

B.D.A. Employment and Dyslexia Handbook 2010.

I.T. Positives and Pitfalls of Specialist Software.

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Widely Recommended Software

Getting the best from conventional software.

Minutes in minutes

Low-tech solutions.



Assistive Technology (A.T.) is a powerful tool for those with dyslexia in addressing difficulties experienced in the workplace. However, A.T. can only ever be part of the solution, and is much more effective both immediately and long term, when combined with one to one strategy coaching.

In selecting A.T. it is vital that the assessor has:

- a sound knowledge of dyslexia
- an up to date knowledge of AT products
- makes focused and appropriate recommendations taking care not to overwhelm.

Any workplace assessor must bear in mind that their recommendations must firstly, lessen the disabling effects of the employee's dyslexia, secondly, enable the employee to become more productive, and thirdly, must be targeted to the specific requirements of the employee's job role. Thus, for example, a worker's difficulty with reading may well be overcome by using a screen reader, however, this would be an inappropriate recommendation if the employee does not have access to a computer, nor does their job role require the employee to read.

A.T. must therefore be carefully matched to the workers difficulties and job role, selecting appropriately between, for example, text-to-speech products, or spellcheckers, to ensure the right choice for the person is made. When the right A.T. is identified the individual can experience what many describe as a life-changing, liberating event. It can quite simply allow those with dyslexia to overcome difficulties and realise potential.

Widely Recommended Software.

- **Text Help Read and Write Gold** software may be used to assist people with many aspects of reading and writing. TextHelp is of particular use when reading text on the PC (including text on the internet), ensuring that when proofreading the correct words have been used. **Abby Fine Reader** and alternative OCR software packages such as **ClaroRead** are of particular use when a document is only available in paper format, supporting reading. This software allows text to be scanned into MS Word, which is then read back, enabling the user to access text much more quickly and accurately. In addition to this, the TextHelp package contains a spell checker, a homophone checker and a thesaurus, all designed for dyslexic users. This should assist with writing tasks. To facilitate working confidentially, the package should be supplied with headphones.
- **Franklin Spell Checker** software provides the dyslexic user with a portable electronic handheld dictionary. Alternatively if internet access is available Google may be used to check the spelling of complex and irregular words.
- **Dragon NaturallySpeaking** is a voice recognition package that can allow a direct match between verbal skills and written work. For dyslexic adults who have major problems with writing and spelling it can be liberating and empowering. Inevitably it avoids problems with spelling.
- **Dictation Machines** can be invaluable for backing up note taking techniques, as well as for dealing with general memory tasks. Some people use them to help find their way about by recording the directions they need to follow before leaving on a journey.

Getting the best from conventional software.

Despite the array of excellent and ingenious A.T. software available, it is still important to bear in mind that some difficulties can be addressed by making more effective use of standard, non-specialist software. For example, looking at two common applications; **MS Word** and **Outlook**, it is possible to identify really useful tools. In MS Word there are tools that allow, for example, the highlighting of selected text; spell checking, (if albeit in a limited fashion), use of a thesaurus; a means of adding 'Post Its' or type comments which appear in a series of balloons in the margin. For those who read better using a colour overlay it is possible to change the page colour using the option found in 'page layout'. These tools often lay

undiscovered and unused by the employee who is unaware of their potential for making a difference in their work performance.

In addition MS Outlook can assist the individual by setting reminders of either jobs to do, or appointments within the calendar. The detail for the appointment can be included, for example contact telephone numbers, location and people's names. As part of Outlook there is also the facility to have a to-do list with due dates – this allows for jobs and tasks to be recorded and stored in one place and one place only, overcoming the many paper lists that invariably are misplaced. There is also a contacts section and of course the all important 'email' facility with spell checker. As mobile phone technology has developed, many new phones now support 'Outlook' in a synchronised format. Thus changes made to Outlook on a phone appear on the PC and vice versa, keeping everything up-to-date and reducing the risk of duplicated work.

Minutes in minutes – using the Pulse Smartpen or Audio Notetaker.

Taking minutes in meetings represents a myriad of difficulties for the dyslexic employee, requiring a number of skills ranging from:

- writing sufficiently quickly
- writing sufficiently legibly
- having sufficient spelling ability
- being able to identify points that need recording and those that don't
- having sufficient working memory to allow the minute taker to hold necessary information in their mind, write down relevant points, whilst continuing to listen to what is being said and effectively filter necessary points. This one skill constitutes, for the majority, one of the most disabling features of their dyslexia, resulting in incomplete minutes with omitted essential information. (This difficulty is also experienced when taking information down from the telephone and is a real difficulty for those working in call centres).

Fortunately, A.T. is available in the form of digital recorders such as the **Olympus DM450**. This allows a minute taker to record the whole meeting and download the recording as an audio file onto a computer, for review at a later date. The employee is then afforded the opportunity to contribute to discussions in the safe knowledge that everything was being recorded and nothing has been missed.

However, one of the challenges with recording meetings is that the user still has to work through the recording, experiencing the same frustrations and difficulties as they would in real time. This can lead to the minute taker listening to the same recording over and over again to ensure all information has been sufficiently captured in text format. However, in recent times A.T. has made impressive developmental strides to reduce further still these difficulties. Two such developments are Audio Notetaker and the Pulse Smartpen.



Audio Notetaker software provides a visual representation of the recording, thus enabling easier navigation around the audio file. Using the timer on the Audio Notetaker tool bar, helps to facilitate the location of information, and this feature when used in conjunction with 'book marks' (available on Olympus digital recorders) enables the recording to be divided into colour coded segments facilitating even easier navigation around the recording. By using the notes panel, the main points of the segment can be summarized in a text format and later exported to MS Word.

The **Pulse Smartpen** is in essence a pen with a built-in recorder and minute scanner. It allows the user to write notes in the usual way – and, when required, use the printed controls on page to activate the digital recorder. Play back can be linked directly to any text on the page. Alternatively, the recorder can be used simultaneously as the user writes and both the recording and the notes made, downloaded to software on the computer. If required, the digital recording can be used in conjunction with Audio Notetaker. The Pulse Smartpen also incorporates handwriting recognition which can be transcribed into printed text. However this really will only work well with clear, well-defined, handwriting, which is often not the

case for those with dyslexia. It is also important to note that special paper is required which comes in a range of stylish note books or pads.



PULSETM SMARTPEN

Record everything you hear and write. Then replay the recorded audio by tapping directly on your notes.



Low-tech solutions.

In addition to all the A.T. available – there are still the old fashioned and, some may argue, more reliable, low-tech aids, such as a piece of paper and a pencil! Here are some of the most common non-A.T. workplace solutions:

- Spelling – a range of dictionaries/thesauruses, from the simple to the complex and even the phonetic. If these don't meet the needs of the individual and their work context, then creating a personalised dictionary using a small note-book and a pencil
- Writing – where possible maximising the use of templates. Collating well-written phrases from colleagues to use in future reports. Adopting a relaxed pen grip to improve handwriting and avoiding premature tiring of the hand.
- Reading – encourage employees to read their work aloud. This will help with identifying errors and improves punctuation and sentence structure. To assist with tracking, a simple piece of card/paper can be placed under the line. Where appropriate, using a colour overlay can also assist with reading accuracy and speed (assessment is recommended).
- Organisation – forming good working habits such as producing a list of jobs at the start of the day that can then be prioritised. As the working day progresses the list and priorities can be revisited. Ensuring a clock is visible and times for tasks are calculated. Perhaps the most effective strategy is the assistance of a trained workplace 'buddy' to help keep on track.

More information on using technology can be found on N.T.C. web:

www.bdatech.org/

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