

Microsoft Digital Tools- Teaching Assistive Technology as a Writing Lesson

Just a note, this document has been created to instruct on the use of Microsoft's Digital Tools in the writing process. This is NOT instruction on the writing process itself.

Grade 6-8

*This lesson is combining two features of **Microsoft Digital Tools** to help students become better writers – the use of the “Dictate” as well as “Immersive Reader (Read Aloud)” tools. Using these two tools combined in addition to peer editing and feedback, will help the students complete the writing process in a much more independent manner.*

Using Microsoft Digital Tools to Create a Document from Scratch

This method STARTS with the dictate feature takes advantage of allowing the students to get their thoughts down on paper as one of the initial steps (after brainstorm) of the writing process. Having an outline to refer from is helpful so that the narration is more fluent.

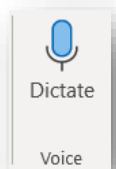
Students open word from Office.com. -> Edge -> My Apps -> OneDrive -> File New -> Word Document

Dictate > Text to Speech (Writing the Story or Non-fiction)

If writing a STORY, proceed to “Access dictate”. If writing a research paper, it helps to create headings FIRST to help the student organize the content.

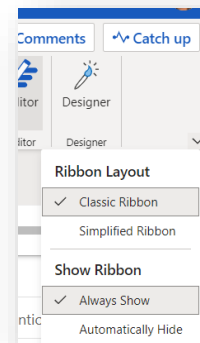
This is done by typing the heading, then going to the ribbon and clicking on the appropriate “Heading” under the styles menu.

NOTE: If you do not see that option, you may need to change the ribbon from “Simple” to “Classic”. This is done by clicking on the little arrow in the bottom right corner of the ribbon -> Classic Ribbon.



Access “Dictate” by clicking the dictate icon located on the ribbon from the “Home” tab.

Students may have to “allow” access to the microphone. Be sure to click “Allow”.





A small window will appear displaying the microphone. The students start talking -> the computer will translate what is being spoken into written text. Punctuation can even be written using the spoken command such as “period”, “comma”, “question mark” and new paragraphs can be added by stating, “next line”.

Note: clicking on the settings icon will allow the user to change the spoken language.

Once the students have “written” their text, they can pause the recording by clicking on the microphone. I encourage them to start and stop often to think about what they would like to say BEFORE saying it so that it has some sense of organization.

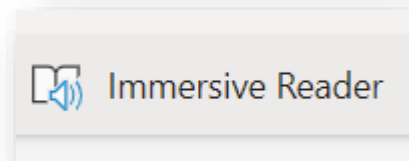
Click on the microphone again to resume OR on the “x” in the top right-hand corner to close the microphone.



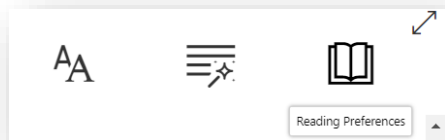
[Immersive Reader > Read aloud](#)

Students will now have the computer read their text back to them. They can listen to make sure that the words/sentences make sense, punctuation is placed where needed and to check to see if more needs to be written to complete the “story.”

Access Immersive Reader from the “View” tab.



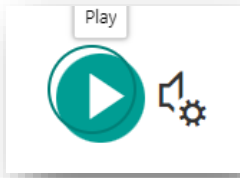
Clicking on the icon will open the written text in the immersive reader interface displaying the unique ribbon accompanying this.



There are many settings that can be customized for the utilization of this tool as an intervention tool. At this time, it might be an idea just to use the default settings.

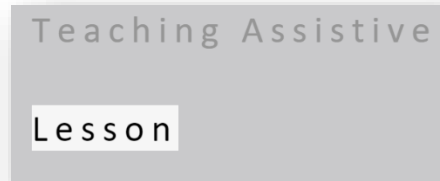
(Note: the desktop application offers a much more robust immersive Reader experience. However, for the purpose of this lesson, the online version works fine.)

If you would like to learn more about using Immersive Reader (Learning Tools) as an intervention tool, watch [THIS video](#).



If the document is not already at the top, scroll to the top, place the cursor at the beginning and press the “Play” icon at the bottom of the screen.

The document becomes greyed out and as the text is read, it is highlighted for easy tracking.



Clicking on a word will display a picture as well as a sound icon to listen to the individual word.



Once the document has been read, exit out of the immersive reader screen by clicking on the <-- located on the top left of the window. Students can then go back and “edit” their document – making necessary adjustments and/or additions. *Unfortunately, editing cannot be done in this screen.*

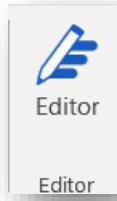
Have them repeat this process until the writing is complete.

Editing

This is now the time to introduce what it means to have words underlined in RED or BLUE. The words underlined in RED mean there is a spelling mistake; blue indicates a grammatical error. At this point the student could simply proceed by scanning through the document and addressing each highlighted word. However, now is the time to introduce another “Digital Tool” by Microsoft -> Editor.

Editor is a tool that uses AI (Artificial Intelligence) to examine the text and make suggestions based on its own experiences it’s been programmed to recognize as well as the user’s input it offers each time the user deploys it. It will learn from each experience and personalize the outcome based on the input provided (i.e., not highlighting obscure words or names as spelling errors).

Editor

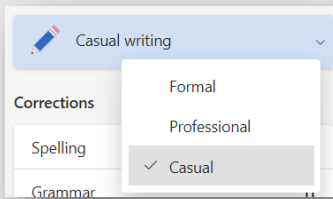
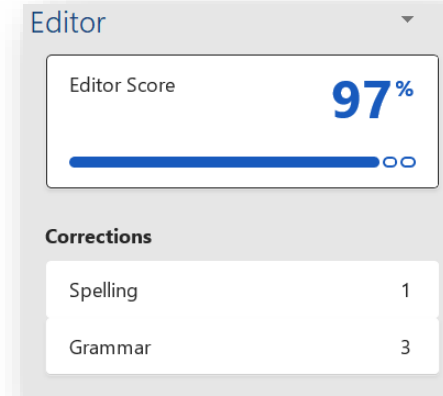


This feature can be accessed from the “Home” ribbon. The icon is located on the far right.

Note: the online version is much more robust BUT if you’d just like a simplified version for the students, the desktop version is perfect.

Clicking on it opens its unique sidebar outlining a number of sections it uses to examine the text. Each section either has a checkmark displayed (all correct) or a number (the number of errors).

It displays a “score” using the sections of text it examined and provides an opportunity to increase this score by “fixing” the items in error.



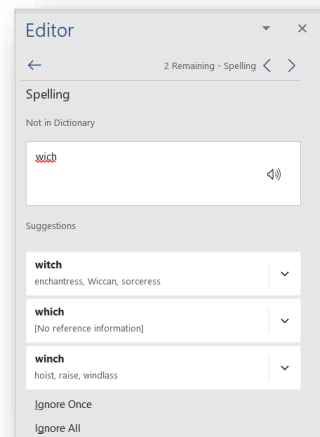
First step however is to change the “style of writing”. By default, it goes to “formal” which is much more judgemental. Switch it to ‘Casual’.
(This option is NOT available on the desktop version)

Clicking on the sections with the numbers (errors) opens a dialogue box to correct these errors.

Spelling

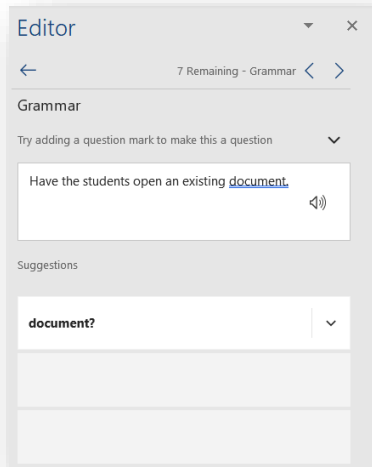
Option (s) will be displayed from which the student will choose. Clicking on the correct word will replace it within the text and proceed to the next error. *Definitions beside each will help the student determine the correct word. The students have the option to “ignore” if it is a name or obscure word the dictionary doesn’t recognize.*

This is a perfect time to discuss using caution– NOT just randomly choosing a word JUST because it’s spelled correctly OR being careful because depending on the dictionary chosen, quite often the correct Canadian spelling is highlighted as incorrect.



Students may also have to adjust the spelling of the word a bit because the AI cannot recognize the word as it's spelled to make suggestions.

Grammar



Examining the text in the “Grammar” section is much harder to do. This is identifying *possible* grammatical errors such as punctuation and word usage (homonyms) BUT it also looks at several other variables that provide a great opportunity for discussion; depending on the writing level of the students, I might even avoid it at the time. Clicking on the section (as with the spelling) will start the correction process.

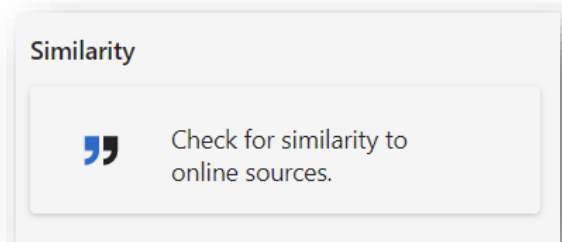
It will scan the document and “stop” at each error – highlighting the error and providing possible solutions.

These are SUGGESTIONS and may not always be appropriate or correct. I remind the students here that it is the computer using AI to determine these solutions AND we have the option to override it. This is especially true when using the “Clarity” or “Conciseness” options.

Each time the student corrects or “ignores” the highlighted errors, the score increases. NOTE: this score is determined NOT by the quality of the writing (content) but by the errors that occur within the writing.

The final feature I sometimes use is the “Similarity” feature. This feature is ONLY available on the online version. It is a very simplified version of a plagiarism checker. It scans the document for phrases or paragraphs that are similar to ones online and not only highlights them but provides reference to where they are located on the internet.

This allows the students to either rephrase the statement/phrase in their own words OR include a citation to this statement/phrase within their own document.



To learn more about using the Editor Tool, click on the links below:

[Online Version](#)

[Desktop Version](#)

[Using for Office 365](#)

Synonyms

The last step in this process is to make the writing more impactful by swapping out basic words with more compelling ones. This is an easy process to do using the “synonym” selection in Word. This is done by right-clicking on the word and selecting “Synonyms for” A list of words will appear in a sidebar and the student can substitute the existing word with one of these.



Note: this functionality works much better in the desktop version. Right clicking will bring up a similar method BUT the suggestions will be listed from an expansion menu, NOT from a side bar.

Using Microsoft Digital Tools with an Existing Document

This method really takes advantage of the immersive reader function helping the student recognize the mistakes in their own writing.

Have the students open an existing document. Read through it once.

Immersive Reader > Read Aloud

Open immersive reader using the above process to have the computer read the document to the students. Because this was a document they created without the aid of speech to text technology, there is a higher likelihood that more errors will be highlighted and identified through this process. It may take a few readings through for the students to be able to identify where the mistakes have been made.

Exit out of the immersive reader screen to make these changes.

Dictate > Speech to Text

Use the dictate tool to do the editing. This can be done by adding punctuation, correcting words, and even adding more to the story so it is more robust.

Have the students use the Immersive Reader tool as an “extra voice” to listen to their writing. When they feel they have captured what they intended in the “just” of the story, they can move onto the next steps using Editor and Synonyms as listed above.