Email, be gone! Using a text expander to reduce inbox fatigue

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Subject: Manuscript feedback

Hi Brave Author

I just finished reading your manuscript, and wanted to offer some feedback. I did a quick edit for you to see how it looks, and hope that you find these changes helpful.

I've attached the changes in this email for you to review. Please let me know if there are any questions!

Best,
Brilliant Editor

What did you make of this email? On the surface it seemed okay, didn't it? But something is just slightly off. Maybe it's the reference to a 'quick edit' on an entire manuscript? As editors, we all know a quick edit is a pipe dream at worst and a unicorn at best. But this is the magic of AI in action because I didn't write the email; an AI writing assistant called Rytr did the heavy lifting.

There are many more AI writers available, such as Writesonic, Wordtune and Jasper, where you type in a few phrases, choose a tone, let the AI oven do its thing and out pops a mediocre piece of text. But what if *you* want to control what the AI gets fed and produces, especially when writing repetitive editorial comments or emails?

In this article, I'm specifically going to look at one such text expander called PhraseExpress, where you as the editor are more in control of what the AI gets up to.
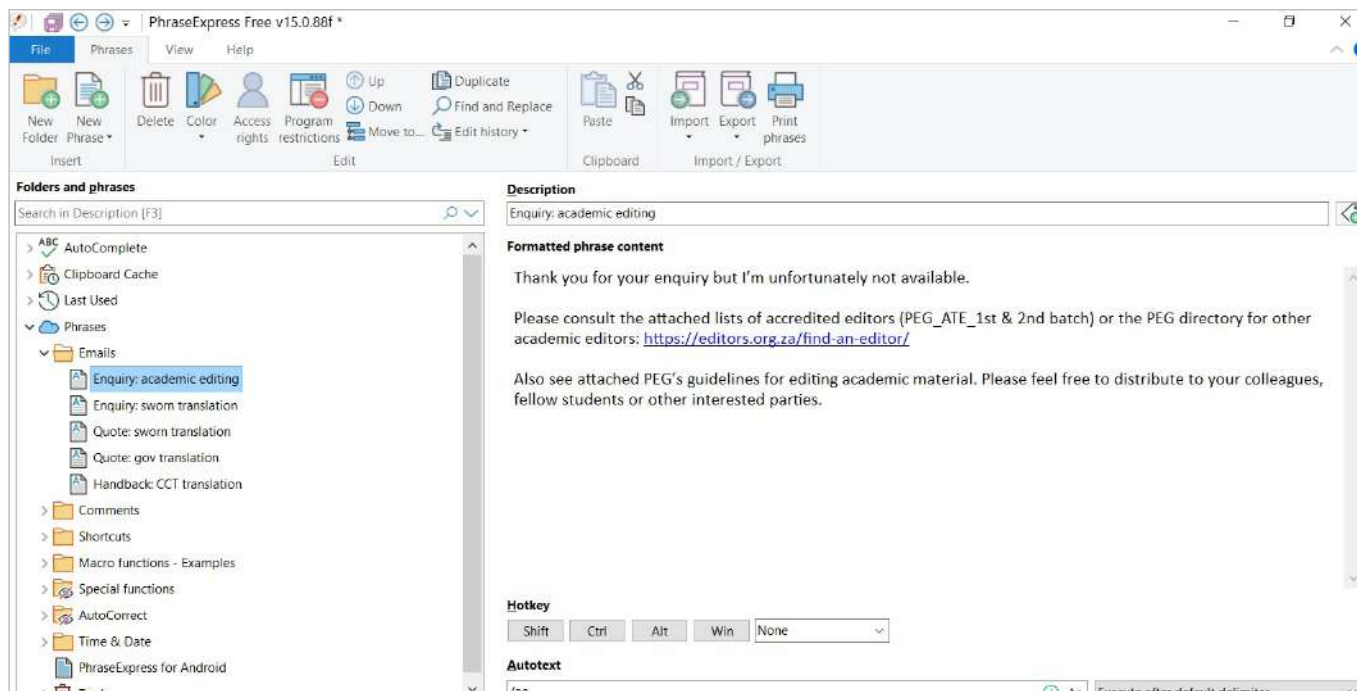
What is a text expander?

Text expanders are programs that let you save pieces of text, assign an abbreviation or short code to it, and then insert the code in seconds without your having to type the same text ad nauseam. There are many text expanders available, such as TextExpander, aText and Beeftext, but I prefer PhraseExpress. Not only is it easy to set up, but it's also free for personal use and works across different programs.

Banishing repetitive emails forever

You've just typed 'Please find attached the edited file' or 'Thank you for your enquiry but I'm not available' for the umpteenth time. ❯

Cut down on repetitive emails with PhraseExpress

Decline work in seconds

Surely there must be a better way to cut down on what is essentially non-billable work and lost productivity? PhraseExpress makes it easy to set up templates as canned responses for emails you write frequently. (Gmail also has this functionality under Settings > Advanced > Templates > Enable.)
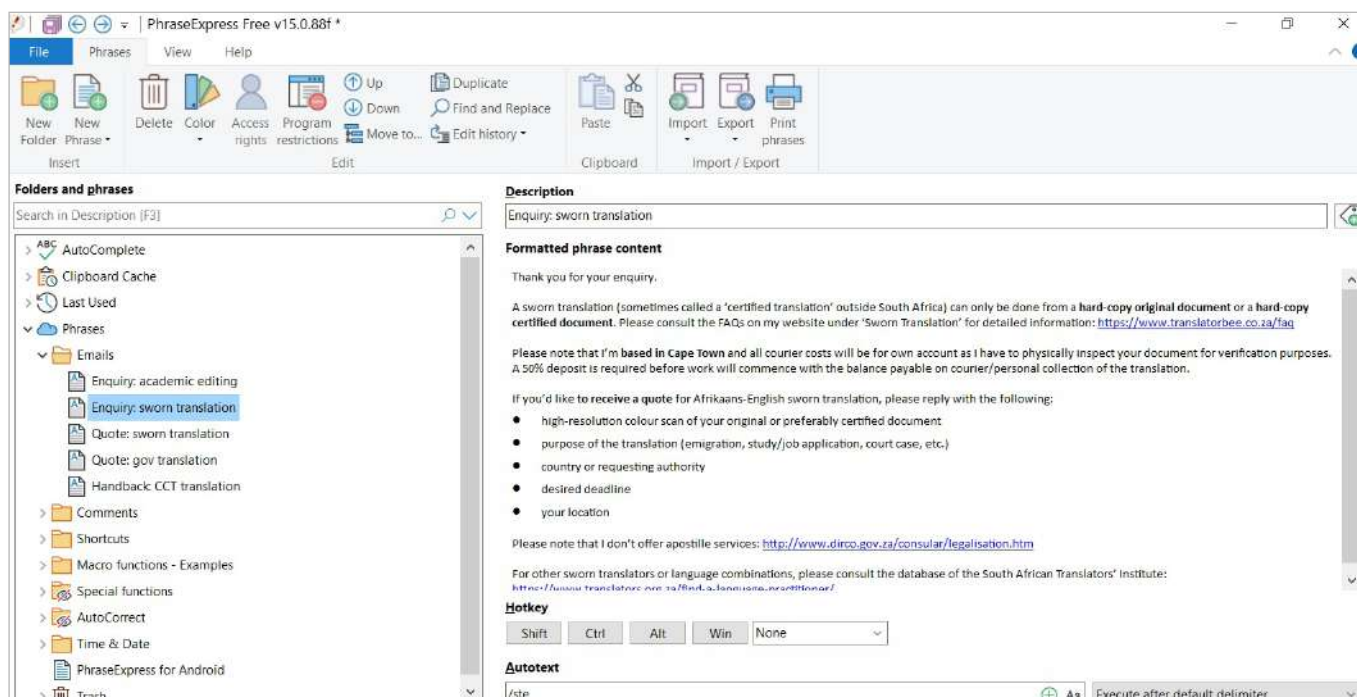
For example, I have an email template saved for when I decline an initial enquiry for academic editing, which I don't offer, and want to refer clients to other PEG Accredited Text Editors (ATEs) or the PEG directory (see screenshot above). Instead of having to think of a response, the template is inserted by simply typing my personal short code (/ae = academic enquiry).

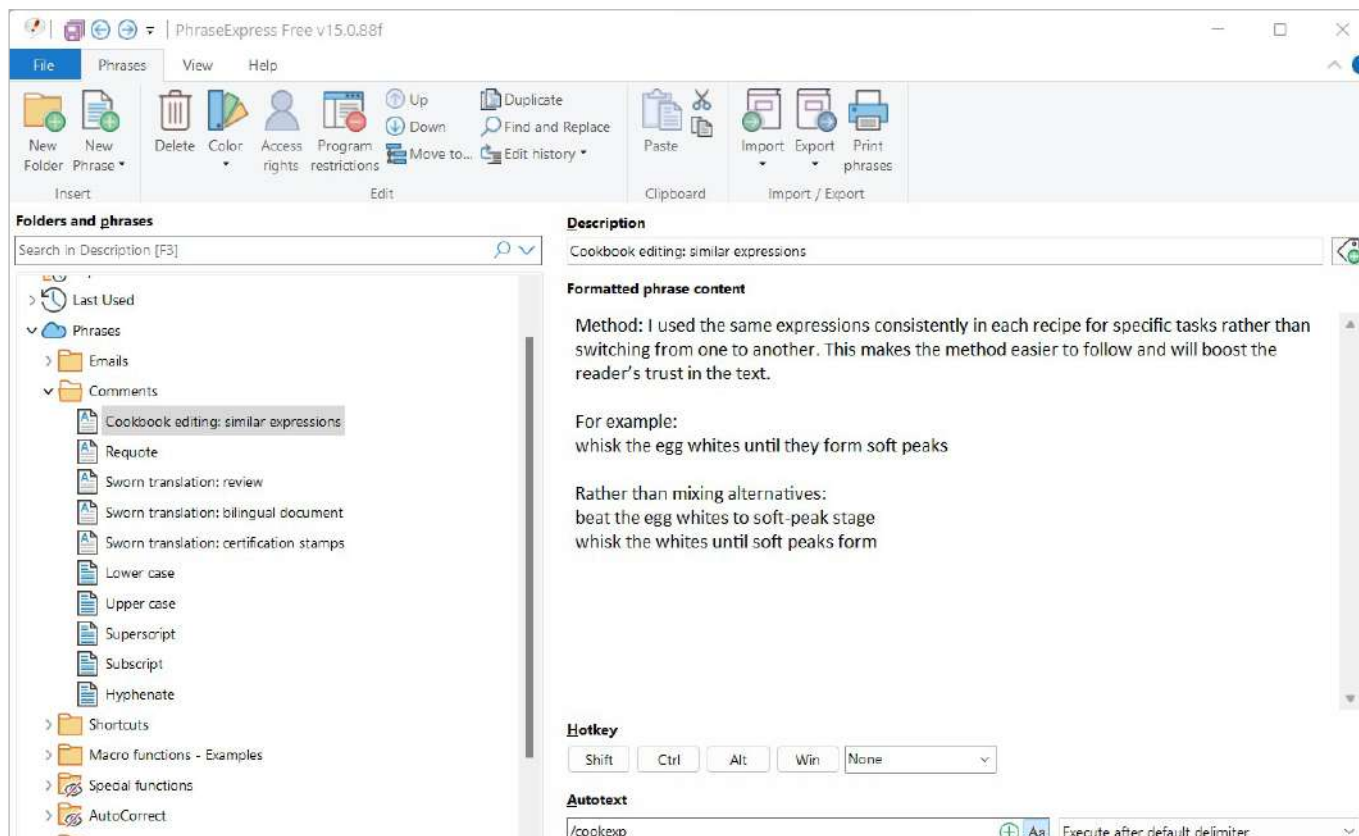Another email I write frequently involves answering an initial enquiry for sworn translation, a service that many people are not familiar with (until they desperately need it!) and which takes a lot of effort to explain (see screenshot below). Instead of typing a long response every time, I use my personal short code (/ste = sworn translation enquiry) to insert the template, together with formatted text and links. Just think how much time I've saved by not having to retype this 'essay' again and again!

Other functions of text expanders

If you find yourself typing the same **editorial comment** in multiple documents, then saving the comment for later use without having to retype it only makes sense. For example, I use an editorial comment template when I want to explain some subtleties for editing recipes to a cookbook author (see screenshot on the next page). ❯

Answer queries in seconds

Add editorial comments in seconds

Because PhraseExpress is a cross-platform program, I can use my assigned short code (/cookexp = cookbook expressions) to insert the editorial comment everywhere I need it: in a Microsoft Word document, in a PDF document, in an email, in a browser interface, in social media posts and so on.

You can also set up other **miscellaneous shortcuts** such as to quickly insert your website address (/web), your author biography (/bio), certain fiddly symbols/punctuation (/en = en dash) or even appending the current date to a file name (/td = today's date).

And that's exactly what artificial intelligence (AI) was created for: removing the mundane and repetitive so you can focus on what makes your editing work human.

Text prediction is another favourite function where the program 'watches' what you type and, in typical AI fashion, starts learning your writing habits of oft-repeated phrasing and then suggests them for insertion as you type.

When you start building up a large library of short codes, you might find it hard to remember all of them. You can easily access text snippets recently used or saved to the clipboard by using the quick access menu via your computer's toolbar.

If you get stuck on what to say in an email, you can also use some of the built-in boilerplate templates as inspiration for your own templates. PhraseExpress will even tell you how much money you've saved by using the program, although I have no idea how this is calculated!

If you've never used text expander software, it might be hard to wrap your head around how much time this tool can save you. This video by editor Crystal Shelley (Rabbit with a Red Pen) is a great explainer tutorial on the major text expander functions.

What's the point?

I know of only three ways an editor can increase their income: increasing their rates, reducing their expenses or upping their productivity. If you find the first two to be impossible, then improving how fast you do your work will be the obvious choice. And that's exactly what AI was created for: removing the mundane and repetitive so you can focus on what makes your editing work human. 🍃

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Laetitia is an award-winning SATI-accredited sworn translator and ATE (English) with 19 years' experience. Her specialisations include user-interface (UI) localisation, legal/official documents, corporate communication and non-fiction/educational publishing. She is also the Afrikaans translator of the best-selling title *Finding and Marketing to Translation Agencies: A Practical Guide for Freelance Translators*. Her loves are tech, pugs, books and wine – mostly at the same time.