What the Tech?!: Word Processors
by Joe McCormick

I would argue that the most important software any student can own is a word processor. Anyone who's ever been through a college composition course has used them extensively, and for some of us they are the lifeblood of our daily activities. I use a word processor at least 5 days out of every week, and for me it's important that I have a recognizable interface with easily accessible options.

There are a lot of word processors out there, some simple, some complex, but they all do the same thing. Microsoft Word has always been a staple in this genre, but recently there have been some contenders that offer a different path to reaching our writing goals. Google Docs offers a super accessible interface at any place, any time, as long as you have an internet connection. And lately, little known OpenOffice has been wedging its way onto the scene as well. Personally, these two newcomers offer a better experience than Word has in the past.

I was completely turned off by the interface revamp that Word underwent when the 2007 version came out. I know it caused a lot of headache in both myself and others who used it. I think we sometimes take for granted the simple menu at the top of every program we use; it's a familiar home to the options we commonly use. When Word 2007 came out, I feel like they complicated the process by moving around all the options under tabs that none of us were familiar with. If it isn't broken, don't fix it. On top of these unwanted changes, you have to pay somewhere around $100 for a software license. As a college student, I don't have this extra cash. I have used Google Docs and OpenOffice for the last few years and find them to be a great replacement for Word.

Google Docs is a really great program because you take it with you wherever you go, and it's free to use. Google also offers slide show presentations, spreadsheets, online forms, and a drawing application, but we'll just focus on the word processor. The fact that everything to do with the program fits into a simple online interface is extremely beneficial.

All documents you've previously created are neatly arranged in chronological order. Also, Google allows you to share your documents quite easily through the click of a button and the copying of a link. Give this link to those who you want to view your document, and your good to go. On top of this, you can also collaborate with other Google Doc users on a single document, which is amazing for large-scale projects. The one drawback of Google Docs is that it lacks some features you'd commonly find in a full-scale processor, like word-wrap around an image or advanced text features. So, when I'm at home, I tend to use OpenOffice.

The reason I like OpenOffice so much is that it sticks with the same look and feel that we're used to with word processors, and computer programs in general. Much like Google Docs, OpenOffice also comes with free graphical calculation, spreadsheet, drawing, and reporting software; all of this for free. The writing program itself is like any other word processor. I don't think it has any features you wouldn't find in Word; some options may be named differently or placed under a different drop down menu. As with any other piece of software, you'll just have to explore and get used to it and see if you like it. If you also don't like the cosmetic changes or cost of Microsoft Word, Google Docs and OpenOffice are a nice, free alternative.

Have question for What the Tech?! Email us at wtt.globe@gmail.com.