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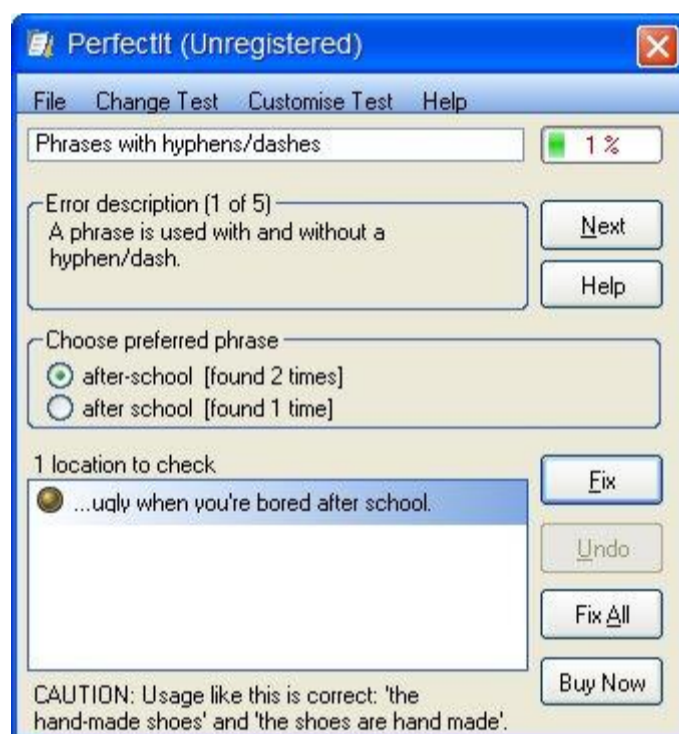
Review: PerfectIt Proofreading Software

This week I've been checking out PerfectIt, a dedicated proofreading application produced by London-based Intelligent Editing Limited.

Like myWriterTools, which I reviewed in this recent post, PerfectIt operates as an add-in for **Microsoft Word**.

It works with Word 2000, 2002, 2003 and 2007. In versions of Word prior to 2007, PerfectIt is listed in the **Tools** menu. In Word 2007 (which I use) you click on the **Add-Ins** tab at the end of the Ribbon, then click on **PerfectIt** to run the software.

So what exactly does PerfectIt do? Essentially, it checks that any Word document is internally consistent. For example, it ensures that if you have spelt a word in one way in a document, you haven't spelt it differently somewhere else. PerfectIt runs a series of tests on your document and highlights any possible errors it finds. You can then allow the software to 'fix' these errors, or ignore them and move on to the next.

The screenshot below shows an example of the software in action. In my test document, it has found the phrase 'after school' used without a hyphen once and with one twice.

In this case, my usage was actually correct. The hyphen was required where the phrase after-school was being used adjectivally in front of the noun (an after-school club), but not where it was used adverbially (bored after school). As you can see, PerfectIt appreciates that this could happen and has included a note at the bottom of the box about it.

If, however, I had wanted to make all my uses 'consistent', I could have chosen the preferred phrase from the list. All exceptions would then be shown below this, and I could correct one at a time by clicking on 'Fix', or change them all by clicking on 'Fix All'.

I found the software easy and intuitive to use, and very fast. On my test documents (mostly modules from courses I've written) it found a few inconsistencies, mainly in my punctuation/capitalization of lists. PerfectIt also revealed that I had spelt 'specialize' with both a 'z' and an 's' in the same document. I'll have to correct these errors the next time the courses concerned are updated!

The software highlights any instances where contractions such as can't or won't have been used, and suggests writing them out in full. I'd accept that this would be preferable with formal documents, but that doesn't really apply to most of my writing. Still, you can skip any tests you don't want the software to run, either temporarily or permanently, using the **Change Test** menu item.

One other small irritation I found is that if you've written a word such as WILL in all caps for added emphasis, the software assumes that this is an abbreviation and asks you to define it. Again, though, I suppose you wouldn't do this in a formal document.

PerfectIt does NOT (oops - done it again!) check the spelling in your document, except for inconsistencies, and neither does it check for grammatical errors. Of course, Word has its own built-in spelling and grammar checkers, or you can use something like myWriterTools or WhiteSmoke. As mentioned earlier, PerfectIt is really a consistency checker. As such, it will work equally well with UK or US English or any other flavour/flavor.

Overall, I was highly impressed with PerfectIt and will be using it regularly from now on. I think anyone who regularly writes long(ish) documents would benefit from it, and it would also be particularly good for ensuring consistency in documents with multiple authors. Incidentally, companies can also get their own customized version of the software, incorporating their own house-style specifications.

If you think you might benefit from using PerfectIt, you can download a one-month trial of the full program free of charge from the PerfectIt website.

- Finally, just a quick note of caution. Programs like PerfectIt, myWriterTools and WhiteSmoke can save you time and help you spot mistakes/weaknesses in your writing, but they are NOT a substitute for learning the rules of grammar and punctuation. My downloadable guide Essential English for Authors covers all the common problem areas, and will bring your written English up to a publishable standard in the shortest possible time.