

Assistive Tech: Tools for Students Newly Transitioned to Online Classes

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Overnight, we've been thrown into providing remote instruction and finding creative ways to support students as they transition to new course formats and requirements. As students spend more time learning technologically, it becomes more important to consider the benefits and supports assistive technology (AT) can provide in online learning. Even if they haven't used AT before, many the students you work with can and will benefit from these tools and resources.

The list below includes different types of assistive technology that may benefit students in online coursework. This list and the examples are not exhaustive but provide some guidance as you support students through the transition to online learning in the coming days and weeks.

Text-to-Speech or Literacy Support Tools:

Students might be responsible for consuming an increased number of printed or digital readings, posted on a Learning Management System, assigned in textbooks, or available online or on websites. Some students may struggle with the increased volume or the online nature of the readings. Text-to-speech and literacy support programs provide support with reading content and also often increase comprehension. Built-in tools, such as dictionaries and translators, support student learning, while other embedded tools provide visual tracking support. Student with learning disabilities, ADHD, mental health diagnoses, concussions or traumatic brain injuries, physical disabilities, chronic health conditions, and visual impairments may all benefit from these types of tools.

Given the variety of spaces in which students work digitally, you'll want to be mindful that the tool(s) you suggest integrate in all those places. Finding a tool that provides support in webpages, within documents such as PDFs, ePubs and Docs, in digital copies of textbooks, in documents students are composing, within your Learning Management System, and in library journals is important. Some technology companies are offering free access to a variety of AT tools for the remainder of the semester to support students during this challenging time. You can easily find this information by visiting technology companies' websites.

Text-to-Speech or Literacy Support Tools:

- [Read&Write](#) or [Read&Write for Google Chrome](#) by Texhelp
- [Kurzweil](#) by Cambium Learning Technologies
- [Microsoft Learning Tools within Office 365](#)

- [VoiceDream Reader](#)
- [Balabolka](#) (Windows Only)
- [VoiceOver](#) on Mac Operating Systems

Writing Tools:

While writing a paper using a computer doesn't change whether you are in an in-person or online class, instructors may assign an increased number of writing or projects because of the decreased time spent in class or in group work. As a result, students may benefit from tools that support them with their writing assignments. Tools such as dictation or speech-to-text, which will type out what a student says, help get content into a document, while grammar and spellchecking tools support the mechanics of writing. Both types of tools may be even more useful if a writing center or peer review/editing support is not available on campus. Mapping out what to write and organizing a paper are other areas where student may struggle. Tools such as mind mapping or brainstorming provide support in graphically creating and organizing a paper.

Dictation/Speech-to-Text:

- Talk&Type within [Read&Write](#) or [Read&Write for Google Chrome](#) by Texthelp
- [Google Voice Typing](#)
- [Dragon Naturally Speaking](#)
- [Dictate within Office 365](#)
- [Voice Control within Mac Operating Systems](#)
- [Windows Voice Recognition](#)

Grammar/Spell Checkers:

- CheckIt! within [Read&Write](#) and [Read&Write for Google Chrome](#) by Texthelp
- [Ginger Grammar and Spell Checker](#)
- [Grammarly](#)
- [Hemingway Editor](#)

Mind Mapping/Brainstorming Tools:

- [Popplet](#)
- [MindMeister](#)
- [Inspiration Maps](#)

Study Skills Tools:

Students might need to synthesize additional information or consume content in methods and formats that are new to them. Providing support tools to help them retain information is another area of support AT can provide. Highlighters, annotation tools, and digital flash cards are all tools which can help students retain and understand information.

Highlighters and Annotation Tools:

- [Read&Write](#) and [Read&Write for Google Chrome](#) by Texthelp
- [Kurzweil](#) by Cambium Learning Technologies
- [Microsoft Learning Tools within Office 365](#)
- [Kami](#)

Flash Cards and Study Aids:

- [Quizlet](#)
- [StudyBlue](#)

Executive Functioning: Organization Tools:

While many college students struggle with organization, being out of their routine might exacerbate these organizational struggles for students suddenly thrust into online courses. As a result, tools which can help them stay organized, plan their time, and stay on top of coursework and assignments are key in this time of transition.

Organization Tools:

- [Google Calendar and Tasks](#) and [Google Keep](#)
- [Microsoft Calendar](#) and [Tasks](#)
- [Todoist](#)
- [Trello](#)

Executive Functioning: Time/Task Management Tools:

Managing time effectively and staying on task can also be challenging in a new environment. Countless tools are on the market to support staying on task, focusing on assignments, and prioritizing work.

Time/Task Management Tools:

- [Pomodoro Technique](#) or Pomodoro Apps (search for these on the internet)
- [Cold Turkey](#) and [Cold Turkey Writer](#)
- [Priority Matrix](#)
- [Written? Kitten!](#)
- [Strict Workflow](#)
- [MinimaList](#)
- [Guided Access](#) and [Do Not Disturb](#) on iOS devices

Visual Support and Screen Masking:

The increased amount of time online might be a struggle for students with visual disabilities, disabilities that impact tracking, or concussions or traumatic brain injuries. Screen masking tools, which put a colored tint on a computer screen, or tools that

support the tracking of a mouse or line of text support students impacted by cognitive or physical disabilities.

Visual Support and Screen Masking Tools:

- Screen Masking tool within [Read&Write](#) and [Read&Write for Google Chrome](#) by Texthelp
- Brightness level, night mode, reduced blue light features built into the operating system of a device
- [Screen Mask Chrome Extension](#)
- [Beeline Reader](#)

As you work with students during this unprecedented time, we hope you'll find time to explore some of the AT that could ease their transition.