

# Sentence Combining courseware from Milliken

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We all await 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 devel-

## 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 seemed to affect Touch 'N' Go.

**DOCUMENTATION:** As I stated earlier, all the documentation is printed on the diskette jacket. At first, my gut feeling was, "Who are they 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 instruction than what is written on the jacket. 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, so I had no occasion to request any help. This is probably a good thing, as the author is in London, England—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 \$50 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. ■

oping 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, possessives and other changes 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 6, provide a clear and effective way to reinforce and help teach the skills of sentence combining.

**FEATURES:** This program set consists of 13 lessons, five reviews and several utility programs on two copy-protected diskettes. The lessons range from relatively simple constructions, such as using *and* to connect sentences and using *good* and *well*

properly, to the correct 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 permits 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, onto the disk, each 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

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<b>RAM Expandability (Internal/External)</b>	To 96K (64K/32K)	To 32K (32K/none)	To 24K (24K/none)
<b>Free bundled software</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Function keys</b>	10	8	0
<b>RAM cartridges</b>	Yes	No	No
<b>Bar Code Reader, RS232, Parallel Port, Cassette Port</b>	Yes	Yes	Not Standard
<b>Floppy Disk and SIO Port, Cursor Cluster</b>	Yes	No	Not Standard

\*Includes perpetual clock/calendar, NICad battery pack, AC adapter/charger power supply.  
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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 pretests 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't 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.

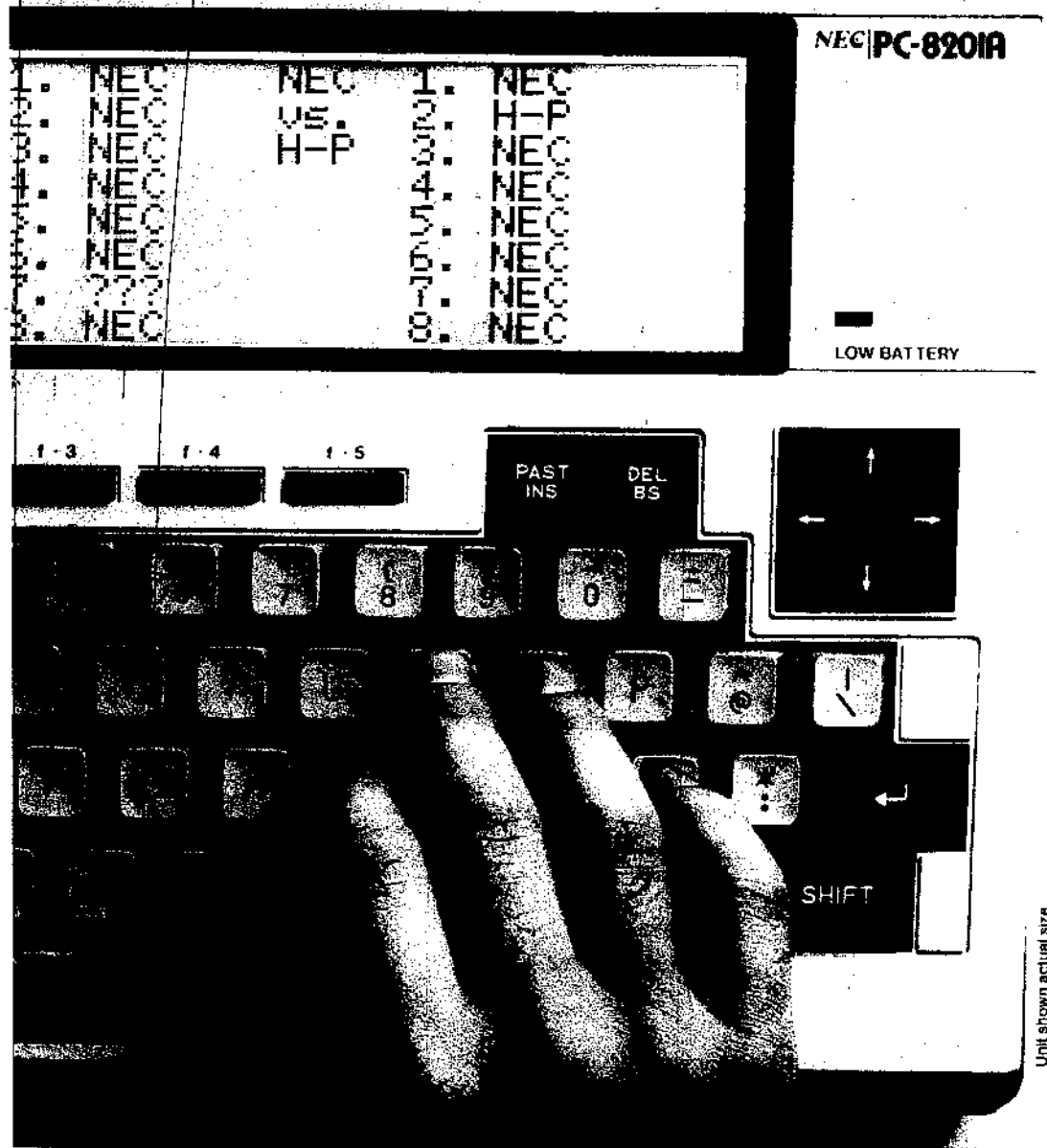
Even the utility programs that manage the class rosters and the selection

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 with the input conventions. Some responses require 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 codes

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### InfoWorld

Software Report Card

### Sentence Combining

	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Performance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of Use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Error Handling	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### System Requirements

- Apple II, II Plus, or IIe with AppleSoft in ROM
- DOS 3.3
- 48K RAM
- One disk drive II

Price: \$395

#### Milliken Publishing Company

1100 Research Blvd  
St. Louis, MO 63132  
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The program has one serious drawback that can inhibit its use in many school settings. It is supplied on uncopyable diskettes. If your school uses a hard disk network (Novus or the like), you will not be able to use the programs on the net. Because the programs cannot be copied, you cannot make backup copies.

Since the disks are designed to be written to in the process of maintaining student and teacher records, the disks are not write-protected and cannot be write-protected. Thus, your students and fellow teachers can easily destroy a disk.

Of course, Milliken can sell you a set of backup disks for an extra \$35 when you purchase the program. You can

See *Sentence*, page 48.

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## Sentence

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also get replacement disks by returning the defective disks, along with \$40.

There is an elaborate warranty and returns policy that protects the original purchaser against defects for 30 days, and Milliken will replace a worn-out disk during the first 12 months once for \$10 (you must return the worn-out disk). Milliken also provides a phone number for you to ask questions.

There is no technical information about the program, and the disk is locked, so you cannot view the code. The program cannot be modified to fit a different set of sentences or a different learning environment.

**ERROR HANDLING:** With the exception of the inconsistent entry styles, the program handles input errors easily and relatively painlessly. The program, however, provides no protection against accidental reset, and if you turn off the machine or remove the disk before the program has terminated normally, you lose the current session record. The manual is clear on these points.

Overall, however, the program is commendably tolerant of student and teacher errors.

**DOCUMENTATION:** The program package includes a good manual that has pictures of the various input screens and a clear, step-by-step series of instructions. If you follow the instructions, everything works fine. But

if you jump in and then look for why things are not going well, you can have some difficulty locating where you went wrong.

The documentation does make the mistake of telling you that you must initialize the diskette before you use it. It means you must use the program's built-in setup program, but if you are an Apple user, you may think the first step is to insert the program diskette and type INIT HELLO. That, of course, would give you a nice blank disk. And since you couldn't have backed it up, you'd have to send it back for replacement before you could get to the program.

**SUMMARY:** What can we say? This is a good, well-executed program. If it cost \$40 and could be used on a net-

work, we'd be very enthusiastic. But it costs \$95. For this money, you get two disks. This means you can have only two students at a time (in different grades) working on the program.

You can't copy it to your hard disk, but if you get backup diskettes that allow you to run four kids at a time, then the package costs \$140. If your kids mess up a diskette by initializing it or something else, you have to wait until you can get return-mail service with a new diskette.

These marketing and packaging decisions make a good program difficult to use effectively in the classroom and schools, and they explain why a "good" program cannot be given an "excellent" rating.

As a teacher or school official, you may question whether this package is worth the money.

## Users can decide if product price is fair

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

With respect to the criticisms concerning student sign-in and password routines and single versus multiple keystroke inputs, these are present in all of our courseware programs. After five years of electronic

## Response

publishing and the distribution of hundreds of thousands of diskettes, this is the first time these procedures have been maligned. In fact, our field testing has always yielded positive remarks about these features.

The implication that our diskettes are easily destroyed because they are not write-protected is truly regrettable. Our defective diskette return rate is less than 1%. Furthermore, any Apple user knows that typing INIT HELLO 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, backup diskette and pricing policies are completely unacceptable to the evaluators.

I question the appropriateness of these topics in a courseware product review. Isn't the role of evaluators 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.

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

**Charles F. Eisenberg**  
Vice-president Marketing  
Milliken Publishing Company

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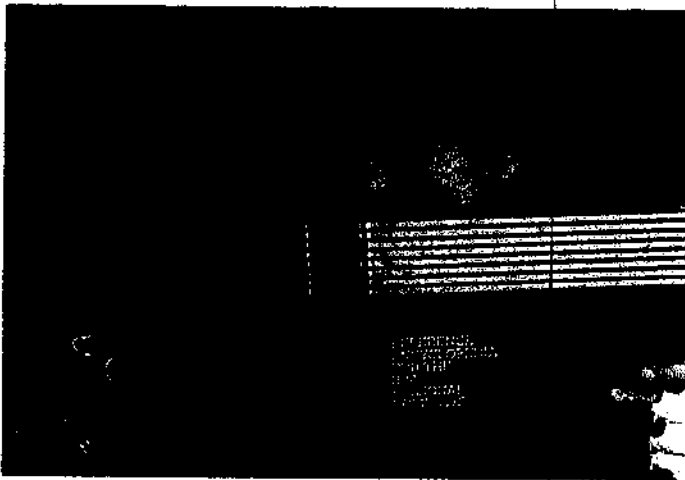
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