

COMPUTER GURU

By Don Benjamin

Apps for Writers

I love to write. Besides these monthly Computer Guru articles, I also prepare our board's meeting agendas and minutes, write speeches I present at Princeton Toastmasters meetings, and compose occasional "thought pieces" for a weekly discussion group. My word processor has become essential to my existence as a human being (I may be overstating this a bit for effect).

Over many years, I've become quite proficient with Microsoft Word. Despite its complicated-looking buttons and menus, it's easy to use for simple documents. But, when you need to format the novel you're writing or prepare a resumé, Word's styles and templates are infinitely "tweakable," and its built-in spell-check, thesaurus, and grammar analysis tools are instantly available to help you proofread your masterpiece.

Word is part of Microsoft's Office 365 suite of programs that includes Excel (spreadsheets), PowerPoint (graphics and presentations), Outlook (mail), OneNote (a nifty electronic notebook), Publisher (newsletters, greeting cards, flyers), and Access (database). Office is available as an annual subscription for \$70 (one computer) or \$100 (up to six computers). Microsoft offers versions for Windows, MacOS, as well as Apple and Android tablets and smart phones. I've used all these versions, and they play well together.

Other (Free) Options

But you don't have to spend a dime for a suite of "office" software. OpenOffice and LibreOffice are feature-packed, available for Windows and MacOS, compatible with Microsoft Office—and free. (As in free). While not as slick as MS Office, both suites can handle most any task you throw at them. Did I mention they're free?

Apple includes its iWork suite on its MacBook computers, iPads, and iPhones. This suite comprises Pages (word processing), Numbers (spreadsheets), and Keynote (graphics and presentations). I prefer



Microsoft Office, but iWork is a capable alternative. If you have a newer Mac, you probably have iWork. You should try it.

Composing versus Writing

MS Word and its ilk are wonderful. But if you want to focus on composing—thinking, organizing, ideating—you might consider either Scrivener (about \$50) or iA Writer (\$30), both available in Windows and MacOS versions. These programs dispense with the word processor's many formatting menus, and present a clean, simple screen that lets you concentrate on organizing your thoughts into paragraphs, sections, and chapters. Scrivener lets you brainstorm your composition on a virtual corkboard of index cards that you can organize for the right "flow." It has

folders to store research articles you download from the internet, as well as graphics, and bibliographies that you can either reference or paste into your document. (I wrote this article on Scrivener article and then exported it to Word for layout and final editing).

iA Writer doesn't provide the research and corkboard features of Scrivener, but its clean interface helps you focus on your words and allows you to move paragraphs around.

If you need help with any of these apps, visit our Technology Lab on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Wednesdays from 1:30 to 4 p.m., or Fridays from 10:00 a.m. until 12:00 noon.

Look For Windows and MacOS Updates This Fall

Apple and Microsoft are "pushing" updates to MacOS and Windows this fall. Apple named its latest version "Mojave." Microsoft calls its update "Windows 10 October 2018."

Both updates will look familiar, with most of the changes comprising features, security improvements, and better performance. Look for a new "dark" mode in each that some may find easier on the eyes.