

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 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.

Dramatica Pro

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

Operating System: Mac OS X (10.4 and higher), Windows (95, 98, Me, 2000, NT, XP, Vista and 7)

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 shows levels 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 – The program has a Story Guide that offers series of questions (up to 250!) to help you determine everything from the overall 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. Word Count /Current Page Number – No.
7. Timeline – No.
8. Notes/Research – No separate area for this.
9. Extras – Has brainstorming tools for both character and story.
10. Help – Offers an extensive start guide within the program as well as a web-based help menu. There is an online searchable knowledge base, as well as an online message board.
11. Install on multiple computers – Yes. Up to three.
12. Portability – You can export reports to a text file, but to utilize the full features you need to

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 2

work in the program itself.

13. Price - \$\$\$

Power Structure

www.powerstructure.com

Operating System: Mac OS X, Windows (XP, Vista, and 7)

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. Does have basic features such as bold and italic.
2. Project Overview – Toolbar has tabs that represent the nine views you can enter. This includes an 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. Word Count /Current Page Number – No.
7. Timeline – No.
8. Notes/Research – There's a Quick Note Pad option that brings up a box similar to a post-it note in which you can jot notes to yourself.
9. Extras – You can print reports from any view, which includes printing a plot point report for a single character. Includes a Name Bank of first and last names (full version only, not included in demo).
10. Help – There's a downloadable pdf help document specific to each operating platform. A help menu inside the program requires internet access since it pulls from the website. You can e-mail or phone their support team.
11. Install on multiple computers – Yes. Up to three.
12. Portability – You can export data to .rtf, but to utilize the full features you need to work in the program itself.
13. Price - \$\$/\$\$\$ Price goes up if you purchase the bonus audio writing courses.

Scrivener

www.literatureandlatte.com/scrivener.html

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 3

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. So you could set 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 – There is nothing provided specific to character development. You can create your own documents to track your characters.
5. Structure – There is no template set up for basic story structure. This program is intended as an organizational tool rather than a project development aid.
6. Word Count /Current Page Number – Yes on word count. No on current page number.
7. Timeline – No.
8. Notes/Research – A research folder is automatically created when you start a new project. Only the research folder can hold non-text data such as images.
9. Extras – Edit Scrivenings is a feature that allows you to select multiple, non-contiguous documents and combine them into one long document. It can be used for collecting all of a character's scenes for analyzing character arc, for example. Allows you to import media files. So, you could have a video or audio file playing in one part of the screen while you're working on your manuscript. Snapshots allow you to save current versions of your text and refer back to them later from a list where they are stored by date and time. There is a word frequency tracker.
10. Help – Good help menu and tutorial. Online help via user maintained FAQ and user forum.
11. Install on multiple computers – Yes. License is per household, with only one copy to be in use at a time.
12. Portability – You can export segments to .doc, .rtf, and to Final Draft format, but to utilize the full features you need to work in the program itself.
13. Price - \$

Storyist

www.storyist.com

Operating System: Mac OS X

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 4

1. Word Processor – Advanced. There is a robust spell checker with autocorrect. There is 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 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 only 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 allocated, 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. Word Count /Current Page Number – Yes. Because you work in full manuscript mode, you see the current page number in the upper right corner of the page and the overall word count on the bottom message bar.
7. Timeline – No.
8. Notes/Research – You can enter comments directly into the manuscript. There is a notes section where you can store notes, images and urls in subfolders.
9. Extras – Has a bookmark feature that allows you to jump around easily to key pieces of text. Allows you to export to .epub format for reading on the iPad and other devices.
10. Help – Has a decent built-in help menu. Online user forums offer user-provided answers to problems.
11. Install on multiple computers – Yes. Up to two. Contact support to add more computers.
12. Portability – You can export segments to .doc, .rtf, and to Final Draft format, among others, but to utilize the full features you need to work in the program itself.
13. Price - \$\$

WriteItNow

www.ravensheadservices.com

Operating System: Mac OS X, Windows (XP, Vista, and 7)

1. Word Processor – Basic. No autocorrect. No auto-replace. Manual spell checker highlighted

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 5

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 manuscript tabbed 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 that you can choose from. You can see a relationship chart showing all the characters tied to the active character and what the relationship is, such as brother, girlfriend. You can import an image and even 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. Word Count /Current Page Number – Yes. You can see the scene/chapter/story word count from the drop-down menu. To find the page number you'd have to export the manuscript.
7. Timeline – Yes. Linear. Requires you to set a start and an end time to events. Allows you to display a chart showing either all events, or just events tied to certain POV characters.
8. Notes/Research – Has tabs for Notes, References, and Ideas. You can insert urls, but not images.
9. Extras – Has prompts, screens that ask you basic questions when setting up a scene or a character, etc. There are reference add-ons such as Myers-Briggs personality types and Victorian Britain historic data and names. Has a dedicated tab to track your submissions. Thesaurus.
10. Help – Has a basic built-in help menu. No online help or forum.
11. Install on multiple computers: Yes. Unlimited and you can install on both a PC and a Mac.
12. Portability – You can export data to .rtf, but to utilize the full features you need to work in the program itself.
13. Price - \$\$

Writer's Café

www.writerscafe.co.uk

Operating System: Mac OS X 10.3.9 and above (PowerPC and Intel processors), Windows (NT 4, 2000, XP, Vista, and 7), most Linux distributions (32-bit or 64-bit; Debian, RPM and tarball packages are provided), FreeBSD 6 and 7, Solaris x86.

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 6

1. Word Processor – Basic to intermediate. Does not check spelling as you type. There is a user dictionary you can edit. Has bold, italics, etc. There are styles that can be applied to the content of scene cards. Preset styles cater more to screenplays than novels. One scene per window.
2. Project Overview – There's a tree view to the left, and a desktop to the right with icons for various features. The pinboard view takes up the entire screen. The Getting Started guide refers to the pinboard as a virtual fridge. It's a place you can store brief notes and images, then move them around. There's also a word importer that adds to the pinboard a number of word tiles tied to a specific theme, such as jungle. This is similar to fridge magnetic word art. Each word can be dragged to a new position on the pinboard. Storyline view shows progression of scenes, shown as cards, in a linear view based on plotlines you designated at the start of the project. Above the linear view is an outline view to the left, and the card data entry screen to the right. The data entry screen is very small. Full screen mode only gets rid of the toolbar across the top of the screen but does not bring up a larger data entry window for the cards. It would be difficult to write your manuscript in such a small window, which is probably why there's a link to the OpenOffice wordprocessor on the Desktop (requires download of free OpenOffice software). In the linear view each plot line has its own color. Cards can be dragged anywhere within the storyline.
3. Tracks writing goals – There is a timer you can use to time your writing.
4. Character Development – Character cards are set up with areas to fill in basic character information such as name, age, personality, etc. But there's no tree view showing all the characters at once.
5. Structure – Allows you to select the organization of your project into Parts/Chapters/Scenes, Chapters/Scenes, or just Scenes.
6. Word Count /Current Page Number – Yes. You can see word count by project, storyline, or card. Page number not available until exported.
7. Timeline – Not really. The storyline view shows you what occurs in each scene, broken out by plot line, but this doesn't address the timing of the events within the story. You can set tags for scenes that color code the background of the card and this could be used for an a.m./p.m. designation.
8. Notes/Research – Yes. Scrapbook stores images, notes, and urls. You can open a journal page to record your thoughts, or a notebook to jot down ideas.
9. Extras – Has writing tips, inspirational quotes, timed writing exercises, and for the purchased version, a writing e-book. Has a collage feature that allows you to create a diagram linking text balloons and images to help you brainstorm your story and the connections between characters, events, etc. There's a character name generator.
10. Help – Basic help menu within the program. Getting Started guide in pdf format. There is a Yahoo! Group for asking questions of users.
11. Install on multiple computers – Yes. License is per user.
12. Portability - One suggested option is to download all operating system versions onto a portable usb drive so you can use the program on any machine while retaining your settings. Data can be exported to a text file or an OpenDocument readable by OpenOffice or NeoOffice.
13. Price - \$/\$\$ depending on whether you want just the download or both the download and a CD-ROM.

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 7

WriteWayPro

www.writewaypro.com

Operating System: Windows (98 Second Edition, 2000, XP, Vista, and 7)

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 select types, such as only the romance plot cards. 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 give you notice 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. Word Count /Current Page Number– Yes, in a report format.
7. Timeline – No.
8. Notes/Research – Research folder exists only in the Professional Edition. You can add notes here, links to urls, and images.
9. Extras – Word usage analysis. Thesaurus. Convert manuscript to ARC/galley format (Professional Edition only).
10. Help – Has a fairly detailed built-in help menu. No online help or forum.
11. Install on multiple computers – Yes. Up to two.
12. Portability – You can export data to .rtf, but to utilize the full features you need to work in the program itself.
13. Price - \$/\$\$ depending on whether you buy the Standard or Professional Edition.

yWriter

www.spacejock.com/yWriter5.html

Operating System: Windows (XP, Vista, and 7 are supported. The website says the program should also work on 98 SE and 2000.)

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 8

Note: Reports display in html, so you have to be connected to the internet to view them.

1. Word Processor – Basic. Manual spell check highlights misspelled words in red, but doesn't offer suggestions. You can open the scene in the included RTF editor, which will open Microsoft Word if you have it installed. They advise against this, as it can be hard to remember the steps to make certain the file gets saved and the data updated inside the program.
2. Project Overview – Main view shows a tree with your chapters and their word count. To the right is a tabbed screen where you can edit/add scenes, project notes, characters, locations, and items. The scene view shows the word count per scene, the title of the scene, the status (outline, draft, 1st edit, etc.) and the characters in the scene. Editing the content of a scene gives you a full window in which to work. You can drag and drop chapters/scenes, then tell the program to renumber them. However, in order to renumber scenes, they have to be named Scene 1, Scene 2, etc. There is a storyboard view for a chapter, arranged with one row per character and one card per scene. Cards show up on the line for the assigned viewpoint character. You can drag and drop to rearrange these scene cards.
3. Tracks writing goals – Yes. You can set a beginning and ending date for each stage of the project and then run a report which tells you which of your scenes need to be moved to the next status and by which date. There's a one day writing worksheet you can print. You tell the program how many words you want to write for the day and how many words per hour, and it sets up a little chart where you can track your progress. You can also set daily writing word count targets within the program.
4. Character Development – The New Character window has tabs for Name, Bio, Notes, Goals and Picture. You can designate the character as major or minor and assign searchable tags. You can import a picture.
5. Structure – There are no templates to guide you in structuring your novel. When you are editing a particular scene, you can assign a viewpoint character, designate whether the scene is action or reaction, and assign characters, locations and items to the scene. You can assign the scene to the plot or the subplot and also rate the scene for relevance, tension, humor, and quality (these fields are customizable). There is also a section in which to write comments on the goal, conflict and outcome of the scene. You can run synopsis reports that show the scenes by chapter, viewpoint character and word count per scene.
6. Word Count /Current Page Number – Yes to word count. At the bottom of the screen in the main window it shows you the total project word count along with the total new words added today. No to page count, since each scene is its own card.
7. Timeline – No. Even though you can assign a start time and duration for a scene, there's no particular view that displays scenes by day or time. Making a scene Day 2 versus Day 3 doesn't affect where it falls on the horizontal axis of the storyboard.
8. Notes/Research – Yes, has a tab for each scene specifically for notes.
9. Extras – If you want to include multiple scenes while typing in content, you can use markers such as *** or # and then have the program separate the text into multiple scenes based on those markers. Allows you to create multiple chapters/scenes at a time and it will number them for you. Has a feature that will search for preset problem words or user defined problem words. You can see a chart showing how many times each word in the project is used.

Writing Software Evaluated
Expanded Article - 9

10. Help – Requires active internet session. There is a Quickstart Guide, a user Wiki site and a Google Groups site for users.
11. Install on multiple computers – Yes.
12. Portability – All scenes are automatically saved as .rtf. There are instructions for how to run the program off of a thumb drive, so you can work on any PC.
13. Price – Free.

One of the programs from the above list appeals 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!

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

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