

Write Now! word processor easy to use

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The field of word processing for the Commodore 64 is a highly competitive one. There are programs available which will create multiple columns on a page, perform arithmetic calculations and even type in foreign languages.

For those who don't need such fancy frills, Cardco's Write Now! 64 is a "basic" word processor which offers plenty of creative opportunities for the serious programmer.

This machine language, cartridge-based program is

in many ways similar to the company's like-named program for the VIC 20, which is, in my opinion, the best word processor for that computer.

The major improvement of the 64 version is an insert mode which can be used to place copy in the middle of previously typed text. With the VIC Write Now! this could be done only with some difficulty. Another new feature is an 80-column preview mode. This is useful for correcting errors in formatting before the copy is sent to the printer.

It's also possible to change the screen colors to one of four different combinations. The VIC version

allowed the use of *any* color, but almost all these would conflict with screen messages. It isn't possible to return to BASIC with the 64 version, but files can be deleted and renamed and a disk formatted.

Write Now! 64 offers control over all four margins of the printed page, up to a maximum length of 254 lines and width of 250 characters. Copy can be flush left, centred or justified. There is considerable versatility in manipulating text in blocks, which can be moved, copied, deleted or saved as separate files.

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Up to nine place markers can be inserted in the text. There is a non-destructive directory which "pauses" with the CONTROL key. Copy can be loaded from other word processors which save with program files and printed with Write Now! 64 after some minor modifications.

There are a wide variety of commands which can be sent to the printer. Most of these are called "dot commands," consisting of a period followed by a two-letter code and optional numeric information. For example, ".tm 08" followed by a return sets the top margin eight lines from the beginning of the page. This information is not printed out.

Character codes for special printer tricks like underlining, italics, emphasized printing and so forth can be obtained with the Commodore E, which represents CHR\$(27), the printer "escape code." This is used in combination with redefinable characters, where a substitute value can be assigned to any keyboard character.

Write Now! 64 can be used to generate multiple copies and it can print individual pages of a docu-

ment, which is handy if a minor error is found.

A Commodore key-K placed in the text will allow input from the keyboard, which can be used for inserting names, addresses and so forth in form letters.

It's also possible to generate form letters using information stored either with Cardco's Mail Now! cartridge or in specially created "mail merge" files (though it should be noted that these must be program, not sequential files as suggested in the manual).

Some of the VIC Write Now's features have not undergone a successful transition. There is audio feedback, but unlike the VIC's precise clicking noises when keys are pressed, the 64 version has a continual whining hum and little beeps.

It's supposed to be possible to use the joystick to scroll copy about the screen, but this wouldn't work with either 64 port. Copy is saved with function key f3 and loaded with f4, which can lead to disaster if you're not careful. And the 64 program's tab positions exist only across the width of the screen, which is 40 characters long.

There are a couple of annoying bugs.

One is that if a line during printing begins with a period, for example a machine language instruction (.G) or an ellipsis ("..."), that whole line will be omitted since the computer recognizes it as a "dot command."

The second is that the "at" sign ("@") should not be used while saving copy to tape because this character is used as an end-of-file marker and any copy after it can't be loaded back in.

Using tape can result in no prompt messages like "press play and record on tape" because the colors of the messages change and sometimes they are the same as that of the screen.

Also, it's not possible to search and/or replace any of the characters created with the Commodore key, which appear as reverse capitals, for example the "E" which takes the place of CHR\$(27) escape code. And you can't search and replace a word with nothing except when this action is performed immediately after the program is booted up.

None of these problems, however, are so serious that they can't be overcome by creative thinking. And any inconvenience they cause is more than made up for by the program's ease of operation, ability to overcome operator errors (the RUN/STOP key returns one to the main text from almost any situation) and speed in printing out, especially when used in conjunction with one of Cardco's popular interfaces.

Compared to many other ill-designed word processing programs, Write Now! 64 is a pleasure to use.