2. New since 3.6

For users of previous versions of Master Spell. Here's a quick update on what's changed and what's new:

Less Restrictions for Unregistered Users

Unregistered users now have the ability to use all tests included with Master Spell and they now have the ability to edit and save their own tests. The five-pupil limit in the Class Editor remains for all users who have not registered the Classroom version.

Class Subfolders and Class Selection

Pupils may now be subdivided into groups called "classes". Each class is a subfolder in the Pupils folder and works identically to the Pupils folder. To use this, create new folders within the Pupils folder and name them the class names. Then drag the Pupils into their appropriate class folders.

Use the "Select Class…" menu item in the Pupil menu to select an active class. If no class is selected, Master Spell will default to using the Pupils folder itself as it did in previous versions. There is also an option in the Preferences (in the Edit menu) to "Select Class at Startup" so that when Master Spell is launched, the user is immediately asked to select his/her class.

The Class Editor always uses the selected class and all new pupils created while a class is selected are kept within the selected class.

Centralized Pupil files and Test files for Networked Lab Macs

It is now possible to keep an entire school's pupil files on one file server and have students use Master Spell from any Mac that is on that network to access their pupil files and tests.

To do this, put the "Pupils" folder and "Tests" folder on the file server. On each of the users Macs, access the "Pupils" folder and "Tests" folder that are on the server in the Finder. Make aliases of both folders and store these in the same folder that Master Spell is located in on the users Macs. In OS8 and up, you may command-option drag to create aliases without disturbing their names. Make sure the names of the aliases are "Pupils" and "Tests". Obviously, actual folders cannot remain if the aliases are placed in this folder.

When Master Spell is launched on the users Mac, Master Spell will look at the "Pupils" folder and "Tests" folder on the file server.

A few caveats about this use:

In my own tests using 10Mb Ethernet with a very slow server, there is about a one-second delay everytime the menubar is clicked before the menus drop. This is because Master Spell does a quick check of the contents of the folders before listing the menus. On a local drive this is unoticeable, but on a network it is noticeable. I believe the one second delay is tolerable but if you encounter longer delays and find those delays intolerable, let me know. In fact, if you find that the delays are less than what I describe, please let me know.

If the server volume is not mounted, Master Spell will convince the MacOS to try to mount the volume. If the volume cannot be mounted, Master Spell will crawl, constantly looking for the volume.

Pupil files are not locked as in-use. This means that a user can load the same pupil file on more than one machine at once. The last one to unload the pupil file records the pupil file data. The best solution for this is to enforce the pupil passwords.

Speak Letters as Typed

Master Spell will speak each letter as it is typed. This feedback is intended mostly for children and may be very cumbersome to adults and fast typists so it is an option. This option can be found under the General tab of the Preferences which is found in the Edit menu.

Two New Pupil Restrictions

With "Disable Stop Test" checked, users will not be able to cancel in the middle of a test. However they could just quit Master Spell without finishing the test. This is an option to make it harder for users to falsify their Test Log.

With "Disable End of Test Retry" checked, users are denied the chance to retry for half credit, words they spelled incorrectly.

These options are in the Preferences dialog under the Pupil Restrictions tab.

Optimized Internal Speech for Macintalk Pro

The Macintalk Pro voices are: Victoria, Bruce and Agnes. I recommend getting the high quality versions of these voices. They can be found at http://speech.apple.com, or they might be found on your MacOS CD.

Macintalk Pro voices and Macintalk 3 voices (e.g. Fred, Kathy, Cellos, Whisper) have different rules for pronunciation so they will speak some words differently, Macintalk Pro often is better at pronunciation by rule then is Macintalk 3. This is a good factor to keep in mind when creating tests if the users may be using different voices.

On some Macs, Macintalk Pro voices tend to click when they are used in Master Spell when Virtual Memory is on. If you find these clicks annoying (as I do), then turn off Virtual Memory using the Memory control panel.

If there are other features you would like to see to make Master Spell work better in your classroom or at home, you can always write me: jay@macinmind.com