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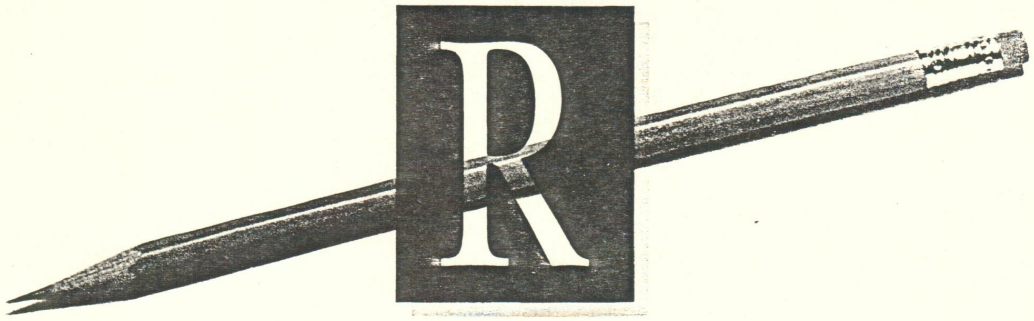

By MARGARET MORABITO

Word processing is one of the most popular and practical applications for educational use. Find out how teachers, parents and students are using it.

Based on the mail I've been receiving, there is great demand for information concerning the use of Commodore computers in education. Many teachers and parents have informed me that they've been using Commodores for educational purposes, but have had to work in a vacuum, relying solely on word of mouth or on their own resources to learn what works and what doesn't. This is a shame, because there are so many people using Commodores successfully in schools.

I'm keeping a database of all contacts made through the Resource Center, and I'll use this file to refer educators and parents to those who can answer their specific questions. With continued efforts, we can make it easier for people to gain reliable information on the use of Commodores in education.

Because of your input, I am now including a new section in the Resource Center: Tips from Teachers. I'm also compiling lists of Commodore software recommended for use by teachers and parents. The first of these lists will appear in next month's column. Now, let's get on with the topic for this month: word processors for teachers and students.

Word Processing

Word processing is mentioned most often by teachers as their primary reason for using a computer. This is probably because word processing can benefit all participants in the educational process: teachers, students, administrators and parents. You can use it in all subject areas; future employers will most likely require it; and you can incorporate it into your day-to-day activities as a practical tool.

Even more important, word processing can be an excellent first step for wary newcomers to computing. It proves that you needn't know how to program to make good use of a computer. Also, it allows you to gradually and easily learn the fundamentals of computer use: creating, saving, loading and printing files. While using a word processor, you can type faster and make mistakes without the inconvenience of having to use "white out" or correcto tape. Word processing leaves you freer to think, and it results in professional-looking printouts.

These factors alone should be enough to spur you on to learn how to use a word processing program. Moreover, they show that this application could be a boon to students who may now shy away from essay writing and typing.

Beyond this, though, there are more practical reasons to use a word processor. It can help you to organize your thoughts, rearrange sentences and phrases, delete unwanted words, make multiple copies with neatly arranged columns and headings, and merge previously created paragraphs to form new documents. The ability to produce high-quality printouts of documents, research papers, letters, quizzes, essays, reports and questionnaires is within the reach of all teachers, administrators and students.

Class Preparation

A word processor can simplify a teacher's classroom preparation, which involves creating tests and other study materials.

For example, Lois Klamar, a learning disabilities teacher in the Cleveland, Ohio, public school system uses a C-64 with the Magic Desk cartridge and an NEC 8023 dot-matrix printer to do the bulk of her test preparation. Klamar states, "The C-64 is not only a big time saver for me, but the printouts are so neat and legible that my students can easily read them."

Klamar's tests follow the format of some workbooks and standardized evaluation tests: fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice and true/false questions. By using these formats for testing, her students are one step ahead on standardized tests because of their familiarity with the formats.

Edward Gase, an earth science teacher at the Fairfield, Ohio, Freshman School, also relies heavily on word processing to help with preparation of tests and other classroom materials. Says Gase, "When I tell other teachers how quickly I can put together a final exam at the end of a term, they don't believe me." A teacher's hectic schedule makes time-saving techniques a major concern, and word processing tends to cut down on class preparation, whatever the subject.

Joseph Smith is a health and phys-

ical education teacher in the Allentown, Pennsylvania, school district. Like most teachers, Smith doesn't consider himself a programmer, but he frequently uses his computer for classroom preparation. With his C-64, Cardco Write Now word processor and Cardco LQ/3 letter-quality printer, Smith creates study sheets for his students.

This entails listing important facts and then replacing the key words on the sheet with blanks. He uses the study material when he shows films in his health-instruction classes. The students first read over the sheets; then, while watching the film, they fill in the blanks as the material is encountered.

After the film is over, Smith puts a copy of the study sheet on the overhead projector and reviews each health fact. This follow-up allows the students to correct their answers and any misspellings, thus reinforcing the health concepts several times within one class period.

In the Classroom and at Home

While word processing helps teachers outside the classroom, it is also an effective learning tool for students, both in class and at home. Incidentally, a helpful by-product of word processing is that it provides a good way to learn key placement. While some students may already be proficient typists, those who aren't can benefit from using these programs.

Another advantage is that students don't have to worry as much about making mistakes when doing writing assignments, because it is so easy to delete and fix errors on a word processor. The rewriting done on a computer is far less annoying and much neater than when done with pen and paper!

Following are ten examples of word processor-related classroom exercises that teachers can use. These are just a few of an endless list of possibilities.

1. Creating designs, pictures, graphs and charts.
2. Filling out forms and information sheets.
3. Writing and revising in-class compositions.
4. Creating a class story to which each student contributes a small part.
5. Writing reports: for example, science lab reports.
6. Creating a newspaper in the classroom.
7. Note-taking.
8. Studying outlining techniques and implementing them on the word processor.
9. Studying and practicing research techniques: for example, practicing proper footnote and bibliographic formats.
10. Taking tests.

It's important to realize that many students may have a C-64 or a C-128 at home because of Commodore's low prices. There are also many good-quality yet inexpensive word processing programs from which you can choose.

Built-in spelling checkers also provide a service to students in pointing out misspelled words. Patricia Walters, a sixth- and seventh-grade teacher in Jones County, Mississippi, noticed an improvement in her eight-year-old son's ability to spell since he learned to use the word processor on their new C-128 at home.

Walters noticed that her son deliberately made spelling errors when typing words that he knew. When questioned about this, he said he enjoyed correcting the word when the spelling checker caught it! (This kind of spelling activity could be modified and incorporated into a classroom exercise where the teacher plants misspelled words that students must locate and correct without activating the spelling checker.)

When Looking for a Word Processor

Most word processors perform similar tasks, but the ease of performance and the difficulty of learning how to use the programs differ widely, so you should investigate those factors carefully when looking for a word processor. You should also consider the age and learning level of the students who will be using it. If possible, take the time to try out several programs before you buy.

Here are some questions to ask when purchasing a word processor.

1. How easy or difficult is it to enter, delete, move and rearrange text?
2. What size document can the word processor hold in memory?
3. How easy or difficult is it to save and load documents?
4. Can you save sections of a larger document to disk?
5. Can you merge and link documents that have been previously saved to create a new one?
6. How difficult is it to print out a document?
7. Which printers will the word processor work with?
8. Can you use any of the Commodore's keyboard graphics characters in the word processor? (This is a help in creating graphs or other designs within your documents.)
9. Can this program's files be used with other word processors? (If the program saves its files as sequential files, it can probably share its files with another Commodore word processor. Also, if the program lets you choose between Commodore and standard ASCII formats, this makes compatibility even more likely.)
10. Does the manufacturer provide any other programs, such as a database or a spreadsheet, which could be integrated with the word processor for future activities?
11. How easy is it to control margins, line spacing and special features such as underlining and centering of text?
12. Does the word processor provide a means for visually previewing the document before printing it out? It can be frustrating to painstakingly create a document on the computer screen, only to find that it looks totally different when formatted and printed out.
13. Does the word processor include a spelling checker?

You should consider these questions with reference to the person who will be using the program. If you have a classroom of third graders, you will want to start them off with a word processor that's easy to handle and doesn't necessarily have a ton of features.

If, on the other hand, your students are tenth graders, they're probably ready for a high-powered word processor that will provide them with the opportunity to write lengthy papers using a variety of formatting features.

I would like to hear from those of you who are using word processing

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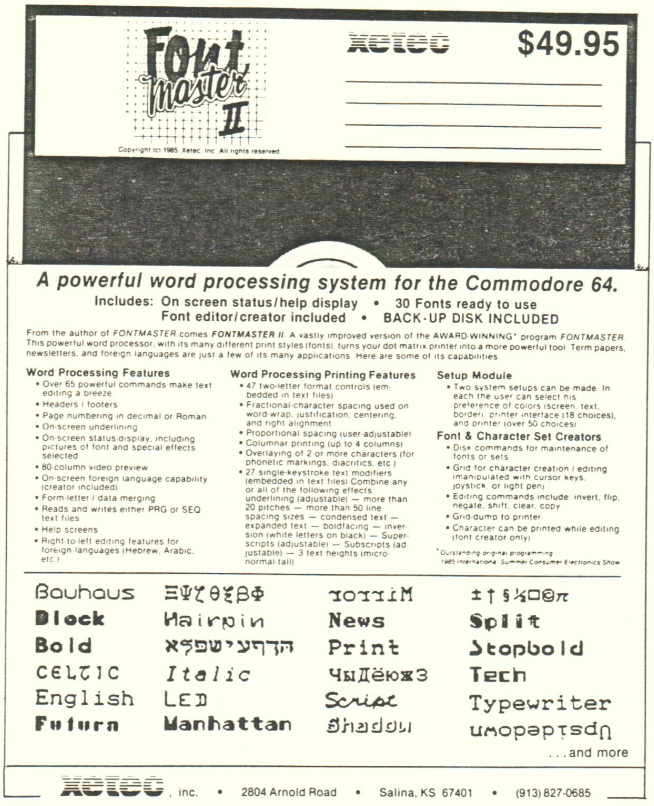

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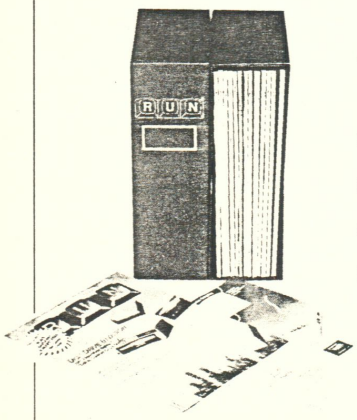

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either in or out of the classroom. I am also interested to know which word processor you're using and the ages of the students involved.

Tips from Teachers

Several teachers have told me about an efficient method of making computers more accessible to students. Where there aren't enough computers to go around, you can create a "mobile computer unit." This is a stand on wheels that holds the computer, disk drive and monitor (and possibly a printer). You just roll the computer to where the students are, rather than moving the students. You can also make a large movable table that will hold several computer systems.

Curt Cardine, the principal of the Winchester Elementary School in New Hampshire, uses one mobile unit to move among classrooms. In the morning kindergarten classroom, small groups of students work with the computer. He then rolls the unit into other classrooms of the school as needed. Cardine relies on this unit as his blackboard when the computer is involved in his teaching of fourth- through sixth-grade classes.

Leon Sullivan, a science teacher and computer coordinator at South Hopkins High School in Nortonville, Kentucky, also uses a mobile computer unit. Sullivan built ten mobile tables for use in his advanced math and science classes.

If you are using Commodore computers for educational purposes (at home or in a school) and would like to share your experiences in the Resource Center, write me a letter detailing the equipment you're using, the subject areas you're involved in, the grade level or age of your students, software that has been effective and any other information you feel like including. Send letters to:

Margaret Morabito
c/o The Resource Center
RUN *Editorial*
80 Pine St.
Peterborough, NH 03458

You can also leave messages in my on-line mail boxes: CompuServe (70616,714), Delphi (MARGM) and QuantumLink (MARGM).