

Legal Services National Technology Assistance Project



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The Best Free and Low Cost Writing Software in 2019

If you do a lot of writing at work you might consider moving beyond Microsoft Word for your writing projects. People just using Microsoft Word for their writing will find that the program is good at finding obvious spelling errors, and not much else. Here at LSNTAP we have put together a handy list of software that will be helpful for writing and editing.

Google Docs

www.docs.google.com

Price: Free!

Google Drive is Google's attempt to compete with Microsoft Office and in my opinion, an objectively better set of tools. Drive does pretty much everything you are used to with classic Office programs, except your files are stored online and saved automatically to the cloud. Google Docs is a text editor (similar to Microsoft Word) that will inform you of spelling issues, neither Word nor Google Docs will diagnose or suggest alternatives to grammatical or formatting problems. With Google Docs you can talk instead of type, which is a great solution to put all your thoughts down easily. It also makes taking notes a snap! With Google Drive you can collaborate with other users, and you can each contribute to a document, the feature even goes so far as to let team members leave notes separate from the document text. You can clear all your formatting options (which is a nice change of pace from Word where it is easy to accidentally make formatting changes and sometimes difficult to undo them. Another helpful feature is that if you are offline you can still edit your documents, and the documents will save when you connect to the internet, neat!

WriteClearly

www.writeclearly.com

Price: Free!

The average reading level of adult Americans is at the 8th-grade level. Experts recommend that to be readable by the average American, a web page should be at the 6th-grade reading level. Use WriteClearly to easily test the reading grade level of a web page with a single click. WriteClearly can either be a button on your bookmark bar or an add-on for Google Docs. WriteClearly was developed using a TIG grant funded by LSC. The idea behind the program is that the software should suggest ways to re-write sentences so as to be readable and easier to digest. WriteClearly does a good job of finding overly complicated single words and offering replacements. WriteClearly will not alert you to typos or grammatical errors and is not a substitute or replacement for more involved types of editing software. Overall WriteClearly is a useful tool for the specific purpose of using less complicated language but is not without its quirks.

ProWritingAid

www.prowritingaid.com

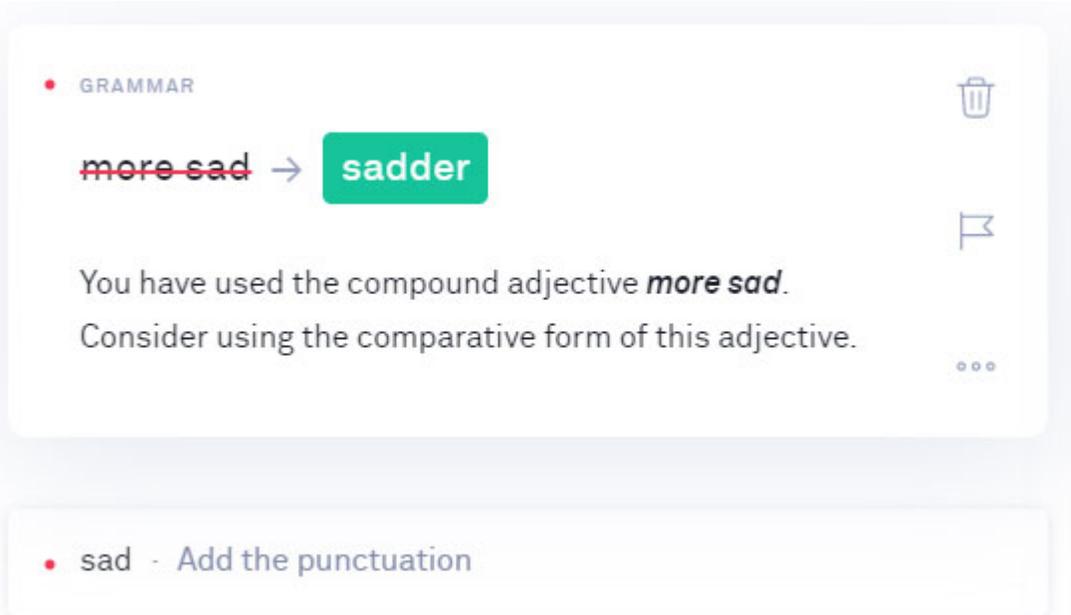
Price: Free for Basic Version or \$60 a year for the Premium version that allows you to check an unlimited amount of text and includes a desktop offline application.

Unlike Google Docs and Microsoft Word, ProWritingAid attempts to give its users alternatives to improperly formatted sentences by offering alternatives. In practice, this seems to be a bit hit or miss. When I changed "sadder" in a sentence to "more sad" it noticed that and offered a solution. Later in my testing ProWritingAid failed to notice when I intentionally added unnecessary semicolons to my work. Given this is free software I would say this a definite step up from just using Google Docs by itself, however...

Grammarly

www.grammarly.com

Price: Basic Version is free, but the Premium version will critique your tone, writing style, wordiness, unclear sentence structure and more.



To improve

the quality of your writing and spot and diagnose grammar issues, there really is no competition for Grammarly. You can open a document within Grammarly's editor system, or simply hit the Grammarly icon in your Chrome extensions area to activate the program. Once activated a window will open on the right with a rundown of errors or issues that the program found in your writing. Grammarly is the only software I have found so far that will reliably notice and offer alternatives to both spelling and grammatical errors. The way the program offers suggestions is similar to ProWritingAid, but where it differs is in the quality of the actual results it finds. If you compare the two programs back to back (Grammarly vs ProWritingAid) the differences are immediate and obvious. Not only are the specific suggestions offered by Grammarly better than the suggestions offered by ProWritingAid, but the program is more reliable in noticing problems in the first place.

The basic version of Grammarly is free but paying for the premium version (\$30 a month) gives you access to more involved suggestions such as punctuation in compound / complex sentences, issues with passive voices, suggestions on improving weak or uncertain language and more.

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