

What's in a Word?

By Jill R. Sommer and Marita Marcano

Counting words, characters, and/or lines is a crucial subject for all freelance translators because it is the foundation for pricing our translations, issuing invoices to clients, and getting paid. If you are like most translators in the U.S., you charge by the word. Other countries have other counting practices. For example, our colleagues in Germany charge by the line (based on a standard line of between 50 to 55 characters, including spaces), and Chinese and Japanese translators charge by the target word (and sometimes the character, since it is hard to define what constitutes a word in those languages).

Whichever way you calculate, you might be selling yourself short. Different word processing programs and translation tools often produce varying word count values for the same document, and sometimes these differences can be quite drastic. Word count variations are due to the use of different rules for counting as well as deficiencies within the applications themselves. For example, if you rely exclusively on the Word Count feature in Microsoft Word to invoice your clients, you might be invoicing for a much lower word count than you actually translated. The reason is that Microsoft Word does not count comments, headers, footers, embedded objects and files, and—most importantly—text boxes.

The issue of word counts is frequently a subject of conversations on all the online newsgroups and discussion listserves in which we have ever participated. Many seem to be of the opinion that the use of third-party counting tools, such as Total Assistant and PractiCount, can help take some of the mystery out of the process. If you would like help creating a counting methodology that is more consistent, you should defi-

nately look into acquiring one or more of these tools. They can pay for themselves, particularly if you are expected to translate a file that is heavily laden with text boxes.

Why Counting Tools?

There are many reasons to think about incorporating third-party counting tools in your daily work.

Counting Numbers: General opinion seems to be split on how to consider numbers in a count. Some say they should not be included in your count since they do not need to be translated.

“...Different word processing programs and translation tools often produce varying word count values for the same document...”

Others argue that numbers should be counted, since they need to be transcribed and checked for accuracy. Whatever your opinion on the subject, tools like PractiCount can help you sort the matter out rather quickly, since they have a setting that allows you to exclude numbers from your count.

Working with PowerPoint files:

Another thing that makes a third-party counting tool so crucial is the ability to count words in PowerPoint. As those of us who regularly translate PowerPoint files know, PowerPoint does not provide character count statistics, and it often uses embedded objects such as Excel worksheets. Jill Sommer was recently confronted with this very issue. The client quoted her a

word count of 2,000, but after a quick count using PractiCount, she discovered the word count was closer to 6,000 words, since the file contained several embedded spreadsheets. She realized the quoted one-day turnaround would simply not be possible and notified her client, who acquiesced to her request and granted her several additional days.

Maintaining Version Consistency:

Another issue you might not be aware of is version consistency when counting in PowerPoint. PowerPoint 97 and 2000 are not consistent with the Microsoft Word counting rules. For example, some versions count hyphenated words as two words. Fortunately (or perhaps unfortunately for us), PowerPoint XP corrects this difference. In plain language, this means that two users with different PowerPoint versions might disagree about the word count on the same document. So if your client contests your word count, the reason might be that he or she is using a different version of PowerPoint.

Saving Time: The above are the areas where third-party counting tools are extremely useful when you are confronted with a large number of documents that need to be counted. In such cases, obtaining an overall word, character, or line count for all the documents can be time-consuming because most translators without counting tools open the documents in Microsoft Word, note the count values for each file, and then total them up. There is also the possibility that you might skip a file or two or could even input an incorrect number while calculating.

One of the advantages of using a third-party counting tool is that this process is automated. All you have to do is tell the program which files need to be counted (often by selecting

entire directories and subdirectories), and it will automatically calculate them in the specified order, giving you a total count at the end. Most of the utilities also support multiple file formats, including Microsoft Word, TXT, HTML, PowerPoint, Excel, and PDF. You can also tweak the settings to meet your needs.

Popular Counting Tools

The following is meant to serve as a brief overview of some third-party counting tools on the market today. Due to space constraints (and the fact that we have no personal experience with AnyCount and FreeBudget), we have not included screenshots of all the programs. Readers are encouraged to visit the websites listed for more comprehensive information.

PractiCount

www.practiline.com

Everyone has their own favorite third-party counting tool. Some prefer PractiCount (\$59.95 for the standard edition) because it is easy to use due to its tabbed interface and adjustable settings, and because it can also generate invoices. PractiCount can count footers, annotations, headers, text boxes, inserted Excel and PowerPoint documents, comments, WordArt, folders and subfolders, and more. It is also available as a toolbar (\$49.95) for Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint (see Figures 1 and 2).

TextCount

www.textcount.com (German)

www.textcount.com/html/textcount-en.html (English)

TextCount (€79, or \$100.25 plus value-added tax) is a German counting tool and was one of the first on the market. If you want to count words, you have to set the maximum word length to 0. The program's default set-

Figure 1: PractiCount file selection window

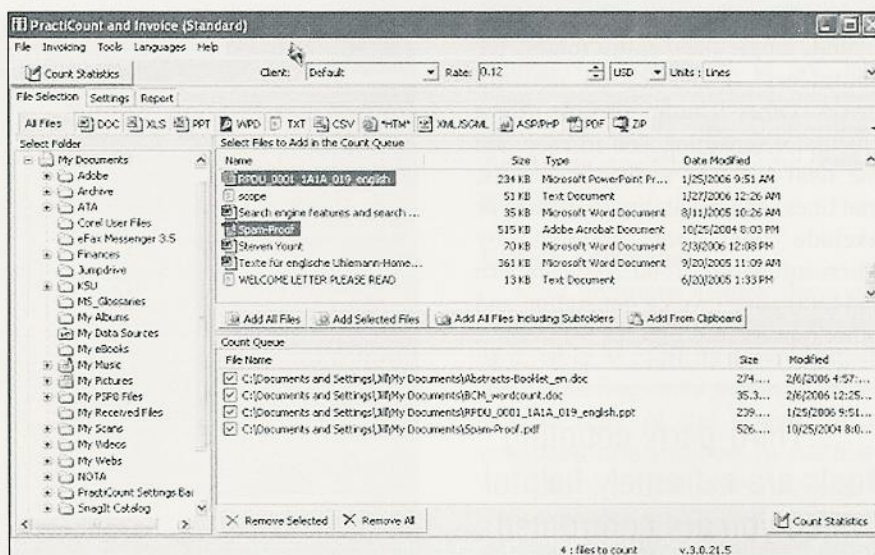


Figure 2: PractiCount report window

PractiCount and Invoice (Standard)

File Invoicing Tools Languages Help

Count Statistics

Rate: 0.12 USD Units: Words Calculator: 0

File Selection Settings Report

Total DOC ppt PDF

#	Document	Words	Characters without Spaces	Characters with Spaces	Lines	Rate	Currency	Amount
1	Abstracts-Booklet_en.doc	44717	51592	907	0.12	USD	839.80	
2	Soun-Proof.pdf	39125	46250	8	0.12	USD	914.04	
3	RPEU_0001_1A1A_019_english.ppt	15313	17969	1	0.12	USD	343.60	
4	BCH_wordcount.doc	12059	14419	103	0.12	USD	206.92	
Subtotal:		19071	111214	130330	1091		USD	2304.52
							USD	2304.52

☐ Enter Text Name

More ...

Client: Default Create Invoice

ting is 8, which means that any words over 8 characters in length will be treated as more than one word. Like PractiCount, it offers a variety of settings to suit your needs (see Figures 3 and 4 on the following page).

Total Assistant

www.surefiresoftware.com/totalassistant

Total Assistant (\$24.95) can produce a word count of multiple files in just two steps, and it counts "unfriendly" formats such as PowerPoint and Adobe Acrobat. Total Assistant is a more basic, but less expensive program than PractiCount. You can count text in multiple file formats, including Microsoft Word, HTML, PDF, Microsoft

PowerPoint, Excel, TXT, XML, PHP, and ASP. The counting options include single files, entire folders (or subfolders), and files on network drives. Other features include a cost calculator (enabling you to calculate the total cost for words, characters, and lines) and the ability to include or exclude text not counted by Microsoft Word. Total Assistant Pro (\$44.95) adds invoice generation and other reports (see Figures 5 and 6).

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AnyCount

www.anycount.com

AnyCount (€29, or \$37, for a personal license) was originally the built-in counting tool in Translation Office 3000. It is now available as a stand-alone product. It supports the following formats: DOC; RTF; WPD; XLS; PPT; PPS; HTM; XML; MIF; CSV; PDF; TXT; and ZIP. When the program has finished counting your files, you can view the results on the screen or print them, export your count into PDF, TXT, HTML, Microsoft Word, Excel, and other formats, or copy the results to your computer's clipboard.

FreeBudget

www.webbudget.com/

fb4dload.htm (free download)

FreeBudget is a stand-alone counting tool made by the same developers as WebBudget (www.webbudget.com),

Figure 3: TextCount settings window

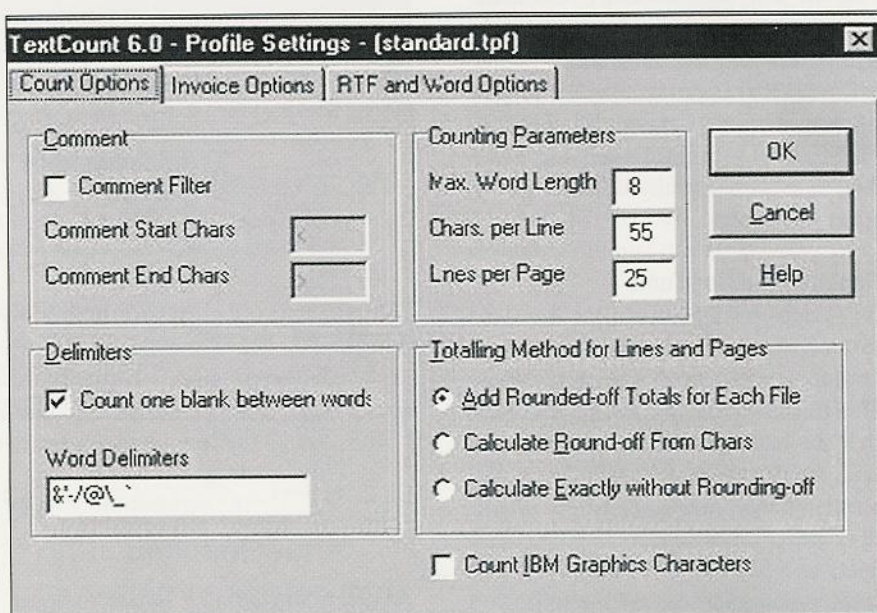


Figure 4: TextCount main window

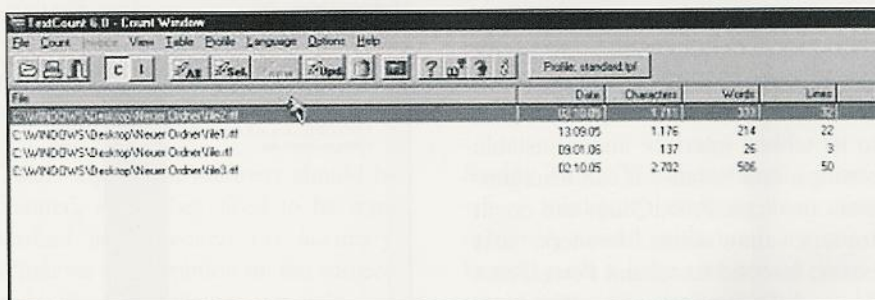


Figure 5: Total Assistant Options dialog

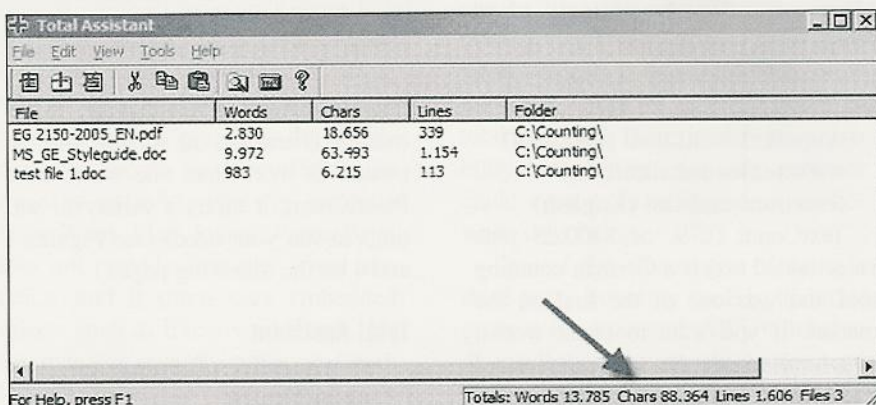
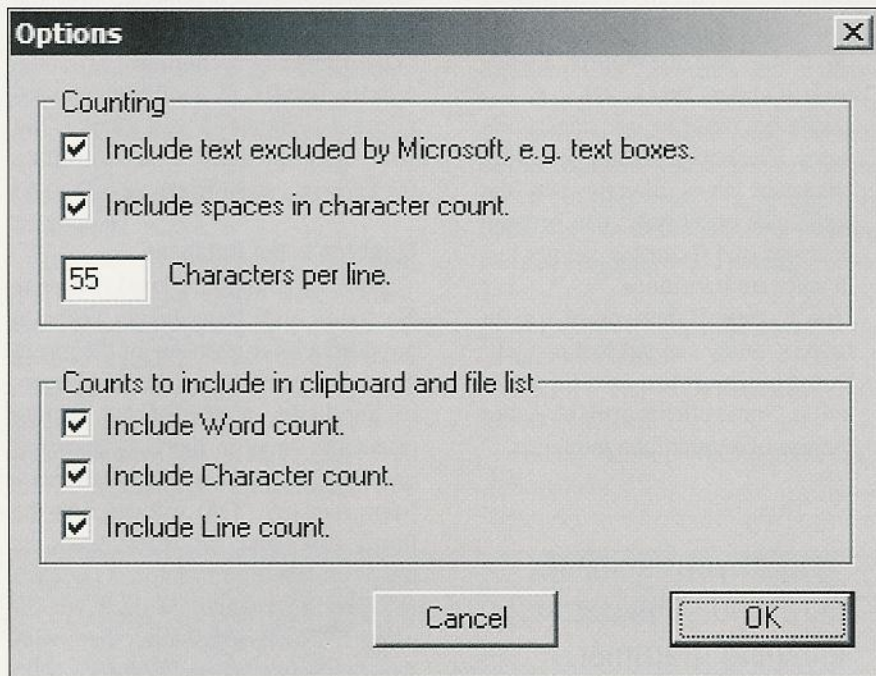


Figure 6: Total Assistant main screen



ments. It also includes a new streamlined interface, internal repetitions calculation, project time estimation, and support for documents in any language, including Asian languages. Most importantly, the application's developers state that it does not contain spyware.

General Comments

Most programs display the word, character, and line count of each file in a table as well as a word, character, and line count summary at the bottom right of the screen. Some programs offer options to calculate your invoice total and/or to export your counting results to your invoice or quote file. We recommend downloading the various free trial versions from the websites listed here in order to decide which tool best suits your needs.

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which is a Web localization and analysis tool. WebBudget costs €395, or \$535.57, while FreeBudget is free.

FreeBudget generates word count and budget reports for RTF, Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, and TXT docu-

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