

Oxford University: “For students writing prose, Dragon works really well.”

Speech recognition has captured the public imagination for decades, promising to deliver a new way in which people engage with devices or services. It has already made a considerable difference to improving the quality of life for many. For instance, products like Nuance Communications' Dragon NaturallySpeaking and Dragon Dictate for Mac, eliminate the spelling worries that often prevent bright dyslexic students, for instance, from using their advanced vocabulary, giving them the freedom to express themselves fluently when creating documents. In these scenarios, Dragon has the ability to make a big difference to a student's academic performance, self-esteem and their future career foundations.

Recognising the value of Dragon

Research published in a review called 'Current Perspectives on Assistive Learning Technologies' by The Kellogg College Centre for Research into Assistive Learning Technologies, states: "Voice recognition software may be an appropriate compensatory technology for learners such as those with dyslexia who have severe difficulties with writing."

With those teaching benefits in mind, Oxford University was keen to introduce Dragon into its existing suite of assistive software products. Peter Quinn, Associate at the Kellogg Centre for AT and formerly Head of the Disability Advisory Service, explains that while he was aware of speech recognition technology, it was seeing Dragon in action that made him realise that the accuracy improvements made it an ideal assistive learning software solution. He stated: "We had a student from Sri Lanka. He learnt to speak English from German teachers, so he spoke with a heavy German accent. I was impressed by the accuracy levels he was achieving with Dragon."

As well as accommodating regional accents, Dragon's accuracy reaches 99%, and enables users to dictate up to 160 words per minute. Dragon can be trained within minutes, making it easy for students to create study, course or home work, simply by talking. Support for popular web-browsers makes internet-based research easier and quicker, too.

Rising to the challenge

Recognising Dragon's benefit to students during their exams as well as during their courses, today Dragon is authorised to support students at Oxford University up to and including exam time. Students have access to Dragon via the Disabled Student Allowances Scheme, through which Nuance already supplies over 10,000 copies of Dragon to students across the UK each academic year. Peter observed: "For students writing prose, Dragon works really well. That's why we had enough confidence in the product to push for it to be allowed in exams."

The path to success

Based on his experience, Peter states, "While Dragon is easy to use, it is still a change to how students capture their thoughts. They need time to get used to this change and to feel comfortable with Dragon.

That lead-in time is very important." Peter advises that students should 'practice, practice and practise', to ensure they're familiar and comfortable with Dragon in advance of their exams. Overall, feedback from the user community has been highly positive. "We receive a lot of compliments about Dragon. Our experiences have been largely positive and successful," Peter stated.

Under the Access To Work scheme, Dragon is also available to Oxford University staff, some of whom use it for responding to emails and completing administration tasks. The use of Dragon is reflected in education establishments across the country, where teachers, lecturers and school administration staff rely on the tangible productivity boost Dragon gives them to help effectively manage their administrative and lesson preparation workload.

As its use at Oxford University demonstrates, Dragon facilitates the introduction of new methods of teaching and learning, enabling students and teaching professionals to achieve even greater results.

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