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Loch, Birgit; Lowe, Tim W.; Mestel, Ben D.

Master's students' perceptions of Microsoft Word for mathematical typesetting.

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Summary: It is widely recognized that mathematical typesetting is more difficult than typesetting in most other disciplines due to the need for specialized mathematical notation and symbols. While most mathematicians type mathematical documents using LaTeX, with varying levels of proficiency, students often use other options or handwrite mathematics. Here, we investigate students' perceptions of the mathematical editor available since Word 2007. This investigation is timely as there is anecdotal evidence that mathematicians do not think that Word is capable of quality mathematical typesetting, and there have not been many studies in the literature on this topic. In this case study, we ask the following questions: Is Word a suitable tool for students to typeset mathematics? And: How does Word compare to other mathematical typesetting packages students have used? We asked master's level students to typeset mathematics in Word and then comment on their experience, relating to the ease of use, quality of output and overall experience. We also asked the students to compare Word to other tools they may have used in the past. The results show that the current versions of Word are indeed capable of producing quality mathematical typesetting, that the learning curve is not high, and that Word should not be dismissed as a tool for typesetting mathematics. While there were concerns that editing takes longer than in other tools and that typesetting in general takes time, overall students were positively surprised by Word's mathematical features and commented favourably.

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