

Multimedia & INTERNET@SCHOOLS

The Media and Technology Specialists' Guide to Electronic Tools and Resources for K-12

PRODUCT REVIEWS

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Electronic Resources for Schools

REPORT CARD

- ★★★★★ = Highly Recommended
- ★★★★ = Recommended
- ★★★ = Good
- ★★ = OK in some cases
- ★ = Don't consider

This section provides concise, original reviews of new or important hardware, software, Web sites, & electronic media that relate to the K-12 curriculum. All reviews are written by practicing educators who, in most cases, have used the software in a school environment. Where grouped into broad, age-appropriate categories, these categories should not be viewed as prescriptive. To facilitate "comparison shopping," these reviews are highly structured. Reviewers prepare a "report card" based on a five-star scale:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SOFTWARE

Simon S.I.O. (Sounds It Out)

Company: Don Johnston, Inc., 26799 W. Commerce Drive, Volo, IL 60073. Phone: (800) 999-4660; Internet: www.donjohnston.com.

Price: \$149 each for one to four computers. \$104.30 each for five to nine computers. \$99.38 each for 10 to 19 computers. \$95.36 each for 20 to 49 computers. Additional pricing options are available for more than 50 computers.

Audience: The publisher recommends an ability level of K-2 and an interest level of K-8.

Format: Mac/Win CD-ROM.

Minimum System Requirements: *Macintosh systems:* G3 iMac, 233 MHz, OS 8.6.1 - 9.2, 8x CD-ROM drive.

Windows systems: Pentium II, 233 MHz, Windows 98 SE through XP, 24x CD-ROM drive, SoundBlaster sound card.

For both platforms: At least 80 MB hard drive space with the Recording option off and an additional 40 MB if the Recording option is on (for a class of 30 students). A color monitor and a microphone (built-in or external) are needed. Headphones are optional but recommended.

★★★★★ REPORT CARD

Installation	A
Content/Features	A
Ease of Use	A
Product Support	A

Description: Simon S.I.O. (Sounds It Out) is a tutor-led motivating phonics intervention program for students of all ages who may be experiencing difficulty mastering phonological awareness.

Warranty: The Radius Audio Learning System has a limited 1-year warranty against manufacturer defects.

Reviewer Comments:

Installation/Access: I reviewed Simon S.I.O. on a Dell Latitude D505 laptop computer with an Intel Pentium M processor (1500 MHz) and Windows XP with 256 RAM. Installation is extremely easy; directions are provided as part of the manual. A Quick Install Guide is also included. Using the guide, I finished the installation within minutes. **Reminder:** Any virus protection programs must be turned off or disabled. **Installation Rating:** A

Content/Features: Simon S.I.O. enables emergent readers to develop core word skills through lessons that introduce new word families and sounds with text, voice,

and graphics. Students complete words by dragging onsets and rimes to correct positions; they are challenged by sorting and spelling activities that allow them to transfer what they have learned. Word mastery is achieved through corrective feedback and voice. On-screen rewards motivate students to self-assess.

Each Simon S.I.O. level features six activities with a focus on beginning and ending sounds that teach a few sounds at a time: First Sounds, Last Sounds, Both Sounds, Spell the Word, Read the Word, and Pick the Word. The last two activities are new and are included in the latest version of the program.

The interface or "look" of the activities is consistent. An Activity bar at the top right of the screen shows which activity is currently running. The Tutor, located in the left portion of the screen, introduces each activity, provides instructions, redirects students if necessary, and reinforces. A Pronouncer icon reads words and sounds. The Help icon is easy to use. A Progress bar at the bottom of the screen indicates how much time is left for the current session.

Beginning with Level 3, challenge activities are provided for fun and motivation between sessions and levels. The Speed Challenge shows students a word and

nine pictures. Students must sound out the word and quickly select the corresponding picture. New to this version is a Reading Challenge activity that provides students with some fun and promotes reading comprehension. A microphone is required for this activity.

The Teacher Options screen enables set-up procedures for students and classes. Options include entering student listings, adjusting individual levels (from one to 33), turning on/off the typing portion of the Spell the Word feature, turning on/off the Recording feature (if turned on, you must have a microphone and additional memory allocated on the computer), and adjusting for students who need single-switch input.

Access to the built-in data collection is available via detailed reports. The data includes statistics on a student's current activity and level, completed sessions, total words, recorded sentences, and accuracy scores, as well as class-level information.

The report and print options are fantastic. I particularly liked the Progress Report print capability. Each student's scores for their current level are available, including a list of study words and sounds. Customized work sheets are

offered, as well as student-personalized Sound Awards that include the Simon S.I.O. sounds learned to date. **Content Features Rating:A**

Ease of Use: Any teacher, regardless of technical expertise, will find the program and the accompanying print materials to be very user friendly.

The 33-page User Guide covers each and every part of the program, from sign in to sign out. This guide also details the use of printed work sheets for students not working at a computer and provides information on changing program accessibility options for students.

The Teacher Materials section covers activity ideas for students at any age, product-integrated lesson plans, and assessment and portfolio support materials. **Ease of Use Rating:A**

Product Support: Simon S.I.O. is fully supported by Don Johnston, Inc. Technical support is available Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (CST) by calling (800) 889-5242. Fax and email support are available around the clock.

A two-page problem-solving section (Appendix C) is included in the product manual. Additional assistance is found on

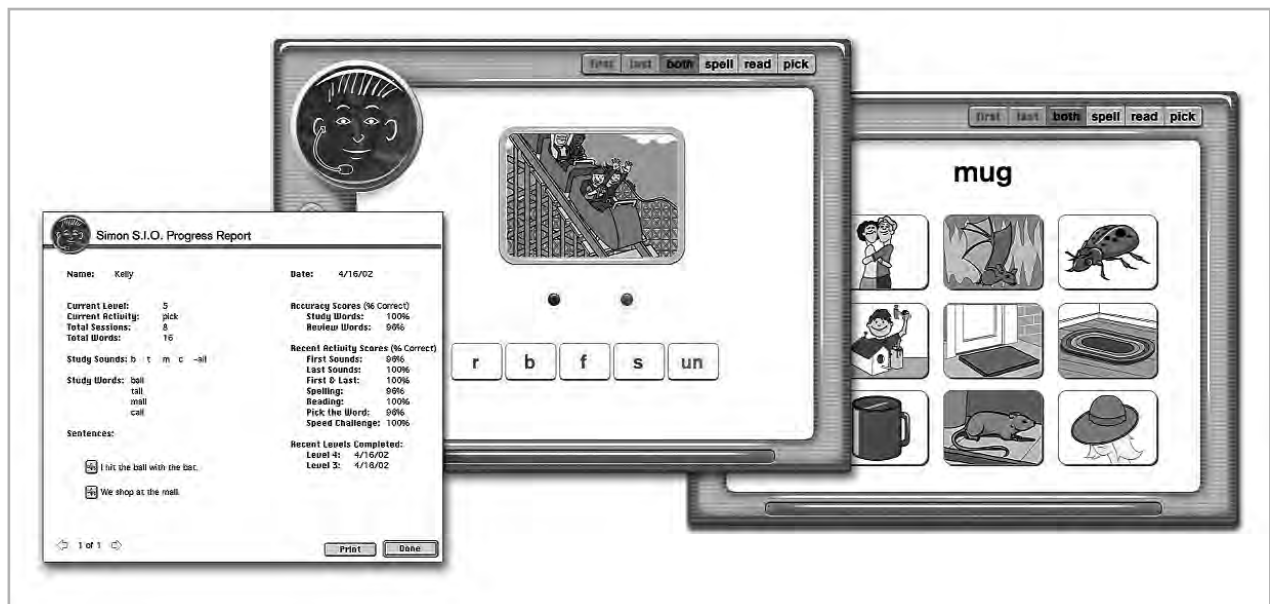
the CD itself in the form of a PDF file (Quick Install Card) and a Microsoft Word document file (Read Me). I found both useful as part of the installation and as an easy source for company contact information regarding technical assistance and customer service. **Product Support Rating:A**

Recommendation: This is an extremely well thought out product that is very easy to use.

The program provides systematic instruction in learning the alphabetic principle, reading words by mapping speech sounds to parts of words, and achieving fluency. Students receive extensive practice, move at their own pace, and experience individualized feedback and lessons.

The Simon S.I.O. individual phonics intervention program, designed at the Peabody Learning Lab at Vanderbilt University, is a "must" in every school. **Highly Recommended.**

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Simon S.I.O. (Sounds It Out)