

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE by George Bruzenak

### Part 1 -- Idea and Word Processors

*"Only a poor worker blames his tools."* Anon.

*"You just have to find the right tool."* George Bruzenak.

Writing tools--paper, pencil, eraser, notebooks, computers . . . the choices for a basic writing tool are almost unlimited. We carry notebooks to jot random ideas, snatches of conversation, descriptions of scenery. At some point however, notes must somehow be incorporated into readable prose.

During our travels this past year the urge to put a story idea into prose struck hard and I began a search for a writing program that would fit my style of organization and writing. I found many writing tools, from idea, plot and random name generators, to grammar and spell checkers. In this first part of this article I'll share some of the story processors I found that are aimed specifically at writers. The second part will include some of the editing tools I discovered.

Many of the tools I found are either free or cost less than \$100. The ones that are not free usually provide a demo program that you can use to determine if it fits your style. The demo programs sometimes limit the number of words, or whether you can save the file.

My search, started by using "writing tools" as a search string, eventually led me to a site (<http://www.alden.nu/resources.shtml>) that lists hundreds of web addresses of particular interest for writers. These include grammar checkers, dictionaries, conferences, contests, organizations, etc., and one labeled "software and personal databases". From that link I selected four programs aimed specifically at the non-business writing community.

### WORD PROCESSORS

A familiar word processor is **MS Works** Word Processor. It comes free with PC's. I first began writing using this program but quickly found that it lacked the features I needed to keep ideas and notes separately from the main body of the text. It does have a built-in spell and grammar checker. However, the grammar checker is aimed at businesses, not writing that includes dialogue with inevitable sentence fragments.

The one word processor I found that is more suitable for everyday writing is the one I'm using to write this article. **RoughDraft** is a free program, available from <http://www.richardsalsbury.com>. It has options for prose, screenplays, stage/radio play or normal page appearance. A separate, free thesaurus is available. RoughDraft looks much like MS Word© but is a much smaller program without the bells and whistles, which in my usage makes it much easier to learn and use. The download program (1.2 mbytes) includes all the help files and a list of its many features.

### STORY PROCESSORS

Story processors are programs with limited editing options (cut/paste, spell checkers, find/replace, and a few others), that are designed to help a writer organize all the bits and pieces of a story. The programs may include character and name generators, places to record settings, conflicts, chapter and scene descriptions, plot notes, all within the same file. Instead of opening with a blank page (word processors) these programs begin with frames, albeit empty, that can lead your creative efforts. As an example, the first program described

below, opens with a wizard that asks for a title and author and opens a basic screen where you begin to lay out chapters and scenes within chapters. There is a frame to describe what must happen within a chapter and another to describe the individual scenes within that chapter.

They all include export options so your manuscript can be exported to word processors for more detailed error-checking. I found four story processors that you may find worth exploring:

**FREE:** For the 2006 National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) I used **yWriter 3** from <http://www.spacejock.com/yWriter.html>. (Click on 'For Writers' and look for yWriter 3 BETA.) Be aware that version 3 is a beta program and still under development. I had one problem with the program. I tried to use it for two projects at the same time, switching from one to the other, and that created problems with the program's internal backup routine. I was able to recover and after discovering that problem I had no others. Another caveat...the beta version, currently at v3.0.24 does not include a help file. The author of the program, Simon Haynes, a science fiction writer from Australia, admits that the program has a "steep learning curve." However, I found that by just poking around in it before beginning to write seriously, I learned the details of how the program worked. Many NaNoWriMo participants use yWriter.

**FREE:** A program called **Papel**, available from <http://papel.teiru.net/papel>. This program does open with a blank screen, but has a help file that leads through the basic process to create a working file. Although I've downloaded and installed the program I've not worked with it enough to make a recommendation. However, people who used it for the NaNoWriMo were universal in their praise for the program.

**\$37.55: WritelNow**, available from <http://www.ravensheadservices.com> is a full-featured story processor. The opening screen has two frames. One has tabs for Overview, Chapters, Characters, Events, Location, Ideas, Notes, Charts and Submissions. Options within the tabbed sections include editing, readability, word counts, dictionaries, etc. The smaller frame echoes the tabbed sections and is linked to them. The program includes a detailed help file. A demo version is available. Many features are available through free add on programs, including character generators (archetypes, Enneagram or Myers-Briggs).

**\$99.95: Power Writer**, available from [http://www.write-brain.com/power\\_writer\\_main.htm](http://www.write-brain.com/power_writer_main.htm). Another full featured program with a demo version available. The program contains both a substantial help file and a tutorial that can be invoked at any time to lead you through program features. The program opens with three main windows: an outliner for non-story text (contents of chapters, scenes, etc.), a story tools section at the bottom with places for characters, plot points, notes/research, etc., and the main composition screen. The program also has many editing capabilities. Plot points, characters, notes and research can be tied to specific places within your text which makes it convenient for cross referencing.

My personal choice is a toss up between WritelNow and yWriter. I purchased WritelNow, and have used it and yWriter extensively. I am experimenting with Power Writer but have not yet learned all the programs capabilities. Try the demos. Also, check out <http://www.alden.nu/resources.shtml>. There are about 40 programs listed under the "software and personal database" section. One of them might be the one you need.