A version of this article was included in B.D.A. Contact magazine, September 2011.

My StudyBar free software.

Craig Mill put together a collection of free programs to support learners with literacy disabilities when he was with the JISC RSC (Regional Support Centre) Scotland North & East. It is now available on the **EduApps** site. Download the XP or the Vista and Windows 7 version on to your computer or a USB stick.

There are excellent Video and Word document tutorials explaining all the facilities in each program. When opened, the programs put an icon on the right side of the bottom navigation bar of the desktop.

My StudyBar gives a good overview of the kind of software that is available to support dyslexic users. They may be enough, or they may lead you to find out about purchasable software that is easier to use and has additional facilities.

1. Planning Support

·   **XMind** for mind mapping.

If you like this idea, consider buying Inspiration, Kidspiration or SparkSpace.

·   **HottNotes** for reminder notes.
·   **Sunbird Calendar**.

2. Reading Support.

·   **T-Bar and screen masking**. It colors a few lines of text and has options of colors and lines across the page.
·   **Rapid-Set.** Select font and background color for the whole screen.
·   **Vu-bar.** Screen ruler, putting a box round one line.

- **ssOverlay colour filter**. Color the whole screen.

4 ways of using color on the screen. There are similar stand-alone free and pay-for versions and Read&Write and ClaroRead include these facilities too.

- **Orato** text reading. It puts selected text copied to the clipboard into a new window and speaks it with synchronised high-lighting of each word or each sentence with options of voice, speed, volume, font and background colors.

If you like this, try free Balabolka which is included in My StudyBar, and many other **Text to Speech programs**.

3. Writing Support.

- **Lingoes dictionary.** Enter your word, hear the pronunciation, read and hear the definition. Use the minimised icon while working on documents.

Most Word processors have dictionaries. Most Text to Speech programs have their own dictionaries which you can hear.

- **Let me type word prediction**. It can learn your words as you type; predict from one or two letters; predict words or phrases. It is essential to study the options and the tutorial.

If you like this, you may want to consider Penfriend or the prediction facilities in Read&Write, ClaroRead and Co-Writer.

- **Balabolka** word processor with text to speech. It can talk as you type. Open PDF and Word files in plain text in Balabolka. Words can be high-lighted as they are read, leaving a font-colored trail. Save text as MP3 files, in blocks for tracks. Hear clipboard text in other applications. Download a spelling checker.

If you like this, consider free Open Office as a word processor, talking word processors and **Text to Speech software** that operates in Word, PDFs and web.

- **TinySpell spell checking**. As you type, it flags words that are not in its dictionary. Click on the icon to see suggestions and click on a spelling to insert it.

There are better spell checkers in many applications.

- **Stamina touch typing tutor.** Starts with forefingers middle row, f,j, adds d,k and further letters in pairs before offering unstructured words beginning with a chosen letter. It gives speed, accuracy and regularity results.

There are many free and pay-for typing programs that are suitably structured for dyslexic learners. See **Typing skills.**

4. Vision support.

- **Virtual Magnifier.** A rectangular magnifying pane that follows the cursor round the screen. Options for magnification size and colors.
- **Sonar mouse tracking.** A large ring or rectangle with a bold border, that you can move round the screen.
- **NVDA screen reader.** (Non-Visual Desktop Access.) This can speak menus and navigation buttons as well as the text.
- The XP version has **Thunder screen reader.**

These are primarily for visually impaired users, although some dyslexic users may also find them helpful.

5. Voice.

Vista and Windows 7 already have:

- **Windows speech recognition**, but it is helpful to have it within the My StudyBar toolbar. The text writing is good, the navigation varies. The difference from Dragon is that you cannot hear what the program has written, or what you said. So My StudyBar suggests using it with Orato Text to Speech.

In this slot, the XP version has the Orato Text Reader which is in the Reading Support section above.

All these programs are available individually and are free. It was very good of Craig to collect them together, with permission, to make them available in one (big) download, and to create the guides for use.

See also, **Freeware Products**.