

THUNDER7™ SOFTWARE REVIEW

By: Bob Marley (2/1/91)

History of the Product

Current reviews weren't available for this product in either MacWorld or MacUser magazines. The February 1989 issue of MacUser magazine commented on a previous version in Minifinders. Thunder (Version 1.1) was evaluated then as fairly fast and good at guessing misspelled words. The rating was 4-1/2 Mice and the supplier at that time was Electronic Arts of San Mateo, CA. A review of that product was in the September '88 issue.

MacZone, a large mail order software house, told me that Thunder7™ was a re-release of a discontinued product called Thunder. This software was not currently in stock but would sell for \$55.00 when it became available. The same day, MacWarehouse said that Thunder7™ would be available for delivery on 2/6/91 and was listed at \$59.00. Their salesperson believed the previous version was Thunder II and was unsure why it jumped to Thunder7™. They were willing to take an order now.

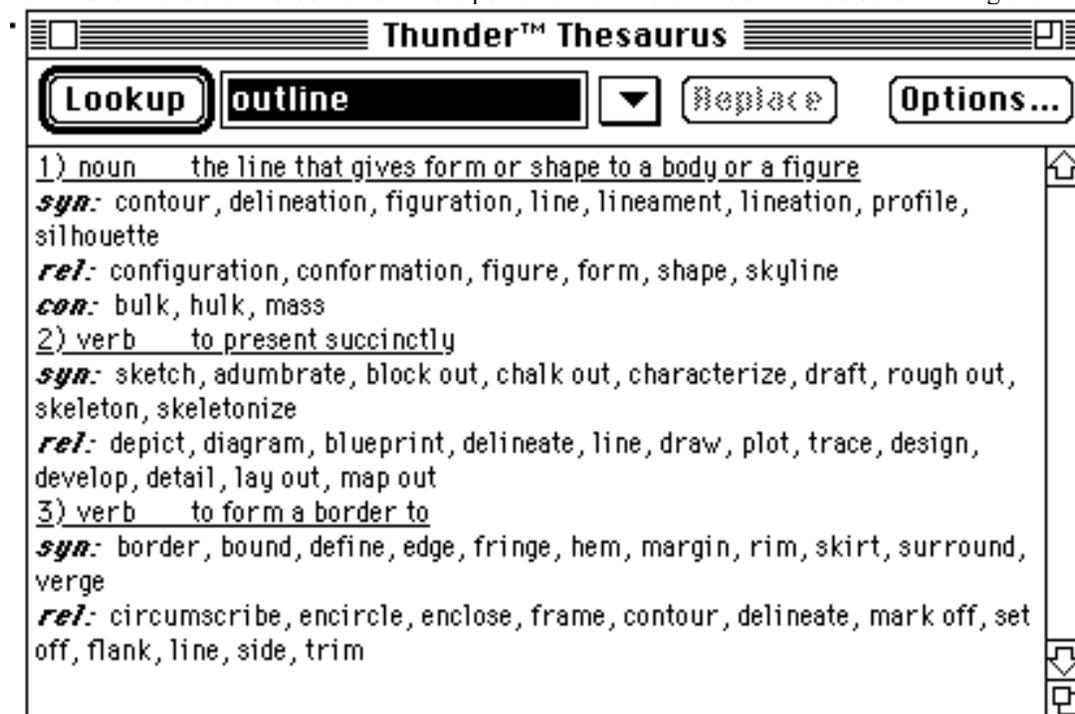
No history of the product's evolution, or current upgrade policy, appeared to be contained within Baseline Publishing, Inc.'s Manual.

Thesaurus Evaluation For Completeness

The thesaurus is extremely large, 595 K. In comparison, a competitive product Word Finder™ is only 328 K. Baseline Publishing claims 1.4 million words in their thesaurus or approximately the number that William F. Buckley Jr. has been estimated to use. Only 40,000 of these 1.4 million words are entry points or indexed words that one can look up. This isn't surprising. Any good thesaurus should take the common words, a small list, and access the uncommon words, a potentially enormous list.

The Thunder7™ Thesaurus was found to be very complete and is the best part of the Thunder7™ package. You can readily find definitions, synonyms, related words, and antonyms. I checked many words using both the Thunder7™ and Word Finder™ Thesaurus. Both generated numerous good synonym suggestions. They weren't necessarily the same suggestion lists although there was a substantial overlap. Even though it apparently accessed a substantially reduced set of available words, some Word Finder™ suggestions were superior to anything on the Thunder7™ suggestion list. Both were quick on a Mac IICI with no apparent speed penalty for the larger Thunder7™ Thesaurus dictionary or the additional information that it generated.

The Thunder7™ Thesaurus is more like an electronic dictionary than a conventional thesaurus. The definitions and related words make it more powerful than Word Finder™ and a better writing aid.



Large Dictionary Evaluation for Completeness

The Thunder7™ Large Dictionary requires 179 K of memory and is cached in memory when selected. In comparison, the MS Word Dictionary requires 184 K of memory and was not cached until I used Disktop to modify it appropriately. The amount of space required for each seemed to indicate the two dictionaries should have a comparable number of words from which to select. Baseline Publishing claims their Large Dictionary has approximately 86,000 words and most professionals only have a working vocabulary of 15,000 words.

The MacIntosh Bible's Dictionary Helper file was used to partially verify the completeness of these two Large Dictionaries. The MS Word Dictionary added 270 words from the more than 1300 possible personal names, place names, contractions, abbreviations, etc. The Thunder7™ Large Dictionary added close to 500 words indicating it was less complete. Baseline Publishing supplies as part of the package contractions, abbreviations, and names in several supplemental dictionaries. These should be added to the Thunder7™ Large dictionary almost immediately.

If you have the MacIntosh Bible's Dictionary Helper file, it should be checked word for word into a new supplemental dictionary and the resulting supplemental dictionary merged into the Large Dictionary. That isn't as formidable a task as it sounds — less than an hour — and you will have a better idea how your spell checker operates.

Spelling Evaluation

I created a short list of misspelled words for the two spellers to check. My necessarily incomplete list follows. It has the word spelled correctly first: house (huose), appetite (apetite), daily (dialy), confusion (conphusion), integrate (intagrate), wonderful (wonerful), subdistrict (subdistriqct), asphyxiate (asphixiate).

Both Thunder7™ and the MS Word dictionary made the correct word the first suggestion in every case but one. Subdistriqct was an incorrect spelling that Thunder verified as correct. However, there were some bizarre suggestions for my erroneous words. Thunder7™ suggested: hoose, dilly, intygrate and the MS Word Dictionary suggested: tical.

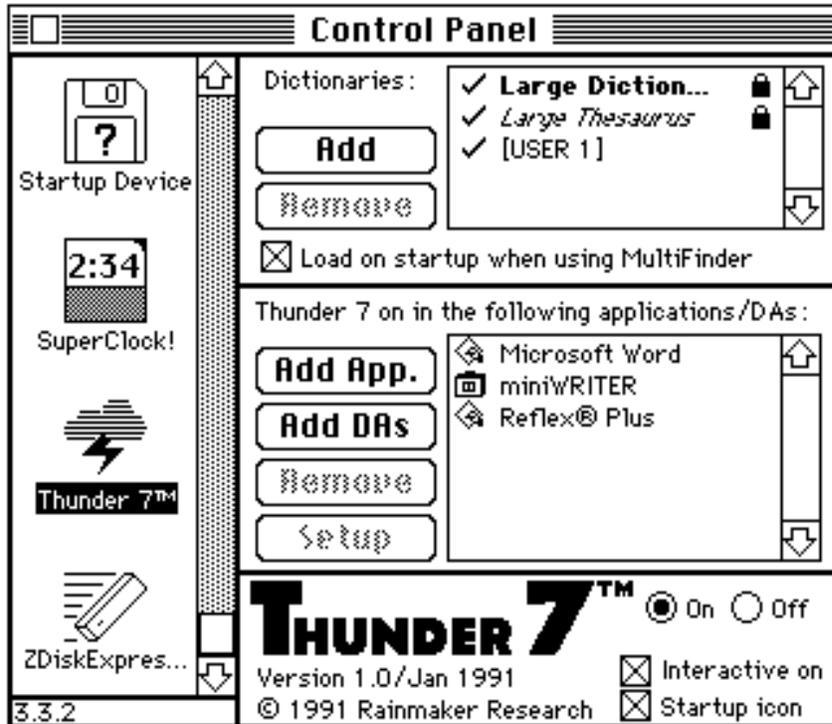
Intygrate appears to be an invalid suggestion since it doesn't even pass the Thunder7™ spell checker and doesn't appear to be a word found in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. The suggestions hoose and dilly are valid word choices. The MS Word Dictionary doesn't contain hoose but it suggests the correct word, house. Tical suggested by the MS Word Dictionary isn't contained in the Thunder7™ dictionary. It is a valid word although it bears little resemblance to the original word which was misspelled, 'dialy'.

All electronic dictionaries probably contain a few incorrectly spelled words, will occasionally make some inane suggestions, and need to be frequently backed up by a good dictionary. Thunder7™ allows you to add words to its main dictionary — MS Word Dictionary doesn't — but even more important might be the capability for both to delete incorrectly spelled words.

Advantages of Thunder 7™

Thunder7™ is a CDEV which can easily be reconfigured. Special dictionaries can be programmed for each application in use. It not only works with applications but it can also be used with DA's (eg. miniwriter), databases, etc. It has a comprehensive dictionary and thesaurus. It can be used in an interactive, or correct as you go, mode. Up to three dictionaries can be open at one time for any application. Words can be added to all dictionaries, including the main dictionary. The supplemental dictionaries are in text form. Additions and deletions are easily accomplished. Text supplemental dictionaries from other spell checkers are readily converted to Thunder7™ format. Thunder7™ has glossary capability. The thesaurus includes multiple word definitions and antonyms.

No compatibility problems were found with the following: MacIntosh IICI, System 6.0.5, Word 4.0C, Reflex Plus, or the Miniwriter DA. No adverse interactional problems with installed INIT's and CDEV's (Suitcase II, Disk Express II, Super Laser Spool, etc.) were noted. The Thunder7™ manual's instructions were easy to follow.



Disadvantages of Thunder 7™

Thunder7™ will not recognize another spelling or grammar checker's USER 1 dictionary. It has to be converted to Thunder format with TEXT as the Type and emg1 as the Creator. Word 4.0 stores the USER 1 words in a text format dictionary with DICT as the Type and MSWD as the Creator. That's the only difference but this difference requires you to keep your special dictionary in two formats with constant updating. Correct Grammar by Lifetree gets around this problem by recognizing the MS Word USER 1 dictionary.

A nice feature is the capability to do 'stats' immediately, but unfortunately the results aren't accurate. The Flesch and Gunning Fog scales should normally have about the same grade level. It seems that the computation of a Flesch score and grade equivalent is substantially in error on Thunder7™ as it repeatedly gave Flesch grades 4-6 years below the Gunning number. Not being an expert on these computations, the results were verified with Correct Grammar. The Correct Grammar and Thunder7™ numbers agreed within a year for Gunning Fog Index but the Thunder7™ Flesch results were always substantially lower.

The 'Missing Capital at the beginning of a sentence' option causes an error after every abbreviation. If you frequently use abbreviations, this option may cause more invalid errors than it will find. Since I infrequently miscapitalize sentences, I disabled this function almost immediately as was suggested in the User's Manual.

Both the command and Menu item for 'Thunder Control Panel' didn't work. 'Command =' is used for Show Suggestions when interactively spell checking. It's a great choice, but unfortunately most applications already have this command assigned to critical operations, usually 'calculate'. Fortunately all Thunder7™ commands can easily be modified.

The last and greatest problem is that the batch spell checking is done on the clipboard and not in the document. If you are using a Word Processing application like Word 4.0, you are probably going to have formatting problems with this approach. When you finish spell checking the clipboard, it will be pasted back into your document and some of your formatting will be gone. Seven pages of the manual are devoted to application incompatibilities resulting from this approach. A folder which supposedly makes your application more compatible with Thunder is included for your system file. You are assured that "Users of Word 4.0 should have no problem" but formatting errors occur regardless. The manual says Thunder7™ in the interactive mode is compatible with practically every application. I found this to be true, but personally prefer using the MS Word spell checker for my completed documents.

Reviewer's Opinion

Thunder7™ has a great thesaurus and an effective interactive spell checker. Since it doesn't work with the document itself while spell checking, it is severely limited in its ability to check completed documents without causing formatting errors. It is an above average product which requires more work on its spell checking capability and application compatibility to make it the product of first choice.