



SCREEN WRITERS

Word processing is the largest single applications area in professional microcomputing — and a surprisingly large number of home computer users also have acquired such software. In this series, we will be looking at a variety of word processing software packages, starting with the world-wide best seller: WordStar.

In its simplest form, a word processor is no more than a sophisticated typewriter. The monitor screen replaces the paper, and the Delete key acts as an eraser. For the business user, the most desirable feature of a word processing system is the ability to save documents — on disk or perhaps cassette tape — and then allow those documents (which might be single lines, sentences, paragraphs or whole pages) to be incorporated into newly generated text. This is especially useful in the production of specifications, contracts and other documents that use the same passage over and over again.

correspondence personalised with a name. In technical terms, WordStar is a menu-driven word processor and text editor with embedded transparent formatting commands, running in a CP/M environment, and requiring the use of the Control key to enable the machine to differentiate between a command and a character. This means the operator can choose to have a menu of options constantly displayed on the screen, in this case in a reserved section 10 lines deep at the top. Commands that affect the way text appears — either at input time or when it is printed — are displayed within the main body on the screen but not reproduced by the printer; and file handling and 'housekeeping' responsibility is assumed by the operating system.

Once loaded, WordStar presents the user with the 'no-file menu', which allows the selection of the required function. The user can create or edit a file, either as a document or as a 'non-document' (used, for example, in Assembly language programs that are to be compiled, or for text that is to be used by another software

The No-File Menu

To begin, WordStar presents a menu showing the choice of its basic functions. The user could create or edit either a document file using all the standard formatting parameters, such as wordwrap, justification, etc., or a non-document file, or copy, rename or delete a file. In short, this section of the program deals with housekeeping routines. These pictures were taken from the Osborne-1, which displays only 52 of the available 80 columns of text, hence the right hand cut-off

The No-File Menu



The Help Menu



The Help Menu

Accessed by the Control [J] code, this menu offers the user a series of fairly comprehensive on-screen explanations of the way in which certain sections of the package operate. It is colloquially known as the Help menu. Following the J control code with one of the subsidiary characters — H, B, F, D etc. — delivers a fuller explanation of those sections of WordStar

Now that the document can be created, modified and manipulated, stored and retrieved, the next aspect to look at is how to re-arrange text on the page. There are three conventional ways of laying out text: ranged left (where each line is aligned at the left), ranged right, or justified. In justified printed text the spacing between words and letters is arranged so that each line is the same length. Most printers that are available for microcomputers, however, vary only the spacing between words when producing justified text.

A word processing package should also be able to search an entire document for a given word or phrase, and replace it with an alternative. This is particularly useful where a word is habitually spelled incorrectly, or where one wishes to produce

correspondence (with or without printing them); change the disk drive in use from A to B, or vice versa; delete, copy or rename a file; exit to the operating system; or set the level of help required.

Each option is selected by a single key depression (no need for the Control key), leading the user to a smaller menu specific to the function in use. The last of these options (to set the help level) allows the user to select the extent to which the menu of available commands will be displayed on the screen. The lower the level of help required, the fewer the lines reserved on the screen for the menu, and the more available for text editing. Most of the initial key commands are mnemonic — as much as they can be with a single