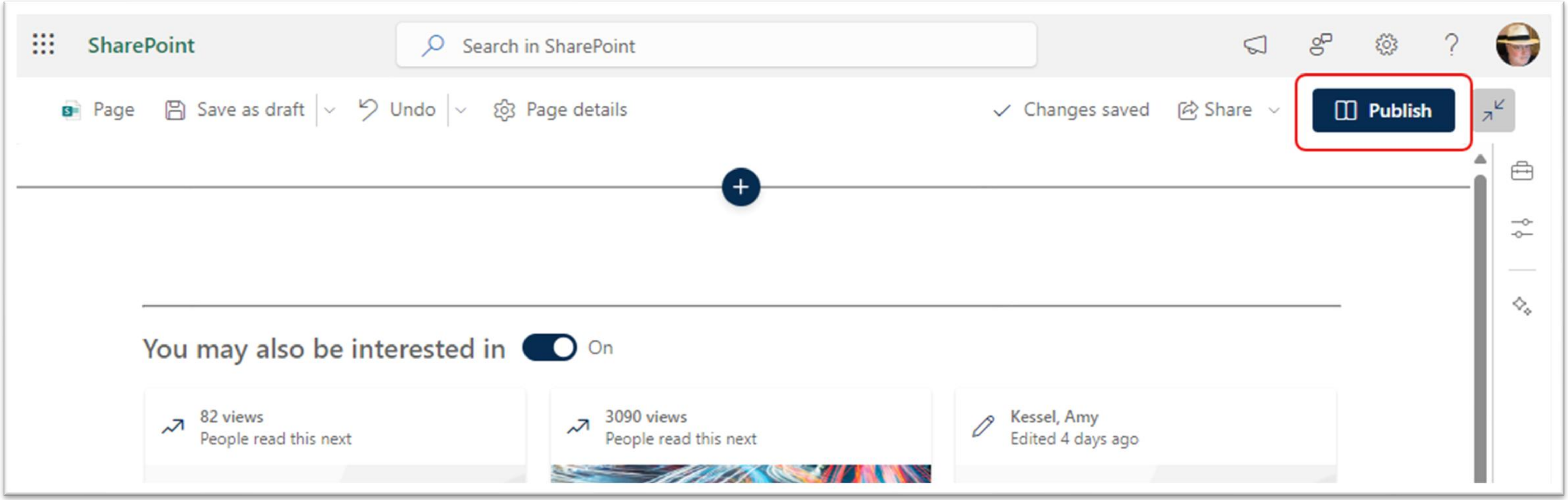
5. Removing the Header section from a SharePoint page

The web part is now gone. Next, we need to delete the entire full-width section. Click into the section and then click the ***Delete*** icon:



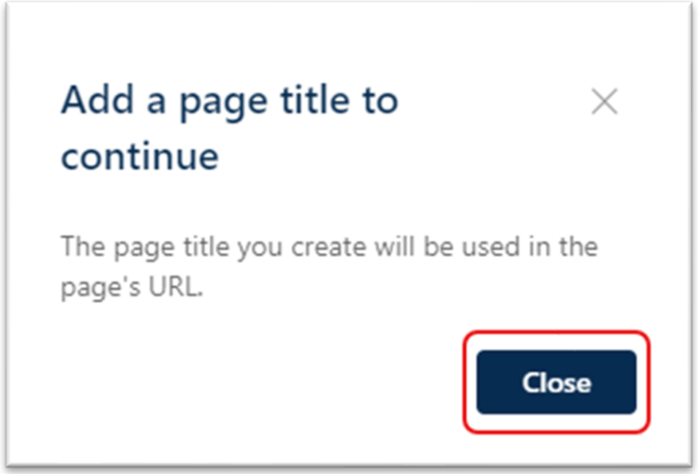
5. Removing the Header section from a SharePoint page

The Title section of the page is now gone! You can now click ***Publish***:

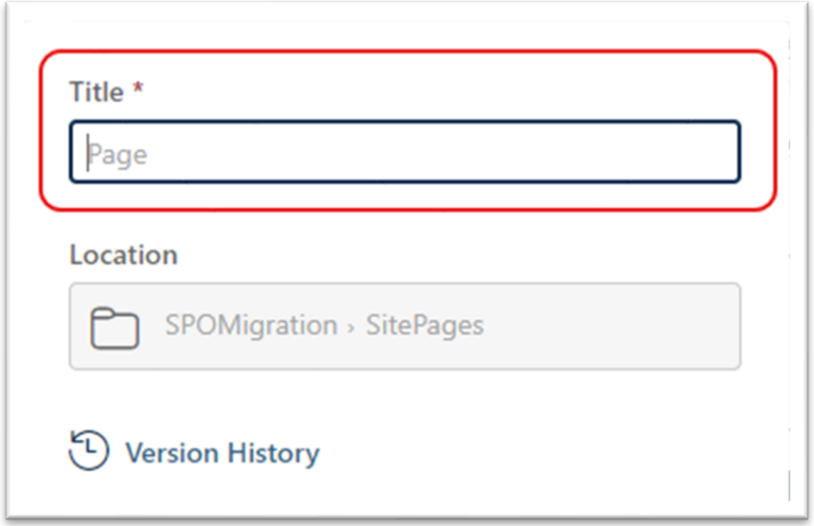


5. Removing the Header section from a SharePoint page

Normally, the page title comes from the area you just deleted. Since the page needs a title for use in the page URL, you are asked to provide a page title. Click ***Close*** on the pop-up box:

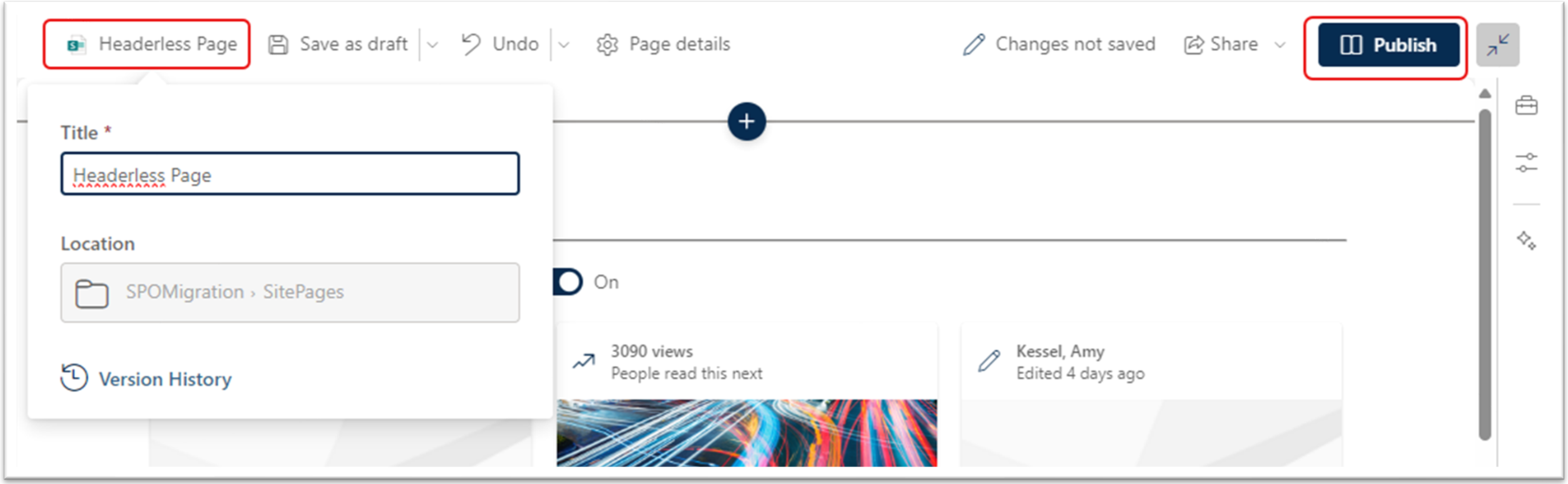


In this panel, you can put the page title you want it to be:

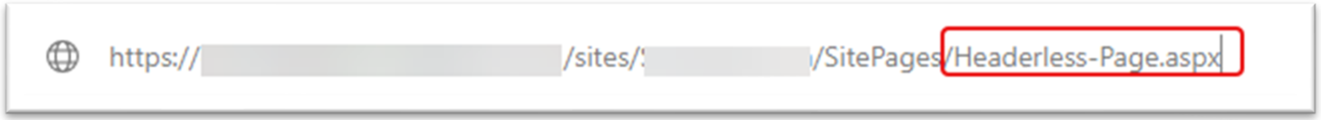


5. Removing the Header section from a SharePoint page

The new title of the page is in the ribbon bar ("Headerless Page"), and you can now click ***Publish*** again:



And in the URL of the page, you can see the page name you selected:



Thanks to Joao Ferreira for the post that he made on this topic: [How to Hide the SharePoint Page Title in a Modern SharePoint Page]

6. Using the Fact Check List pattern

Copilot can help in many areas—but can you trust its answers?

This prompt pattern helps validate the accuracy of Copilot responses by explicitly asking Copilot to list the facts it used to generate its answer. This improves transparency and gives you a way to independently verify the content.

To begin fact validation, I used a simple prompt, asking to list the facts or sources used in the previous response.

This triggers Copilot to cite the basis of its response, making it easier to separate generalizations from grounded statements.

In this case, I asked Copilot to provide some data around Duran Duran during the MTV era (back when they used to play music videos)

> Whenever you output text, generate a set of facts that are contained in the output. The set of facts should be inserted at the end of the output. The set of facts should be the fundamental facts that could undermine the veracity of the output if any of them are incorrect.

Here's an expanded outline for **Global Success and the MTV Era (1982-1985)**:

- **Release of "Rio" (1982)**
  - Overview of the album and its significance
  - Key tracks: "Rio," "Hungry Like the Wolf," "Save a Prayer"
  - Collaboration with producer Colin Thurston
  - Album's critical and commercial success
- **The Impact of MTV**
  - Duran Duran as pioneers of the music video era
  - Innovative music videos directed by Russell Mulcahy
  - Global reach through MTV, helping t ment their image

6. Using the Fact Check List pattern

Here are the "facts" the AI provided to support its last response.

At this point, ask yourself two things:

1. Are the facts accurate?
2. Are those facts being used appropriately in Copilot's conclusions?

This habit encourages deeper engagement with AI-generated content—and reduces your risk of repeating misinformation.

After providing its facts, it again asked for additional information using the Outline Expander prompt pattern. I asked it for more granular data.

Set of Facts:

1. "Rio" was released in 1982 and featured key tracks like "Rio," "Hungry Like the Wolf," and "Save a Prayer."
2. Duran Duran collaborated with producer Colin Thurston on "Rio."
3. The music videos for "Rio" were directed by Russell Mulcahy.
4. "Seven and the Ragged Tiger" was released in 1983, with key tracks including "The Reflex," "Union of the Snake," and "New Moon on Monday."
5. Duran Duran participated in Band Aid and performed at Live Aid in 1984-1985.

Which bullet point would you like to expand on next?

3.4

Here's an expanded outline for **"Seven and the Ragged Tiger" (1983)**:

- **Album Overview**
  - Duran Duran's third studio album, released in November 1983
  - Represented a stylistic evolution with more complex production and a broader sound
  - The title reflects the band's ambition and the challenges they faced in maintaining success
- **Key Tracks**

6. Using the Fact Check List pattern

And here are the facts provided for the even more granular results requested.

Cool stuff.

And an excellent album, btw.

Set of Facts:

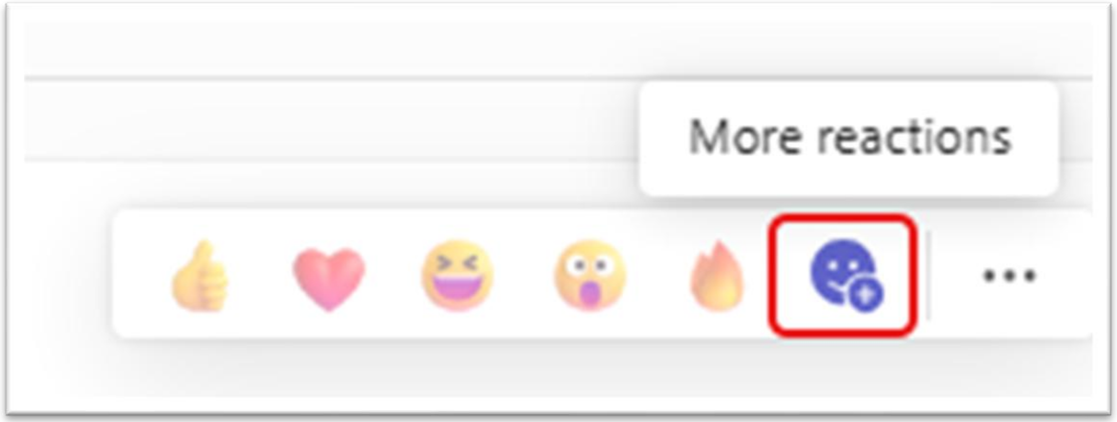
1. "Seven and the Ragged Tiger" was released in November 1983.
2. The album includes key tracks "The Reflex," "Union of the Snake," and "New Moon on Monday."
3. Producer Alex Sadkin worked on the album, known for his work with Grace Jones and Bob Marley.
4. "The Reflex" reached No. 1 in both the UK and US, with a remix by Nile Rodgers.
5. The band embarked on the "Sing Blue Silver" world tour following the album's release.

Which bullet point would you like to expand on next?

7. Changing your default emojis in Teams

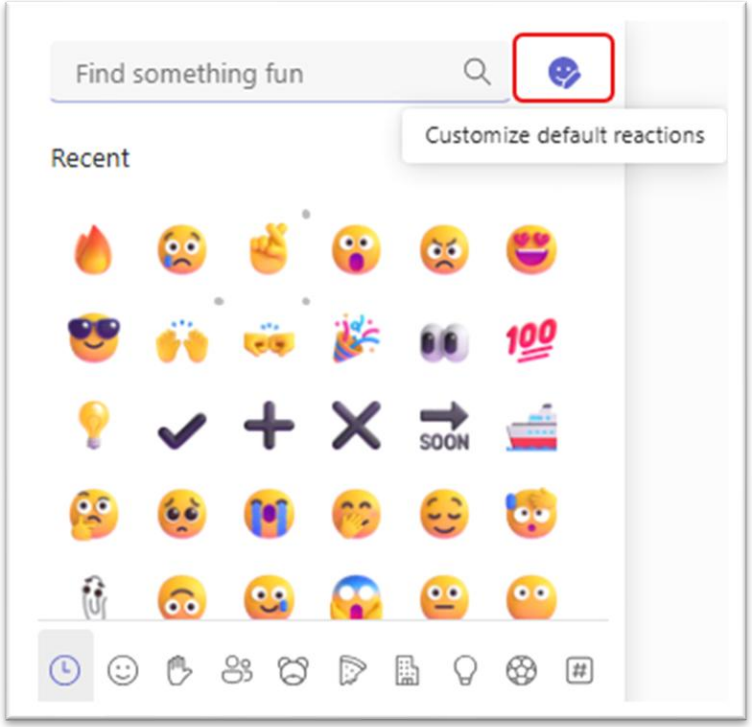
This tip comes to you via Sandra's significant other... spousal tips are awesome! Did you know that you can change the default emojis that appear when you click on a chat message in Microsoft Teams? I certainly didn't... and neither did Sandra. :) Here's how you can set the default five emojis that you can easily access when you're reacting to a chat message...

Hover over a Teams chat message and click on the ***More reactions icon***:



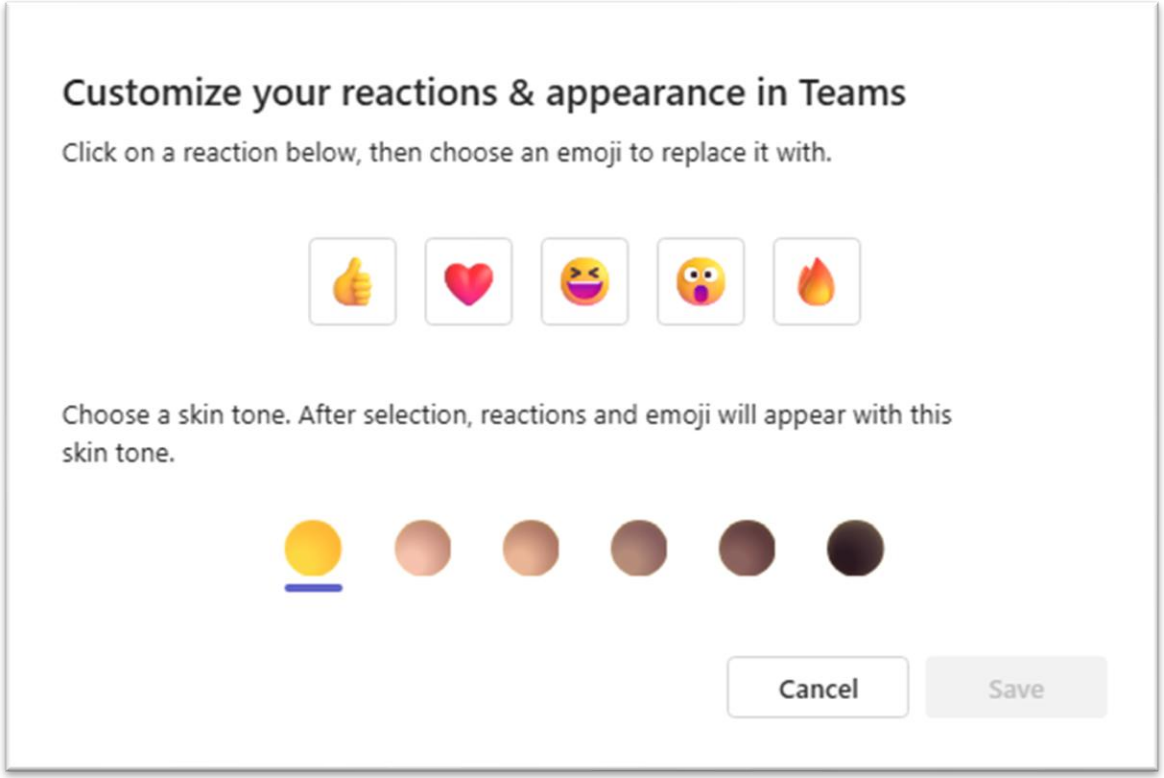
7. Changing your default emojis in Teams

In the ***More reactions panel***, click on the ***Customize default reactions icon*** in the upper-right corner:



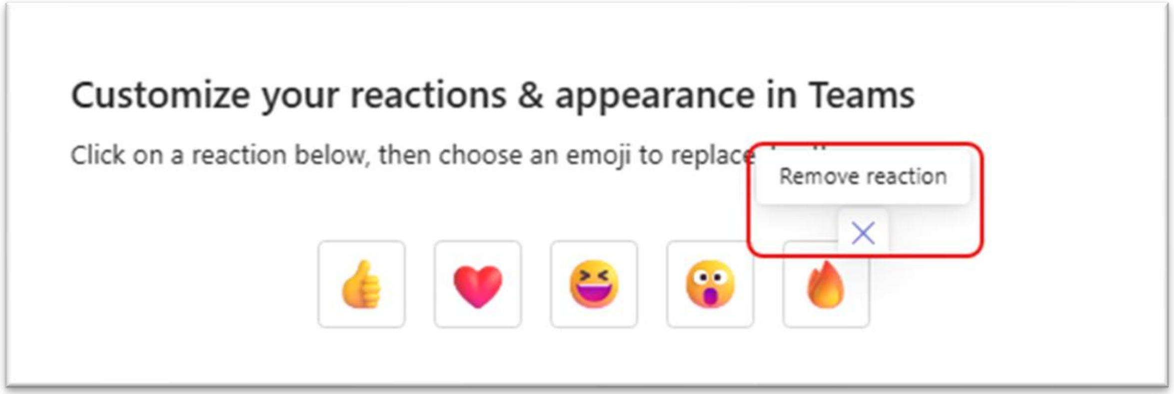
7. Changing your default emojis in Teams

Look at that! You can now customize the five emojis that appear when you click on a chat!

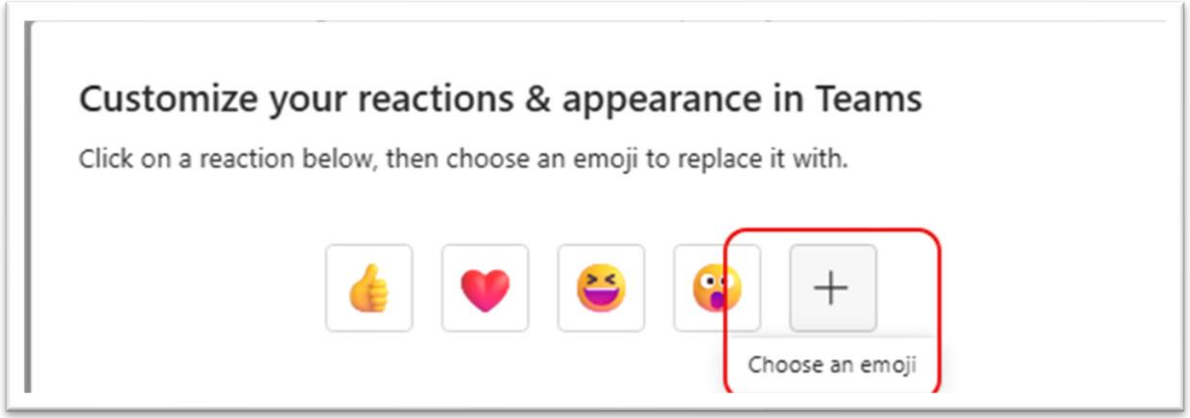


7. Changing your default emojis in Teams

To remove one of the emojis, hover over the emoji and click the ***Remove reaction icon***:

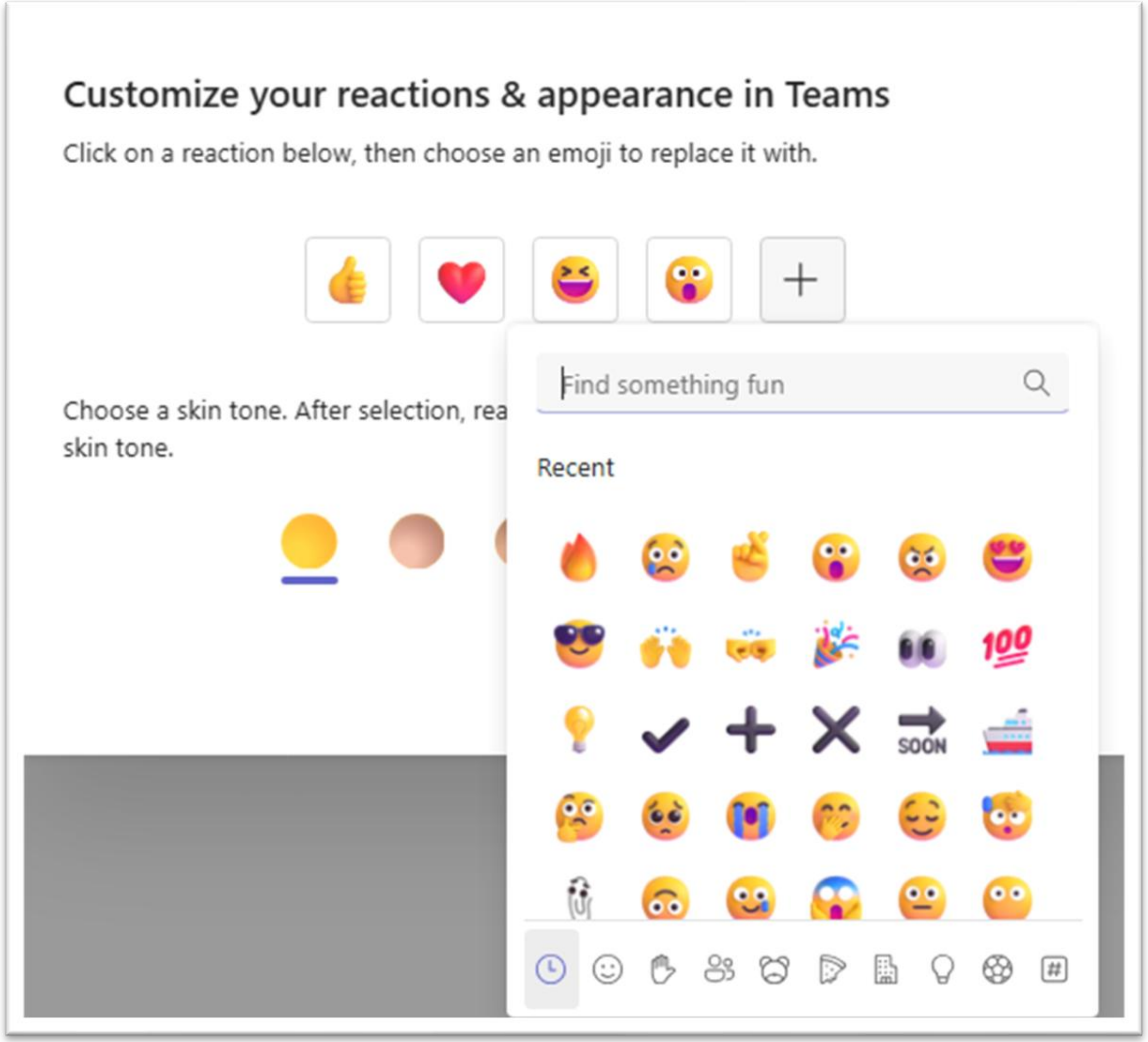


To add a new custom emoji, click on the ***Choose an emoji icon***:



7. Changing your default emojis in Teams

That brings up the entire emoji collection! Select the one you want to have in your default emoji collection, click ***Save*** at the bottom of the panel, and you're good to go!

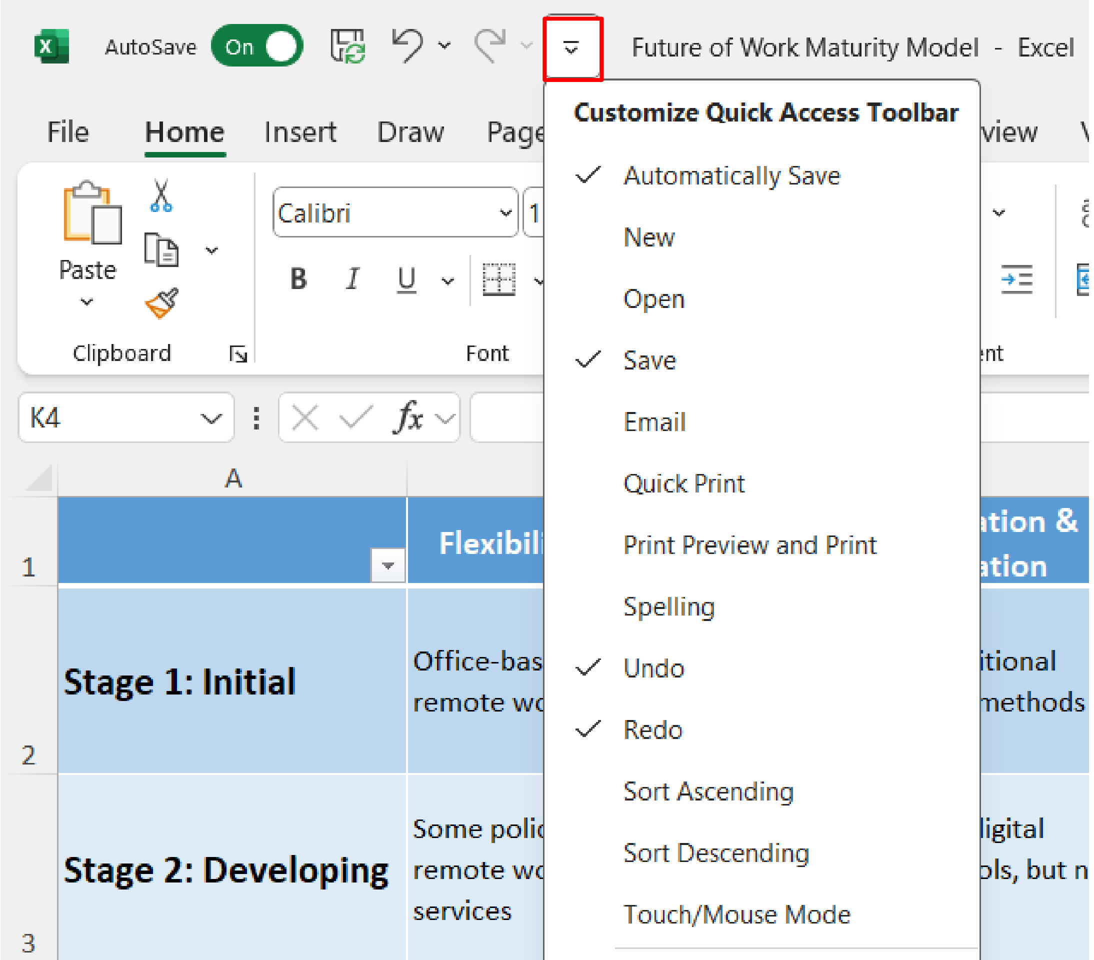


8. Create simple dashboards using the Excel Camera Tool

What if you could build a real-time dashboard in Excel without writing a single formula? The **Excel Camera Tool** is your secret weapon — a little-known feature that lets you capture live snapshots of your data and turn static sheets into dynamic, visual dashboards. With this tool, you can take a live snapshot of any cell range, table, or chart — and paste it as a dynamic image that updates whenever the source data changes.

It's perfect for:

- **Dashboards:** Combine key visual elements from multiple sheets into a single view.
- **Reporting:** Track changes in real time without re-copying charts.
- **Presentation prep:** Create polished visuals that stay in sync with data.

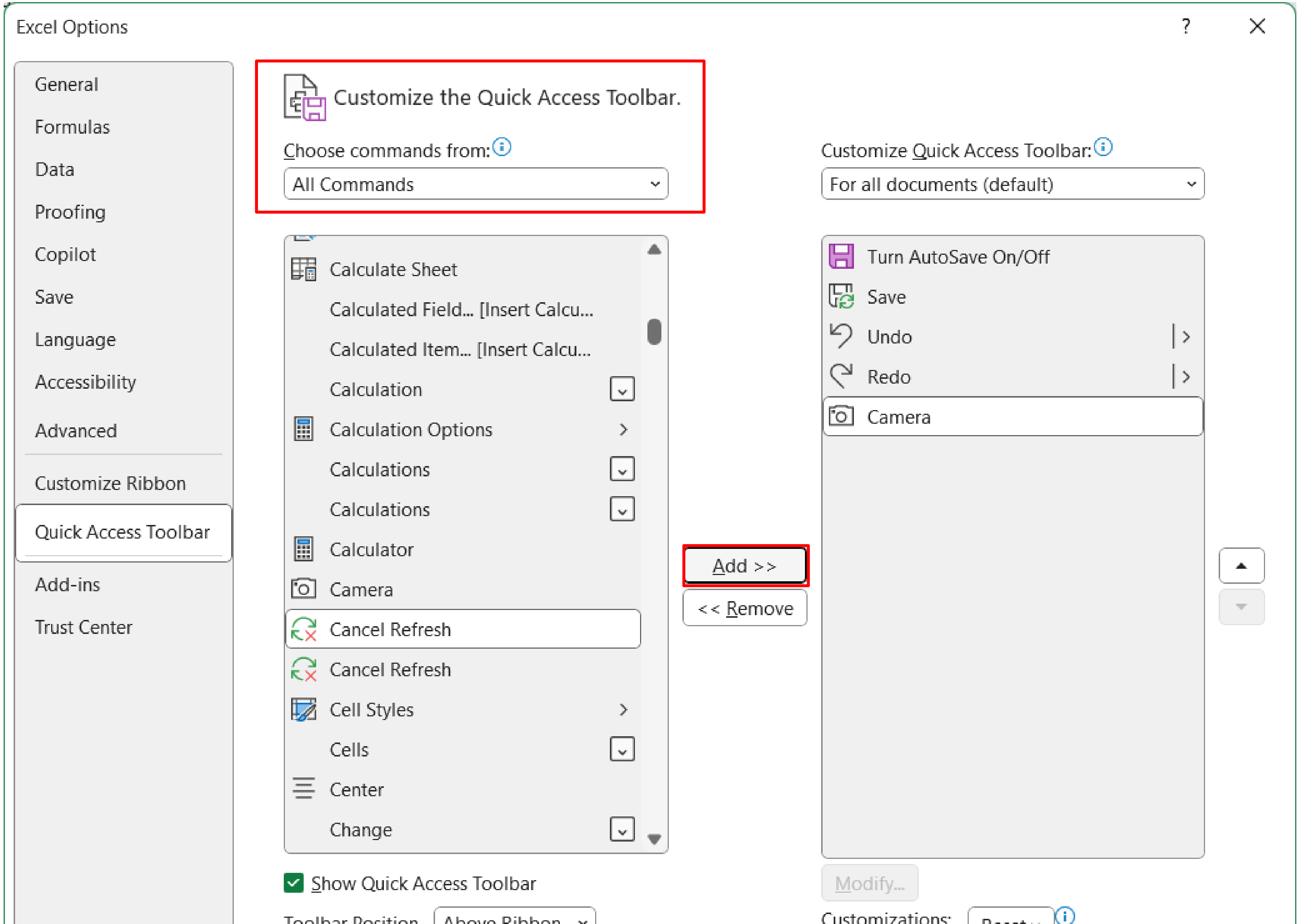


8. Create simple dashboards using the Excel Camera Tool

To enable the Camera Tool, open Excel and right-click the **Quick Access Toolbar** (top-left) and select **More Commands** to access the **Customize Quick Access Toolbar** dialog box.

In the dialog box under **Choose commands from,** change **Popular Commands** to **All Commands**.

Scroll to **Camera**, select it, click **Add >>** and click **OK**.

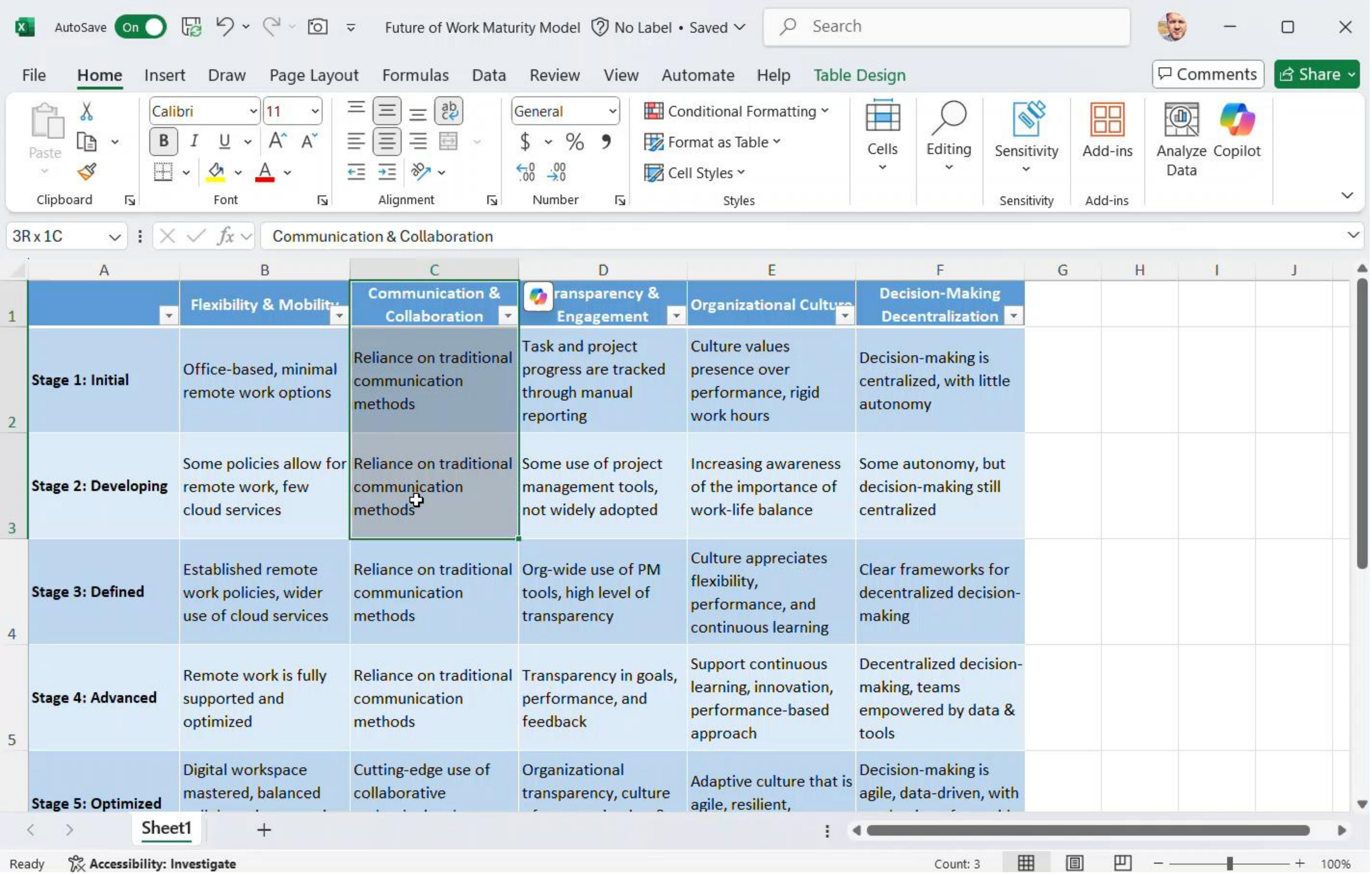


8. Create simple dashboards using the Excel Camera Tool

To use the Camera Tool, **select the range** (cells, table, or chart) you want to monitor. Click the **Camera icon** from the Quick Access Toolbar to copy the range, then **click anywhere** in the workbook to paste the live image.

The pasted snapshot will now update automatically with any changes made to the original data — no manual refresh needed.

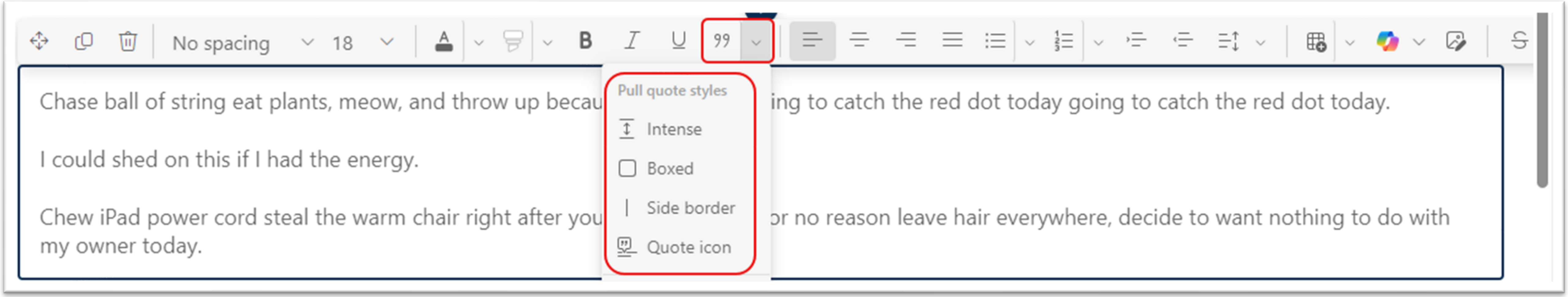
You can paste the live snapshot into any worksheet within the **same workbook**.



9. Pull Quotes on a SharePoint page

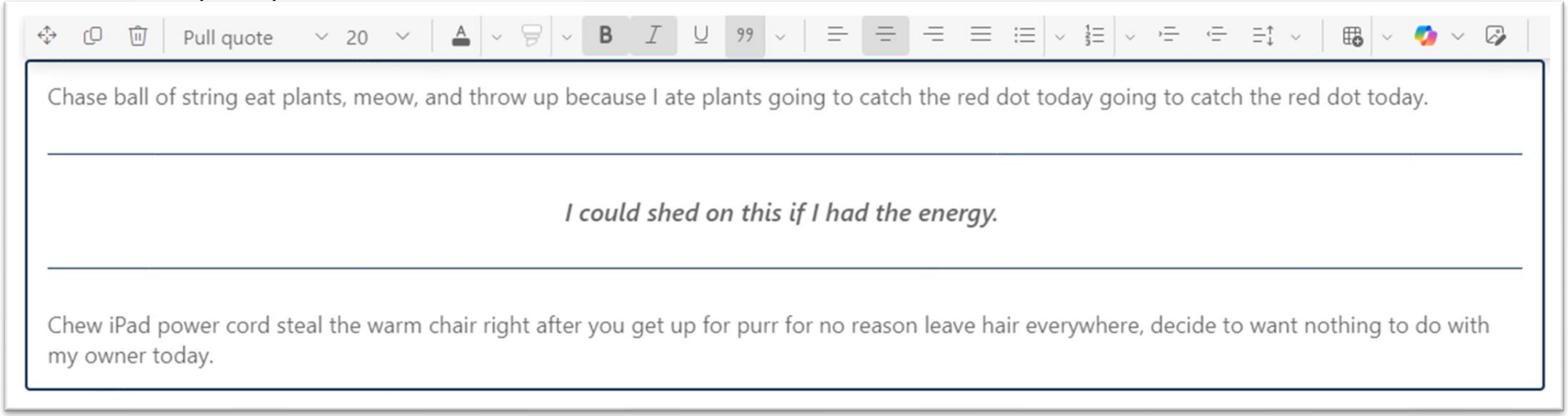
When you're creating a SharePoint page with a moderate amount of text, you may want to have a particular line or two stand out for the reader. You can do this with ***Pull Quotes***. When you're formatting your text on a page, you can select from four different pull quote styles. Here's how that works…

In the SharePoint page ***Text web part***, you'll see a ***pull quote icon*** in the text ribbon bar. In my example, I wanted to take the second sentence and have it show up as a pull quote. I highlight that second sentence and ***click the dropdown arrow next to the pull quote icon***. That gives me the list of what type of pull quote to use:

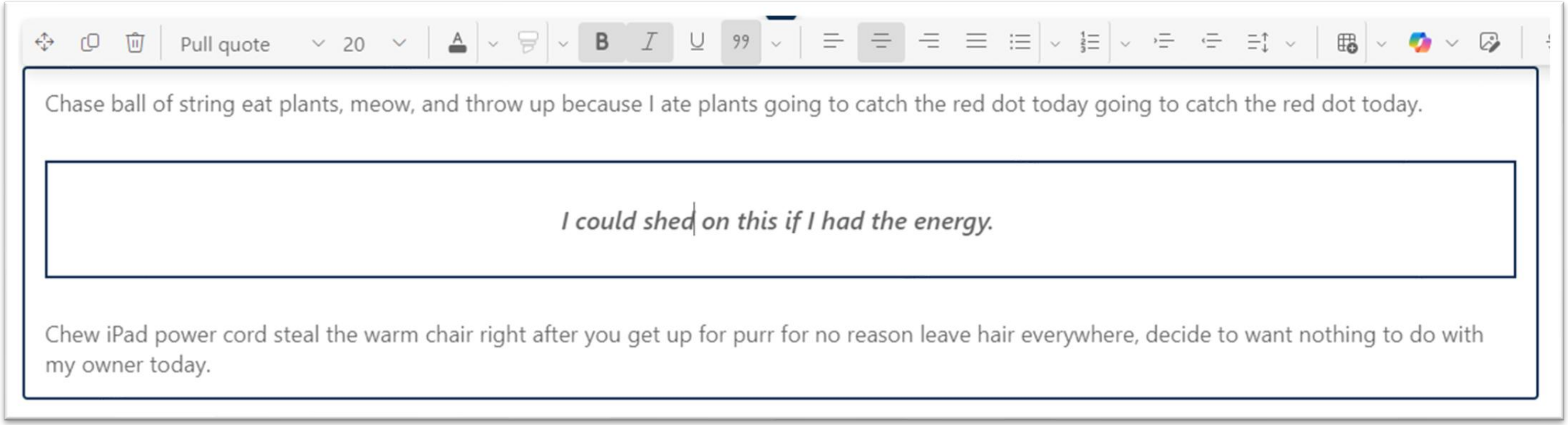


9. Pull Quotes on a SharePoint page

This is an ***Intense*** pull quote format:

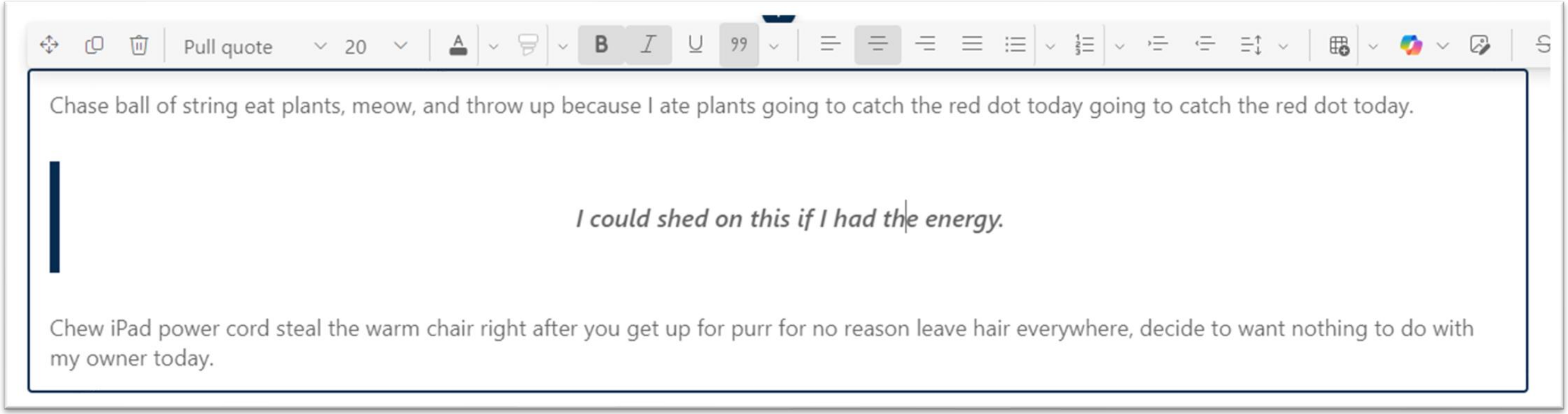


This is a ***Boxed*** pull quote format:

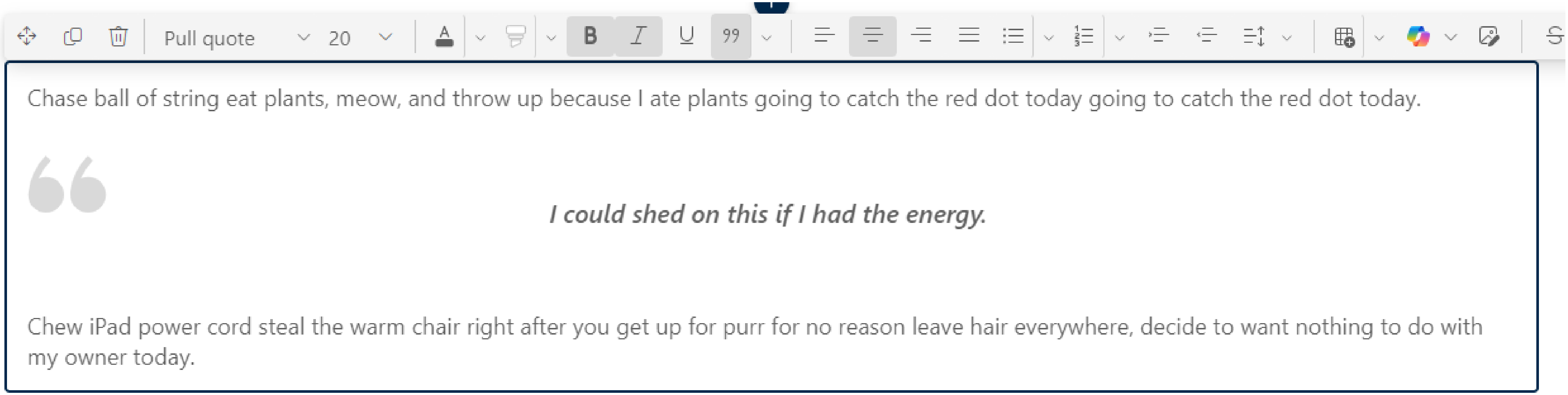


9. Pull Quotes on a SharePoint page

This is the ***Side Border*** pull quote format:



And this is the ***Quote Icon*** pull quote format:



10. Archive Emails in New Outlook

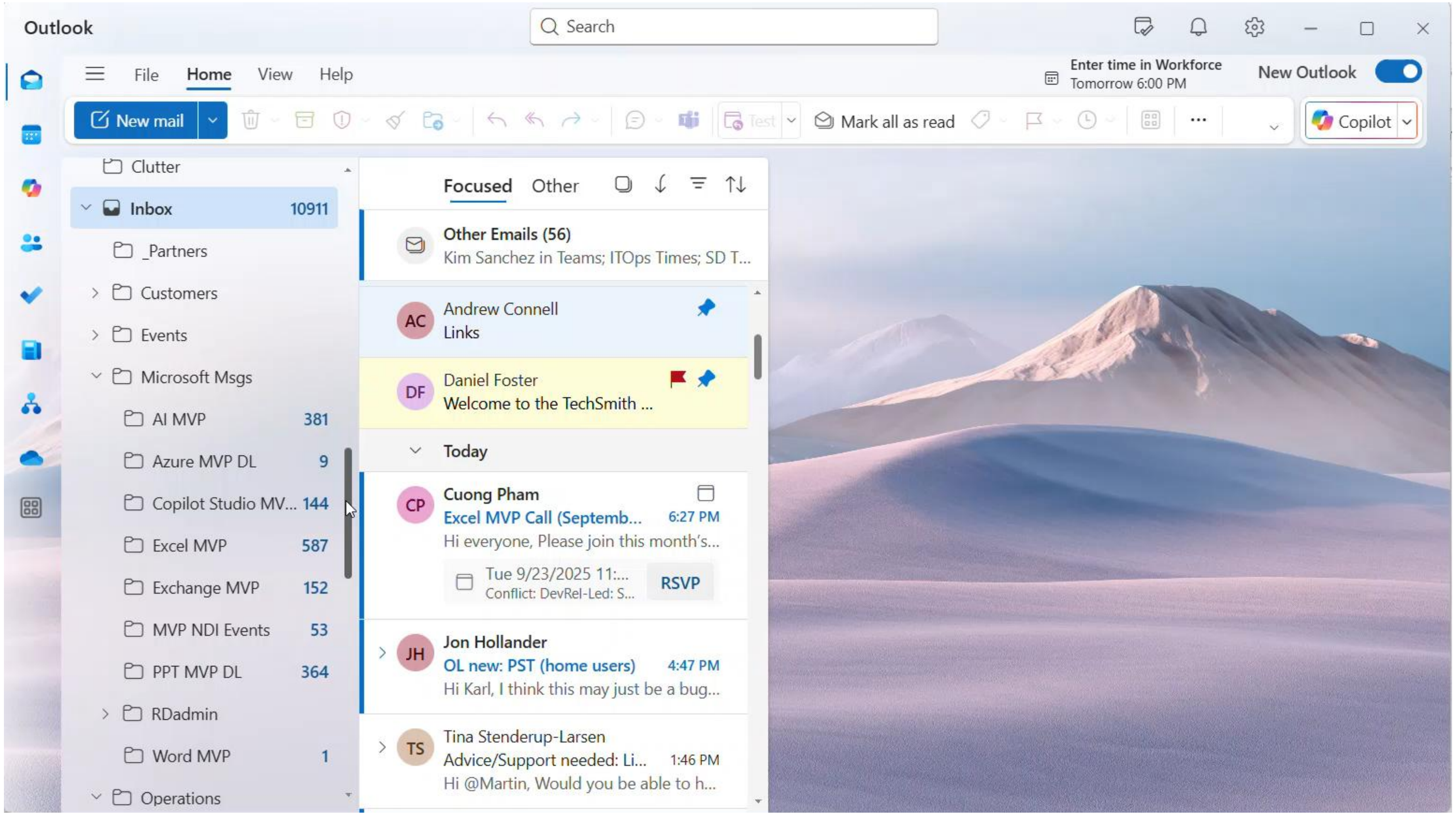
Stop creating email folders!

Within the new Outlook, take advantage of the **Archive** folder.

Microsoft has been talking for years about flattening your folder structure and instead using Search.

Not sure if you need to keep it? Archive it. Anything archived is retained and accessible using search.

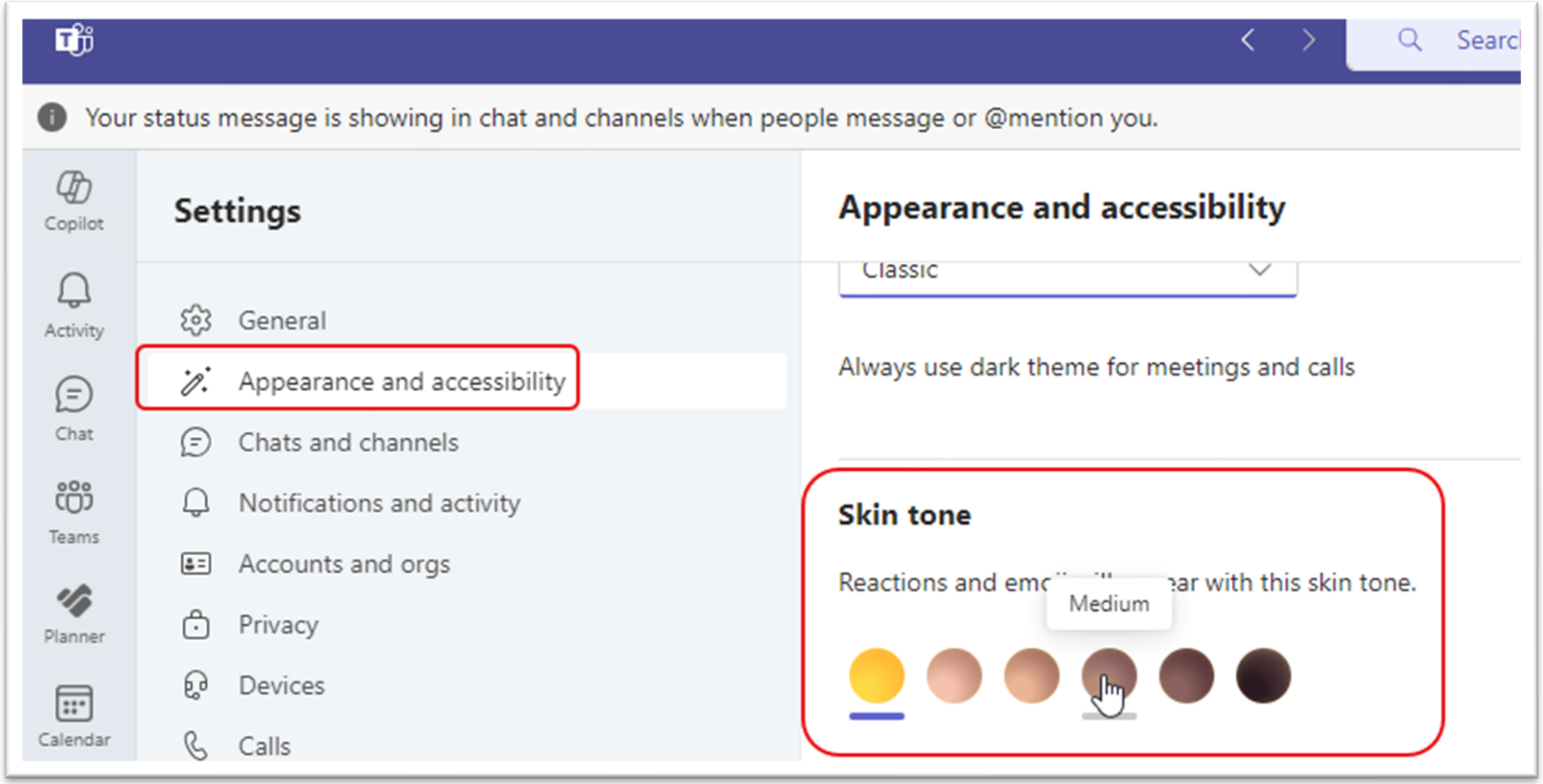
Simplify your life by using the Archive feature.



11. Microsoft Teams: New skin tone settings and reactions

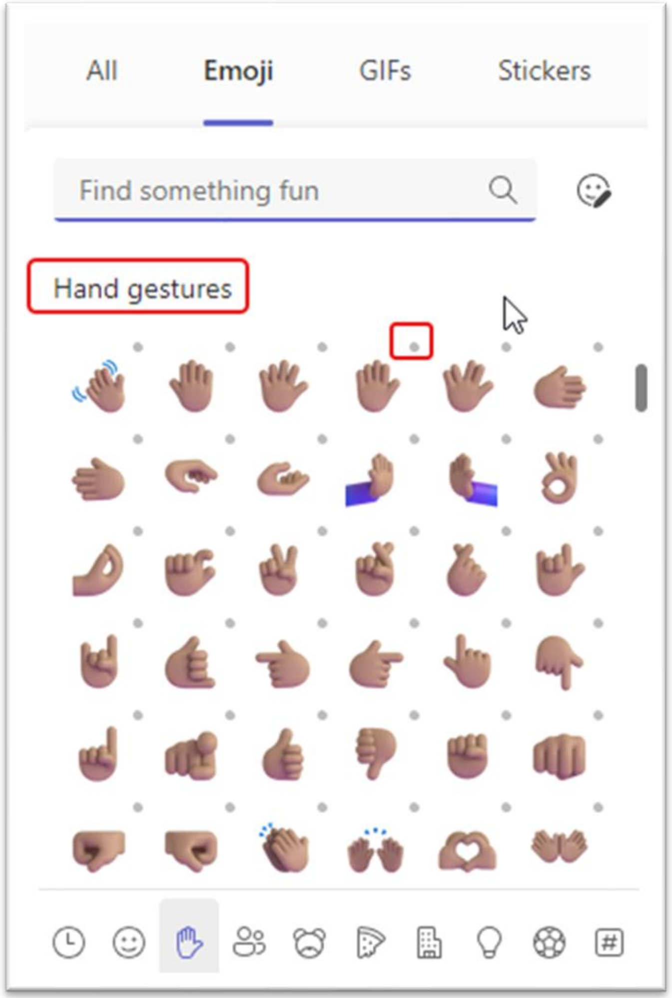
In Microsoft Teams, everyone loves their emojis and reactions. But in terms of "skin tone", you were pretty much stuck with yellow. Now, you can set a skin tone for the hand gestures and people emojis that is more representative of who you are. Here's how that works…

In ***Teams Settings***, go to ***Appearance and accessibility*** > ***Skin tone***, and pick one of the six skin tone colors that you'd like to use:

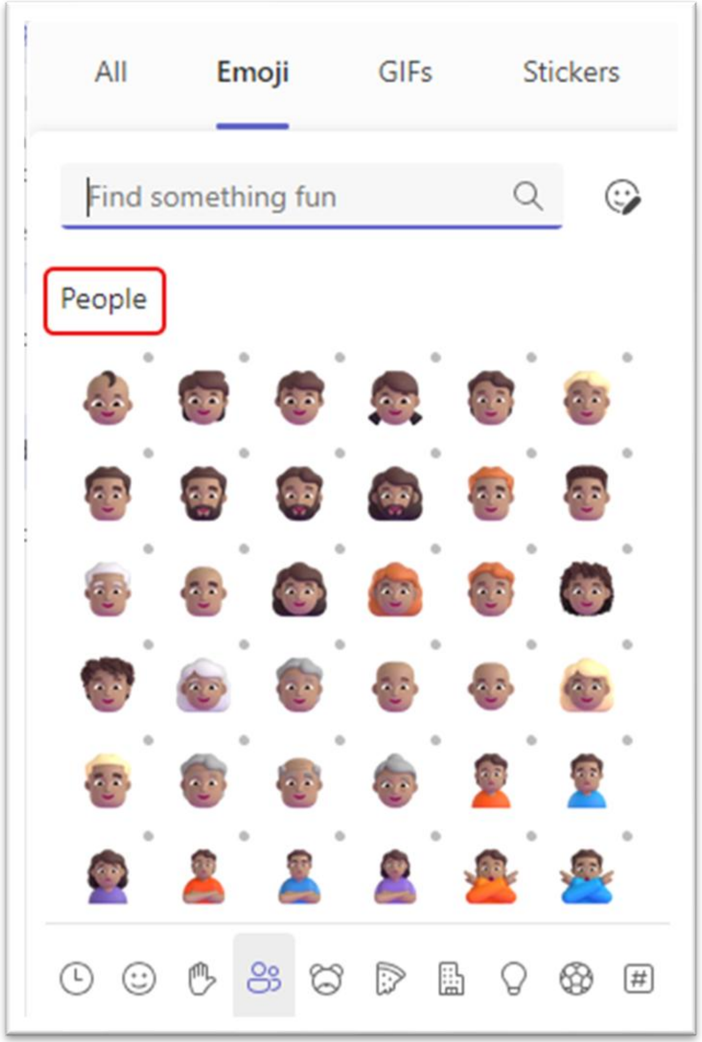


11. Microsoft Teams: New skin tone settings and reactions

Now when you use ***Hand gesture emojis***, they will be in the skin tone color you selected. Note that any emoji that has a small grey dot in the upper-right corner will use your selected skin tone:

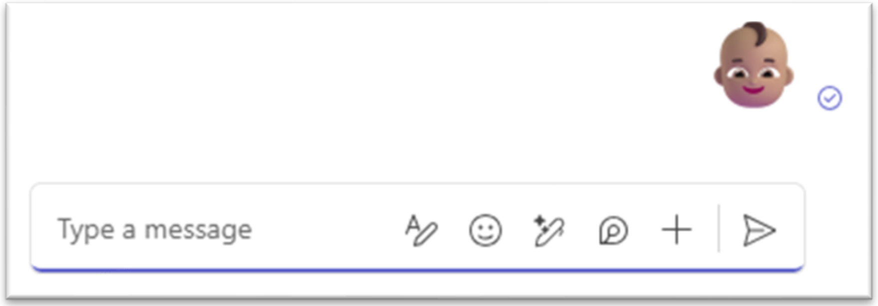


Same with the ***People emojis***:

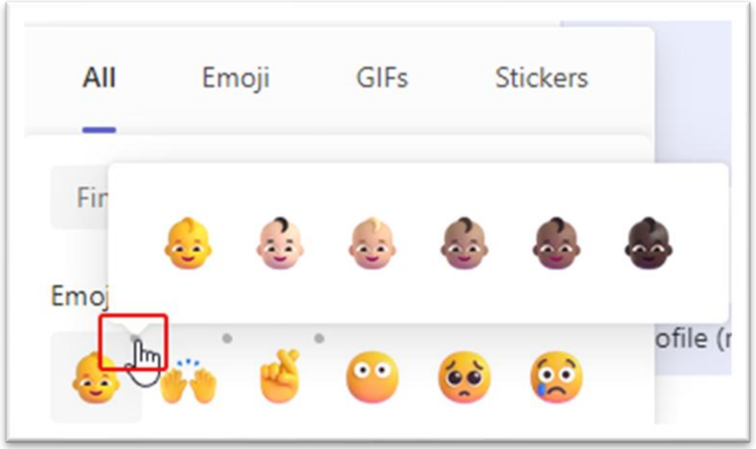


11. Microsoft Teams: New skin tone settings and reactions

And when you select one of them in a chat or conversation, your chosen skin tone will appear in that emoji:



If you want to do a one-time change to the skin tone of an emoji that has the grey dot on it, just ***right-click on the grey dot***. The six skin tone versions will show in a pop-up box, and you can select which one you want to use:

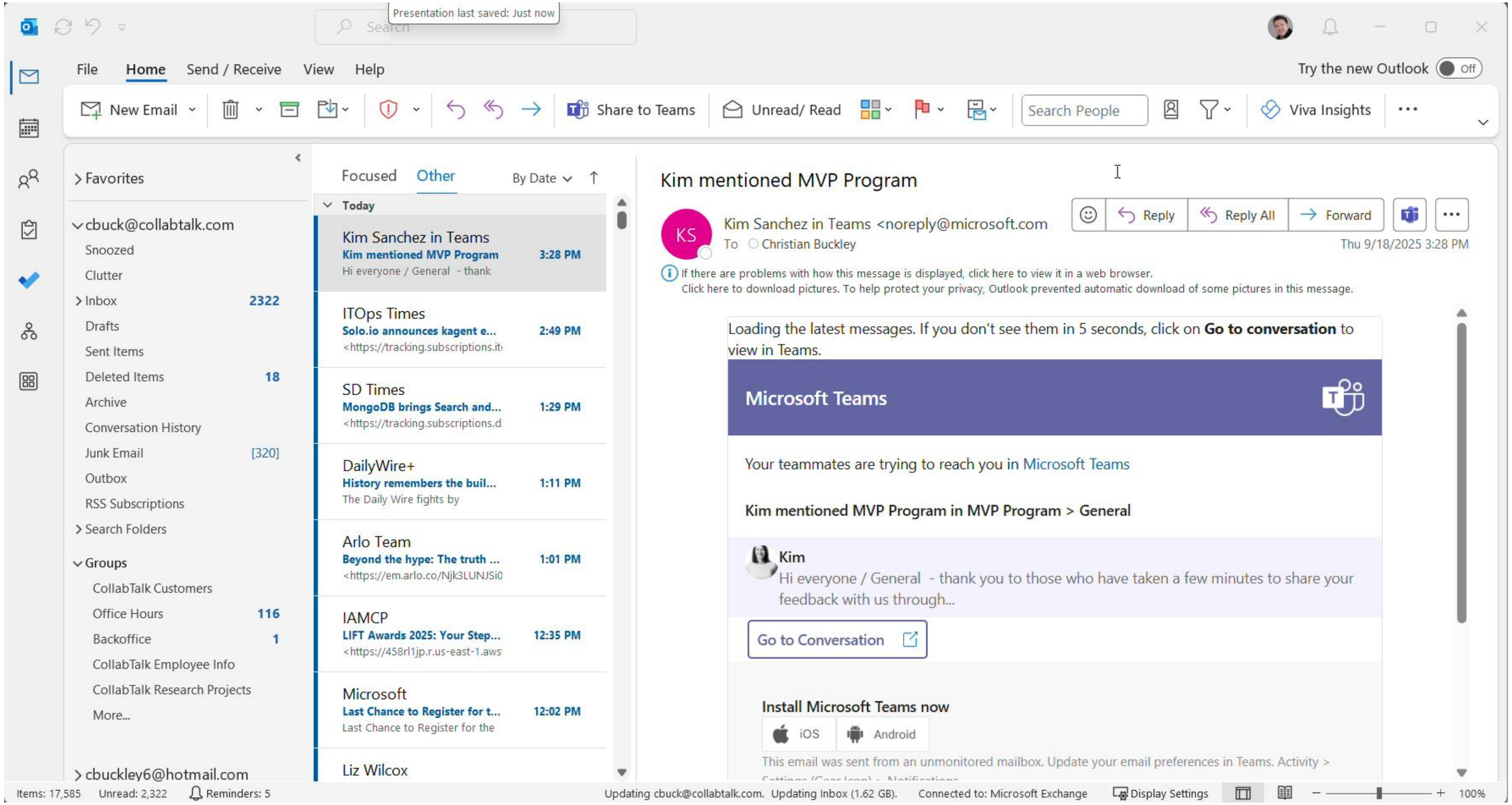


12. Color Categorize your Emails

Not a fan of archiving? Instead of folders, categorize. Even better is to categorize and THEN archive.

Within the old Outlook, you can find the Categories within the ribbon. From there you can add, edit, or remove categories.

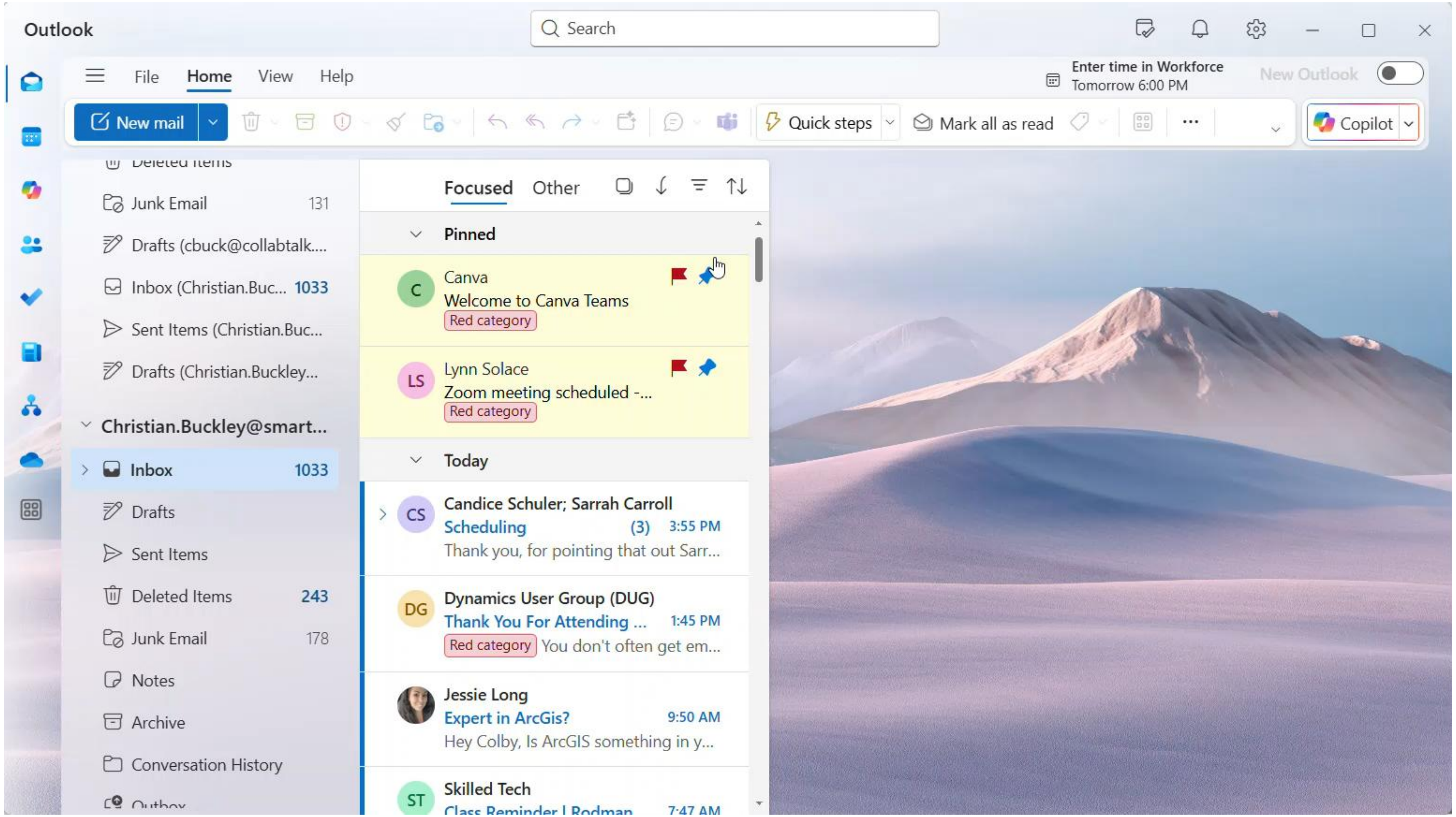
Archiving an email that has been categorized removes the email from your inbox, but you can still find it quickly and easily using the Category (or via search).



12. Color Categorize your Emails

Within the new Outlook, you'll find Categories using the settings gear, and then looking under General or Accounts, depending on your version of Outlook. One great feature is to select the star, which adds the category to your Favorites, making it even easier to recall any and all messages within that category.

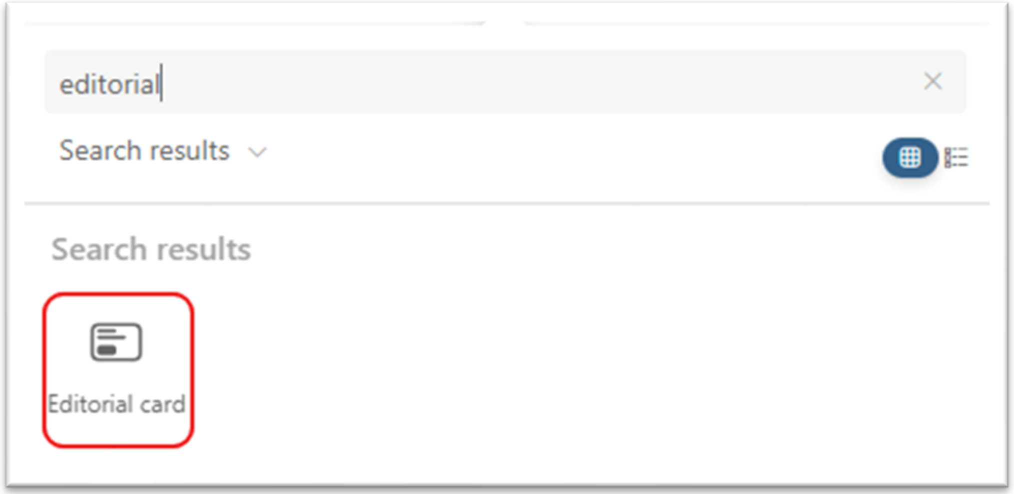
And when you select Archive on a categorized email, it disappears from your inbox, but remains within your favorited category.



13. Using the new Editorial Card web part on SharePoint pages

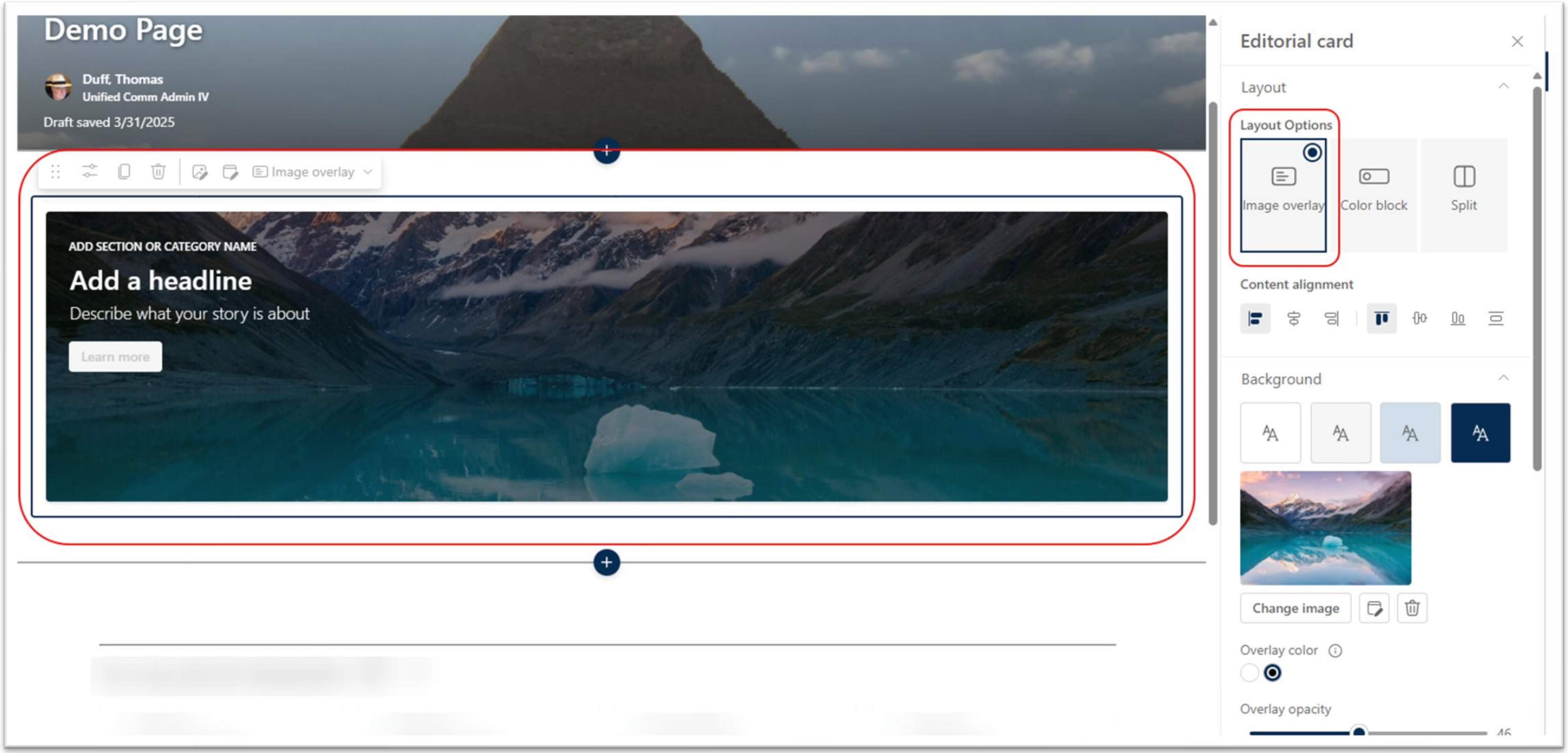
Microsoft has come out with a new SharePoint page web part that is rather interesting. It's called an Editorial Card web part, and Microsoft describes it as "*The SharePoint Editorial Card web part is a new feature designed to enhance content presentation on SharePoint pages and news. It allows for manual customization, enabling users to create visually appealing card-like containers tailored to specific needs.*" Let's dive in to see what it looks like and how it works…

To add the new web part on your page, search for Editorial and click on the icon:



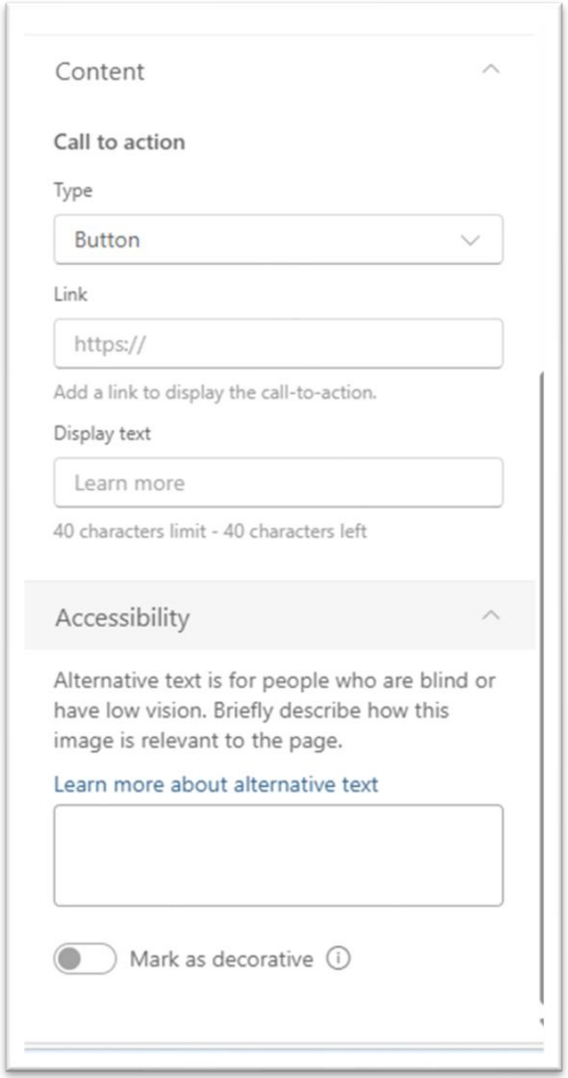
13. Using the new Editorial Card web part on SharePoint pages

The web part is added to your section and will take up the width of the column. The default is Image Overlay, and you have the ability to adjust the alignment, any background color, the image to use, the overlay color, and the overlay opacity:



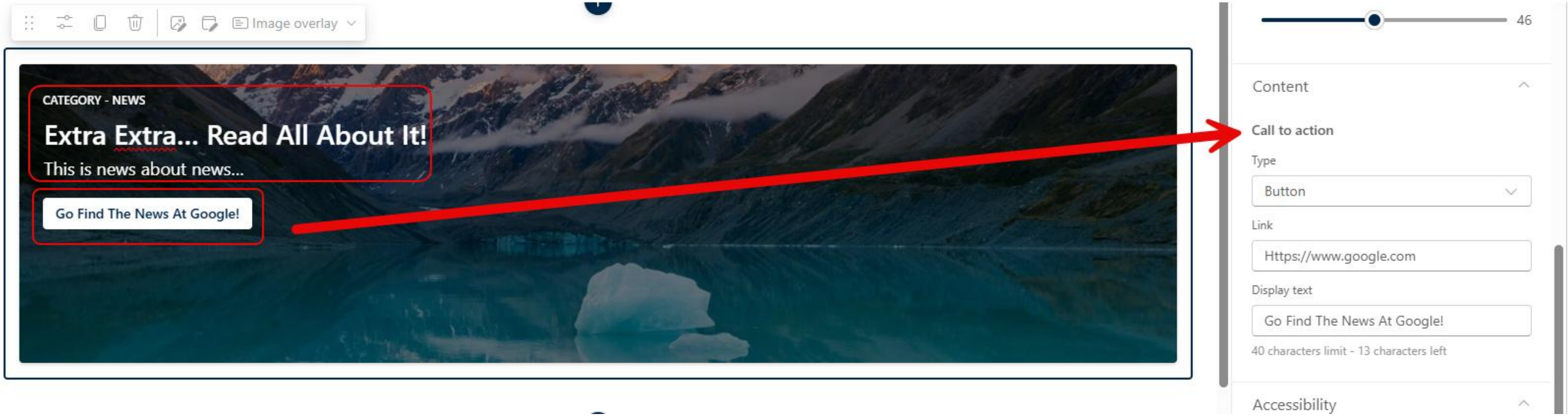
13. Using the new Editorial Card web part on SharePoint pages

If you scroll down further in the right-side configuration panel, you'll find the Call to action section which controls the clickable link on your image to get your reader to go somewhere:



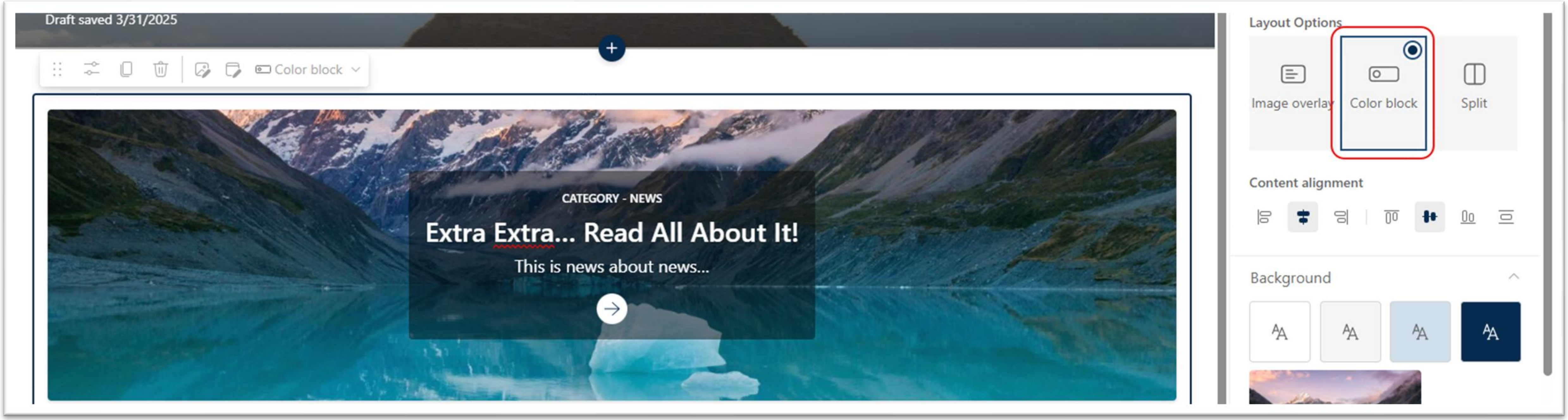
13. Using the new Editorial Card web part on SharePoint pages

In this example, I've set a call to action button to go to the Google web site. I can also update the content on the image by clicking on the line of text and typing in what I want:



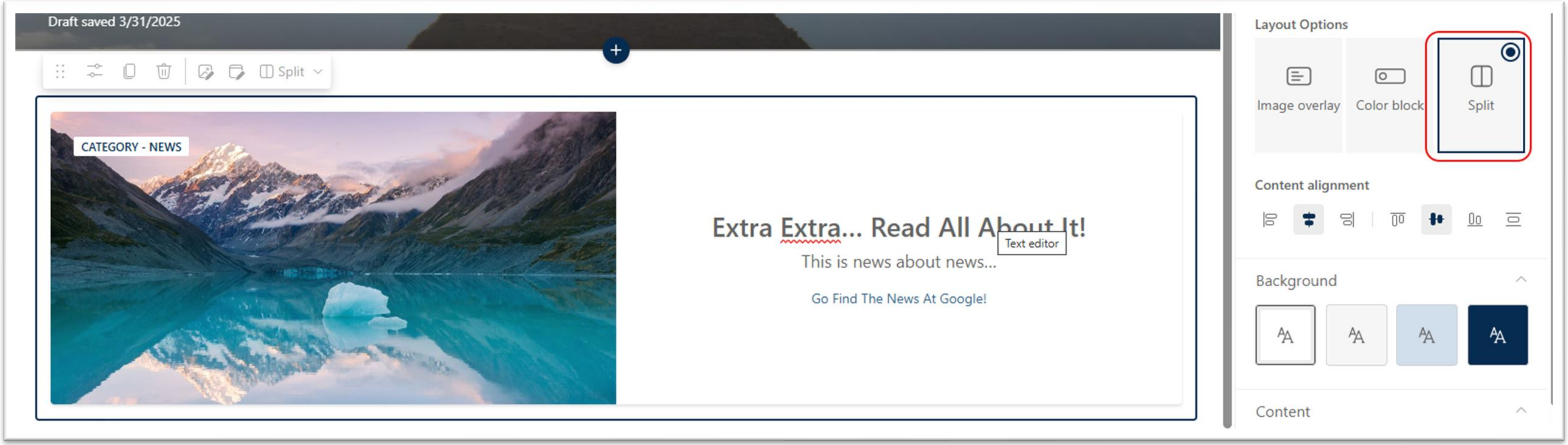
13. Using the new Editorial Card web part on SharePoint pages

While the default is Image Overlay, you can also have your text box be a solid color block:



13. Using the new Editorial Card web part on SharePoint pages

Or… you can use the Split option to have the image on one side, and all the text and call to action on the right:



14. Get organized with OneNote Tags

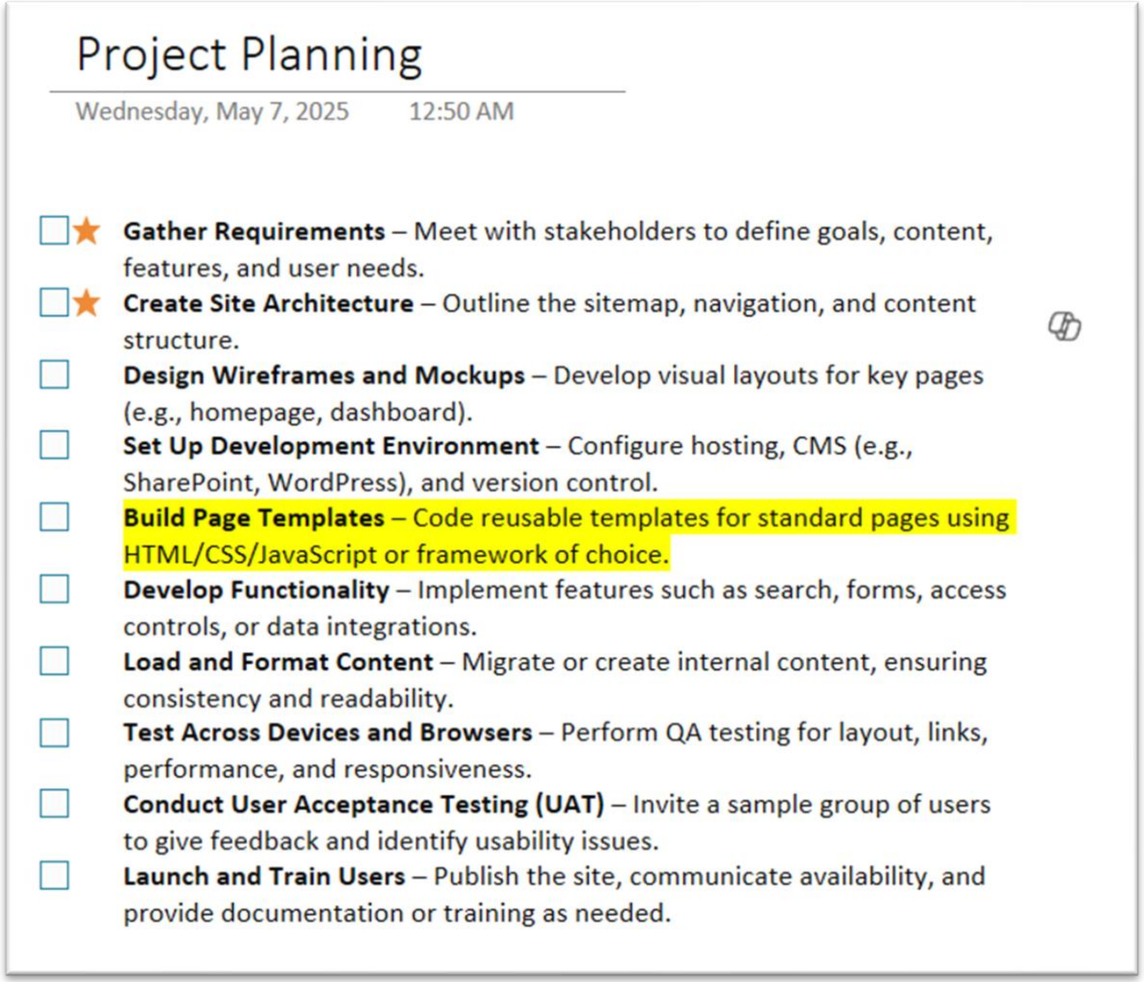
Tags in OneNote do more than just highlight information — they turn your notebook into a dynamic productivity tool.

You can use tags to:

- Flag important points
- Track to-dos
- Mark open questions
- Highlight action items, follow-ups, or ideas

Later, you can use the Search Tags feature to pull up a summary of everything tagged — instantly surfacing your priorities without digging through pages of notes.

Tags help you transform scattered notes into a searchable, actionable system — especially useful during meetings, brainstorming sessions, or project planning.



Project Planning

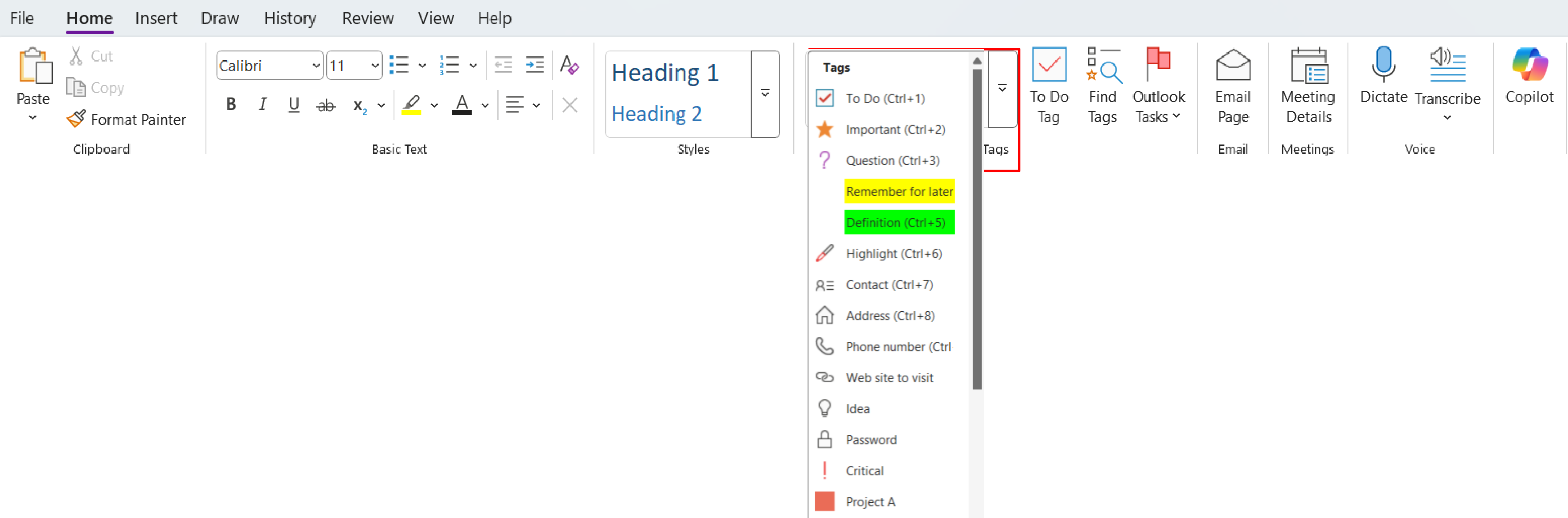
Wednesday, May 7, 2025 12:50 AM

- **Gather Requirements** – Meet with stakeholders to define goals, content, features, and user needs.
- **Create Site Architecture** – Outline the sitemap, navigation, and content structure.
- **Design Wireframes and Mockups** – Develop visual layouts for key pages (e.g., homepage, dashboard).
- **Set Up Development Environment** – Configure hosting, CMS (e.g., SharePoint, WordPress), and version control.
- **Build Page Templates** – Code reusable templates for standard pages using HTML/CSS/JavaScript or framework of choice.
- **Develop Functionality** – Implement features such as search, forms, access controls, or data integrations.
- **Load and Format Content** – Migrate or create internal content, ensuring consistency and readability.
- **Test Across Devices and Browsers** – Perform QA testing for layout, links, performance, and responsiveness.
- **Conduct User Acceptance Testing (UAT)** – Invite a sample group of users to give feedback and identify usability issues.
- **Launch and Train Users** – Publish the site, communicate availability, and provide documentation or training as needed.

14. Get organized with OneNote Tags

To use Tags in OneNote, open OneNote and select your text, highlighting the note, task, or idea you want to tag.

Go to **Home > Tags** group and choose a built-in tag (e.g., To Do, Important, Question, etc.) or click the drop-down to see more tag options.

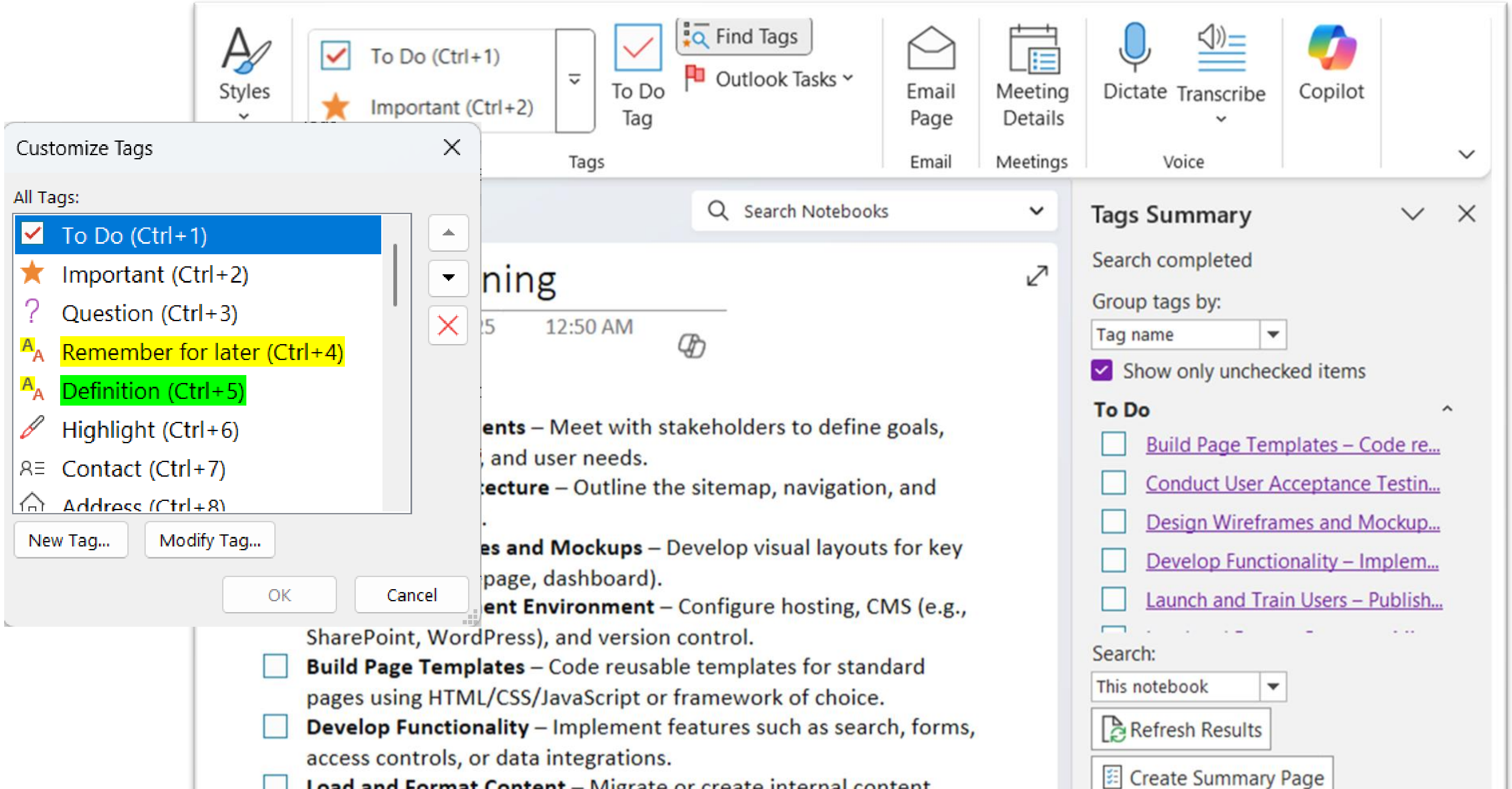


14. Get organized with OneNote Tags

To search for tagged items, click **Find Tags** on the Home tab to open the Tags Summary pane.

This shows all tagged content across your notebook — organized by tag type and page.

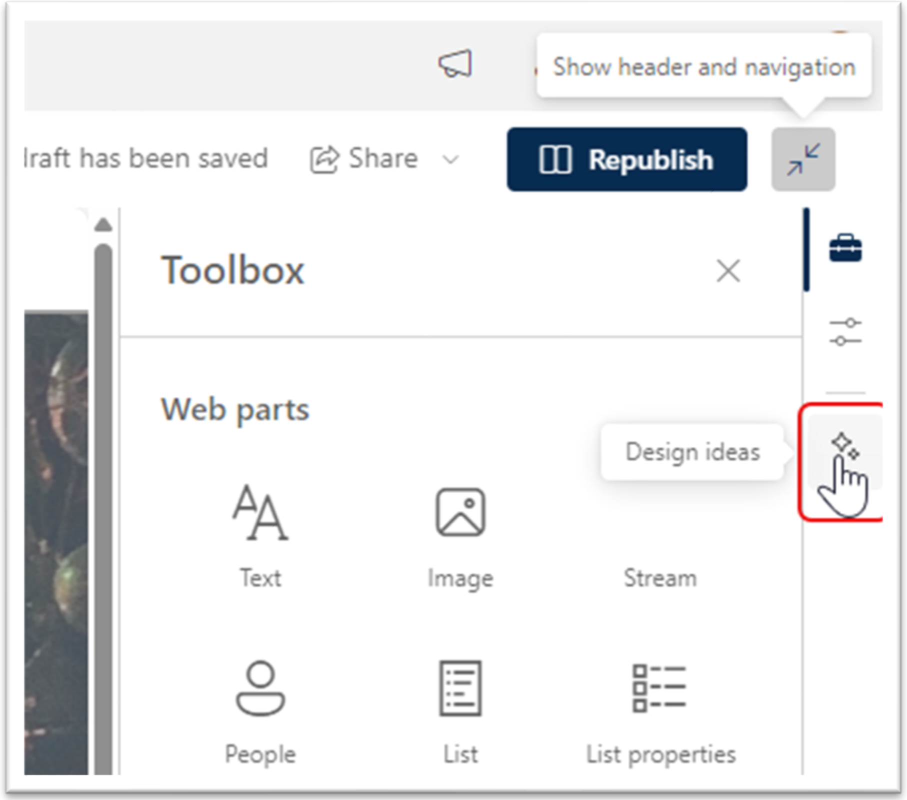
You can also create **Custom Tags** by scrolling to the bottom of the tag list and selecting **Customize Tags**. You can create your own label and icon for personalized organization.



15. Using Design Ideas on SharePoint Online Pages

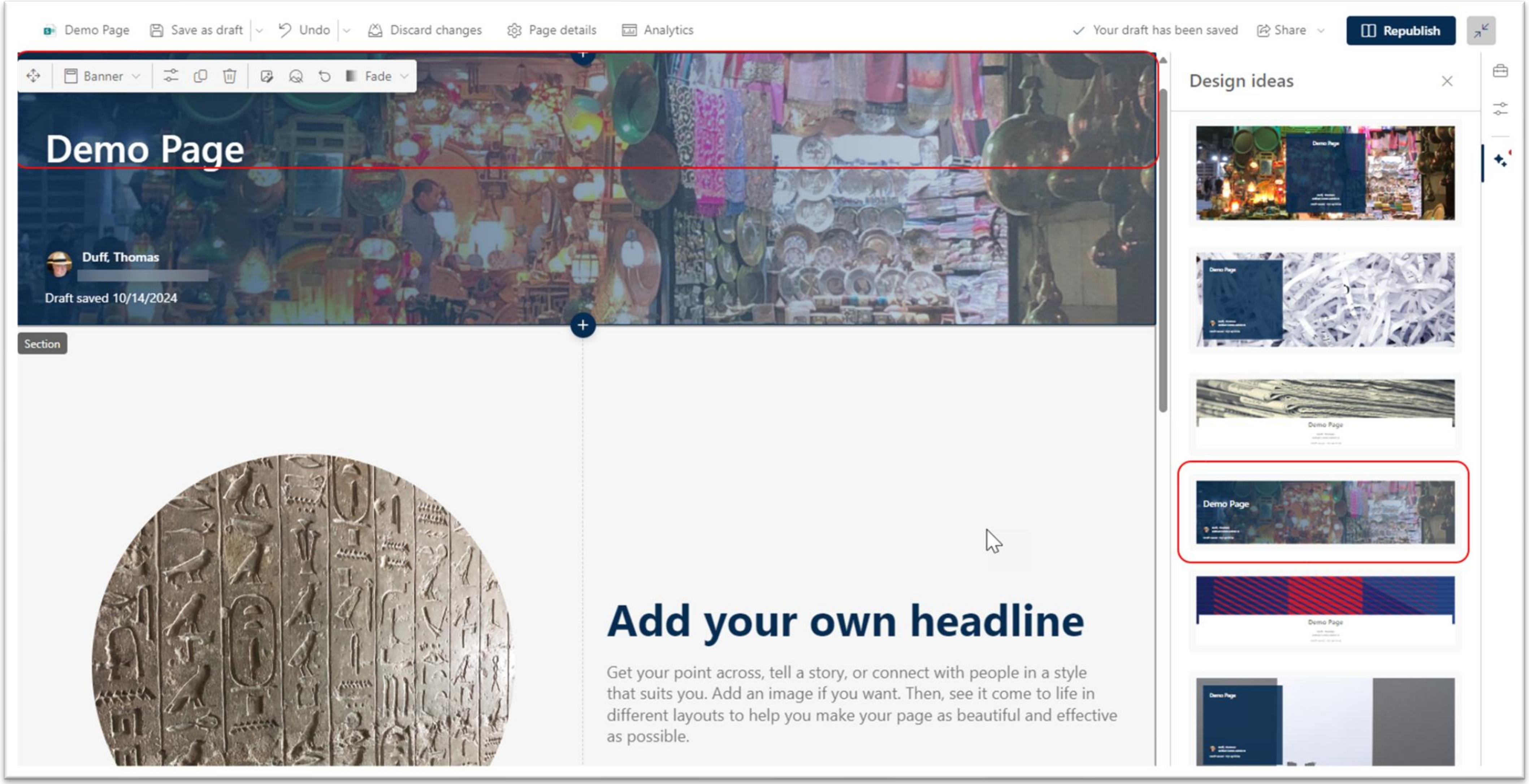
If you struggle with coming up with nice layouts on your SharePoint Pages, the new ***Design Ideas*** feature will be of interest to you. It can help you come up with design options that you may not have thought of (or like me, are incapable of). Here's how that works…

To open the Design Ideas feature when your page is in Edit mode, click on the ***Design Ideas icon*** on the right side of the screen:



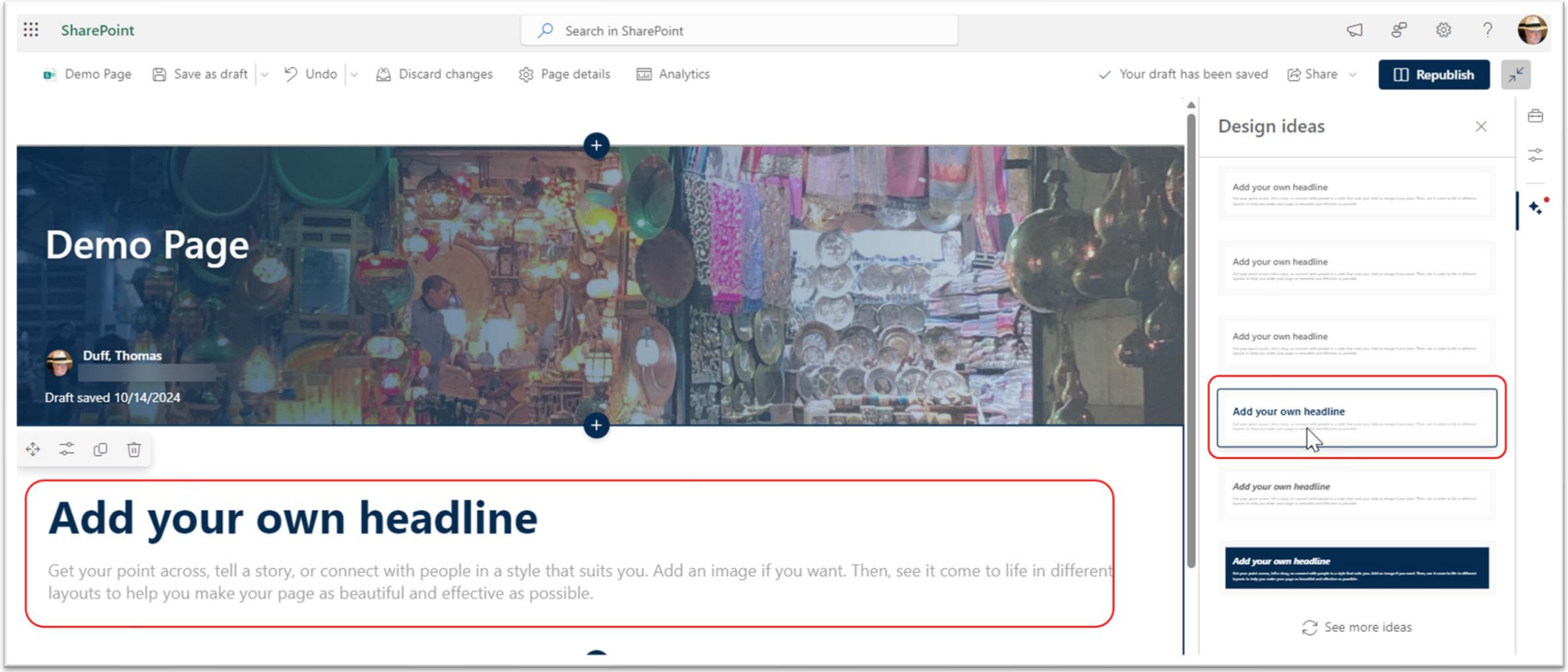
15. Using Design Ideas on SharePoint Online Pages

To use it in the Banner section, click somewhere in the Banner section and Design Ideas will offer up some various images and text layouts that would work well on the page:



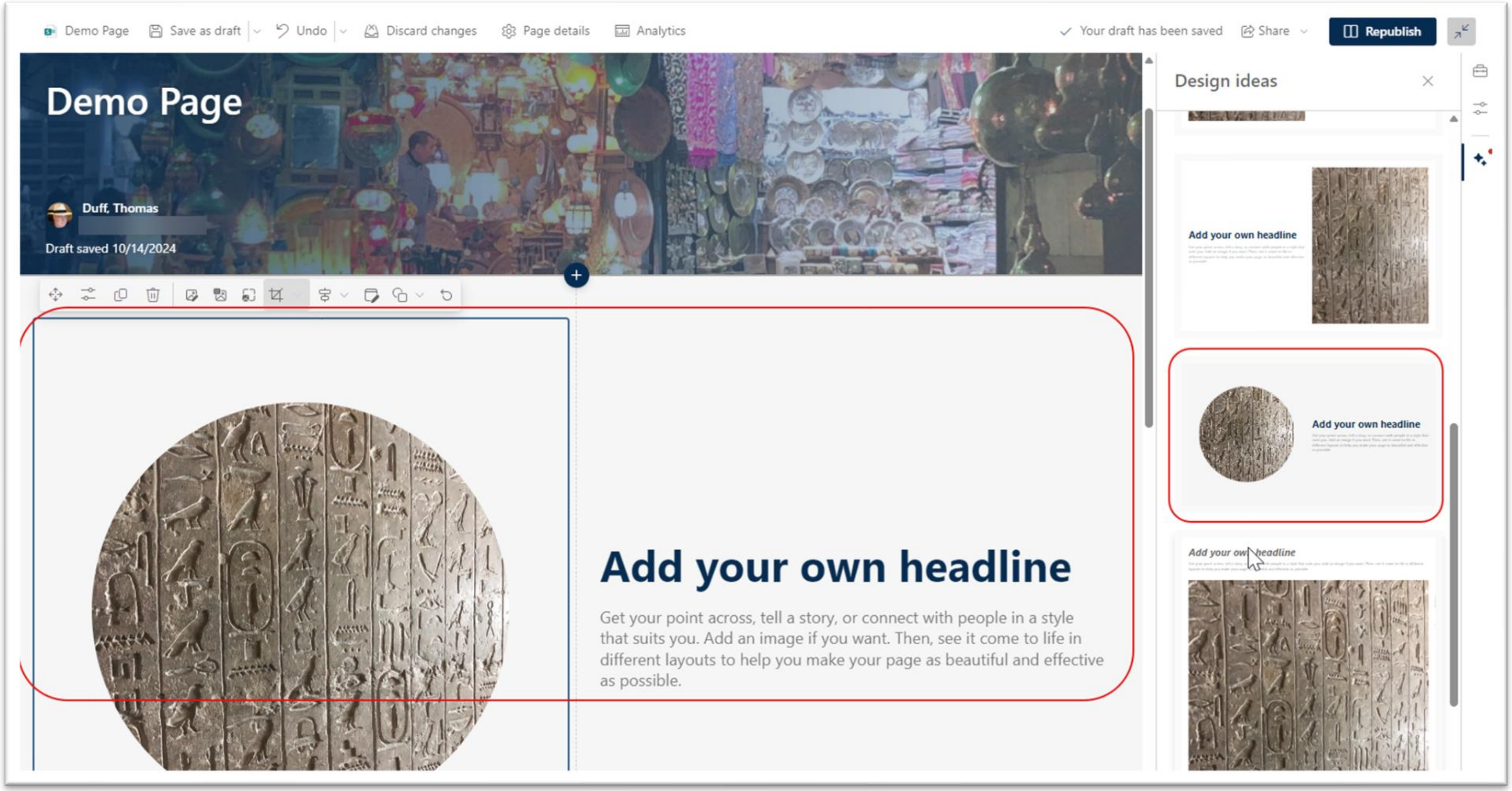
15. Using Design Ideas on SharePoint Online Pages

For text design, click in your text web part and Design Ideas will come up with some various color and font options that are better than just the out-of-the-box look:



15. Using Design Ideas on SharePoint Online Pages

Finally, click in an Image web part to get some options for various image and text layouts that are extremely helpful in creating unique and pleasing page layouts:



At this current time, Design Ideas only works with banner, text and image webparts. If you click on one of those web parts and Design Ideas are available, you'll see a small red dot next to the Design Ideas icon.

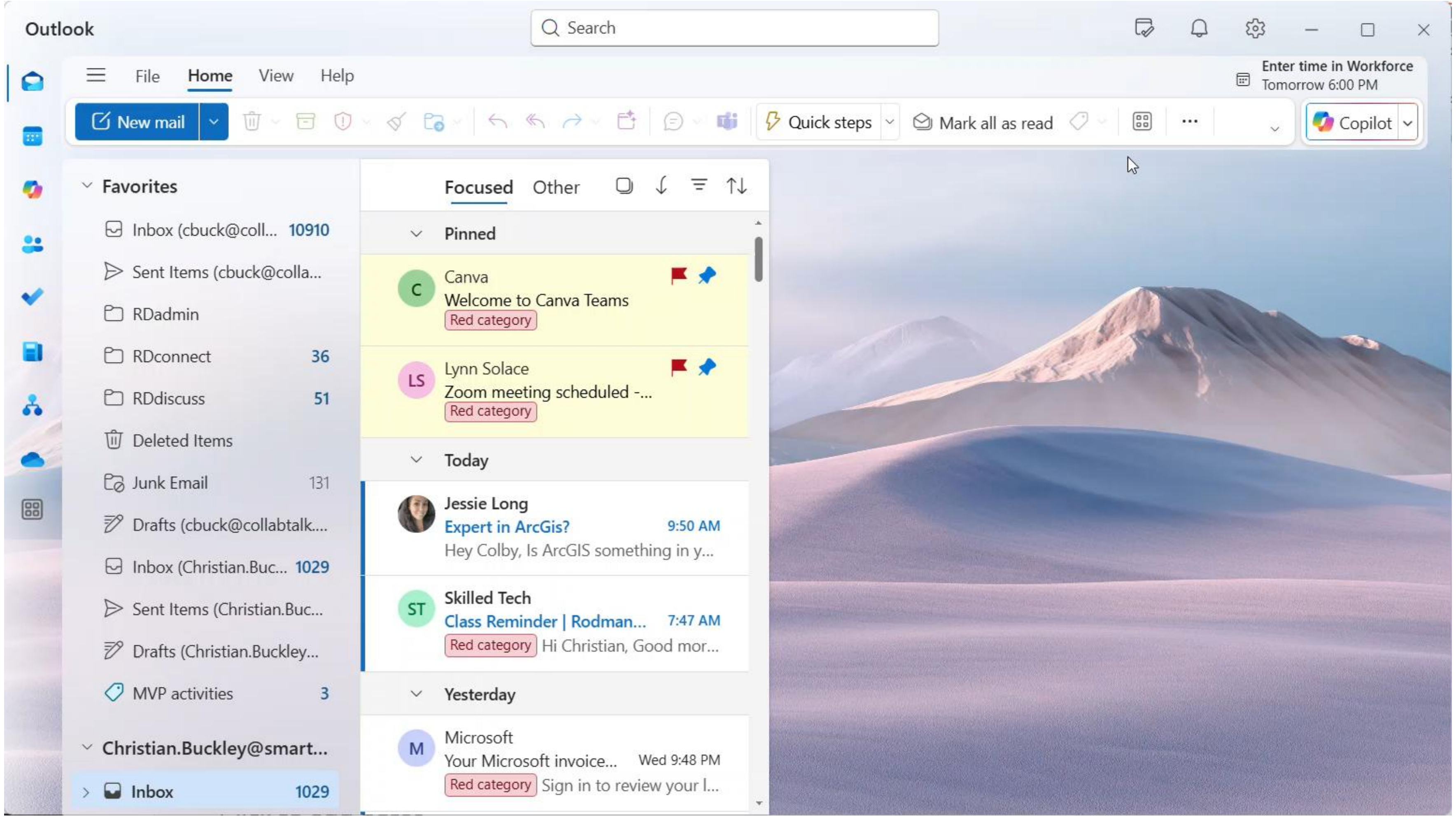
16. Create your own Outlook Templates

Do you find yourself creating similar email responses to common requests?

- Thank you for reaching out.
- Let's schedule a meeting.
- Here is this week's training schedule for the team.

You can add the My Templates app by going to the app launcher and searching for it, clicking Open, and confirming.

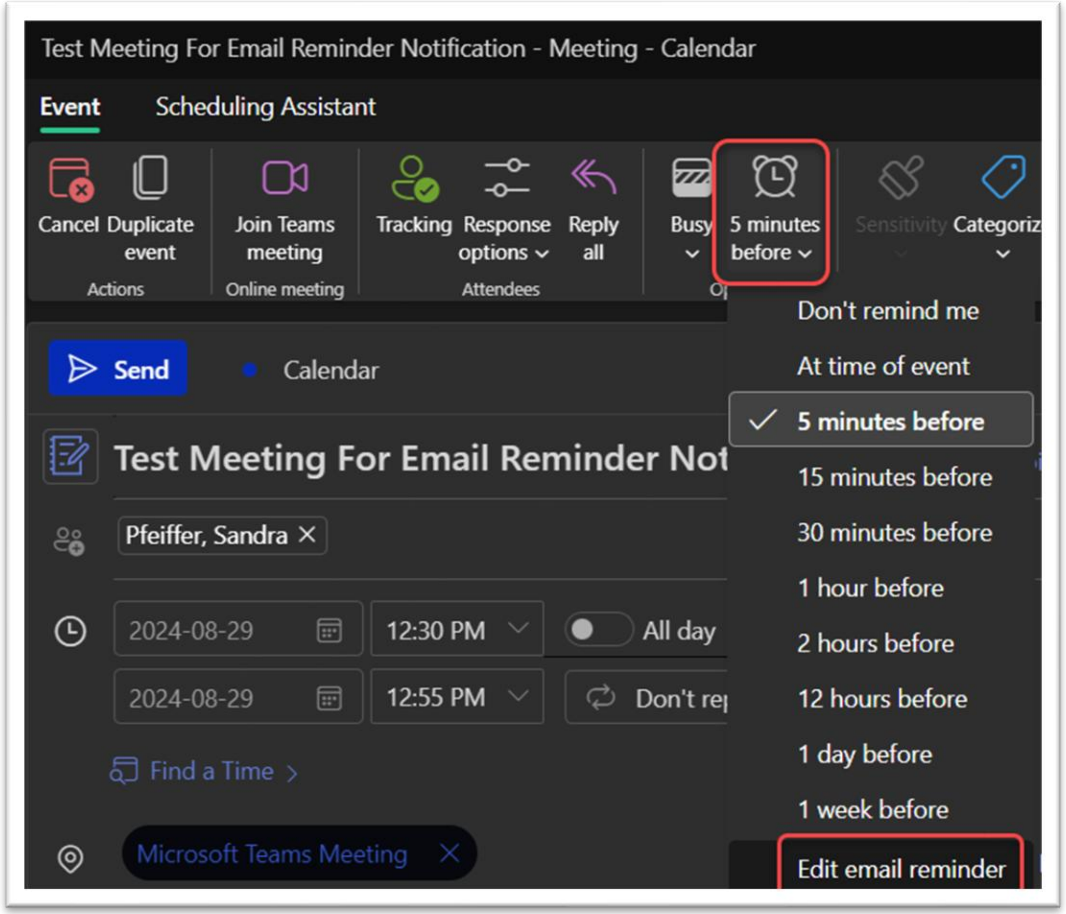
To start using the app, create a new email, click on Apps, and then select the My Templates app. A dialog box will open, and from there you can insert an existing template or create new templates.



17. Sending meeting reminder emails from Outlook on the web

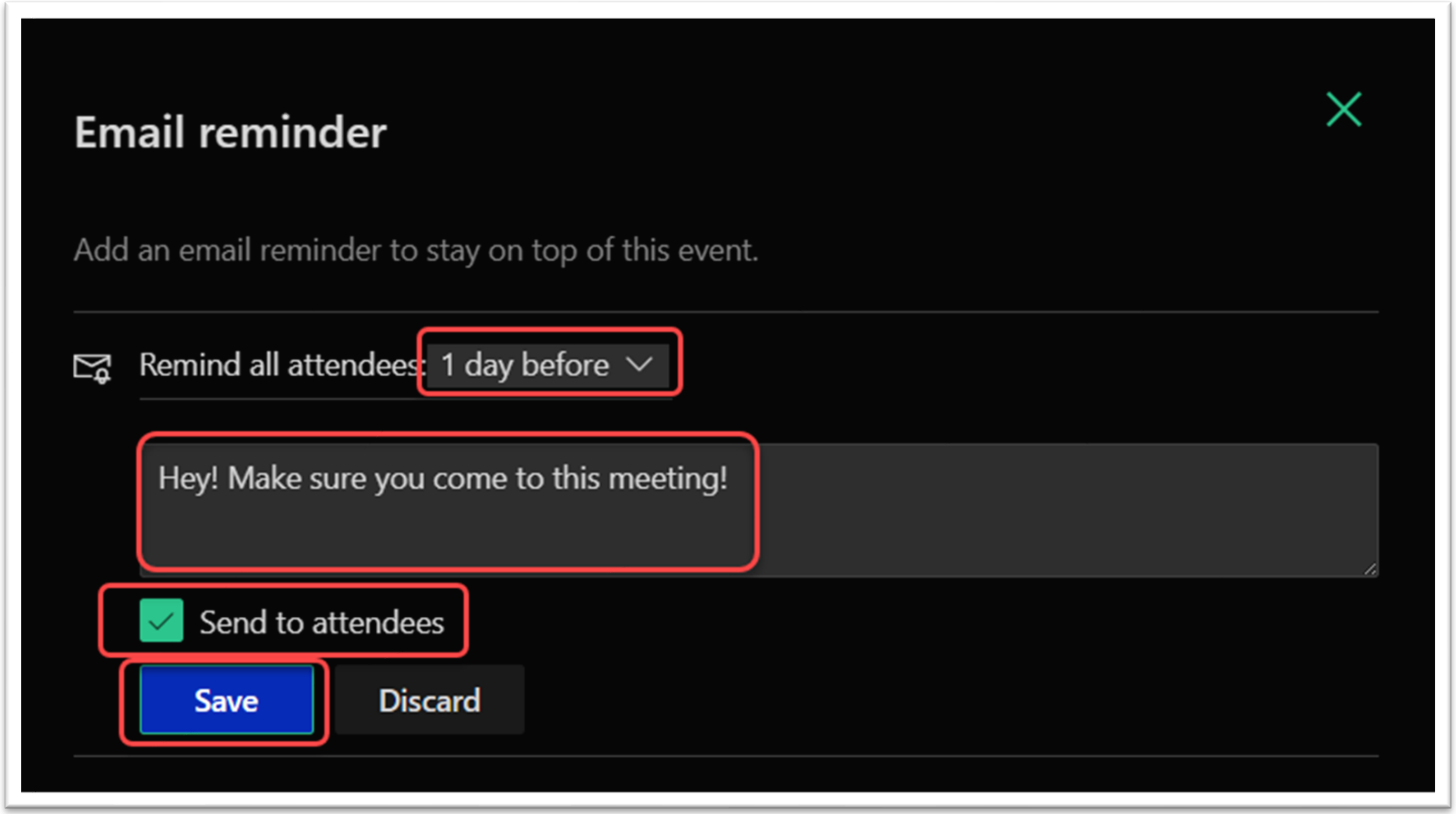
Sandra found a really cool feature that's somewhat buried in the calendar that you have on Outlook on the web. It's the ability to have Outlook ***send a reminder email*** to your attendees prior to your meeting based on whatever lead time you want! This is a really cool feature that takes meeting reminders up a notch. Here's how that works…

If you are setting up your meeting in the Outlook on the web calendar, click on ***Event > 5 minutes before > Edit email reminder***:



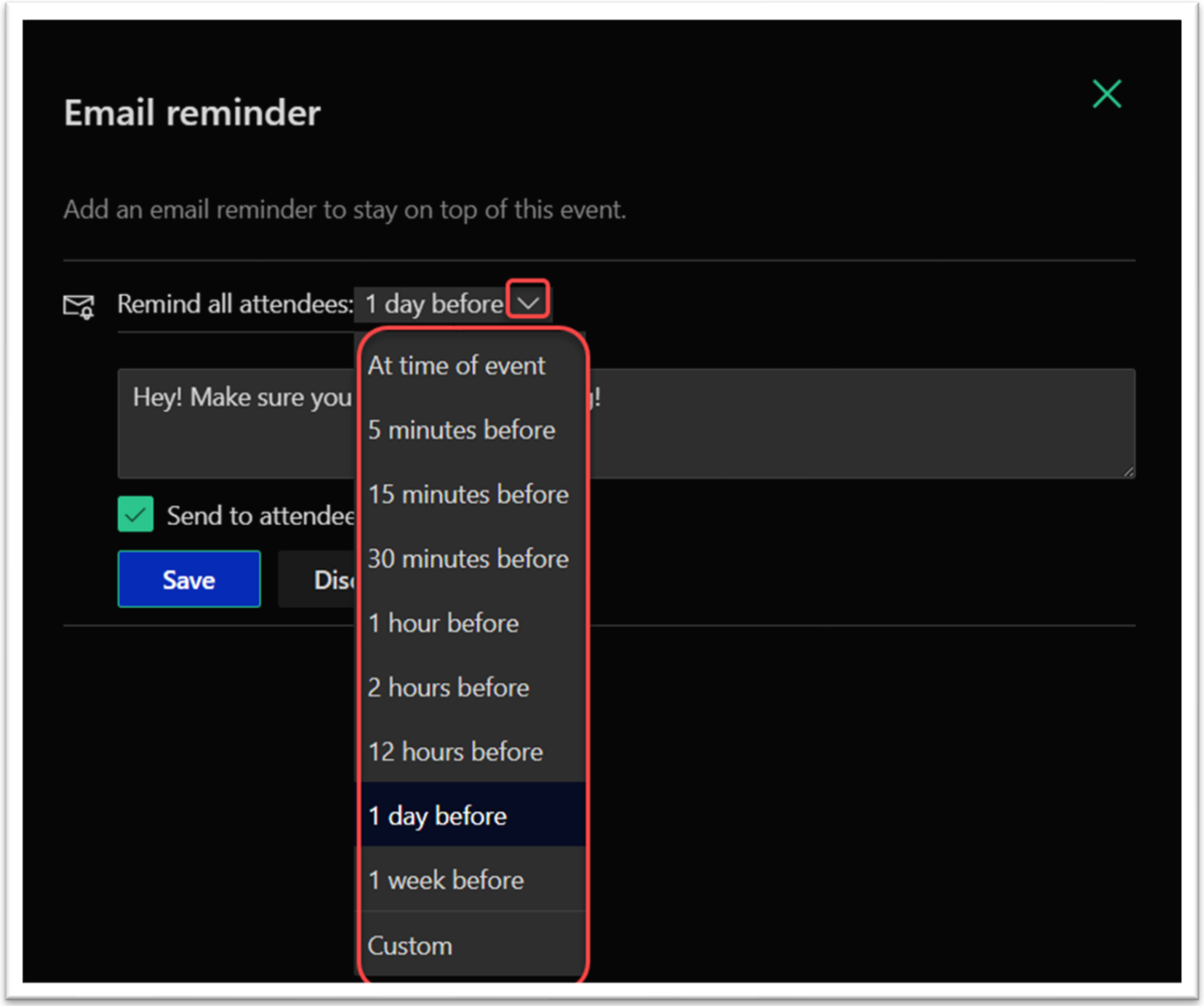
17. Sending meeting reminder emails from Outlook on the web

Now instead of having the attendee ***just*** get a pop-up reminder five minutes before the meeting, you can also have an email reminder sent to them before the meeting. In this case, I chose have a reminder email go out to ***all attendees 1 day before*** the meeting:



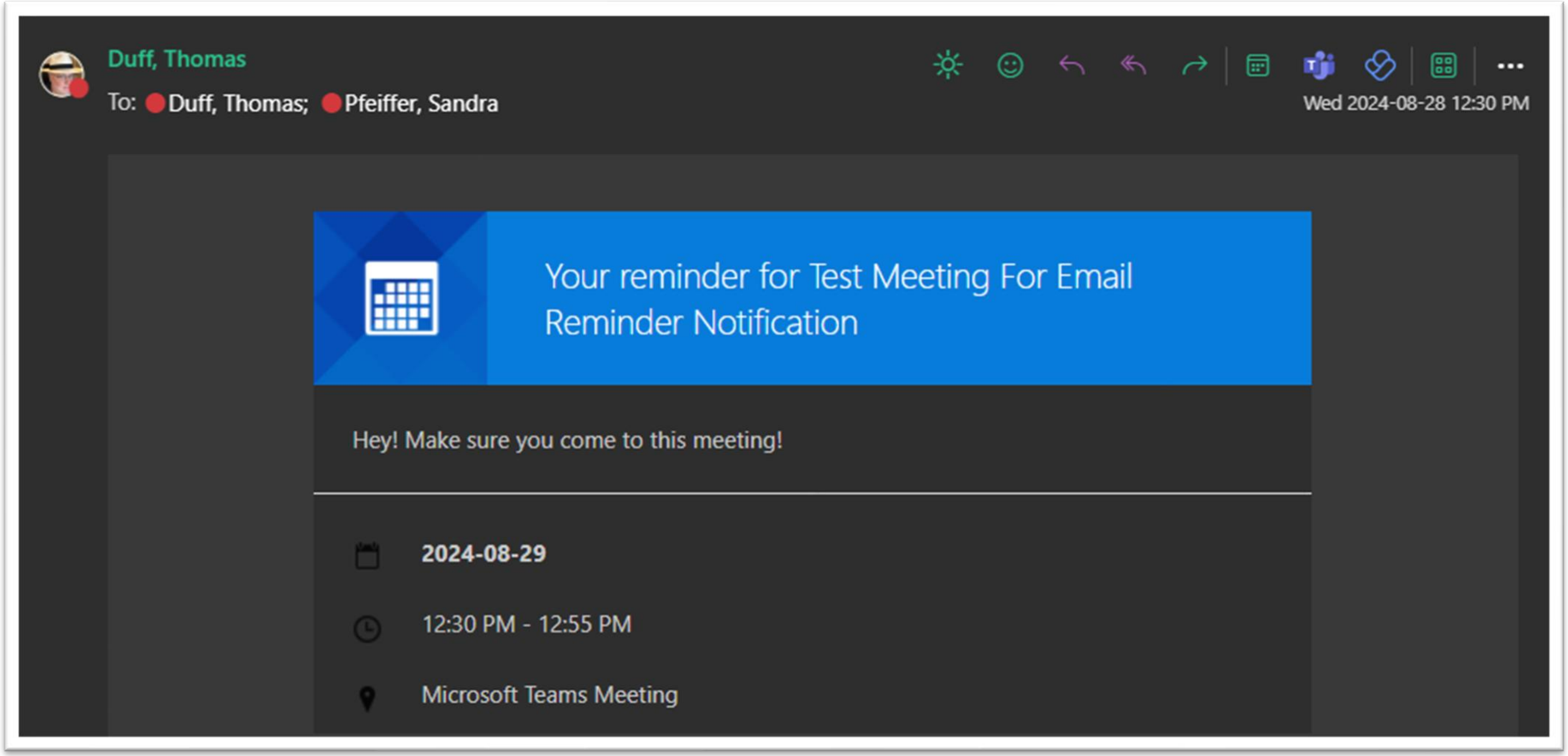
17. Sending meeting reminder emails from Outlook on the web

If I wanted, I could choose from a list of time frames for the reminder email, or I could use ***Custom*** to pick my own time frame:



17. Sending meeting reminder emails from Outlook on the web

In my example, here's the email I got one day before the meeting. The email went out exactly one day before the meeting, at the same time the meeting would be happening the next day:



This is a great feature to give people a heads-up on important meetings, and one that is not dependent on them getting the pop-up reminder a few minutes before the scheduled event.

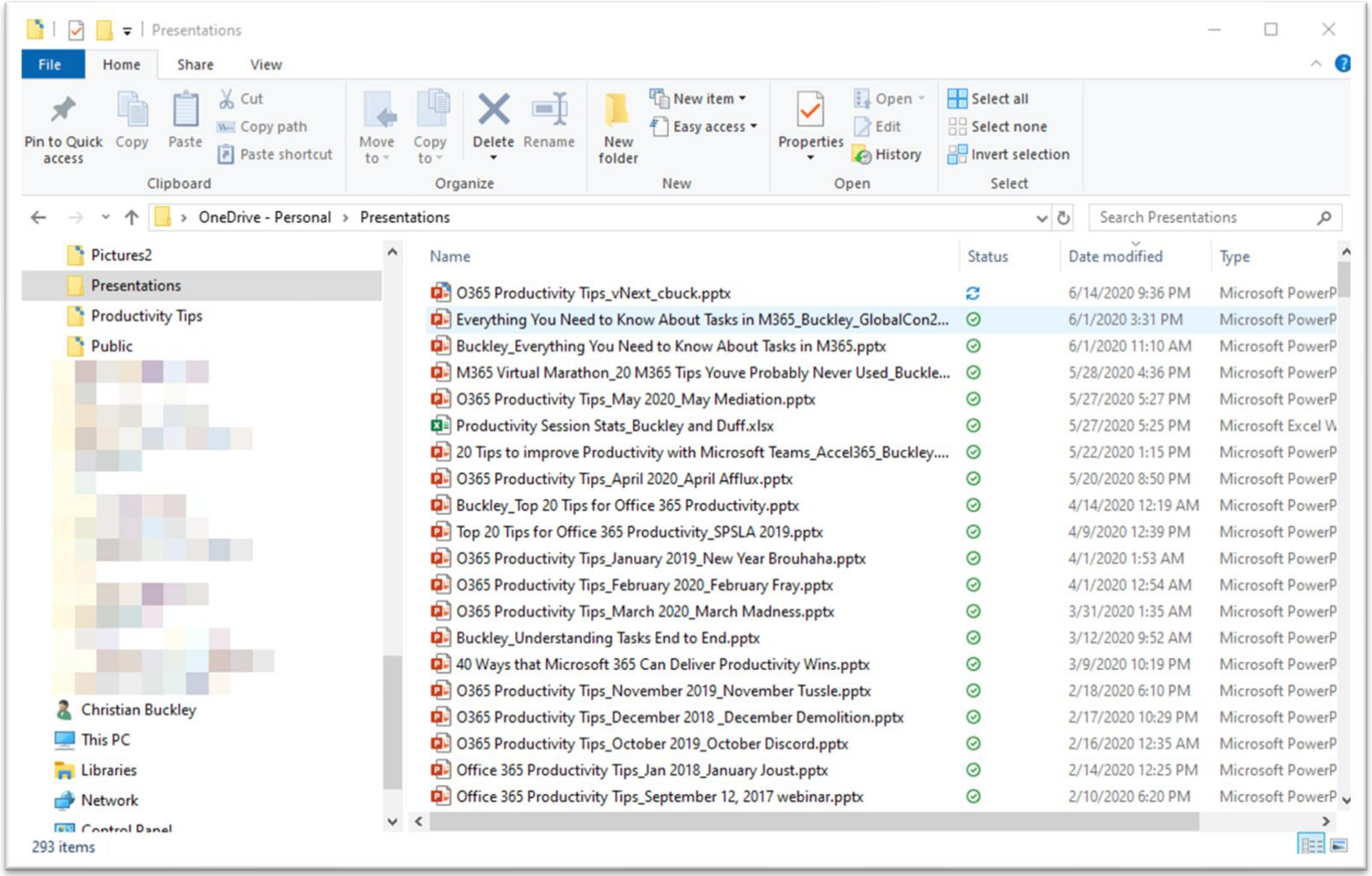
18. Restore previous versions in File Explorer

Did you know that you can view and restore versions of a document directly within File Explorer?

Sadly, Windows 11 did away with the desktop timeline feature.

When Microsoft announced their Windows Recall feature, users and pundits complained it was too much of a “Big Brother” capability.

But in File Explorer, we have the ability to jump backwards in time into previous versions of our files.

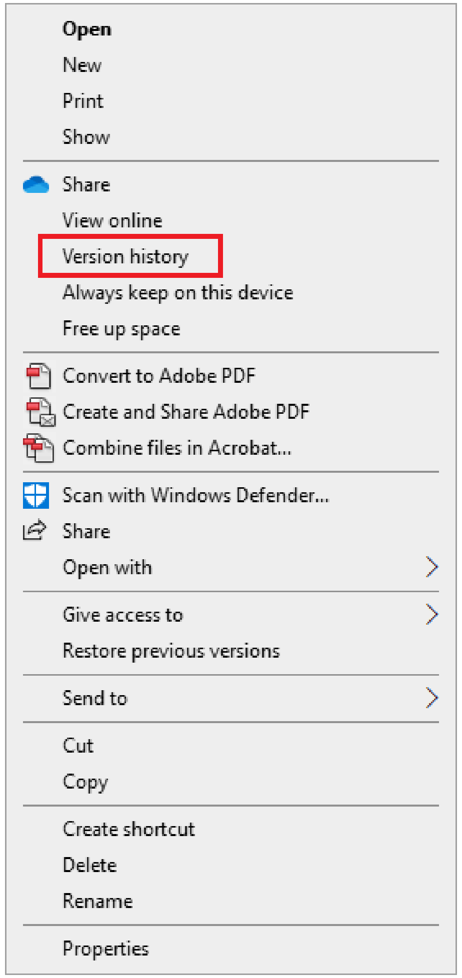


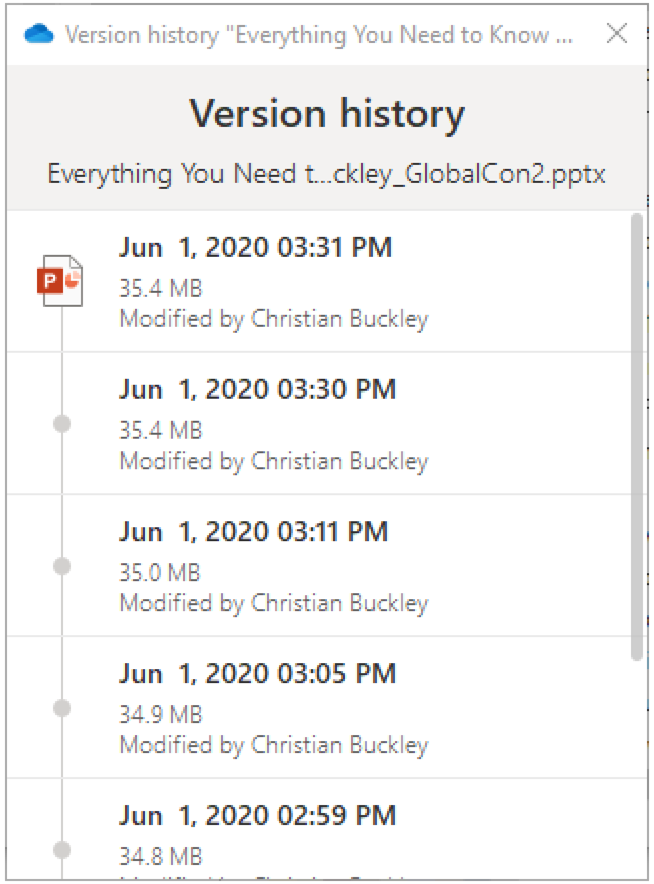
18. Restore previous versions in File Explorer

Why should you care? Sometimes you’re hours into edits and realize that you accidentally deleted some key content or images. With this feature, you can jump back into an older version and correct your mistakes.

To access the version history, simply right click on the file name, and from the menu dialog, select **Version History**

The version history dialog opens, allowing you to scan through your various versions and open the right version.

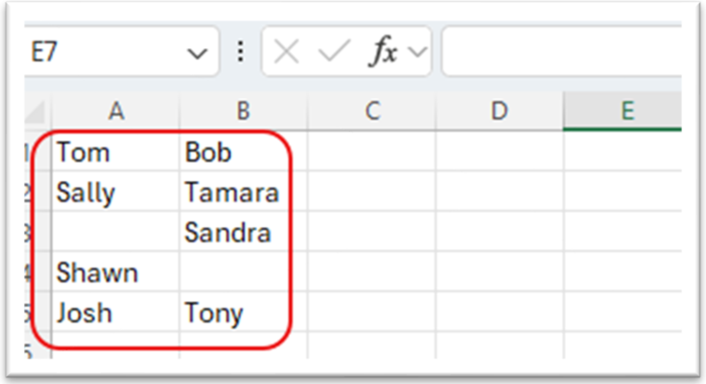




19. Combining Excel columns with the ToCol function

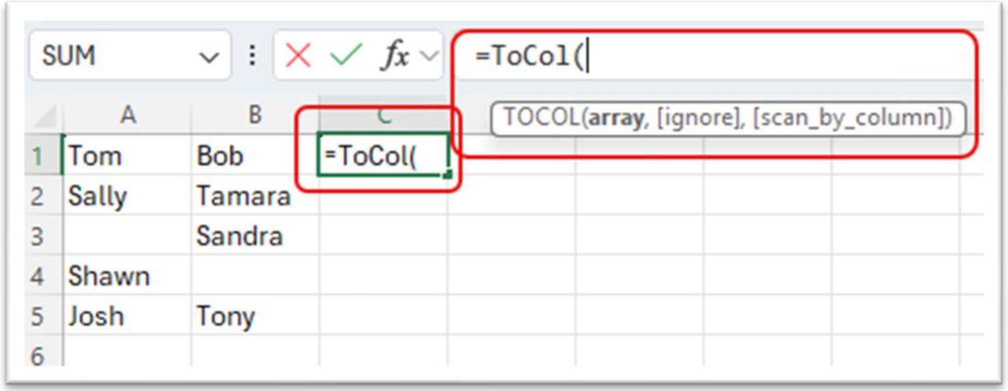
Tamara (my wife) called me into her office yesterday to share this tip she just learned, and it's pretty cool. Have you ever had multiple columns in Excel that you wanted to combine into a single column without copying and pasting? You can do that with the ***ToCol (To Column) function***. Here's how that works…

In this example, I have two columns of names, along with a few blank cells mixed in. I'd like to get all of those to show up in a single combined column without the blank cells…

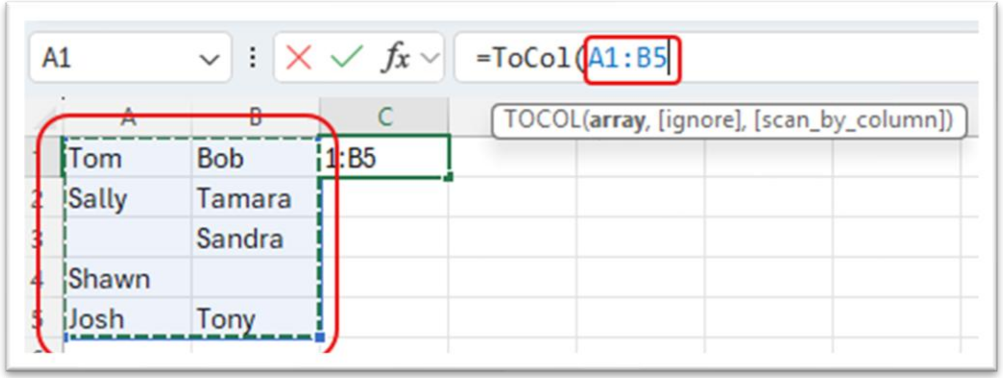


19. Combining Excel columns with the ToCol function

I put my cursor in cell C1 and in the function bar I typed ***=ToCol(***. That provided me the type-ahead format of the function:

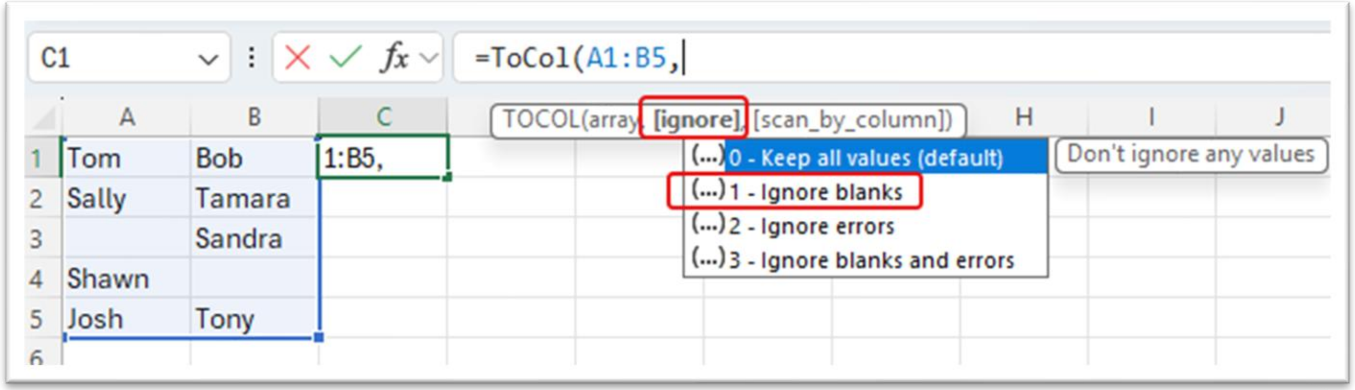


To get the ***array*** value, I highlighted the content in the two columns. That automatically filled in ***A1:B5*** for the array value:

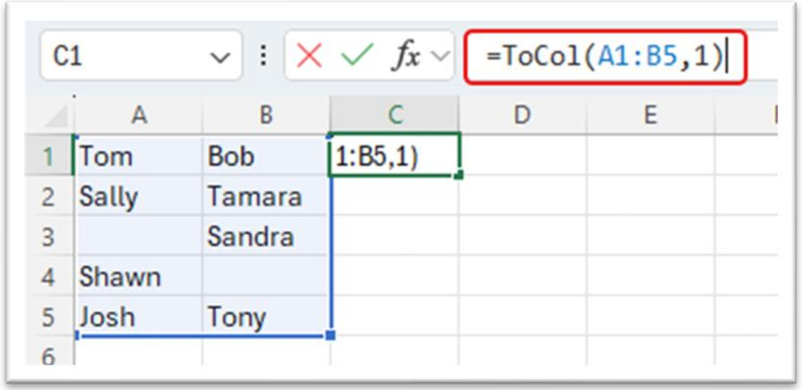


19. Combining Excel columns with the ToCol function

Next, I added a ***comma*** to the function to get the ***ignore*** values. By using the value of ***1***, the function ignores all the blank cells:



I then added the closing parenthesis and pressed ***Enter***:



19. Combining Excel columns with the ToCol function

Column C now has the combined list of all the names found in columns A and B!

C2 | =TOCOL(A1:B5,1)

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Tom	Bob	Tom		
2	Sally	Tamara	Bob		
3		Sandra	Sally		
4	Shawn		Tamara		
5	Josh	Tony	Sandra		
6			Shawn		
7			Josh		
8			Tony		
9					

20. Using the Game Play pattern

This pattern turns a prompt into an interactive or playful experience.

Use it for quizzes, simulations, or training exercises that mimic game mechanics.

This pattern is awesome for teams trying to build prompt literacy, or anyone who wants to sharpen their skills in a more engaging way.

We are going to play a game involving prompt engineering. You are going to give me a single task that can be accomplished via prompting. Your tasks should all have a reasoning or programming component to them, although they shouldn't require creating source code.

I will try to write a prompt for you to solve the task. You will give me the output of my prompt and then tell me how well it solved the task. Ask me questions until I tell you to stop. You will ask me a question, wait for my response, and then ask me another question after you tell me how I did.

Ask me the first question.

Take this simple note:

> “Reminder: Beth to send slides by EOD Friday.”

Your job: write a prompt that extracts the **task, owner, and due date** in a clear table (Markdown, 3 columns). Assume today is Wednesday, September 17, 2025 (America/Chicago), and “EOD Friday” means 2025-09-19.

First question:

What’s the exact prompt you’d give the AI to turn that note into the required table?

20. Using the Game Play pattern

Create a markdown table with 3 columns to track task, owner, and due date. Use today's date as a baseline, and assign all tasks based on weekdays and normal business hours Central Time. Prompt me for a single line of data, and then parse that data and add to the markdown table. Ask me for inputs until I say STOP. with each new input, organize/prioritize the list by due date.

Thought for 24s

Here's the result of running your prompt on the note:

Task	Owner	Due Date
Send slides	Beth	2025-09-19

How you did: Solid start—concise loop design and CT/weekday guardrails. Two quick gaps to tighten next time: you didn't force a specific date format or define relative-time rules (e.g., "this Friday" vs. "next Friday," "EOD" = 5pm CT), so different models might interpret inconsistently. Also, you didn't say how to normalize task phrasing (e.g., strip "Reminder:").

20. Using the Game Play pattern

Remind Jonathan to review the courseware and provide his feedback by Sept 23rd, as Phil needs to complete the course and have it in production by the 25th

Thought for 16s

Here's your updated table, sorted by due date:

Task	Owner	Due Date
Send slides	Beth	2025-09-19
Review courseware and provide feedback	Jonathan	2025-09-23

How you did: Nice! You correctly inferred the actionable task for Jonathan and normalized the casual "Sept 23rd" into a concrete date. One limitation: your prompt didn't specify what to do with secondary deadlines (Phil's 9/25 dependency), so it was ignored. If you want those captured in future, add a rule like "if a line contains multiple actionable items, create separate rows."

My question: Got another single-line note for the table, or type **STOP**?

20. Using the Game Play pattern

Additionally, you can ask Copilot to provide its own response. Simply ask “How would you respond? Create a 10/10 prompt to demonstrate what a perfect prompt might look like.

Copilot will come back with a “perfect” example and explain why it was good.

You missed the second part of that input, and should parse it for a secondary task

Thought for 31s

You’re right—I should’ve split that into two tasks. Added Phil’s item and re-sorted:

Task	Owner	Due Date
Send slides	Beth	2025-09-19
Review courseware and provide feedback	Jonathan	2025-09-23
Complete course and publish to production	Phil	2025-09-25

How you did: Much better. The note actually contained two actionable items owned by different people on different dates. Your original prompt didn’t instruct the model to split multi-owner inputs, so it treated the second part as context. To lock this in, add: “If an input line includes multiple owners or deliverables, create separate rows for each and preserve dependencies if implied.”

My question: Got another single-line note to add, or type **STOP**?

That's 20, folks!
Thank you!

M365

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