

The Bulletin

Statewide Vision Resource Centre

Number 7

Friday 23rd May 2008

This issue was edited by Lyn Robinson, Resource Teacher, Statewide Vision Resource Centre.

Professional Development Activities for Term 2, 2008

For workshop sessions, please BYO laptop.

Professional Development Event 2008	Date
Term 2 Visiting Teacher Professional Development Day	Tues 3 June
SPEVI Meeting – After The Visiting Teacher Professional Development Day	Tues 3 June

To see the annual program and to download programs for professional development activities, go to: <http://www.visiontech.svrc.vic.edu.au/pd2008.htm>

Friends of SPEVI Gathering

Date: Tuesday, June 3, 4.30pm until about 6.00pm

Venue: Statewide Vision Resource Centre, 370 Springvale Rd, Donvale

Parking: just North in the Doncaster Indoor Sports Centre car park

Format: 4.30pm drinks and nibbles 5.15pm Guest speaker and panel

Theme: Art and Community access for VI students

Cost: \$5 for members, \$10 for non-members

Come and hear Michael Donnelly (Art teacher, Vision Australia) on 'Arts Access, UK style'. Michael will outline some of the approaches being used in England for making the 'visual' arts accessible to people who are blind or have low vision. These findings come from Michael's recent visit to London and attendance at the inaugural "In touch with art" conference held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in November 2007.

Also catch up on the latest with the exciting "Braille Windows Project" which has been in Sydney and now Melbourne. Lyn Robinson (Resource teacher, Statewide Vision Resource Centre, DEECD) will outline how the project came to Melbourne and where it might go from here.

Further Studies in Vision Impairment

Are you interested in furthering your studies in vision impairment? Renwick (through the University of Newcastle) offers a great course that you might like to consider - with on campus units (and cheap accommodation) or distance education options. You can even propose your own study if there is something you feel passionate about.

To see the handbook and explore the range of options, visit:

<http://www.ridbc.org.au/renwick/handbook/2008%20Student%20Handbook.pdf>

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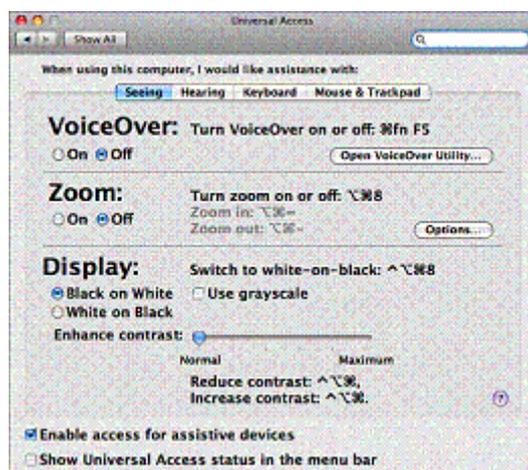
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Macintosh Accessibility Options for Vision Impaired Users

I have recently received a number of queries from people wanting to know about accessibility options for Macintosh computers. Although the PC still dominates school environments there are a number of schools and students who have opted for Macintosh computers. Macintosh now has voice and enlarging software built into their operating systems. With that in mind I thought it would be timely to have a closer look at exactly what is on offer from Macintosh computers.

VoiceOver Screen Reader for Apple Macintosh Leopard

The Apple OS X v10.4 (also known as Tiger), released in April 2005, included the first implementation of its VoiceOver screen reader. With the release of v10.5 (Leopard) in November 2007, VoiceOver has been further developed.



Unlike screen readers for Windows, VoiceOver is built into the operating system and is free (Narrator, included with Windows, is, at best, a very rudimentary screen reader). VoiceOver employs Apple's high-quality synthetic speech and offers text magnification. A number of electronic Braille displays are also supported.

VoiceOver can be set to start automatically from System Preferences. Importantly, one option is to have it start at the login screen, thus facilitating entry of username and password. Adjustment to a wide variety of parameters can be made on either a temporary or "permanent" basis. That is, temporary settings are lost when turning off VoiceOver or shutting down the computer, while permanent adjustments are retained until the user changes them again. Parameters that can be customised include voice(s) to be used, speech rate and level of spoken punctuation, text size and tailoring of keyboard combinations for issuing some VoiceOver commands. Customised settings can also be copied to another computer, thereby providing the user with a consistent interface on multiple machines.

The User Experience

It is stressed that the reviewer has limited knowledge of the Macintosh operating system. Access to the test machine was also limited, both in terms of session time and frequency. Therefore, not all of the VoiceOver benefits have yet been fully explored.

One feature common to screen readers is their employment of keyboard commands. Due in no small part to the different environment, VoiceOver's commands are somewhat different to popular

Windows-based screen readers. People coming from a Windows background must therefore undertake a considerable amount of relearning. This process is greatly assisted by inclusion of two features. The first is the keyboard learning mode (ctrl-option-k) which announces the function of each key combination. The second is the Commands Menu (Command-h), which provides a list of available commands for the current situation.

An excellent manual is also available from <http://w3.wmcnet.org/dtbuilder/books/vogs/> in several formats including DAISY, correctly structured PDF and grade 2 Braille. The manual in PDF form was put onto the test machine and this proved useful, both by way of information acquisition and for practising navigation. Unlike Windows-based screen readers, it is often necessary to issue a command (option-shift=down arrow) to begin interacting with content and another (option-shift-up arrow) to finish the interaction. Until recognising the situations where this process is necessary, it was not possible to access the table of contents in the PDF manual.

Software supplied with Macintosh computers is specifically written to work with VoiceOver. This is well demonstrated by TextEdit, the default Macintosh word processor. Feedback on document layout, including text size and attributes is available. Words shown as misspelled by TextEdit are also reported by VoiceOver.

Performance with Safari, the Macintosh web browser, is not as impressive. While basic web access is provided, features now commonplace on Windows-based screen readers are lacking. These include facilities for reading data tables and jumping to elements such as paragraphs, headings and lists.

A limitation of VoiceOver is lack of keyboard control of the mouse pointer. Other screen readers offer movement by such increments as character, word and line and can restrict movement to within the active window. Especially for exploring screen contents and/or for dealing with difficult layouts, this can be an important facility.

On the other hand, VoiceOver does offer magnification of screen contents. This can be helpful to those who have some useful residual vision. The combination of speech output and visual display is also valuable to those who have visual reading difficulties.

Summary

While not yet as powerful as screen readers developed for the Windows platform, VoiceOver will be very effective for some people. It seems especially suitable for those who wish to augment the visual display with synthetic speech output, but should also benefit those who have little or no vision wanting to use the computer for word processing, email and basic internet access. The availability of screen magnification is also an important feature.

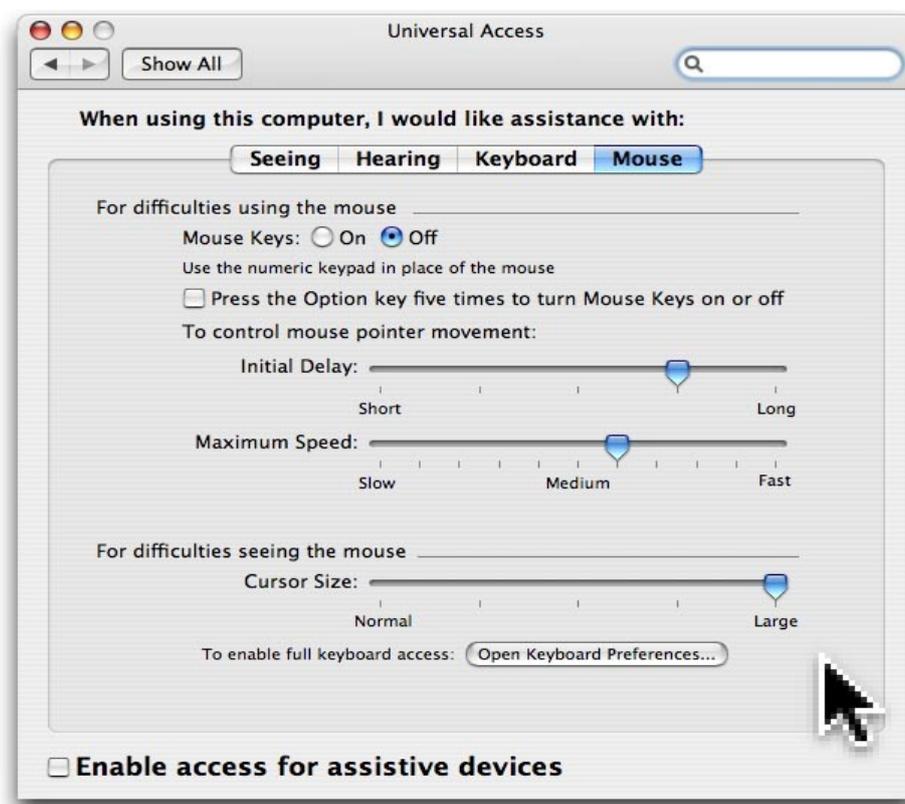
The inclusion of VoiceOver as part of the operating system is noteworthy. Any Apple Macintosh with the current operating system is immediately available for use by people requiring speech output and/or screen magnification. Furthermore, most screen readers for Windows cost between \$1,000 and \$1,800. Cost of upgrading these can also be considerable.

From: Adaptive Technologies News and Reviews April 2008

http://www.cli.nsw.edu.au/cli/e-learning/Adaptive_technologies/reviews_2008/voiceover.shtm

Enlarging the Cursor in Apple Macs

Mac OS X enables you to easily increase the size of the mouse cursor so it's easier to find and follow when you move the mouse. The cursor remains scaled to your preferred size even when the cursor shape changes from an arrow to an I-beam, to cross-hairs, or any other shape. It remains in effect until you change it, even when you logout, shutdown or restart your computer. Cursor scaling works together with other screen magnification technologies in Mac OS X, allowing you to combine them in unique ways to suit your needs.



For a copy of the article about accessibility go to: <http://www.apple.com/accessibility/vision/>

Vision Kits

If you are looking for some good resources for multi-impaired vision impaired students try the Vision Associates web site. Vision Kits and professional learning resources from Vision Associates offer a wide range of materials many from leaders in the field including Dr. Lea Hyvärinen, Lilli Nielsen, Dr. Jan van Dijk.

For more information go to: <http://www.visionkits.com/index.cfm>

Space Camp 2008

It appears that we don't have enough students to proceed with Space Camp this year, however 2009 is looking rather promising. So far, there are a number of students who have expressed interest - so if you would like to be kept in the loop with information for 2009, please let Deb Lewis know. You may be joining the group which already comprises:

Brooke - Northern Region
Cassie - Northern Region
Crissy - Eastern Region
Daniel - Eastern Region

For more information about Space Camp, visit either the SVRC website or the Texas School for the Blind website: <http://www.visiontech.svrc.vic.edu.au/camps.htm> - and click on the Space Camp link <http://www.tsbvi.edu/space/>

In the past the cost has been around \$4,600 per student - some students do fundraising, some families pay - if you need assistance, please ask and we can see what suggestions/support we can offer - but if you are fundraising for 2009, you really need to start now!

SVRC contact person: Deb Lewis 9841 0242 /

deblewis@svrc.vic.edu.au

HONOUR the GIFT of LOUIS BRAILLE

A project of ABLA: Australian Braille Literacy Action

Rebecca Maxwell is compiling a book of interviews with people who use braille. The publication of the book is to celebrate the bicentennial of Louis Braille's birth, in January 2009. Rebecca comments "We wish to recognize his huge gift of tactile literacy. Braille script is as precious to blind people as the roman alphabet is to sighted people. Life without a system of reading and writing would be unthinkable, for sighted people, and equally unthinkable for blind people."

Rebecca is facilitating some workshops for braille users who wish to express themselves on two themes: "living with braille literacy", and "particular interests". You can choose to be interviewed by Rebecca, or to write your ideas on these themes yourself and send writing to Rebecca. Rebecca will be editing the book for publication.

Interviews can be done by phone, or in person. For more information contact Rebecca by phone on (03) 9427 7579 or write to her at 60 Butler Street, Richmond, Vic. 3121

UEB and BrailleNote

From: Ramona Mandy, National Blindness Products Consultant, HumanWare

Is your student still using a notetaker that is not UEB compliant? As you may know, a decision was recently made by the Australian Braille Authority to adopt UEB (Unified English Braille) as Australia's official reading and writing braille code.

We at HumanWare believe it is paramount for students to have access to this code and in September 2007, implemented UEB into the BrailleNote family of products. In fact, the BrailleNote is the only device of its type to offer UEB support!

BrailleNote UEB means students can read and write literary material in UEB, as well as use the scientific calculator with the UEB Maths code. This is an absolute time-saver for both students and teachers! No more having to remember and switch between two codes. When connected to a monitor, teachers can be confident that your students are indeed on the right track.

So, what can you do? Trade in your old (blindness-related) notetaker for a BrailleNote or VoiceNote mPower, and receive up to \$1890 off the retail price. The BrailleNote has all the standard peripherals you would expect in a student's laptop, including inbuilt bluetooth, SD card, serial port and two USB ports. In addition, free support for reading/writing of Spanish, French, German and Italian is now included. Free on-site training can be arranged in most instances. Please contact HumanWare on 02 9686 2600 or sam.taylor@humanware.com for further information.

Tandem Bike Riding

Vision Australia, Access All Abilities and ValleySport are looking at holding Tandem Bike Riding Days in the following areas:

- Shepparton
- Benalla
- Wangaratta
- Wodonga/ Albury

If you would be interested in coming along for a great day in the following areas please call us on (03) 58313555 or email louise.pettigrew@visionaustralia.org to receive more information



* If you are interested in becoming a front rider on one of these days please contact Louise on 0358313555

SVRC News

It's so nice to hear from people who read the bulletin. Recently I received this email from a reader who tried out the "Braille Teddy Bear" from the previous edition of the bulletin. She writes:

"Being a bit spatially challenged I always struggle using the slate and stylus but since it is my only braille writing tool on hand at the moment thought I'd take a moment and make a teddy for my friend. After a few disastrous trials I realised that if you entered the pattern into the slate exactly as written and working left to right you'd come out with the perfect teddy. Just thought Toni might like to add that to her armoury of knowledge. From Penny Stevenson"

Thanks Penny for your email –I'm sure others will be interested in your discovery and may even try it themselves!

Visiting Teacher Vacancy

There is a full-time Visiting Teacher Vacancy in Western Metropolitan Region for a Visiting Teacher Vision Impairment/Health beginning 14/07/2008. The advertisement for this position can be found on Recruitment Online, the Job Reference Number is 627402.

Please phone the contact person, Pat Brophy on (03) 9291 6500 if you would like more information. The closing date for applications is 27/05/08.

Finally

Thanks to Marion, Deb, Mike, Penny and everyone else who contributed to this edition of The Bulletin. Thanks also to the fabulous team of proof-readers, stuffers and mailers.

If you have something you would like included in 'The Bulletin', please contact:

Lyn Robinson (who can be emailed at lynrobin@svrc.vic.edu.au).