

# The Premier's Reading Challenge Toolkit

## Introduction

Many students with reading difficulties experience a number of barriers to reading when participating in the Premier's Reading Challenge. Assistive Reading Technologies can support students with reading difficulties to be more independent and participate more fully in the Premier's Reading Challenge. This resource document has been compiled to assist teachers in determining technology solutions.

## How do Assistive Technologies help?

Assistive technologies are designed to provide additional accessibility to individuals who have physical or cognitive difficulties, impairments, and disabilities.

Specialised applications which support students with reading difficulties have text to speech engines that read out the text on the screen to the student. Many of these programs highlight the individual words as they are read. This allows students to visually track the words being read out aloud.

By using assistive technologies to support reading, students are able to tackle more varied and challenging texts independently.

Research (NEIRTEC 200; Hecker, L. Urquhart Engstrom, E. 2004) shows that employing Assistive Reading Technologies supports students to attend better to their reading with reduced distractibility, read with less stress and fatigue, read for longer periods of time, complete reading in less time and better comprehend text.

## What is readily available?

Students with disabilities may use texts that have been adapted to meet their individual learning and literacy needs including Braille texts, talking books, and books on tape, DVD or CD. Many published books are also available from iTunes for use on an iPod or iPad. Many feature text highlighting within their read aloud function.

Bookshare.org is a service which can provide a reader with a print disability access to a wide range of titles in DAISY text only format and Braille. The service is now available in Australia and can be accessed at <http://www.guidedogswa.org/bookshare/>. Annual subscription to Bookshare also offers members access to assistive reading software applications that have high-quality voices. A DAISY reader from the DAISY Consortium is also available for free.

The Apple device app called Read2Go has recently been released. It offers high quality text speech with dual highlighting of text.

Free e-texts can be obtained from a number of web sites. This link at <http://bit.ly/dY0B4j> provides a listing of over 300 web sites which have free eBooks. One of the most comprehensive of these web sites is Project Gutenberg (<http://www.gutenberg.org/>) a site containing over 17,000 titles. The copyright free books are in simple text format. The e-text files can be kept intact or converted to other formats. These text files can be converted in to XPS or ePub format for use in eReader software such as Blio. The site does store a range of formats for some titles. Some books have been recorded by volunteers as audio books. Texts can also be converted to an audio file using technology. (Refer to the Text to Audio section for more details).

## Creating Talking Books

Book content can also be created within a wide range of software options which can utilize text to speech functions. Some of these software options also have the added functionality of highlighting the words as the text is read out aloud by the computer voice.

### Blio Reader [www.blio.com](http://www.blio.com)

Blio is a free eReader application which offers realistic book interaction. It displays books in full colour, with fonts and pictures that replicate the publisher's layout. Its many accessibility features include the ability to highlight each word as they are spoken aloud. A mobile device version of Blio has also been released. Blind students can utilize a version of Blio optimized for JAWS (versions 11 and 12).

Blio can import files in XPS\* and ePub format. Blio books can be created in any Office 2007 application including PowerPoint, Word and Publisher.

\*The 2007 Microsoft Office Add-in: Microsoft Save as PDF or XPS can be downloaded from the Microsoft web site.

**PowerTalk** <http://fullmeasure.co.uk/powertalk/>

PowerTalk is a free program which will read PowerPoint files. A useful program for reading the text in books created in PowerPoint format.

**Clicker 5** <http://www.cricksoft.com/uk/>

Clicker 5 has a text to speech engine and will read aloud e-text pasted in to the document. Talking books can also be created with the program.

**TextHELP Read and Write Gold** <http://www.texthelp.com>

TextHELP Read and Write Gold can read aloud any file format containing text including PDF files. It utilizes natural sounding Australian voices to read the text aloud. The program also has Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology. This technology is used to create an electronic text file from print materials (eg newspapers, magazines, novels). These newly created files can then be read by the software.

App versions of this software will be released for mobile devices in early 2012.

**vBookz** <http://vbookz.com/v1/Home.html> (compatible with iPhone, iPod and iPad)

This iOS app provides text to speech support of eBooks. It has a good quality reading voice and a rectangular magnifying glass hovers over each word as it is read aloud. Thousands of free books can be imported in the app. The site has a tutorial outlining how users can also upload their own adapted books.

**ZoomReader** <http://mobile.aisquared.com/> (only compatible with iPhone 4)

In combination with the built-in camera of the Apple device, ZoomReader takes a picture of a page in a book. It then converts the image into text using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology.

ZoomReader will then read the text out aloud using a natural sounding voice.

## Text to Audio Options

Book content can also be converted to an audio file. The audio can be played back on an mp3 player or iPod while a student is handling a hard copy of the text.

**TextAloud 3** <http://www.nextup.com/TextAloud/>

TextAloud 3 uses voice synthesis to convert text into spoken audio. Students can listen to converted stories on a PC or portable devices. The natural sounding Australian RealSpeak voices made by Scansoft can be obtained at time of purchase. A 30 day trial is available.

**TextHELP Read and Write Gold** <http://www.texthelp.com>

This assistive technology toolkit has a feature called Speech Maker. This tool can convert text in to a wave or mp3 audio file. It utilizes the RealSpeak Australian voices.

**WordTalk** [www.wordtalk.org.uk](http://www.wordtalk.org.uk)

This free Microsoft Word add-in speaks the text of a document with highlighting it as it goes. It also features a talking dictionary and a text-to-mp3 converter.

**Yakitome** <http://www.yakitome.com/>

This free online service utilizes high quality voices to create audio files from uploaded documents or pasted text.

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## References:

Technology and Teaching Children to Read

NEIRTEC project [http://www.neirtec.org/reading\\_report/report.htm](http://www.neirtec.org/reading_report/report.htm)

Assistive Technology and Individuals with Dyslexia

Linda Hecker and Ellen Urquhart Engstrom

<http://textbooks.brookespublishing.com/birsh/21/fulltext.htm>