

## **SHOW AND TELL**

# **Making reasonable adjustments for reading and language disabilities with visual and audio communication**

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Issues identified in Personal Learning Plans (PLPs) have included language-related difficulties, with the recommendation that our institution make reasonable adjustments for its provision.

### **The problem**

PLPs tend to provide generic adjustments – to time allowances and to absences, for instance – rather than anything more disability-specific. Traditional adjustments to language and reading related disabilities also often involve providing notes in advance, providing ‘reading lists’ and ‘additional explanations’, and allowing students to audio-record lectures. However, there is a danger that this is simply giving more language to students with language disabilities, and giving students with reading difficulties more to read: in a different format, maybe, or at a different time – but still more of the same thing that has been identified as a problem. It can perhaps be compared with shouting at a deaf person!

## The solution

One PLP stated that a student with ‘reading and comprehension difficulties’ *“may well need visual reinforcement....to absorb new information”*. A key technique for doing this in general within the discipline of Computing – where dynamic and abstract software techniques can be dynamically and concretely demonstrated – has been the ‘screencast’. This is a video recording of what an expert user does on the computer screen, with zooming and summary captioning as appropriate, and accompanied by an audio explanation. These screencasts are often set-pieces that take a considerable amount of time (and specialist software such as Camtasia or Captivate) to plan and develop, and, although visual, may not therefore necessarily present as an obvious adjustment tailored specifically for students with language disabilities. More promising are the online services provided by Screenr and Jing. Either of these is to screencasts and Camtasia what twitter is to blogs and WordPress: free screen recordings of up to 5 minutes can be made and distributed via the web. This provides the facility for making relatively casual and off-the-cuff screen recordings for students, as feedback, troubleshooting. For example, after a tutorial meeting with a project student who has a PLP for language and comprehension difficulties, I recorded my interactions with, and summary comments on, his draft report and software. This was provided in place of the traditional written summary of our meeting. The student received a link to the screen recording. So rather than digesting purely verbal information, they can **see** things being done, and have control, via pause, replay etc., of the visual experience. The project student expressed a definite preference for receiving feedback in this way.

A crucial aspect of the use of Jing or Screenr is its relative informality – the brief recordings should be spontaneous rather than elaborately planned, with little concern for ums and ahs or background noise. Paradoxically your production values can improve when you relax and abandon them!

## The techy bit

While Jing, the baby sibling of Camtasia and Snagit, requires the installation of a small program (an icon with a passing resemblance to the teletubbies sun will sit in the top right of your screen), Screenr runs directly from the web without the need for any installation. A free account at [screencast.com](http://screencast.com) allows you to build an online repository of short Jing screencasts. Alternatively, if you

have a Twitter, Facebook, Google or Yahoo account, you can use it to log onto a free Screenr account with apparently unlimited storage. You can, by the same token, share your Screenr recordings automatically via Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc. as well as via url and embedding. Jing recordings are private by default, and can also be password-protected. In addition to url linking to recordings, Jing produces Flash .swf files, Screenr outputs as .mp4.

Jing can be downloaded at [www.techsmith.com/jing.html](http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html) , Screenr can be used immediately at [screenr.com](http://screenr.com). Similar tools include ScreenCastle ([screencastle.com](http://screencastle.com)), and Screencast-O-Matic ([screencast-o-matic.com/](http://screencast-o-matic.com/)).