



It's a long story

Long documents, and why the current crop of word processors are really rather good at them. Plus, some points about WordPerfect. With Tim Phillips.

Much of the criticism of Word for Windows, WordPerfect and Word Pro centres on the fact that they do too much and are just too complicated for most people to use. This is borne out by one incident during my time as a freelance journalist when I was writing for a rival magazine. The publication decided to check the usability of the top half a dozen word processors, and so devised a series

of simple tasks that represented a run-through of the most common features of the modern Windows word processor: formatting, printing, spell-checking, mailmerging and so on.

The usability testers were hired from a temp agency for the day; intelligent, qualified typists with some experience of word processors. No-one was put on a word processor they knew. The person in

charge of that 80 features are only used by 20 people? Whatever. There remain a host of features on your word processor you have never even considered. Look down each menu bar in turn, and count the number of functions you have never used, perhaps never noticed, before.

I would admit to a blind spot when it comes to producing long documents. For me, anything over 2,000 words (the length of this column) is hard to contemplate. I blame MTV, as if I spent less time watching it, my articles would be longer. Last month, I was asked to write something 25,000 words long with a table of contents, lots of headings, and even an index! I agreed because I had a vague idea my word processor would help.

This has often been a rash decision. This time, I can report that the package I chose (Word for Windows) coped admirably. When I cross-checked with WordPerfect and Word Pro, in some respects they were even better. The job of knocking off a begging letter to the bank manager may be much the same in WinWord 7 as it was in WordStar 1512 a decade ago, but the job of writing your life story is much simpler. Here are a few things I learned.

Indexing for beginners

Ever bought a computer book and wondered why the indexes are so huge? These guys index for fun. It is, by any standards, almost too easy. Where's the challenge in that?

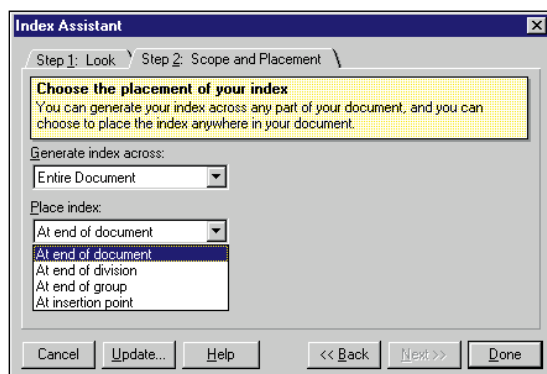
WinWord has a typical Microsoft straight-to-the-point solution. Go to Insert, Index and tables, and up pops a floating dialogue box with four tabs, to take care of a contents page, an index, a table of figures and a table of authorities. There's few enough of us will use all four. There are seven styles plus a style editor with a preview, so it is easy to see how your index will look. Once you choose the style (including tab leaders and the option to justify numbers) it calls up a box allowing you to mark entries. As you mark each entry, the box stays on top and the index generates itself.

Word Pro generates the index as a two-stage process but has more support for making "sub-indexes" in the middle of a document, and is more flexible for power functions, if less for display. The indexing dialogue box anchors to the bottom of the toolbar, neatly out of the way. You can easily leave it there while you write or

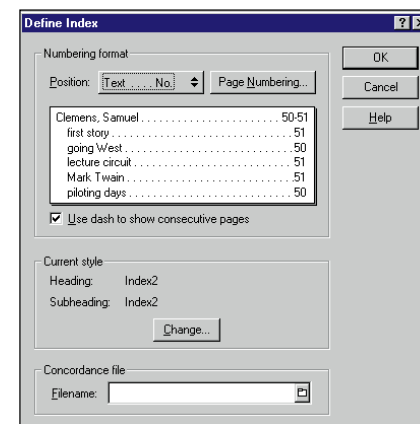


Word for Windows one-pass indexing, not the easiest to use, but pretty comprehensive

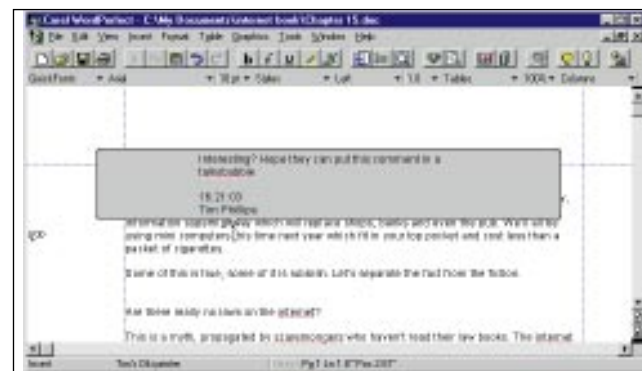
The index assistant for Word Pro needs a preview function, but indexing is powerful



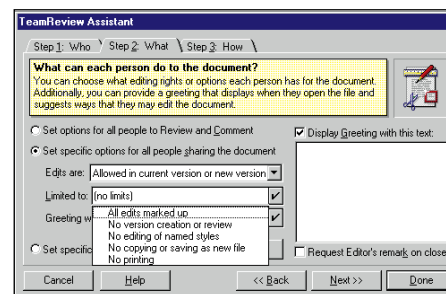
assemble a document, unlike WinWord's box and, when marking words to be indexed, it gives you the choice of whether to have them in the index or the contents. Despite its four-tab dialogue box, WinWord forces you to each separately. When you finish that part, you call up the "Index



Above Defining an index in WordPerfect is fussier, but it is probably the most feature-rich
Right Word for Windows doesn't major on comment field. This is the best it can do



Above WordPerfect has a much better-looking option.
Right The WordPro TeamReview assistant - complicated but powerful.



assistant", which should help you format your index. But without previews of how the index would look, and without the opportunity to right-justify page numbers,

it's a bit of a let-down in visual terms. You can, however, put the index anywhere in the document you wish.

Finally, Corel WordPerfect has the same two-stage process but not as much control over where you put your index. Rather than choose a style for your index, it allows you to choose from a set of six predefined formatting choices with previews (justified or not, with or without leader). Marking is better than WinWord's — again the box is docked to the toolbar, and it is better at standardising your entries — offering you the automatic pick box of other entries so that you don't, for example, have an index with "browser" and "browsers" as two separate entries.

All three are quick and easy and, with a little care, they are easily up to professional indexing standards.

More on long documents: revising and annotating

Another useful long-document feature is the chance to mark up edits and comments, especially when more than one person wants to see the document. When I write a long piece I usually don't

know one or two facts, but instead of stopping to look them up, I leave a marker to say "don't forget to look this up later". Word is spectacularly poor at this sort of editing, instead assuming that you will want to make a hidden "annotation" to your document. The only way to see these annotations easily is to leave the annotation window open at the bottom of the screen, where the annotations pop up as you pass them. This is a very

unsatisfactory solution.

By contrast, Word Pro has every conceivable type of group review and annotation scheme, enough to make your

head hurt. Starting on the File menu, there's the format scheme for passing a document around a workgroup, called TeamReview. You can set the names that the document is passed to. If you enter those names as email addresses or network logins, it makes passing the document more simple. You can set what type of access people have to the document; whether they can change styles, content, or just look at it. And finally, there's TeamConsolidate where you work out how to reconcile all the annotations.

Then there's the Lotus idea of versions, by which more than one copy of the document is stored in a file. Each version is named and dated, and cannot be changed. A new version is created instead. This is good if you are working on the document alone but want to create several ideas to pass on for review. If you use TeamReview with a versioned document, I challenge anyone to get their heads around the data that comes back.

For simpler tasks, WordPro has the "Comment Note" and, if you don't want to do that workgroup stuff, this is fine. Adding a comment note pops up a yellow square, into which you type your note. It signs and dates the note according to who the software is registered by and, when the note is closed, adds a yellow blob to the document. Simple, quick and effective.

WordPerfect has a similar yellow blob scheme, but its blobs are grey and appear in the margin as small talksbubbles. Click on the talksbubble and it pops up into a bigger one, anchored at the insertion point of the note. When writing a comment, it gives you buttons to press to insert your initials, the date, the time or your name. Again, excellent.

Less impressive is the lack of a facility to mark revisions before making them. Word and WordPro both have a switch to toggle on by which your deletions and edits are simply marked up in another colour or struck through with a line. WordPerfect needs a function like this.

WordPro has the most functions but the most headaches. Word is hopeless. WordPerfect does what it does well.

There's a lot more to creating long documents, like handling styles, inserting objects, files and fields, but no room to discuss it here. I do recommend that you start that book you have been promising yourself though, because it really makes you like your word processor a lot more.

You can't please everyone

I hope this helps to pacify Peter Burgess, who wrote to me after my recent remarks on WordPerfect to allege that "you have no idea what you are writing about". Well, I have a broad back, but the points he raises bear some examination.

On the subject of internet awareness, he asks: "Can you tell me of any other word processor that is as integrated at the moment?" Well, yes. Look at the degree of commonality between Word and Internet Explorer 3.0, where you can use the browser to pass Microsoft Office files without using FTP, and you will see what I mean.

"WordPerfect tables have always surpassed those in Word, as do many of its other functions." On balance, I agree. "Do tabbed dialogue boxes really make a program any better? Pretty, maybe, but I

wouldn't be lost without them," he adds. Yes, by providing a single "console" for related functions like formatting, a tabbed dialogue box saves a huge amount of time. Where they are a con is in grouping functions that can't be used together. Look at the explanation of indexing and Table of Contents generation above.

I do take Mr Burgess' point that "it would be a shame to lose this calibre of competition in this segment of the market." He's right. WordPerfect may not be without certain faults, but all three of the major packages are excellent pieces of software.

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Tim's Macro Club

Not much space for macros, but a very useful one for Word 7 users from Dave Wade. Send us your address, Dave, and there's a book token for you.

"I know that MS Word only masquerades as an MDI application and is not really one. However, if it is going to pretend, it would be nice if it did it properly," he starts. Fair play to Dave. "I frequently edit multiple documents, and having to use the Window menu to switch to the next seems a real pain. Why does it not support Ctrl+Tab like every other MDI application!"

He solves the problem with a simple macro:

```
Sub MAIN
' macro to navigate round the
window list
' find current window
i = Window()
' is it the last
If I < CountWindows() Then
' no get next
i = i + 1
Else
' yes get first
I = 1
EndIf
WindowList I
End Sub
```

But, you can't assign this macro to Ctrl-Tab. Word doesn't allow it. So it takes another macro:

```
Sub MAIN
' set i to scan code for ctrl+tab
i = 256 + 9
ToolsCustomizeKeyboard .KeyCode = i, .Category = 2, .Name =
"NextWindow", .ADD
End Sub
```

"I ran it once and bingo — Ctl+Tab now rotates around documents. What is more, as key mappings are stored in the normal.dot template, you only to run it once," he adds.

Now a challenge for users who liked the crossword solver macro in the August issue. From John McCulloch:

"I wish to increase the number of words which are returned in the search results. Currently it is limited to 20 words. I realise that the 'Dim outarr\$(20)' array will need modifying and I have tried increasing this, but it hasn't made any difference. 20 resulting words are still returned as a maximum." Solution, please!