



# The Computer Monitor



Volume XIII

Winter 2001

PACER Center has a new and expanded technology center for families. Come visit the new facility on Saturday, April 21, 2001, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Parents and professionals are invited to find out about the latest in assistive technology for children and adults with disabilities.

There will be demonstration areas with computers, assistive technology, and accessible toys. Learn more about the services offered and have a great time with clowns, balloons and enjoyable activities for all!

Whether you're a parent, professional, or just someone interested in learning more about assistive technology, come on by, there's something for everyone!

## Open House Saturday, April 21<sup>st</sup>!



*Please call PACER at (952) 838-9000 to receive an invitation.*

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# A Parent's Perspective of the Computer

By Janet Peters, CRC Coordinator

Lisa Deitering learned about PACER's Computer Resource Center three years ago when her son's teacher mentioned PACER Center's resources for parents of children with disabilities.

Lisa and Doug's son Ryan has a speech disability and was receiving services through the Early Childhood Service Cooperative.

Lisa made the initial call to PACER Center, and the first recommendation was a consultation with the Computer Resource Center. A consultation is a free, individualized, appointment to experiment with software and devices in the Center. An Assistive Technology specialist can recommend software or devices for a child to try. Professionals or other family members are also encouraged to participate. Lisa remembers the welcoming environment and how comfortable she

felt at PACER Center. During the consultation Ryan tried a variety of software tools and the AT specialist was able to give Lisa suggestions to try immediately on their home computer.



*Ryan using the computer at his home.*

"Ryan has always responded great to the computer" recalls Lisa. "He has fun with the software games and is more motivated by them than he is by flash cards or other learning methods - and therefore sticks with it longer."

After the initial consultation, Lisa and Ryan joined the Software Lending Library and have been active members ever since. "The Library is

fabulous!" says Lisa. "It's a great way to try the software and know what will motivate Ryan, before making the purchase."

The Software Lending Library is available to parents in Minnesota for a fee of \$25 per year, which allows a family to try three pieces of software or devices every three weeks. The items can be mailed to a families' home. Professionals are

also welcome to use the Library's services. The annual fee for a professional is \$100.

Lisa especially appreciates the help from the staff. "Perrine, a computer center staff person, has been extremely helpful with appropriate selections for Ryan based on a historical record of all our checkouts. She knows what Ryan likes and makes great recommendations."

"PACER  
Computer  
Resource  
Center  
is a  
welcoming  
environ-  
ment."

# Resource Center

As members of the Library, families receive a catalog of all the software and assistive technology available for loan. Ryan sometimes helps Lisa make the software selections. His favorite programs are the very popular Living Books by Broderbund, while Lisa thinks Words Around Me by Edmark is a very good program to achieve academic goals.

Lisa recently joined the Computer Resource Center advisory board. She said, "I want to help the CRC keep up the good service to parents and offer the CRC advice from parents' perspective." As a member of the advisory board, Lisa plans on spreading the word about PACER Center, "I've always been a strong advocate for

Ryan, and I want other parents to know about resources out there for them."

Lisa said "PACER Computer Resource Center is a great place to learn about technology for your child, and it would be especially beneficial to parents that maybe don't have a lot of technology experience to help get them started."

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## Assistive Technology Conferences

PACER Computer Resource Center is presenting on a variety of topics at the following conferences. Please contact the conference host for more information about registration.

### *Day of Excellence Conference*

Day of Excellence Conference is sponsored by the SW/WC Service Cooperatives Regional Special Needs Projects. It will be held at Southwest State University in Marshall on March 12. Contact Bob Braun (507) 537-6800 for more information.

### *Early Childhood Mega Conference*

Early Childhood Mega Conference is sponsored by Bemidji State University. It will be held at Bemidji State University March 14 - 16. Please contact Cherry Brouwer (218) 755-3779 for more information.

### *Writing Fest*

Writing Fest is sponsored by Northeast Metro 916 Intermediate School District Assistive Technology Resource Center (ATRC) and Metro ECSU. It will be held at Capital View Center in Little Canada on Thursday, March 29. Contact Joan Purrington at (651) 415-5593 for more information

### *Charting the C's 2001 - An AT Odyssey*

Charting the C's is sponsored by the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. It will be held at the Kahler Grand Hotel April 23 - 24, in Rochester. Please contact Joan Breslin-Larson at (651) 582-1599 for more information.

### *Parent Retreat Family Fun and Friendship*

Parent Retreat Family Fun and Friendship is sponsored by Parent Partnership Project. It will be held in Brainerd on Saturday, April 28. Call Monica at (320) 285-2158 for more information.

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*These conferences, on a variety of assistive technology-related topics, are for Minnesota families and professionals.*

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# Assistive Technology On the Go!

By Annette Cerreta, Assistive Technology Specialist

With the trend toward electronic devices that conveniently fit in a pocket or backpack, it's not surprising that makers of assistive technology have followed suit with an array of portable devices. Now people with special learning considerations can benefit from the growing availability of compact assistive technology products designed to boost academic performance.

Children who have difficulty with spelling and writing can gain independence and confidence with the aid of pocket-sized spell checkers and dictionaries with speech output. These devices speak words, spellings, and definitions aloud. These functions can be very useful to people with dyslexia or other learning disabilities. One such device, the *Speaking Homework Wiz* (about \$50) by Franklin Electronic Publishers [www.franklin.com](http://www.franklin.com), pronounces all words,



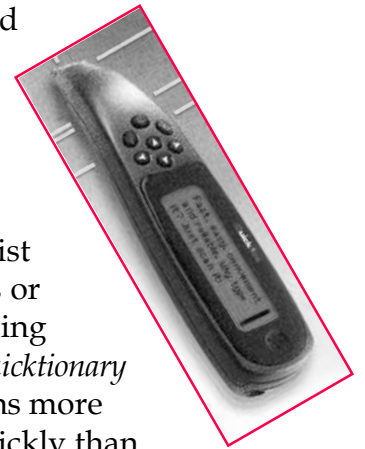
definitions, and "help" text out loud. If the user enters the phonetic spelling of a word, the device will display and

speak the correct word. It even helps students distinguish between common homophones (words that sound alike) such as to, too, and two.

Another pint-sized technology breakthrough is the *Quicktionary Reading Pen II* (about \$280) by Wizcom Technologies [www.wizcomtech.com](http://www.wizcomtech.com). With this hand-held, pen-shaped device users can scan

a variety of printed materials and hear the word or sentence spoken aloud.

This reading aid is designed to assist beginning readers or persons with reading difficulties. The *Quicktionary Reading Pen II* scans more accurately and quickly than its predecessor, the *Quicktionary Reading Pen*, and has several new features, including the ability to read word definitions aloud.



For many students with disabilities, the writing process can be slow and frustrating, causing them to fall behind the rest of their peers. A portable word processor can be a powerful compensatory tool for these children. A portable word processor is a device similar in size and appearance to a laptop computer that allows the user to enter text and save it in separate files. Later, the file can be loaded into a Mac, PC or directly to a printer. Students often use portable word processors in the classroom for note taking, writing papers, and even taking tests. Many of these devices offer other useful features such as built-in calculators, spelling checkers, calendars, spreadsheets, and typing tutors.



People with special learning considerations can benefit from the growing availability of compact assistive technology products.

Portable word processors are light-weight (about 2-3 pounds), ruggedly designed, and economically priced from about \$200 to 300; a fraction of the price of a laptop computer. When you add up all the advantages of portability, durability, and affordability, a portable word processor is an ideal tool for students who need extra assistance with writing.

Children with disabilities can benefit greatly from the assortment of portable technology tools available. For more information on these and other assistive technologies, contact the PACER Computer Resource Center at 952-838-9000 or e-mail [crc@pacer.org](mailto:crc@pacer.org)

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## CRC Workshops

*PACER Computer Resource Center offers workshops and presents at conferences throughout Minnesota for families and professionals on a variety of assistive technology-related topics, ranging from early childhood to the transition process.*

**Workshops** - Workshops for families and the community are free of charge. The following workshops are scheduled in Minnesota. Please contact the PACER Center (952) 838-9000 or [crc@pacer.org](mailto:crc@pacer.org) to register. Pre-registration is required.

### *Play and Learn: Early Childhood Inclusion*

A collaborative workshop between PACER Computer Resource Center and AbleNet, Inc. This workshop will explore technology used for play to promote inclusion in Early Childhood settings.

**Wednesday, March 7, 8 a.m. to noon at PACER**

### *Technology for Students with Learning Disabilities*

This workshop discusses software and assistive technology that can assist students with learning disabilities with reading and writing.

**Thursday, March 8, 6 p.m in Monticello**

### *Transition Workshop with Assistive Technology*

This workshop demonstrates assistive technology and the transition process from home to work, and school.

**Sat., March 17, 9 a.m at PACER**

### *Introduction to AAC*

Overview of various alternative and augmentative communication devices and strategies for their use.

**Thursday, March 22, 6 p.m. in Red Wing**

### *Participation for All in Literacy*

A collaborative workshop between PACER Computer Resource Center and AbleNet, Inc. This workshop will explore literacy activities accessible to all children.

**Wednesday, April 11, 8 a.m. to noon at PACER**

### *Minnesota Guidelines on Assistive Technology*

Introduction for parents to the new Minnesota Assistive Technology Guidelines for selection and implementation of assistive technology in the schools.

**Tuesday, March 27, 6 p.m. in Mankato**

**Tuesday, April 17, 6 p.m. in Virginia**

**Tuesday, May 8, 6 p.m. in Moorhead**

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*PACER  
workshops  
help you  
make a  
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in the  
life of  
your  
child.*

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# Behold! The Battery!

By Perrine Dailey, Assistive Technology Specialist

Many assistive technology devices, such as augmentative and alternative communication devices, switch toys, and cordless mice, require batteries to function. Batteries come in a variety of shapes and sizes from tiny batteries in hearing aids, to large batteries on motorized wheelchairs. This article presents an overview of different types and purposes of batteries and how to take care of batteries, including recharging and recycling. A list of resources for further information about batteries is also included.

Many kinds of batteries are available, each with a specific use. Alkaline batteries are most common, but there are many other kinds of batteries including Nickel Metal Hydride (Ni-MH), Nickel-Cadmium (Ni-Cd), and Lithium Ion (Li-ion). As well, batteries come in a variety of sizes, the most common ranging from AAA, AA, to C, D and 9 Volts.

Battery capacities are measured in milliamp hours (mAh). This determines how long the battery will last. To have increased capacity, the user must increase the battery's size and weight. However, some batteries, such as Ni-MH and Li-ion batteries are able to provide high capacities with minimal size and weight.

## Varieties of Batteries

- **Alkaline** batteries are popular, cheap, and disposable. Because they are not rechargeable, users must constantly replace dead batteries and take care to dispose of the dead batteries appropri-

ately (see the recycling section below). Standard alkaline batteries have a high internal resistance that means when the batteries are used in tape players or radios, which have a low current, they last a long time. New batteries have been developed for use with high current devices, such as digital cameras.



- **Nickel Metal Hydride (Ni-MH)** rechargeable batteries have the highest recharge capability. However, even when they are not in use, these batteries can slowly lose their charge. These batteries are often used in cellular and portable phones.
- **Nickel-Cadmium (Ni-Cd)** batteries are the most common type of portable rechargeable battery. Ni-Cds have roughly half the capacity of Ni-MH cells, but are less expensive. These batteries often can be recharged and reused up to a thousand times. Even when they are not in use, these batteries can slowly lose their charge. Ni-Cd batteries are subject to voltage depression, so users must ensure the batteries are fully discharged before recharging.

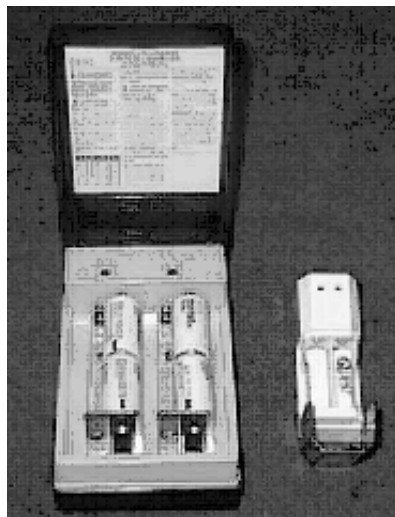
Many devices require batteries which come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

- **Lithium-ion batteries (Li-ion)** are the best rechargeable batteries available. They offer long life and high capacity in slim, lightweight batteries that are also memory-free. Li-ion batteries are available for many premium cellular phones and computers.

### About Rechargeable Batteries

Rechargeable batteries have many positives (pun intended), but one of the negatives of this type of battery is that some are subject to voltage depression, sometimes called the memory effect. This occurs when a battery is charged before the previous charge is used up. The battery will not be able to be charged to full capacity. This can shorten the life of the batteries. Sometimes users can fully charge and discharge the battery to eliminate this problem. Over time, the battery will suddenly require charging much sooner than before. Recharge batteries only when they are near to fully discharged. Users can tell when a battery is discharged by a sharp drop in power or speed. Buy a battery tester to check the power of the batteries.

To make the most of rechargeable batteries, users will need a charger designed for the particular kind or brand of batteries. The price range for chargers varies, but any of them will allow users to save money on batteries in the long run. Battery chargers that run on solar power are also available.



Look for a battery charger that automatically shuts off when the batteries are finished charging, since overcharging can damage the battery or shorten its life span. When the battery is finished charging, remove it promptly from the charger. As well, don't expect battery chargers to work in less than a few hours, a full charge would take up to 10-12 hours.

Most users are not aware that they should charge new batteries before using them for the first time. This is called "initializing" and will enable the user to obtain maximum battery capacity.

Never try to charge non-rechargeable batteries such as carbon-zinc or alkaline. It's dangerous, some types can overheat and even explode. As well, do not mix non-rechargeable and rechargeable batteries in the same device.

### Recycling Batteries

When recyclable batteries such as Ni-Cd no longer hold a charge, they should be recycled. Don't throw away rechargeable batteries. Call 1-800-8-BATTERY or contact the Rechargeable Battery Recycling Corporation (RBRC), an international, not-for-profit organization that runs the "Charge Up to Recycle!" program for Ni-Cd battery recycling. Visit [www.rbrc.org](http://www.rbrc.org) to find the nearest retail site or recycling center.

The active elements in Ni-Cd rechargeable batteries are nickel and cadmium.

*Continued on page 8*

*There are many positives to using rechargeable batteries, but voltage depression or memory effect can be a downside.*

# Behold! The Battery!

*Continued from page 7*

The cadmium takes a long time to degrade and is toxic to some aquatic life. When a Ni-Cd battery is thrown in the garbage, it eventually ends up in a landfill or municipal incinerator. By recycling used Ni-Cd rechargeable batteries, the reclaimed nickel is used to make stainless steel products, while the cadmium is reused in new Ni-Cd rechargeable batteries.

## Battery Tips

Following are a few simple tips that will help you keep your batteries in good working order. More tips can be found at the Web sites listed.

- Store batteries in a cool, dry location out of the reach of children. If the device containing the batteries will not be used for an extended period, remove the batteries.

- Avoid high-temperature storage, and keep batteries away from direct sunlight, radiators, and other heat sources.
- Batteries may explode or leak and cause burns or injury if improperly recharged, disposed of in fire, mixed with used or different-type batteries, installed backwards, or disassembled.

To keep track of your batteries, consider purchasing a wall or shelf-mounted battery organizer that stores many batteries, and helps keep the batteries organized. Some storage units have a built-in battery tester.

Batteries power many assistive technology devices such as augmentative and alternative communication devices, portable computers, and wheelchairs. It is useful to know the basics about batteries to maximize their use.

Many devices require batteries which come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

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## "Mini" Workshops held in the Software Lending Library

PACER Center will offer mini sessions on various technology subjects. Software Lending Library members are invited to attend these free sessions. Please contact the Perrine in the PACER Computer Resource Center (952) 838-9000 or [pdailey@pacer.org](mailto:pdailey@pacer.org) to register. Pre-registration is required.

### *Where can I buy this?*

Learn about various software companies, both commercial and disability specific, where you can get software and assistive devices. Catalogs will be distributed.

**Tuesday, March 13, 6 to 7:45 p.m. at PACER Center**

### *Basic PC Maintenance*

Learn basic maintenance techniques such as Scan Disk and Defrag for your PC Windows 95 or 98 computer. Learn how to load disks and CDs and how to remove programs from your hard drive.

**Tuesday, April 17, 6 to 7:45 p.m. at PACER Center**

### *Internet of Interest*

This session discusses using Internet search engines to find helpful information. The Internet is a good place to find information on disability topics and other areas of interest.

**Tuesday, May 15, 6 to 7:45 p.m. at PACER Center**

# Introduction to Augmentative and Alternative Communication

By Kari Jaehnert, Assistive Technology Specialist

Nearly everyone would agree that communication is an essential part of our daily lives. Through communication, we are able to express our likes, dislikes, needs, and ideas to others. For most people, verbal communication comes very naturally and is taken for granted. Yet for individuals with communication disorders, speaking can be an overwhelming and frustrating experience.

Fortunately, there are devices that can help a person who has little or no verbal communication skills. These augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices are very powerful communication aids that can open many doors for users.

## *New Devices in the Computer Resource Center*

The PACER Computer Resource Center has a wide variety of AAC devices available for parents and professionals to try with their child or students. A few of the devices including the *CheapTalk 8*, *Tech/Scan* and the *DynaMyte* are highlighted below.

*CheapTalk* by Enabling Toys & Devices is an affordable and user-friendly device. It is available in several models including the most popular *CheapTalk 4* (four message buttons) and *CheapTalk 8* (eight message buttons). Each device allows the user to have 5-second messages recorded and rerecorded as often as they like.

Programming for the *CheapTalk* is relatively simple and consists of pressing a recording button and the desired message button while speaking into a built-in microphone. Each message button has an easy-to-remove, plastic protective cover to hold words and pictures; and an insert overlay option to facilitate the use of picture cards. Minimal pressure is required to activate the message buttons, allowing a wide range of accessibility.

All *CheapTalk* models come equipped with an on-off switch and volume control knob. Both are important features that conserve battery power

and allow the user to be heard in a variety of environments. Switch access with scanning is an additional option available to the *CheapTalk*. The *CheapTalk 4* can be purchased for \$89.95. The *CheapTalk 8* costs \$180.00 and is available to preview in the PACER Computer Resource Center.

One of the newest additions to the Computer Resource Center is the *Tech/Scan* by Advanced Multimedia Devices, Inc. The *Tech/Scan* is a portable and user-friendly device that is accessible by a switch. There are 32 message buttons that can record up to 4.5 seconds each and can be rerecorded as often as needed.

*Continued on page 10*

*New  
communi-  
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devices  
open many  
doors for  
users.*

# Introduction to Augmentative, Alternative

*Continued from page 9*

The *Tech/Scan* has three scanning options for users: step scanning, linear scanning, and row-column scanning. The scan speed can be set to slow, medium or fast.

In addition to the 32 message buttons, the *Tech/Scan* is a multi-level device. This means users have the ability to change to another internal memory area (or level), thereby having access to a new set of messages. If the user or the adult working with the user wants to change the level, they turn a knob to the next level, insert another overlay of picture symbols, and the *Tech/Scan* will automatically go to the pre-recorded messages for that level. This is a very convenient feature that allows the user to have access to a much broader vocabulary without having to continuously reprogram the device. *Tech/Scan* can have from one to six levels and varies in price according to the number of levels. Like the *CheapTalk*, the *Tech/Scan* is very easy to program and is extremely durable. The *Tech/Scan* also comes equipped with

the on-off button and volume adjustment feature. Overall, the *Tech/Scan* is a very accessible device that can adapt to the changing needs of its user without necessarily having to be replaced. The *Tech/Scan* (with two levels) can be previewed at PACER Computer Resource Center and can be purchased for approximately \$925.00.

Another addition to the Center's AAC resources is the *DynaMyte* by Sentient Systems, a division of Sunrise Medical. The *DynaMyte* is an extremely powerful computerized device that, aside from

daily living needs. The *DynaMyte* claims to be the "lightest, most full-featured device available," which may very well be true. At first glance, the *DynaMyte* looks like a mini-computer with a vivid and colorful dynamic display.

Adults as well as young children can use the *DynaMyte*. It would be a good investment for a person who will need an AAC device to grow with them, because it has the ability to adapt to the user's changing needs. Personalized communication pages can be created for hundreds of topics and situations. Links are created between pages making the selection process easy and less complicated for the user. Having access to a large number of pages and symbols allows the user to communicate more naturally and express their needs and ideas.

Pages on the *DynaMyte* can also be designed for specific age groups or abilities. For instance, a four-year-old may have a page designed with two large icons and will only



*Schrantz family trying devices in the CRC.*

serving as an AAC device, can also allow users to access and operate televisions, VCR's, and other appliances. It has a built-in infrared environmental control feature that provides users with greater independence in their

*The DynMyte is very accessible for all ages, abilities, and situations.*

# Communication

have access to two choices at a time, whereas an adult or experienced user may have 15 small icons on one page and may have links branching off of all 15 icons.

Ultimately, the *DynaMyte* is very accessible for all ages, abilities, and situations. There are many ways to expand the *DynaMyte's* abilities through upgrades and continuous support offered through Sunrise

Medical. Back-up memory cards, software and symbols are available for relatively low costs to the *DynaMyte* user. Aside from being a communication aid and providing environmental control, the *DynaMyte* can also be connected to a PC with additional hardware, allowing the user to type letters or access e-mail. The *DynaMyte* is a very comprehensive device, but a drawback may be the high cost,

which ranges from \$6,000 to \$7,000. Another possible drawback is the synthesized voice which can sound mechanical and unlike a human voice. The *DynaMyte* does allow for some recorded sound to be programmed into it, but does not allow a complete digitized voice output. Overall the *DynaMyte* is an extremely high-tech and very functional device for the right user.

## Tips on Selecting an AAC Device

Closing the Gap and Sentiment Systems Technology (a supplier of AAC devices) offer some guidelines to consider while choosing your AAC device.

1. Look for devices that are easy to use. Most AAC devices can be easily programmed. Others with the dynamic display tend to be more complicated but may offer more features and capabilities.
2. Choose portable devices. They allow nonverbal users to take their "voices" wherever they go. This is important especially for mobile and active users.
3. Consider accessibility features. Some devices offer a variety of access options such as switch jacks and scanning. It is important to consider the user's immediate needs, as well as their future needs. It may be possible to use the same device for many years if it offers a range of accessibility features.
4. Take voice quality into account. Sound projection and clarity are obviously very important, but you may also consider digital versus synthesized voice output. Digital voice allows an actual human voice to record the messages while the synthesized voice is a computerized voice that is standard in some devices.
5. Look for a device that fits the user's current needs but has the potential to grow. Think about an individual's needs a few years down the road. Can vocabulary be added and used quickly? Can the device be up-graded with the user's changing needs?
6. Choose durable, reliable devices. Can the device withstand the stress of daily use? Make sure the battery life lasts long enough to meet a user's needs or find an alternate power source, if needed.

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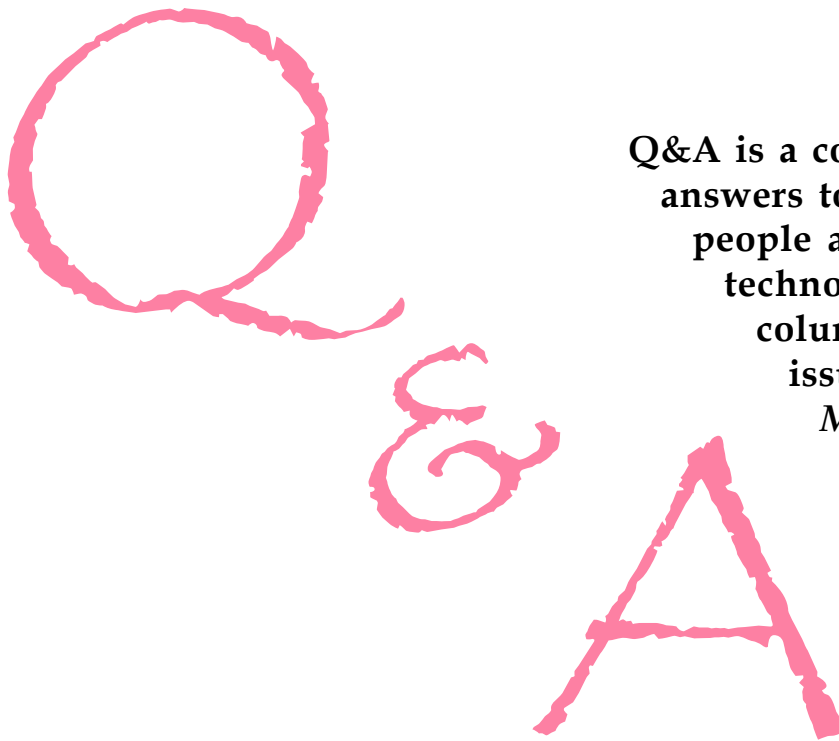
The PACER  
Computer  
Resource  
Center  
produces  
handouts  
on a  
variety of  
assistive  
technology  
topics.

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Call us at  
800-53-  
PACER or  
e-mail  
crc@pacer.  
org with  
your  
technology  
questions.

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**Q&A is a column featuring answers to common questions people ask about assistive technology. The Q&A column appears in every issue of the *Computer Monitor* newsletter. You can submit a question via e-mail at [crc@pacer.org](mailto:crc@pacer.org).**

**Q:** *Is there a way to avoid repeated letters while I am typing? Backspacing works but slows me down.*

**A:** Pressing keyboard keys can sometimes result in multiple unwanted letters, but it is easy to slow down the key-repeat rate.

To slow down the key repeat rate on a Windows computer, go to the Control Panel and open the built-in Accessibility Options panel. The Filter Keys option allows you to set the repeat rate or prevent double letters from being typed.

To slow down the key repeat rate on a Macintosh, open the Easy Access control panel built into Mac OS 7.x and 8.x. If you don't have it; you can download it from <http://www.apple.com/education/k12/disability/easyaccess.html>. The Slow Keys utility allows you to select the repeat rate and avoid duplicate letters.

Another option might be to use a keyguard while typing. A keyguard is a piece of clear plastic with holes corresponding to each key. A keyguard sits on top of the keyboard to prevent users from pressing unwanted keys. There are many different keyguards available for different keyboards. You can also contact the PACER Computer Resource Center for more information: e-mail: [crc@pacer.org](mailto:crc@pacer.org) phone: 952-838-9000.

**Q:** *I'm a teacher in a special education classroom where we have several computers for our students to use. Several of my students have difficulty controlling their saliva. How can I keep the keyboards clean and dry?*

**A:** One way to clean and disinfect your keyboards is with a diluted bleach/water solution sprayed onto a paper towel. Use a paper towel that is strong and does not shed or break apart, leaving little chunks of paper on your keyboard. This is how we clean our keyboards here at the PACER Computer Resource Center.

All mice, trackballs, and touch screens are cleaned on a regular basis too. We also offer waterless hand cleaner in several fun colors and scents for the children to use before they begin using the computer.

Another option for your classroom would be to purchase a keyboard

protector, sometimes called a moisture guard or keyboard skin, which is a clear form-fitting cover for your keyboard. This kind of cover will help protect your keyboard from many things: dust, dirt, pet hair, food crumbs, and saliva.

Look for a keyboard protector that fits snugly and is specifically designed for your brand of keyboard. It helps to have some way to fasten the keyboard cover to the keyboard, such as double-sided tape or Velcro. As well, find a brand that is translucent, so you can see the letters on the keys. Something else to consider is a brand that is flexible and will remain that way over time. These covers can be cleaned easily with a mild soap and water or a wet sponge.

Several companies make keyboard covers. Most are inexpensive, under \$20.

Here are some web sites of companies that market these keyboard covers.

ProtecT Keyboard Covers:	<a href="http://www.protectcovers.com">www.protectcovers.com</a>	1-800-669-7739
Fentek Industries:	<a href="http://www.fentek-ind.com/kbprtect.htm">www.fentek-ind.com/kbprtect.htm</a>	1-800-639-0710
Keyskin Keyboard Protector:	<a href="http://www.compucover.com/">www.compucover.com/</a>	1-800-874-6391
Viziflex:	<a href="http://www.viziflex.com/cgi-bin/Web%20store/">www.viziflex.com/cgi-bin/Web store/</a>	1-800-307-3357
Microedcessories:	<a href="http://www.microedcessories.com/">www.microedcessories.com/</a>	1-888-264-2763
Custom Seals:	<a href="http://www.softcom.com.au/business/">www.softcom.com.au/business/</a>	(Australia)

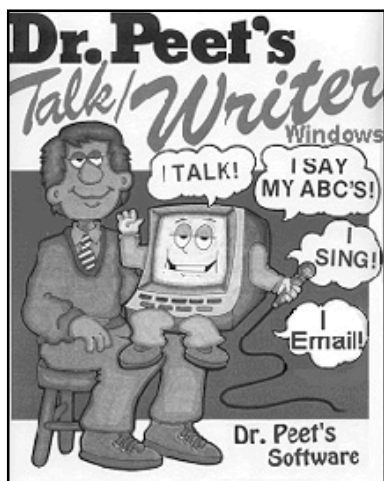
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*Keyboard covers protect your keyboard from dust, dirt, food crumbs, and saliva.*

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# Dr. Peet's TalkWriter Review

By Perrine Dailey, Assistive Technology Specialist



Dr. Peet's  
can help  
children  
learn  
crucial  
reading  
and  
writing  
skills.

Dr. Peet's talking word processing software for children has been around since 1987. The latest offering Dr. Peet's *TalkWriter* is the best yet,

with many useful features. Children who use *Dr. Peet's TalkWriter* will learn crucial reading and writing skills in a natural way, using a variety of entertaining and educational features.

There are two program modes, ABC Discovery and the *TalkWriter* word processor. ABC Discovery contains an introduction to keyboarding, a letter-recognition game with music and a one-line talking word processor called Write Words. This module helps teach the alphabet using images of a word that starts with each letter. Users can play the "ABC Song" and can write their own letter songs and hear them sung! In the "Find Letters" activity, the user is prompted to locate a certain letter on the keyboard. They can also hear each letter as they type. When they press the spacebar, they hear their word spoken

Children will love the talking word processor, which allows the user to hear a realistic voice speak each letter, word, or sentence as they type. Users can also customize the letter size, font, format, and color. As well, the picture dictionary

offers words paired with pictures, and parents or teachers can customize this feature by adding or deleting words and pictures. Another feature is the "Internet-safe E-mail Wizard", which teaches kids how to write an e-mail letter to a friend, or family member that can then be sent via e-mail (with help from a responsible adult) or printed. The friends and family choices are multicultural. Designed for multiple users, the program also offers a built-in journal feature.

*Dr. Peet's TalkWriter* is simple enough to be used by a 3-year-old child. It is appropriate for children with disabilities because it can be accessed with a variety of access methods, including a touch screen, alternative keyboard, or a single switch with adjustable scanning. Also offered is a *double-touch* option for users with visual impairments, a talking cursor, and the choice of having menu items spoken or sung. The program also contains a built-in "Help Movie" that explains the main functions of the program.

The program is available in Mac or Windows versions. The Mac version costs about \$30, and the Windows version costs about \$40. School versions come with activities and checklist. A freestanding activities guide can be purchased from Dr. Peet for about \$20 (see the contact information below).

*Dr. Peet's TalkWriter* is available to preview in the PACER Computer Resource Center (925) 838-9000 or contact Interest-Driven Learning Inc. via e-mail [wpeet@drpeet.com](mailto:wpeet@drpeet.com) or phone: 1-800-245-5733.

## Getting to Know Sharon Young

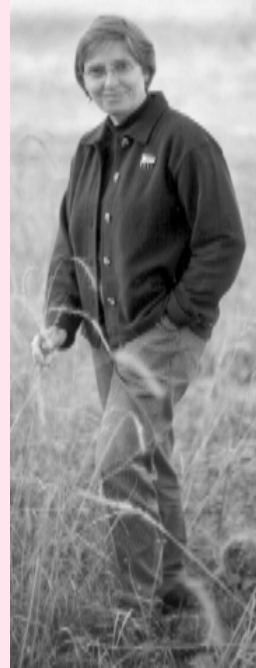
Sharon Young is the Early Childhood Technology Trainer for Project KITE (Kids Included with Technology are Enriched), a project of the PACER Computer Resource Center.

Sharon has long been an advocate for children with disabilities and used PACER's services before joining the staff. As a parent of a child with a learning disability, she learned first-hand about the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process and accommodations for her child.

Sharon has several degrees and a unique work history. She earned a social work degree from the College of Saint Teresa. She facilitated groups and tutored at a boy's correctional facility. During this time Sharon learned about PACER Center. Sharon was also an active member of the Orton Dyslexia Society and Children with Attention Deficit Disorder (CHADD).

Sharon attended the University of Houston-Texas graduate school and completed a two-year internship to become an educational therapist for children with specific language disabilities. At the same time, she worked part-time in Texas preschools. She received her teaching license as an early childhood family educator in 1993 from Concordia University. For five years she worked in a therapeutic preschool as a teacher and home visitor for families at risk.

In 1994 Sharon read in the *PACESETTER* about a grant to train teams of teachers, therapists, and parents in the use of technology in early childhood classrooms. Sharon participated in the first training group for Project KITE. She brought her first-hand experience with her when she began working at PACER in 1999. She has since attended a graduate certificate program in Teaching and Technology at Hamline University.



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The lab will offer mini sessions on various assistive technology subjects monthly. (see page 3)

Please contact Perrine Dailey ([pdailey@pacer.org](mailto:pdailey@pacer.org)) in the PACER Computer Resource Center for more information.



# The Computer Monitor

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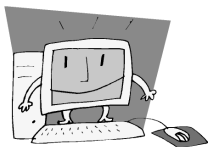
PACER Computer Resource Center  
8161 Normandale Boulevard  
Minneapolis, MN 55437-1044

### Fax



(952) 838-0199

### E-mail



[pacer@pacer.org](mailto:pacer@pacer.org) (e-mail)  
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