

Step 3. Identify Promising Software

If requirements are specified in detail, the teacher (or materials selection committee) will have a good head start when it comes to identifying promising software.

There are many ways to identify promising software, and the responsible selector should use as many of them as possible. Catalogs still remain an important source for descriptions of software. Most district level educational communications/media centers are on catalog mailing lists from virtually all software producers and wholesalers.

Software is advertised, described, and often reviewed in magazines and journals found in schools and universities.

Teachers who have access to the Internet can find out about software from other teachers by joining a listserv. Posting a question such as, "I am an eighth grade science teacher and I am looking for interactive software for a PC environment that will teach my students how to . . ." is likely to bring dozens of responses.

Many listservs are archived on the AskERIC web site (<http://eric.syr.edu/>). Directions for joining a listserv may be found in the archives, or <mailto:askeric@askeric.org>, for more information on listservs.

The above are but a few sources for identifying promising software. The more precisely the requirements are specified in Step 2, the easier it will be to screen out those products that are least likely to meet the user's specifications and the easier it will be to focus on more promising products.

CAT~net (<http://catnet.sdacc.org>) provides the opportunity for teachers to submit reviews of software and strategies that they are using. Be sure to check these out and contribute your successes.

Step 4. Read Relevant Reviews

After a list of promising software has been identified (using the suggestions outlined in Step 3), the teacher (or materials selection committee) may be able to narrow or expand the list by reading relevant software reviews. (*see Appendix E for Internet sites.*) It is very important to realize, however, that reading reviews should not take the place of previewing, described in Step 5.

Software reviews may be found in educational journals, some of which may be identified by searching the ERIC database using appropriate descriptors (e.g. software, selection, evaluation, elementary, secondary).

Evaluation services such as EPIE, subscribed to by many school and public libraries, provide a database of selected software evaluations and reviews. A visit to the library is an important part of responsible software selection.

Keep Step 1 (Analyze Needs) and Step 2 (Specify Requirements) in mind as you read the reviews. It is also important to note the audience upon which the review is based. A software program may have received a poor review because it was tested with a different audience than the one you have in mind.

Reviews are important screening tools when used as part of the entire selection process.

Step 5. Preview Software

The most effective way to judge whether software is appropriate or not is to observe students as they interact with the program. Are the educational objectives achieved when the student uses the program?

The responsible teacher should not purchase software without previewing it with his or her own students. Preview as many programs as you can find that appear to meet your

