

Writing Apps: 10 of the Best Paid & Free Writing Tools for New Writers

[Irish Writers Union](#)

By [Keith Lang](#)



Writers have new editing options thanks to software that is becoming more sophisticated: here we discuss the best paid and free writing tools for writers.

Hiring an editor to critique and proofread your work is the ideal way of improving your manuscript before you show it to an agent or publisher or launch it as an eBook. But good editors are expensive and software alternatives are becoming more effective. The previously time-consuming process of formatting your text for publication is now a simple one thanks to inexpensive or even free software.

The tedium of backing up and storing your work is easy thanks to smart cloud-based software and fast internet connections (something inconceivable or prohibitively expensive only a few years ago). There's no longer an excuse for grammatical errors and spelling mistakes. I'll get straight to the point in saying that losing your work forever results from laziness and carelessness, rather than lack of funds or misfortune.

Looking for the Best writing apps to help spellcheck, format, and publish your novel, article, or blog post? These are some of the tools that can do the job for you. You never need work solo again thanks to your own personal editor in the form of a sophisticated modern writing app.

Hemingway Editor (previously Hemingway App)

hemingwayapp.com

Unless you happen to be J. K. Rowling or Stephen King, you'll welcome the opportunity to save a few euros on writing software. Luckily, one of the best tools for perfecting your prose is free.

Hemingway Editor is a free app that examines your writing for readability and highlights grammar and spelling mistakes. Copy and paste your text into the web-based editor and the tool will highlight complicated phrases and long sentences. Named after Ernest Hemingway, who emphasised "true simple declarative sentences" and urged us to "write it as straight as you can", this writing tool will force you to be brief and direct in your writing (if you follow all the recommendations).

Hemingway app will tell you if you're overusing adverbs, a writing crutch we're all guilty of using. Weeding out the passive voice is also easy with the app's colour coding of grammatical sins.

Here's how the tool interprets the first page or two of James Joyce's most famous work:

The screenshot shows the Hemingway Editor interface. On the left, there's a text editor with a toolbar (Bold, Italic, H1, H2, H3, Quote, Bullets, Numbers, Link) and a text area containing a passage from 'The Dead'. The text is highlighted in yellow and green. On the right, there's a sidebar with the Hemingway Editor logo and a readability analysis. The analysis shows a readability score of 'Grade 5' (Good) and a word count of 333. It also lists several grammatical issues: 13 adverbs (aim for 4 or fewer), 1 use of passive voice (meeting the goal of 7 or fewer), 0 phrases with simpler alternatives, 5 of 33 sentences are hard to read, and 2 of 33 sentences are very hard to read.

Write Edit

Hemingway
Editor

Readability
Grade 5
Good

Words: **333**
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13 adverbs. Aim for 4 or fewer.

1 use of passive voice, meeting the goal of 7 or fewer.

0 phrases have simpler alternatives.

5 of 33 sentences are hard to read.

2 of 33 sentences are very hard to read.

Bold Italic H1 H2 H3 Quote Bullets Numbers Link

Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed. A yellow dressinggown, ungirdled, was sustained gently behind him on the mild morning air. He held the bowl aloft and intoned:

—*Introibo ad altare Dei.*

Halted, he peered down the dark winding stairs and called out coarsely:

—Come up, Kinch! Come up, you fearful jesuit!

Solemnly he came forward and mounted the round gunrest. He faced about and blessed gravely thrice the tower, the surrounding land and the awaking mountains. Then, catching sight of Stephen Dedalus, he bent towards him and made rapid crosses in the air, gurgling in his throat and shaking his head. Stephen Dedalus, displeased and sleepy, leaned his arms on the top of the staircase and looked coldly at the shaking gurgling face that blessed him, equine in its length, and at the light untoussured hair, grained and hued like pale oak.

Buck Mulligan peeped an instant under the mirror and then covered the bowl smartly.

If you've read Ulysses, you might agree with Hemingway Editor that “hard to read” could describe much of the body of text. But this also demonstrates a limitation of all software, it can't address deliberately stylised sentence construction or experimental prose.

Best for

- Keeping your sentences short and snappy
- Reducing complexity and cutting out repetitions

Pros

- Easy to use with a clutter-free interface.
- Free (Web version)
- Handy indicators like the “reading time” and Grade level.

Cons

- Limited in scope
- Doesn't allow you to customise the editor to your writing style.

Price

100% Free for the web version which will suit most people.

The desktop app is \$19.99

Grammarly

[Grammarly.com](https://www.grammarly.com)

Despite its origins as a grammar and spell checking tool, Grammarly is also a decent writing app. The software is a decade in development and the creators have had time to perfect the algorithm and iron out the bugs.

The free version is good enough for most people, but the Premium version offers some tempting features like “advanced writing feedback” and plagiarism checks.

The advanced writing feedback features include:

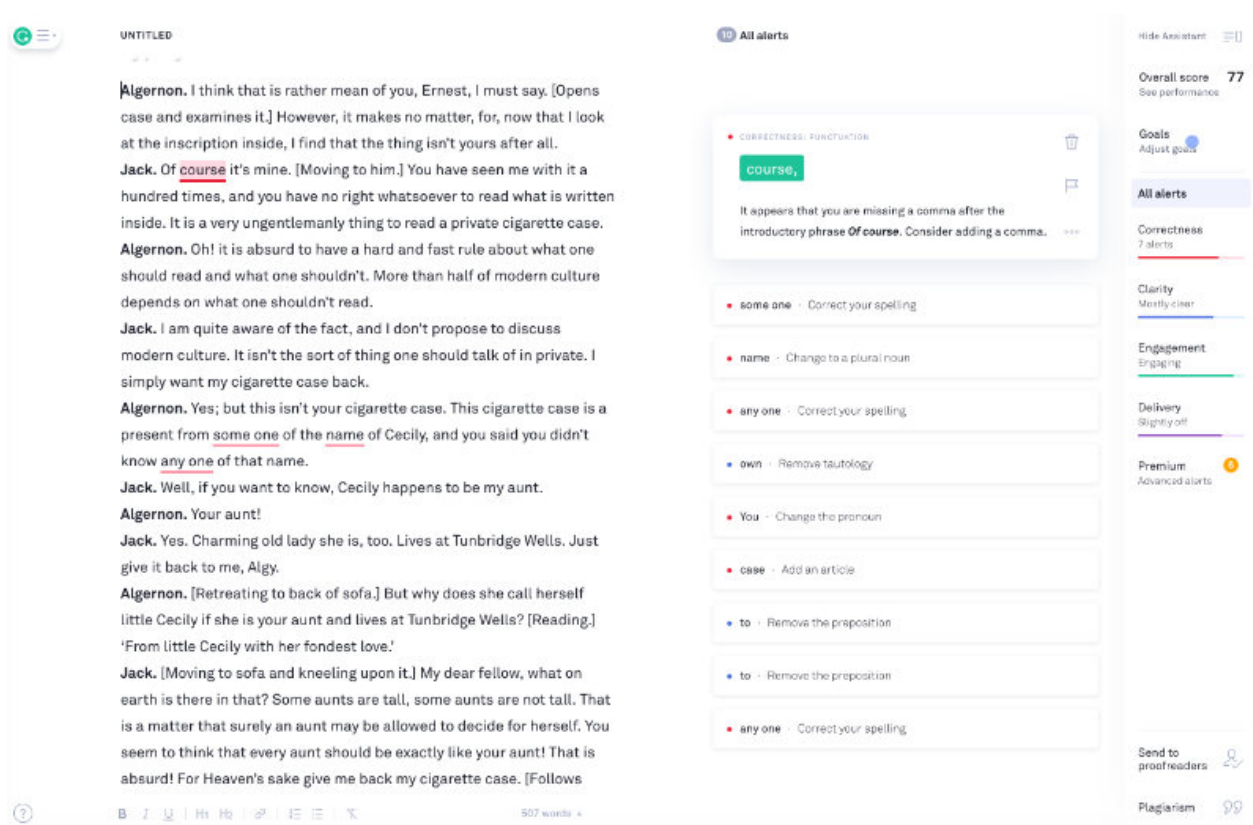
- Tone detection
- Ineffective vocabulary warnings

- Vocabulary enhancement suggestions
- Genre-specific writing style checks

Grammarly even displays warnings for “insensitive or non-inclusive language” in your writing – even more useful in today’s minefield of political correctness and communication breakdowns.

Grammarly is available as a web-based (browser) app and a slick desktop app that suggests changes as you write. There’s also a Chrome extension for your browser that helps you avoid grammar and spelling mistakes in your emails, forms, and anywhere you write on the internet.

Here’s how the Grammarly analyses the work of one of Ireland’s best-loved playwrights, Oscar Wilde.



Keep in mind that not every suggestion is a keeper. An important point to remember when using writing apps: your own judgement should be the final call. Don’t rely on a machine to perfect your writing. Remove boring prose, fix lengthy inaccessible sentences, and correct obvious spelling mistakes, but your personality and writing style should take precedence over an algorithm. Use these tools as guides and break the rules if you have to. That’s what Oscar Wilde did. And he’s still read today.

Grammarly is a favourite of people that write online. That you can grammar and spellcheck in WordPress (A content management system and the weapon of choice for website content publishers) thanks to a browser plugin, makes writing online a much faster process.

Best for

- Spell checking on the fly on the web
- Quick grammar and spelling checks

Pros

- The free version is a powerful and easy-to-use tool.
- Access your documents on multiple devices across the web (Premium)

Cons

- The Premium version is expensive

Price

\$29.95 a month or one year for \$139.95

Google Docs

docs.google.com

Many authors don't realise just how good of a writing and editing tool Google Docs is. As a simple word processor, it's effective but Docs also offers a range of add-ons that enhance the writing process. Bloggers and writers that produce blog posts regularly will love add-ons like ProWritingAid's suite of editing tools (paid), SEMrush's SEO writing tools (paid), and "Publish to WordPress", an add on that allows you to send your posts directly to WordPress.

If you don't want to pay for premium add-ons, Google Docs has its own grammar and spelling checker.

The most compelling things about Google Docs are the clean layout and the peace of mind in knowing that almost every keystroke is saved to the cloud. If your computer suddenly dies or you accidentally close your browser, you don't have to fret over lost work.

Google Docs is free but you'll need a Gmail account. Business account owners can use their own email address but will have to pay a monthly subscription to Google suite.

Best for

- Writers looking for a simple writing tool with web-focused formatting that also stores their work in the cloud.

Pros

- Free (as long as you have a Gmail account)
- Easier to use than Word online
- Designed for sharing and real-time collaborative editing
- Lots of plugins that improve the writing process
- Automatic cloud-based backup with revision history

Cons

- Potential privacy issues with Google's access to your documents.

Price

Free

ProWritingAid

[Prowritingaid.com](https://prowritingaid.com)

ProWritingAid is the ninja toolkit of writing apps. A tool designed from the ground up to help the writing process.

ProWritingAid's grammar and spelling checker falls behind the speedy Grammarly and native spell checking tools. However, it is the cheapest tool in its class. The number of features offered is staggering. Most people will never run their writing through all the reports, but PWA covers every angle in case you want to over optimise.

Copy and paste from any writing tool, web page, or document and PWA retains the formatting. From there you run checks depending on your goals which may be any of the following.

- To improve the style
- To fix grammar issues
- To check spelling
- To find overused words
- To count the words, characters, and sentences
- To check the Flesch-Kincaid Grade and other reading grade level measures.
- To analyse transitions (words and phrases that link your writing together).

A useful feature is the ability to change the writing style to suit your audience or market. Set the writing style to academic, for example, and PWA will deliver a different report than it would if you chose the creative style.

Non-fiction writers can choose Business, Casual, Technical, and Web styles. Fiction writers will want to choose Creative or General styles.

The screenshot shows the ProWritingAid interface with a teal header bar containing 'Menu', 'Reports', and 'Settings'. Below the header is a toolbar with icons for Realtime, Summary, Style, Grammar, Thesaurus, Overused, Combo, All Repeats, Echoes, Structure, Length, Transition, and More Reports. The main content area displays a text snippet: "substantial achievement of this book is that it will send readers back an interest in – the writers and works that are so enthusiastically fe [Gerald] Dawe has done the Irish literary world some service. ~ John The Sunday Times". A dropdown menu is open over the text, listing various checks: Readability, Sticky, Clichés, Diction, Pronoun, Alliteration, Homonym, Consistency, Acronym, Dialogue, Pacing, House, and Plagiarism. On the left, a sidebar shows a list of findings: 1 readability enhancement found, No passive verbs found, No hidden verbs found, No style improvements found, No long subordinate clauses, No adverbs found in dialogue, 2 adverbs found outside dialogue. Use adverbs sparingly in your writing, especially in creative writing, and No repeated sentence starts found.

Other insights you might discover from the tool's reports

- The level of “corporate” wording in your text.
- If you use inconsistent spelling in a piece of writing
- The number of clichés
- Echoes – words and phrases repeated within a short space of writing.

PWA is a powerhouse editing tool that leaves no stone unturned. The features can seem a little overwhelming. There's no reason for anyone to try to eliminate every error in their text in a futile attempt to score 100% in all reports. But that's not the point. Treat PWA as you would with any software in this article, as a guide, not as Gospel.

The screenshot shows the ProWritingAid interface with a teal header bar containing 'Menu', 'Core', 'Repeats', 'Structure', 'Readability', 'Consistency', 'Fiction', 'House', 'Plagiarism', and 'Settings'. Below the header is a toolbar with icons for Realtime, Summary, Style, Grammar, Thesaurus, Overused, and Combo. The main content area displays a text snippet: "The Representation of People Act 1918 granted the vote to Irish and English women aged over 30 who met certain property qualifications. While some nations had extended that right to women earlier, other countries, in Europe as well as elsewhere, did not allow women to vote until much later into the 20th century. **New Zealand:** First nation to grant female suffrage, in 1893, to all adult women. **Australia:** In 1894 women in South Australia were granted the vote and the right to stand for parliamentary elections. In 1899 women in Western Australia were". A dropdown menu is open over the text, listing various checks: Readability, Sticky, Clichés, Diction, Pronoun, Alliteration, Homonym, Consistency, Acronym, Dialogue, Pacing, House, and Plagiarism. On the left, a sidebar shows a list of findings: Overused words (1), No clichés in dialogue, Cliches outside dialogue (2), and Redundancies.



PWA's analysis of a short section from an Irish Times article.

Best for

- Grammar nerds

Pros

- Incredible range of tools for writing analysis
- Desktop and web versions with backup to the cloud
- Add-ons and plugins for other writing applications

Cons

- Not available for mobile devices
- Relatively expensive (but cheaper than Grammarly Premium)

Price

\$70 a year or \$240 for lifetime access

iA Writer

ia.net/writer

If you're looking for distraction-free writing, iA Writer might be just the tool for you. A plain text editor that focuses on, well, total focus, iA Writer is the ultimate in minimalistic writing environments.

Don't expect any bells and whistles with this one. But that's just the point. The idea is to use simplicity in design to let your writing speak for itself.

iA Writer uses markdown, graded fonts and typography that enhance the writing experience.

Some tools I've mentioned above offer distraction-free modes, but iA Writer takes it to the next

level. In our hyper-connected world, writers need all the help they can get in finding space and freedom to perform deep work. Writers that flick between social media, the news, and their emails, do not get things done. That's where distraction-free writing can help.

Best for

- The budget writer or the distracted author.

Pros

- Fast loading and lightweight
- Inexpensive
- Shareable texts

Cons

- Limited for more advanced writers
- No structure for organising or storing files
- Sync-able across multiple devices and platforms including iOS and Android.

Price

\$29.99 once-off payment

Scrivener

literatureandlatte.com/store/scrivener

Scrivener is the writing tool I used to compose this blog post. It's the most versatile editor, organiser, and formatting tool for every writing style.

However, Scrivener does not offer tips on writing and the spell check or grammar checking abilities are the very same as the built-in Mac or PC tools.

One plugin lets you open Scrivener files in PWA. You can then run PWA's checks and when you're happy with the results, save the file back to Scrivener.

Scrivener is a feature-packed app designed for managing writing projects and organising notes and research. If you're tackling huge writing projects and need a powerhouse writing and management tool, there's nothing better.

Best for

- Long-form writing and books
- Technical writing involving lots of research material and notes

Pros

- Feature-packed
- Lots of keyboard shortcuts help speed up the writing process.
- Great value

Cons

- Steeper learning curve than other products in the list
- Desktop app only

Price

\$53 per release (every couple of years)

Word

products.office.com/en-ie/compare-all-microsoft-office-products

Microsoft's Word is the oldest kid on the block and is still going strong. It's not my first choice (or even second or third) but at a pinch, Word will do the trick.

With a powerful and free tool like Google Docs to hand, Word feels a little clunky and outdated. Office 365 owners get access to the online version of Word, which feels a

As with Google Docs, the web-based version of Word lets you dictate directly to the page in real-time. Tired of typing? Direct dictation via Google's voice recognition software is one way to get your message on "paper". All that's left to do is editing and refining.

Word comes with a "focus mode" feature (in the toolbar at the bottom of the screen) which removes all sidebars and toolbars, takes over your entire screen, and hopefully, removes distractions to help you get down to the business of writing