



Online Resources

for Medical Communicators

This is the final article in a 4-part series about fun, free online resources.

Free “Techie” Tips and Tools on the Web

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This article provides an overview of Web sites with free tips, downloads, tools, etc, to make computing less stressful and more productive. AMWA members might use these tools to enhance their computer power, work more efficiently, automate file backups, and streamline other tasks.

Lifehacker

Lifehacker (www.lifehacker.com) is a technology blog containing tips and downloads to optimize computing experiences. This site was founded by San Diego, CA-based computer programmer and author Gina Trapani. Whether you are a Linux, Mac, or Windows user, you will find something useful on this site. At first glance, the site appears a bit chaotic and disorganized; however, there are several easy ways to navigate the excellent content. Near the top of the main page is a toolbar that you can use to select posts grouped according to top number of views, content by computing platform, downloads, and a large selection of do-it-yourself projects. Posts are also grouped according to popularity, date of posting, or by number of comments. There is a search box that can be used to find the desired content. Some examples of the useful content on this site include a Microsoft Outlook Forgotten Attachment Detector plug-in (and one for Gmail users as well) that alerts users before e-mail messages are sent if a file is not attached and it appears that an attachment should be present; “top 10 tools for your blog or web site”; “top 10 productivity basics explained”; and “the essentials of e-mail etiquette.” Trapani is also the author of *Upgrade Your Life: The Lifehacker Guide to Working Smarter, Faster, Better* (Wiley, 2008), which contains many valuable tips, including how to tame your e-mail, automatically back-up files, improve your productivity, and manage your data.

Microsoft Word Tips

There are a number of good resources on the Internet for Microsoft Word users. Mid-America chapter member Lynne Roney alerted me to The Editorium site (www.editorium.com/index.htm), which contains some free macros, a free informative newsletter, and some useful macros available for purchase. Under the “freebies” tab are free downloadable macros with instructions on advanced Find and Replace tips; a NameSwapper macro to simplify formatting of names, and a customizable page layout template, among others.

Allen Wyatt’s Word Tips site (<http://word.tips.net>) contains thousands of free Microsoft Word shortcuts and tips. The tips are organized by functional categories, including bullets and numbering, editing, formatting, printing, tables, and many more. It is also possible to search the entire site to find exactly what you are looking for. The tips support different versions of Microsoft Word, including Word 6, Word 95, Word 97, Word 2000, Word 2002, Word 2003, and Word 2007. At the end of each tip is a note that indicates to which version(s) of Word the tip applies, and if the versions of Word differ with respect to the tip, this is noted as well. Also free is the Word Tips e-newsletter, a weekly mailing with a few Word tips and tricks in it each week. Users can post problems/questions they are having with Word to the Web site or can submit them for inclusion in the Help Wanted section of the weekly newsletter.

Potpourri

If you have tired of the fonts available in the standard version of your programs, jazz up your documents with free downloadable fonts from DaFont.com (www.dafont.com). This site has over 9,000 fonts that are free for personal use.

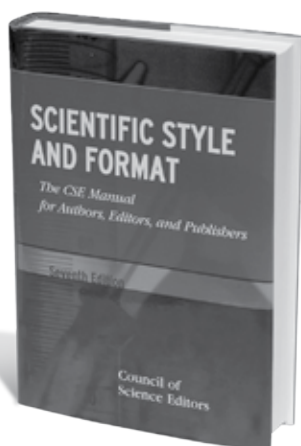
Most are Windows and Mac compatible. The fonts are grouped into categories such as basic (fixed width, serif, sans serif), fancy, holidays, and script. This site is also searchable. There is a help section detailing how to install the fonts once you've downloaded them, and how to avoid common problems with fonts.

TinyURL (<http://tinyurl.com>) is a free service that converts long URLs into much shorter ones. If you have ever tried to share a long link in an e-mail or document, and had it "break" on receipt, then you will really appreciate this site. The first step to using the site is to copy the long URL that you would like to change into the "Enter a long URL to make tiny:" box on the home page. You can choose to create a custom alias, or simply allow the site to generate a shorter, random one. Next you click on the "Make Tiny URL!" button and in a few seconds the smaller URL will appear, with a preview window if you want to check its accuracy before sharing with others. The links that are created by TinyURL are permanent and will never expire. If you become a fan of this site, there is a link on the home page that you can drag into your browser's links toolbar, and a button will be created for easy usage.

Those in need of a fast, online dictionary may find Ninjawords (<http://ninjawords.com>) helpful. This site bills itself as "a really fast dictionary... fast like a ninja." The site is useful when you need a simple definition of a word. The definitions on the site are provided by Wiktionary and the Princeton WordNet dictionary. Single words can be typed into the search box, or to compare definitions, you can type several words into the search box separated by commas and a group of definitions will appear.

To quickly share a Web page via e-mail with a colleague or friend, try the Email the Web.com (www.emailtheweb.com) site. There are 2 simple steps—type or paste the URL into the box, and then click the "email web page" button, which will prompt you for your recipient's e-mail address and an optional note. To use this site, you must have a free Google or G-mail account. Recipients receive messages containing the Web pages as they looked when they were sent by e-mail, without any popup ads or other advertising. This can be useful for archiving sites and also saves the time of having to click on a link.

Joanne McAndrews is a freelance medical writer in St. Louis, MO, and president of AMWA's Mid-America chapter. She has led the breakfast roundtable "Top 10 Free Web Sites for Medical Writers" at the AMWA annual conference for the past 3 years.



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