Easy Drop Caps with a Macro
by Gayle G. Humpherys and William J. Schultz
WordPerfect Magazine

Newsletters, fliers, reports. We're inundated with documents. To grab the exhausted reader's attention, you need to start your work off with a bang. A good way to do this is with a large, initial capital letter (called a "drop cap") like the one you see at the beginning of this paragraph.

Drop caps are especially useful in documents that have many solid paragraphs with no headings, lists or bullets. But how to create them? Don't bother making all the calculations yourself. Here's a macro that makes drop caps as simple as pressing a few keystrokes.

Drop caps in WordPerfect are easy enough to set up. All you do is put a large capital letter inside a graphics user box and let the body text flow around it. But calculating the right box and letter dimensions isn't so easy. To look good, a drop cap should be close to the following letter, without touching or overlapping. It also shouldn't interfere with the text on the next line below.

Getting just the right combination of height, width and point size can try the patience of Job. Even within the same font, capital letters come in a surprising variety of widths, so if you make your box a tad too small or your font a point too large, you end up with a user box that's empty because the letter doesn't fit.

This macro, however, solves all the guesswork and lets you create drop caps on the fly. It prompts you to press the letter for the drop cap and automatically determines the correct point size for the font and the correct height and width for the user box, based on the current base font. It even lets you choose which font to use as a drop cap, so you can add variety with unique drop. The drop caps created by the macro are two lines high. The only limitation is that you must use a scalable font for the drop cap; otherwise, the macro won't be able to select the correct point size.

Creating the Macro

The macro is included as DROPCAP.WPM. Be sure to place it in the directory that contains your macros.

Using the Macro

You can use the macro as you're typing new text or you can use it on existing text. If you're typing new text, place the cursor at the left margin where you want the drop cap (don't tab or indent), press Macro (Alt-F10), type "dropcap" and press (Enter). You'll see the prompt Press the drop cap letter at the bottom left of the screen. Simply press any letter – uppercase or lowercase. If you don't press a letter, you'll hear a beep and see a prompt reminding you to press a letter.

After you press a letter, the macro pauses in the font list, with the prompt Select the drop cap font, then press (Enter) at the bottom of the screen. Use the arrow keys (not name search) to move to the desired font for the drop cap. A bold font often works well for drop caps. Try to stay away from italic fonts. The slant in some italic fonts may cause the drop cap to touch the second letter of the word. Remember, you must choose a scalable font.

With the desired font highlighted, press (Enter), and the macro inserts the correct point size for the letter you chose. The macro finishes formatting the user box and quits.

You can continue typing the text. Don't type the initial letter again. You won't see the capital letter that's in the user box-only the outline of the box appears as you type. In fact, you won't even see the text right after the drop cap – the user box obscures the letters. To get a good look at your drop cap, press Print (Shift-F7), (6) View Document. Press Exit (F7) to return to your document.

You can easily add a drop cap to text that's already typed. For example, if you had typed "Once upon a time" and wanted to make the capital "O" a drop cap, first make sure there are no tabs or indents before the word "Once." Then delete the existing "O." Without moving your cursor, run the macro as described above, pressing O when asked for the drop cap. When the macro has finished, it might look like some of your text was deleted, but it's just "hiding" behind the user box. Use View Document to see how your drop cap looks.

Note: if you're placing a drop cap right after an [HRt-SPg] code, the macro inserts a hard page break instead, so the drop cap is sized properly.

Understanding the Macro

The macro begins on lines 2-4 by checking to see if the cursor is immediately after a [HRt-SPg] code. If it is, a hard page break is inserted instead. Lines 5-7 determine the line height of the current font so that the appropriate height and point size can be chosen for the drop cap. Line 8 converts the line height to the point size for the drop cap.

The macro prompts the user for the drop cap letter on line 10. The {CHAR} command accepts the first letter pressed, without requiring the (Enter) key to be pressed. Lines 11-20 check to see if a letter was pressed and whether it was a capital letter or not. If a letter wasn't pressed, the user is prompted to press a letter, and the macro execution returns to line 9. If the letter was a lowercase letter, the macro automatically converts it to uppercase.

Lines 21-31 are where the graphics box is created. Line 21 inserts a user box options code to set the outside border spacing to zero. Line 22 creates a user box at the left margin and then goes into the Graphics Edit screen.

Lines 23-27 display the base font menu and prompt you to select the font for the drop cap. The correct point size (determined by the macro earlier) is inserted (line 26) and then the letter is typed into the user box (line 28). Lines 29-30 determine the correct width for the box based on the width of the letter inserted and set the width and height of the box. Line 31 exits back to the document screen and ends the macro.