IconPoet

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	COLLABORATORS			

	TITLE : IconPoet			
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IconPoet

1.1   IconPoet Guide

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Icon Poet -- A writing toy for human/machine collaboration.
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Icon Poet for the Amiga is freeware, but I'd really appreciate
getting feedback from anyone who spends much time using it.

     Contact the Author
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1.2   Icon Poet

WHAT IS IT AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

Icon Poet is a creative writing toy. You click on a grid of
grammatical terms, and words appear in a text window. It's like
the machine is your coauthor -- you supply the structure and the
program suggests the content.

You don't have to accept the first word it displays. Click on
the same box again, and it replaces the word with another of the
same type. Click until you see something you can work with, but
don't get too obsessed over finding one particular word. If you
need a specific word that badly, just type it in.

The keyboard should be used sparingly. The fun of Icon Poet is
in learning to stay loose and work with the curves it throws you.
Be open to its bizarre suggestions, and you will find yourself
writing things you would never have imagined.

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INSTALLATION

Put the IconPoet directory wherever you want it. Keep this
directory intact -- the program needs to find a Projects directory
and a Words directory containing 20 specifically-named files.

WHAT'S THIS FILE IT WANTS TO WRITE?

The first time you run the program, it asks you to center the
screen and then pick an option. If you let it write the file to
your S: directory, it will center itself automatically after that.

If you somehow centered it wrong and then saved it, delete the
file "S:AmosXyOffsetNTSC.config" and run the program again.

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FEATURES OF THE INTERFACE

The main grid consists mostly of grammatical terms grouped by
color -- orange for interjections, purple for adjectives and
adverbs, green for nouns and pronouns, blue for verbs, brown for
prepositions and blue-green for conjunctions. There are also
various punctuation marks in gray, and some "function icons" in
black.

You may be better off just playing with it and discovering how it
works by trial and error, but there's some not-readily-apparent

information below if you'd rather study up. Or it may make sense
to just read about the function icons since a couple of those
aren't terribly intuitive.

the -- Click this repeatedly and it cycles through these
  words: the, that, this, these, those.

-- Number, that is. Normally this gives you words like
  "fourteen" and "three," but if you just clicked on "a"
  it gives you words like "few" and "dozen."

-y -- This adds a "y" to change certain words to adjectives,
  e.g. "dirt" to "dirty." It knows enough to remove the space
  between the end of the word and the cursor, so you don't
  have to back up manually, but it doesn't have the smarts to
  change "mud" to "muddy," so you still need to double certain
  letters yourself.

more -- Cycles through: more, less, most, least.

-er -- Click again for "-est." This one knows some irregular
  comparatives and superlatives, e.g. "good, better, best,"
  but it probably doesn't know them all. Also, deciding
  correctly between "____er" and "more ____" remains your
  responsibility.

pronoun -- Like the Preposition and Conjunction boxes, this
  selection opens another grid filled with specific words.
  These words provide structure more than content, so it
  makes sense for the user to choose them directly. The right
  column of the Pronoun window has space for six words of your
  choosing. Just edit the vocabulary file Custom6. Note that
  the color scheme here is just to break up the space, it
  isn't as meaningful as on the main grid.

modal -- These are words like "would" "can" "may" "might" etc.
  Also known as auxiliary or helping verbs, though that
  category also includes "be" "do" "have" and "used" (as
  in "she used to rock and roll") which aren't modals. You
  may nevertheless wish to add "used" to the modal file,
  because there wasn't room for it on the main grid like
  "be" "do" and "have".

have, be, do, get -- Repeated clicking just cycles through
  different conjugations of the actual verb.

go, say -- The first time you click on these, you get the actual
  verb. Repeated clicking gives you verbs that are go-related
  or say-related.

verb -- This is the main box for content verbs.

_, s, ing, ed, en -- Click here after clicking on a verb and
  it conjugates it for you. Usually you can click on
  "verb" once, then, even if you don't like that verb,
  click on "ed" or "ing" or whatever to conjugate it,
  then go back to clicking on "verb" and you'll be able

   to review your options properly conjugated.

not -- May give you the contraction "n't" first. If you want
  the full "not," click again. Once more for "never."

to -- For convenience's sake, this cycles through "to" "too"
  and "two."

of, and -- Like "to," these words are used so frequently that it
  made sense to put the actual words on the main screen.
  Plus, by color and proximity they give new users an example
  of a preposition and a conjunction, which seem to be the
  least-known grammatical terms, except of course for "modal."

-ly -- Just like -y, except changes certain words to adverbs,
  e.g. "slow" to "slowly."

" -- Keep clicking if the quotes aren't spaced right at first.

' -- May guess that what you really want is apostrophe-S.
  If not, click again for more options. If you click here
  after selecting certain modals, it gives you the correct
  contraction, e.g., you + will + ' produces "you'll."

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THE FUNCTION ICONS (the black ones)

PLURALIZE -- All nouns start singular, but you can make them
plural by clicking here immediately after you select the noun.
Don't worry about the space between the end of the noun and the
cursor; it takes care of that.

REPEAT OKAY -- Say you want two adjectives in a row. After you
find an acceptable first adjective, click here to lock it in
before clicking on the Adjective box again.

CIRCLE WITH A SLASH THROUGH IT -- Removes the last word entered.
Useful when you realize you've started clicking on the wrong box.

GRAB -- Lets you insert a copy of a word you've used recently.
Just click on GRAB, then click on any word in the text window,
and it appears at the cursor.

BACKSPACE ARROW, DELETE, RETURN, and SPACE -- Same as on the
computer's keyboard.

CAPITALIZE -- Capitalizes the word you just entered. Click once,
it capitalizes the first letter only. Click again and all
letters are in caps. A third click, they're all lower-case
again. This also works with highlighted words.

EXIT -- This gets you out of the Pronoun, Preposition, and
Conjunction windows if you elect not to make a selection or if

your selection causes Icon Poet to guess wrongly that you wish to
remain in that window.

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TEXT EDITING IN ICON POET

You may load, save, and clear the screen from the Project menu.
It can only load ASCII files, and if they're wider than 71
characters it does its best to reformat them to that width.

Icon Poet is by no means a full-featured word processor. You can
highlight single words by double-clicking on them, then delete or
replace them, but there's no way to cut and paste longer blocks
of text. It's a toy! If you have nevertheless used it to create
important work that needs major revision, save the file and load
it into a real word processor for editing.

Note that longer documents slow it down. It can only hold 660
lines of text, which is equivalent to about 10 typewritten pages.
Personally, I can't imagine writing anything even close to that
length with it, but if you have decided it's time to write the
Great American Novel bizarro-style, then stick to short chapters
and save each chapter as a separate file. Save frequently. And
send me a copy.

Icon Poet was written in AMOS, so its screen isn't affected by
Left Amiga-M. Use Left Amiga-A to toggle between Icon Poet and
Workbench. Also, on the file requester, if a file that you know
is there doesn't show up, click the "Get Dir" button.

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CUSTOMIZING THE VOCABULARY FILES

Advanced users may wish to replace or enhance the standard
vocabulary with words of their own. This is easy to do.

In the Words directory are 20 files: adj, advD, advM, advP,
advTF, anumber, char, concept, custom6, event, goverb,
interjection, modal, number, person, place, sayverb, substance,
thing, and verb. Do not rename these files. They may be edited
in an ASCII editor such as Ed. You can even use Icon Poet to
edit them, but the new words won't be recognized until you quit
the program and run it again. That's because when you start it
up, all the vocabulary words get loaded into files in memory that
are small enough to be read quickly. Larger vocabularies take
longer to load, but aren't any slower once it's running.

For everything but verbs, you can either arrange the vocabulary
words in long lists (ideally alphabetical, so you can spot any
duplicates) or separate them with commas and NO SPACES. If you

use commas, be sure the lines don't end with a comma -- the end
of the line itself serves as a separator, and if there's a comma
there too it results in a blank word. Be sure there are no empty
lines at the top or bottom of the file, because those also show up
as blank words.

For verbs, put each verb on its own line. It should follow the
_,s,ing,ed,en format. For example:

    fall,falls,falling,fell,fallen

Each line must have four commas, but you can omit the most
regular conjugations. Here are the rules on what you can omit:

_   "to _____"   The verb itself can never be omitted.
s   "she _____"   Omit if formed by adding 's' to the verb.
ing   "I am _____"   Omit if formed by adding 'ing' to the verb.
ed   "Yesterday I ___" Omit if formed by adding 'ed' to the verb.
en   "I have ____"   Omit if it's the same as the "ed" form.

So our verb "fall" would actually look like this:

    fall,,,fell,fallen

and a regular verb like "walk" would look like this:

    walk,,,,

If you get mistakes after editing verb files, count your commas.
There must be exactly four in every line -- no more, no less.
Also, be careful with verbs that end in 'e', such as 'bake', when
you do the "ed" form. Its last two letters are 'ed' but that's
not the same as being formed by adding 'ed'. If you leave the
"ed" slot blank, it will conjugate as 'bakeed', i.e. 'bake'+'ed'.

If you develop a rich vocabulary set, why not upload your Words
directory to Aminet? Let other Icon Poet users give it a try.
Give it a name like IconVocab2.lha or something, so it'll be
close to IconPoet.lha in Aminet's alphabetical filelist.

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FUN ICON POET ACTIVITY IDEAS

The surrealists of the 20's and 30's played a game called
Exquisite Corpse, in which a text would be passed from person to
person with all but the last line or two covered up. Each person
would continue the story based on what they could gather from the
visible portion. You could do a similar thing by taking turns
writing with the Icon Poet in a group. You could even cover part
of the monitor so only the last line or two of the text window

can be seen. When everyone has had a turn, read the result.

Do you remember Mad-Libs? They're stories with blanks in them,
and in each blank is a description of the kind of word that would
go there -- famous person, name of a body part, etc. You solicit
words from someone who can't see the story, then read it through
with the words they provided inserted in the blanks. The results
can be quite amusing. You can approximate the Mad-Libs effect by
importing a serious piece of writing (ASCII only!), then going
through and replacing key words with whatever Icon Poet suggests.

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HISTORY OF ICON POET

I wrote the first version of this ten years ago, in AmigaBasic.
It looked about the same, but there was no way to load, save, or
edit. When text scrolled off the top of the screen, it was gone.
I put that version aside to work on other projects, and a number
of years passed before I looked at it again. When I did, I was
surprised at how entertaining I still found it, though I got a
bit tired of having to "Save" by copying the screen in longhand.
So I decided to redo it in AMOS with a more colorful look and
better text handling.

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ABOUT THE NAME...

It has been suggested that the boxes you click on are really more
buttons than icons. Obviously they're not the same kind of
icons you see on Workbench, but Merriam Webster's Collegiate
Dictionary, 10th Edition, defines an icon as "a graphic symbol on
a computer display screen that suggests the purpose of an
available function."

"Graphic" can include written words, so by this definition each
box on the grid would certainly qualify as a kind of icon.

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Also on Aminet from the creator of Icon Poet:

More bits of whimsy that use randomness:
   misc/misc/SeasonInRAM.lha   (poetry generator)
   misc/misc/SteveHeadroom.lha   (talking head)
   demo/slide/PictureGarden.lha   (collage generator)

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For AMOS programmers only:
   dev/amos/ArtCoder.lha        (super-handy for interface design)
   dev/amos/AnimFlipper.lha     (includes screen-centering code)
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CONTACT THE AUTHOR

I'm hoping to hear from people who have taken Icon Poet for a
spin. My main question is: Did you think it was fun?

Or, was the learning curve too steep? If you basically liked it
but one or two things irritated you, what were they?

If there are any teachers out there with Amigas in the classroom,
please let your students try this new way of writing, and drop me
a line to tell me how it went. It seems to me that kids could
actually learn their grammatical terms by using this program.
It's like diagramming sentences in reverse, only fun.

If you find a bug that screws up the same way every time, feel
free to send me a precise description and I'll try to fix it.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: if you write something using Icon Poet that
you wouldn't mind sharing with the world, please send me a copy,
along with your name, city/state/country, and perhaps a few words
about yourself. If I get enough interesting examples, I want to
make a "Best of Icon Poet" web page. By the way, I intentionally
emptied the Projects directory before putting it on Aminet to keep
people from being influenced by my own stylistic inclinations.
Everything is permitted -- have fun!

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(addresses current April 1998, and probably long after)
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