RESEARCH IN WORD PROCESSING NEWSLETTER

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° ° DATABASES & BYGONE DAYS: COMPUTERS IN COMPOSITION INSTRUCTION ° °

Composition Instructor--the appellation once struck fear and loathing in the hearts of young Ph.D.s fresh from the tomes of intellectualism and off to seek their apprenticeships as Literature Professors. But things change. Whether symptomatic of an ever-narrowing job market, of medical breakthroughs in health care, or of guilt feelings brought on by weekly reams of over-generalized babble, English educators are teaching less literary analysis and are embracing composition, rhetoric, and technical communication as long-lost friends.

Within the last two years, the computer has begun reaching the typewriter as a seminal component of the writing process' love triangle (student/thesis/method of dissemination). Word processing and text analysis afford students and teachers an intellectual and editorial dynamic unattainable a decade ago. Readability statistics can be sorted, merged, graphed, and printed in moments. Spelling, punctuation, and usage suggestions can be integrated with original text on disk. Synonyms, antonyms, and gender-specific terms can be highlighted for immediate or later action. Words, phrases, clauses, paragraphs, and pages of text can be inserted or deleted at the touch of a button. Tables of content, footnotes, bibliographies, and indices can be created effortlessly.

With all of this editing ease and power, it seems inconceivable that writers and teachers of writing would ignore a technology that actively encourages creativity by decreasing the time needed to accomplish, among other things, repetitious editorial tasks. Nevertheless, today there appears to be as strong an opposition to the introduction of computer technology into the writing process as there was over four hundred years ago to the introduction of the printing press into the bookmaking process.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° WHY ALL THE BUZZ AND RUCKUS? ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

A misplaced belief in tradition may be partly the cause. The legendary clashes between science and humanities titans have nurtured a contemporary apathy among some English teachers for anything overflowing from the caldrons of empirical inquiry. Then there are the demon utility companies. Shocking newspaper horror stories abound that call to our attention the welfare recipient who froze to death in her one-room apartment because the "insensitive, heartless computer" said she was two dollars short on last month's electric bill.

Yet, could 1984 be the year Orwell's provocative, nightmarish visions of a world dominated by the computer (and those who "think like one")? Are intellectually chaste, unassuming scholars being manipulated body and soul--Barth and Shakespeare--by the malevolent microprocessor? (Egad, what melodrama!)

Maybe the reason for our less-than-enthusiastic welcoming of the computer into the compositional fold has its roots in purely procedural protocol. Some academic traditionalists, particularly in the humanities, call for a return to the "good old days" of liberal learning when the most significant mechanical device invented to foster intellectual evolution was the electric light bulb. But did Edison have research scholars or English teachers in mind while he was working in his laboratory?

Nevertheless, it is difficult to discover from those who staunchly defend tactile tradition exactly what constitutes the "good old days." How far must one devolve? Are fountain pens the answer? What about goose quills? Maybe wax tablets and wooden stylii?

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° IT'S JUST A TYPEWRITER WITH A TV SCREEN ° ° ° ° ° ° °

Those who condemn the computer's use in the compositional process fail to see its primary value (and the primary value of machines in general): to facilitate our work. "It's just a typewriter with a TV screen," some say. True, it is, if you want to perceive it as such. But the rationale behind embracing such a limited understanding of computer technology doesn't lessen the inherent mechanical potential of the technology. It only limits user applications.

Most teachers of writing, whether in composition or literature courses, attempt to guide their students into expressive, concise, and logical pathways of communication. To infer that technology only retards and, in some cases, destroys the liberal learning process--that a computer stifles creativity by seducing the student

Everywriter into a brothel of mechanical, repetitious behavior--holds about as much ink as an argument favoring goose quills over ball points.

A possible monologue: "you appreciate words and their creation more when you have to stop and reflect as you put quill to fountain. A ball point fosters a scattershot approach; the writer's ideas will flow unchecked, hastened toward uninformed rationalization by the godless Jotter." Sounds absurd, doesn't it? But try mentioning the use of the computer in composition to some English teachers. Their anti-technological rationalizations contain similar bizarre argumentative logistics.

o o o o o o o o o o o o A TOOL FOR MODERN TIMES o o o o o o o o o o o o

All teachers of writing should see the computer for what it truly is: a tool. Granted, there are those technological mainliners (including, on occasion, yours truly) who insist that word-processing and text-analysis programs have the potential to revolutionize writing, changing forever the way we analyze, synthesize, and disseminate knowledge. Don't let this overabundance of energy alienate you.

Not all of us need or want to become computer aficionados: the old Smith Corona serves our purposes nicely, thank you! But what's good for the father isn't necessarily what's good for the sun. Does your stereo (which, by the way, is probably microprocessor-controlled) destroy forever the beauty of a symphony performance just because it, a godless machine, reproduces the sound?

We and our students will face the challenges of the 21st century. Without the tools to tackle the job--including mechanical tools such as the computer--students will find themselves ill-fitted for tomorrow. In this time of apathy toward learning for its own sake, the fountain of creativity has run dry for many. The computer awaits, a fountain of possibilities for Composition Instructors, Literature Professors, and--most importantly, our students.

o o o o o o o o o MLA CONVENTION: CALLS FOR PAPERS o o o o o o o o

At its 1984 convention next December in Washington, D.C., the Modern Language Association will again explore the impact of computer tech nology on the writing process:

Computers and the Teaching of Composition. The Association for Computers and the Humanities invites 1-2 page proposals. Contact Donald Ross, Composition Program, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455. This program is hosting a national conference on computers and writing on April 12-14, 1984.

Beyond Word Processing: Microcomputer Resources for Teaching the Writing Process. This special session will focus on overviews and critiques of resources, including heuristic programs, stylistic editors, idea processors, on-line research, and authoring programs. Write to Stanley Doherty, Bentley College, Waltham, MA 02254.

Computer-Aided Composition: Its Effects on the Creative Process. This discussion group would like to include empirical research based upon observing writers at work, possible effects on genre, and theoretical implications for reader-response theory. Contact Patricia Galloway, The Mississippi Department of Archives and History Jackson, MS 39205.

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o o o o o o o o o o o o IDEAS ARE WORTH MONEY o o o o o o o o o o o o

Most writing professors make it a point to attend at least one major English conference a year, whether it be the NCTE, CCCC, MLA, or some other scholarly gathering. As few as three years ago, teachers interested in exploring the applications of computerized word processing to composition instruction found little if any guidance or support at many of these conferences. Lately, however, things have changed.

At last year's NCTE in Denver, we were approached by many colleagues eager to share experiences and ideas concerning the integration of computers into writing programs. Not only were teachers eager to learn more about word processing; a number of book publishing houses--who were just beginning to enter the world of educational computer software--made it a point to pick our brains regarding what would be the best (translated: "most profitable") programs for composition instructors to use.

It didn't take us very long to realize that while the publishers' intentions were good, brainstorming sessions weren't the most conducive environs for developing educational software strategies. Most of us have experienced more that one software "dud" because of a publisher's haste to get the product on the shelves.

Not only that, but we began wondering if some of our ideas weren't worth more than approbative verbal acknowledgments. These two realizations probably came to others at the convention, so here are a few guidelines to follow whenever you are approached by a publishing house seeking ideas about courseware:

1. Ideas are worth money, so be careful not to "share" too much on a gratis basis. After all, business consultants make good money for their ideas, so why shouldn't composition professors?

2. If you are approached by a publisher seeking to sign you to a consultant or production contract, make sure that you understand all of the legal and financial implications (those who have written textbooks or tradebooks know that overenthusiasm at the outset of negotiations can often spell a loss of financial compensation after the work is finally published).

3. Whenever in doubt, ask for a second opinion (you can call us at the Newsletter for advice, too).

Following these three simple steps should not only improve the chances of your colleagues obtaining reliable software programs in the future but should also provide you with the groundwork for supplementing your teaching salary.

° ° ° ° THE PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT: COMPUTERS AND WRITING ° ° °

The Pennsylvania Writing Project will conduct a three-week workshop at West Chester University between June 25 and July 10, 1984. Topics to be covered include a look at rhetoric and composition theory needed to evaluate CAI in composition training and a review of software packages and computer-assisted teaching techniques which support the different stages of the composing process. Hands-on experience with these programs will be built into the program for participants.

According to Project Director Bob Weiss, participants will complete two projects: 1) a review of existing software or a design outline for new software, and 2) a project of their own design--a "teaching plan" for a lesson assisted by a computer, for instance. While participants may choose to do theoretical or research projects, one of the two class projects must be a practical application that they can take with them into a classroom. Both projects will be distributed to all participants.

Weiss will be assisted in the workshops by Kate Kiefer, who piloted WRITER'S WORKBENCH at Colorado State University; Helen Schwartz, who developed SEEN as an aid for prewriting and writing about literature; and Stephen Marcus, author of COMPUPOEM and a member of the Apple Foundation Advisory Board. All participants will automatically be registered in the two-day conference on computers and humanities on June 28-29, 1984.

Applicants should send Project Office a description of your background in computers or writing instruction and a statement of your willingness to develop in-service presentations based on computers and writing. The deadline for applications is May 19, 1984, and participants will be notified in three weeks. Information and application forms can be obtained from the Pennsylvania Writing Project, Room 210, Philips Memorial Hall, West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° SOFTWARE REVIEW -- QUICK-TEXT II ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

Continuing our series of articles in which we conduct hands-on evaluations of popupar word-processing software for 8- and 16-bit microcomputers is a look at

Distributed Software Systems' Quick-Text II. Our aim is not to endorse any product. Rather, we will list each program's major EDIT and COMMAND features, comment upon special utilities, and analyze strengths and weaknesses as they pertain to student and teacher interaction with the software in a writing-laboratory environment. If there are specifics about a program that are not covered here but about which you want to know, just drop us a note: we will try to answer your questions.

PROGRAM:	Quick-Text II
PUBLISHER:	Distributed Software Systems
ADDRESS:	P.O. Box 1301, Northbrook, IL 60062
PRICE:	$70.00
OPER SYS:	IBM-PC (and comp.)
MEMORY:	64k
DISK DRVS:	one (two recommended)

DEFAULT TEXTFILE LENGTH:	68 bytes
MAXIMUM TEXTFILE LENGTH:	100k +
SIZE OF SPELLING DICTIONARY:	1,500 words
CORRECTS SPELLING:	---
ON-DISK TUTORIALS:	---
DOCUMENTATION READABILITY:	fair
DOCUMENTATION TUTORIALS:	---
QUALITY OF "HELP" SCREENS:	fair
MENU-SUPPORTED PRINTERS:	poor

(Quick-Text II's price/performance ratio ranks above average. The lack of documented printer support is troublesome, though; unless you own an NEC Spinwriter [3550, 55XX] a Diablo 620/630, or a model that emulates one of these printers, you are leaving printer compatibility to the "All Other Printers" category--and there are, to be sure, dozens of dot-matrix and daisywheel machines that can be described as such. As with just about any software program you buy, ask about compatibility before purchasing.)

HELP UTILITIES

Interactive "HELP" screens	---
On-screen "HELP" status line	yes
Enable/disable on-screen "HELP" status line	---
Create user-defined "HELP" screens	---

(The "HELP" facility contains one screen's worth of information concerning text-formatting commands. That may not seem like much, but this program doesn't need much to make it work efficiently.)

FORMATTING

Underlining	yes
Boldface/shadow print	yes(bold)
Automatic headers/footers/page numbers	yes
Subscript/superscript	---
Centering	yes
Document justification options (L,R,C)	yes
Word wrap	yes
Graphics	---
Menu-driven formatting commands	yes
Override menu with dot/inline commands	---
Save parameters with textfile	yes

(You do have the option to change the beginning printer margin--in effect, readjusting the left margin--within the document, but for those who require switching between single- and double-spaced text interactively, this program isn't up to the task. Also, Quick-Text II doesn't currently support super and subscripting, which could prove troublesome in the foot/endnote department [although style manuals such as the MLA Style Sheet have gone away from requiring foot/endnote reference numbers in text].)

TEXT HANDLING

Full-screen cursor scroll/control	yes
Auto text adjust after insert/delete	---
Cut/paste	yes
Copy only (buffer)	yes
Boilerplating (library)	yes
File merging	yes
Search/replace	yes
Locate (w/o replace)	yes
Paragraph division	yes

(This feature, or lack of one, will drive you mad: while there is a provision for adjusting text after insert/delete operations, it forces a once-indented paragraph over to column 1, thus negating your tab. If you enter the "insert" mode to

regain the five-space indent, your right margin looks out of whack. How to get out of this fatal error has yet to be discovered by yours truly. You could always retype the line, wait for the automatic word wrap to take affect, and then delete characters until the line reverts to normal. This procedure, however, wastes too much time.)

PRINTING

View text before printing (print-to-screen)	---
Proportional spacing	yes
Print from memory	yes
Print from disk	yes
Background printing while editing	---
File chaining	yes
Menu-driven formatting	---

(Quick-Text II does not feature print-to-screen, but after performing the initial document-formatting procedure, it uses a what-you-see-is-what-you-get [sans double-spaced text] feature, which includes right-justified and centered text, during initial input. This capability is absent in some more-expensive word-processing packages.)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Programmable function keys	---
Integrated EDIT and COMMAND modes	yes
Menu-driven disk housekeeping utilities	yes
Binding spaces	yes

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

While many programs offer data-merging capabilities that allow you to print multiple personalized form letters and envelopes, Quick-Text II offers a nice visually-oriented "envelope" screen in which you may address envelopes individually or merge information from data files.

STRENGTHS

In academic settings, this program has most of the standard features required to generate student papers, memoranda, and other documents. It would be easy for students to orient themselves to the software's text-formatting features, since they

utilize the function keys as well as the standard "insert," "page up," "page down," and other factory-specified IBM keyboard labels.

WEAKNESSES

To execute an end-of-line marker--usually a simple "Return"--you need to depress the Control key and the Return key together. Easy to get used to, but you didn't have to do it with the old Smith Corona!

OVERALL EVALUATION

Quick-Text II can't be compared fairly to programs such as WordStar 3.3, EasyWriter II, WordPlus-PC, Spellbinder, or other full-blown word-processing packages. Then again, it costs approximately one-eighth of their retail. In the under-$100 range, you receive a system that allows efficient text entry and printing without too much effort. The program is worth a hard look for high-school and other environs where multiple formats within documents aren't required.

o o o o o o o o o o **MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSIONS WELCOME** o o o o o o o o o

The Newsletter welcomes article submissions from our readers which pertain to the applications of word processing in academic writing programs. Manuscripts should be OCR readable (Courier, Letter Gothic, or similar letter-quality typefaces) and should include a short autobiographical sketch (direct uploading of articles via modem will be enabled soon). The Editors reserve the right to edit articles, if necessary. If you want your manuscript returned, please enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope with your submission. Address all correspondence to the Editors, Research in Word Processing Newsletter, Liberal Arts Department, South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Rapid City, SD 57701.