

Reading with Alternative Print: Academics and Leisure

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Individuals with dyslexia often benefit from using alternative print in the academic or career fields as well as for leisure. Alternative print can be digital (electronic) and/or audio. As a topic, it can be rather complex and daunting, especially when one desires to use it in the academic setting. Alternative print falls under the category of Accessible Instructional Material (AIM). The National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials hosts a great deal of information on the topic. An additional resource for obtaining information on AIM in regards to the public K-12, parochial and private, and home-school setting as well as collegiate settings can be found at [Wrightslaw](#).

There are several ways one can acquire alternative print. Accessible Media Producers (AMPs) such as BookShare, Learning Ally, and Access Text Network offer a wide variety of literature and textbooks. These resources offer individual and school memberships for individuals who qualify with a reading disorder. BookShare is a free resource for digital text and offers free reading software downloads for individuals to have the text read aloud using computer-synthesized speech. Learning Ally is a subscription resource offering human narrated audio books. Access Text Network is similar to BookShare for the collegiate setting. All three of these organizations will convert books not currently in their libraries free of charge.

Another wonderful free resource for residents in the state of MN is Net Library. If you currently have a library membership to your local library, you can acquire additional memberships to any or all other MN libraries by visiting their website and registering using your library card. Once registered, you can then download audio and digital books. More information on how to access Net Library from your local library can be found by visiting your local library in person or via their website. For a detailed list of mainstream resources, which offer alternative print for free or purchase [CLICK HERE](#).

Additionally, you can create alternative digital print yourself by scanning traditional text or simply creating it as you would if you were creating

written text on the computer. You can create audio versions or have digital text read aloud with computer-synthesized speech by using software programs or the built in features in some computer operating systems (look in your system preferences for text-to- speech or voice over for Mac and your control panel for narrator in Windows). Now that you have acquired alternative print you need to consider how to use it. There are several software programs that will allow the user to adjust the visual display, voice preferences, take annotations, and create audio files for transfer to mobile devices when working with digital text. There are also several hardware devices that will allow the user to navigate digital and audio text formats. To learn more about these products [CLICK HERE](#).

One also needs to understand there are several different formats when identifying alternative print. Most people are familiar with .PDF, .doc, HTML and .wav or MP3. NIMAS is a technical standard used to develop multiple specialized formats (such as Braille or audio books) for students with print disabilities. DAISY stands for Digital Accessible Information System and is a multimedia standard supporting traditional presentation of images, text, audio, video, and content navigation. While you do not need to fully comprehend the meaning of these terms, you need to know they exist when considering use of assistive technology tools you will be pairing with your alternative text. For example, some old versions of Microsoft are not able to read the new .docx. You will need to determine which formats your device or program can successfully interact.

Alternative text can enhance fluency, comprehension, and independence. It is best practice for individuals with a reading disorder to continue to hone their reading skills and work with a reading specialist if there is a need. Use of alternative text with Assistive Technology (AT) tools (the software programs or hardware devices used in conjunction with alternative print) can greatly assist the user and enhance academic and life settings. Imagine the dyslexic student in a classroom where the teacher has instructed 30

minutes of independent reading and then group discussion. This situation often makes the dyslexic student experience feelings of anxiety and failure. This same student may experience feelings of success and greater self-esteem if provided with alternative text and AT tools matched for their specific needs. While peers would read in the “traditional manner,” the dyslexic student may “read” listening to the text on a portable device, allowing them greater opportunity to finish the content in the same amount of time as their peers. This student can now partake in the class discussions.

AT tools and technology can be very advantageous but they are not a “magic wand.” The user must be correctly matched to the tools by identifying his or her specific strengths, challenges, tasks, and settings. The user also needs to be motivated in using the tools and the alternative print provided needs to be at a level the user can comprehend. An example for a student is the highlighting feature built into many of the reading software tools. The student may benefit from having the text read aloud for fluency and comprehension but he still needs to have the study skill of knowing what information is important to highlight and extract. Care should also be taken in identifying if the user is stronger as a visual or auditory learner and if he prefers audio content read aloud by a computer-synthesized voice or human narrated.

To learn more about the author and Assistive Technology, go to THINK With Success