

## Standardizing Phone Numbers Using GREP in InDesign CS3


In this example, a list of phone numbers using non-standard formatting (*left column*) needs to be formatted consistently (*right column*). I want to impose consistency where there is none. Or isn't there? If you get past the inconsistent formatting, every one of these phone numbers have one thing in common: they're made up of ten digits.

The ten-digit phone number itself is a pattern. Within it, there are sub-patterns: a three-digit area code, followed by another three digits, then the last four digits.

The challenge is to build a Find/Change query that will find those patterns, account for and remove any inconsistencies in what exists around them, then apply standard formatting while leaving the ten digits of the phone number intact.

Using GREP in InDesign CS3, this can be done in one operation using metacharacters. A GREP search looks for patterns or conditions, not literal text. Metacharacters act as placeholders for the text itself. Some metacharacters will

stand in for the numbers themselves (as they are all different), other metacharacters will recognize that some parts of the search may or may not produce a match (i.e., zero or one instance; one or more instances, etc.), and others will consider any of a range of characters (i.e, either this or that, whichever comes first) to be a match.

So where are these metacharacters and how do you use them? For a complete list, search the InDesign CS3 Help files for the word "metacharacter" and click the first match in the list: Metacharacters for Searching to view a table showing every possible metacharacter for text-based searches and GREP searches. These metacharacters are also available from the Special Characters for Search (or Replace) flyout menus  at the end of the Find What and Change To fields.

First, let's take a big picture look at what needs to be done, then the GREP query that will do it. Each piece of the pattern is color-coded to associate the "idea" of the search (*below*) with the GREP query (*next page*).

### WHAT I HAVE:

800-833-6687  
888-649-2990  
800-945-9120  
1-800-642-3623  
1-800-945-9120  
800-642-3623  
1 (800) 767-2775  
(877) 412-7753  
(800) 277-5356  
(877) 412-7753  
(877)427-5776  
(408) 974-2042  
(800) 793-2378  
1-(888) 840-8433  
1(800)-692-7753  
(800) 780-5009  
8009877543  
1.800.800.2775  
800.538.9696  
800.300.3532  
949.756.5108

### WHAT I WANT:

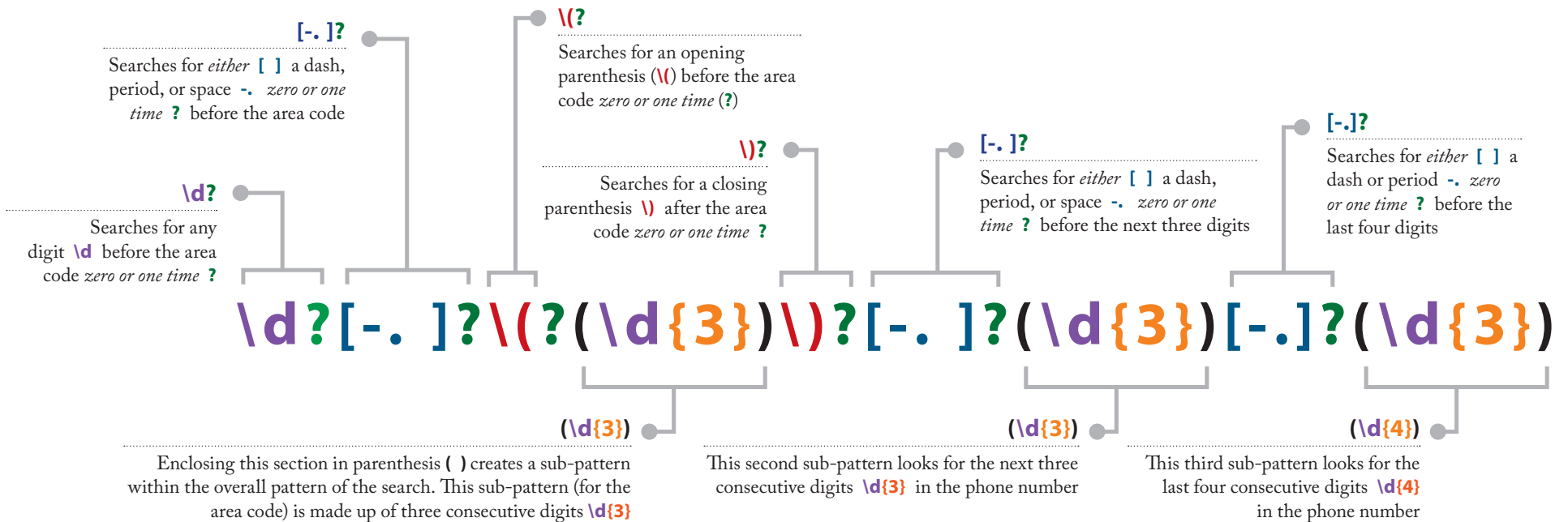
(800) 833-6687  
(888) 649-2990  
(800) 945-9120  
(800) 642-3623  
(800) 945-9120  
(800) 642-3623  
(800) 767-2775  
(877) 412-7753  
(800) 277-5356  
(877) 412-7753  
(877) 427-5776  
(408) 974-2042  
(800) 793-2378  
(888) 840-8433  
(800) 692-7753  
(800) 780-5009  
(800) 987-7543  
(800) 800-2775  
(800) 538-9696  
(800) 300-3532  
(949) 756-5108

### What needs to be done:

Find a **digit** (that *may or may not be there*), followed by *either* a **dash, period or space** (that *may or may not be there*), followed by **an opening parenthesis** (that *may or may not be there*), followed by a set of **three consecutive digits**, followed by **a closing parenthesis** (that *may or may not be there*), followed by *either* a **dash, period or space** (that *may or may not be there*), followed by a second set of **three consecutive digits**, followed by *either* a **dash or a period** (that *may or may not be there*), then a set of **four consecutive digits**.

Replace that with **an opening parenthesis**, the first set of three digits, **a closing parenthesis**, a **space**, the second set of three digits, a **dash**, then the last set of four digits.

## GREP query for the "Find what" field:



## What to enter in the "Change To" field:

