

Computer-Assisted Writing Instruction

Computer programs for writing help students with developing ideas, organizing, outlining, and brainstorming. **Templates** provide a framework and reduce the physical effort spent on writing so that students can pay attention to organization and content.

Graphic Organizers- The example at the right, similar to the program Inspiration, demonstrates how a student has organized her writing. Her topic is the Chesapeake Bay. She thinks about three main ideas for her topic: food, fun, and jobs. Next, she adds supporting details for each of her three main ideas. Now she can compose her paragraph. Programs like Inspiration or Kidspiration are fun because students can use pictures, change the shape or colors of the circles, and change the chart into an outline.

Word processors are excellent tools for students who find handwriting tedious. Often, students with disabilities have difficulty with all the requirements for the writing process. They have trouble organizing their thoughts and then retaining those thoughts long enough to put them on paper. Their handwriting must be neat enough and their spelling and grammar correct enough to convey their message, tasks that they may find difficult.

Spell-checker

- * helps student identify misspelled words
- * automatically corrects words if the teacher set the program that way

Thesaurus

- * offers student other words that mean the same as the word he or she is using
- * adds variety to student's writing and increases student vocabulary

But before word-processing can save time during the actual writing process, students must know **how to type and how to use the computer**. Typing speeds may be slower without proper instruction in typing; slower typing may lead to less quality and shorter length in writing assignments (MacArthur, 2000; MacArthur, Ferretti, Okolo, & Cavalier, 2001). If students cannot type fluently or must search for letters and numbers, the process may be slower than handwriting.

Speech-to-text program

- * student speaks into a microphone and the program types the words
- * program must be "trained" to the student's word pronunciation and speech style
- * student must be taught how to use the program
- * increased speed from thought to text

Text-to-speech program

- * student can hear what she has typed to check if it says what she wants it to say
- * good for editing

http://www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/computeraided_writing.asp