

# **Assistive Technology for university.**

**Rob Wheeldon. May 2012.**

## **Mind maps.**

A useful study aid is the use of mind maps which were developed by educational specialist **Tony Buzan**. You can create mind maps with nothing more than a pen and a piece of paper, linking thought bubbles from a main subject to any number of linked ideas. A lot of dyslexics think non-sequentially. This is a very useful tool for the creation of essays. There is also software available to do this on the PC. One version is called **Inspiration**. I used Inspiration at university and would highly recommend it (it also helps put your ideas in order).

## **Text to Speech.**

Another very useful piece of kit is a software package called **Read and Write** which highlights the text and reads it back to you. As dyslexics often miss words out entirely especially small words so this can be very useful.

## **Speech Recognition.**

I am writing this with my chief study aid called **Dragon Naturally Speaking** (version number 11). I'm currently training it, and with a strong north-west English accent, this is not always an easy task! However it is considerably easier than touch typing which I manage to do with one finger. I never learned to type at school; most boys didn't; we did wood and metal work instead in the 80s. This seems an incredible oversight in this multimedia day and age. Although I'd like to be able to type, realistically I never had the time to do this at University whilst still covering my study load. Dragon NaturallySpeaking saved me a great deal of time and effort and I never would have completed my dissertation without it. Dragon NaturallySpeaking was not supplied to me by the University but was rather my own purchase (a purchase well worth making). Nobody saw the information age coming and the usefulness of as having typing skills.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking is advertised on television as a dictation device. You wear headphones and talk into a microphone. You try to talk as naturally as possible and most of the time it gets the words right (I'd say about 75% of the time in my case but with training and continued usage this does improve). However it does get a little frustrating when it

continually gets a word wrong at which point I switch off the microphone and type the word in (this only happens with certain words). This version most recent version of Dragon NaturallySpeaking cost me £50 from Amazon which I consider to be money very well spent.

When spending a long time dictating I would recommend the occasional short break as it can be quite mentally tiring if you are unused to it. Dragon has both improved in accuracy and dropped in price since the first version I used six years ago. If you are dyslexic or have a dyslexic child who is struggling at school this is one of the main products I would recommend. Having said that dyslexia is a syndrome and not a medical condition and it may not prove useful for all dyslexic individuals.

### **Summary.**

In **Summary** is best to have an assessment of your needs as a dyslexic, whether at school or at college or university (or even just to give you peace of mind). After the assessment it is just a matter of trying different tools and methods and seeing what working best for you.

**[See current version of Dragon Naturally Speaking.](#)**

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