

Tools of the Trade by George Bruzenak

Part 2 – Miscellaneous Tools

"One needs only two tools in life: WD40 to make things go, and duct tape to make them stop" G. Weilacher

"Add a can opener and you can become an RVer" G. Bruzenak

In the last issue of Penwheels I focused on free or low-cost story (word) processing software for writers. In this part I will list a few of the other tools that just might make your work more publishable.

First I must withdraw one recommendation I made in the last article—that of **Power Writer**. When I first installed the program I suffered through several days attempting to use their on-line registration program and receiving notices that my registration would expire in 14 days. Many emails and calls to their support staff seemed to correct the problem. I used the program for about two months until one morning when I again received warnings from the program insisting that my registration would expire in 14 days. After considering the issue and not willing to try to troubleshoot what should be a simple problem again, I sent the program back and have since received a full refund. 'Nuff said.

- **Text-to-Speech**

On to other tools. One consistent piece of advice I've come across is to read what you've written, aloud. A good idea, but what if you a full house of children, a mate, and you've written a racy romance? Why not have your computer read it back to you and use headphones?

I use a program called "**TextAloud**", available from www.nextup.com. You can download a free trial at the site, or purchase it for \$29.95. Once you connect a set of earphones (keep that racy romance private!) and start the program you can vary the speed and volume of the read back. No text-to-speech program is perfect, but in TextAloud

you can correct some common mispronunciations. I like to have a printed copy of my work in hand while having the program read it back to me. I can make instant notations on the copy.

The program comes with a basic voice ("Sam"), but for about \$15.00 you can add other voices such as one with a British accent, available through the TextAloud site.

There are many more text-to-speech programs available, including those from Microsoft, AT&T and others.

- **Speech to Text**

What if your typing skills are limited to hunt-and-peck? Then use a program that allows you to speak aloud and have your computer turn your prose to text. Try "**Dragon Naturally Speaking**", available from www.nuance.com, \$99.00. A member of our local writing group recommended this program to me. Using the microphone (provided) input to your PC and almost any word processing program, you speak and the program converts your speech to text, up to about 120 words per minute. Beats the average typist by a bunch.

- **Analyzer Programs**

Once you've got your novel ready to send off, why not do an in-depth analysis and see just how "average" your prose is? "**HEALaDOC**", available on a 30-trial basis, from www.healadoc.com. (Or \$27.50 for a registered copy through PayPal). After analyzing your writing, the program finds and highlights adverbs, prepositions, overused words, clichés, profiles sentences among many other categories. A summary of your prose is provided with a comparison made to other works. An amazing analysis tool.

If you use MS Word and are familiar with **macros**, there are several available (free) from www.rogerjcarlson.com. The macros can be added to your copy of MS Word and provide word counts, adverb locators, passive word and preposition highlighters, and a phrase frequency counter. Check out the site for more information.

- **Script Writing**

After I wrote the first part of this article, I found a free script-writing program called "**Celtx**", available from www.celtx.com. If you're thinking you might enjoy trying your hand at writing a screen or stage play, give this program a try. There is an extensive web-based help system available, along with user forums

Many of the tools in these two articles were found either through the www.alden.nu site, or from recommendations from various writing forums. During the National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) held in November of each year, the forums at their website (www.nanowrimo.org) were filled with links to great (and some not-so-great) writing programs and tools. Check out the web site and forums.

I discovered that there are many more tools than I've listed here available for writers on the Web. Using Google, I typed in "writing tools" and 0.22 seconds later it replied that it had found 1,130,000 hits. Some of those hits might be hints on how to use a chisel on a flat rock, but that's still a lot of tools!

