Making a Tool Bar to Mark Student Written Work*

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For a language teacher who teaches many classes of students, marking numerous written assignments at a time is often inevitable and very hard work. Is it possible to provide appropriate feedback while reducing the workload? Giving symbols for self-correction is one technique which has been introduced by many experts (Byrne, 1988, Gower et al., 1995). This technique is very practical and useful, since a teacher does not have to write much and students have to rethink their own writing. Hopefully, this can raise their awareness in language use. However, students frequently make the same mistakes several times in one piece of work, thereby requiring a teacher to write the same symbols on every piece of work again and again. Therefore, marking written work by giving symbols still requires a lot of work. In this paper, a solution to this problem is suggested.

Nowadays, the increase of computers in every educational institution can facilitate language learning. It is not inconvenient for students to use Microsoft Word to type their work and submit it via e-mail or diskette. This also means that a teacher can open and correct their work on computer. Moreover, instead of typing every comment or symbol on the assignments, the teacher can create automatic texts/symbols and insert them wherever needed.

The following is a part of a student's written work. It is a task record form in which the student reflected on what he learned from reading practice. The original version was entirely in black. When correcting the work, the teacher changed the mistakes to **red** and inserted italic symbols by clicking buttons on a toolbar. The comments are also automatic expressions.

> This material is about **the**^{article} famous band in Japan "Lucifer". This band will **coming**$^{verb\,form}$ to Thailand to promote their new album. I like this band because ∧name "lucifer" is the same name that I use **in**^{Preposition} ∧internet. I had a difficulty with the vocabulary. I don't ∧some of words and all of **this**^{Voc} words **is**$^{subject\text{-}verb\,agreement}$ important in this article. If I don't know their meaning, I cannot understand the article too....."
>
> **What did you learn from this material?**
>
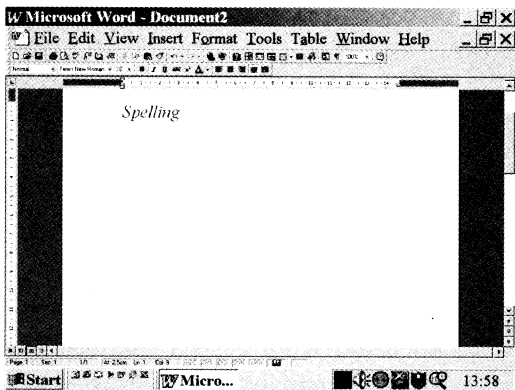> **Give some examples of the words you do not know.**

To create a toolbar of automatic texts, no special programs or knowledge of computers are needed. It can be made on any recent version of Microsoft Word (in this paper, it is Microsoft Word 97). There are three major stages involved in the creation: creating automatic texts, creating a new tool bar, and putting automatic texts on the tool bar.

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I. Creating automatic texts

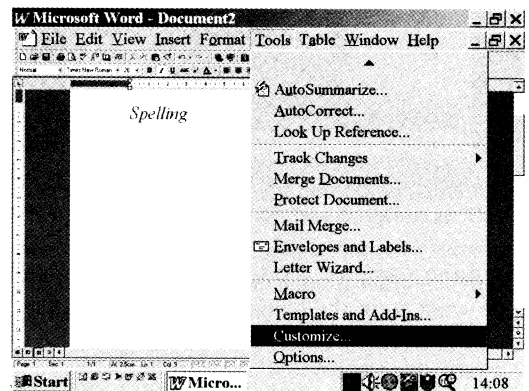1. Type the expression (it can be in any length). Change the font, size and the color as you want it to appear.
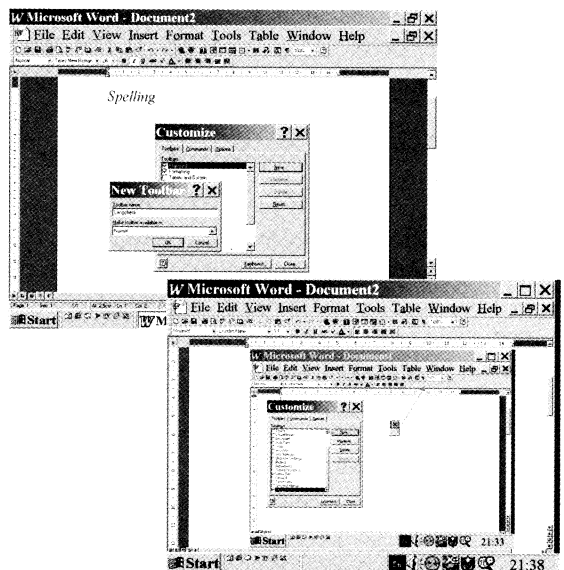

2. Highlight the expression and click on "Tools". Select "AutoCorrect"

3. Select "AutoText". The expression will be shown in the box "Preview".

4. Type the name of the expression in the box "Enter AutoText entries here". It is practical to use a short form of the expression. In this case, "Sp" is used to stand for "Spelling". Then click "Add".

5. Do the same for other expressions such as Active/Passive, Tense, Word order.
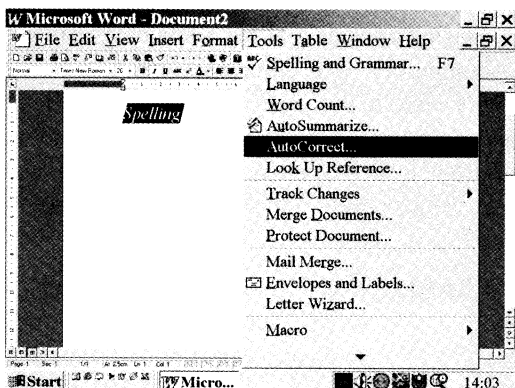
II. Creating a new toolbar

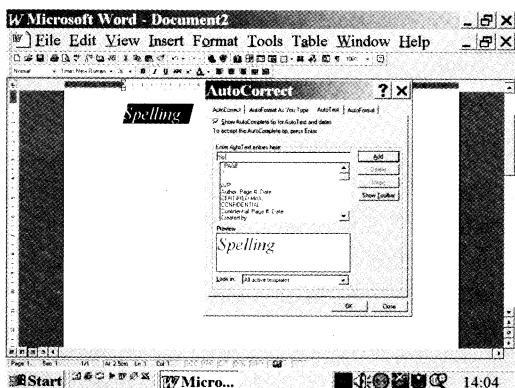1. Click "Tools" and select "Customize...".

2. Select "Toolbars", then click "New". A window "New Toolbar" will come up. Type in the name of the new tool bar. In this paper, it is called "Langcheck". Click "OK". A new very small tool bar will appear. Drag it to the same area as other tool bars.

III. Putting automatic texts on the tool bar

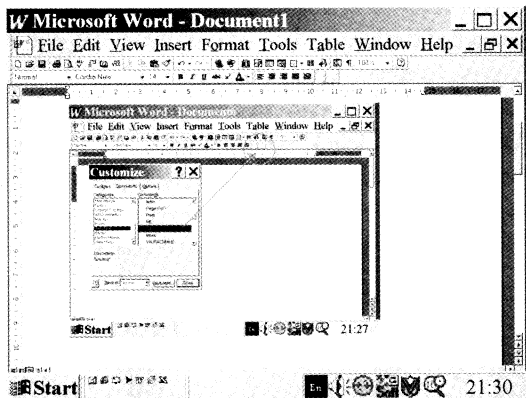1. Click "Tools" and select "Customize...". After that, select "Command", then "Autotext"
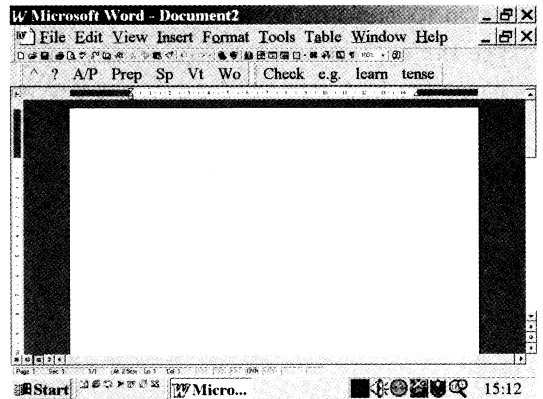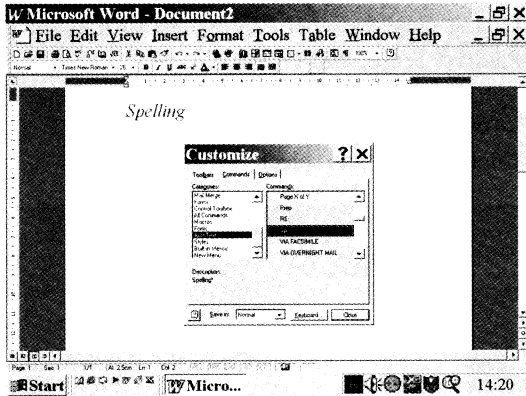
2. Find the name (a short form) of the expression you want from the column on the right. Drag the name and drop it onto the tool bar.

3. Use the same technique to put other expressions on the tool bar. In the picture below, the "Langcheck" tool bar contains the buttons "^" (missing word), "?" (unclear), "A/P" (Active/Passive), "Prep" (Preposition), "Sp" (Spelling), "Vt" (tense), and "Wo" (Word order).

To use the toolbar, a teacher has to open a student's work on Microsoft Word, read it and identify the mistakes. For every mistake, change its color to red, and place the cursor after it. Then click the related button on the toolbar. The symbol will appear after the mistake.

Having another tool bar containing buttons for long commonly used comments can also ease the teacher's work. In this paper, it is named "Tcomment". These comments are made in green in order to make them differ from grammatical symbols. Each button (shown in the above picture) stands for differ-ent expressions as follows:

Check = Use "Spelling and Grammar" to check your language before submitting your work.

e.g. = Give some examples of the words you do not know.

Learn = What did you learn from this material?

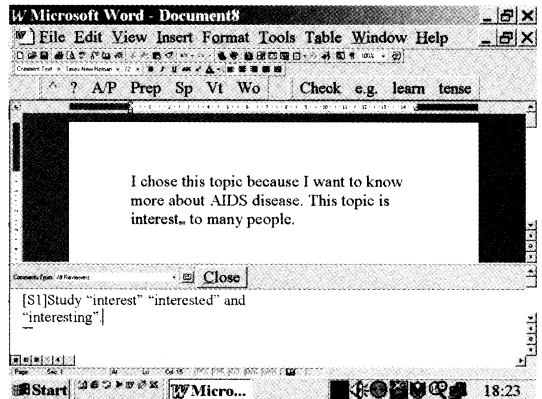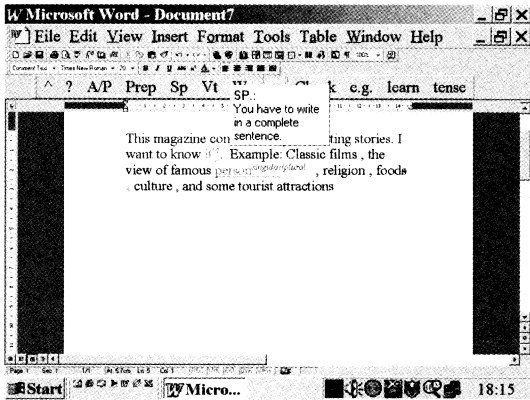**Tense** = Be more careful about using tenses

Inserting a comment

Another useful tool available on Microsoft Word is "Comment". Sometimes, a mistake is too serious to correct. It is impossible for a teacher to give a symbol for self-correction. In this case, a teacher needs to highlight the mistake and insert a comment or a

suggestion to correct it. It can also be used for asking a question concerning that particular point. A student can see the comment, which is in a pop-up box, by placing the cursor in the highlighted area.


How to insert a comment:

1. Highlight the mistake
2. Click "Insert", then "Comment". A new page will come up at the bottom and the mistake will be highlighted.

3. Type the comment into the space provided.

If a teacher would like students to send their work via e-mail, he or she has to manage the mail properly using a program such as Outlook Express and Netscape Messenger. Otherwise, it will be difficult to deal with a lot of mail at the same time.

The "automatic text" tool bar is a very useful tool. It can save time from writing the same boring words over and over again. It is also very attractive for students since it is colorful and easy to read. Moreover, the teacher can create a folder on, for example, Outlook Express or Microsoft Word to collect the work of each student or each group. It is useful for tracing back what each of them has done. This technique also reduces the amount of paper in a workplace.
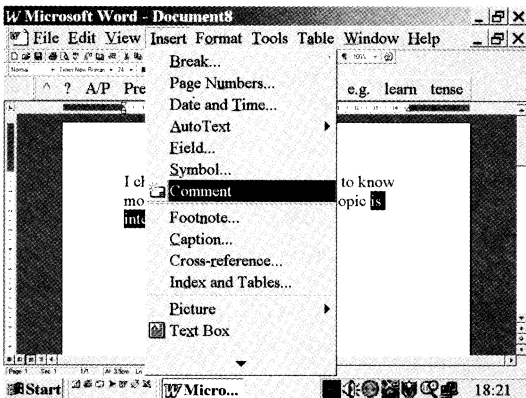
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Gower, R., Phillips, D. and Walters, S., 1995, Teaching Practice Handbook, new edition, Oxford, Heinemann.

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Kasamaporn Maneekhao is an Assistant Professor working at the Department of Languages, School of Liberal Arts of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. She teaches both at undergraduate and graduate levels. She is the head of the Faculty's Test Center. Her main interests lie in the area of using technology in language learning, and writing self-access and test materials for computers.