# Not a magic cure.

An updated version of 'Where do I start? BDA Contact, January 2008.

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Can I have a list of useful software?

Frequently people ask for a list of suggested technologies and specific items of software for students to help with areas of dyslexic difficulty. This appears to be a simple question but one which is impossible to respond with a simple answer.
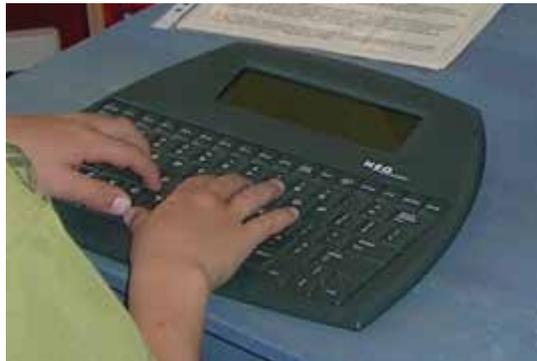
Why? Mainly because those with experience of using supportive software are only too well aware that it needs to be chosen and used to suit the needs of the individual. Technology does not provide a "one size fits all" solution since one person's dyslexic difficulties are not identical to another's.

Choosing technology to suit the needs of the individual.

Technology can be used with enormous benefits but some users have been deterred by previous unsuccessful experiences. They may have struggled with an earlier version of software or a piece of hardware which was not set up adequately. Sometimes this can be helped by training but it can also occur because the technology chosen just did not suit the individual. It is only by observing how a person works that one can really obtain an understanding of the needs that must be met.

Using the same software in different ways.

Individuals may also use the same piece of software in many different ways and configure it to best suit their own style of working. A good

example to illustrate this point was an observation of the use of the same word prediction software package used in different ways by two students, both of whom had very similar abilities and needs.
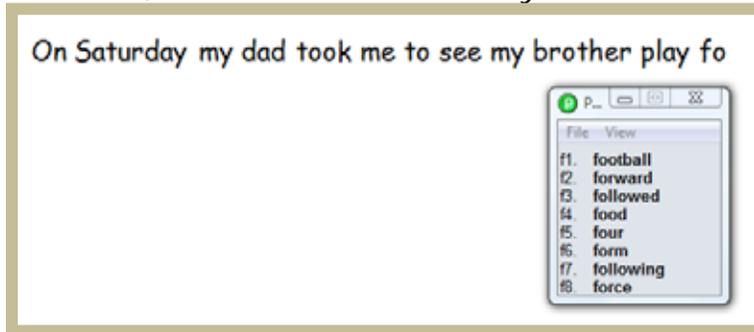

Word prediction using Penfriend

Word prediction software can be useful as it uses a corpus of vocabulary which makes suggestions for words as a student inputs the first few letters of the word. Some packages can make suggestions based upon the structure and context of the sentence. The words that are suggested can also be spoken by the computer which can give support and reassurance. Some students find this type of software extremely useful not just for helping them with spelling difficulties but with structuring and speeding up the whole writing process.

Most packages allow the pane with the predicted words to be moved around the screen. One of these students ran this pane alongside the text as he typed and used the keyboard shortcuts to enter the selected word directly into the text.

The other student preferred to keep the predictive textbox static in the corner of the screen. She tended to use the suggestions to check her spelling of words but preferred to enter these by continuing to type the appropriate word, letter by letter from the keyboard.
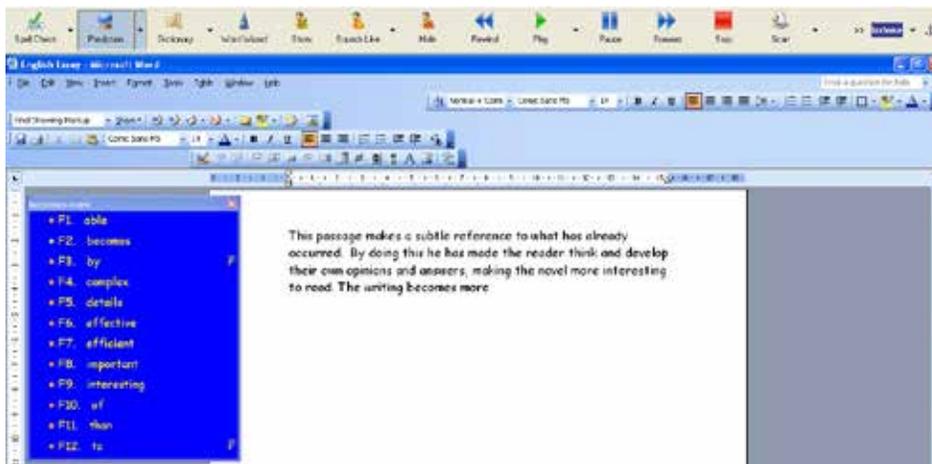
Word prediction feature used in textHELP

It was the same piece of software but each student had found and preferred a method of support which suited them best.

Where can I get help?

So how does this help anybody turning to use software or technology for the very first time? Where do you find resources and more importantly which ones do you choose?

Looking at what you already have on your computer and adapting it to suit you is a good starting point:
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- My Web My Way accessibility pages can provide useful ideas for enlarging text, changing colours and settings to your own personal preference.
- MyStudyBar is a set of freely downloadable applications which can be used to support literacy issues.
- The Word 2007 document on this site shows you how to use some of the readily available features in Word.

And of course there are many more useful starting points and suggestions to be found on this website including suppliers and other useful contacts for information.

If you want to purchase software, sometimes working demonstrations of the program can be obtained which either allow use with restricted access to certain features or for a limited trial period.

Look out for training opportunities where various types of software and hardware can be demonstrated and tried or where people can meet suppliers and users of technology to give them an opportunity to see and try ideas out for themselves.

The use of technology is certainly not a magic cure for the alleviation of dyslexic difficulties but if chosen and used wisely, can provide a means to overcome some of the barriers which many face on a daily basis.