

## Word Reviewed

### **By Way of Introduction**

I write and edit for a living. When I moved from MS-DOS to the Macintosh I also switched from the DOS-dominating Word Perfect to the Mac-dominating Microsoft Word. The move wasn't a leap into the dark. I'd helped proofread the first edition of *Working With Word* (itself done almost totally with Word 3) and was quite impressed with how a graphic-filled book could be written using a Mac and Word. In addition, while working for Boeing I'd gotten frustrated with Word Perfect. Even on what was then a fairly fast machine, a 12 MHz 286, WP 5.1 was far more sluggish than Word 4 on a Mac. The Macintosh/Word was and remains a better tool for the kind of writing, editing and publishing I do than a PC/Word Perfect.

Nevertheless, Word still frustrates me. The 5.0 version continues to have the same kind of problem that bothered me in earlier versions. Microsoft may take out expensive double-page ads asking for user suggestions, but the company seems to spend little time testing how users actually feel about how those changes are implemented. The company's thousands of employees fill rapidly multiplying cell-like buildings in a suburb east of Seattle and they've made Bill Gates one of the world's richest men. Yet it appears that no one spent time actually using (as opposed to beta-testing) Word 5 before it hit

the shelves. You'd think a little of Bill Gates' billions could hire a few resident poets, SF novelists and secretaries to gripe about what they don't like about the new version.

Since the cost of either purchase or upgrade is high in comparison with its competitors, I thought you might appreciate an brief and critical overview of Word 5.0 for the perspective of someone who doesn't have the temptation of the revenues coming from expensive fold-out front page ads Microsoft puts in virtually every issue of Mac magazines.

### **First the Good News**

The good news is that Word 5 does have substantial new features over Word 4. Since Microsoft is tooting them far and wide, I won't dwell on them. The built in grammar-checker and thesaurus should be quite useful for less experienced writers. The ability to place graphics in documents directly from disk without clumsily using the clipboard is also a much-needed and long overdue feature. PICT, TIFF and EPS graphics can now be included in documents. For those who've moved up to System 7, Word is one of the first major programs to use enhancements. Finally, the menu is beginning to make sense. The top choices are logical and with only minor changes I managed to make the entries under them equally so.

### **The Spelling Checkar**

The spelling checker is somewhat better than previous versions though that's not saying very much. (The new ability to catch double words is a plus.) The auto-suggestion feature, however, is especially clumsy. When a beta-test review I read recommended turning the feature off I wondered why. After all auto-suggest works fine in Word Perfect. Having used it I now agree with the reviewer. Turn it off.

Like many of the new features in Word 5.0 the spell checker was developed by another company and merely licensed to Microsoft. As a result the user interface still shows troublesome rough edges. For instance, after it has found a "bad" word and you've made a continue/change selection the window should (intuitively and logically) clear the boxes of the old words before it looks for the next "bad" word. It doesn't. The old "bad" word and suggestions remain in place while it quietly looks for the next error, giving you the uneasy feeling that you didn't do anything and that the checker is still waiting for a response. On long, hard days at the keyboard, features like that make the difference between a good program and a frustrating one.

### **That Pesky Save Reminder**

Word Perfect has long had a auto save feature that works like a dream. I felt safe knowing that if my writing was interrupted for any reason then five minutes later my screen would blank (WP wasn't responsible for that) and ten minutes or

less later WP would auto-save my work. Barring a hard disk crash, you never lost more than 10 minutes work.

Word's new Save Reminder doesn't work that way. Its closest relative appears to be Chinese water torture. When a user-set time has passed since the last save has passed, an intrusive "Save Now" query window pops up on the screen, gobbling up any characters you may have been typing and demanding that you reply to its obvious question. As a result I find myself doing a lot of manual saves just to avoid the pesky reminder.

I realize that a small percentage of the time a small percentage of users may not want the autosave feature active. They've retrieved a document that they want to modify without destroying the original. But Microsoft's solution merely makes everyone constantly miserable to avoid an occasional problem. Those few users can lock or make their original document stationery. As a last resort they can simply be forced to remember to turn autosave off. A really elegant solution would be to prompt the user about autosave the first time an existing document is saved and after that autosave without pestering.

Ironically, the Save Reminder doesn't work at all where it's most needed: when you get called away from your desk. Not only does it require a user response before saving, with my screen saver (Dark Side) it doesn't even put up the prompt while the screen is blanked. The malicious little

routine just sits there waiting for you to come back and begin typing so it gobble up your first key strokes and pester you. Call it Sadisticware.

In short, a autosave should:

1. Save automatically have a set length of time
2. Wait until the keyboard is inactive for a few seconds to activate and then save in the background.
3. Save all documents irrespective of whether their window is open at the time their clock has run out.
4. Save even when the screen is blanked and the user is gone to lunch.

Word's Save Reminder does none of these things. For that it deserves zero mice and a the green wiener award.

## **Enhancing Word with Add-Ons**

One redeeming feature of Word is the opportunity it offers to correct its flaws. Shareware authors and third-party developers, I am told, can write software that integrates seamlessly with Word and offers new built-in features. Given the enormous market share of Word, it could be a lucrative market. So if you're interested in retiring at thirty, here are my suggestions. Don't forget to send me a copy.

*Enhanced Draw* —One of Word's nicer features is a built-in MacDraw-like "Edit Picture." As draw programs go, however, it's pretty whimpy. It'd be

nice to replace it with something with more muscle.

*Built-in Graphs*— Graphs are widely used in business and scientific documents. While you can now create charts in other programs, save them as PICT or EPS files and import them into Word, you can't make or edit charts inside Word itself. A simple built-in bar-line-pie chart add-on could prove quite popular. You'd just need to discover a way to hide the data so it didn't print but could be edited and used to drive the graph. Don't look to Microsoft for this feature, however, it would cut into their sales of Excel.

*Language Tools*—Including some languages in a document requires more than just getting a set of fonts for their characters. Semitic languages like Arabic and Hebrew go right to left instead of left to right. Chinese can be written top to bottom and has thousands of intricate characters. Hebrew often includes vowel "pointing" above and below the characters. Greek and Hebrew use different forms for some characters at the end of words. Doing this manually is tedious. Word's Equation Editor offers similar features for the peculiarities of mathematics languages. It's be nice to have add on editors for some of the more common but odd languages. I suspect Microsoft would even help you promote such a product.

*Letter Writer*— Correspondence is one of the most common uses of Word, yet it has few built-in features to make letter writing a snap. An add-on

letter writing feature should sell like hotcakes. It'd allow you to choose one of several letterhead and letter format options. A built-in database would then let you select who you're writing. A boilerplate function would let you insert often used paragraphs and graphics. It could autoprint an envelope. Finally, a archive feature would allow you to save to letter in a multi-letter archive. If you need to review it later, a search feature would let you find it again by date, addressee or key words. Do it and send me a copy in thanks.