

1 What is word processing?

The easiest way to describe word processing is to contrast it with normal typing. Think about what happens when you type a document.

First you type it in rough so that it can be edited. You edit it, changing words, swapping paragraphs around, changing paragraph lengths, adding headings, redrafting some of it and putting other sections in tabular form.

After that you type it all again. You check it, correct it, retype parts in a narrower column with side headings, perhaps retype whole pages where there are too many corrections.

After all that, you have your 'top' copy. If you want other copies, you have to photocopy, use carbons, or type it all again.

All this may seem quite normal - until you try word processing.

With a word processor, you type the text in as before, with the difference that the text appears on a monitor or television screens instead of on paper. The continual rapping and buzzing of conventional typewriters is replaced by the soft rattle of keys, and when you make a mistake, instead of going to a great deal of trouble to make a fairly adequate correction, you have only to replace one character image on the screen with another and the job is done, quickly and perfectly.

You record your rough draft on a magnetic disc or on tape, and you can cause the printer to type out copies on paper for checking.

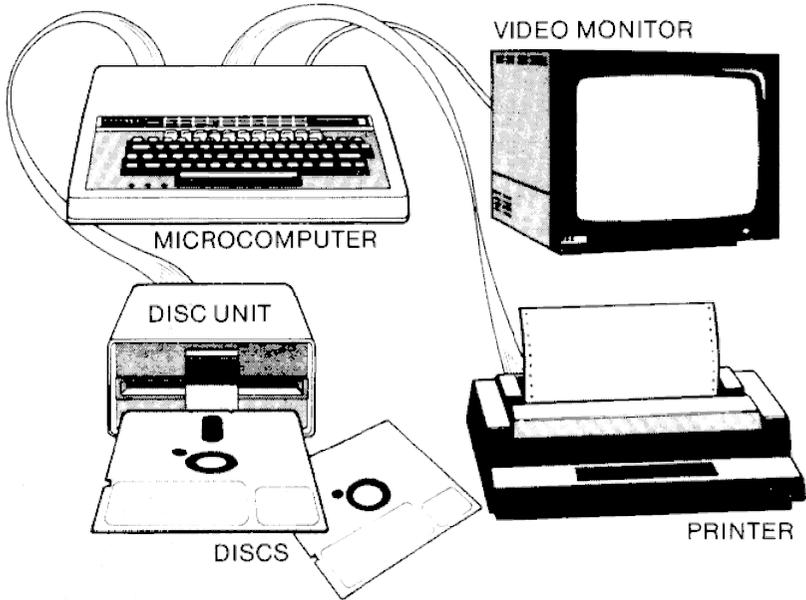
You edit the draft. When you come to 'retype' it you may find that large chunks of it are correct. With word processing there is no need ever to type these again, since they are recorded for you to use as many times as you like, in this or any other document.

You make your corrections on the screen, very easily. You insert and delete lines, move blocks of text around, and restructure the TABs even though the text is already typed! If you want to see what the text blocks like in a narrower column, you can try it out in a matter of seconds.

Then you print it out again, perhaps with three 'top' copies - since it is all recorded, this is just as easy as putting another piece of paper into the machine.

And if you want to send another, almost identical copy to firm XYZ Ltd instead of ABC Ltd, with changed names throughout, there are some very cunning and very easy ways of doing that too.

The item that makes all the difference in a word processor is the microcomputer that controls it all. A typical word processor layout is like this:



All the processing is done in the microcomputer and the results are displayed on the monitor, before being recorded for future use on discs, and printed out.