

Software Reviews

REVIEW SCORING

InfoWorld reviews only finished, production versions of products, never beta test versions.

Products receive ratings ranging from unacceptable to excellent in various categories. Scores are derived by multiplying the weighting (in parentheses) of each criterion by its rating, where:

Excellent = 1.0 — Outstanding in all areas.

Very Good = 0.75 — Meets all essential criteria and offers significant advantages.

Good = 0.625 — Meets essential criteria and includes some special features.

Satisfactory = 0.5 — Meets essential criteria.

Poor = 0.25 — Falls short in essential areas.

Unacceptable or N/A = 0.0 — Fails to meet minimum standards or lacks this feature.

Scores are summed, divided by 100, and rounded down to one decimal place to yield the final score out of a maximum possible score of 10 (plus bonus). Products rated within 0.2 points of one another differ little.

Average score (1987) for all products reviewed: 6.5.

INDEXES

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Also Included
In This Section

- Full Impact70
- Quarterly
Indexes72
- Review
Responses76

Wordstar Professional 5.0

Classic Word Processing Program Still Fighting

Update Challenges Rivals While Maintaining Original Interface

By John Lombardi Review Board

The revival of microcomputing's classic word processing program, Wordstar, is as awe-inspiring to watch as Rocky's valiant struggle back from the edge of defeat against younger and more powerful opponents. Wordstar 4, with added features and improvements, showed us that the old fighter is still alive.

Now Wordstar 5 brings a competitive program that challenges — although it doesn't quite defeat — the current champions.

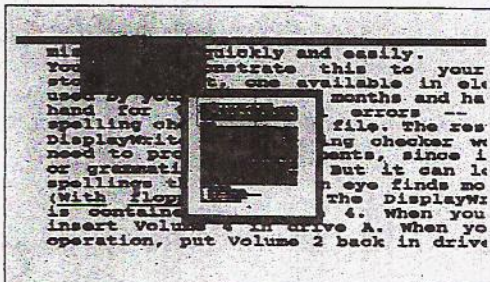
FEATURES:

Micropro has recognized the importance of the large installed base of original Wordstar users by maintaining the original interface of control-key commands. Corporate sibling Wordstar 2000 deviated substantially from that standard, thereby alienating many devoted traditionalists; in recompense, Wordstar 5 has all the familiar control-key combinations for editing and formatting.

The original core of commands have, of course, been augmented to account for a host of additional features, and the infamous dot commands used to control page layouts, headers and footers, and the like, have also been expanded. But lest the new generation of word processing users feel lost in the sea of nostalgic control-keying, Wordstar Professional 5 adds an alternative interface of pull-down menus, and lets you switch back and forth.

Behind all this flash lie significant improvements. Its most spectacular new feature is a page-preview system capable of displaying more views of a document than any of its competitors. You can view a full page, two facing pages, multiple pages (eight on our machine), and thumbnail pages (21 on our machine, but up to 144 on some systems).

You also get twofold and fourfold magnification that shows the page almost exactly as it will appear when printed, including specific fonts and proportional spacing. On the multiple-page displays, the text can be displayed as black lines that show only the general flow of the text, but you can easily select a page from the thumbnail and zoom to read and even edit the text. Furthermore, you can put a 1-inch grid on the display with inch markings down the side and across the top of the page so you can see that things are lining up as they should. Wordstar 5's



Wordstar 5.0 offers pull-down menus; its excellent page preview includes two- or four-time zoom.

page display is the best in the business.

Wordstar's editing works as devotees have always wanted it to, with easy keystroke commands to move the cursor. Wordstar will optionally auto-reformat text as you enter it, but a change in ruler lines and margins does not automatically reformat existing text — that takes a special command. Wordstar displays correct line and page breaks, even with proportionally spaced fonts.

Wordstar offers other enhancements, including some add-in programs. A fine outliner, PC-Outline from Brown Bag Software, is included, but is not very well-integrated. (Its cursor and delete commands are not enough like Wordstar's.) A telecommunications program is capable of all functions, including script files and Xmodem error-correcting protocols, except for Kermit file transfers.

A mail-list utility provides ready-made templates for an address file and an inventory file; these are very effective, but they cannot be customized. The mail list includes the capability of sorting and maintaining up to 32 predefined sort sequences, with up to nine levels of sort per sequence. The mail list data integrates seamlessly into Wordstar's comprehensive mail-merge program.

Profinder serves as an operating system shell for Wordstar users handling a host of tasks related to file management. Profinder sorts file names, finds words or phrases, renames files with new times and dates, creates directories, views files, and will run Wordstar or other programs from its shell.

All Wordstar 4 features remain, including date and time insertion and a simple macro facility. This version of Wordstar supports good block opera-

tions, which include block math, copy, move, delete, read, write, append, sort, and convert case (upper with lower, and lower with upper at beginning of sentence), along with rectangular (column) block operations. In addition, Wordstar's calculator can handle trigonometric functions.

Editing newspaper columns is reasonably effective, although they are displayed side by side only for previewing, not for editing. Wordstar can handle up to eight newspaper-style columns, but they must be of the same width. All measurements are in inches — a great improvement for working with proportionally spaced fonts.

With its preview feature Wordstar has attacked fonts with a vengeance. Its support of Laserjet soft fonts is excellent.

Even with all these features, in some areas Wordstar Professional 5 does not quite come up to the highest standard represented by such products as Word Perfect 5, Samna IV Plus, or Microsoft Word 4, among other heavyweights. There is no table of authorities function. Wordstar includes no graphics commands. Its handling of newspaper columns, while effective, is clumsy, and it does not do multiple lists for illustrations. Wordstar does not support alternative keyboards, and requires that special characters be entered by the clumsy Alt-plus-code-number method.

(For details on our criteria and testing procedures for professional word processors, see our product comparison in the March 28 issue. For a roundup of direct competitors, see our product comparison of September 26.)

PERFORMANCE:

Our correspondence tests show Micropro has removed many of

the lingering hindrances to formatting and, more importantly, reformatting. Wordstar Professional now supports redefinable tabs (inserting tab characters rather than spaces), although it has only left and decimal tabs, lacking right-justified tabs and centered tabs. Hyphenation and some paragraph reformatting occur as you type. Most formatting commands (such as justification, margins, and tabs) are now automatically embedded in the document as dot commands; they are preserved after closing the document, and the document can be globally reformatted even if there are differing ruler settings. You can search and replace the dot commands to make universal changes.

Measurements can now be in inches rather than columns. Also new, two windows can be opened — either onto different or the same documents — and the number of lines in each window can be set. The status line sports new indicators including column number and inches from left margin, window number, and justification flag. The Go To page has been expanded to include "go to next font" and "go forward or backward a certain number of pages." Wordstar Professional 5 earns a good rating in correspondence.

The spelling checker uses a dictionary of more than 100,000 words, is easy to use, and checks for double words. A spelling corrector can be installed and will give you definitions like a dictionary. The thesaurus is built into the program, rather than being RAM-resident. Spelling and thesaurus support are very good.

Wordstar's mail merge now supports a number of file formats directly, including Lotus WKS/WK1 (which includes Quattro and Symphony), Dbase II and III, and its own format: standard comma-delimited files. This mail-list feature brings Wordstar Professional's list management solidly into the realm of its more powerful sibling, Wordstar 2000. Wordstar Professional retains all of its predecessor's characteristics — both good and bad. It offers the benefits of conditional selections and user-prompted fill-in; but it still fails to handle a record that does not have the correct number of fields. Balancing its powerful mail-merge features against a few drawbacks, we rate Wordstar's mail merge very good.

The PC-Outline program is a terrific outliner, although its integration with Wordstar is limited to its capability to run memory-resident and therefore be called from within Wordstar. We rate outlining very good.

Index entry marking and table of contents generation remain much the same as in Wordstar 4. Entries are embedded with dot commands that include all of the indenting and formatting for that entry. This is an awkward approach, but it does work. Indexing is much improved by the capability to mark a word with a control-key command or embed the reference or cross-

reference directly into a paragraph without disturbing its formatting. Users can also make subtopics, cross-references, and bold entries. Table of contents and indexing are rated good.

Footnotes, endnotes, non-printing notes, and annotations have been added. Each item is entered in a window and then embedded into the text, showing only the number or reference. Notes numbers are automatically updated while editing, although it is difficult to tell which are endnotes and which are footnotes while editing. Wordstar has a command to switch endnotes to footnotes and vice versa, and has a dot command that reverses endnotes and footnotes without actually changing them. We rate footnotes very good.

Fonts and styles are much improved. Users can select the desired font from a list of font names. Installation of fonts, selection, and application are quite transparent, and the program includes a printer utility for editing fonts. The remarkable page preview system displays the fonts nicely. Wordstar still lacks style sheets, but 10 predefined rulers, called style guides, can be stored, and macros can help fill in some of the missing functionality that style sheets provide. There is also a utility for creating a batch file to download fonts to a laser printer. Word Perfect does a better job in that regard. We rate fonts and styles good.

Graphics integration does not really exist, but there is a graphics tag in the editor designed to work with Inset, a graphics utility available separately. The documentation contains a stray reference to Inset, perhaps accidentally borrowed from Wordstar 2000 (where it is an included utility).

Overall, Wordstar 5.0 has picked up a little speed. While file loading takes marginally longer, the once-overlong file save time has been dramatically reduced. Likewise, although jumping from the top to the bottom of our test document took more time, searches, search and replace, and reformatting took less time. We rate speed good.

Compatibility, unfortunately, is lacking. Wordstar Professional continues to support only ASCII translations, although the program will import Wordstar files from previous versions and export Wordstar 4 files. The file inclusion capability for Lotus 1-2-3 (and compati-

ble) files is excellent, permitting ranges, whole sheets, and print-time insertion of spreadsheet data for mail merge; compatibility among word processing programs is not as good. Micropro includes a coupon for a \$79.95 conversion utility — Star Exchange from Systems Compatibility Corp. — that supports many file formats; it's scheduled to be available November 1. Because DCA file exchange costs extra, Wordstar 5 does not meet our compatibility requirements; we rate it poor.

This version of Wordstar Professional revives the old fighter to competitive ranking just below the top of the class.

DOCUMENTATION:

Encased in an elegant three-ring binder, Wordstar documentation covers the program and all its add-ons, as well as printer information and tutorial. A special section discusses applications using Wordstar and a set of appendices explores customizing. The index is good.

On-line help is reasonably extensive. Error messages are informative and the manual's appendix provides good explanations of error conditions and messages. Overall, documentation is well-written, clear, and thorough. Some of the explanations could have included more examples, but all in all this is very good documentation.

EASE OF LEARNING:

Wordstar Professional 5 takes about 40 minutes to get up and running, depending on how complicated the font and printer installation needs to be. To learn the basic functions through the tutorial might take a reasonably computer-literate user two hours. Those familiar with older Wordstars will have no trouble at all. Micropro's pull-down menu interface follows IBM's SAA recommendations, resembling that in OS/2 Presentation Manager.

The good menus, dialog boxes, and on-line help all facilitate user learning. While not the easiest program to pick up, Wordstar Professional earns a good rating here.

EASE OF USE:

To become reasonably competent for daily work, a user will need three to five hours of systematic training, but once familiar with the system, users will find

that Wordstar has many ways of doing the same thing, so you can use it the way you like. Menus and help systems can be tailored to the amount of help needed. A host of customization options is available to change the characteristics of the program to match the working environment of the user. The choice of menu and control-key interfaces, both available all the time, is an big advantage, and many users will find themselves using both systems.

Ease of use is very good, inhibited only by some clumsy operations with newspaper columns and the reformatting requirement for new ruler lines.

ERROR HANDLING:

Wordstar uses a backup system that always preserves the most recently saved file and the one before it. In addition, a timed backup option is available; unfortunately, you can't just toggle it on, you must instead exit Wordstar and run the install routine to activate auto-save. The Undo command is one-level, which makes it less flexible than in other systems. The undelete buffer is normally 500 bytes long. It is possible to change Wordstar to expand the buffer and also undelete single characters.

A system crash or power outage loses all data since the last save, but very little text will be lost unless you have made major changes without saving or implementing the auto-save feature.

We rate error handling very good.

SUPPORT:

Micropro offers a 90-day refund guarantee that the product meets specifications as outlined in the manual and advertisements. In addition, standard technical support is good for the life of the release plus six months. Toll-free support is available 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. Pacific time, Monday to Friday, and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday and Sunday. A newsletter and information about updates are provided to all registered users. There is a CompuServe forum for Micropro products. It is not supported by the company but is very useful for hints. Micropro offers two levels of additional support for corporate customers. We rate support policies excellent.

Technical support is satisfactory — when you can get it. We called nine times over four days before connecting with a technician on a Sunday morning. One time we stayed on hold for 20 minutes before giving up, five times we held on 10 minutes each before giving up, and twice the phone was busy. To get to technical support you need a lot of free time. Fortunately, it is a toll-free number.

When we got through, we found technical support very helpful and accommodating. In each instance, our questions received competent answers. The company admits that it was overwhelmed by the volume of users seeking technical support, and says that it will increase its staff. Given the difficulty of getting through, we rate technical support poor.

VALUE

In its current incarnation, Wordstar Professional 5 (\$495) offers a strong complement of features, exceptionally good print preview, strong support for mail merge and telecommunications, an outliner, and a host of other capabilities at a reasonable price. We think Wordstar Professional 5 is a very good value in the professional word processing category.

John Lombardi is provost of a major university and author of five books. He has been working with computers since 1967.

INFO WORLD

REPORT CARD

PROFESSIONAL WORD PROCESSOR WORDSTAR PROFESSIONAL VERSION 5.0

Criterion	(Weighting)	Score
Performance		
Correspondence	(40)	Good
Speller/Thesaurus	(40)	Very Good
Mail merge	(30)	Very Good
Outlining	(25)	Very Good
Table of contents and indexing	(20)	Good
Footnotes	(25)	Very Good
Document tracking	(15)	N/A
Fonts and style sheets	(25)	Good
Graphics integration	(25)	N/A
Speed	(125)	Good
Compatibility	(30)	Poor
Documentation	(100)	Very Good
Ease of learning	(125)	Good
Ease of use	(150)	Very Good
Error handling	(75)	Very Good
Support		
Support policies	(25)	Excellent
Technical support	(25)	Poor
Value	(100)	Very Good
Final score		6.5

PRODUCT SUMMARY

Company: Micropro International Corp., 33 San Pablo Ave., San Rafael, CA 94903; (415) 499-1200, (800) 669-1250.
List Price: \$495; update from any earlier version (any operating system) is \$119.

Requires: IBM PC, XT, AT, PS/2, and true compatibles; PC/MS-DOS 2.0 or later; 384K of RAM; two disk drives; hard disk recommended. Requires 512K of RAM for Advanced Page Preview or PC-Outline; graphics card required for preview and graphics; Telecom requires Hayes or compatible modem up to 2,400 bps, direct connections to 9,600 bps.

Support: 90-day money-back guarantee; unlimited technical support on toll-free line for life of release plus six months; two levels of corporate support.

Pros: Powerful features and very good performance; strong mail merge, dictionary and thesaurus; laser printer support; spreadsheet integration. Hands-down best page preview in the business.

Cons: Some clumsiness in newspaper columns; no graphics integration; limited compatibility with other word processors; overloaded telephone support.

Summary: Maintaining the characteristics that endear the product to so many users, this update greatly expands features while eliminating most defects. A contender.

OFFICE/PROFESSIONAL WORD PROCESSING BENCHMARKS

	Wordstar Professional 5.0	Word Perfect 5.0	Wordstar Professional 4.0
File			
Load	1.4	1.9	<1.0
Save & continue	6.7	3.7	11.9
Import ASCII	1.8	1	1.0
Export ASCII	21.9	8.4	12.2
Import DCA	N/A ²	19.9	N/A ²
Cursor movement			
Top to bottom	3.3	1.9	1.7
Manual scroll	62.4	44.9	93.6
Reformat	31.7	19.6 ³	53.7
Search			
Last word	4.4	1.7	8.3
Replace	10.9	6.1	13.3
Spelling Checking	122.0	97.0	122.0
Append document	2.6	1.2	1.6

All times in seconds.

All tests conducted on an 8-MHz IBM PC AT (640K of RAM with EGA).

¹Import times varied from 8.2 to 15.3 seconds.

²Cannot translate DCA.

³Could not globally alter all rulers. This time included stripping out all margin sets, creating and applying a style sheet.