

Student Assistant

Version 1.1.0

Baggetta_Ware

Windows 98 and Up Program Only

On the secondary level we find that many students, when they are left to the task of producing a piece of writing on their own, are not good writers because they don't pay attention to details and the elements of presenting the language in written form. On the other hand, when a student is paired with a teacher to guide him through the technicalities of writing, he often produces a pretty descent piece of writing. The student really has the knowledge and the skills to write well, but often is a little bit lazy and needs the prodding of a second party to help him through the writing process -- to spur him on to doing a better job.

We know it is not always possible for the student writer to have a teacher at his side, so we often assign a reference or textbook source to help the student write. This is usually not very productive because of the "lazy" factor. Most of the student writers we encounter are more likely to "wing" style rather than look up propriety.

At Baggetta_Ware, we have come up with a middle ground, in our program called *Student Assistant*. The software will not take the place of a good teacher or writing assistant nor will check for every detail known, but it will give an edge to the conscientious student who wants to improve in writing, helping him to demolish a lot of the writing demons that usually make the difference between an ordinary piece of writing and a polished piece of prose.

Student Assistant does the following:

- ❑ It functions as a simple word processor in which the student can type his essay neatly and accurately. We want the student to concentrate on good writing, so we have eliminated a lot of the overhead of the typical word processor. We don't allow any fancy fonts or attributes. The student types in a plain, "vanilla" font -- very readable and unobtrusive.
- ❑ *Student Assistant* checks the student's spelling as he types. We have found that a student will not often go back and check a complete document, but will take notice of a word is underlined in red, after he has typed it. This attention grabbing feature allows the student to immediately check spelling and correct the error on the spot.
- ❑ One of the big bugaboo's of serious writing is the excessive use of cliché. *Student Assistant* has a quick check button that will quickly find typical clichés and colloquialisms and alert the student to fix them before finishing. Hey, if

nothing else this program gives you a chance to introduce your students to the words colloquialism and cliché.

- Another demon that detracts from formal writing is the contraction. Students should be encouraged to eliminate as many of these from their writing as possible (dialog effects being the obvious exception). Another quick check button in the program allows students to swiftly scan their text for contractions they are directed to for repairs.
- The typed composition has brought with it many helpful devices for the writer and the reader, but it has also created new problems for the writer. Two of the most common problems are treated by *Student Assistant*. We call one of these problems the "Period Spaces" problem. It has become standard practice that one should place two spaces after a period at the end of a sentence. Most of the time a reader will not even notice this error, but other times, depending upon the wording, it becomes a glaring error. While this might sound like nitpicking, in reality it is just keeping on task and preventing one problem from adding to another.
- The other common typographical problem is called "Punctuation In Quotes." Every good writer is aware of proper punctuation at the end of a quotation, especially for the common marks. Periods at the ends of sentences go inside the quotation mark. *Student Assistant* checks for trouble spots and alerts the writer, when the quick check button is pressed.
- One final negative is checked in *Student Assistant*, and that is excessive use of passive voice. Quick checks for what can be a problem of over using the passive voice will make student more aware of just what this is. Possible offenses in the text will be flushed out and placed up for examination by the student. In some cases these are okay, but in other case a reconstruction of the sentence might be in order to strengthen the sentence.
- *Student Assistant* is not totally negative in its searches. Students should make judicious use of transitional expressions to smooth the flow of ideas from sentence to sentence and paragraph to paragraph. *Student Assistant* will flag the student if there does not seem to be much use of this technique so that sentence connections can be reassessed.
- A key requirement for some essays is length. Some instructors will demand that the student stay within a barrier of so many words. *Student Assistant* will quickly give a good estimate of how many words exist in the text.
- *Student Assistant* also has a general search facility, so that students can look for specific words, check how often certain words may have been repeated, or to look up some of the problems indicated by the quick search buttons.

We can discuss some other features best by taking a close look at the program itself, so let's run through some of the features as though we were checking a composition written by a student.

OPENING THE PROGRAM

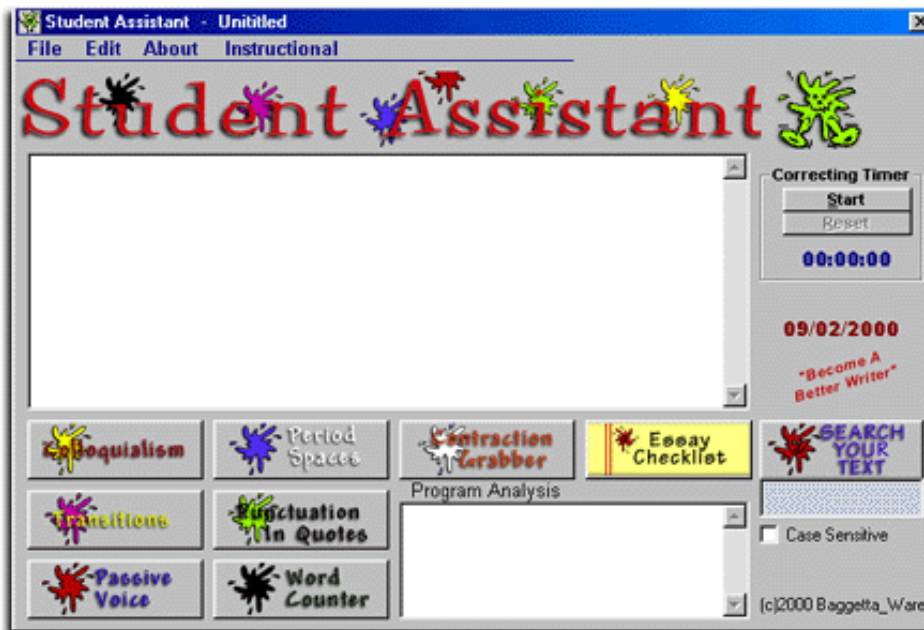
If you purchased *Student Assistant* on a disk or CD Rom, simply place the CD in your drive, double click the My Computer icon, on the Windows desktop, double click the CD icon to open the window and view the files. Double click the *Student Assistant Setup.exe* file and the program will be installed on your C: drive (the hard drive assumed name) in a folder called *Student Assistant*. An icon will be installed on your PC desktop.

If you downloaded the package from the internet, save to a new folder and then unzip with WinZip. Double click the Setup.exe file to install on your computer. You will find an icon on your desktop after you install.

In either case, simply double click the desktop icon to open the program.

USING STUDENT ASSISTANT

The program starts with a splash screen that looks like this illustration. You can click the screen to make it pass by or wait a few seconds and it will disappear on its own, giving way to the main workscreen which looks like the illustration below.



This colorful workscreen is a good eye catcher and it pretty much reveals all of the action of the program that are visible on the surface.

There is a menu bar at the top of the screen, a text

window in the center of the screen, and a series of controls surrounding the window, all of which help the student search for problems in the writing. There is a Correcting Timer at the top right of the screen and a Program Analysis window at the bottom of the screen.

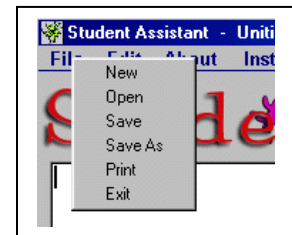
As we indicated earlier, in the outline of the program features, *Student Assistant* has eliminated features of word processing which are frivolous to the actual purpose of writing. The program uses plain text with no features. After the student has used the program to examine his work and is satisfied that it is the best possible work he can achieve, he can then transfer the work to a word processor for "dressing up," if he feels the need to do so.

There are two ways of getting text into the program. The student can use a regular word processor to write his composition and then save it in "text only" format. This can be done by just about any word processor -- even non-Windows machines can do this. The text file can then be opened in *Student Assistant*. Do not try to open specific word processor files (like .doc or .wrk done with Word or Works or Mac files), these will not work properly with the program

The second way of getting a composition into the program for examination is actually better, since it cuts down the porting of your work all over the place. You can simply open the program (as we did above) and start typing the composition in the large text window in the center of the screen. We have all of our students use this program only for writing and checking their work and find this much easier than jumping from one program to another.

OPENING A FILE

Let's start by opening the SAMPLE.TXT file that comes with the program. Slide the mouse up to the word "File" at the top of the screen and click on it with the left mouse button. You should get a drop-down menu that looks like this illustration: There are six features listed. New is used to clear the program memory to start a new file. Open, the option we are looking for, will allow you to open a file to be scanned in *Student Assistant*. Save is a quick way of saving your text file, once you have already saved it. Save As is a first time save, so that you can name the file. Print will print the composition for you, if you want a hard copy. Exit, is the proper way to quit the program. Each of these options will give you a warning dialog, just to make sure you have not clicked on the wrong option.

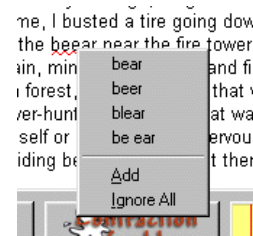


To open the sample file, click on Open and the usual Windows dialog appears. You can navigate to the location of the SAMPLE.TXT file if it is not in the same directory as the program. Highlight the SAMPLE.TXT program and click the OPEN button on the dialog. Your screen should now look something like the illustration here.



If you study the text screen carefully, you will notice that *Student Assistant* is already at work. If you scroll down the window (using the scroll bar at the right side of the window) you will see that some of the words are underlined with a wavy red line. This indicates a possible spelling error. A student seeing this would be immediately alerted that something has to be fixed.

Here's a quick way to fix a spelling error spotted by *Student Assistant*. Point the mouse to the offending word then press down the RIGHT mouse button. This will give you what is called a context menu. At the top of the menu you will see a list of possible correct spellings. To fix the word, simply click on the correct choice with the LEFT mouse button and it will be immediately fixed. In the illustration we found that the word "bear" was obviously misspelled and fixed it this way. Most errors can be repaired this way. Keep in mind that not all of the underlined words are going to be incorrect. The student must make the final judgment, but it will flag any possible errors, saving the student some embarrassment and some headaches later on.



ESSAY CHECKLIST

Once the essay is in the machine, the student should start to methodically examine the work to clean up any obvious errors. To assist in this task and to help the teacher decide if the student has been doing his job, we have incorporated what we call the ESSAY CHECKLIST. This can be brought up by clicking the Essay Checklist button. It's the yellow button among the controls. This handy check list can be used by the student to keep on task. It can also be used as a check by teachers to see that the student has examined each of the listed points. As a student completes a task in the program, he should check it here. Some of the checkboxes concern the operation of the controls, others are concepts the student should try to observe in his reading of the work. Notice that some of the boxes are already checked here for the sample. This information is stored from session to session and is preserved so that a teacher can also check to see what the student claims to have done. The student should type his name at the bottom, and some teachers will ask the student to give an honest opinion of what they think their essay is worth. Notice that there is a TIME button in the lower corner of the yellow pad. If you click on

Student Assistant -- Checklist	
Student Assistant Checklist	
<i>To assure that you have a top-notch essay, start at the top of this list and perform each of the given functions. Check each one as you complete it.</i>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Write Your Essay or Open An Essay First
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Read the Essay Thoughtfully
<input type="checkbox"/>	Use Control To Check for Colloquialisms
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Check for Enough Transitional Phrases
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check for Excessive Use of Passive Voice
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Two Spaces At End of Sentences
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Punctuation Inside of Quotes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check for Correct Number of Words
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check to Eliminate Contractions
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check Spelling and Grammatical Errors
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check for Sentences Stating the Main Idea
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are Sentences Varied In Length and Type?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are Ideas Given Logically or Chronologically?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do All Sentences Have A Complete Thought?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the essay written neatly?
Enter your honest % grade for this essay <input type="text"/> %	
Enter Writer's Name <input type="text"/>	<input type="button" value="Time"/>

this button with the left mouse button, the screen expands to reveal how much time the student spent correcting the essay, using *Student Assistant*.

If you are going to use *Student Assistant* in a classroom or lab setting, we would advise you to establish some hard and fast rules as to how you want students to work, beforehand. You might want them to actually write all of the essays using the program. You might want them to work in pairs, especially if you are incorporating cooperative learning techniques. You might want each student to check another student's work. There are many ways in which the program can be quite beneficial to student and teacher, so plan this out ahead of time. The yellow pad helps students to become more organized and might be a protocol you want to establish from the start.

Let's close this yellow pad and go back to the main program. Click the close button in the upper right corner.

TIMER

If the teacher is going to allot a student time to work on the essay, they should expect that the student will spend a good amount of time doing just that. To help the student and teacher keep track of the time, we have included a stop watch in the program. Students should click the start button at the beginning of a session. At the end of the session, or when the essay has been thoroughly examined, they should press the button again to stop the timer. This information will be saved along with all the other information on the yellow pad check list.

CONTROLS

The quick controls are easy to use once an essay has been typed or opened. The introductory outline to this documentation pretty much covers what effect each button will have. Try the controls on the sample essay we have provided. Keep in mind that it is a mine field of errors, especially set for test purposes. Hopefully your kids will not have such error infested writing.

PROGRAM ANALYSIS

The Program Analysis window, in the lower right section of the screen, indicates the findings of some of the controls. If there are contractions found, for example, it will list the contractions that are noticed. We purposely did not have the program stop at each error because this would slow the work process down, and we also feel that the students should have to work to find the errors -- this will help to imbed them in their minds. We have given them some assistance, however, by including a SEARCH YOUR TEXT option. If the student wants to find one of the contractions in his essay, for example, he simply types it in the little blue window and clicks the button. He can even make his search case

sensitive by checking the box underneath the window. The program will take him to it immediately where he can examine the sentence for repairs, if needed.

EDIT FEATURES

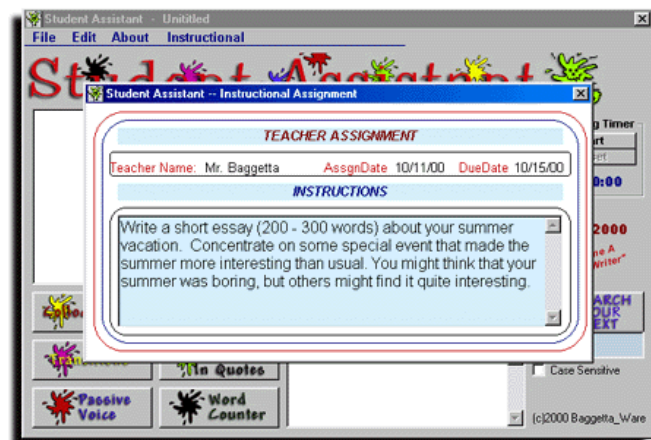
As with any good word processor, *Student Assistant* contains editing controls so that students can COPY, CUT, DELETE, and PASTE text. This is located on the menu bar and can be used any time the student wants to make some fast changes or moves in his essay. Of course, you can also use the trick of highlighting your text and the RIGHT CLICKING to bring up the editing context menu. The whole text can even be copied and pasted into another program, like a word processor, for example, if you want to finish the work in a fancier format.

SAVE

Naturally, after all fixes have been made, the student will want to use SAVE or SAVE AS from the Files menu to save his work. It might be a good idea if the work is saved under different names, to keep the original for comparison.

TEACHER ASSIGNMENT

Finally, you will notice that there is an option on the menu bar labeled Instructional. Teachers can imbed specific writing assignments for students to perform with *Student Assistant*. Teachers can make these and save them to the same directory in which the main program resides (if you install the program to the C:\PROGRAM FILES directory you would save your assignment there too).



The assignment is simple text file that can be created with a text editor or word processor like Microsoft Notepad (on the Accessories menu). The format is as follows:

TEACHER'S NAME
ASSIGNMENT START DATE
ASSIGNMENT FINISH DATE
ASSIGNMENT INSTRUCTIONS

Here's the sample included with the program:

Mr. Baggetta
10/11/00
10/15/00

Write a short essay (200 - 300 words) about your summer vacation. Concentrate on some special event that made the summer more interesting than usual. You might think that your summer was boring, but others might find it quite interesting.

This file is always called TA.TXT and is saved under this name and recognized by the program at start. Each time you save an assignment under this name the previous is erased -- so be warned. You can save your assignments in a separate folder if you like and then copy them to the working directory. If you want to quickly make this assignment sheet, simply double click the TA.TXT file and it will be placed in the Notepad for editing. When you are done making changes, save it back by clicking on SAVE in Notepad. The new assignment will replace the old.

When you have finished using *Student Assistant* simply click on the Files menu to Exit the program. You will be warned to save first, so make sure your students are aware of this. Closing the program without saving will mean that all changes will be lost.

CONCLUSION

We realize at Baggetta_Ware that teaching writing is a very difficult task. It is tedious and time consuming for teachers and hard work for students who are really sincere about improving their writing. It is only by building good work habits that students will become good writers, and we feel that *Student Assistant* is just one more help to the harried teacher and student. It doesn't cover all problems that could come up, but it does cover some of the most common ones and if students use it wisely it will help them become better and more conscious writers.

Caveat

No guarantees are expressed or implied with this program. It should work as described; however, some unpredictable results could occur depending on the computer systems used. We have tested the program on several systems with no problems resulting. If you should encounter a bug in the program, please let us know so that we can fix it. Report all bugs to baggetta@baggetta.com. Also, if you have any new ideas that you think will improve the program, please let us know. If we use the idea in an upgrade we will credit you and reimburse you as an Affiliate Writer (see our website for details).

Thank you for purchasing *Student Assistant*.

Baggetta_Ware
www.baggetta.com