

The Assessor's Guide to Freeware and Open Source Software Alternatives



By:
Craig Mill
JISC Regional Support Centre
Scotland North & East

The Assessor's Guide to Freeware and Open Source Software Alternatives

Further information

For further information about this publication, or the work of the JISC Regional Support Centre, please contact:

Craig Mill (Accessibility & Inclusion)
Sarah Price (Manager)
JISC RSC Scotland North & East
Edinburgh's Telford College
350 West Granton Road
Edinburgh EH5 1QE

e-mail: support@rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk
tel: 0131 559 4112
web: www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk

Content

Introduction	4
Overview of applications.....	5
1. Mind maps	5
XMind.....	5
MindMeister	6
2. Colour preferences, screen masking and tracking	7
RapidSet	7
T-Bar	8
ssOverlay	9
Vu-Bar 4.0	10
3. Dictionary and thesaurus.....	11
TheSage.....	11
4. Text-to-speech	12
Thunder.....	12
DSpeech.....	13
WordTalk	14
5. Word Prediction.....	15
LetMe Type	15
6. Visual Support	16
Non Visual Desktop Access (NVDA).....	16
WebbIE.....	17
7. Voice recognition	18
Windows Speech Recognition	18

Introduction

The aim of this guide is to promote awareness of open source¹ and freeware² Windows programs that can be used to support learners with additional support needs. The overall collection of programs is called AccessApps. In many cases, AccessApps programs are very similar in functionality to well-known commercial products.

An individual learner, especially one with literacy support needs, may benefit from a range of tools such as text-to-speech, screen masking, dictionaries, highlighting, voice recognition etc. In some cases, learners require only a few of the features that come with the popular commercial products. Unfortunately, though the products can often easily be customised to reduce the number of features, such reductions do not typically reduce the overall cost.

AccessApps programs are portable, running from a USB stick, providing a range of solutions to support writing, reading and planning as well as sensory and physical difficulties. As with the commercial products, whether the full features of AccessApps programs are used, or only a subset of these, the cost stays the same. The big difference with the AccessApps programs is that the cost remains *no cost!*

This guide highlights a selection of 14 common applications although there are over 40 assistive technology applications to choose from on AccessApps. All the software described in this guide can be downloaded from: www.eduapps.org. Training materials and step-by-step guides can also be obtained from the EduApps website. They can be downloaded in a range of formats, e.g., large print, MP3, Digital Talking Book (DTB). Furthermore, the RSC can provide comprehensive support, guidance and advice to individuals who have downloaded the software.

Because the software is portable, learners can use it at home, at college/university or even at work - wherever a Windows PC is available to them. Learners have access to the technology they need, whenever and wherever they need it, without having to ask, making AccessApps an invaluable tool for promoting inclusive learning and teaching.

¹ The JISC Open Source Software Advisory Service (OSS Watch), defines open source software as “software that has been released under an Open Source Initiative (OSI) certified license”: <http://www.oss-watch.ac.uk/resources/opensourcesoftware.xml>

² Freeware is computer [software](#) that is available for use at no cost or for an optional fee

Overview of applications

1. Mind maps

XMind

XMind is an open source mind mapping program, similar to Inspiration, Mind Manager and Mind Genius.

Who would benefit?

XMind can help individuals who think, plan and learn visually.

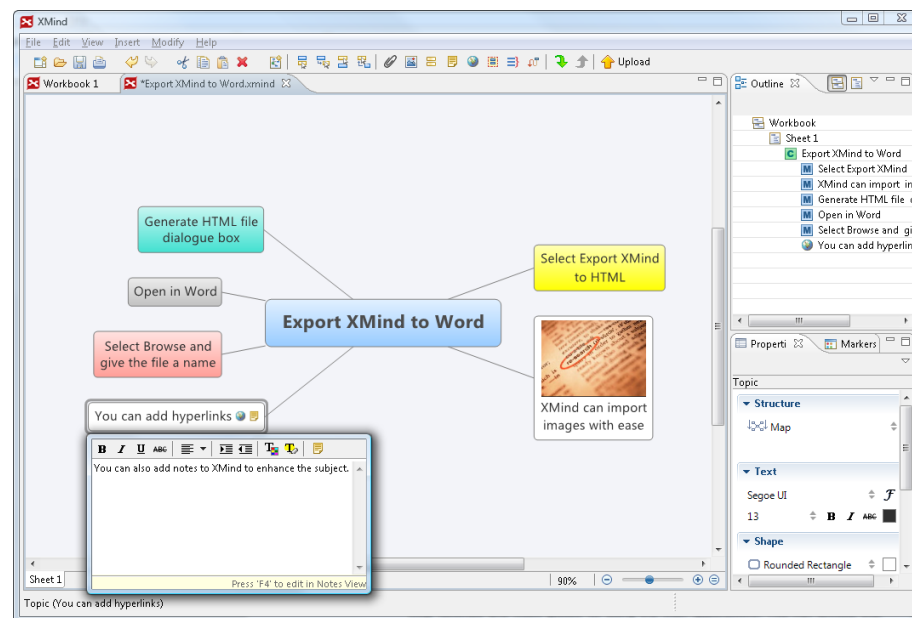


Figure 1: XMind is an easy-to-use mind mapping program.

Main features:

- Add topics and sub topics using the mouse and keyboard shortcuts.
- Customise font style, font and background colour of topics and subtopics.
- Add images, hyperlinks/files and notes to topics and subtopics.
- Outline and text view (right pane) .
- Spell checking.
- Import Mind Manager files.
- Export to HTML, Word etc.

Limitations:

- XMind can export mind maps to PowerPoint but only to one slide.
- XMind does not feature audio support but can be used in combination with Thunder text-to-speech.

Website: XMind can be downloaded from: <http://www.xmind.net/>

MindMeister

MindMeister is a free online collaborative mind mapping program with similar features to Inspiration, Mind Manager and Mind Genius.

Who would benefit?

MindMeister can help individuals who think, plan and learn visually. MindMeister can be used to collaborate with fellow colleagues, students or lecturers in real time.

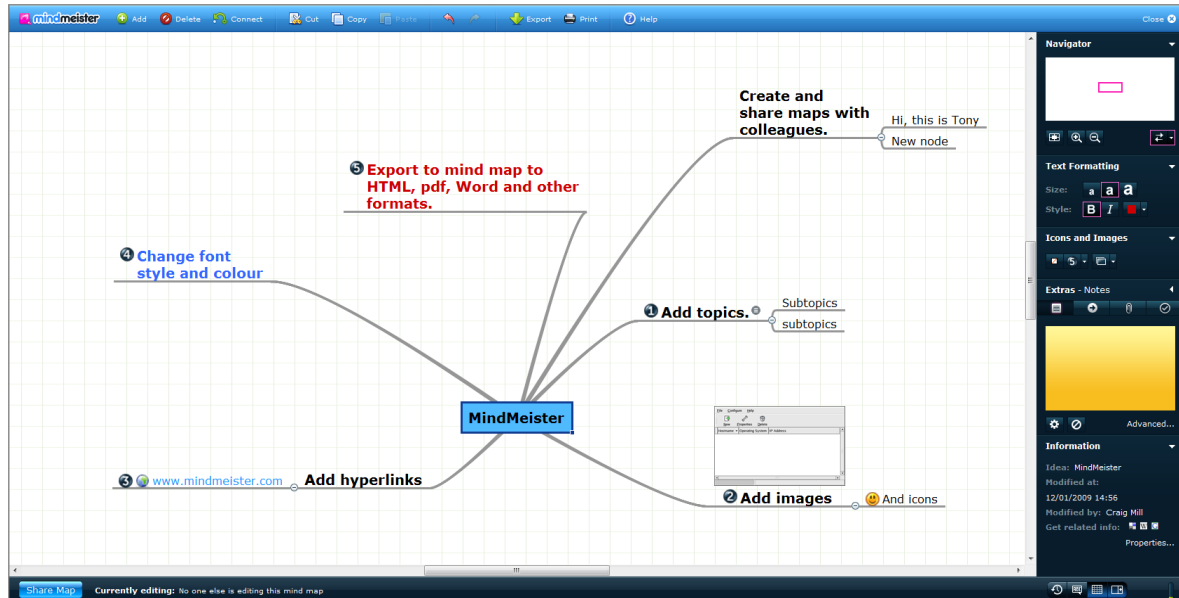


Figure 2: MindMeister is a free collaborative web based mind mapping program.

Main features:

- Add topics and sub topics.
- Customise font style, size and colour of topics and subtopics.
- Add images, hyperlinks/files and notes to topics and subtopics.
- Export to HTML, Word and other popular formats.
- A MindMeister app can be downloaded from iTunes for use with the iPhone.

Limitations:

- MindMeister requires an internet connection.
- The free account limits the user to 6 mind maps.
- Does not feature spell checking.
- MindMeister is not suitable for screen reader users.

Website: You can set up a free MindMeister account at:

<http://www.mindmeister.com/>

2. Colour preferences, screen masking and tracking

RapidSet

RapidSet is an easy-to-use program which allows you to change font and background colours.

Who would benefit?

Individuals who prefer to use an alternative font and background colour to the Windows default.

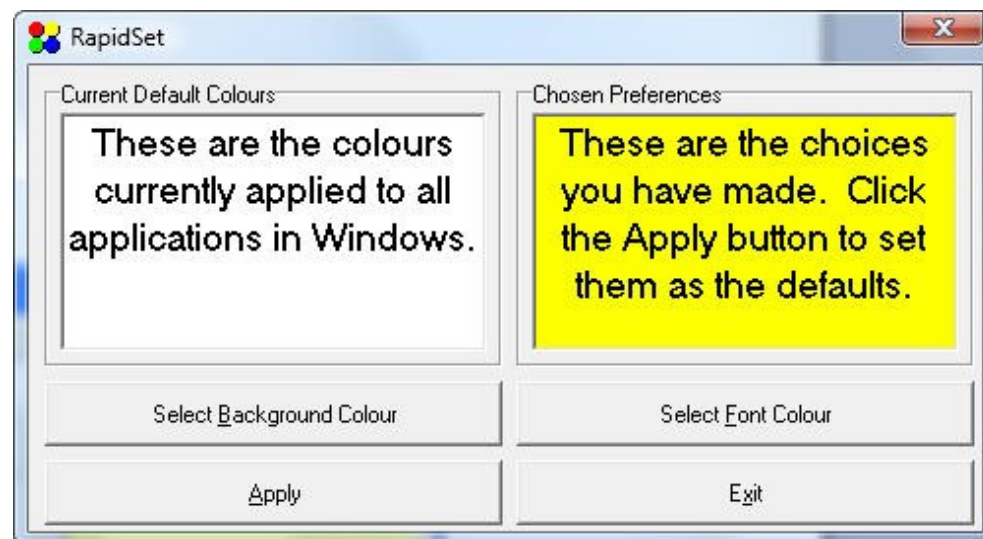


Figure 3: RapidSet font and background colour changer.

Main features:

- Change background and font colours to Windows applications, e.g., Word etc.

Limitations:

- RapidSet does not save individual user settings when computer is shut down.

Website: RapidSet can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/5Cokje>

Tutorial: <http://tinyurl.com/6ovpw4>

T-Bar

T-bar is a coloured screen masking/ruler similar to the features found in Texthelp's Read and Write Gold (v9) and ClaroRead's Screen Ruler/Claroview.

Who would benefit?

Individuals who prefer to use an alternative font and background colour to the Windows default.



Figure 4: T-Bar is a screen masking/ruler program to help track text.

Main features:

- Screen masking with 1 or 2 ruled lines.
- Ruled lines can be adjusted to read one or more lines of text.
- Adjustable screen masking width and length.
- Lock T-bar so it follows the mouse pointer.
- Finely tune colour, line and saturation settings using the Control Panel.
- User settings can be saved.

Website: T-Bar can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/5Cokje>

ssOverlay

ssOverlay is screen masking program similar to the features in Read and Write Gold and ClaroRead's Claroview.

Who would benefit?

ssOverlay can help individuals who find it easier to read information on a computer with a colour overlay or screen masking. ssOverlay can also help to reduce screen glare on older monitors.



Figure 5: ssOverlay masks the complete screen.

Main features:

- 8 screen colour masking options.
- Adjust transparency levels to suit individual preferences.

Website: ssOverlay can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/5Cokje>

Vu-Bar 4.0

Vu-Bar is an on-screen, slotted ruler similar to the ClaroRead's ScreenRuler.

Who would benefit?

Vu-Bar can help individuals who find it difficult to read large amounts of text and would benefit from reading one or more lines at a time.

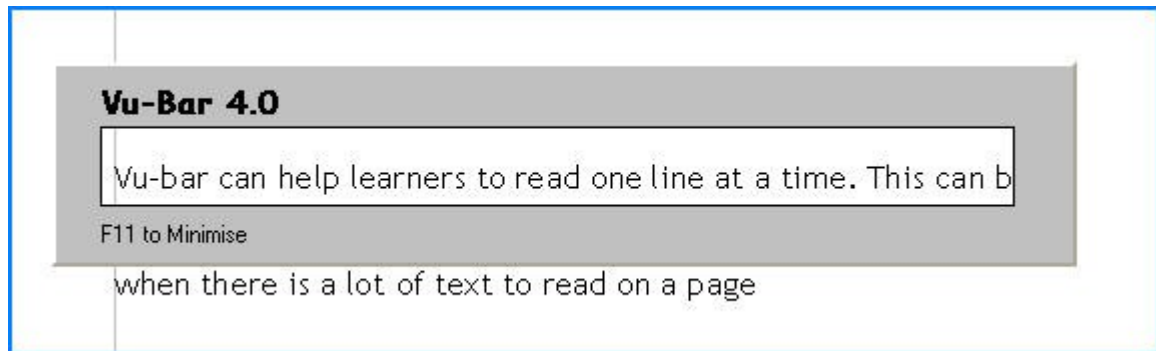


Figure 6: Vu-Bar can help to read single lines of text.

Main features:

- Adjust length of Vu-Bar.
- Ruled lines can be adjusted to read one or more lines of text.
- Adjust the colour settings of Vu-Bar.
- Lock Vu-Bar so it follows the mouse pointer.

Website: Vu-Bar can be downloaded from <http://bit.ly/5Cokje>

Tutorial: <http://tinyurl.com/69c25o>

3. Dictionary and thesaurus

TheSage

TheSage is an English dictionary and thesaurus. It offers similar features to the Dictionary option in Read & Write Gold.

Who would benefit?

TheSage can help individuals with specific learning difficulties or those with literacy or language support needs.

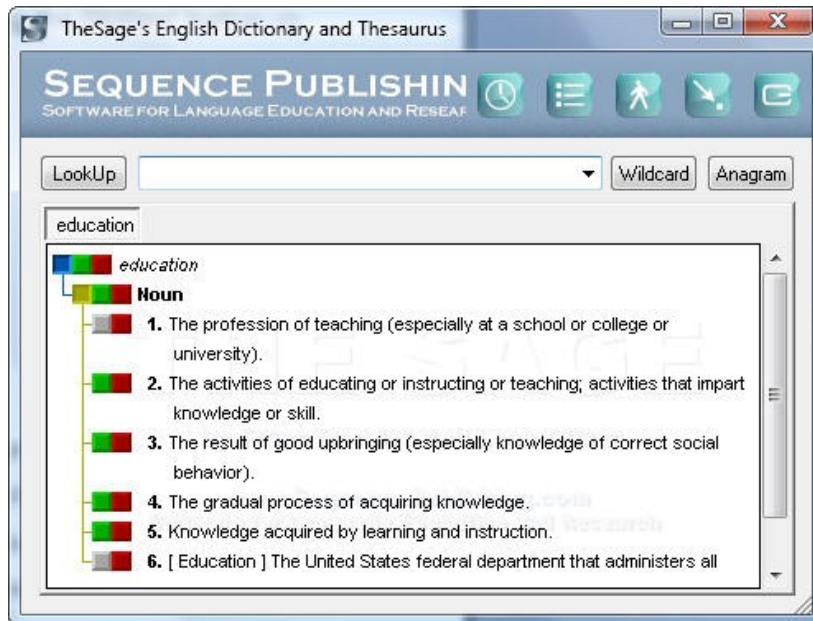


Figure 7: TheSage - dictionary and thesaurus.

Main features:

- Easy-to-use powerful word search.
- Over 300,000 definitions including history, geographical, political, medicine, biology etc.
- Includes phonetic transcriptions.
- Customise colour and font settings.
- Text-to-speech.
- Works with web applications such as Google, WikiPedia, Wiktionary etc.
- Fully supported with help and tutorial guides.

Website: www.sequencepublishing.com

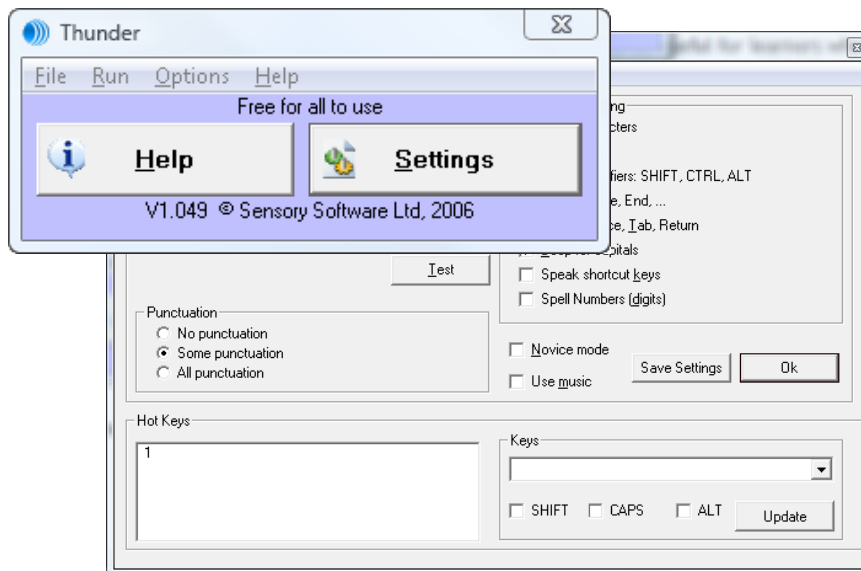
4. Text-to-speech

Thunder

Thunder is a text-to-speech program that can read information on a computer screen, e.g., menus, icons, etc.

Who would benefit?

Thunder can help individuals who have literacy difficulties and require additional audio support when reading or writing text. It is particularly useful for proof reading.



Main features:

- Read information, icons, menus, text etc.
- Will read text in most word processing applications.
- Reads typed characters, words, sentences and paragraphs.
- Supports SAPI 5 voices, e.g., Heather, Daniel etc.
- Integrates with WebBIE - the text browser.
- Provides help and support via LookOUT (numeric keypad 0).
- Save user settings.

Limitations:

- Does not support Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox browsers.

Website: Thunder be downloaded from www.screenreader.net

DSpeech

DSpeech is a text-to-speech program that can import a wide range of text-based files, read them aloud, highlight words as they are read, and convert text to speech, e.g., MP3.

Who would benefit?

DSpeech is for individuals who find it helpful to read and listen to text. DSpeech can also help those for whom English is not their first language.

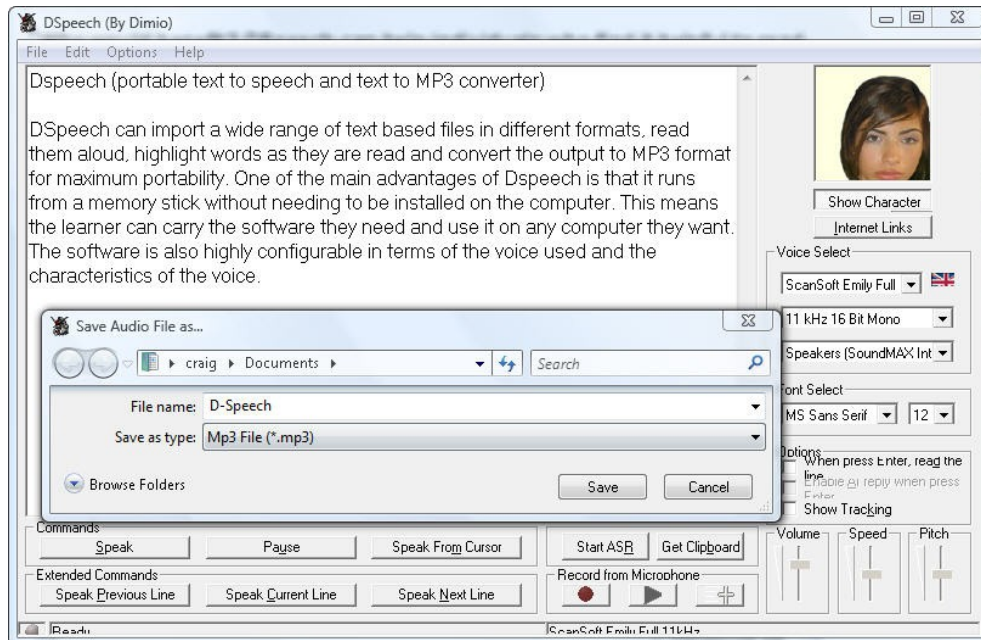


Figure 8: DSpeech reads text and saves to MP3.

Main features:

- Imports a wide range of text-based files, e.g., Word, HTML etc.
- Supports copy and paste, e.g., copy text from web browsers.
- Highlights text as it is read.
- Supports SAPI 5 voices, e.g., Heather, Daniel etc.
- Saves text to audio format, e.g., MP3 and WAV.
- Supports voice recognition, (Dragon and Windows Speech) - text can be spoken into text box and read back.
- Saves user settings on exit.

Website: DSpeech can be downloaded from <http://dspeech.en.softonic.com>

Tutorial: <http://bit.ly/4XnX9t>

WordTalk

WordTalk is a text-to-speech program (Add-in) that works alongside Microsoft Word.

Who would benefit?

WordTalk is for individuals who find it helpful to read and listen to text. WordTalk can also help those for whom English is not their first language. It is particularly useful for proof reading Word documents.

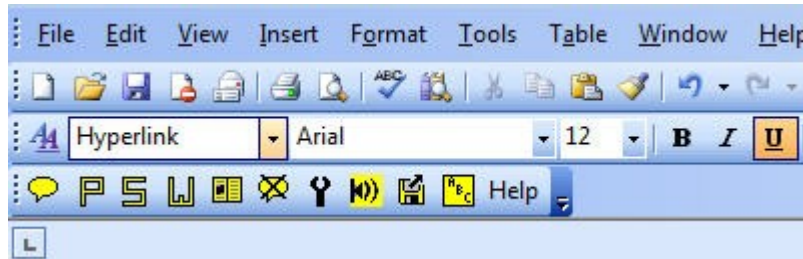


Figure 9: WordTalk sits in Word's toolbar.

Main features:

- Highlights text as it is read.
- Supports SAPI 5 voices, e.g., Heather, Daniel etc.
- Saves text to audio format, e.g., MP3.
- Audio support for spell checking and thesaurus.
- Reads text from cursor or with keyboard shortcuts.

Limitations

- Only supports Microsoft Word.

Website: WordTalk can be downloaded from www.wordtalk.org.uk/Home

5. Word Prediction

LetMe Type

LetMe Type is a word prediction program that predicts single words or phrases in a range of Windows applications.

Who would benefit?

LetMe Type would benefit individuals who require additional help with spelling and/or word recognition, particularly with longer complex words. LetMe Type will also benefit individuals who have a mobility difficulty and find it difficult to input text or are slow typists.

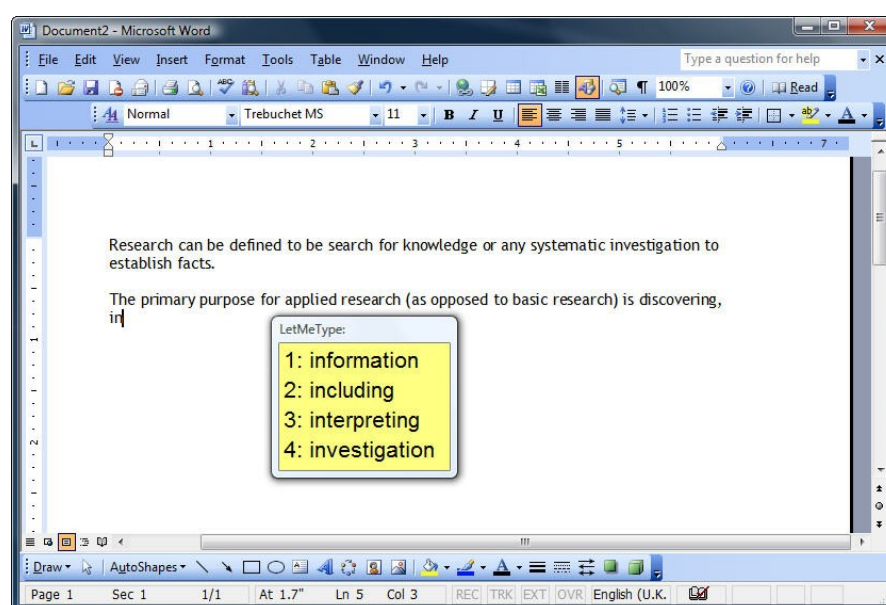


Figure 10: LetMe Type predicts words as they are typed.

Main Features:

- Create subject specific lexicons, e.g., sociology, psychology, biology etc.
- Predicts in most Windows applications, Microsoft Word, Open Writer etc.
- Predicts word after first two or three letters have been typed.
- Predicts words in context.
- Predicts single words or phrases.
- Customise prediction window with font, font size and colour background.
- Set amount of words to be predicted in prediction window.

Website: LetMe Type can be downloaded from <http://www.clasohm.com/lmt/en/>

6. Visual Support

Non Visual Desktop Access (NVDA)

NVDA is a screen reading program similar to JAWS, Windows Eyes etc.

Who would benefit?

NVDA can help individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

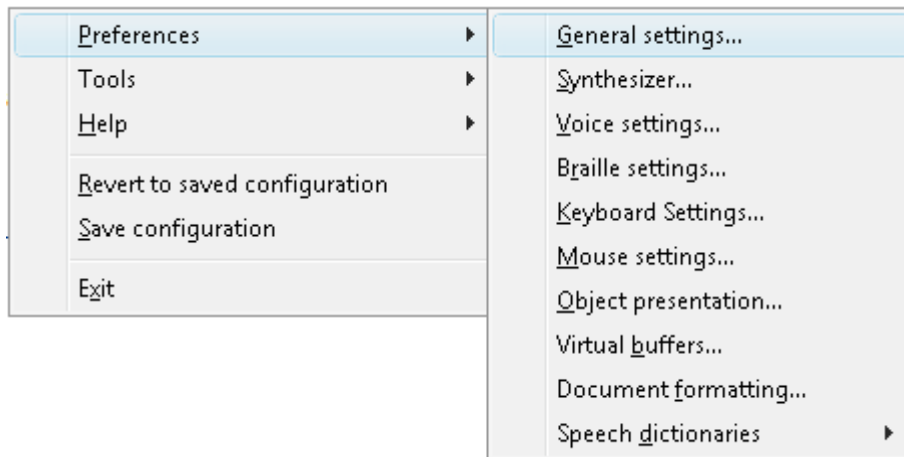


Figure 11: NVDA Preferences menu

Main features:

- Support SAPI 5 voices.
- Choice of individual preferences, e.g., rate, pitch, inflection of voice etc.
- Supports Windows environment and most applications, e.g., Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox etc.
- Plenty of support/tutorials.
- Supports some Braille writers (PacMate).

Limitations

- Not as powerful as JAWS and other commercial screen readers.
- Requires the user to learn keyboard shortcuts.

Website: NVDA can be downloaded from www.nvda-project.org

WebbIE

WebbIE is text based browser with an easy-to-use interface.

Who would benefit?

WebbIE can benefit blind and visually impaired users.

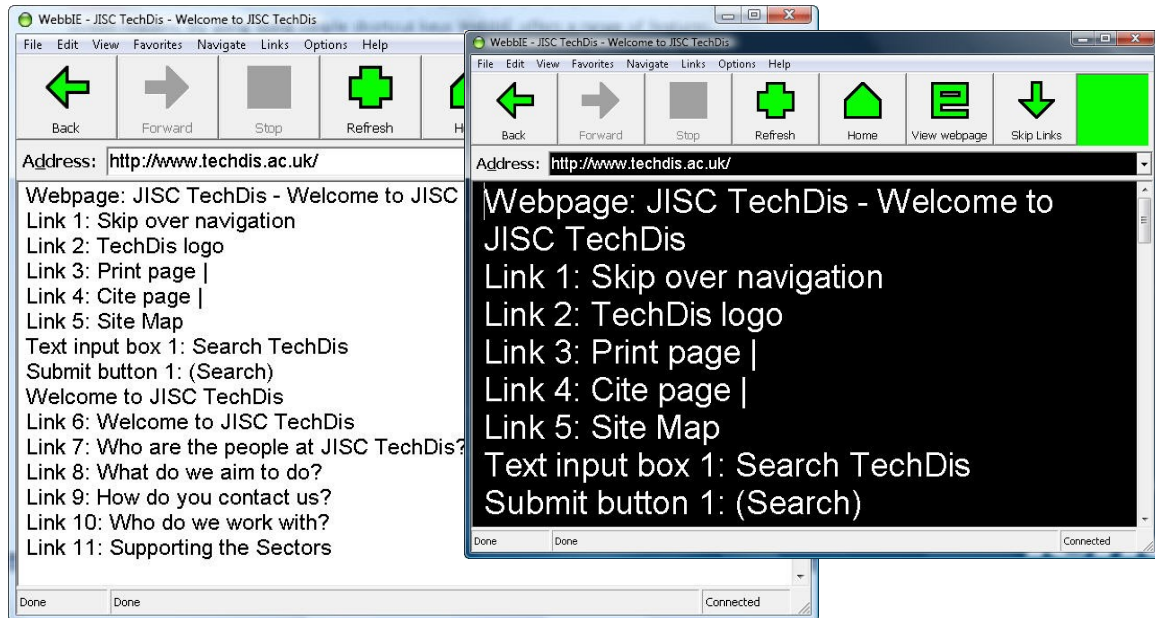


Figure 12: WebbIE features high contrast view with large text.

Main features:

- Large buttons on browser to help with navigation.
- Toggles between a visual and text based browser.
- Supports Thunder Screen Reader.
- Works with simple keyboard shortcuts.
- Inverts colours, e.g., high contrast.
- Increase text size.
- Comes bundled with 'Accessible Software', e.g., Accessible Podcatcher, RSS reader etc.

Limitations:

- Can struggle with complicated websites, e.g., complex php scripts etc.

Website: WebbIE can be downloaded from www.webbie.org.uk

Tutorial: <http://tinyurl.com/6ywve6>

7. Voice recognition

Windows Speech Recognition

Windows speech recognition is a voice recognition program similar to Dragon NaturallySpeaking Preferred.

Who would benefit?

Windows speech recognition can be useful for individuals who have mobility difficulties and find it difficult or impossible to use a keyboard and mouse. Voice recognition can also support people with literacy difficulties.

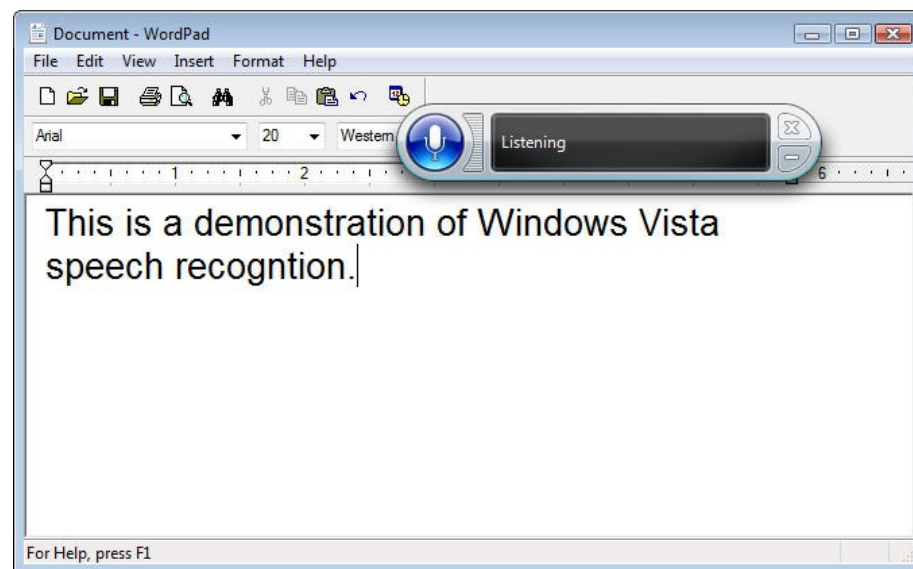


Figure 13: The Speech Recognition toolbar.

Main features:

- Easy-to-follow and comprehensive tutorials.
- Accurate dictation.
- Control and navigate Windows environment and applications.
- MouseGrid commands.
- Comprehensive support, e.g., Quick reference cards.
- Minimises to system tray.
- Options to add words to lexicon.

Limitations:

- Does not support 'read that back' or 'play that back' commands.

Website: www.microsoft.com/speech/speech2007/default.mspx