

W I G H T

S C I E N T I F I C

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ALL ABOUT SIGNWRITER

Thank you for your enquiry. SIGNWRITER is an evolving family of programs, with a master version for IBM PC-compatibles, and versions for Amstrad PCW and 6128, Apricot, Nimbus, and BBC computers. Here is what it can do in midsummer 1987.

SIGNWRITER'S USES

SIGNWRITER uses ordinary printers to print large characters of near-typesetting quality, but more quickly and cheaply. Some examples are scattered around these pages.

Showing information neatly at a distance

- special-offer notices, price tickets, etc. in shops
- signs at exhibitions
- travel announcements
- labels on packages
- theatrical posters
- banners
- hazard warnings in laboratories
- community notice boards
- political posters
- overhead transparencies, etc.

For graphic design

- of company logos, letterheads
- marking positions of dry-transfer lettering accurately
- preparing rough-drafts of advertisements, highway signs, etc

As an entry into desk-top publishing

- printing foreign alphabets, special symbols, etc
- low-budget newsletters, as for voluntary organizations

Specialized uses

- video titling; T-shirt slogans
- displaying results from other computer programs
- camera-ready artwork for reduction (e.g., for business cards)
- driving various cutting tools

THE PROGRAMS IN SIGNWRITER

- 1) a typographical word-processor for inputting signs (SIGNIN)
 - 2) a character-printer for putting dots on paper (SIGNOUT)
 - 3) a CAD program for creating and editing characters (DESIGN)
 - 4) some number-crunching to prepare fonts for printing (FONTCALC)
- plus font data and instructions, all in one innovative, affordable package.

WHAT MAKES SIGNWRITER UNIQUE

SIGNWRITER stores the outlines of its characters as a series of lines and curves. While printing, it calculates each character's outline to the nearest dot that a particular printer can put on paper and prints every dot within that outline. That is why its letters are always crisp, dark, and smooth. They can be any size, not just a few fixed sizes: and **THE BIGGER THE BETTER.**

"Characters" can be much more complex than mere letters or numbers.

SIGNWRITER is easy to use at a simple level. If you have a common type of equipment (Epson-type dot-matrix printer) your first sign can be printing out in minutes. But SIGNWRITER is also flexible, with reserves of power for the ambitious artist or programmer.

SIGNWRITER

instant display lettering
by computer

WHAT EACH PROGRAM DOES

SIGNIN treats a sign like a piece of text, not minding whether the component characters are letters or logos, numbers or pictures, punctuation or borders. First it asks you to define the overall shape and layout of a sign. Then it switches into a simple word-processing program for the main data entry.

SIGNIN takes care of typographical details (proportional spacing, justification or centering, etc), but does not display the whole sign on the screen as it will appear on the paper. This means that:

(a) the quality of the ultimate output on paper is not compromised to fit the limited size and resolution of video displays; and
(b) SIGNIN runs on standard text display screens, and does not require you to have a particular type of hardware in your computer.

The latest PC version of SIGNIN makes it easy to read in a text file or revise a previously printed sign. Specialist users can bypass SIGNIN altogether and write their own input programs.

SIGNOUT prints the sign by putting dots on paper. This takes several minutes for a typical sign -- though you can get a speedy low-resolution or reduced-size printout to see what it will look like. SIGNOUT can print across or down the paper, up to the full width of your printer's carriage, and can produce mirror images, white on black, frames, etc.

DESIGN lets you examine and modify individual characters on the screen, or create new ones. You could produce a foreign alphabet or your business logo and then be able to print them any size for evermore. DESIGN has facilities normally found only in expensive computer-aided-design packages, e.g. rotating, scaling, mirror imaging, and merging characters. SIGNWRITER's way of storing character outlines is fully explained. Ultimately you have full artistic control over what you print.

QUALITY

SIGNWRITER is "instant" by comparison with a trip to a typesetter or buying and sticking down dry-transfer lettering. A simple one-line banner saying "This way to the Exhibition" might literally take you only 2 minutes to input. It still takes practice to make an elaborate sign look professional, and composing a complex multi-line advertisement full of unusual symbols might take hours of struggle, looking at proofs and making fine adjustments. Learning to use DESIGN effectively takes practice, too.

SIGNWRITER's output is remarkably good. Most Epson printers put 120 dots to the inch across the page and 216 to the inch down; some relatively cheap printers do even better. (In comparison, laser printers typically put 300 dots to the inch, and typesetting is equivalent to around a thousand). By printing artwork large and then reducing it with a photocopier or camera, you can render the dots invisible, so that the only imperfections are in the quality of the font and the layout (which are ultimately under your control).

COMPETITORS

Other "presentation graphics" packages are generally complementary to SIGNWRITER rather than directly competing, and fall into three broad groups. First, there are near-letter-quality printing programs that store their characters as dots on a fixed matrix, e.g. Fancy Font and its many successors (Lettrix, Polyprint, etc). Second, there are programs that produce an on-screen display like a Macintosh (Gem, Windows, Newsroom, Clickart, etc.). Third, there are desk-top-publishing packages and highly evolved word-processing programs. Some programs outperform SIGNWRITER in sophistication of on-screen display, or quality of small printing, or speed of printing, or range of artwork available off the shelf. But we know of no modestly priced package that beats SIGNWRITER's quality of large characters on paper.

SUPPORT

Wight Scientific has an excellent record of support to its program users worldwide. SIGNWRITER has developed continually since its launch in April 1986, and that development is continuing. Early buyers do not lose out, but can claim upgrades as the program improves. (We also heed suggestions.) The price includes one free upgrade; subsequent upgrades cost £5 each.

IBM PC version: The master version of SIGNWRITER runs on PC compatibles with DOS version 2 or later and at least 128K of memory. One sign can have up to 100 lines, each with up to 64 characters. Sign inputting and outputting works with any display adapter, but on-screen DESIGNing of characters needs a graphics display. The standard version runs with a Color/Graphics Adapter or equivalent, as found in many "clones". Hercules monochrome graphics boards need a distinct version of DESIGN; if you have a Hercules, please mention it when ordering. A free demonstration disk is available for PCs, but for no other machines yet.

Apricot version: essentially the same as the early-1987 IBM PC version.

On-screen design needs a recent BIOS (found in most Apricots and easy to obtain if you do not have it). Normal disks are double-sided; single-sided on request. Our experience of Apricot-owner customers has been mixed. Some are delighted with SIGNWRITER. Others get stuck on paragraph 2 of the instructions, where we try to explain how many different varieties of Apricot there are!

Nimbus version: being worked on now with completion expected at the end of July 1987. Price and features same as IBM PC.

Amstrad PCW version: This very popular version has essentially the same features as its 16-bit parent, but runs about half as fast, needs more disk-shuffling, has less sign capacity, is specific for the Amstrad printer, has a cruder instruction manual, and lags 1-3 months behind in incorporation of new features. Its printer appears to be one of the better Epson-compatibles, and gives quality just like you see here. (SIGNWRITER is of course a CP/M program and has nothing to do with Locoscript.)

Amstrad 6128 version: is just an adaptation of the PCW version, running slower and with less capacity. It drives only Epson-compatible dot-matrix printers.

BBC version: A 128K quart crammed into a 32K pint pot! Almost all the features of the PC version are there, but the BBC version requires more disk-shuffling, cannot manage such complex signs, has limited capacity for on-screen design, has limited abilities to revise a sign, and prints out quite slowly: a full A4 page that would be a cup-of-tea job on a 16-bit PC is a go-away-and-have-supper job on the BBC! On the other hand, BBC SIGNIN has a full-screen editor, and pop-down menus. It runs on all configurations of disk drives (specify when ordering: 40 or 80 track, number of drives and of sides) and does not use up your precious ROM slots. It works only with Epson-type printers. It works on all variants of the BBC so far tested, and Electrons with a suitable disk drive, but it objects to some bugged DFSs and misbehaving ROMs. Master Compact soon.

Printers: SIGNWRITER comes ready to work with any Epson-type (i.e. IBM Graphics Printer compatible) 8-pin dot-matrix printer. By changing a configuration file you you can make the 16-bit versions drive most common printers; instructions are currently provided for many Epson-almost-compatibles, 24-pin Epsoms, some Okis, Toshiba 24-pin, Printronics MVP, HP Laserjets, and a few others. The range supported is being widened all the time. First-generation laser printers with limited memory can print only a tiny area (three postage stamps) in high resolution; a full A4 page needs a Laserjet Plus compatible. Our favourite printer is the NEC P660, a 24-pin dot-matrix that emulates the 180 x 180 dots per square inch Epson LQ, but also has a slow exquisite-quality 360 x 360 mode.

Foreign-language versions in French, German, Spanish, and Dutch, in various stages of development, are available for the PC compatibles.

Optional extras (Prices liable to change)

A program to drive plotters, especially those that use Hewlett-Packard Graphics Language, from PC-compatibles -- £20. A plotter is now available for cutting out SIGNWRITER characters from metal sheets, etc -- prices start at £2 thousand. Applications notes and an extra program for price ticketing -- £20.

Wight Scientific can put you in touch with suppliers of various materials to help you get the best out of SIGNWRITER: coloured ribbons for many printers, coloured paper and large labels, ribbons for printing on polyester T-shirts, chemical kits for transferring images to metal, etc.

How to order SIGNWRITER:

Available direct from Wight Scientific or from your dealer. Our prices:

IBM PC-compatible or Apricot	£80 + VAT
Amstrad PCW8256/8512	£49.95 including VAT
BBC or Amstrad 6128	£29.95 including VAT

These prices include delivery by post. Dealer enquiries welcome.

Wight Scientific, 44 Roan Street, London SE10 9JT (01) 858 2699

Free demo disk for IBM PC (CGA display) + Epson-compatible printers.

This little sign shows how signs can go sideways and also how the characters stay legible, though less pretty, even when very tiny.

**WHITE
ON
BLACK**

**IF
YOU
CAN
KEEP
YOUR HEAD
WHEN ALL AROUND
ARE LOSING THEIRS,
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON. MY FRIEND.**

!ooT zəpəmI ɾorɾIM

Fonts: SIGNWRITER comes with one all-purpose, medium-weight, sans-serif, upright font. It contains most of the letters, numbers, punctuation, symbols, and foreign letters in the IBM PC's "extended ASCII" character set, so you can print most European languages and technical texts. Here is a sample printout:

**AaBbCcDdEeFf
GgHhIiJjKkLlMm
NnOoPpQqRrSs
TtUuVvWwXxYy
Zz0123456789:;
£\$+=?!{|}%&@#<>
♣☀▶ǰüéÑ¥πσ√**

A growing catalogue of alternative fonts is available, for £5 (+VAT) each, plus the cost of a disk to hold it if necessary: £1 (+VAT) for 3.5-inch, £2.50 (+VAT) for 3-inch. Each font has a distinctive four-letters+"FONT" name; please specify it carefully when ordering. Complex fonts take up lots of disk space and memory, so the number of different characters you can access at one time depends on your computer. Different fonts have different areas of application and print out at different speeds, but remember that in general SIGNWRITER is best on chunky, ... with this lines should not be printed too small

This sheet shows the range of SIGNWRITER extra fonts in July 1987. These fonts are ready for immediate despatch in all disk formats: ROME, HAND, DAWN, OLDE, ZOO, SHOP, FAIR, STEP, OCTO, and ELE. These fonts are almost ready (but not all illustrated here): HOLE, BOLD, HBRW, ARAB, DECO, MOON, ICON, and FELT. In general, the fonts constructed most economically out of straight lines and few curves are fastest to print out and easiest to fit into the low-capacity computers. The chunkiest fonts are best for printing small, while those containing thin lines are best used only on quite large characters. Most fonts contain a few exotic, non-letter-type characters, too. This sheet has been photoreduced to about 70% from a montage of originals produced on various low-cost dot-matrix printers.

STOP PRESS
ICONFONT



SHOPFONT £5.00
(recommended for price ticketing)
is similar to
Futura Extra Bold Condensed
(Copyright Neufville SA, Barcelona, Spain)

COMING SOON
DECOFONT

This is ZOOFONT:

☛ Gadzooks !!
'tis Oldefont ☛



Hath the scribe gone mad ? ???

Build your empire with
ROMEFONT

 Mechanics do it with OCTOFONT 

 Engineers do it
with STEPFONT 

GOOD MORNING
from
DAWNFONT

Memento homo quia pulvis es.

Et in pulverem reverteris.

This is FAIRFONT

Fill in the details with
HOLEFONT

ELEFONT
Bold, clear and distinctive.

Wight Scientific
requests the pleasure of your company
as a purchaser of:
HANDFONT