

TECH HELP

Thirty-five tech products to revolutionize your writing.

BY K. L. ROMO

The mechanics of writing have evolved over the centuries. From using pen and ink to pecking away on a typewriter to fingers flying over computer keyboards, the process has gotten easier. Writers are now more productive than ever.

When I first started writing seriously back in the late '80s, it was all pen and paper until I got my fancy Brother EM-630 stand-alone word processing machine – similar to a typewriter, with a minuscule text preview window and a rudimentary ability to make corrections before printing. Then, in the mid-'90s, I got my first computer and was able to type away, making corrections with the flick of a key (although the software back then was not as user-friendly, and my dot-matrix printer was far from optimal).

Now PCs and Macs have made our jobs so much easier and faster. Although Microsoft Word is the standard software for word processing, it also has its drawbacks. Writing a novel using Word gets messy and cumbersome when trying to piece your chapters together into a cohesive work.

So – although some of you still swear by pen and paper or your beloved typewriter – for those who prefer more choices and flexibility, there is a wealth of software available that improves efficiency, facilitates organization, helps with story and development, and lets a writer tailor her process to her own tastes.

Here's what we've found that might make your writing process easier, more effective, and possibly even more fun.

CREATIVE WRITING FOR NOVELS/SCREENPLAYS

1 SCRIVENER

Word processing software geared to novelists and screenwriters. Has the capability to organize scenes and chapters, compile, and save all research and description documents in one place. Can also convert files to different formats.

COST: \$40 for PC, \$45 for macOS

BEST FOR: Novelists and screenwriters who want to have all documents in one place, and easily organize and revise their writing.

↳ literatureandlatte.com

2 ULYSSES

Word processing software and writing organizer. Currently only available for macOS and Apple mobile products.

COST: Mac app - \$44.99;

iPhone and iPad app - \$24.99

BEST FOR: Apple fans who want to have their writing and documents in one place, and easily organize and revise their writing.

↳ ulyssesapp.com

3 POWER WRITER

Writing software advertised as “the convergence of organization and creativity.” Includes word processing, integrated outlining, the ability to save and organize notes and research, and story development tools.

COST: \$99.95

BEST FOR: Writers who want to write their stories/novels, organize, and save research all in one place.

↳ write-brain.com

4 FINAL DRAFT 10

Writing software for screenplays, stage plays, and teleplays. Includes over 100 templates as well as options for collaboration and alternate dialogue.

COST: From \$99 to \$249

BEST FOR: Screenwriters and playwrights.

↳ finaldraft.com

5 DRAMATICA STORY EXPERT/ DRAMATICA PRO

Story development tool that addresses both story analysis and creation.

COST: \$129 to \$159

BEST FOR: Writers who want to sharpen their story structure and get help with character interactions.

↳ dramatica.com

6 TRUBY'S BLOCKBUSTER 6.0

Story and character development software for screenplays. Can customize with genre-specific add-ons.

COST: \$179

BEST FOR: Screenwriters who want specific storyline development and help in keeping up with plot, structure, and characters.

↳ truby.com

7 STORYIST 3.4

Novel and screenplay writing software that includes word processing, the ability to organize chapters and scenes, and a process to outline your story using notecards. Formats and compiles final manuscript. Currently only available for Macs, iPhones, and iPads; users can also work from the cloud.

COST: \$59

BEST FOR: Apple users who travel often or appreciate a more visual-minded way to organize their work.

↳ storyist.com

8 WRITWAY

Novel-writing software that includes word processing, the ability to organize your manuscript, and tools for creating outlines, synopses, and story notecards. Also includes a function that will read your manuscript out loud. Note: For Windows only.

COST: Free

BEST FOR: Writers who want to organize their manuscripts with a user-friendly interface.

↳ writewaypro.com



OUTLINING

9 CONTOUR

Story development software that turns your screenplay ideas into an outline.

COST: \$39.95 to \$99.95

BEST FOR: Screenwriters who want to easily develop and outline their story.

↳ marinersoftware.com

10 OUTLINE 4D

Outlining software that displays graphics of your story outline in a timeline view, map form, index cards, and traditional outline format. (Only for Windows at this time).

COST: \$99.95

BEST FOR: Fiction writers, playwrights, and screenwriters who want to see the “big picture.”

↳ write-bros.com

Grammar and word usage

11 MASTERWRITER

A collection of writing tools that lets you quickly and easily access synonyms, definitions, alliteration, rhyming words, and phrases. Includes the only electronic version of The Synonym Finder and the only alliteration dictionary on the market. Can also capture and manage .mp3 audio files.

COST: Monthly license \$9.95, annual license \$99.95, 2-year license \$149.95

BEST FOR: Poets, songwriters, and writers who want quick access to a multitude of words and phrases.

↳ masterwriter.com

12 GRAMMARLY

Software that inspects grammar and contextual spelling. With a premium subscription, Grammarly checks style, business- or academic-specific issues, and sentence structure; offers content-based vocabulary improvements; and detects plagiarism.

COST: Free for basic; Monthly subscription \$11.66

BEST FOR: Writers who want to make sure they're always putting their best grammatical foot forward.

↳ app.grammarly.com

13 VISUALTHESAURUS

Online thesaurus and dictionary, which include 150,000 words and 120,000 meanings. Also provides word maps to show linguistic connections.

COST: \$2.95 per month or \$19.95 per year

BEST FOR: Writers who want to find just the right word quickly.

↳ visualthesaurus.com

DICTATION

14 DRAGON

Dictation software that lets you dictate documents and control your computer using voice commands. Includes functions for creating and sending emails, posting on social media, and searching the web.

COST: \$74.99 to \$400, depending on the technical level needed

BEST FOR: Writers who want to increase productivity by working hands-free.

↳ nuance.com

15 BRAINA

Speech recognition and dictation software that allows users to convert voice to text on any website or word processing software. Supports forty different languages. Can also be used as a virtual assistant to complete tasks, find answers to questions, send emails, access websites, schedule reminders, and control your PC. (Only for Windows at this time.)

COST: Six-month license \$29, annual license \$39, 3-year license \$79 (a free "lite" option is also available)

BEST FOR: Writers who want a less-expensive dictation and virtual assistant option to maximize productivity.

↳ brainasoft.com/braina/download.html

Character development

16 PERSONA

Character development software that enables you to explore the psychology of your characters and determine how your characters interact and fit together in your story. Includes archetypal themes for creating believable characters.

COST: \$39.95 to \$99.95

BEST FOR: Writers who want help creating complex and realistic characters.

↳ marinersoftware.com

17 CHARAHUB

Website for creation, organization, and sharing of character attributes and descriptions. Allows the user to include images for characters and link character relationships.

COST: Free for up to 100 characters.

BEST FOR: Writers who want to organize their character profiles and don't need extensive tools for development.

↳ charahub.com/refer/ev6l

ACADEMIC

18 REF-N-WRITE Academic writing software that includes academic phrases and templates, reference material import, imitative learning, and text recycling from your previous documents.

COST: \$37.50

BEST FOR: Academic writers, professors, or students.

↳ ref-n-write.com/trial

JOURNALING

19 MACJOURNAL & WINJOURNAL

Journaling software that allows for easy export and sync between devices in addition to the capability to add images, recordings, and video to entries. Note: WINJOURNAL only available through third-party sellers.

COST: \$39.95 to \$99.95

BEST FOR: Writers and bloggers who want to journal on multiple devices and include sounds, images, and videos.

↳ marinersoftware.com

20 LIFE JOURNAL

Journaling software that includes optional writer-specific add-ons to provide focus and inspiration for your writing. Users can customize their journal to reflect their life and needs. Available online or as a Windows download.

COST: \$49.95 for Windows download and \$27 per year for the online version

BEST FOR: Writers and bloggers who want to easily journal thoughts while having access to writing prompts, tips, and inspiration.

↳ lifejournal.com

ORGANIZATION

21 SCAPPLE

A system to organize notes and thought processes. Allows notes to be moved, arranged, stacked, and connected.

COST: \$14.99

BEST FOR: Writers who want more efficiency in keeping and organizing notes, especially those who have complex characters and/or plot.

↳ literatureandlatte.com/scapple.php

22 INSPIRATION 9.0

Creates “mind maps” of ideas, organizes notes, transforms diagrams, and provides structure for your writing. Facilitates communication of concepts and knowledge, and includes a “Presentation Manager,” which easily exports existing ideas and images into professional presentations.

COST: \$39.95

BEST FOR: Writers who want to effectively organize their ideas and prepare refined presentations for conferences or workshops.

↳ inspiration.com

23 PAPERPORT

Software for organizing paperwork, such as bills, invoices, expenses, and other related documents.

COST: \$22.97 (on Amazon) to \$69.99 (through Nuance.com)

BEST FOR: Freelancers who want to digitally organize financial documents for their writing business.

↳ nuance.com

MARKETING

24 STORYBASE Software that helps writers create relevant content to boost internet exposure. Provides analytics of readers and markets to allow for narrowed focus.
COST: \$19 to \$29 per month, or \$69 to download
BEST FOR: Fiction authors and screenwriters who want to better target their audiences and market accordingly.
↳ storybase.com

EDITING

25 SMARTEDIT An editing tool for creative writers to use after the first draft has been completed. Will help identify a list of issues for review, such as repeated and redundant words and phrases, suspect punctuation list, misused words, and even profanity usage. Can be purchased as an insert for Microsoft Word or as a standalone version.
COST: \$67 stand-alone; \$77 for use with Word
BEST FOR: Writers who want to perform a first-pass edit of their draft.
↳ smart-edit.com

DIALOGUE

26 GREAT DIALOGUE SOFTWARE An interactive database that provides 101 techniques and samples of dialogue for different situations. (At press time, Great Dialogue Software was for Windows only).
COST: \$19.95
BEST FOR: Writers who want examples and techniques for writing believable dialogue.
↳ greatdialogue.com

eBook creation

27 SIGIL User-friendly, open-source eBook creation software that offers both a user-friendly “what you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) interface and code-based editing.
COST: Free
BEST FOR: Writers who want to create an eBook without having formatting/coding experience.
↳ sigil.en.softonic.com

28 CREATIVIST User-friendly software that creates various types of eBooks, video/audio projects, magazines, educational materials, picture books, and photo albums. Includes photo rendering. Can also translate your project into different languages.
COST: Free
BEST FOR: Writers who want to easily create and publish eBooks and other video and audio projects.
↳ atavist.com/signup

29 EBOOK MAESTRO User-friendly creation software for eBooks, magazines, guides, reports, educational materials, galleries, and presentations.
COST: \$12.95 for standard; \$19.95 for pro
BEST FOR: Writers who want to upload projects to the web with password protection, create trial periods for their readers, and promote author branding.
↳ ebookmaestro.com

WORD PROCESSING

30 WRITEMONKEY
Bare-bones word processing software (for Windows).
COST: Free
BEST FOR: Writers who just want to get the words onto the page with little distraction.
↳ writemonkey.com

31 LIBRE OFFICE WRITER
Word processing software with many of the features of Microsoft Word, including templates.
COST: Free
BEST FOR: Writers who want a less-expensive word processor option.
↳ libreoffice.org

32 HEMINGWAY
Word processing software with built-in grammatical and usage/sentence structure suggestions aimed at simplifying and tightening your writing. Highlights passive verbs, unwieldy sentences, adverbs, or unnecessary complicated words.
COST: \$19.99 for Windows and Mac; free web-based app
BEST FOR: Writers who want to edit their work for maximum comprehension and clarity.
↳ hemingwayapp.com/desktop.html

Distraction blockers

33 FOCUSME
Software that enables you to instantly block access to specific websites and applications, with a strong, irreversible “Force Mode” to prevent users from bypassing the blacklisted sites. Also allows users to only block sites for certain amounts of time and provides analytical data to show how much time users spend on each site or app.
COST: \$9 per month, \$29 per year, \$119 lifetime
BEST FOR: Writers who severely struggle with social media or web-browsing distractions.
↳ focusme.com

34 FOCUSWRITER
Text-to-screen word processor that lets writers get their ideas down. The program takes over your computer’s entire screen to avoid distractions. Also includes spellcheck, auto-save, some formatting, alarms, and goal-setting targets. Not intended for the editing/revision process.
COST: Free (though requests a tip)
BEST FOR: Writers who want to block out online distractions but also want the ability to bypass.
↳ gottcode.org/focuswriter

35 WRITER’S BLOCKS
Divide your manuscripts into blocks according to idea. Each block is a separate word processing document, and all blocks remain on the screen for easy organization.
COST: \$149
BEST FOR: Authors who work on longer projects or manuscripts who like nonlinear organizational structures and dislike excessive document navigation.
↳ writersblocks.com

If you’re a writer who prefers plain old pen and paper, more power to you. But if you’re among the rest of us who prefer using a modern computer, check out these tools to save time and help you write more efficiently. Your work-in-progress may be all the better for it. **W**

K.L. Romo writes about life on the fringe: teetering dangerously on the edge is more interesting than standing safely in the middle. She is passionate about women’s issues, loves noisy clocks and fuzzy blankets, but HATES the word normal. Her historical novel, *Life Before*, is about two women separated by a century who discover they’ve shared a soul. Web: KLRomo.com or [@klromo](https://twitter.com/klromo).