

The Best Writing Apps | 2021 Update

If you're aspiring to be a writer or already one, you may have experienced a situation where you struggle writing a screenplay or a book without the benefit of a full circle word processor (like Google Docs).

The software in the market caters to the general public, looking at basics like grammar or spell checking. Unless of course, you're got a serious amount of cash lying around to pay someone to create something just for you.

We were curious enough that we spent quality time with some of the writing apps currently in the market and this is our review. Mind you, there's not many we'd recommend but here are four strong contenders and a few honorable mentions.

1. LivingWriter (\$9.99/month)

This is a new app in the market. It has taken lessons learnt from other apps and amalgamated the best features of other writing apps with a dash of current technology. For example, ability to do live edit and share stories with friends/editors and doing everything on cloud, rather than the usual desktop.

One flaw we've seen here is that it does not cover screenwriting, but it works really well for books, blogs, professional or school work.

Features

- Splits chapters, subchapters, and story elements with a sidebar.
- Provides drag and drop function to reorganize chapters or subchapters.
- Easy access, organization, and detailing of all story elements (characters, themes, locations, etc).
- Allows detailing of story elements (e.g. photos, description, notes, and history).
- Recognizes story elements via a Smart Text Feature that can auto-suggests them as you type and creates hyperlinks to pull up all your notes and descriptions of the story element.
- Provides right sidebar to view and edit notes and descriptions.

- Sidebar is collapsible for a full-screen view.
- Provides “virtual corkboard” for quick view of scenes and chapters.
- Pre loaded template of time tested novel writing outlines such as (Three Act Structure, 27 Beat Chapter Plotting, Dan Harmon’s Story Circle, etc) with easy guidance on how to fill them in with your ideas.
- Shares the whole story or separate chapters.
- Enables live collaboration with anyone you share your story with.
- Auto save every keystroke to the cloud with exponential storage and backup.
- Revision history saved every few 10 minutes.
- Standard renaming of each revision history.
- Able to import Docx and Doc files.
- Export to Amazon manuscript templates, PDF, docx.

The screenshot displays the Living Writer software interface. At the top, there is a menu bar with options: Story, Outline, Edit, Insert, Format, Help, Export. Below the menu is a toolbar with various editing tools. The main workspace shows a document titled "The Death of Lucas Alder" with 1776 words. The text in the document is as follows:

The Death of Lucas Alder

The cell doors slammed open and I startled awake. A stupid, unwarranted glimmer of hope sparked in my mind as I rubbed sleep out of my eyes.

"Come on L the familiar voice of Barnett, one of the prison guards, swirled in my ears.

I felt his rough, but careful hand grab me by my arm and yank me off the dirty pile of sheets that I'd been using as a bed for nine months. My legs had grown weak in my stasis and they wobbled indignantly. I stumbled out of my cell like a calf fresh out of the womb.

"What happened?" I asked, my throat was dry and my voice croaked. "Am I getting out of here? Did the bastard have a change of heart?"

Barnett walked a step ahead of me, dragging me along the darkened hallway. It was eerily lit by only a single torch and moonlight streaming through the slits they called windows.

"You know that's highly unlikely," Barnett said, monotonously. He stared ahead, pointedly not looking me in the face.

"I had to ask. What's going on then?"

Barnett opened a door to my left. I'd never seen it before or seen anyone

The interface also features a sidebar on the left with "Chapters" and "Story Elements". The "Chapters" section shows "Act 1 - Exposition" and "The Death of Lucas Alder". The "Story Elements" section lists "Kane" (Character), "Lucas" (Character), and "Dercas" (Setting). On the right, a "Story Element" panel for "Kane" shows a description: "The body Lucas has been zapped into. Lucas begins to slowly unravel Kane's life." and a history note: "Kane is a hardcore criminal in his world. One of the most wanted men and a notorious killer. Even most of the people he works with wants him dead."

[Click here to try Living Writer](#)

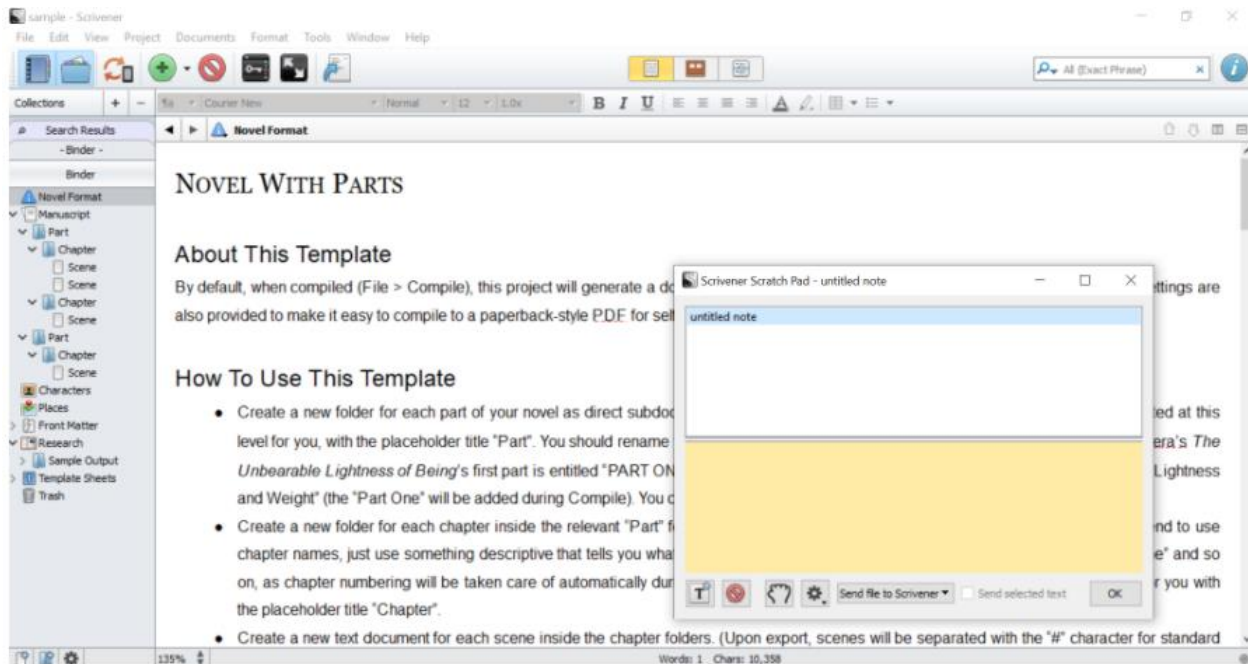
2. Scrivener (\$49.00; Free 30 days trial)

Scrivener has a good set of features that's useful to users. Reason for the drop in ranking was its user interface. We've found that it is quite confusing to use, requiring users to view the YouTube videos for instruction. The attached tutorial is not much help because of its length and reads like a book.

Other than its GUI and unlike Living Writer, Scrivener works off a desktop and syncing is only available via independent storage devices. As it isn't on Cloud, users won't be able to co-author or edit separately.

Features

- Separates scenes and chapters.
- Provides "virtual corkboard" to view scenes and chapters that can be used to rearrange on a timeline as well.
- Has an outline that shows chapters separate from subchapters.
- Provides drag and drop function to reorganize chapters or subchapters.
- Provides scriptwriting formatting.
- Able to view documents, side by side.
- Allows full-screen writing mode.
- Sets word or character targets.
- Auto saves into your individual program.
- Create your own templates, MLA, and APA, novel, a novel with parts, screenplay, documentary script, BBC taped drama.
- Import from Word and OpenOffice documents, plain text files, Final Draft scripts, images, PDF documents, movies, sound files and web pages.
- Export to Microsoft Word, RTF, PDR, OpenOffice, Epub, or Final Draft format.
- Option to purchase a mobile version.



[Click here to try Scrivener](#)

3. Final Draft (\$250.00; Free 30 days trial)

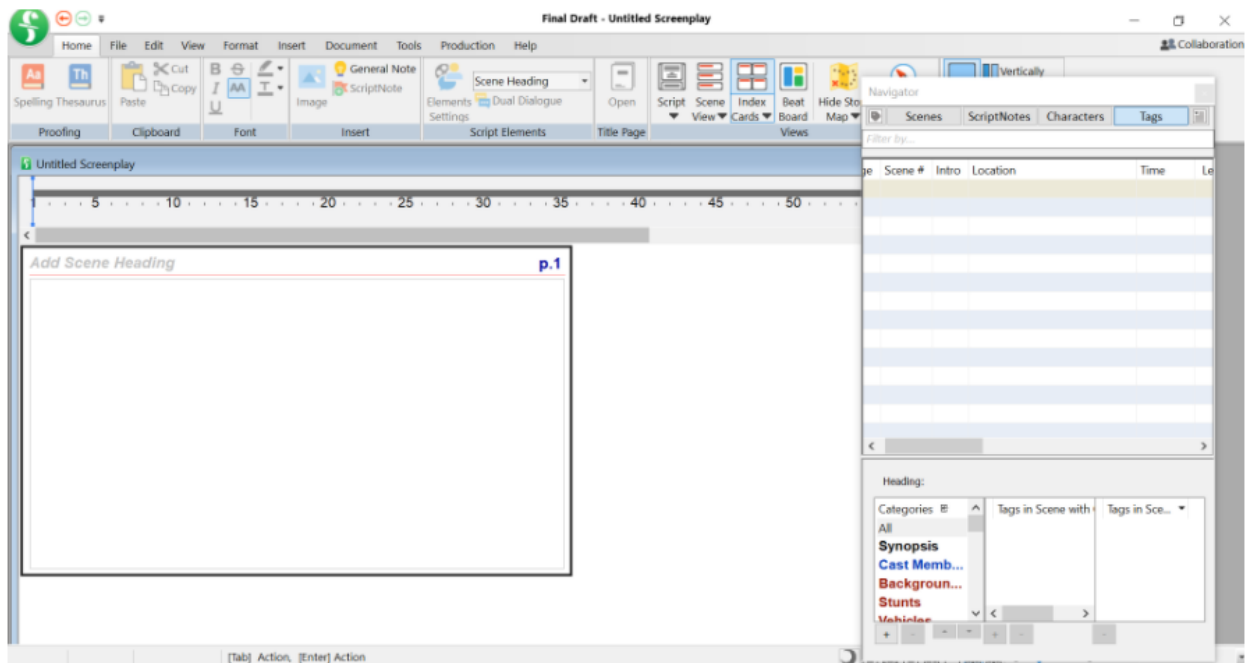
This app has a strong fan base among serious screenwriters. For the whopping price tag of \$250, this app comes with screenwriting features (unlike the others) and enables co-author or editing.

Yet like Scrivener, the user interface fails our review as it seems outdated and users need to view YouTube videos to work its multiple features.

Features

- Formatting tools specific to screenwriting.
- Auto suggest for dialogue.
- Has a navigator window for scenes, script notes, characters, and tags (script day, location, makeup, cast members, etc).
- Helpful script templates such as Cole Haag or Warner Brother, Dramatists Guild Musical template. Also for different graphic novels, half-hour sitcom, or one-hour TV drama.

- Story Map shows the length of your script in pages, as well as your current position among those pages.
- Beat board (@ virtual corkboard) that you can drag these scene cards into the story map.
- Ease of split screen views.
- Enables collaboration with others on Final Draft software.
- Auto save every 15 minutes.
- Revision history saved to a local folder on your computer.



[Click to try Final Draft](#)

4. Storyist (\$59.99 – Mac Only; Free trial)

The last review from us, Storyist, is a good option for screenwriters and doesn't cost as much. Additionally, it has good templates for screenwriters.

One advantage it has over Final Draft and Scrivener is its interface, though not as nice as Living Writer. Unfortunately, Storyist doesn't have as many features as the choices above.

Features

- Creates folders for chapters and subchapters.
- Auto suggest for dialogue, scene introductions, locations, times, character names, and transitions virtual index cards for each scene.
- Story Sheets for storing information about plot, character, setting, etc.
- Revision history created every hour.
- Has standard name revision history.
- Has stylesheets for common manuscript and screenplay formats.
- Adds photos to characters.
- Provides word count goals.
- Has add, edit and delete comments.
- Export to Blurb, DOCX, HTML, RTF, TXT, as well as SCRIV (Scrivener), FDX and FCF (Final Draft)

[Click here to try Storyist](#)

Conclusion

LivingWriter is recommended in general with the most relevant features though Scrivener is a close second and covers screenwriting which is a market LivingWriter omitted. If you spend time working on screenwriting, we'd recommend Final Draft instead though first timers may want to start with Storyist for cost's sake.

Here's a snapshot of the pros and cons for the top four choices.

	Pro	Con
LivingWriter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cleanest interface of all the writing apps with the most user-friendly (modern) UI UX design.• Easy free trial and sign up process. Sign in and start, no downloading a program required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not tailored to screenwriting.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good features for writing books with smart text, outline templates, story elements, etc. • Cloud-based and autosaves every keystroke. • Easy live collaboration with anyone you share your story with. • Companion apps for iOS and Android. 	
Scrivener	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Available for Windows and iOS. • Many templates to choose from. • Feature rich for writers of all types. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdated and somewhat confusing interface. Bigger learning curve than the rest. • Software upgrade is possible at extra charges. • Purchase different version for each mode (e.g. MAC, PC, Phone). • No web or Android apps. • No collaborative features, such as co-authoring tools or the ability to share files, allowing them to edit. • File sync only possible via third-party storage service, and only between devices that have Scrivener app.
Final Draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most tools, options, and templates for screenwriters. • Many view options. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auto draft only saves every 15 minutes, not every keystroke. • The price is higher than all other apps. • Very complicated to collaborate and all the collaborators must own a copy of Final Draft.
Storyist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A newer looking interface than Scrivener and Final Draft, however 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only for Mac and IOS. It does not have apps for Windows, Android, or the web.

	<p>not as clean or as user friendly as LivingWriter.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes tools for storyboarding, outlining, character sheets. • Supports importing and exporting many formats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional cost for iPhone app. • No co-authoring or editing capabilities. • Smart text doesn't link story elements to description and notes. It only auto suggests the word. • Revision history is every hour instead every few minutes.
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As promised, here are the other apps we've spotted in the market;

- ✓ IA Writer (\$29.99) – Basic features, provides mostly distraction-free writing
- ✓ Ulysses (\$39.99 yearly – Mac Only) – Similar to IA Writer with additional feature to publish to WordPress. Beyond that, leans towards distraction-free writing.
- ✓ Microsoft Word (\$129.99) – Pricey for a word processor. Enough said.
- ✓ Google Docs (Free) – Word processor that's free with additional benefit of allowing co-author.
- ✓ The Novel Writing Factory (\$24.99) – Good possibility but leans towards story development instead of writing.
- ✓ Campfire (\$24.99-\$49.99) – Similar to Novel Writing Factory but emphasizes character development.
- ✓ Evernote (\$0-\$14.99/month) – Convenient for note taking, not even a word processor.
- ✓ Reedsy (Free) – Similar to Google Docs, it allows co-authoring with added feature of e-pub conversion.
- ✓ Plot Factory (\$9-\$19/month) – Decent outlining features but suffers poor from user interface.
- ✓ Ywriter (\$11.95-\$24.95) – Features close to Scrivener and Storyist but interfaces like excel.