

I've been playing around on the Hanx Writer app, and I must say that I find it very pleasant. Normally, I like writing apps that offer some basic punctuation. Not only does Hanx not offer apostrophes, it also doesn't follow the keyboard conventions of iOS in general. For example, you can't long-press the comma for an apostrophe; your symbol preferences (such as the pound sign to replace the dollar sign) are not remembered; the number keyboard doesn't automatically revert to the letters when you press the spacebar; system abbreviations and alternative languages do not work; long-pressing backspace only advances you one letter, and, of all the atrocities, there is no auto-correct! Not even to capitalise the first word of a sentence!

So why do I enjoy Hanx Writer? First of all, because it addresses a common complaint I have with modern keyboards and touchscreen typing: it provides ample feedback. There is something very satisfying about clacking keys. Only yesterday, I found myself jealously eyeing a woman on the train who spent her entire journey working vigourously on a small iPad keyboard, reaching impressive speeds. She sounded so productive that I was itching to be able to do the same.

The second reason I like Hanx Writer is that, rather ironically, it slows one down. The Qwerty keyboard was invented to impede typists for mechanical reasons, and I think Hanx Writer is doing the same, but for intellectual reasons. Keyboards like Fleksy boast of being able to decipher your typing even if it looks like gibberish (which it almost always does, thanks to their strange layout). We have become as lazy and slovenly in our typing habits as in our handwriting, and I can't help but think that it is all reflected in our writing. I, for one, have found my spelling skills diminishing as I rely entirely on autocorrect, and I often find myself picking up pen and paper because I want to write something without worrying about my screen turning off as I cogitate. The single-backspace of the app, which can be made even more inefficient by turning it into old-style Xs, ~~xxxx~~, means you think twice before rattling off a sub-standard sentence.

My favourite Hanx Writer feature, however, has to do with reading rather than writing. It isn't possible to type with the app in the vertical position (an understandable restriction - no one typewrites with their thumbs), but in a brilliant move, the app designers have turned portrait orientation into "reading mode", so that when you tilt your device, the keyboard disappears and you can page through the sheets of your manuscript without distraction.

Unfortunately, it is still a bit buggy, but I hope these will be addressed with updates. Nevertheless, thanks, Hanx!