Word Processing for the IBM PC and PC*jr* and Compatible Computers

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A step-by-step guide for the hundreds of thousands
who are buying, or are thinking about buying,
an IBM PC, IBM PC*jr*, or one of
the compatible computers

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Preface

"I want a word processor," announced Dr. Ruth I. Matthews (Marty's stepmother), "but how do I find the right one? I don't have the time to spend looking at all the alternatives. And even if I did," she continued, "I don't want to spend my time that way! I just want to know how to select the best software and equipment for myself so I can get on with my writing!"

Ruthie's frustration echoes similar statements that we hear from computer novices and experts alike. These people want the benefits of using a computer for word processing but are confused about the many alternatives. The question is no longer "Do I want a word processor?" but "Which word processor is best for me?"

The truth, of course, is that the "best" software for Ruthie is not necessarily the "best" for everyone. It's impossible to suggest one software package that is most suitable for all types of writing.

The equipment, or hardware, is also an important part of a word processor. We chose the IBM PC as the focus of this book for six compelling reasons:

1. The IBM PC is manufactured and supported by the largest and most successful company in the computer industry: IBM.

2. The IBM PC is a technically excellent personal computer at a reasonable price.

3. IBM has fully disclosed the technical details of its PC, thereby allowing many other companies to create hardware and software products for use with the PC.

4. Many software packages, word processing and otherwise, have been and continue to be written for the IBM. Soon (if not already) there will be more software available for the IBM PC than for any other personal computer.

5. The IBM PC and its compatible competitors are rapidly becoming the most widely sold of all personal computers—bar none.

6. We like the IBM PC—and many of the compatibles.

This book gives you information about the features and capabilities of the IBM PC, IBM PC*jr*, compatible computers, and the word processing software that can be used with them. When you have read this book, you will know and understand the features you need in a word processor, enabling you to judge which word processing packages—whether or not they are described or evaluated in this book—are the best for your kind of writing. In addition, you will learn about the computers that are compatible with the IBM PC—those personal computers that claim to operate like the IBM PC. You will learn what is meant by "compatible" or "lookalike."

We also give you a step-by-step plan for deciding what to buy. You will know your own requirements and what to look for in equipment, ,port, training, and documentation. We present suggestions for organizing your files and establishing working procedures to help you set up your word processing workshop.

Each chapter ends with a brief summary. Each summary, along with the evaluation criteria in Appendix A, will make it easy for you to define your word processing requirements. You can then compare your requirements with the word processing packages currently available.

Our aim and desire are to make this a basic and enduring guide to the expanding world of word processing on the IBM PC. We would be glad to hear from readers with comments or suggestions for future editions. Happy word processing!

Acknowledgments

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The Word Processing World

Finding the right word processor is not a simple task. Besides the IBM PC, there are a number of other choices for word processing. Even if you have already chosen your computer, it is important to learn about the alternatives available to you— if only to satisfy yourself that you've made the right choice.

Chapter 1 examines two aspects of finding a word processor that suits your needs. First, it explores means of word processing other than with the IBM PC. Included are electronic typewriters, microcomputers, minicomputers, mainframe computers, and dedicated, or standalone, word processors.

Second, the chapter puts the various word processing options in perspective, to prepare you for defining your word processing requirements so that you can judge which features are important to you.

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Kinds of
Word Processors

"It even corrects my spelling—and my spelling is excellent! What an unexpected bonus that was!" So spoke Kathy Grosse, an author who owns a word processing software package. With considerable enthusiasm, she was describing her reasons for switching from typewriter to word processor.

The biggest advantage of a word processor is simply being able to write, revise, and revise again without retyping a document over and over. To one who spends a lot of time writing, this benefit alone is well worth the investment. A word processor can halve the time it takes to prepare documents. Also, your accuracy is increased significantly, since new errors are not introduced in the retyping process.

Other benefits are numerous. Having a computer opens up many timesaving and laborsaving possibilities. New tools can both improve your writing and make it easier. For example, you can automatically write to an entire mailing list. You write the letter once, set up a name and address file, and the computer prints out each letter individually addressed. Bid farewell to photocopying a "To whom it may concern" letter or—worse—typing each letter by hand so it will look personalized! Your word processor can even improve your grammar, as you'll see in Chapter 9.

Before we describe these and other features that word processing brings to your writing environment, let's look at the whole world of word processing and see how the IBM PC relates to it. The IBM PC is just one flavor of the word processing available. There are larger, more specialized word processors, and there are smaller, less expensive word processors. Understanding where these other word processors fit in the spectrum will let us put the IBM PC in perspective. Is it the top of the

line? the bottom? Is it expensive compared to other word processors? What does it offer in capability compared to other word processors? We answer these questions and others by describing various word processors not in as great detail as the IBM PC but in sufficient detail to provide some scope and definition.

Four types of word processors now dominate the market. Each type appeals to different users, although the differences between them diminish as they become more comparable in price. So even if it's impossible to state flatly that any one type of word processing is unique, it is useful to separate the world of word processors into these four groups. The four categories are (1) electronic typewriters, (2) microcomputer word processors (we refer to these as personal computers, or PCs), (3) standalone (or dedicated) word processors, and (4) minicomputer and mainframe computer word processors. Which type of word processor you need depends on your word processing uses and the degree to which others will share in its use. Are you part of a big company dealing with large volumes of correspondence, contracts, proposals? a free-lance writer? a self-employed individual with correspondence needs? No single setup satisfies all word processing requirements. Let's take a look at the four types and see how each relates to the IBM PC.

Electronic Typewriters

Electronic typewriters have quickly moved into the word processing arena. They are at the low end of the spectrum, as far as "ultimate" word processing goes. But as we will see, with every passing month, improvements make this less true. *Electronic* typewriters feature several options that *electric* typewriters don't have. These options give you some of the capabilities that the more advanced word processors possess.

Common Options

Memory. Memory allows us to save and recall information at a later time. Electronic typewriters also have a "memory," by which you can save letters and numbers as you type. As you strike the typewriter keys, the characters enter into this memory, not onto a printed page (at least not immediately).

Most electronic typewriters use the memory feature in two ways. One way allows you to recall and correct the last characters typed (usually from 1 line up to a page). This way you can see what will print and correct any characters in memory before the line or page is

printed. Thus you can correct line by line as you go. The other use of memory allows you to store whole pages (from 1 to as many as 15 pages). You can store commonly used letters or documents and retrieve them error-free when you want to type one. The material is stored by document name so that you can easily find what you want.

The most expensive electronic typewriters use diskette drives for this memory. Such drives enable you to store and recall even more pages as you want them—up to 70 pages on one diskette. (See Chapter 7 for a thorough discussion of diskette drives.)

Display screen. Some electronic typewriters have a small display screen, mounted above the keyboard, to show you what characters you are typing. (See Figure 1-1.) Usually the screen keeps a running display of the last 20 characters typed.

Formatting features. Many special formatting features automatically perform such functions as centering and indenting. No more counting spaces or repetitive tabbing! Some electronic typewriters can be directed to locate information anywhere within a document. If your electronic typewriter has such a command, it will search your document and display the first occurrence of the information you want. You can then make any desired changes to the text. With some electronic typewriters you can perform cut-and-paste functions: You can move paragraphs around on the page the way you want them. Two other features, decimal tabbing (aligning numbers on the decimal point) and
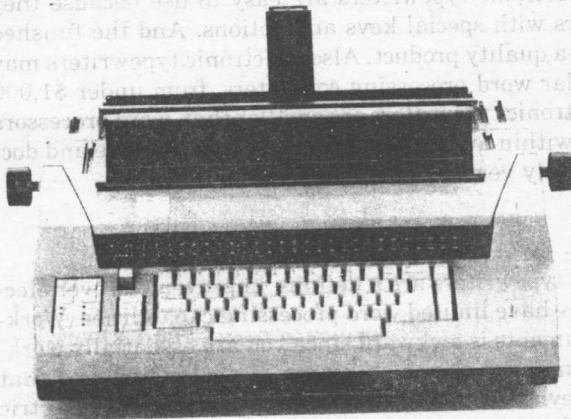

Figure 1-1   IBM Electronic Typewriter 85. (*Courtesy IBM.*)