Software Reviews

New World Writer

Webster’s Has Solid Editing, Formatting Capabilities
By John Lombardi, Review Board

Start with a dictionary and a superb word processing program, and what do you get? Webster’s New World Writer from Simon and Schuster, a word processor that has solid performance, strong on editing and formatting.

Webster’s is not as powerful as Word Perfect or Microsoft Word, but it offers a quick, effective word processing program that is easy to use and learn. Unlike other programs, it doesn’t require you to form letters which (Webster’s won’t handle). New World Writer is a competitive product in a market that includes PFS Professional Write, PC-Write, Deluxe Plus II, and Easy Extra.

FEATURES:
In the battle of the checklist wars, Webster’s makes a respectable showing. As a word processing program, Webster’s has most of the general editing commands for moving the cursor, inserting and deleting text, reorganizing blocks, and saving and retrieving information.

As a word processing program, Webster’s has a reasonable complement of features. Webster’s will produce justified or ragged margins and hanging indents. It’s easy to build footnotes, endnotes, and Websters can center individual lines or align them all left or right.

The program will handle up to three predefined formats, which you can mix as many times as you like. Webster’s input line will accept text from any other application, including Lotus 1-2-3, Microsoft Word, and WordStar. In addition, you can type any portion of your text from your word processor, as long as it is in a word processor format and special formatting is intact.

Your files can be added to single, double, and triple spacing. You can set the number of characters per inch at 60. You can also set margins at 1.0 and special formatting is intact.

Webster can also draw line diagrams using lines or text. The line diagrams are placed in the background of your text, so you can see them as you work.
In the battle of the checklist wars, Webster's makes a respectable showing.

Webster's New World Writer from Simon and Schuster uses the popular and powerful Webster's Thesaurus, which is one of the highest rated programs that we have seen.

The program allows you to edit a text hypertext that is printed only when it is appropriate to divide a word. The program offers you to keep two words together so they don't split between two texts. Webster's shows all justification on-screen.

As should be clear, Webster's does not offer the same range of features found in more expensive word processing programs. For example, Webster's does not handle footnotes, indexes, tables of contents, or outlines. Nor does it support proportional spacing or provide sorting or spell check.

However, Webster's also lacks form letter and mailing list capabilities, features found in other similarly priced programs.

Webster's also includes a dictionary of some 114,000 words and a highly capable thesaurus program.

The screen is divided into three areas: a status and menu area of four lines at the top, a ruler line with margins and tabs at the bottom of the screen, and the main text area in between.

PERFORMANCE:

Editing is fast and effective, even with large documents. Cursor movement is quick and natural. Such features as delete, insert, and move blocks all perform as you would expect.

Because you can turn off the required four lines at the top of the screen, some users may find them an annoyance. Nonetheless, the program works quite well.

Search and replace functions are very effective, with a wide range of search options not found in many programs. With Webster's, for example, you can specify the beginning and end of a search and ask the program to find the passage, however much text might be in between.

The spelling program, not memory-resident, is the type that reads the entire file at once. It has a list of words not found in its dictionary. Unlike programs such as Turbo Lightning, it does not operate in background mode; on one screen at a time, or while you type. Webster's presents the suspect words in context. When you replace or correct a word, Webster's does not automatically reformat the paragraph. You can have the dictionary mark word changes so you can readjust those passages yourself.

Although the spellers works well, it is limited in the number of suspect words it can process at one time. We found no mention in the documentation about the number of suspect words that the spell checker can accommodate, but we have a document with a substantial number of pages that Webster's Thesaurus 104 alternatives, and that the spell checker could accommodate.

The program's performance is based on ease of use. The quality of ease of use is evident in the ease of use of the spell checker.

Webster's New World Writer has a good collection of features and capabilities. Its chief bonus is the fine thesaurus; its chief shortcoming is the lack of a mailing list capability. On the balance, we rate it a satisfactory performer.

DOCUMENTATION:

Webster's comes with a clear, comprehensive, and well-written 116-page manual. In addition, you get two supplements that include a writer's guide and other writing aids. Following all this is an index.

The documentation includes an installation and setup booklet and a handy quick-reference card that contains a command map and extra information.

Webster's also has elaborate and comprehensive on-line help. If you like,
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EASE OF LEARNING:

Webster's is also easy to learn. It is a well-organized program with good graphics to make it easier for the beginner to learn the system. The menus are excellent and easy to understand. And if you fail to complete a two-stroke command, Webster's menu and help screens pop up, providing instant help.

The many menus and pop-up explanations, and the good documentation, make this program easy to learn that we can accept it as easy to learn.

EASE OF USE:

Webster's is also easy to use. Once you've learned the program well, you can turn off its menu and pop-up screens so that it's in your way.

The quick operation of the editor, the easy to read and understand screen layout, and the help available at the touch of a key all combine to make this program easy to use at every level.

As mentioned above, Webster's offers different ways of accessing the various commands and functions. You can use a highlight bar over a menu, or you can use one of the many key combinations as a shortcut to the commands. Webster's also implements many WordStar control-key commands.

The program is so flexible that it is convenient and easy to use by itself. Beginners can also use the tool and the experienced users.

ERROR HANDLING:

Webster's is quite a user friendly. It never modifies the original file, workin only from a copy held in memory (except for the first time you create a file). When saving files, Webster's operates much like WordStar, saving the working file and then backing up the original with a .BAK extension, and then deleting any previous working file.

It is difficult to lose text with Webster's, especially if you save your text as you type. Webster's has a backup feature that will save your file to disk if you do not have a backup file.

Finally, the program recovers from power failure and it works well.

The program's strong error-handling features, plus its file backup, automation, and error recovery, make Webster's an excellent error handler.

SUPPORT:

Webster's New World Writer is not copy-protected. Like many programs, Webster's is sold without any warranty about its usefulness or reliability. The company will replace defective disks for free within the first 30 days.

You can reach technical support (at toll free) from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Eastern time. We called the hotline for help in getting Webster's to produce a brochure on our Diskette (which I ordered and got and out). The technical support was quick and accurate. We rate support as satisfactory.

VALUE:

Webster's, which costs $150, is a fine product. It has strong editing and formatting capabilities, its dictionary and thesaurus are current. Most competing programs are almost as good at editing and formatting, and also have good spellers. Much of the competition also has some form of mail list management and some are quite sophisticated (Perf Pro Professional Writer is $195 and Easy Extra at $195). For example, Easy Extra (Diskette Plus $99) has focus feature capabilities, even if it doesn't include the database to manage the mailing list.

If you don't need mail list capability, this product could be a fine choice. The lack of this capability will be a real hardship in the small business market, where mailings and form letters represent the majority. The $195 price is a strong advantage, but this would likely appeal to a different type of user.

We rate Webster's New World Writer a satisfactory value.

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Abbe-1 (able Internationally) — Score: 4.7  — An integrated package with a database, spreadsheet, word processor, and communications. Not copy-protected. For the IBM PC: (7/28/86; score updated 1/10/86)

Access (Symphony) — Score: 5.8  — An outline processor for the Macintosh (not for IBM PC). Not copy-protected. (8/11/86)

Alpha/Throo (Alpha) — Score: 6.1  — A menu-driven database manager for the IBM PC that reads and writes Diskette Plus data and index files directly, not copy-protected. For the IBM PC: (9/29/86)

Autocad, Version 2.5 (Autodesk) — Score: 5.5  — Autodesk is a professional-level drafting program for the IBM PC. Version 2.5 also has a copy-locking device.

BMDP (BMDP Statistical Software) — Score: 4.0  — An IBM PC version of the same basic statistics package. Copy-protected. (7/18/86)

Celticwor (Celticwor Software) — Score: 3.5  — A spreadsheet manager and graph writer. Not copy-protected. For the IBM PC (10/28/86)

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