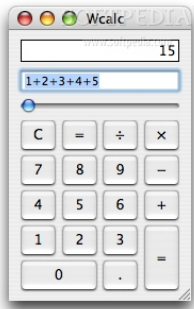


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By: Victor Mihailescu, Apple News Editor

Wcalc, Complete Calculator Solution

Perfect for both the simple and the complex...



For anything but the simplest of math, calculators are the easy and fast way to go about getting results. Whether it's adding up your bills for the month or calculating exactly how many pixels you have left over once the banner and the sidebar are put into the webpage, the simple calculator is a useful tool. OS X comes with its own calculator and while it is perfect for quick and dirty math, it leaves a lot to be desired for more complex equations. On the other side of things, complex calculators are often a pain when you only need to do simple things. As a result, I ended up using two calculators, depending on how much power I needed, but I have finally found one single program that I can use for both tasks, called Wcalc. **What it does** Wcalc is a complex calculator with many advanced features that go well beyond your average calculator. At the same time, it can also be used as a very simple calculator, akin to the default one, when you don't need anything but the basic functions. Wcalc is incredibly versatile and complex, building on a strong formula approach and expanding into functions such as conversions, variables and a history. **Working with it** Formula calculators can be pain to work with for basic math simply because you have to structure everything out using parenthesis in order to ensure that the order of operations is respected when the computer finally does the calculation. This approach is very different from the simple calculator where the result is calculated at every step. As a formula calculator, Wcalc suffers from the same problem, but it can be overcome through the application's use of variables. The program will always assign the result of the last calculation to a variable called 'a.' Thus, to use Wcalc as you would use the default calculator, after the first operation, instead of using an operator key and then a number, you type 'a' then the operator key and then the number. Typing in the extra variable every time might seem cumbersome, but it is something that you get quickly used to. For the complicated calculations, Wcalc offers everything you could possibly need. Because it is formula based, you can work with very complex operations and these can be even more complex by using the variable editor. Variables can range from simple numbers to complex equations, which can also include other variables themselves. You then have a choice of functions, which range from common square roots and absolute values to all the trigonometric and hyperbolic ones. You also have a choice of constants from the simple 'pi' and 'e' to universal, electromagnetic, atomic and nuclear ones. Everything is nicely grouped and ordered into submenus, so you only need to go into the ones you will be using and all of them can also be accessed simply by typing them via the keyboard. The program also gives you a large choice of operators that range from simple mathematical ones such as power and modulo, to logical ones such as 'logical or' and 'equal to or great than.' Unlike functions and constants, these operators can't be easily accessed from the menus during operation, they can only be typed. On the up side, you will not be needing all of them and they are listed in the read-me. **The extra mile** Beside being such a good formula calculator, Wcalc also has some extra features that really make it stand out. Firstly, you have total control over the precision of the results. By simply using the slider, you can change the number of digits to be displayed after the decimal point. The limit it can display is 150 characters, both before and after the decimal point, but that is more than enough to give you a great deal of accuracy. The best part is that you can simply turn it up when you need it and not bother with it the rest of the time. Secondly, the calculator can work in a number of bases. Most of the time you will be working in decimal, but you also can change at will between hexadecimal, octal and binary. The program will automatically update the result and add a prefix that helps you identify what base you are currently working in. Thirdly,

Wcalc comes with a huge database of conversion operations. These are split into Length, Area, Volume, Mass, Speed, Power, Force, Acceleration, Temperature, Angle and Pressure. They cover so many different system and units that listing them all would take up more space than this review and all of them are easily accessible simply by typing in a value in the calculator and choosing the appropriate conversion. **The Good**A very powerful formula calculator with lots of features and options. It has everything you need to make even the most complex of calculations a breeze, while at the same time being very practical for the very simple stuff. **The Bad**Sometimes Wcalc crashes from simple things such as scrolling in its windows. It doesn't always happen, but it can, and it is annoying. **The Truth** The great thing about Wcalc is not how powerful it is, but simply that it is as powerful as you need it to be. If all you want is simple operations, you can use it like any other old calculator, but when you need to go advanced, it easily complies. Here are some screenshots, click to enlarge: