

Part II: AlphaSmart 3000: An essential part of the AT toolkit

By **Brian S. Friedlander**

When the AlphaSmart 3000 was first introduced, there was a great deal of excitement owing to the new "applet" feature. For the first time ever, it was possible to load small applications to the AlphaSmart 3000 to change its functionality and capabilities. While having a convenient calculator applet included with the AlphaSmart 3000 was a start, many of us were waiting for truly innovative smart applets to be published. One of the first really exciting smart applets to be released just a short while ago was the Co:Writer SmartApplet from Don Johnston, Inc. When I first heard about the idea of bringing word prediction to the AlphaSmart 3000, I was just a little skeptical considering the processing demands for such a task. Having used the Co:Writer SmartApplet for the past six months on the AlphaSmart 3000, I have to tell you that my hat goes off to the programmers who have delivered a very fine and well thought out program.

Once you have downloaded the Co:Writer SmartApplet to your AlphaSmart 3000, it shows up the on list of applications after you press the Applet key. To load the applet, press the Applet key on your AlphaSmart 3000. You should now see a list of the applets that are installed. Select the Co:Writer Smart Applet with the up and down arrow keys and press the Enter key. In order to use the Co:Writer SmartApplet you must first make sure that you have Alphaword 1.4 loaded on your AlphaSmart 3000.

If you need to update your copy of Alphaword, go to the AlphaSmart Web site and download the latest version.

Co:Writer Screen

As soon as you start typing on your AlphaSmart 3000, Co:Writer will begin to start predicting a series of words as seen in the screen above. The user has the option of having Co:Writer display from one to six predicted words. Pressing the Home key on the AlphaSmart 3000 when Co:Writer has been turned on can set this feature. To select a word from the predicted list all you need to do is type the number. In the example above, if I wanted to enter the word "am," I would press the number 2 on the keyboard and Co:Writer would enter the word for me. As you type, Co:Writer is there to provide you with the spelling support that your students may need. If you like, you can also turn on the Grammar support by pressing the Home key while Co:Writer is loaded and press the 5 key to turn Grammar Support on or off.

One of the features that have turned out to be really handy is that of Collected Words. With Co:Writer loaded, press the Home key to go to the Co:Writer Options screen and press the 2 key to go to Collected Words. Users of Co:Writer 4000 will be familiar with the concept of collected words and it is a very powerful feature. In essence, when Collected Words is turned on, Co:Writer will record and save any words, that are not part of the built-in standard dictionary. Once

Co:Writer has saved the collected words it will use them to base its predictions. This is very helpful for students who may be writing on a subject and are going to be using a specialized vocabulary. Imagine a student writing about a novel they just read and having to retype the character's name over and over. However, if they are using Co:Writer and have turned on Collected Words, all they would have to do is type the name of the character one time before Co:Writer would start predicting it. Here is a tip, if your students are going to be using Co:Write,r you can go directly to the Collected Word file and type a short list of the specialized words right into the file which will improve the prediction of the words that your students will be using in their writing. It is an ideal place to store the names of characters and technical words to help improve the prediction rate. It is a good idea to have the student review the Collected Word list every now and then to make sure that the words are spelled correctly. Some regular housekeeping and cleaning will keep the list in good shape and help improve the prediction rate.

One of the advanced features which found its way into the Co:Writer Smart Applet is the Topic Dictionary feature. This feature was first introduced to us in the Co:Writer 4000 application, which is available for desktop computers for both the Macintosh and Windows platform. Essentially, a Topic Dictionary is a specialized list of words that might pertain to a spe-

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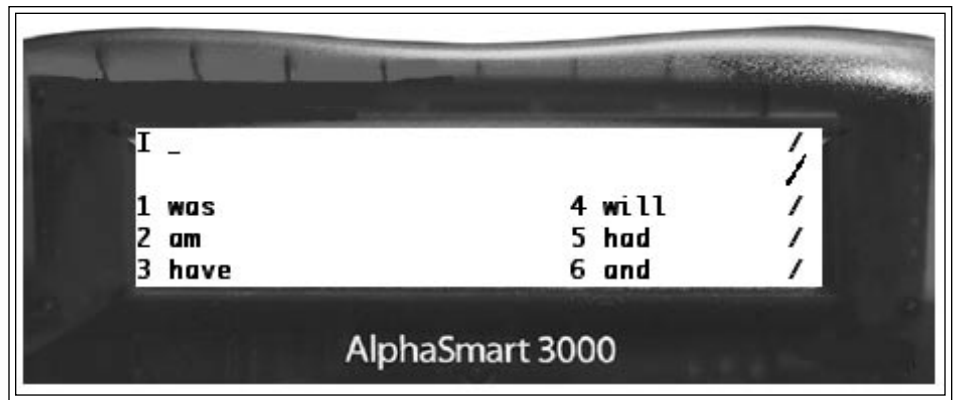
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cial topic. For example, you may have a topic dictionary for Halloween, which has a list of words that are specific to that occasion. The Co:Writer SmartApplet ships with a dozen or so Topic Dictionaries and others can be downloaded from the Don Johnston, Inc., Web site.

Additionally, Co:Writer 4000 has a feature that allows users to create their own Topic Dictionaries. This is a very powerful feature that, when used in conjunction with the standard dictionary, can really increase the prediction rate. You may be saying to yourself at this point, what does this have to do with the Co:Writer SmartApplet? Actually, it has a lot to do with it. It is now possible to create your own Topic Dictionary using Co:Writer 4000 on a computer and then download the topic dictionary to the AlphaSmart to be used with the Co:Writer SmartApplet. The Co:Writer SmartApplet ships with a small utility called the Topic Dictionary Loader which, when launched from your computer, can send Topic Dictionaries from your computer to your AlphaSmart. The Co:Writer SmartApplet can store a maximum of five Topic Dictionaries on the AlphaSmart 3000, and allows the user to have one active in memory at any time. Once you have downloaded the Topic Dictionaries to the AlphaSmart 3000 you can activate them by pressing the File 8 key. This brings up the Select Topics menu listing the Topic Dictionaries that are available. Press the number of the Topic Dictionary you want to activate and you are done. This is a very powerful feature and one that can improve the writing experience for students who need the spelling support.

The AlphaSmart is very unique and flexible tool that can be individualized to meet the needs of a wide variety of students with special needs. By getting acquainted with the feature set, it is really possible to fine tune the features so that more students can benefit from this very powerful writing tool. With the advent of the AlphaSmart 3000 and the open architecture, educators can now look to innovative smart applets that are being published to increase the functionality and utility of this portable note taker. The Co:Writer SmartApplet adds much in the way of writing support for students that are looking for a portable solution with word prediction and makes great strides in bringing a feature rich applet to this platform.



Alphasmart 3000

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Products

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