Research, Write, Publish | Writing Process

Word Processing

**Key Concept**

What is a *word processing application*? It is a software program used to create documents. You have probably used one many times. Have you ever thought about how it works? Have you ever thought about how documents were created before computers?

Before computers, the only way to create a document was by hand, with a typewriter, or on a printing press. Making any changes to a document was a lot of work. If you made a mistake, you often had to start all over. Even a small mistake was a really big deal!

The first word processing applications made changing a document quicker and easier than it was before. If you made a mistake, all you had to do was delete it and retype. You could also move text around whenever and wherever you wanted. However, with the first word processing applications, you could only work with text and create simple documents. Modern word processing applications can create complex documents and contain many types of multimedia.

Are you getting the most out of your word processing application? Unless you know how it works, you probably are using only a few of its tools. The more you know about how the application works, the more you can do with it.

**Look Ahead**

**Task:** Describe five actions you can select from the menus of a word processing application’s graphical user interface.

**Goal:** Explain how you can use these five actions to write your narrative essay.

You may want to review an example of a *menu identification* before you begin.

*See the example: Menu Identification*
Vocabulary

**Words to Remember**
This page gives basic definitions for some important terms that can help you learn about a word processing application. You can get a more complete definition of each term from Fact Monster*.

**New Words**
**Application**: A computer program designed for a specific purpose.

**Graphical User Interface (GUI)**: A set of menus and icons that makes an application easier for people to use.

**Icon**: A picture that represents a specific action for a computer to take.

**Input**: Data entered into a computer.

**Output**: Data produced by a computer.

**Program**: A set of instructions for a computer to perform.

**Word Processing Application**: A software application designed to create documents.

**Review Words**
**Multimedia**: Combining more than one type of information, such as words, numbers, images, audio, and video.

**Network**: A system of computers connected either by wires and cables or wirelessly by antennas and towers.
Exploration

Learning from the Web
Explore some Web sites about word processing applications. Learn what a word processing application is and how it works.

While you explore the following Web sites, think about the guiding questions. You may want to take notes to help you answer the questions. If you think of other questions about word processing applications, keep those in mind too.

Guiding Questions

- How does word processing make writing a narrative easier?
- What are the main parts of a word processing application’s graphical user interface?

Web Sites

- Word Processing* from Fact Monster*
- Computer Program* from Fact Monster*
- How PCs Work* from HowStuffWorks*
- ABCs of Word Processing* from GeekGirls*
Information

What to Know
This page summarizes some of the information from the Web sites you explored. This information helps you learn what you need to know for this activity about a word processing application. You may want to take notes to help you remember the most important points. You can return to the Web sites for more exploration if you want to learn more.

Word Processing Applications
A word processing application is designed to create documents. Word processing applications provide tools that help you write, edit, format, and print documents. The first word processing applications only handled text. They were capable of creating basic documents, such as letters and reports.

Modern word processing applications can create multimedia documents. Users now have much more control over how a document appears. Word processing can be now be used to create brochures, greeting cards, and even Web pages.

Early Word Processing Applications
The first word processing applications only accepted input from a keyboard. You did not need a mouse because they did not have any menus or icons. You had to know the command for what you wanted to do. Then, you would type the command on your keyboard. A keyboard is an input device, because you use it to enter information into a computer.

Modern printers are usually connected directly to a computer. You could only use the printer if you were using the computer that was connected to the printer. Modern printers are usually shared by many computers on a network.

Modern Word Processing Applications
Modern word processing applications have a graphical user interface (GUI). The GUI provides menus that list what actions the computer can take. The GUI also provides icons that are small pictures that represent commands. Icons that are grouped together in toolbars are often called buttons.

Many other improvements have been made in output technology as well. Modern printers can print both images and text. Modern monitors can display any kind of...
multimedia in millions of colors. Today’s printers can produce complex graphics and print millions of colors.

**How Word Processing Applications Work**

- A processor runs the application
- A keyboard and mouse are used for input
- A monitor and printer are used for output
- A GUI provides menu commands and toolbar icons and buttons
Task

What to Do
Complete the following task to show what you have learned about using a word processing application. While you work through the task, think about whether you are achieving the goal. You may want to review an example of a menu identification before you begin.

**Task:** Describe five actions you can select from the menus of a word processing application’s graphical user interface.

**Goal:** Explain how you can use these five actions to write your narrative essay.

**See the example:** Menu Identification

1. Explore the graphical user interface of your word processing application. Identify five menu actions you can use to write your narrative essay.

2. Start a new word processing document. Always remember to type your name and the date at the top of a new document.

3. Describe the five menu actions you identified. Explain how these actions can help you write your narrative essay.

4. Review the checklist and revise your document to make sure it is complete.

5. Remember to save your document often while you work.

6. Share your descriptions.
Task Example

Student Name

Date

Using Graphical User Interface (GUI) with My Narrative Essay

1. **Format Menu > Font**
   The font tool can be used to enhance my narrative essay by changing the font style. For example, I can add bold or italicize words in my essay.

2. **Format Menu > Paragraph**
   The paragraph tool can be used to change the line spacing from single to double space in my narrative essay.

3. **Format Menu > Bullets and Numbering**
   The bullets and numbering tool can be used to add different styles of bullets and numbered lists to my essay.

4. **Insert Menu > Comment**
   The comment tool can be used when I peer review one of my classmate’s essays.

5. **Tools Menu > Spelling and Grammar**
   The spelling and grammar tools can be used to check if there is spelling or grammatical errors throughout my essay.