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## **Assistive Technology: Writing Tools Found in Microsoft Word** **Updated March 2004**

MS Word, the most common word processor software program, is a tool that can be used to assist with writing tasks and is accessible on Macintosh or Windows platform. There are many writing tools available within MS Word that can enhance a students' ability to write. Formatting tools found in MS Word, such as centering text, columns and tables, and changing font size and color. The following highlights specific features that can be used as strategies to support writing skills.

**Spell and Grammar Checker** – MS Word uses red and green underline squiggles representing spelling (red) and grammar (green) errors. For each incorrect item, the program tools offer alternative solutions that can easily replace, or ignore the “incorrect” item with a click of the mouse.

**Thesaurus and Dictionary** – The thesaurus helps to refine writing as well as expose students to new vocabulary words. Students with poor spelling skills often have difficulty using a dictionary. This feature provides an instant definition for a highlighted word, eliminating the task of dictionary lookup.

**Use of auto correct** – Whether a word is mistyped or misspelled, the auto correct feature can automatically correct certain errors. If the first two initial letters are capitalized, auto correct will capitalize only the first letter, as well as the first letter of a sentence. A correction can replace the error as the student types, if so specified. Within the auto correct feature, a list of common mistakes can be added to an existing “error table”.

**Use of auto summarize** – Auto summarize in MS Word will summarize a document. If the text from a textbook chapter is scanned into the computer as a MS Word document, then the chapter can be summarized for the student. When enabled, a window opens to question what kind of summary is needed, such as highlight key words in the document, create a new document with the summary, insert an abstract at the top of the document, or hide the document except for the summary. The student can also specify, with a percent, the length of the summary.

**Insert voice or typed notes for later recall or study** – Under the Insert menu item, a student can insert a comment in a document where the cursor is positioned. A typed note or voice note (using the microphone), or both can be entered. When selecting insert comment, a window opens in which a note can be typed. The location of the note is highlighted to show a note exists. The note pop up box is displayed as the cursor is placed over the spot where the note was inserted.



Michigan's Assistive Technology Resource is an IDEA Mandated Activity Project offered through the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services

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**Highlighting of text** – In the formatting toolbar, there is an icon for highlighting text with a variety of colors from which to select. By highlighting important passages, a student can focus on important information when studying. By editing text with copy, cut and paste, a student can create a new document of highlighted text for study notes as well as easily reorganize the sequence of sentences as needed.

**Font size and background color** – Adjust background color and font color and size to increase visibility and attention to text.

**Writing Templates** – For those students who need additional writing support, a teacher can provide structured writing opportunities by creating writing templates that may or may not include specific prompt questions for the student to answer. MS Word does come with templates for mostly business applications; however, new templates can be created and stored in the template folder. For example, a teacher can create a template for a science or book report, a compare/contrast writing assignment, or a topic report.

**Pictures with text** - For emergent readers who benefit from symbols or pictures, pictures can be inserted anywhere in the document.

**Text readers used in conjunction with MS Word-** Speech output provides strong reading support as well as writing support. With speech output, students can monitor their writing by noticing omissions, incorrect grammar or misspellings as it is read aloud to them. A free text reader from [readplease .com](http://readplease.com) , [E Reader](#) from CAST, [Text Assist](#) from Mindmaker, Universal Reader from Premier Assistive Technology ,or [Screen Reader](#) from TextHelp, can be used with MS Word in order to provide text-to-speech capabilities. Examples of **scan and read** integrated systems that interface a scanner, word processor such as MS Word, and speech output are [Read and Write Gold](#) from TextHelp or [Scan and Read Pro](#) from Premier Assistive Technology. These program offers all the writing tools found in MS Word, as well as text-to-speech, phonetic spell checkers, word retrieval, talking calculator, homophone assistance, and a word predictor.

**Test templates**-MS Word can be used to develop and design tests using the forms toolbar. Tools included in the toolbar are: specific text boxes for fill in the blank, a check box, and a drop down field for multiple-choice questions. Text can also be locked to prevent students from changing test questions.

## **References**

Microsoft Accessibility <http://www.microsoft.com/enable/>

Built-In Windows Accessibility Features and Utilities to Enhance Diverse User Needs: DiverseAbility.Net  
[http://www.dlrp.org/html/IT/diverseability/access\\_features\\_ability.htm](http://www.dlrp.org/html/IT/diverseability/access_features_ability.htm)



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