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SPECIFIC LEARNING DIFFICULTIES ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED

Clever Schools and Clever Homes create clever kids- best practice for supporting all students particularly those with learning difficulties

Our tips are posted regularly and include strategies for teachers and parents. They are not mutually exclusive.

Clever Byte #10: PowerPoint for struggling writers

Writing involves many processes and by the time pen touches paper and the challenge of working out how to spell the first word or even which word to use is reached by a struggling writer, the rest of their ideas have disappeared from their memory.

How to use the Audio/Record audio feature of PowerPoint to help students remember their ideas in extended writing activities (If students are taught to record their ideas in sentences, PowerPoint can be used as a tool for alternative assessment).

Step 1: Focus the student on the subject

The first step to getting students to plan what they are going to write is to focus them on the subject. This can be done with a discussion that explores what they already know, and introduces them to ideas of other students. This can be done as a whole group, small group or pair activity.

Step 2: Brainstorm and create a question for each paragraph topic

When a student starts reading they need to have clear ideas of what information they are looking for as they read. A question can help them focus on the finding the information they need. Model the use of a simple mindmap to help choose a topic for each paragraph and then ask the student to create their own simple mindmap to help them choose the topics they will write about. You can download a pdf of a simple mind map here: <http://speldsa.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/simple-mindmap.pdf>.

Once students have chosen a topic for each paragraph, model and then ask them to formulate a question for each topic. E.g. For a report about elephants a student might choose the following headings; Description, Habitat and Food

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- Description: Q. What do elephants look like?
- Habitat: Q. Where do elephants live?
- Food: Q. What do elephants eat?

Type the question for each paragraph in the title box of a PowerPoint slide (One slide for each paragraph). A scribe could type these questions, or the student can record them into PowerPoint. Some students may use a program such as Word Q 4 to help them as they type hard to spell words.

Instructions for recording in PowerPoint:-

1. click on the insert tab
2. go to audio/record audio
3. practice what you are going to say
4. click on the red record button and record your idea
5. click stop (square black button)
6. click the play button (black triangle) to check you are happy with what you have recorded
7. click save if you want to keep the file, or cancel if you want to re-record your idea
8. the student can then drag the sound icon to any part of the PowerPoint slide so that they can refocus on their ideas by relistening to each recorded idea when they start writing.

Step 4: Research the topic using the questions to guide the collection of information

For students with moderate to severe reading difficulties

- **Research information**

If students are researching the internet and they have reading difficulties, they can use Free Natural Reader to read the text for them. See SPELD SA Clever Byte #4 <http://www.speld-sa.org.au/images/CleverBytes/clever%20byte%204.pdf>.

- **Record information using their own words**

The student can listen to the text they are researching, formulate their own understanding of the information, practice what they will write about and record their ideas into the PowerPoint slide that relates to the information they have gathered.

For students who can read but struggle

- **Research information and highlight key points**

If a student is researching a book, allow the student to photocopy the page so that they can highlight the keywords they need to discuss in their writing. You will need to model which information is important to highlight.

Highlighting information makes it much easier for students to find and follow important points when they begin recording their ideas. As they address different ideas they can tick the highlighted idea in the text, so that they can follow where they are up to.

Step 5: Student writes their report or essay

At this stage students are encouraged to listen to the sound files they have recorded to orientate themselves to their original ideas and then type their work into PowerPoint or Microsoft Word.

At this stage some students may find a word prediction program such as WordQ4, may help them write words that they use in their vocabulary, but wouldn't usually be able to spell. These are words that many students having difficulty spelling replace with a less complicated word.

A trial of WordQ4 can be downloaded at <https://www.gogsoftware.com/trial/>.