

Three Software Programs to Keep a Writer Organized

by Vanessa Kier

Let's face it, writing a story requires a certain level of organization.

I know, I know. All you pantsers just broke out in hives, right? But no matter if you're a pantsers or plotter, details matter. Did the heroine's brother say he prefers coffee or tea? Did the hero's next-door-neighbor have a Sheltie or a Labrador? Readers will notice if the heroine is Lucy in the first third of the book and then Sue in the rest of the book, or if Fred is on a flight from San Francisco to Alaska that ends before he took off.

Sure, you can search your manuscript for scenes that reference the detail you're trying to recall, but that takes up time that's better spent writing. It's much easier to keep all of the key details organized so that you can access them at a moment's notice, allowing you to focus on your primary job of writing the book.

Here are my top three software programs for keeping my writing organized:

Scrivener

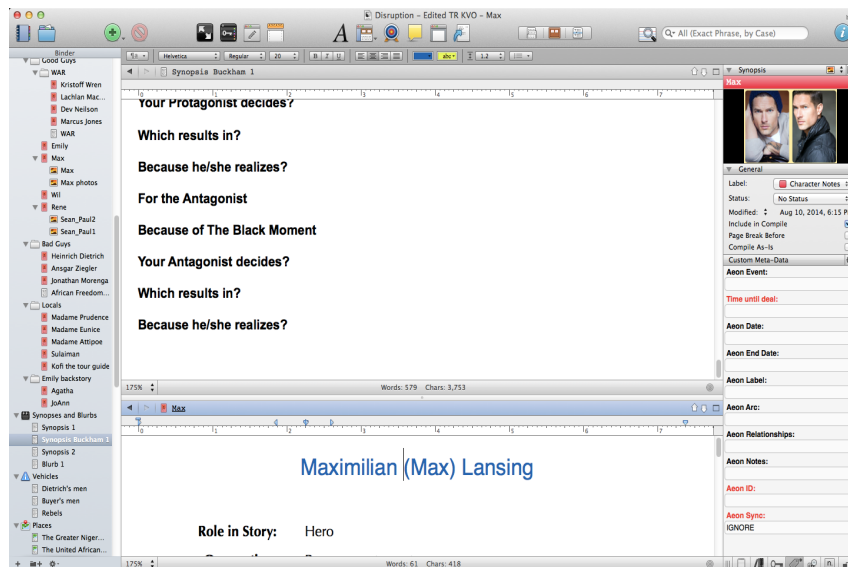
It's hard to move around in the writing world without running into someone who's using Scrivener. There's a good reason for this. Scrivener offers such an appealing variety of features, that it even tempted me into switching over from a different writing program. Here are three reasons why I love Scrivener.

Character Management

The first detail I need to know before naming a character is

Have I given this name to another character? With 113 characters in my SSU series (including dog names) I can't remember all the names I've used. So I've put together a master list of all the characters in my books. This list started out in Excel, but I copied and pasted it into my Scrivener project and it's now searchable within Scrivener. By searching this list, I discovered that I shouldn't name an upcoming character Iain, because I have two minor characters named Ian already.

Scrivener comes preloaded with character templates you can fill out. I've modified these to create custom character templates for both my major and my minor characters. This is where I store such details as physical description, mannerisms, and whether a character is still alive or has been killed off. Can you tell I write suspense? Also, if I find an appropriate image, I add a photo to the character's template to assist with writing his/her description. Then, while working on my manuscript in Scrivener, I go into the split screen view with the character information at the bottom of the screen and my current scene at the top. This allows me to reference the character description while I write, without interrupting my flow by exiting to another program. No more heroes switching from icy blue to deep brown eyes.



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Scene and Chapter Management

I pretty much write linearly. However, during revisions I might decide that a certain scene works better in the last third of the book rather than the first third. Scrivener allows me to easily drag and drop scenes within the manuscript. Or, if I think a scene is too long, I can tell Scrivener to split it. If two scenes really should be just one, I can merge them.

I also group all of my scenes into folders that represent my chapters. When I'm done with the manuscript and ready to export it (called Compile by Scrivener) Scrivener will automatically number my chapters for me. This is a HUGE help. The previous software I used didn't do this, and I once had to manually renumber thirty-seven chapters. It wasn't fun.

Research

I do a lot of research for my books, a lot of it on the web. Scrivener offers several options for organizing such information. For internet data, you can have Scrivener store an image of the website inside the project, copy and paste the data from the webpage into a text file, or simply put the url in as an external project reference. I also create text files to store any research tidbits I think might be relevant now or in the future, and add images to the research folder using drag and drop.

There are a lot of other features that make Scrivener the number one tool for a lot of writers. If you're interested in trying it out, Scrivener is available from [Literature and Latte](#).

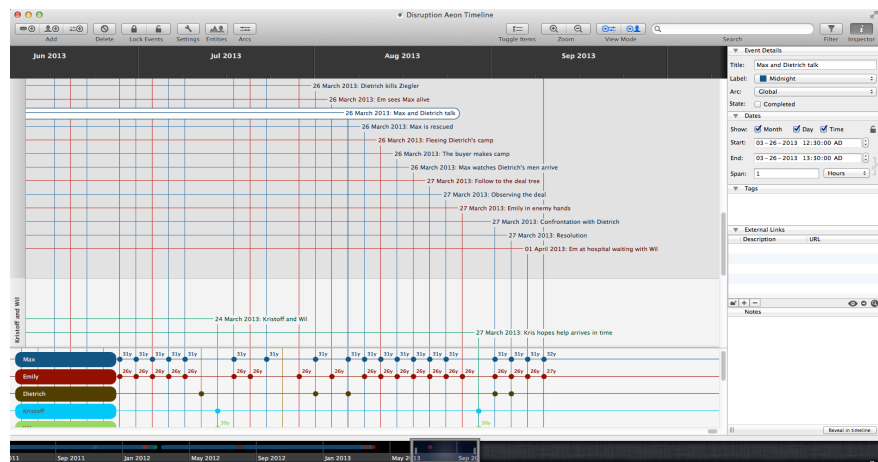
Aeon Timeline

Story timelines are the bane of my existence! Until I found Aeon Timeline, I used a combination of large, laminated wall calendars, iCal calendars, and even Excel spreadsheets in an attempt to keep track of who was where at what time.

Aeon Timeline simplifies all that. It presents my sequence of events in a linear timeline that allows me to see how time is progressing throughout my book.

Plus, it syncs with Scrivener, which means that I can import all of my current Scrivener scenes into Aeon as events, then assign them dates, times, participants, and observers. Once the scenes are in Aeon, I designate them to a particular story arc and give events specific colors based on POV character.

Aeon has saved me from timing mistakes by showing me how many days occur between key events. No more writing that an event takes place in six days when according to the progression of days it was actually twelve



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days. I also use Aeon to track backstory events that don't occur in the novel but do influence the plot.

Because I sync Aeon with Scrivener, I am able to change timing details in Scrivener and have them show up on the Aeon timeline. I love being able to tweak details without actually leaving the Scrivener environment.

Also, when I create a character as an entity inside Aeon and assign him or her a birth date, Aeon will then display that character's age for each event on the timeline. Helpful in keeping track of a character's age across multiple books.

Aeon Timeline is available from [Scribble Code](#).

Scapple

Although Scrivener has both an outline and an index card/corkboard feature that can be used when plotting a novel, that's too structured for me when I'm in brainstorming mode. So I use Scapple creative mapping software instead. It allows me to create text bubbles anywhere on the page, assign colors based on the type of idea I'm working with, and

connect related ideas via arrows. I've used Scapple to plot my series arc, my individual character arcs within books, and the fictional history of the countries in my new series. I've even used it to keep track of the positions of a variety of good guy and bad guy vehicles during a particular chase scene.

Scapple is also available from [Literature and Latte](#).

With these three programs in my repertoire, keeping organized is easier than ever. Allowing me time to do what's most important. Write.

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