

Reading Aloud



What this handout is about

This handout explains some of the benefits of hearing your writing read aloud. It offers tips on reading your draft yourself, asking a friend to read it to you, or having your computer read it.

Why read out loud?

If you come to the Writing Center for a tutoring session, you will probably hear your tutor say, “We always read papers out loud—would you like to read yours, or would you like to hear me read it?” Reading aloud has many benefits that we want to share with writers. Most people have far more experience listening to and speaking English than they do reading and editing it on the printed page. When you read your draft out loud or listen to someone else read it, your brain gets the information in a new way, and you may notice things that you didn’t see before:

- As listeners, we need the order of ideas in a paper to make sense. We can’t flip back and forth from page to page to try to figure out what is going on or find information we need. When you hear your paper read out loud, you may recognize that you need to re-order the information in it or realize that there are gaps in your explanation.
- Listeners also need transitions to help us get from one main idea to the next. When you hear your paper, you may recognize places where you have moved from one topic to another too abruptly.
- We all make errors in our sentences. Sometimes we leave out a word, mess things up as we copy and paste text, or make a grammatical mistake. These kinds of errors can be hard to see on the page, but sentences that contain them are very likely to sound wrong. For native speakers of English (and some non-native speakers, too), reading out loud is one of the most powerful proofreading techniques around.
- Sometimes sentences aren’t grammatically incorrect, but they are still awkward in some way—too long, too convoluted, too repetitive. Problems like these are often easily heard.
- Hearing your paper can also help you get a sense of whether the tone is right. Does it sound too formal? Too chatty or casual? What kind of impression will your voice in this paper make on a reader? Sometimes hearing your words helps you get a more objective sense of the impression you are creating—listening puts in you in something more like the position your reader will be in as he/she moves through your text.

What are some strategies for reading out loud?

Reading your paper out loud has a lot of benefits, but it presents a few challenges, too. One issue is that a lot depends on how you read. It is very easy to read too quickly or to let your brain automatically “smooth over” mistakes, fill in missing words, and make little corrections without you ever becoming consciously aware that it’s happening. If you don’t read exactly what is on the printed page, you won’t get an accurate sense of what is in your paper. Here are some strategies to help you read out loud effectively:

- Try working from a printed copy. This will allow you to make marks at places where something sounds wrong to you so you can return to them later.
- Try working from a printed copy. This will allow you to make marks at places where something sounds wrong to you so you can return to them later.
- As you read, follow along with your finger, pointing at each word. This can help you stay focused and not skip anything.
- Try to read at a moderate pace.
- If you are proofreading, consider reading your paper out loud one sentence at a time, starting at the end and working back to the beginning. This will help you focus on the structure of each sentence, rather than on the overall flow of your argument.
- Try covering up everything but the section or sentence you are working on at the moment so you can concentrate on it and not get lost.

One great strategy to try is to ask a friend to read your paper out loud while you listen. Make sure that your friend knows to read exactly what is on the printed page. Pay close attention to places where your friend seems to stumble or get lost—those may be places where you need to make things clearer for your readers. As your friend is speaking, you can jot notes on a printed copy of the paper. You don’t have to be in the same room to do this—you could email a copy of your paper to your friend and ask him/her to call you and read to you over the phone.

How can your computer help?

You don’t necessarily need to recruit a friend to read to you. There are a number of text to speech software applications and web-based services that will help you get your computer to read your paper out loud to you. One advantage of this approach is that the computer will definitely not cover up any errors for you! You can also control where it starts and stops, speed it up or slow it down, and have it re-read the same paragraph as many times as you want.

There are many text-to-speech programs and services you can try—far more than we can review here. Some are free; others may have a free trial version but cost between \$10 and \$80 for long-term use, or for versions with more features. Here are a few free ones that seem to be easily available, user friendly, and potentially effective. If you would like to explore others that may be available now or created in the future, do a Google search for “text to speech,” “TTS,” or “text reader.”

Some differences to keep in mind as you choose the best reader for you:

- Voice quality and selection: how many voices can you choose from, and how natural do

they sound?

- Controls: can you determine the speed and pitch of the speaker, where the reading starts and stops, etc.? Is there a pause button?
- Can you convert your text file into an mp3 or wav file, download it, and listen to it on your music player?
- Does the software highlight each word as it is read (which may be especially helpful for non-native English speakers and students with reading/writing disabilities)?
- How many pages of text or words can be converted to voice at one?
- How quickly does the conversion happen?
- Do you need to copy text and paste it into a new window, or can the program work directly within an application (like Word or Powerpoint) and just read the text on your screen?
- Do you have to install any files on your computer to use the system? If so, how big are the files?
- Do you need an active internet connection to use the program, or can you run it without internet access once it has been installed?
- Does it work with your operating system (e.g., Mac, or Windows Vista)?

Software

You can download and install software applications that will allow your computer to read to you. In most cases, the free versions of these applications use electronic voices created by Microsoft, nicknamed "Sam," "Mike," and "Mary." These voices are acceptable to most readers but are not very natural-sounding. If you decide you would like better voices, you may need to purchase an enhanced version of the software and AT&T's Natural Voices, which sound better. The applications we'll list here are fairly easy to download (from the web address provided with each one), install, and run. If you try one and later decide that you want to uninstall it from your Windows computer, go to the Control Panel and choose "Add or Remove Programs."

Read Please: www.readplease.com. This application, which has been around for a while, is for Windows operating systems only; it may take some extra work to make it run with Vista. There is a free version; the enhanced one costs \$49.95. Read Please allows you to copy text from a Word document, paste it into a window, and hear it read back to you—it highlights each word as it is read. You can change the speed of the voice that is reading. Read Please does not make mp3 or wav files. Use the Tools/Options menu to adjust settings, like whether it begins to read as soon as text is copied or waits for you to hit "play." Most of the controls (play, pause, speed, voice selection, etc.) are visible in the Read Please window where you paste the text.

Natural Reader: www.naturalreaders.com. You can use the free version of Natural Reader 9.0, or you can purchase the enhanced "Personal" one for \$49.50. Natural Reader can convert text from any program. One thing that makes Natural Reader stand out is that Mac versions of both the free and enhanced software are available. Natural Reader does allow you to create wav and mp3 files. It offers a "mini-bar" that looks like the controls on a tape recorder—this can hover over text (say, a Word document), allowing you to easily start, stop, and control the application.

Web-based applications

Web-based text to speech applications allow you to hear your text read without having to install any software on your computer. You will need an active internet connection to have your text translated into speech—but you may then be able to download a wav or mp3 file and listen to your paper on your mp3 player or computer.

iSpeech: www.ispeech.org. The iSpeech website offers a demonstration of its text to voice conversion; if you try it and like it, click “personal use” and create a free account. Now you will be able to upload files or paste your text into a box on the iSpeech site. When your chosen text has been converted to speech, just press “listen.” You can download the speech file or podcast it. The voice iSpeech uses is fairly natural; unfortunately, you cannot choose from a variety of voices, control the speed at which the voice reads while it is playing, or stop and start the voice. iSpeech may have trouble uploading open files, so be sure to close your file first if you want to upload everything. iSpeech does not highlight text as it reads, so if that’s important to you, this is not a good reader for you. If you download the sound file, you can open it with a media player. iSpeech works for PDF, text, html, Excel, Word, rtf, and even Powerpoint files. Conversion is often fairly quick, and your uploads are archived with your account.

Yakitome www.yakitome.com. On this website, click on “Free Text to Speech” to create an account. Experiment with the different voices (the AT&T ones sound more natural than the Microsoft ones), choose your settings, and paste in your text. Your request will then be put in a work queue; it may take quite some time for it to be converted (it took 15 minutes for a four-page paper in one of our tests), so it’s best if you have something else to work on while you wait. Longer documents seem to linger at the bottom of the work queue. Once the conversion is done, your text is stored on the site as an mp3 or wav file in the Yakitome Podcast Library and can be downloaded (to listen to it on your computer or mp3 player). It is stored as private, unless you set it as public, so you’ll need to sign into your account to access it. Yakitome’s controls take a little getting used to, and its pronunciation is occasionally imperfect. Click “text” under view if you want to look at your text onscreen while listening. Hover your cursor over various controls to see how they work.

Vozme vozme.com. Vozme is a very straightforward site. Paste your text into a window; Vozme will then create an mp3 and begin to read to you, in a male or female voice that isn’t super-natural but isn’t awful, either. You can’t control the speed at which the voice reads, and you can’t pause, stop, or start. Vozme also reads in some foreign languages, including Spanish. You’ll need to feed it relatively small chunks of text, perhaps a couple of paragraphs at a time. Vozme allows you to install a widget for Facebook or iGoogle so that you can access it easily.

I feel kind of silly doing this...

Reading aloud (or listening to your writing being read) takes some getting used to, but give it a try. You may be surprised at how much it can speed up your revision process!



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/).

You may reproduce it for non-commercial use if you use the entire handout (just click print) and attribute the source: The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

If you enjoy using our handouts, we appreciate contributions of acknowledgement.

[Make a Gift](#)

The Writing Center · Campus Box #5137 · SASB North Suite 0127 · UNC-CH · Chapel Hill, NC 27599 · CSSAC Home · <http://cssac.unc.edu/>

phone: (919) 962-7710 · **email:** writing_center@unc.edu

© 2010-2012 by The Writing Center at UNC Chapel Hill.