RESEARCH IN WORD PROCESSING NEWSLETTER

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° ° ALPHADATA OFFERS HARDWARE-SOFTWARE PACKAGES FOR COMPOSITION ° °

When in Washington, D.C., a visit to AlphaData's national demonstration center will provide insights into this consulting organization's attempt to bring computer technologies to the writing, editing, and publishing process.

The firm offers complete hardware-software packages to academic writing programs; the Campus Writing System includes a desktop CPU with eight terminals (an enhanced version of the Wang word processing program operating on a Fortune Systems 32:16 Expanded Performance Computer System). Features include 23 dedicated keys, on screen help, passwords, 1 million characters of RAM memory, 20 million characters of hard disk storage, and record keeping information about individual users. Because the Campus Writing System includes the UNIX operating system, AlphaData plans to make Bell Laboratory's 32-program "Writer's Workbench" text analysis software available as well.

Academic writing programs with limited budgets can pay for the Campus Writing System by charging students. According to the company, "If you choose to charge for time, the Campus Writing System will pay for itself within a year at a charge of less than $1 per hour of use."

AlphaData's goal is to assist in establishing computer writing centers in academic departments, dormitories, student centers, libraries, and classrooms. Prose improvement will be increasingly stressed. A weekly seminar schedule and further information can be obtained from AlphaData, 1200 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., Suite 320, Washington, D.C. 20036.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° CALL FOR PAPERS ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

"The Practical Aspects of Engineering Communication" is the theme of the IEEE Professional Communication Society's 1984 conference to be held in Atlantic City,

New Jersey, on October 24-26. Topics will include "Writing and editing on text-management and word processing systems" and other hands-on experiences.

Exhibits are being coordinated by William Frevold, Wang Laboratories, 437 South Union Street, Lawrence, MA 01843. And 250-word abstracts are being welcomed by the program chairman: John E. Friedman, RCA Corp., Mail Stop 108-113, Moorestown, NJ 08057. The deadline for abstracts has been set for February 29, 1984. The world's largest professional engineering organization, the IEEE has taken the lead in promoting better writing in science and industry.

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° ° ° ° ° ° WORD PROCESSING-WRITING CONFERENCE IN ARIZONA ° ° ° ° °

Arizona State University will hold a two-day pre-conference on "Microcomputers and the Writing Process" on March 13-14, 1984, including word processing workshops. Registration is $15.00. Further information can be obtained by writing to Microcomputer Conference, University Conference Services, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287.

° ° ° TEXT ANALYSIS: COMPOSITION AND LITERARY RESEARCH TO BENEFIT ° °

The ability of the computer to analyze a writer's style holds growing promise for literary criticism and the teaching of composition. Set against quantifiable norms, stylistic choices reveal a great deal about a writer's development--a common interest of those studying literature and student compositions. Research done for the one can often be adapted for the other.

To meet the challenge, the MLA has recently announced that an "Electronic Workshop" will be a new feature at its annual convention this year. Demonstrations include

1) a computerized bibliography program that automatically formats different entries and permits variable sorting;

2) a library of 1,500 computer-readable literary texts to which quantitative text-analysis is applied, providing such research tools as an electronic concordance with specific graphic displays of word-idea distributions;

3) text-analysis software for microprocessors that includes various concordances and indexes for measuring such variables as frequency distribution and other text-scanning applications to construct reference works and similar data-banks;

4) poetry-writing software which allows for studying traditional poetic forms;

5) a foreign-language program that helps students to understand, for example, the morphology of various parts of speech, sentence translation, and the parsing of words in context. The software also includes routines which inflect the variable parts of speech, and a program which can generate certain regular and irregular parts of speech; and

6) a videodisc data base of 600 pictures which can be individually recalled through a computerized index and matched with corresponding poems to assist literary criticism and scholarly record-keeping.

o o o o o o o o o o SOFTWARE REVIEW -- SPELLBINDER o o o o o o o o o o

Responding to numerous reader requests, the Newsletter is beginning a series of articles in which we will conduct hands-on tests of word-processing software for 8- and 16-bit microcomputers. 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 learning environment. If there's anything about a program that isn't covered here but about which you want to know, just drop us a note, and we will try to answer your questions.

PROGRAM:	Spellbinder
PUBLISHER:	Lexisoft
ADDRESS:	P.O. Box 1378, Davis, CA 95687
PRICE:	$495.00
OPER SYS:	CP/M, PC-DOS, MS-DOS
MEMORY:	64k (CP/M), 128k (PC-DOS, MS-DOS)
DISK DRVS:	one (two recommended)

DEFAULT TEXTFILE LENGTH	2k
MAXIMUM TEXTFILE LENGTH	size of disk
SIZE OF SPELLING DICTIONARY	n/a
CORRECTS SPELLING	n/a
ON-DISK TUTORIALS	n/a
DOCUMENTATION READABILITY	fair
DOCUMENTATION TUTORIALS	poor
QUALITY OF "HELP" SCREENS	very good
MENU-SUPPORTED PRINTERS	fair

(Notice that Spellbinder's minimum textfile length is 2k. This means that one "word" saved to a file will take up 2k--quite a price to pay, space-wise. On the

other hand, being able to create textfiles at lengths only limited by available disk space is quite nice. But beware: if something happens to your disk and the file is damaged, you could lose an entire book-length volume in one fell swoop. It's a good practice to save text to disk at regular intervals in separate files, say of 12k each, and link them later when printing.)

HELP UTILITIES

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

(Interactive HELP screens allow you to access help regarding an editing or formatting command in medias res, rather than after the fact. Note Spellbinder's allowance for user-defined HELP screens. This is a big plus, since on-screen, interactive grammar/rhetoric tutorials can be created with little effort.)

FORMATTING

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

(Subtle, but important points to consider here are the program's ability to save text formatting parameters with the file; to create graphics characters; and to assign headers, footers, and page numbers automatically. Imagine the waste of your and the students' time having to reformat a document before printing. Graphics characters are a must in most technical-writing courses. Without the ability to create headers, footers, and page numbers on documents, students will spend inordinate amounts of time positioning their names, course numbers, paper titles, and the like, on documents.)

TEXT HANDLING

Full-screen cursor scroll/control	yes
Auto text adjust after insert/delete	---
Cut/paste	yes
Boilerplating	yes
File merging	yes
Search/replace	yes
Locate string (w/o replace)	yes

(Without full-screen cursor/scroll control, your students are relegated to editing only one screen at a time. With documents longer than 24 lines, you must designate line numbers, go through a series of commands to view the lines, then edit them and return to another portion of the document. This style of editor, often called a "line editor," is still found on most computers, from mainframe to micro [IBM PCs have EDLIN, for example].)

PRINTING

View formatted document before printing	yes
Proportional spacing	yes
Print from memory	yes
Print from disk	yes
Background printing while editing	---
File chaining	yes
Menu-driven commands	yes
Accepts embedded ASCII and/or ESC codes	---

(Two major considerations are viewing a formatted document before printing--this saves a lot of paper, as well as time--and being able to do printing in the background, thus allowing you to edit another document while the program is printing one. Spellbinder does the first, but doesn't do the second.)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

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

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

Spellbinder comes bundled with quite a few interesting programs in addition to its sophisticated word-processing features. These "macros" allow for various alphanumeric sorts, 2-column printing, in-text numerical row and column math, mailmerge, and batch file processing. In addition, the user can write his or her own macro programs using Spellbinder's powerful "M-Speak" programming language.

STRENGTHS

One of Spellbinder's greatest assets is its text-handling speed (hence, the name). Also, there's an opportunity to define your own special control keys, but you have to dig deeply into the users' manual to discover how (hint: check out the PCONTROL.TAB file).

WEAKNESSES

Probably the biggest problem with Spellbinder, aside from having to toggle between EDIT and COMMAND modes (users quickly tire of strident "beeps" when trying to edit in "COMMAND" mode), is its documentation. The users' manual is full of information, but it's so poorly constructed that even a professional lexicographer would have trouble locating specifics. Also, some of the hardcopy screens used in the tutorials don't match what's on the CRT, a problem which could send faculty and students alike clamoring after their old Smith Coronas. Rewriting some of the manual to enhance its accessibility would make this package a real gem for senior high and college WP centers.

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.