From Word Processing to Desktop Publishing and CD ROM: A Five-Year Bibliographic Perspective on the Impact of Computers on Writing and Research
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Bradford A. Morgan

When the first issue of the Research in Word Processing Newsletter appeared in May of 1983, computer-using writers were already discovering that word-processing software could do much more than allow for a highly efficient typewriter. Academic and corporate writers were experimenting with programs that supported various parts of the writing process; online thesauri, grammar, style, and spelling checkers were supplemented with outline and idea processors, database managers, telecommunications-based access to research archives, heuristic thought-generators, and project managers. Writers during this period tended to feel at home with both mainframes and micros, often writing their own programs for applications that have since become commercially sophisticated.

As more and more of the writing process became supported by software applications, it became apparent that advancing micro technology and laser printing was allowing writers further control over the interplay between form and content: personal typesetting programs were extending the range of options by which ideas could be visually communicated. The earlier projection of a paperless writing environment was momentarily checked by the emergence of desktop publishing, and typesetting replaced typewriting as the operational model for the writer: customized page layouts encouraged the merging of pictures and font-based text. Many writers are rediscovering the interdisciplinary relevance of art, graphic design, printing, and typography.

But the writer now stands upon yet another word-processing threshold: CD ROM is further evidence of the steady drive toward integration, autonomy, and vast memory. Combined with online access to scholarly databases, CD ROM is giving the writer a reference-intensive electronic workstation. Font and picture libraries stored on CD ROM are being supplemented by writers with scanning devices who are digitizing fonts and pictures from previously published books and periodicals.

Though not intended as an all-inclusive compilation of research, the following bibliography represents a selection of published writing which chronicles the manifold attempts by writers to manipulate words, and hence ideas, on a computer.

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