

How To Find and Make Simple Computer Books

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In today's multimedia world, many kids love reading books on the computer. Computers have the ability to level the playing field for all students, including those with disabilities who may have difficulty engaging with a paper book. For students with attention problems, the sound and animation of a computer book can grab their interest. For students with visual impairments, the ability to adjust background color, font size, and auditory feedback lets them focus on parts of books they

use computer books, software that can be used to create new computer books, and sources on the Internet for free online books.

SOME BASIC TOOLS

Students with motor difficulties may have trouble using a standard mouse and/or keyboard to operate a computer book. Occupational therapy practitioners need to be able to identify the most appropriate adaptations to

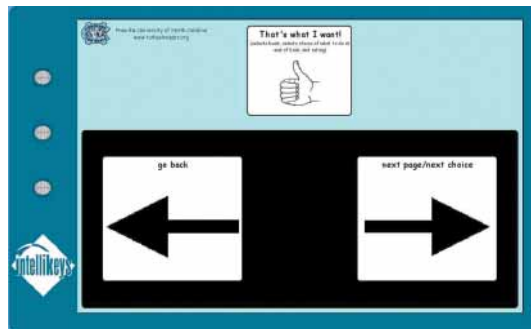
be programmed to do a range of functions, from being a simple keyboard to being programmed to read a book on the computer. The keyboard doesn't have the same types of traditional keys that are used on computers; instead, it uses interchangeable paper overlays. The IntelliKeys comes with pre-made standard alphabet overlays.

Because of physical challenges, some students are unable to use special keyboards, enlarged trackballs, joysticks, and touchscreens, and instead may need to use switches to access the computer. Using switches with the computer requires a computer switch interface box, which is a small box that plugs into the USB port. Depending on the interface, there may be one to five ports where individual switches can be connected. Many of the interfaces are plug and play; others require some programming using special software.

Listings of computer input devices and computer switch interfaces can be found at the Closing the Gap Resource Directory at www.closingthegap.com.



IntelliKeys Keyboard with Standard Overlays (Cambium Learning)



Custom Made Intellikeys Book Reading Overlay (Made using Overlay Maker Software, Cambium Learning)

had not been able to see before. For students with hearing impairments, pictures and/or short video clips of sign language can help the story make more sense. For students with physical disabilities who cannot hold a paper book, decreasing motor demands by reading on a computer allows them to fully explore a book.

There is a fast-growing supply of electronic books for students with learning disabilities. However, there are fewer resources for very beginning, struggling readers who may have intellectual disabilities, including those who are older. This article will focus on books for this population, with sugges-

help students successfully explore computer books. Solutions or tools for making computer use more successful include simple visual adjustments to the computer, such as changing the screen background color, the font size, and the size of the icons and the cursor. Students can also use such tools as enlarged trackballs, joysticks, and touch screens.

Students with more significant physical needs who have difficulty controlling their hands may need different types of alternative tools to access the computer, such as switches or an alternative keyboard. Cambium's IntelliKeys keyboard, for example, can

Software for Making Books

Specialized authoring programs exist for teachers and therapists to create custom educational activities for students with disabilities—and making electronic books is at the top of the list. The power of these programs is that the activities can be made accessible for students who are using a range of alternative tools to operate the computer. Commonly used software programs include (though are not limited to):

- **My Own Bookshelf:** Makes electronic books that can be presented on an electronic bookshelf, to offer students a choice of books. Has

some nice free, downloadable short technology tips sheets for setting up switch interfaces and the IntelliKeys. Available at www.softtouch.com.

- **Classroom Suite:** Used to make books and other materials. Has an activity sharing area where activities can be downloaded for free. Available at www.cambiumlearning.com.
- **Clicker 5:** Used to make books and other materials. Has an activity sharing area where activities can be downloaded for free. Available at www.cricksoftware.com.

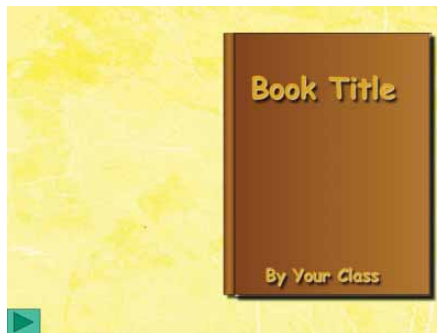
These programs come with a variety of sample activities and templates to help save time. Authors can add their own pictures, recorded sounds, animation, and even movies, or use the ones provided with the programs. Each of these companies has an activity sharing area on its Web site where teachers and therapists can download activities for free. No need to reinvent the wheel!

OTHER COMPUTER SOFTWARE

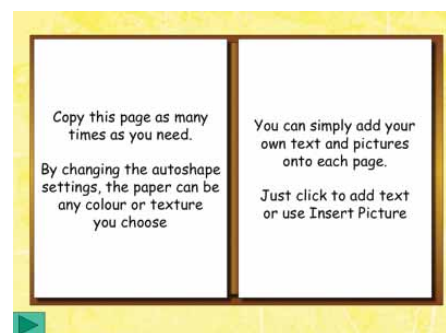
PowerPoint, the Microsoft product traditionally used to make electronic slide-shows for computer presentations, is not special education software. But it is ideal for making electronic books; each slide is a book page. In addition to being able to manipulate the text and the picture, book authors can use PowerPoint to add sound and animation. Premade PowerPoint talking book templates can be downloaded from Priory Woods, at www.priorywoods.middlesbrough.sch.uk, along with sample stories. PowerPoint book templates can also be downloaded from the Center for Literacy and Disability Studies, at www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds. There are plain book and ABC book templates, some of which have fingerspelling signs for students with hearing impairments. Using either of these templates, authors simply add their own text and a picture to each page.

COMMERCIALY AVAILABLE BOOK KITS

Companies are beginning to respond to the challenge of finding age-appropriate materials for older struggling readers who may not be reading yet or for those who may be starting to read a few words. Featuring real photos and short, simple text, the books are available in paper or



PowerPoint Book Template from Priory Woods



electronic format, with the electronic books accessible using switches or the IntelliKeys. There are many resources for electronic books, as listed in the Closing the Gap directory, including companies that make materials directed at older students, some of whom have disabilities.

Don Johnston (www.donjohnston.com), for example, offers book materials for students with a range of needs, from learning disabilities to more significant physical and cognitive challenges. Its Start to Finish Literacy Starter Kits are particularly useful for students with significant disabilities. These kits, written for older students, cover academic topics such as life cycles, habitats, occupations, history, ocean animals, foreign countries, rights and responsibilities, health, and safety.

In addition, the **Attainment Company** (www.attainmentcompany.com) Learning to Work series of books, by Caroline Muselwhite and Laurel Richardson, was written to help high school students explore different jobs. Currently, these books are available only in paper format, although the company plans sometime in the future to release them in an electronic switch-accessible format as well.

FREE AND NEARLY FREE INTERNET RESOURCES

Tarheel Reader (www.tarheelreader.org) is a free online book resource with more than 10,000 books written for students with disabilities who are very beginning readers, as well as for students who are not yet reading. Adults select and set up books on a “favorites” page for students to choose and explore independently while online. Written by teachers, therapists, and parents, the books are simple and short, with lots of photographs. Favorite books can always be downloaded as PowerPoint files and read offline. The

site offers a number of means for improving access, including the ability to change the background and text color as well as to gain alternative access using switches or IntelliKeys with a custom overlay.

CAST UDL Book Builder (<http://bookbuilder.cast.org>) is another great book-authoring resource. This site allows you to make and share books online. It gives you a number of options, such as page layout, animation, sound, pictures, and a text-reading toolbar. A unique feature of Book Builder is its onscreen animated coaches, who can assist readers on select pages.

Accessible Book Collection (www.accessiblebookcollection.org) is chock full of children’s literature that has been scanned in and made available in a digital format. The files can be downloaded in an HTML format and then modified as appropriate (e.g., placed in a text reader or made into a braille book). Some of the books have already been formatted in special software that makes them accessible (i.e., Clicker, Classroom Suite, and Boardmaker). Individuals and schools can subscribe for a minimal annual fee, though they must also complete paperwork certifying that students have a print disability.

Students without disabilities spend hundreds of hours holed up with books. Students with disabilities need access to that same opportunity. Using the computer with the right books and the right assistive technology can be an effective solution to help students with intellectual disabilities become readers. Happy book surfing, and stay tuned for more literacy tips! ■

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