

Making the Most of Your Word Processor - 1

by Vanessa Kier

As writers, our word processors are crucial career partners. The last thing we need is to waste time on routine but necessary tasks such as formatting.

Below are a few of my favorite shortcuts to make the word processing relationship as efficient as possible. You'll need a bit of time to set these up, but once they're in place, they're great time savers.

Warning: Not all word processors will have these features, particularly if you're working with a very old version.

AutoCorrect

This is definitely at the top of my timesaving list. I hate having to type out the full name of my characters. Yet I hate seeing my manuscript dotted with acronyms like Vkk that will need to be replaced later by my character's name. Instead, I use the AutoCorrect feature. With AutoCorrect set up, every time I type the abbreviation Vkk the program immediately replaces it with Vanessa Kier. This saves me from having to do a search and replace on the acronym after I'm done working for the day.

To use AutoCorrect, look under the Tools menu. Then, in the AutoCorrect window type the acronym for your character in the Replace box. Type the character's name in the With box. Hit Add or Okay and you're done.

Note of caution! This works best if your acronym is a combination of letters that normally don't occur together. Otherwise, you may end up with your character's name popping up in the middle of regular words.

AutoCorrect is also handy if you constantly misspell the same words, but the program doesn't automatically correct the spelling for you.

Bookmarks

Most of you are probably familiar with using online bookmarks to quickly return to your favorite websites. A word processor's Bookmark feature operates on the same principle. For me, since I keep my entire manuscript in one document, bookmarks save me from scrolling through the document trying to find a particular scene I want to edit. If I know I'm likely to want to edit the scene of the first kiss, I'll create a bookmark to that scene after I've first written it. Then, weeks later when I'm ready to edit the scene, I click on the bookmark and I'm taken right there. You can also use this feature to take you back to the spot in the manuscript you were working on when you saved and closed out of the document.

To find the Bookmark feature in your word processor, check under the Insert menu. You'll want your cursor either at the beginning of the scene you want to mark, or somewhere within the scene. Type a name for the bookmark in the window that pops up, such as First Kiss. If the Add or Okay button remains grayed out, meaning it's inactive, try renaming the bookmark First_Kiss or FirstKiss. Some programs, such as Microsoft® Word, don't allow spaces in the names of their bookmarks.

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How you use the Bookmark to take you where you want to go differs based on the program. In Word you can hit CTRL + G to bring up the Go To window and then choose first the Bookmark option from the list and then the bookmark name from the pop-up window. Or you can go directly to the bookmark list from the Insert>Bookmark menu, choose the bookmark, and select Go To. In OpenOffice.org, you choose the bookmark from the list in the Navigator.

Styles

Styles are good for quickly applying a series of formatting commands. For example, if you always want your chapter title to be Times New Roman 14 pt, bold, and three inches down from the bottom of the top margin, then you can create a style that applies all of that in one fell stroke.

To set up a style look under the Format menu. Most programs allow you to set a style either from scratch, by choosing the parameters you want from a formatting window, or by selecting text already formatted the way you want and creating a style from there. In either case, once you've set up a style, to apply it you highlight the section of text you want to change the formatting on, and then choose the particular style from the style list in the toolbar.

Styles are also good for formatting data you might include at the beginning of a scene. For example, I have a single-spaced, italic style set up for when I give the scene's date and location.

Hopefully the above tips will give you more time to do what we all love best.

Write!

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