

Word Processing Basics

What is a Word Processor?

A **word processor** (WP) is a device or computer program that provides for input, editing, formatting and output of text, often with other additional features.

The functions of a word processor program fall somewhere between those of a simple **text editor** (a program without features like 'bold', 'italic', coloured text, columns etc.) and a fully functioned **desktop publishing** program (creates the setting of a book, magazine etc.)

Historical Background

The following diagram shows the Sholes-Glidden-Soule typewriter. It was a **mechanical** typewriter and was patented in 1868 (was not a QWERTY typewriter).



The typewriter proliferated after the mid-1880s and soon became an indispensable tool, particularly for business correspondence.



The figure above shows the Blickensderfer **electric** typewriter. The use of electricity reduced the amount of force needed to operate the typewriter. This model was exhibited in an exhibition in 1901. It was far ahead of its time for the fact that electric power transmission had not been standardized yet.

The diagram below shows the Colossal typewriter introduced in 1960. It combines the technologies of electric typewriters and computers. Note the screen and the size of the computer.



Later **electronic** typewriters with embedded software were constructed. They became known as word processors. The diagram below shows one such machine, the Brother EP-20, which was introduced in 1983. This typewriter featured also a small dot matrix display on which typed text appeared and a memory that allowed text to be stored and corrected where necessary.



Then came the time when word processors were simply one (but the most used) computer applications. The picture below shows WordStar marketed since 1978. It was the first market leader.



The diagram below shows the opening page of WordPerfect, marketed in 1979. Its R4.2 version overtook WordStar as most popular.



After 1991 Microsoft Word was the most popular word processor (logo below).



Advantages and Disadvantages

Some advantages of a word processor are the following:

- Time saving - people can generally type words faster than they can write using a pen.
- Clarity - word processors have fonts that help make the document clear or easy to read as compared to different handwriting.

- Spell checking - word processors have automatic spell-checking features that help in error elimination.

Some disadvantages are:

- Expensive - not everyone can afford a computer which is essential in using word processors.
- Need for powered computer - when there is a power black-out, word processors cannot be used since computers require power to function.
- Complexity - some word processors have too many options which make them difficult to use for those who do not have experience.

Features

Today's word processors have so many features. Some of the most basic are the following:

- Choice of different **fonts** and sizes.
- Coloured text.
- Font variations like **bold**, **underline** and **italic**.
- **Word wrap** i.e. the automatic continuation to the next line when the text reaches the end of the margin.
- **Alignment** of text (margin **justification**): left, centred or right.
- Possibility to insert and delete text.
- **Indentations (tabs)**: horizontal jumps to particular points on the line.
- Word count of a document.
- **Spell checker** and **grammar checker**.
- **Page layout**: deciding the thickness of the margins, the **orientation** of the pages (portrait or landscape), the size (A4, A5 etc.) and the number of columns.
- Find and find/replace i.e. find all the occurrences of a term and the possibility of changing the term with another.
- **Numbered lists** and **bulleted lists**.
- Possibility to insert pictures and videos.
- **Tables**: one can insert tables where each cell contains text, pictures etc.
- **Blocks**: a part of a document that is selected. This selection is done with by means of the mouse or the cursor keys. When chosen, changes can be made on the whole block e.g. the characters' fonts are changed and underlined.