RESEARCH IN WORD PROCESSING NEWSLETTER

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o o o o o o o o TAX TIPS FOR COMPUTERIZED WRITING PROGRAMS o o o o o o

Academic writing programs looking to computer corporations for word-processing equipment donations should be aware of relevant tax breaks. The 1981 modifications of the tax code have significantly increased the giving of major companies such as IBM, Apple, Wang, Control Data, Radio Shack, Digital Equipment, and Honeywell.

To make room for new product lines, some corporate marketing strategies favor donations as a means of reducing inventories of existing equipment, thus avoiding the image of competitive "obsolescence." Other firms are willing to contribute state-of-the-art equipment--or allow generous discounts--to cultivate corporate identity in the academic marketplace.

Research-based writing programs--such as those involved with monitoring R&D data of text-analysis parameters--are especially favored. Companies are able to deduct the book value of word-processing equipment and add at least half of what the retail profit factor would be. For example, if a word-processing system retailed for $50,000, but cost only $25,000 to manufacture, then the tax write-off would amount to $37,500. Such a firm needs to have made at least half of the contributed equipment. Academic writing departments with research training programs also qualify.

Or is your department willing to become an extended R&D arm of a hardware or software company? A tax credit of 16% is realized by firms who contract out additional research to colleges and universities--rather than face the prospect of developing new facilities and hiring extra employees. If, for example, a firm spends $300,000 each year for research, but wants to shoot that figure up to $450,000, then the 16% tax credit will apply on the extra $150,000, allowing $25,600 worth of credit. Better than deductions, tax credits can be totally subtracted from the tax bill.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○   SOFTWARE COMPANIES AND COLLEGE WRITING PROGRAMS ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

For the future, the lure of inexpensive research will probably appeal most to software companies hoping to develop courseware for big-budget college writing market, a financial sleeping giant because of its prominent place in the required curriculum. Indeed, this is a unique moment in the history of a discipline which has, to some extent, been demoralized by the labor-spending and time-consuming routine of "processing" great volumes of student writing samples.

The market is ripe, and software developers may well experience a windfall once faculty become enlightened to the mission-accomplishing advantages which word processing seems to promise. Indeed, the "low prestige" often associated with the teaching of writing--compared to the teaching of literature--is expected to be reversed once high technology is brought to bear.

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ WORD PROCESSING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Taking advantage of student enthusiasm for the "electronic page," elementary language-arts classes are increasingly computerizing curricula in reading and writing. Programs that are especially popular include "Bank Street Writer," "Word Crunch," "Author 1," "Cloze-Plus," "Snooper Troops," "Quick Quiz," and "Crossword Magic."

Teachers and administrators in such programs realize that careful planning and research tend to strengthen the chances for success. Typical concerns include 1) integrating hardware-software acquisition 2) budgetary options 3) teacher training 4) keeping abreast of research 5) making tests using the computer 6) practical concerns about location of units in the classroom and whether students should work alone or in groups 7) measuring the impact on the student's achievement 8) evaluating academic programs and hardware-software performance 9) the importance of programming in the curriculum and 10) the management of writing-reading programs in light of the existing curricular mission.

A survey of courseware available to reinforce language-arts instruction has been prepared by Robert W. Lawler of M.I.T's Artificial Intelligence Lab. The booklet Computers in Composition Instruction looks at the present level of computer-aided composition instruction and discusses the use of computers in pre-writing and later stages of writing. A summary of current software is also included. A copy can be obtained for $5.00 from K-12 MicroMedia, 172 Broadway, Woodcliff, NJ 07675.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° IN-CLASS WRITING AND WORD PROCESSORS ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

While word-processed or typewritten copies of student themes are the prevalent mode of student delivery (largely because of their ability to provide a standardized visual feedback), in-class writing assignments have provided the complementary "up-front" or functional assessment of a student's writing ability. No writing program will ever want to lose the evaluative insights which the "distance" between the two makes possible in establishing the profile of a particular writer's performance.

And the ability of computers to process handwritten documents is getting better. Delpha Systems (London, England), for example, will be marketing its "Telexpad" in which handwritten copy on special paper can be translated to a digital display in seconds. Such a program goes beyond the familiar Optical Character Reader which allows only typewritten copy to be electronically transcribed.

° ° ° ° ° ° WORD PROCESSING TOPS FACULTY'S PERSONAL-USE LIST ° ° ° ° ° °

According to a survey of 607 college and university faculty conducted by TALMIS--an Oak Park, Illinois, consulting service for computer software publishers--word processing is the major personal-use application of microcomputers on college campuses. The 53% for word processing was followed by computation (45%), record keeping (34%), recreation (33%), creative teaching programs (32%), graphics (27%), and accounting (12%).

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° FREE SUBSCRIPTION TO APPLE EDUCATION NEWS ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

Published three times per year, Apple Education News is a well-rounded resource covering academic applications on every level, including word processing in college writing programs. Though the emphasis is Apple-oriented, the newsletter provides more generic information as well. A free subscription can be obtained by writing to Glenn Polin, Editor, Apple Education News, P.O. Box 20485, San Jose, CA 95160.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° CALL FOR PAPERS ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

"Computer Applications to the Communications Process" is the theme of a national conference to be held in Minneapolis on April 15-17, 1984. Sponsored by NCR-90: A National Communications Committee, emphasis will be both research-oriented ("e.g. tracking audiences, audience perceptions and changing needs of audiences") and applications-based ("e.g. studies of message formats, message effects, and user attitudes"). January 15 is the deadline for 1-3 page abstracts of possible paper topics, which are being received by Dr. E. W. Vernon, 1301 W. Gregory, Univ. of Illinois, Urbana, IL 61801.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° PRINTERS: IT USED TO TAKE TWO ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

There once was a time when every well-equipped compositional word-processing center had two varieties of printers for users: letter-quality and dot-matrix. The letter-quality, or "daisywheel," printer was used for final hardcopy drafts, while the dot-matrix printer buzzed away in the corner, spooling reams of readable, though not "professionally acceptable," text.

Although a veritable turtle when it came to characters-per-second speed, the daisywheel gave documents that "just-typed look" professors and employers expected. The more efficient (and much less expensive) dot-matrix models churned out documents at triple or quadruple the speed of their letter-quality comrades, but they were shunned as second-rate document dumpers whose fonts looked as if an amateur acupuncturer using #10 nails had printed them. But such is no longer the case.

Arriving on the computer-printer scene are moderately-priced, incredibly fast dot-matrix and ink-jet printers that not only form characters comparable in quality to many daisywheel units, but do so at speeds in excess of 150 characters-per-second (as a point of reference, current daisywheel technology outputs text at speeds of 12 to 55 characters-per-second). Toshiba, Canon, Digital Equipment, Siemens, and Quandex are but five manufacturers currently marketing these letter-dot hybrids, which also provide adjustable print speeds in excess of 200 characters-per-second for rough-draft work.

If your college is currently studying printer needs, don't fail to take a close look at the new breed of dot-matrix and ink-jet workhorses. After comparing prices and productivity potentials, you may discover that one really is better than two.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° NO-COST COMPOSITIONAL "HELP" ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

Unless your compositional word-processing center has expensive text-analysis software such as the "Writer's Workbench" online, you've probably discovered that students composing and/or editing manuscripts must rely on their textbooks when referencing rules of punctuation, grammar, and usage. This "analog" page-turning takes up a great deal of terminal time that could be used more productively.

One way to accelerate your students' referencing process is by creating your own interactive "help" screens with the word-processing software resident on your computer. Most word-processing software packages have easy-to-use utilities that allow you to format .HLP or .HEP files to individual specifications.

Imagine a student's indecision regarding whether or not to use a semicolon in a particular sentence. Instead of flipping through the pages of a handbook of style and usage, all he or she would have to do is to follow the software's "help" command sequence and access the file, say, on "Advanced Punctuation Strategies." The requested tutorial would flash on the screen; the student would read it, making any necessary notes; and then he or she would immediately return to the text and affect the necessary punctuation.

Remember, one of the major assets of using computers to teach composition is the increased editing speed afforded by the machine. Use that speed to your students' best advantage by designing and installing interactive "help" screens on your word-processing software.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° APPLES FOR THE TEACHERS (AND STUDENTS) ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

If you are currently shopping around for computer hardware and software in anticipation of establishing a compositional word-processing center on campus, Apple Computer may have a deal you can't refuse.

The Cupertino, California-based microcomputer manufacturer has recently announced that it will be giving 30% discounts on all Apple products (with the exception of the Lisa computer and related peripherals) purchased by public and non-profit private educational institutions between November 1, 1983, and February 28, 1984.

Not only will there be hardware and software discounts, but Apple will also be initiating start-up and ongoing support for local computer clubs--where system users meet regularly to trade information regarding programs and applications.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° CHI'83 HUMAN FACTORS IN COMPUTING CONFERENCE ° ° ° ° ° ° °

Are you discovering more "lookers" than "takers" in your compositional word-processing center? Has "computerphobia" taken hold, dampening your spirits while leaving your machines without mates? Do the negative attitudes of colleagues concerning using "those things" manifest themselves in "anti-creativity" articles being stuffed into your mailbox and shoved under your office door?

If you're experiencing some difficulty interfacing users with computers, or if you're looking for ways to help fellow faculty members realize the creative potentials of computer hardware and software, you might like to attend this year's Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, which will be held in Boston, Massachusetts, from December 12-15.

Among the topics of interest to composition professors and word-processing center staffers include human issues in software and how to introduce individuals to computation systems. The conference will also feature papers, sessions, and tutorials, as well as numerous cognitive models of users and other human-factors issues.

For more information about the conference, contact Mr. Raoul N. Smith, GTE Laboratories, 40 Sylvan Road, Waltham, MA 02254; (617) 466-4044.

° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° COMPUTERS AS TYPING TUTORS ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° ° °

Initially, it's not difficult to generate student and faculty enthusiasm for using computers to enhance text processing and analysis. At first, the excitement abounds and would-be word-processing wizards just can't wait for their turn at the keyboard. For some, however, this enthusiasm quickly wanes as they are at last confronted by an old nemesis: the physical process of "typing."

Students and teachers who never formally learned how to type, or who forgot how for any number of reasons, will quickly discover that the computer's keyboard can be an uncompromising taskmaster. Not only do users have to enter text strings, but command sequences and operational codes used to generate hardcopy output just add to the number of required keystrokes.

One way to help ease "keyophobia" is to include one of the many available software typing tutors in your compositional word-processing center's program bank. These computerized business educators take a variety of instructional approaches, from the traditional "I'll knock your knuckles" (actually, it only "beeps") method to the more futuristic video-arcade graphics format where you "blast into hyperdrive" as your typing speed increases.

Some examples of these programmed short-courses include "Type-Writer" [Oakes Co., 2100 Oriole Dr., Freeport, IL 61032; (815) 235-9131], "Touch Typing Made Easy" [Alkazar Associates, 2638 South Lynn St., Arlington, VA 22202; (202) 382-7407], "Type & Learn" [Simsoft, Box 7095, Port Huron, MI 48301; (313) 984-1570], and "MasterType" [Lightning Software, 480 California Ave., Palo Alto, CA 94306; (415) 327-3280].

All of these instructional typing programs retail for under $70.00 and can give your initially-enthusiastic computer users a positive boost in the technique department, thereby significantly reducing "keyophobia" and enhancing individual productivity.