

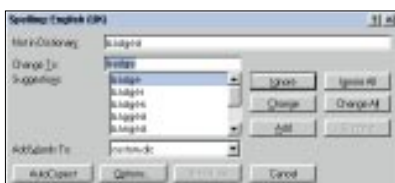
Buying a WORD PROCESSOR

Word processing is the most common task a personal computer is asked to perform. Its principal function is to enable you, the writer, to compose text on the screen before committing the results to paper. This is made easy because word-processing software allows you to change words and move text around until you are completely happy with it. The software also takes care of a lot of mechanical stuff that typists used to have to do themselves, such as starting a new line or a new page, checking spelling or counting lines and words.

Advanced facilities

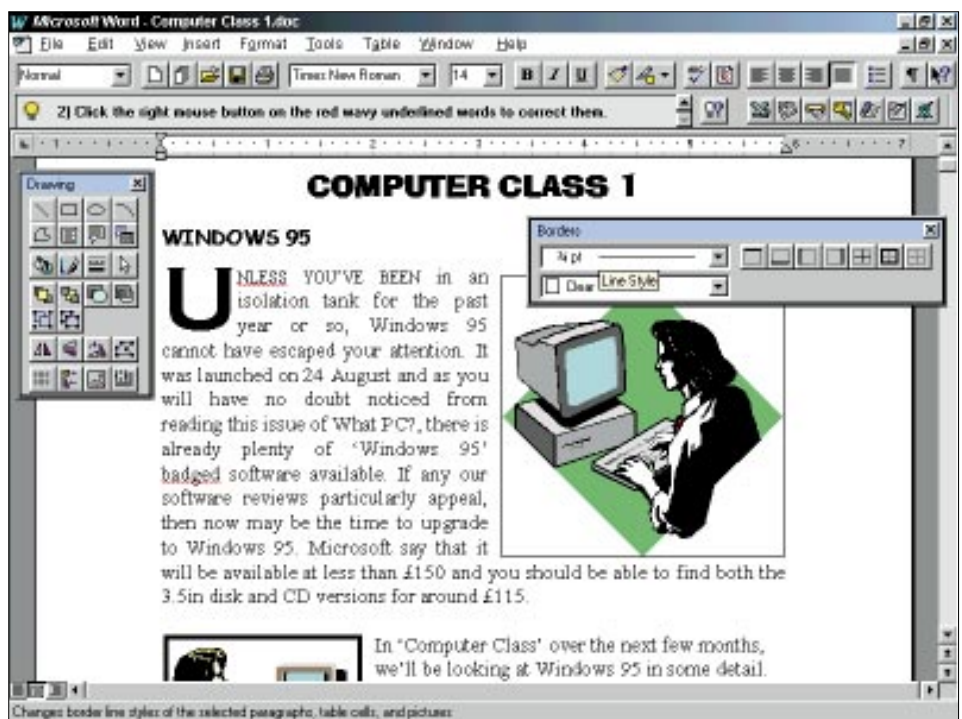
Current word processors add countless improvements to the basic text-editing features. Almost all include a thesaurus that suggests similes when you are stuck for the right word. Many include drawing and charting tools and can import artwork created with other programs.

Because most word-processing programs are designed to work with Microsoft Windows, they are capable of displaying words and pictures on the screen almost exactly as they will print. This WYSIWYG capability (say wizziwig – it stands for What You See Is What You Get) has led to the inclusion of many features concerned more with layout than composition. For example, text can be made to flow in multiple columns like a newspaper and different type-styles can be used.



Bells and whistles

As each new version of a program is released, it incorporates the features of its competitors. This has led to the inclusion of many new frills



designed as much to differentiate a product as to provide useful capabilities. Microsoft is a past master at this and Word for Windows 7, the latest version for Windows 95, is designed to respond to the

sort of work you do by watching what you type and applying a sort of rudimentary artificial intelligence to try and anticipate your needs. In this way, certain tasks may be completed automatically for you.

Buying tips

The three major word processors: Word, Wordperfect and Ami Pro (now Word Pro) – and most of the minor ones – will all make a good job of text entry, layout and editing, so there seems to be little basis for choosing one over the other. The software companies would argue differently – but take their claims with a pinch of salt.

- The system requirements of a word processor are usually stated in terms of how much memory your computer should have, the speed of its processor and how much hard disk space is needed. Manufacturers' figures will tend to be rosy. If minimum requirements are quoted it's a safe bet you need more than the minimum to get the most out of the software. So always buy a word processor that fits comfortably within your system's specifications.

- Prices vary wildly, according to where you buy (retail or direct) and when. Word processors, like other types of software, are frequently offered at promotional prices – look out for these offers.

- Don't be swayed by impressive lists of features. Their value is zero if you are not actually going to use them. Why pay for multilingual capabilities if you always write in English? Similarly, sophisticated graphing utilities are pointless if you intend to spend your time writing novels.