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What is Assistive Technology?

Assistive technology, also referred to as AT, is an umbrella term that includes assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities and also includes the process used in selecting, locating and using them. Assistive technology can be a device or service that helps children with disabilities participate more independently within their environment at home or school.

An assistive technology device is "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child and specifically excludes a medical device that is surgically implanted or the replacement of such device" - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA '04)

Making a Difference in the Lives of Individuals with Disabilities through Assistive Technology

Assistive technology assists an individual with a disability to do something that he or she cannot do otherwise. Assistive technology can be anything from a simple magnifying glass to a complex device, such as a computerized communication system that provides vocal output for a child who cannot communicate using his or her own voice. It can be big (an automated van lift for a wheelchair) or small (a grip attached to a pen or fork by Velcro).

Technology is rapidly advancing, sometimes on a daily basis. New technology changes not only how we learn and engage with the world, but how we function in daily life. More than ever, technology makes it possible for children with disabilities to lead independent and fulfilling lives. Tools such as:

- Electronic devices that "speak" for an individual,
- Electric wheelchairs that enhance independence and allow participation in sports, and
- Computers that assist a student with school work, reports and learning.

Facts about Assistive Technology and the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

1. Assistive technology needs must be considered along with the child's other educational needs.
2. Needs for technology must be identified on an individual basis.
3. Identification of technology needs must involve family members and a multidisciplinary team.
4. Parents or IEP members can ask for additional evaluations or an independent evaluation to determine assistive technology needs.
5. When an evaluation is being conducted, consider fine-motor skills, communication, and alternatives to traditional learning approaches.
6. Lack of availability of equipment or cost alone cannot be used as an excuse for denying an assistive technology service.

7. If included in the IEP, assistive technology services and devices must be provided at no cost to the family and, if so indicated, devices must be allowed to go home with the student.
8. Parents always have the right to appeal if assistive technology services are denied.

The need for assistive technology must be considered like other needs, on a case-by-case basis. Assessments can also be requested through the IEP process. IEPs that include assistive technology should be written so that students have access to these accommodations not only for in-class work, but also for projects and all types of tests, including high-stakes assessment. To support the need for assistive technology, parents and professionals should document precisely how the student benefits educationally. For instance, documentation could include information such as: "Mary usually takes 1 hour to do 8 long division math problems. With a voice output (talking) calculator, she can do the same number of problems in 20 minutes."

Learning More about Assistive Technology

Parents can help to identify potential assistive technology (AT) for their child if they learn about the choices that are available. A good place to start is often with speech-language therapists, occupational therapists and school professionals. There are many organizations that provide AT information and training to consumers and families such as Parent Training and Information centers (PTIs), community technology centers, state assistive technology programs and rehabilitation centers. If possible you should visit an AT center with your child to see and try out various devices and equipment. Some AT centers offer lending programs that allow families to borrow devices for a trial period.

The following list includes several organizations that offer various resources on AT.

- Utah Center for Assistive Technology – <http://ucat.usor.utah.gov>
- Alliance for Technology Access – www.ataccess.org
- Abledata – www.abledata.com
- Assistivetech.net – www.assistivetech.net
- AbilityHub - www.abilityhub.com
- Family Center on Technology and Disability – www.fctd.info
- Utah Assistive Technology Program – www.uatp.org
- Utah Assistive Technology Foundation – www.utaf.org

Assistive Technology E-Journal

The Utah Parent Center (UPC) created this e-Journal to provide information to the families of children with disabilities and special health care needs in Utah about assistive technology and how it can be used to enhance the lives of their children. Read this publication to become more informed about AT, AT in schools, AT and young children, parent stories, and AT resources.

Read Here: <http://www.utahparentcenter.org/publications/e-journals/>



Special monograph edition of the Utah Special Educator: Technology: Enabled, Engaged, Empowered

The March 2012 special issue of the Utah Special Educator journal is dedicated to teaching us how technology is used as a tool to support instruction. Find out what is different about teaching 21st century learners.

Journal PDF Link: http://essentiaeducator.org/?page_id=112

Assistive Technology Information Sheets Available on the UPC Website

<http://www.utahparentcenter.org/resources/assistive-technology/>

- Assistive Technology Glossary
- Assistive Technology Solutions
- Assistive Technology 101
- Assistive Technology for Infants, Toddlers and Young Children with Disabilities
- Simple, Inexpensive Devices Can Assist in Communication
- Techniques and Devices Can Help a Child Learn to Communicate
- Augmentative Device Helps Max Speak
- Switch Activities Promote Classroom Inclusion for Young Students
- Technology that Empowers People with Memory Loss

Online Training Resources

The Utah Parent Center's YouTube Page (www.youtube.com/user/UtahParentCenterUPC) has a wide range of online trainings on assistive technology. Click the links below to view these online trainings:

- [Practical Ideas for Using Assistive Technology to Make Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)
- [Developing the Individual Education Plan \(IEP\)](#)
- [Section 504 – What services are available?](#)
- [Understanding Assistive Technology: Simply Said](#) is a short video explaining the complex topic of Assistive Technology in easy-to-understand language.
- [AT in Action Video Series](#), this video series produced by PACER Center's Simon Technology Center to raise awareness about available devices. This series offers real-world examples of how innovative AT is making a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities.



Assistive Technology Resource Centers

Utah Center for Assistive Technology (UCAT) - <http://ucap.usor.utah.gov/>

is a statewide resource that offers information and technical services to help people with disabilities acquire and use assistive technology devices. We provide services for people with disabilities to help them identify and obtain assistive technology that will enhance the quality of their lives. Our services are free to people with disabilities within the state of Utah. UCAT helps identify and access information that is vital in acquiring equipment. We provide the following services:

- Help to define seating and positioning needs to ensure maximum effectiveness and seating solutions.
- Help clients learn to use aids to daily living (ADLs) including electronic ADLs, which increase independent activity.
- Assess job and home-sites to determine the best way to facilitate client access.
- Assess aptitude for using voice input technology for computer access by people who cannot use other methods.
- UCAT has an extensive loan bank allowing clients to use a device for up to 30 days ensuring that the proper device is successful for each individual client.
- Driving evaluations for individuals with physical impairments.
- Funding advice. Lack of funds can sometimes be a big barrier to device acquisition. Our funding specialist can help identify appropriate funding sources, assistance in contacting funding sources and applying for services and conflict resolution throughout the funding process.
- Design and custom solutions. Sometimes a commercial, off-the-shelf device is just not quite right to fill a need or allow independence. UCAT has a well-equipped shop and skilled staff who can modify equipment or fabricate solutions for each individual.
- UCAT is a complete information and referral service. We have a good presence within the school districts, local advocacy in differing arenas, Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living.

Computer Center for Citizens with Disabilities (CCCD)

UCAT also houses the Computer Center for Citizens with Disabilities (CCCD) which is an integral part of UCAT. The Education and Technical Specialist at the Computer Center can help you in the following ways.

- Workshops - We provide workshops for parents and professionals concerning all aspects of applying computer technology to the needs of persons with disabilities.
- Information - As a technology resource center, we can answer questions and provide information on many types of adaptive equipment and special software.
- Augmentative Communication - We work with teams of professionals in the public schools throughout Utah to help children find the most comfortable and effective ways to communicate with teachers, family, and peers. Under a contract with the Department of Education, we loan augmentative devices and adaptive equipment to teachers and therapists on these teams. We also offer augmentative communications assessments and services to adults with disabilities. Visit <http://ucap.usor.utah.gov/cccd/> to learn more.

Utah Assistive Technology Program

<http://www.uatpat.org/>

The Utah Assistive Technology Program (UATP) gets assistive technology into the hands of people who need it. Our goal is to help people use technology to be more independent in education, employment, and community settings. UATP provides demonstrations and trainings, AT Lab, AT lending and recycling, low interest loans and small business loans.

The UATP is a federally funded program serving individuals with disabilities of all ages in Utah and the intermountain region. Our job is to provide assistive technology devices and services as well as train university students, parents, children with disabilities and professional service providers about assistive technology. We coordinate our services with community organizations and others who provide independence-related supports to individuals with disabilities.

CReATE

Citizens Reutilizing Assistive Technology Equipment (CReATE)



CReATE, established in 2007, is a 501(c)3 that refurbishes donated mobility equipment and makes it available at a low cost to Utahns with disabilities. CReATE has a certified Assistive Technology Specialist to do wheelchair evaluations to ensure individuals receive appropriate devices. A funding specialist is also available to help those who may not be able to afford a mobility device.

To view CReATE's updated refurbished inventory, visit <http://www.createutah.org> click on "View the CReATE Inventory..." If you do not see a device on the inventory that will fit your needs, contact CReATE. There are many more devices that have not been refurbished yet. If you would like to receive or donate a device, please call 801-887-9398.

School Tools: Overcoming writing barriers with Co:Writer

Originally published 11/24/2014 on [UATP blog](#)

By Kent Remund

In its most simple form, writing is recording; writing is a powerful way for humans to record and express ideas from an individual's mind and can be kept for future generations to read. Think of some of our greatest recorded writings from Twain, Dickens, Tolstoy and Dr. Seuss.

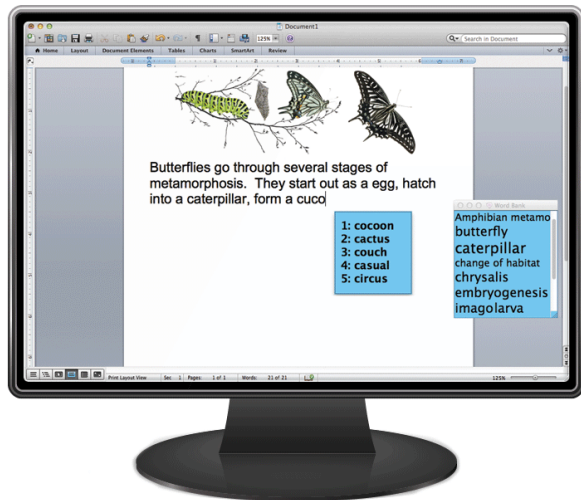
Writing in the school setting has changed over the years. From chalk and slate, graphite pencils, and pens, to typewriters, computers, laptops and tablets. Students with disabilities have some powerful tools to assist them in recording their thoughts today.

For students with learning disabilities, it can be difficult for them to get the words out. There's a wall between the idea and writing it out. Word recall is a barrier as well as grammar and spelling can get in the way. One of our favorite tools to help students overcome these barriers over the past decade is Co:Writer from Don Johnston <http://donjohnston.com/cowriter>.

If students can write just a fraction of what they want to say, Co:Writer will do the rest. The most basic feature of Co:Writer predicts what students are trying to say, and offers word suggestions in real time.

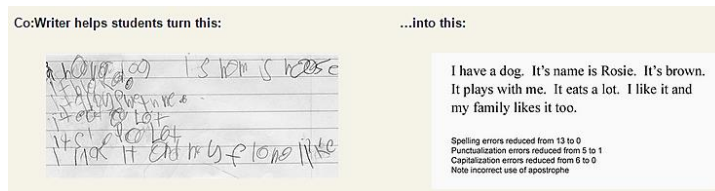
Even the worst spelling and grammar mistakes are not a problem for Co:Writer. In addition to prediction is the ability to add topic-specific vocabulary, which it uses to predict words from.

If a student were to write a paper on our solar system, a dictionary specific to the solar system could be added to the words that it will predict. The student starts to type "pl" and Co:Writer will predict "Planet" and "Pluto".



Another feature is the ability for it to speak each letter, word and complete sentence as the student types. This allows them to check their writing through auditory feedback.

Co:Writer is also a great tool for students that lack fine motor skills or range of motion challenges. Many students with cerebral palsy use the program with great success as it eliminates keystrokes with the word prediction.



In the past, Co:Writer was only available on the PC for \$189.00 per computer. Last year it was released for Apple devices for \$19.99! Don Johnston just released Co:Writer Universal, which is \$89.00 per year, but has some great features that we love. Co:Writer Universal uses the Cloud to store its information and is available to access on a computer, iPhone, iPad or Chromebook.

If a teacher were to set up a custom dictionary at school, the student can then login to his/her account at home, and continue working on the same work from school. In addition, Co:Writer Universal now has some powerful data collection features for teachers and parents. It continually tracks which words and sentence the student is writing and compiles it in useful charts and graphs to monitor a full range of qualitative and productivity data. This data will help track writing skills and help set goals for the student.



Kent Remund is part of the Utah Center for Assistive Technology serving Utahns with disabilities, and a member of the Utah Assistive Technology Teams serving Utah school districts.

Handwriting Activities for Home

If your child struggles with handwriting, you are not alone. Handwriting is challenging for many children, and difficulties can occur for a variety of reasons including decreased attention, poor fine motor coordination, weak muscles in the hands, poor core strength, visual motor or visual processing deficits, and/or sensory processing problems. Here are some fun ways you can help your child increase his or her handwriting skills:

Preschool/Kindergarten:

- Work on building trunk and upper body strength by doing animal walks, wheelbarrow walks, or drawing or coloring on a vertical surface such as an easel
- Increase strength in the small muscles of the hand by coloring with small pieces of crayons, painting with cotton balls, playing with Play-Doh, playing with connecting toys such as Mr. Potato Head and Mega Blocks, or stringing beads
- Increase your child's ability to form letters by writing letters or drawing shapes in sand, pudding, finger paint, or shaving cream (using verbal cues can help ensure that the letters are formed the same way each time)

Elementary School:

- Work on building trunk and upper body strength by playing catch while sitting on a yoga ball, playing crab walk soccer, or having your child lie on his/her tummy (with elbows propped) while doing puzzles or playing a board game
- Increase coordination and control in the hands by encouraging your child to complete color-by- numbers and dot-to-dots (both can be printed from the internet)
- Practice handwriting by writing words during games such as I Spy, Pictionary, or Silent Guess Who; or, have the child find hidden letters in the house and then write a word that starts with each letter he/she finds

Middle School:

- Increase coordination and control in the hands by encouraging your child to complete mazes (making sure not to touch the sides) and copying step-by-step drawings (both can be printed from the internet)
- Practice handwriting by making a book about something he/she is interested in, completing Mad Libs, or playing Scattagories

If you are concerned with your child's handwriting skills, he or she might benefit from an occupational therapy evaluation to help determine the specific reasons that handwriting is difficult. Your child's therapist might recommend ongoing occupational therapy treatment to address these deficits and provide you with activities for home that are specific to your child.

At the Easter Seals-Goodwill Pediatric Therapy Clinic we provide individual occupational therapy that addresses handwriting concerns, as well as handwriting groups. Please call us at (801) 946-1860 if you have any questions or would like more information.



Madelyn Mauer, Occupational Therapist
Easter Seals-Goodwill Pediatric Therapy

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