Sentence Combining courseware from Milliken

By John V. Lembo and Judy A. Laron

We all know that wonderful time when computers can teach our kids what they need to know, but for some reason the best programming talent ends up zapping asteroids, not developing high-quality courseware. There is some hope, however, as educational publishers get involved in microcomputer learning. The Sentence Combining courseware package from Milliken Publishing Corporation is one such package.

Sentence combining is the process of putting two sentences together into one more complex sentence. So, if I have a sentence that says, "John is wet," and another one that says, "He is cold," the combined sentence would read, "John is wet and cold."

Simple enough, but when punctuation rules, conjunctions, prepositions, and other things are required to get the two sentences or two phrases to match, then even well-prepared students can make mistakes. The programs in this courseware package, designed for students in grades 4 through 8 but probably most suited to students in grades 4 through 8, provide a clear and effective way to reinforce and help teach the skills of sentence combining.

FEATURES: This program set consists of 12 lessons, five review, and several utility programs on two copy-protected discettes. The lessons range from relatively simple constructions, such as using and to connect sentences and using good and well properly, to the complex usage of who, which or that and the use of because with subordinate clauses.

Both the lessons themselves and the support programs are carefully structured. There is a well-developed class-management routine that allows a teacher to handle students individually or as a class. It allows teachers to enter up to 100 students, arranged in up to five classes, into the disk pack with an individually tailored set of lessons. Students then call the appropriate set of lessons by entering their names and a password.

As the student works through the assigned lessons, the program keeps track of the student's progress and is able to direct the teaching to the student’s needs. The program is of particular value for students who may have difficulty with language or who may have difficulty with sentence combining.

Touch 'N Go

continued from preceding page

port on your progress and areas of proficiency, or lack thereof, in a short time. Even the most jaded terminal users can be smoking along at a much more efficient rate.

EASE OF USE: Installation of Touch 'N Go couldn't be easier. Just run a module called C.COM for type C, and the program prompts you through a short and clear menu. You choose your terminal type, confirm it and you're off and running.

The only additional requirement is to set an internal clock in the program. To do this, you simply press the space bar at the beginning of a timed, ten-second interval. Press the space bar again at the end of ten seconds, and your installation is complete.

To use the program itself couldn't be simpler: Type A T at the keyboard and you are prompted through a series of easy-to-understand menus.

While I was playing with Touch 'N Go, a friend dropped by with his eight-year-old daughter. I allowed Amy to try the program, and I had her learning to type in about ten seconds. Not only was it easy, but Amy enjoyed the lesson. The only prerequisite to using Touch 'N Go is the ability to read and understand simple instructions in English.

ERROR HANDLING: Touch 'N Go is a tutorial on keyboard usage. As such, it has to expect almost any combination of dumb entries imaginable. With the exception of Control-C, which, of course, aborts the program, nothing else seems to affect the program.

DOCUMENTATION: As I stated earlier, all the documentation is printed on the diskette packet. At least, we got feeling sick. Who are we trying to kid? Where are all the goodies telling me how to run this program?

Actually, the authors did such a great job of installing excellent menus within the software that you really don't need any more information than what is written on the diskette. It seems strange, but maybe this is a glimpse into the future: programs that don't require volumes of written instructions.

SUPPORT: I experienced absolutely no difficulties with this software, and I had no occasion to request any help. This is probably a good thing as the author is in England—if it might be a pretty expensive phone call.

Judging from the great care apparently given in generating the software, I would expect any required help would be promptly attended to.

SUMMARY: For $60 I have not seen a piece of software as carefully done as this one. The subject may seem trivial to some, but anybody who spends time at a keyboard would certainly be able to improve his or her skills with this product.

We think you're calculating enough to

And we've devised a little test to prove it. All you have to do is compare our PC-8200's specs with the specs for Radio Shack's Model 100 or the HP-75. For someone who's savvy enough about computers to read this magazine, you shouldn't have any trouble picking the best one. So here goes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NEC</th>
<th>Radio Shack</th>
<th>Hewlett-Packard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>$799</td>
<td>$799</td>
<td>$905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM/RAM</td>
<td>16K/128K</td>
<td>8K/256K</td>
<td>16K/48K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM Expandability</td>
<td>16K</td>
<td>32K</td>
<td>256K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diskette</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAM cartridges</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bar Code</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Floppy Disk and SHO Port</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassette Port</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassette Cluster</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Not Standard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The PC-8200 portable is NEC's version 04980C RS-232C, with AC adapter charge only. The HP-75 comes in various special ONSC versions.

It all boils down to more power and better features for the same price. And, of course, more software—14 FREE programs to start, including linear forecasting and weather information.

The PC-8200 portable from NEC. We think you should be impressed; if you're not, maybe you picked up the wrong magazine.
track of performance levels, which the instructor can later call up for review. Teachers can have student performance records printed out as well. Teachers have a variety of options that permit them to establish different passing levels for the various lessons.

Another feature of the program package is that it includes ditto masters with exercises that match the various lessons. Teachers can use these as assignments to determine the students’ abilities, or separately for drill and practice.

Performance: In general, the lessons worked well. One of the successes of this package is that the authors have devised clever ways to avoid typing. Through efficient and imaginative use of high-resolution graphics, students do not have to type to work through the lessons.

Although a description does not do the screen justice, let me say that decision words are surrounded by boxes that students can move from word to word, commas move from place to place until students press a key to make them stay put and similar devices are used. They work well.

Feedback in the program is sensible and intelligent. No noise—just clear, intelligible messages.

These lessons teach what they are supposed to teach. There are a reasonable number of different examples in each lesson, the lessons teach important and useful things and students will probably learn from them. Like many programs of this kind, Sentence Combining is well suited for drill and practice for difficult concepts. The 20 examples per lesson limit the amount of repetitive drill possible with one student, but we expect if your students can do it in 10 or 20 tries, they need more help than any computer can provide.

In short, the package is a good performer within the boundaries of its goals and design.

Ease of Use: The program moves from place to place and from lesson to lesson quite easily. Students should have little difficulty making it work. Although the sign-on procedure is not as easy as it could be, most students will have no problem after the first try.

Even the utility programs that manage the class roster and the selection of programs work relatively easily, although users must pay attention to the instruction manual.

The major difficulty for individuals using this program is a trivial but irritating inconsistency in the input conventions required pressing one letter without pressing Return and others take several letters with a Return. The result is that users can press the one letter and a Return, thereby skipping a response, or frame because the program only expects the single letter.

Although the package has various password routines to secure student records and other identifying information, most clever students who know something about computers can probably figure out how to crack the code.
What IBM won’t tell you.

When it comes to manuals, IBM makes terrific computer manuals. But working your fingers to the bone soon takes the bloom off the rose. So we’ve taken everything that you might think you want to know about the IBM PC and compatible products and assembled it in one place.

The IBM PC Reference Encyclopedia.

This Second Edition of our Encyclopedia is two volumes jam-packed with information that gives you the meanings behind the manuals and keeps you current on compatible software and hardware products. Inside, you’ll find several thousand quick reference entries over a hundred in-depth “how-to” items.

We’ll tell you everything you need to know about DOS (including 2.0). We cover the PC and the XT so thoroughly you won’t need to buy the Technical and Hardware manuals. We detail topics like disk organization, printer control and more. Review IBM and non-IBM programs and add-ons realistically so you don’t get trapped in the software/hardware jungle. And show you dozens of other ways to get the most out of your PC.

We’ve compiled tables and comparisons you won’t find anywhere else. Gathered hundreds of practical tips and techniques from magazines, newsletters and dozens of experienced users, so you won’t have to learn them the hard way.

It’s easy to take.

We’ve made all this information easily accessible, because the Encyclopedia is efficiently indexed and thoroughly cross-referenced.

It’s all explained in plain English with enough depth for both novices and experts. We update it twice a year, so keep you up to speed on all the new developments.

And it’s all yours for a suggested retail price of just $39.95.

Including 1 year of free updates.

So pick up a copy of the Ashton-Tate IBM PC Reference Encyclopedia (Second Edition) at your nearest computer or software store. And stamp out manual labor today.

Ashton-Tate, 1050 West Jefferson Boulevard, Culver City, CA 90230. (213) 204-5570.

Users can decide if product price is fair

I certainly appreciate the many positive comments contained in your review of our Sentinel Combining program, as well as the overall favorable evaluation. There are a few points of the review, however, that I feel need to be addressed.

With respect to the criticisms concerning student usage and password controls and single versus multiple keyboard inputs, these are present in all of our courseware programs. After five years of extensive publishing and the distribution of hundreds of thousands of diskettes, this is the first time these procedures have been evaluated. In fact, our field testing has always yielded positive remarks about these features.

The implication that our diskettes are not well-protected is simply incorrect. Our protective diskette return rate is less than 1%. Furthermore, any Apple user knows that typing INIT 000 will erase any diskette, not just ours. Milliken’s initialization process is clearly spelled out in the teacher’s guide. Again, after hundreds of thousands of diskettes, this situation has never occurred. Not once.

I suspect that these criticisms are really related to the remaining negative comments in the review. It seems that our copy protection, diskette return and pricing policies are completely unacceptable to the reviewers. I question the appropriateness of these topics in a courseware product review. Isn’t the role of reviewers to determine how well a program does what it is supposed to do? Perhaps if the reviewers were aware of the staggering costs of developing, distributing and supporting high quality instructional programs, their opinions would be different.

I value your product and the acceptance of its price are up to the users. We are perfectly satisfied to abide by their decision.

Charles P. Eisenberg

Vice-president Marketing

Milliken Publishing Company