

## TextReader / Speak

**Cost:**

£20

**Version reviewed:**

1.23 for Acorn

**Publisher:**

Jon Duddington, 6a Old Mill Avenue, Coventry CV4 7DY. Tel. 01203 415535

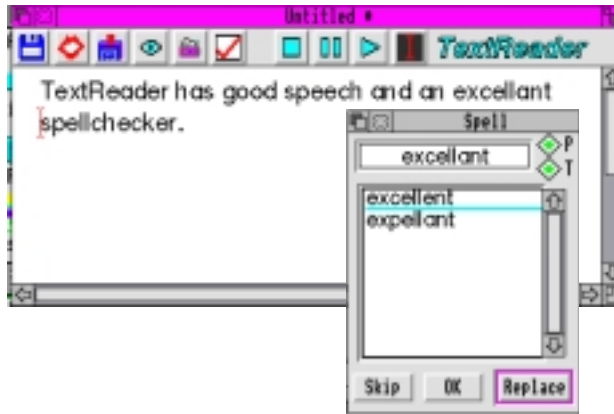
**Available from:**

Jon Duddington



### Features

The *!Speak* system comprises several programs: *TextReader* is a talking word processor; *!RunTAYT* is used to add *Speak as you write* to a non-talking word processor; *!PhonEdit* is a pronunciation exception editor. Most of the Acorn talking word processors and other programs which have text to speech (such as *Pages*, or *Clicker*) use the *!Speak* speech engine. *Text Reader* is a simple word processor: documents can be created, saved and



loaded; it has basic cut, copy and paste editing; and it can display text in different fonts and sizes. It does not have more sophisticated facilities like page numbers, headers or footers, or font styles (bold etc.). However, it does have very good speech facilities. Text can be highlighted and then spoken either continuously, or single words, sentences, clauses or paragraphs can be spoken out one at a time by using the function keys. Speech can be paused, stopped and started at any time using buttons on the toolbar. Individual words can also be spoken by clicking on them with the mouse. The *speak as you write* option speaks letters, letter sounds, part and whole words, or sentences as text is typed from the keyboard.

The speech synthesiser sounds slightly more 'robotic' compared to some of the PC and Mac systems, but it has an English rather than American accent, and is also particularly clear and easy to understand. *TextReader* also has one of the best spellcheckers available for writers with specific spelling difficulties. It is configurable, and can be adjusted to deal with one or more of different sorts of errors, to suit a writer with a particular pattern of spelling difficulty. For most writers, the 'standard' setting is still very effective. The spellchecker also speaks the words in the correction list.

### Who would use it?

*TextReader* is useful for pupils with reading difficulties who need to use text to speech to 'read' files on the computer – whether typed or scanned in from a book. It is limited as a word processor, but the combination of good speech and spellchecker would make it useful for writers with spelling difficulties, who could write, edit and spell-check their work, and then copy it to another program such as *PenDown*, *Pages* or *TextEase*, for layout and printing.

### Pros

Cost; ease of use; good speech; excellent talking spellchecker.

### Cons

Limited editing facilities. Only available for Acorn computers.

### Summary

Basic word processing, but with good speech output and a superb spellchecker for writers with specific spelling problems.

## Writer's Toolkit

### Cost:

£39

### Version reviewed:

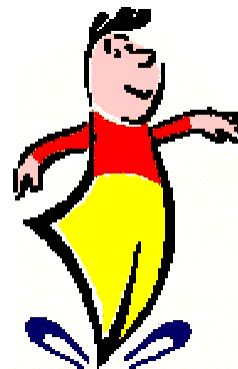
2 for Macintosh

### Publisher:

SCET, 74 Victoria Crescent Road, Glasgow G12 9JN.  
Tel. 0141 337 5000. (www.scet.org.uk)

### Available from:

SCET, TAG

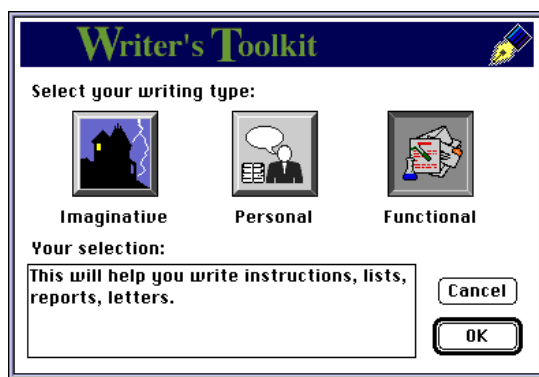


## Features

*Writer's Toolkit* is a novel program designed to provide a structured environment to support writing. It contains a selection of linked tools that assist and guide the writer through each stage of the writing process. First, the writer chooses the type of writing (imaginative, personal or functional), the purpose and the

audience. Then the writer can use the *NoteMaker* to draft an outline of events, descriptions of characters, places and scenarios for stories, list of equipment, method and observations used in experiments, arguments for and against for reports, dialogue for plays, and so on. Notes can be printed out for editing on paper, which is useful for collaborative writing. The *WordBuilder* can also be used to create a word list of key words.

The notes are then put into the correct order using *StructureMaker*, and filled out with some text using *DraftMaker*.



NoteMaker screen

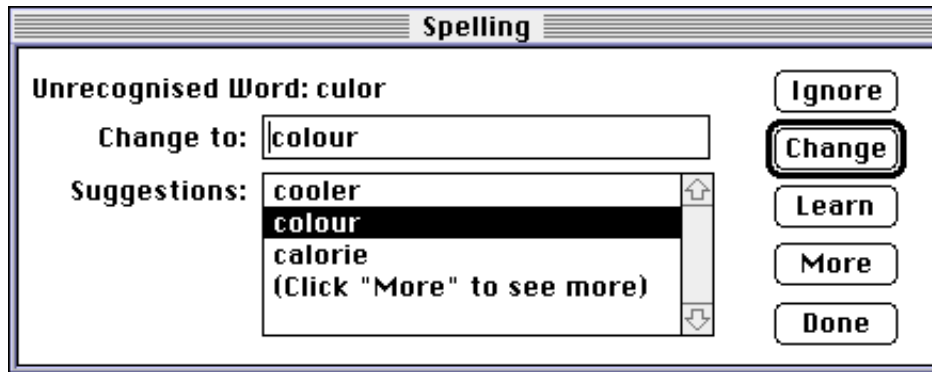


Character description

At any point words from the word banks, or descriptions of characters can be displayed and copied into the text. The writer then uses *ProofMaker* to check the spelling of the text. In the tests reported in Chapter 14 the *Writer's Toolkit* spellchecker performed very well, but the tests do not take account of the fact that the writer has to click on 'More' until the correct spelling appears on the list. This has the advantage that the writer is only presented with the minimum number of words from which to choose, but it takes longer to find the word if the 'More' button has to be pressed four or five times. The checker has two methods of operation: the writer can either manually click on suspect words in the text, or ask the program to look for possible mis-spellings. The program lists the words in alphabetic order, and the writer can either try to correct them manually, use the suggestions offered by the program, or use previously prepared words from *WordBuilder*.

The speech output facilities can also be used to help with proofreading, and can read out lines, sentences, paragraphs or documents. There is no *speak as you type* facility.

The writer can go back and forwards between the tools to draft and re-draft, before using the *Word Processor* to do a final edit, format, set font styles, add graphics and do a final spell check.



Lastly, *RecordMaker* encourages the writer to review the process and identify aspects which they feel they have done well, and aspects which could be improved.

With so many tools, at first sight the program looks complex to use and teachers must be prepared to familiarise themselves with the program and explore its potential. Pupils need to be taught how to use it and it is advisable to monitor progress while they are using it initially.

With each tool *Writer's Toolkit* offers help and hints (which can be spoken out), and the amount of help can be tailored to suit the writer. A comprehensive manual is provided and a video and sample story starters are available from SCET.

### Who might use it?

*Writer's Toolkit* is aimed at writers age 9 to adult who need help with planning and structuring work - most pupils will gain from using it initially to help them get into the writing process, and to write collaboratively. Writers who have a *specific* difficulty with planning, organising and structuring their work may find it useful on a more permanent basis. It is not suitable in itself for writers with very severe reading or spelling difficulties, but can be used in conjunction with other tools like word prediction. Although many word processors can be used to create outlines, drafts, character notes, word list etc., *Writer's Toolkit* draws these elements together into a linked, structured package which is easier to use.

### Pros

Unique support for the process of planning writing; good spellchecker; speech; designed for classroom use.

### Cons

Initially complex; no *speak as you type*; no word prediction.

### Conclusion

A very useful program for writers with a wide range of ability.

# Write:Outloud

## Cost:

£71, (£34 from SCET, for Scottish schools)

## Version reviewed:

2 and 3 for Mac and PC

## Publisher:

Don Johnson Special Needs, 18 Clarendon Court,  
Calver Road, Winwick Quay, Warrington WA2 8QP.  
Tel. 01925 241642. (www.donjohnston.com)

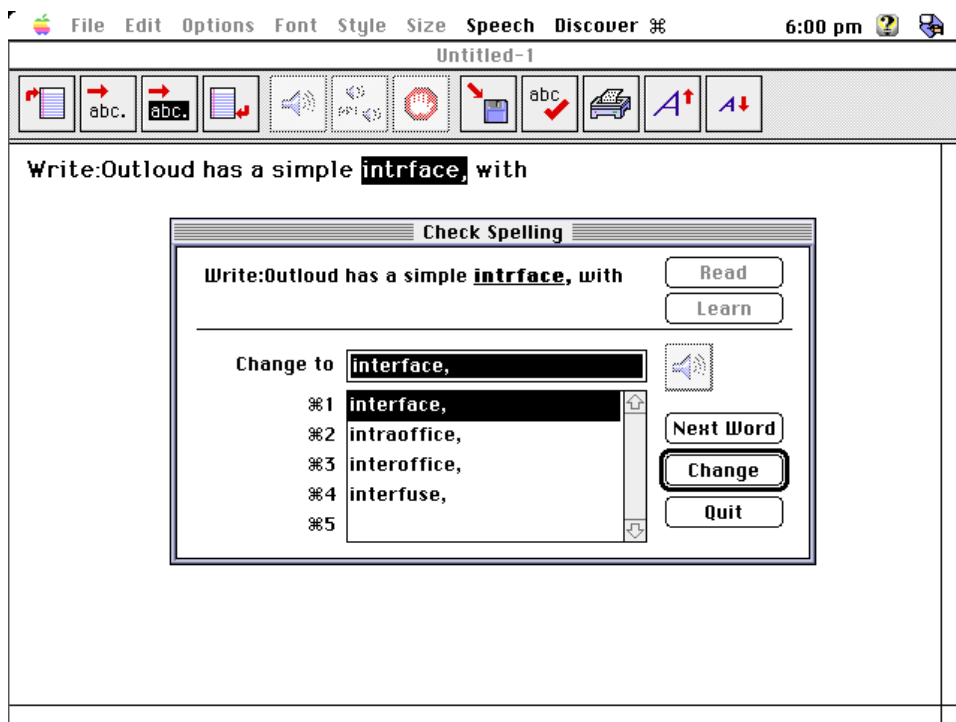
## Available from:

Don Johnston, SCET



## Features

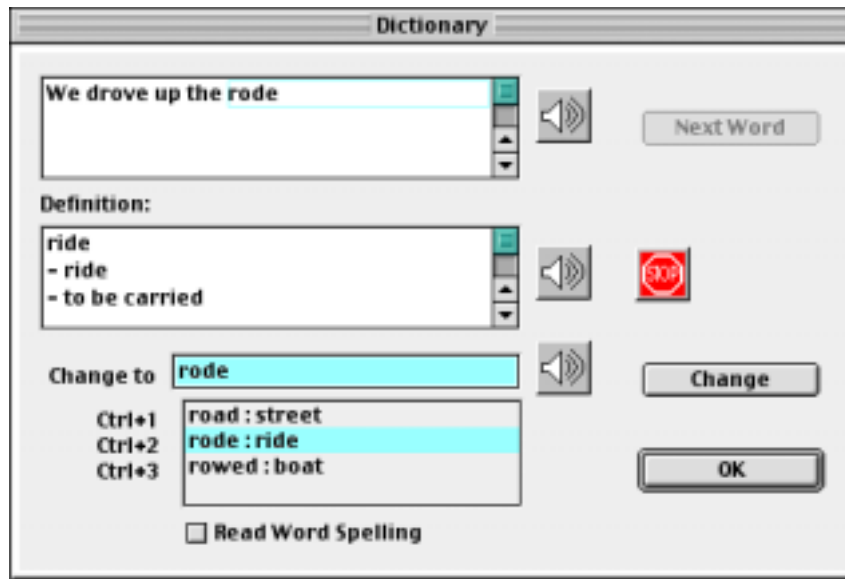
*Write:OutLoud* is a talking word processor for Macintosh and PC, designed for children. It gives control over text font, size and style, and usefully, text and background colour. Text can be cut or copied and pasted; there is a 'Find' function which shows the found words in context; but there are no other editing or formatting facilities – no headers or footers, rulers, or page numbers – and graphics cannot be put into the text. (The new version 3 of *Write:OutLoud* can accept graphics.)



*Write:OutLoud* has a simple interface, with the commonly used functions available in a large toolbar at the top of the screen. Most of the functions are also accessible using keyboard shortcuts, which is helpful for writers who have difficulty with the mouse.

*Write:OutLoud* has good speech features: speak-as-you-type (letters, words, sentences and paragraphs); speak marked text; a talking toolbar; and a talking spellchecker and dictionary. The Macintosh versions use *Macintalk*, which gives a range of low to high quality, mainly American voices depending on the type of Mac and amount of RAM available. The Windows version 2 uses *ProVoice* which has a single fairly high quality American voice; while the new *Write:OutLoud 3* uses *ViaVoice Outloud*, which has several very high quality voices. A good feature is that words are highlighted as they are spoken, and the highlight colour can be defined by the writer. To read a single word, the word must be highlighted and then the 'speak' icon or keystroke command activated – you cannot simply click on a word with the right hand mouse button to read it, as you can with *TextEase* or *Pages*.

The spellchecker can give a beep and/or flash the menu bar at the top of the screen when a suspected spelling error is typed, but the word itself is not marked in any way. The spellchecker window is simple and easy to use: it shows the word in context within the sentence; it can read the sentence and spell out the word (using letter names rather than sounds); and can read and spell out the suggested words in the spellchecker list. The spellchecker in *Write:OutLoud 2* was not great, but the new version 3 has the Franklin spellchecker system,



Write:OutLoud 3 'Dictionary' spellchecker and definition window

which performs much better (see Chapter 14). *Write:OutLoud* version 3 also has a talking dictionary facility, which can give and speak a short definition of the word. The standard spellchecker and the 'dictionary' spellchecker in Version 3 actually gave different results in our tests: as well as offering more words (e.g. homonyms), the 'dictionary' checker also tended to offer them in a smaller list. Also, the standard spellchecker could only check the entire document, which is irritating and much less useful than the dictionary tool which can check selected text. The spellchecker font in the Macintosh version is reasonably large and clear, but the Windows version uses the standard system font, which is fairly small and not particularly suitable for younger users.

### Who Might Use It?

*Write:OutLoud* is suitable for early writers who need a simple word processor without advanced editing and formatting facilities. Older writers with spelling difficulties might also use the new version 3 because of its spellchecker. It is comparable with programs like *TextEase* and *Pages* in that it is aimed mainly at primary schools. *Pages/TextEase* have more extensive word processing and graphics facilities, and the 'click to speak word' facility, but *Write:OutLoud's* spellchecker (particularly the new Franklin-based system) is better. Writers who have difficulty with the mouse may find *Write:OutLoud* easier to use because it is a more 'traditional' word processor as opposed to a desktop publishing program like *Pages/TextEase*, and because the functions are accessible from the keyboard. Note that schools and educational establishments in Scotland can buy *Write:OutLoud* at a substantial discount (£16 for the CD, £2 for each licence and £16 for a manual) from SCET.

### Pros

Simple to use; good speech; talking spellchecker; new version has the excellent Franklin spellchecker; cheap in Scotland.

### Cons

Limited editing and formatting facilities; .

### Conclusion

Good, simple, talking word processor. The new version 3 has the best spellchecker available for Mac and Windows, for children with spelling difficulties.