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Review

Christine Hult and Jeannette Harris, *A Writer's Introduction to Word Processing* (Wadsworth, 1987)

Dawn Rodrigues

A Writer's Introduction to Word Processing by Christine Hult and Jeanette Harris is a valuable guidebook for writers—both novices and experts. Intended for students, the book seems useful for teachers, too. The clear technological advice provided to students should make it possible for them to progress at their own pace, mastering several word processing strategies useful for writers in one chapter before encountering new strategies in each subsequent chapter. The link between computer skills and writing should help teachers integrate computers into their courses almost effortlessly.

Even teachers new to word processing themselves will probably feel comfortable with Hult and Harris's text. The first chapter provides an overview of the writing process—with foreshadowing on ways subsequent chapters will provide links with word processing. I like this approach. It puts writing where it belongs—first, ahead of technology. The next chapter includes a brief, non-threatening introduction to word processing. In no way do the authors suggest that teachers or students need to know much about computers in order to use them as writing tools.

Chapters 3-6 lead readers through phases of the writing process: pre-writing, drafting, revising, and editing. In each chapter, the authors present word processing strategies that would be useful for writers at each respective stage of their own writing projects. These chapters are packed with imaginative, instructional, and practical exercises that give students hands-on guidance with inserting, deleting, and moving text as they write.

Students are unlikely to tap the full power of the computer without a text like this. Many composition instructors have begun to observe that students do not learn how to apply word processing to writing through tutorials or by doing exercises in manuals. Students learn how to enter and delete text with these approaches, nothing more. They learn how to use the computer as a fancy typewriter. With Hult and Harris' text as a guide, however, students should learn how to apply the word processor of their choice powerfully.

Throughout the text, students are shown how to tailor special functions of their word processor to their own needs as writers. For example, if students have a word processor with split-screen capability, Hult and Harris suggest that they can use this feature as a revising tool by loading a rough version of their paper in one screen and re-working another version in the second screen. The authors also give students directions for creating customized files on their disks: files with book report formats, files with favorite prewriting questions, and files with questions for peer readers to use as they review other students' writing.

Intended for students new to computers and writing, this text bridges the gap between word processing manuals and rhetorics. As they state in their preface, "Because many fine rhetoric and composition texts are available, we saw no advantage in producing another one." Many teachers have faced a dilemma when they learned that they will be teaching with computers: should they drop the rhetoric they have used previously and replace it with a rhetoric that incorporates word processing strategies or should they continue using their favorite rhetoric and supplement it with a word processing manual? Hult and Harris's approach in *A Writer's Introduction to Word Processing* makes it possible for teachers to continue using the rhetoric of their choice when they incorporate computers into their English classes. The writing exercises in Hult and Harris's introduction to word processing would complement almost any rhetoric.

The only objection I have to the text is that the authors have not been completely successful in making their directions about word processing functions generic. Many of their comments are simply incorrect. Consider this statement: "Once you have created and named a file for a particular text, you can begin to enter your work into that file. . . ." Microsoft Word and Bank Street Writer are just two of the many word processors that do not require writers to create a file before they write. Consider also: "You can . . . combine files into one file, rename files, and copy, or write, a file to another disk using an appropriate command sequence." Unfortunately, some easy-to-use word processing systems such as PFS: *Write* do not include these features. In other places, some of the authors' directions and explanations are directed to one kind of word processor—one that requires the writer to load the operating system first. But many students work on

computers which make the operating systems transparent. Further, many students now work on computers with hard disks that do not require any loading of files from floppy disks.

Many teachers are afraid to start using the computer with their English classes. It is difficult to admit ignorance. It takes a major commitment to begin teaching in a new way. This text provides a security blanket. It helps the teacher and it helps the students. The exercises give students practice in word processing while they are getting practice with writing.

Finally, Hult and Harris's text is fun to read. I can't finish this review without noting my favorite feature—the comics. Ranging from "Cathy" to "Shoe" to "Peanuts," each chapter begins with a hilarious comic poking fun at some aspect of computers and writing. Anyone with writing anxiety or computer phobia will appreciate the light touch these comic strips lend to the book.

Dawn Rodrigues directs the computer and composition lab at Colorado State University; in addition, she is co-author of *Teaching Writing with a Word Processor, Grades 7-13*.