



## Small and Portable Devices

Apart from full computers there are a number of smaller and cheaper devices which can also help dyslexic people. They are mostly electronic and, these days, they mostly have quite a lot of computer intelligence themselves. You could call them gadgets.

### Franklin electronic dictionaries

If you want to know how a word is spelt and you are not working at a computer, just key in the word that you are looking for. Franklins will work from even quite strange spelling and offer the correct spelling.

- Many also have dictionaries and thesauruses to help you make sure that you are using the right word.
- Some of the more expensive dictionaries even read words and definitions out loud.
- The Literacy Word Bank contains the entire Oxford primary dictionary and is aimed at the National Curriculum and the National Literacy Strategy.

### Reading Pen

This is perhaps how all dictionaries will be. WizCom's Reading Pen has also been around for some time. In its latest version it will scan and read a whole line out loud, although it is most useful for people who have problems reading (decoding) individual words.

- Scan a word and listen to it.
- If that is still not enough, look it up in the comprehensive dictionary.
- Listen to it read the dictionary definition.
- With a Memory Extension Kit it can also scan and store quotes and notes, and can take translation dictionaries e.g. French-English for those studying or working in other languages.
- Research shows it speeds learning because a student can experience many more words, and hear the phonic pattern, so reinforcing the learning, in the time that it would take to look up one word in a dictionary, or decode it with a teacher one to one.

### Alphasmart

The Alphasmart 3000 is a simple word processor with a full keyboard and a small screen. These are great as low-cost word processors. In some ways they are better than a full laptop:

- They are more robust;
- Less likely to be stolen;

- They have a spell checker and, optionally, word prediction.
- But they don't have any means of doing computer speech, which can be so valuable for people with reading, spelling or grammar problems.

### More information about Alphasmart

The **Alphasmart Dana** is basically a Palm type PDA (see below) with a full size keyboard and a much larger screen. Although the screen is still smaller than a lap top PC, and monochrome, you can now use different styles and sizes of fonts and read them more legibly.

- It has all the usual PDA functions of calendar, address book etc;
- You can run very many add -on programs which are available for the Palm.
- This includes word prediction and mind mapping.
- However, at the moment, there is still no way of getting speech output, whether recorded speech for digital books, or synthesised speech to read back your work.

### **Recorders**

Recorders are useful for taking notes, noting homework and other things to do, and recording lectures and seminars, particularly if you have problems writing, copying or taking notes whilst listening.

- A traditional cassette tape recorder is cheap, but not very versatile and it is tedious finding your place on a tape.
- MiniDisc recorders are more expensive but easier to find your position on and popular because they can be used for recording music.
- Solid state recorders, which record onto RAM chips rather than moving discs can also record for long periods of time e.g. 10 hours or more, which makes them fine for recording lectures.
- Solid state recorders can also be used for remote dictation: you can dictate text away from your computer and then transcribe it into your speech recognition program later.
- Digital recorders can transfer text to the computer much more quickly than some MiniDisc recorders which have to do it at the full recorded speed.

### **PDA's**

Personal Digital Assistants, are the little portable computers not much bigger than a mobile phone. Indeed, some PDA's now include mobile phones and some mobile phones now include PDA's. PDA's usually include a text editor, a calendar, e-mail, Web browser and other software.

- They are useful if you have problems remembering things and organising yourself.
- PDA's may also incorporate MP3 players, which you can use for listening to text, as well as the more common use of listening to music.
- PDA's vary in price, size and clarity of the screen, in memory and speed, and in how easy they are to control.
- Some PDA's can now record a certain amount of speech. However, it is generally a more expensive way of doing so than a purpose built recorder.
- You need to back up their contents regularly: they are easy to lose.

## Tablet computers

Tablets are roughly A4 size computers with practically nothing except a touch sensitive screen.

- Some include a keyboard as well.
- They are surprisingly good at recognising hand writing using a stylus on the screen but not suitable if you have serious handwriting difficulties.
- They are very handy and may be a good format for reading electronic books, taking notes in subjects where diagrams and equations are common or drawing mind maps.
- They are still fairly expensive, compared with an ordinary laptop.
- Are they robust enough for what you want to use them for?
- They tend to be low powered compared with the equivalent laptop.
- Not all software supports the swivelling screen (portrait or landscape).

## E-Books

By getting your text in electronic form, you control the typeface (font) foreground and background colour perhaps and type size. You can read E-Books on tablet or ordinary computers, PDAs and some special e-book readers.

- A large screen is more comfortable as screens are still not as clear as printed text.
- You may also be able to listen to the text -- hopefully studio recorded speech, as synthesised speech is rather hard to listen to for a long time.
- There are also audio only devices and e-books on CD.
- DAISY format can give you e-books which you can listen to, but also search and move around.

## GPS

Dyslexic people often have difficulty in finding their way about, in map reading and navigating from place to place. If you do, there are now gadgets to help you, based on the GPS (Global Positioning System).

- An add-on for a PDA will show a map and give you travel directions.
- Some systems are installed in more expensive cars.
- SmartNav from Trafficmaster Web: [www.SmartNav.co.uk](http://www.SmartNav.co.uk) Knows about current traffic conditions and has a human at the end, so can take you around traffic jams, too. It costs around £600 installed, with either an annual fee or a charge per call.

## Thumb drives

It's nothing particularly to do with dyslexia, but if you need to move files between machines, consider a Thumb Drive. It's a little device that plugs into the USB port; no moving parts but it behaves like another disk drive. Clip it to your key ring and take it from one machine to another, where it installs on most modern computers in seconds. They range in price and amount of memory.

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