Tool Kit

Exploring Assistive Technology for Academic Support:

Education and Strategies for Taking the Next Step

Technology Learning Services
Landmark College
Examples of Assistive Technology*

- **Text-to-Speech (Text Readers)**
  - Kurzweil 3000
  - Read & Write Gold
  - WordQ
  - WYNN Wizard
  - Co:Writer
  - Universal Reader
  - Microsoft Narrator

- **Speech-to-Text (Voice Recognition)**
  - Dragon NaturallySpeaking Preferred
  - SpeaQ
  - Microsoft
  - MacSpeech

- **Concept / Mind-mapping (Visual Mapping)**
  - Inspiration
  - Thinking Maps

- **Electronic Organizers**
  - PDA (personal digital assistants)

* This is just a small sampling of the assistive technology software available. Assistive technology is “any technology that enables an individual with a learning disability to compensate for specific deficits” (Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1998). Assistive technology ranges from low-tech (paper and pencil) to high-tech (spellcheck, word prediction, voice recognition, etc.).

Notes
How Assistive Technology Is Used at Landmark College

- **Students use Text-to-Speech** (such as Kurzweil 3000) to:
  - Improve decoding and fluency;
  - Hear text spoken aloud;
  - Read back their own typing, predict words, and spell check as they are typing;
  - Strengthen their study skills, using the Study Skills Toolbar;
  - Increase independence.

- **Students use Concept / Mind-mapping** (such as Inspiration) to:
  - Generate and develop ideas for the writing process;
  - Organize thinking;
  - Create outlines;
  - Test their memory;
  - Increase independence.

- **Students use Speech-to-Text** (such as Dragon NaturallySpeaking Preferred) to:
  - Free up cognitive working space;
  - Eliminate handwriting & spelling problems;
  - Brainstorm and turn oral language into text;
  - Produce large amounts of writing;
  - Spell check documents they created in a different application;
  - Increase independence.

**Notes**
Know Your Learning Profile
(Some questions to ask yourself…)

☐ What is the best way for me to learn something new?

☐ What do I want to be able to do?

☐ Do I need support with my:
  o Writing?
    o generating content
    o spelling & grammar
    o organizing

  o Reading?
    o decoding
    o comprehension
    o fluency

  o Public speaking

  o Study skills?

  o Test preparation?

  o Memory?

  o Planning?

  o Organizing?

  o Time Management?

☐ Which assistive technologies might best support my learning profile?
Choosing Assistive Technology: Questions to Consider

☐ What do other assistive technology users think of this product?

☐ Is there a low-tech option that is sufficient for my needs?

☐ Can I try it before I buy it? (Demo CDs or free trial downloads are often available.)

☐ Which option assists me in meeting both current needs and long-term goals of independence?

☐ Which option is manageable in all or most of my areas of my life? (school, work, home)?

☐ How will I receive the training support I need?

☐ Does my computer’s processor and memory support the assistive technology software I am considering?

Notes
Finding Assistive Technology Support

☐ Know what your rights are. (See the Georgia Tools for Life site link listed below for details of your legal rights.)

☐ Be able to clearly state your needs (to yourself and others).

☐ Advocate for yourself.

☐ Identify people who can support you.

☐ Visit vendor web sites to find out about training near you.

☐ Develop a strategy for finding funding to purchase your assistive technology. There is an excellent resource for this on the Georgia Tools for Life Financial Assistance page, available at: www.gatfl.org/ldguide/funding.htm

Notes
Assistive Technology Resources on the Internet

General

Landmark College
www.landmark.edu/institute/assistive_technology
Find contacts and schedules for individual and group training in assistive technologies, links to information specifically for students, parents, and instructors, and skill sheets for a variety of software programs (Coming Soon!).

Georgia Tools for Life
www.gatfl.org
The mission of this group is to increase access to and acquisition of assistive technologies. Resources include general information and referral services, equipment exchange/loan programs, a computer recycling program, and information on finding funding for assistive technology products and services.

LD Online
www.ldonline.org
Billing itself as “the world’s leading website on learning disabilities and ADHD,” this site offers an abundance of both basic and in-depth articles and reports on LDs, sections specifically for parents, students, and educators, columns by Rick Lavoie and Dr. Louise Spear-Swerling, daily featured stories, an LD store, and much more.

LD Resources
www.ldresources.com
This friendly, comprehensive and well-organized site is a collection of approximately 1070 entries on various aspects of learning disabilities with over 1601 comments from members of the LD community. You can access its offering via a keyword search, or use the sidebar for navigating and browsing subjects from Discussion Lists and Personal Stories to Low-Tech Tools, Computers and Software, Electronic Text collections and more.

Schwab Learning
www.schwablearning.org
This award-winning site was created by parents of a child with an LD and is dedicated to providing reliable, parent-friendly information from experts and other parents. Special features include their “Expert Answers” series, an Assistive Technology database of products from alternative keyboards to word prediction software, and their parent-to-parent Message Board.
Technical Assistance Project (RESNA)
www.resna.org/taproject/at/statecontacts.html
RESNA is an association of people from different disciplines who share a common interest in using technology to close the gaps in learning differences. They promote research, advocacy and provision of technology to support the people engaged in these activities. State funding sources are collected on their Alternative Financing page, located at: www.resna.org/AFTAP/state/index.html

Wisconsin Assistive Technology Initiative
www.wati.org
Though this organization was formed primarily for Wisconsin students, their scope reaches nationwide through their publications and trainings. For assistance with self-advocating, see their helpful publication “Hey, Can I Try That?,” available at http://www.wati.org/Curriculum/pdf/student_handbook.pdf

Assistive Technology Products

AbilityNet
http://www.abilitynet.org.uk/edu_shareware
This site offers many relevant and user-friendly resources for those familiar with AT and those just beginning their exploration. Check out their extensive list Skillsheets, Factsheets, and free or low-cost shareware for people with a wide variety of disabilities and learning differences.

Dyslexic.com
www.dyslexic.com
Looking for comparison charts of assistive software and hardware? If so, this is the place to come! This British organization provides both technology overviews, and in-depth comparisons of a wide variety of products, from mind-mapping, text-to-speech, spell checking, and dictation software, to microphones for speech recognition, PDAs, digital recorders, and more!

Freedom Scientific
www.freedomscientific.com
Makers of the WYNN screen reader, this company creates additional assistive and adaptive technology for individuals who have low vision or learning disabilities. Here you can find information on additional products, including alternative screen readers, magnification software, and software for accessible scanning, reading, and notetaking.
Inspiration
www.inspiration.com
You may view a quick tour of this product as well as InspireData (for math and science). You can also download a free trial of either product and explore pages for parents and educators.

Kurzweil 3000
www.kurzweiledu.com
In addition useful lists of compatible and preferred scanners, there are two outstanding features on this site are the excellent Knowledge Base which you can access for detailed help with troubleshooting Kurzweil, and the wealth of Success Stories gathered from both students and teachers. You might also consider joining the excellent Kurzweil listserv at k3000@listserv.kurzweiledu.com.

Nuance (Dragon NaturallySpeaking Preferred)
www.nuance.com
Access this site for the latest product information, including updates, compatibility issues, recommended peripherals, and user guides. Particularly helpful links include the Hardware Compatibility List (for recommended headsets, PDAs, etc.) and the Knowledge Base. Both links are located by clicking the Support link on the home page.

Premier Assistive Technology
http://www.readingmadeez.com/
This company offers a variety of text conversion, reading comprehension, and writing products. Their core philosophy includes "Breaking down all barriers to the use of assistive software," and they strongly emphasize the importance of designing products that are both simple and affordable.

Quillsoft
http://www.wordq.com/speakqenglish.html
Makers of WordQ and SpeakQ, Quillsoft offers free trial downloads and handy tips sheets to help you use their products more skillfully and efficiently.

TextHelp
http://www.texthelp.com/page.asp
This site by TextHelp, maker of Read & Write Gold, features a comparison chart of all of their products as well as video tours and a free download of BrowseAloud, a screen reader for the internet. It also provides links to technical assistance and posts Alerts about specific difficulties users may encounter.
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