

Working around writing

The following guide is written with students in mind. However, some of the ideas may work well in everyday situations.

Essentially there are two ways to work around writing:

- a) **Present information in an alternative format**
- b) **Use an alternative means to put your thoughts on paper**

a) Present information in an alternative format

Oral presentation. Some courses may allow you to demonstrate your knowledge by talking about it. The technical term for this activity is a 'viva voce' (Pronounced 'vee-va voe-chay'). The 'viva' used to be common practice in Universities and is still used - particularly on higher level courses - to ensure that students really understand their subject.

Illustrated presentation. This is a presentation that normally uses a mixture of talk and show. It may involve using:

- images, video and sounds
- a whiteboard or flipchart
- an overhead projector
- a data projector linked to a computer, perhaps running presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint.
- a 'hands-on' demonstration

Of course, it may also be possible to submit a **presentation entirely on video, audiotape or computer**. This is probably as close as you can get to submitting a traditional assignment - but without the writing.

b) Use an alternative means to put your thoughts on paper

Sometimes, your material just has to be presented in written form. However, if you have great difficulty with the process of writing or typing (transcription), then it is often possible to work around this.

Dictate to tape: Put your material onto audiotape or digital recorder and ask someone else to word-process it. Some colleges and universities have facilities that take care of this for you. If you are not sure, ask.

Dictate direct: This involves working next to someone who is using a word-processor. You dictate and they type out your words. If you are able to read the material, then you can easily instruct your typist to make changes as you go along.

Use dictation software (also known as Voice Recognition software): With this software, you speak into a microphone and your words appear on the computer screen. You can edit and print your material without having to worry too much about typing skills or weak spelling.

Note: If you have tried this software in the past, you may have been disappointed with its performance. However, modern packages, such as Dragon Naturally Speaking Preferred are much easier to use and give good results. It's important, though, to be realistic about what to expect from the software and you may require training before you can use it effectively.

Remember: dictation software only takes care of the typing. You still have to provide the ideas, the structure and, normally, the punctuation.

The above are suggestions only and you will certainly have to negotiate with your college or university before using any of the methods outlined.

For further information about Dictation Software, see:

Scansoft:

<http://www.scansoft.com/naturallyspeaking/>

Dyslexic.com:

<http://www.dyslexic.com/products>

MKC Learning

<http://www.mkclearning.co.uk/>