

Case Study: Assistive Technology Tool Changes Student's Outlook on Learning and Life

April 2008



QUOTES

“This creative writing tool dramatically changed Frank’s learning outlook in school and carved out a larger opportunity for him to feel more confident about his writing abilities.”

**Sharon Dees,
Lead Speech
Pathologist**

Sharon Dees, Lead Speech Pathologist and Assistive Technology Specialist
Kathleen Sawyers, M.A., CCC-SLP, Speech Language Pathologist,
Gilbert Public Schools, AZ
Julie Dobson, Special Education Teacher, Desert Ridge Junior High School, AZ

Co:Writer, A Recipe for Success



**Julie Dobson, Kathleen Sawyer
and Sharon Dees**

Assistive Technology Specialist, Sharon Dees and her colleagues Julie Dobson, a Junior High School Special Education Teacher at Desert Ridge Junior High and Kathleen Sawyers, Speech Language Pathologist, share this enlightening story about a student named Frank, who used Co:Writer to create a recipe cookbook. “This writing tool dramatically changed Frank’s learning outlook in school and carved out a larger opportunity for him to feel more confident about his writing abilities,” shared Ms. Dobson.

Gilbert Public Schools in Gilbert Arizona serves 27 elementary school campuses and over 35,000 students. The district runs more than 50 licenses of Co:Writer software, an assistive technology tool that enables students to break through handwriting, spelling and grammar barriers and fully express their thoughts in writing.

Co:Writer is a word prediction writing tool that supports struggling learners and helps them improve their writing skills by presenting lists of word choices based on students’ attempts at spelling words. Teachers define Co:Writer as a kind of intelligent dictionary and grammar tool that sits as a small open window on your computer screen. It can assist students on any word processing program, email, or the Internet, to help them find the right word they want to use to more fully express themselves in complete sentences.

Co:Writer includes over 35,000 root words and uses sophisticated logic to identify words based on a student’s phonetic spellings such as the word elephant – could be found in Co:Writer by spelling “l-fant”. Co:Writer’s logic also helps students write with proper grammar and syntax. Teachers can create their own customized dictionary vocabulary lists or choose from a variety of pre-made Topic Dictionaries based on curriculum-aligned themes.



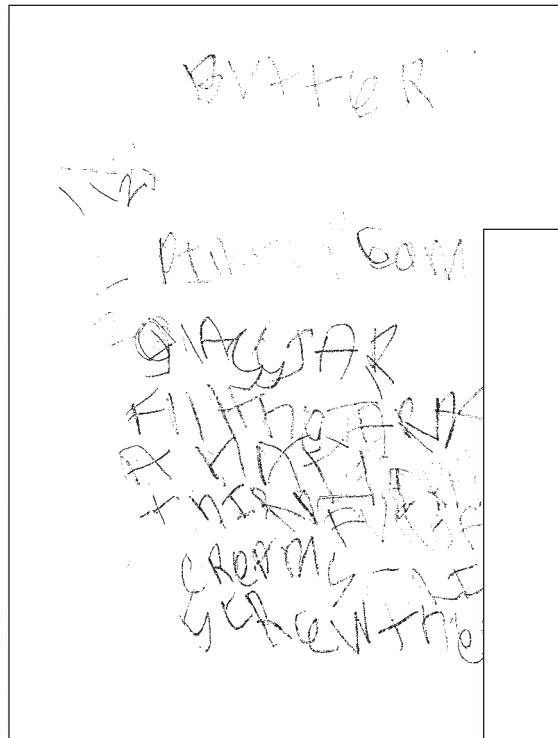
Over 5000 US schools have chosen Co:Writer to provide writing accommodations for students with special needs.

Frank's story:

Frank's handwriting was illegible to his teachers, his peers and his family. Through the extended efforts of Ms. Dobson, his teacher and his speech pathologists, Frank used Co:Writer to create a recipe cookbook for his family. Throughout this creative project, his teachers saw Frank's attitude shift to a "I can write" learning attitude!

His teacher, Ms. Dobson said, "Frank struggled terribly with his spelling and vocabulary. I could not read his writing on tests and each day I could see his frustrations mounting. At that point, we gathered around him and talked about how we could help him increase his writing skills and build back the self-confidence he had lost. Unanimously, the three of us agreed to use Co:Writer and the change we saw in Frank was astounding! He began to write recipes and create a cookbook for a family Christmas gift. When he gave his cookbook to his family, he was so proud of himself!"

Frank's illegible handwriting



Applesauce

10 medium to large apple
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 cup water

Peel, core, and dice apples.

Place apple pieces in pot. Add sugar, cinnamon, and water. You may want to add more water for desired consistency. Cook mixture on high for about 4-6 hours. Mash apple mixture and let cool slightly before serving.

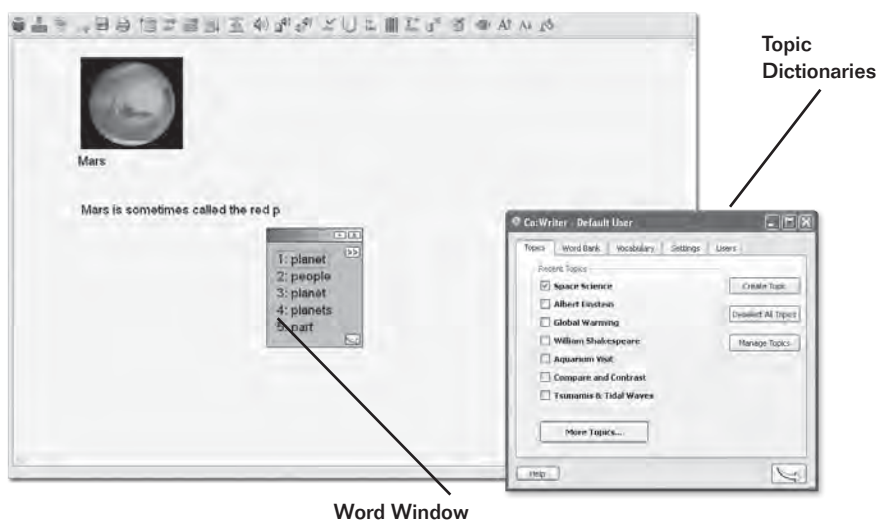
Yields 20 servings

Frank's cookbook using Co:Writer

Serving Students with multiple writing needs:

Kathleen Sawyers said, "I train teachers to use Co:Writer for students who have multiple learning difficulties. We like it because it accommodates a lot of students' needs. The beauty is that it works on any word processor, email program or the Internet. Most other word prediction programs don't do that, and if they do, they don't do it well. You can customize it to add your own spelling words and create new personal dictionaries based on your own syllabus. The 140 Topic Dictionaries that are included save enormous planning time and effort. It's also a great tool for improving students' spelling and vocabulary skills!"

Co:Writer gives students a new way to focus on what they want to write whether it's a topic-specific word or a word they know how to say, but not how to spell. It can help struggling writers find the right words, build a better vocabulary and feel good about their writing progress. For students with disabilities, Co:Writer cuts down on writing fatigue. It can also improve a students' writing confidence. Teachers like it because they can quickly create customized dictionaries that relate to their curriculum for theme-based writing assignments.



Other word prediction tools rarely include Topic Dictionaries and have difficulty interpreting inventive, phonetic spelling, letter reversals and letter omissions. Co:Writer uses proprietary logic to recognize these spelling pitfalls through FlexSpell technology. Auditory feedback provides added support for students helping students recognize correct spelling. The teachers say their students really benefit from hearing the words read back to them and they like that Co:Writer adds spaces between words and at the end of sentences to help students demonstrate effective writing structure. The program is very user friendly and keeps students on task.

Sharon Dees and Julie Dobson summarized, "This grammar-smart tool uses intelligent word prediction to help students type, speak, hear and write complete sentences. It has become an invaluable technology learning tool for many assistive technologists, special education and general education teachers. It's part of our curriculum now. When I see a student's face light up because they can fully express their ideas and communicate with their teachers and their peers and parents, it's a wonderful feeling! Frank finally got to show off what he could really do and what he knew inside of him. Our wish would be for all struggling students to get the tools they need, like Co:Writer, to make a real difference in their learning experiences."

“Co:Writer is part of our curriculum now. When I see a student's face light up because they can fully express their ideas and communicate with their teachers, peers and parents, it's a wonderful feeling!”

**Julie Dobson,
Junior High School
Special Education
Teacher**

Our Vision

Empower Students with Accessible Technologies that Address Unique Literacy Needs

It's commonplace in schools to see stacks of textbooks, paper notebooks, pencils and pens. These are the "conventional" learning tools in schools, and they are effective for many students. But for students with physical, cognitive or learning differences, these tools pose significant barriers to learning. These students require **specialized accessible technology** and media to maximize their learning. This is where Don Johnston excels. Since 1980 we have been developing and supplying innovative technologies to schools who recognize that each student has unique learning needs and can thrive in the right environment.

We strive to create the right environment. This requires the right tools, the right implementation and the right instructional approaches. We are committed to providing you with the most value from product selection to ongoing support and implementation.

Don Johnston empowers educators with specialized accessible technologies and supported reading and writing tools for students with cognitive, physical, and learning differences. Since 1980, the company has partnered with literacy experts, assistive technology specialists, speech language pathologists, psychologists, teachers, researchers, and scientists to develop over a dozen assistive technology products. The company also publishes Start-to-Finish®, a collection of paperback, audio and computer books for students who read below grade level.