

Writing Software Evaluated - 1

by Vanessa Kier

So, you've decided you want to try a writing specific program. You've made your checklist of priority features. You've decided on a price point. Where to start?

To help you narrow down your choices, I'm now going to evaluate several of the more popular writing programs. The below list is by no means complete and is presented in alphabetical order.

Please note, nothing in this article is intended as an endorsement or a rejection of any particular program. Writing software is an individual choice. Prices and/or features may have changed since the printing of this article, so please do your own research to make certain a software meets your needs.

Price is broken out as follows: \$ = less than \$50; \$\$ = \$51 - \$100; \$\$\$ = over \$100. All programs below allow installation on multiple computers, but check individual websites for limitations.

Dramatica Pro

www.screenplay.com/p-13-dramatica-pro.aspx

Operating System: Mac OS X, Windows

1. Word Processor – Minimal. This program focuses on developing the story, not the actual writing of pages. You can write the actual scenes in the scene description window and then export these to a text file as part of a report. Does not have spell check, bold, italic, and other typical word processing features.
2. Tracks writing goals – No.
3. Project Overview – The left side is a tree that varies based on which module you're working in. To the right is an input screen with room for explanation. Or the entire screen might be taken up by a plot point chart. There is no index card view that allows you to reorder scenes, but you can reorder within the scene list.
4. Character Development – Has eight basic archetype templates plus the ability to add complexity. Has a character library of photos and cartoons that you can use to represent your characters.
5. Structure – You can choose a template for a short story, novel or screenplay. The program has a Story Guide that offers series of questions to help you determine everything from the overall story arc, to the progression of scenes, to character motivation. The program provides explanations and examples to help you understand the questions. Based on your choices, the program will limit your choices on future questions to those answers that make sense within the dramatic structure that the program supports.
6. Price - \$\$\$

Power Structure

www.powerstructure.com

Operating System: Mac OS X, Windows

1. Word Processor – Basic. This is an organizational tool to help you outline your story, not to write it. Spell check is run manually or can be set to automatically check upon leaving a window. Word replacements can be added to the User Dictionary, which will replace acronyms with a full word upon activation of spell check. Has basic features such as bold and italic.
2. Project Overview – Toolbar has tabs that represent the nine views you can enter. This includes an

Writing Software Evaluated - 2

Index Card view where, if you drag and drop plot point cards it will warn you if the move will create a problem such as resolving a plot conflict before the conflict has been introduced. Other views show a breakout by Act, Chapters, Plot Points, etc.

3. Tracks writing goals – No.
4. Character Development – The main character screen shows the character's basic information such as name, age, profession, education, and history such as Biggest Failure to Date. Other screens offer physical description, desires and goals, character arc (which includes options for character development by act), etc. Topics can be customized. Characters are grouped into Major, Subplot, and Other categories. Additional categories can be added as needed.
5. Structure – There are eight templates you can choose for your project, including novel, Mythic 12 Steps (based on the work of Campbell and Vogler) and screenplay. Tracks the entire story structure from theme down to plot points. You can assign characters to a conflict within a plot point, and give the conflict a color and a level of tension to be shown on a chart. You can create categories such as romance and suspense and track the progress of that category's plot points across the story.
6. Price - \$\$/\$\$\$ Price goes up if you purchase the bonus audio writing courses.

Scrivener

www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.html

Operating System: Mac OS X

1. Word Processor – Intermediate. It can automatically check spelling as you work. It will automatically indent the first line. One window per document/scene.
2. Project Overview – Organizes project into documents and folders, which can be assigned various labels. For example, a folder could be a chapter and the documents inside it, scenes. You work with one document per window. Tree view, called the binder, to the left. Document window to the right. You have various options for arranging the screen involving three windows max and horizontal or vertical splitting of the screen. Corkboard view allows you to see cards color tinted (or with a colored stick pin) based on the label, which you can customize, setting action scenes to green and love scenes to red, etc. You can set the card to display a diagonal stamp reflecting the status as final, in progress, etc. Outliner view shows document name, document type, synopsis (brief description of document), label and status in a column view. You can drag and drop from the binder, corkboard, or outliner view. The program will not renumber chapters/scenes once moved.
3. Tracks writing goals – Yes. You can set project and session targets. Session targets reset to zero upon closing the program. Does not automatically notify you when your goal is met.
4. Character Development – No templates. You can create your own documents to track your characters.
5. Structure – No templates. This program is intended as an organizational tool rather than a project development aid.
6. Price - \$

Storyist

www.storyist.com

Operating System: Mac OS X

1. Word Processor – Advanced. There is a robust spell checker with autocorrect and auto-replace which utilizes your System Preferences text substitutions. Your work is automatically formatted as you type with proper indents for paragraphs. You work in the full manuscript, so you have the

Writing Software Evaluated - 3

- ability to scroll through it as you work.
2. Project Overview – Has tree, storyboard, and outline views. You have various options for arranging the screen involving three windows max and horizontal or vertical splitting of the screen and you can save a particular arrangement as a workspace to be used in future sessions. You can drag and drop scenes from any view. Does not automatically renumber scene/chapter after reorganization. Storyboard cards contain basic information such as scene title and the scene description.
 3. Tracks writing goals – Yes. You can set project and session goals by minutes or by words. It will notify you via a sound when you've reached your goal. Session goals stay active until you create a new session goal, even after closing and reopening the program.
 4. Character Development – The character template has basic fields set up for you to fill in, which you can customize and save as your own template. You can assign character development points to the character and store images. On the tree you can organize characters into groups such as good guys, bad guys, etc.
 5. Structure – It comes with templates formatted for novels, screenplays and plays. The template sets up the correct formatting, which you can customize. The setting and plot point templates have basic fields set up for you to fill in and customize. There are a few plot points already created, such as inciting incident, but there are no explanations of what the plot point represents. However, more complex templates created by Storyist users can be downloaded from the online forum.
 6. Price - \$\$

WriteItNow

www.ravensheadservices.com

Operating System: Mac OS X, Windows

1. Word Processor – Basic. No autocorrect. No auto-replace. Manual spell checker highlighted contractions as misspelled. However, you can add words to the dictionary. You don't get automatic indenting of paragraphs. One scene per window, either in full-screen mode or as part of the main window.
2. Project Overview – Standard view has tree to the left and a tabbed manuscript window to the right. There is also a storyboard view. You can drag and drop to rearrange scenes chapter from either the tree or the storyboard. Automatically renumbers scene/chapter after drag and drop completed. Storyboard cards show headers: Scene 2 of 3, scene description, and beginning of the scene text. Hovering the cursor over the header brings up a box that shows scene word count and readability in terms of age.
3. Tracks writing goals – Yes. Called writing targets. You can set this for number of minutes or pages and either keep track throughout the entire project or reset the targets at the beginning of each writing session. You can see how far you have left to go on a progress bar. It does not notify you when you've reached your goal.
4. Character Development – No templates, but the character screen has tabs for description, personality and relationships and there is a list of traits you can choose from. You can see a relationship chart showing all the characters tied to the active character and the relationship tag— brother, girlfriend, etc. You can import images and change the color of the icon that represents the character on the tree. Program can generate a random character for you.
5. Structure – Straightforward chapter and scene organization. Has prompts for setting up a scene and for setting up Act 1 that guide you through key points to consider.
6. Price - \$\$

Writing Software Evaluated - 4

WriteWayPro

www.writewaypro.com

Operating System: Windows

1. Word Processor – Basic. No autocorrect. No auto-replace. Basic manual spell checker highlighted some contractions as misspelled. Has the option to add words to the dictionary. Will automatically indent paragraphs. One scene per window. There is a full-screen mode.
2. Project Overview – Standard view is outline on the left, tabbed manuscript window to the right. The storyboard view is only available in Professional Edition. It shows chapter and scene notecards which are set up to track various plots and subplots. The cards show such items as POV character, scene goal, etc. You can choose to show all notecard types, or only the romance plot cards, etc. You can drag and drop from either the outline or storyboard view and the program will automatically renumber scenes and chapters.
3. Tracks writing goals – Yes. You enter the total estimated project word count and deadline, and the program will calculate what your daily productivity must be. You can block out non-work days on a calendar and it will recalculate your productivity requirements. You can see your daily or manuscript progress in a chart. It does not notify you when you've reached your goal.
4. Character Development – Character profiles have preset fields for you to fill in and questions for you to answer. You can import images.
5. Structure – The program is set up to follow the hero's journey in three acts. You can start a new project based on one of the three pre-loaded samples, which include questions to guide you in building your story, such as what is the turning point of the scene, etc. There are Master Character Templates and Master NoteCard Templates. You can use the templates as is or customize them.
6. Price - \$/\$\$ depending on whether you buy the Standard or Professional Edition.

Does one of the programs from the above list appeal to you? Great! Visit the product website and download a demo version. Playing with the program, going through the tutorial if available, is the only way to know for certain if the program meets your current needs. WARNING! Read the demo limitations very carefully. Some programs give you thirty calendar days. Some give you thirty use days, which means that if you play with the software on Monday, but don't open it again until Saturday, you only get "charged" for two days. Some demos don't allow you to save your work, which means you can't use the same test data over time unless you constantly reenter it.

Hopefully this series of articles matches you to a program that increases your organization and productivity. Good luck and have fun!

Note: To see an expanded evaluation of the above programs, plus an evaluation of Writer's Café and the free program yWriter, visit the For Writers section of my website.

Information contained in this article was valid as of June 2010, but prices and/or features may have since changed.

This article first appeared in the *Tech Talk* column in the June 2010 issue of *Heart of the Bay*, the San Francisco RWA newsletter.