Editorium Update

Tips and Techniques for Publishing Professionals

Review: Geoff Hart's Write Faster with Your Word Processor

By JACK LYON | *Published:* MAY 25, 2022

I've been a fan of Geoff Hart's books and articles since 2007, when I reviewed the first edition of his book *Effective Onscreen Editing*. The beauty of that book is that it applies to *any* software an editor might use. As Geoff explained then, "The overall goal is to teach editing strategies, not specific software." However, in his latest book, *Write Faster with Your Word Processor*, Geoff changes his approach in three ways:

- The book is aimed primarily at writers rather than editors, including writers of fiction. (Geoff is well known for his technical writing, but he's also the author of several novels and short stories.)
- The book focuses mainly on writing with Microsoft Word. Why? As Geoff explains, "I've provided Word-specific examples because most writers use Word. Moreover, I've learned from teaching many workshops that it's necessary to make general strategies concrete, and Word does a great job of showing how to implement those strategies."
- The book isn't as concerned with being *effective* as it is with being *fast*. It's packed with useful tips and advice to help you spend less time fighting with your computer and more time actually writing. Geoff promises, "I'll teach you how to improve your existing skills and learn new ones. As you master these skills, you'll find yourself focusing more on the craft of writing and less on the tools themselves. That means you'll write better and faster, with less need for revision."

Like all of Geoff's books, this one is *thorough*—I mean *really* thorough.

Part 1, "Get started," explains how to personalize your computer to fit the way you work, with an emphasis on something many writers overlook: hardware. Geoff covers:

- Choosing a good monitor.
- Choosing a good keyboard.
- Choosing a good mouse.

I can't emphasize enough how important these are. But Geoff takes all of this a step further, covering your computer's overall behavior, keyboard settings, mouse settings, language settings, and display settings. Then he explains how to organize your files, part of the book I'll be reading in more depth (not that I have any problems with organization). Finally, he talks about developing safeguards: security considerations, backing up your work, updating software, protecting your work with passwords, and protecting yourself from computer-related injury

and other problems.

Part 2, "Write your first draft," focuses on getting your words out of your head and into your word processor, again with an emphasis on speed. "Write first, edit later," as the saying goes. Geoff explains in detail how to develop and use a strong outline (with a nod to those who prefer not to). Then he covers Microsoft Word's features that are especially useful for writing (including some you probably don't know about) as well as settings that you might want to change. Out of the box, Microsoft Word is set up to produce business memos and family newsletters; it is definitely *not* set up for serious writing. But the beauty of Word is that it's practically infinitely customizable, so why not turn it into a lean, mean writing machine? Here, Geoff explains how.

I'm not going to go into much more detail about what the book includes; you'll find a detailed table of contents on Geoff's website. I'll just say that part 3 explains how to revise your writing once you've got it down (*now* it's time to edit), and part 4 includes more detailed information and resources to help you back up your work and avoid stress injury, as well as a list of helpful keyboard shortcuts. The book ends with a glossary of publishing terms, a link to an online bibliography for those who want more information about a particular area, a collection of helpful internet resources, and an index that, like the rest of the book, is amazingly thorough.

Geoff writes, "My goal is NOT to teach you the writer's craft; there are many better books for that purpose. The goal is NOT to teach you how Microsoft Word works; Word is just one of many alternatives you can use." What, then, is the book's purpose? "My goal," Geoff says, "is to teach you *how to write using a word processor*." And in that, he succeeds beautifully.

Write Faster With Your Word Processor is one of the most comprehensive books I've seen about how to write on the computer. At 352 pages (548 for the PDF version, which includes screen shots), it's not for the faint of heart. But, as Geoff says, "I've provided the information in small chunks, designed for easy reading and browsing. You can dip into the book to solve a specific problem, or read it a chapter at a time to increase your mastery." I'll be keeping the book near at hand for those very purposes, and I recommend that you do the same.

Geoff makes it easy to buy the book. You can learn more here.

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- PDF version (suitable for most tablet computers and very large phones): 548 pages, including index. ISBN 978-1-927972-30-4
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