

Closing The Gap

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“T.H.E. P.A.C.T.” – TECHNOLOGY HELPS EASY & PRACTICAL ADAPTED CURRICULUM TEACHING
DESIGNING “LEARN ABOUT, READ ABOUT, WRITE ABOUT, AND TALK ABOUT” MODULES

IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE USES OF ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

STUDENTS + TEACHERS + LOW COST HARDWARE + ACCESSIBLE SOFTWARE = CHANGE

VIRTUALLY REAL ACTIVITIES

KURZWEIL 3000 VERSION 11
NEW TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE WRITING PROCESS

AT SPECIALIST OR CHANGE AGENT?

PRODUCT SPOTLIGHTS

DISCOVERIES



KURZWEIL 3000 VERSION 11

NEW TOOLS TO SUPPORT THE WRITING PROCESS

By Jennifer Edge-Savage

"Class, please take out your journals and respond to the writing prompt provided on the board..." This simple direction often results in groans, blank stares, heads drooping down on desks, requests for pencils, requests for passes to the restroom and far worse behaviors. This shouldn't surprise us. According to 2005 NAEP statistics on student writing performance: 71 percent of fourth graders, 71 percent of eighth graders and 64 percent of 12th graders did not meet writing proficiency goals. Meaning, less than one third of America's high school students are reading or writing at grade level. How can we challenge our students to become more proficient writers, and, perhaps, even enjoy writing? Are we using the right tools and strategies to represent information to our students, engage them in learning and help them to express what they know through writing? (See Figure 1)

We frequently discuss the transition from "learning to read" and "reading to learn" and the inevitable struggles students face if they have not, in fact, learned to read proficiently. Proficient readers think actively as they read and engage with the content to understand and learn from it. After all, the ultimate goal of reading is *meaning*. Struggling readers, who have not yet "learned to read," face a significant barrier to "reading to learn" and, therefore, have limited opportunities for building knowledge and vocabulary and limited access to models of good writing. If you are expending all your energy struggling to decode words, what cognitive resources do you have left for comprehension?

According to the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), "Writers must learn how texts are structured because this knowledge supports their ability to create them." (2004) Through reading, we gain content knowledge, get exposure to written language structure and conventions, and develop the vocabulary that is essential for success in both reading and

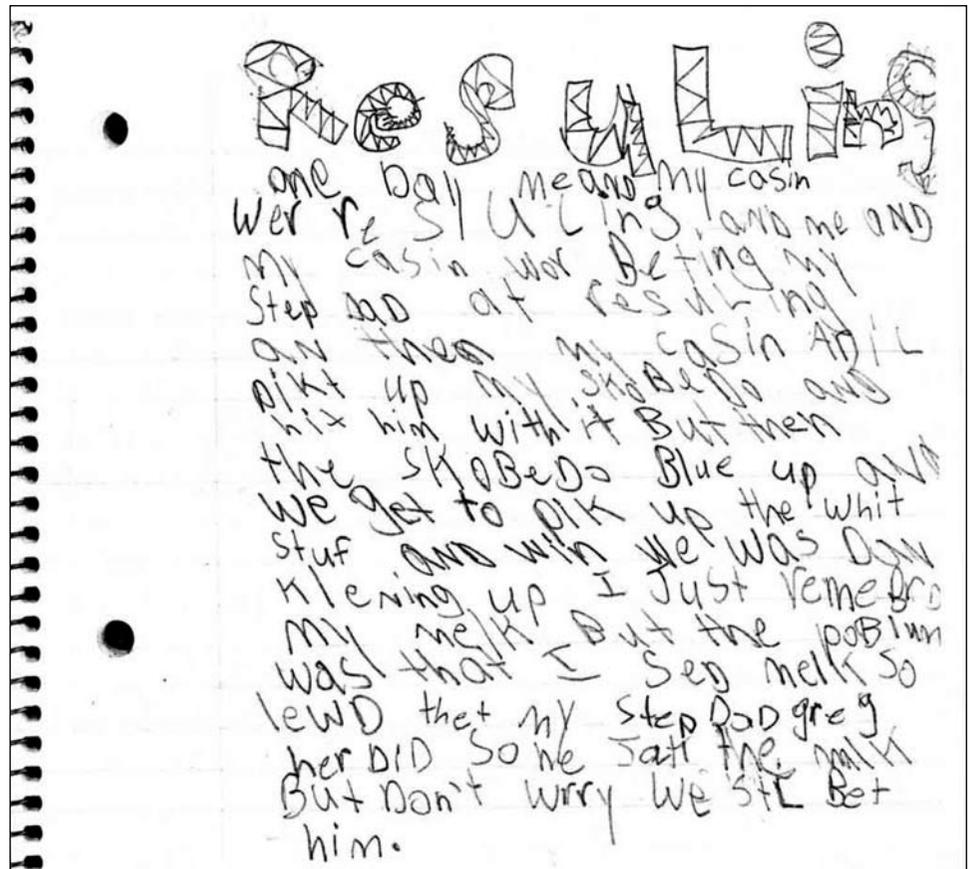


Figure 1: Does this look familiar?

writing. "When we write, we more fully understand what we read; when we read, we push ahead our ability to write." (Wood, 2000) Reading and writing are indeed complementary processes, but many of us are good readers and not necessarily good writers. If this is the case, it begs the question: "Can you be a good writer if you are not a good reader?"

In "Writing Next" (2007), Graham and Perin describe a transition that occurs with writing that is similar to that of reading. It presents the notion of "learning to write" and "writing to learn." Proficient writers have the knowledge, skills and flexibility needed to write in a clear and organized manner for different contexts, formats and

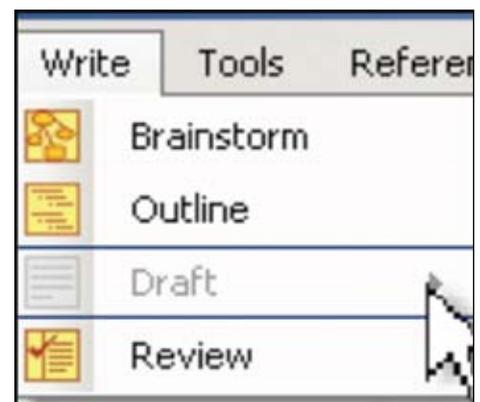


Figure 2: Kurzweil 3000's new Writing Path tools.

purposes, using a variety of forms, strategies and tones. They get to the point of “knowledge transformation,” figuring out what they know as they write. Struggling or beginning writers lack the high-level process strategies needed to plan, generate ideas and revise text. They have difficulty with the low-level transcription skills, such as handwriting, keyboarding, spelling, grammar, punctuation, word retrieval and vocabulary, and therefore, expend all their energy before they can get truly caught up in the process of writing. They remain at the point of “knowledge telling.” If students are focusing on the *mechanics of writing*, they don’t have the energy or cognitive resources left to devote to planning, composing and revising their work.

Imagine, if you will, a typical high school classroom. Consider the number of classes an English teacher might conduct in a course of a day; the number of students in each class; the number of papers a teacher might need to correct if they assigned just one writing task per day, per week; the time constraints in a typical classroom; the time demands on a teacher, ... How much time do our teachers have to actually devote to writing, re-writing and peer review of writing? According to the Alliance for Excellent Education Policy Brief: Making Writing Instruction a Priority in America’s Middle and High Schools (2007): not enough. Furthermore, many teachers do not receive the required professional development opportunities to learn *how* to effectively teach writing. Students need explicit instruction in research-based writing strategies, exposure to models of good writing, and lots of opportunities to write. The right combination of good instruction, teamed with powerful digital writing tools can potentially help support all students in becoming proficient writers.

For many years, Kurzweil 3000 has been at the forefront of making text accessible to students with different learning abilities. This research-based technology provides the reading, study strategies and research tools needed to help students access models of good writing and access content so they can then write about it! About 90 percent of the writing required of students is expository in nature: writing about what they have read to demonstrate understanding. Technology can not only help to extend a time-strapped teacher’s reach in the classroom, it can support students in becoming independent writers by providing them with the tools needed to get beyond “learning to write” so they can focus on “writing to learn.” Kurzweil 3000’s

writing supports have always included a talking word processor, speaking spell check, dictionary and thesaurus support, highlighting tools, word prediction, custom vocabulary lists, etc. But, this is just the tip-of-the-iceberg needed to thoroughly support writing. With Version 11, Kurzweil 3000 has introduced several new tools to support students through all phases of the

writing process, including column notes, mind-mapping/brainstorming, outlining, split-screen drafting, writing templates and graphic organizers, floating word lists, note snippets and a review checklist. Of course, Kurzweil 3000 does not replace good writing instruction, rather it is a powerful tool for supporting the writing process

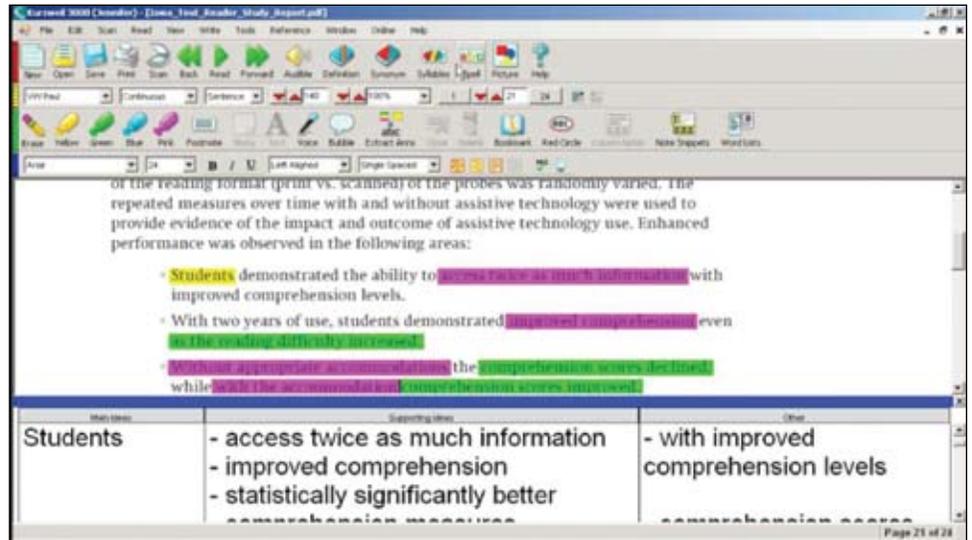


Figure 3a: Using two or three column notes to collect ideas from single or multiple texts.

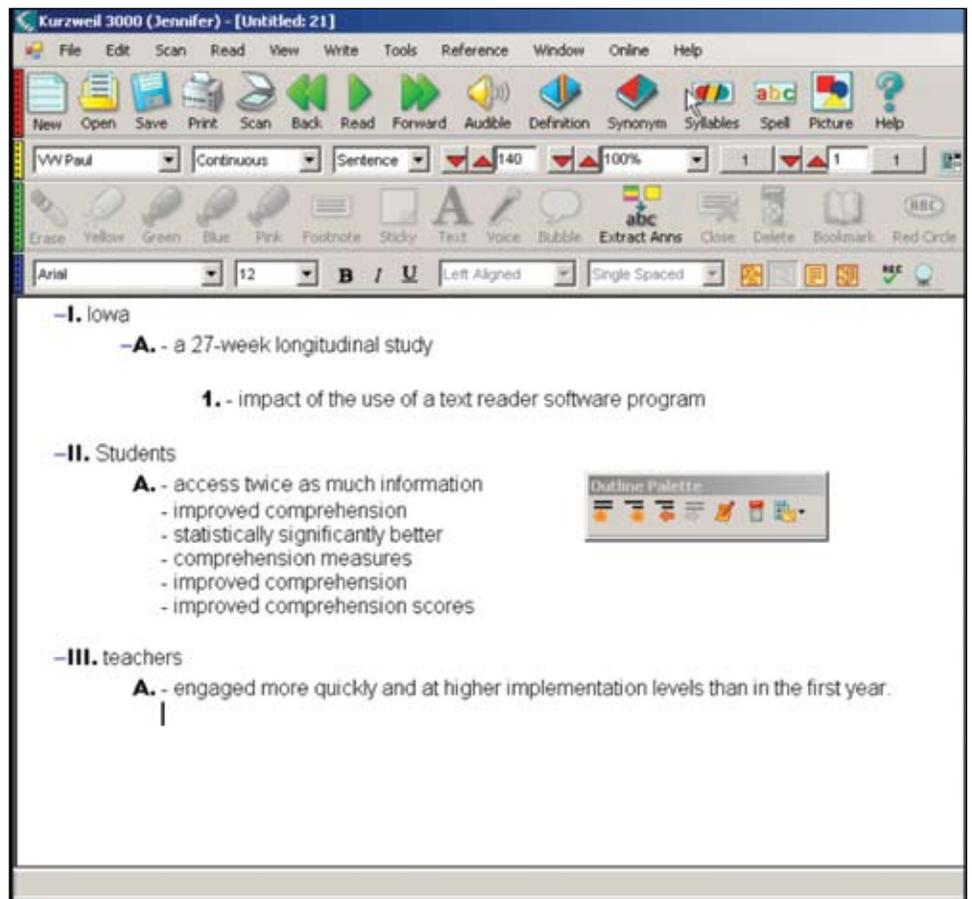


Figure 3b: Extracting column notes into an outline.

for individuals, as well as supporting the teacher for whole class writing instruction.

Kurzweil now has multiple tools to support different entry and exit points in the writing process for all types of learning styles and strategies. Let's take a closer look at how Kurzweil 3000's old and new features in Kurzweil 3000's "writing path" can support the multi-draft, cyclical process of **Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Editing** and **Publishing** written work. (See Figure 2)

PREWRITING

Pre-reading with a purpose, brainstorming thoughts, organizing thoughts via outlining or graphic organizers, and most importantly, *planning*.

Column Notes – Column notes are used to organize text into meaningful categories and are a really powerful way to actively engage in reading and ensure comprehension. Kurzweil 3000 now provides the ability to take two or three column notes while reading any files within the program. You can type directly into column note cells, extract highlighted text into column

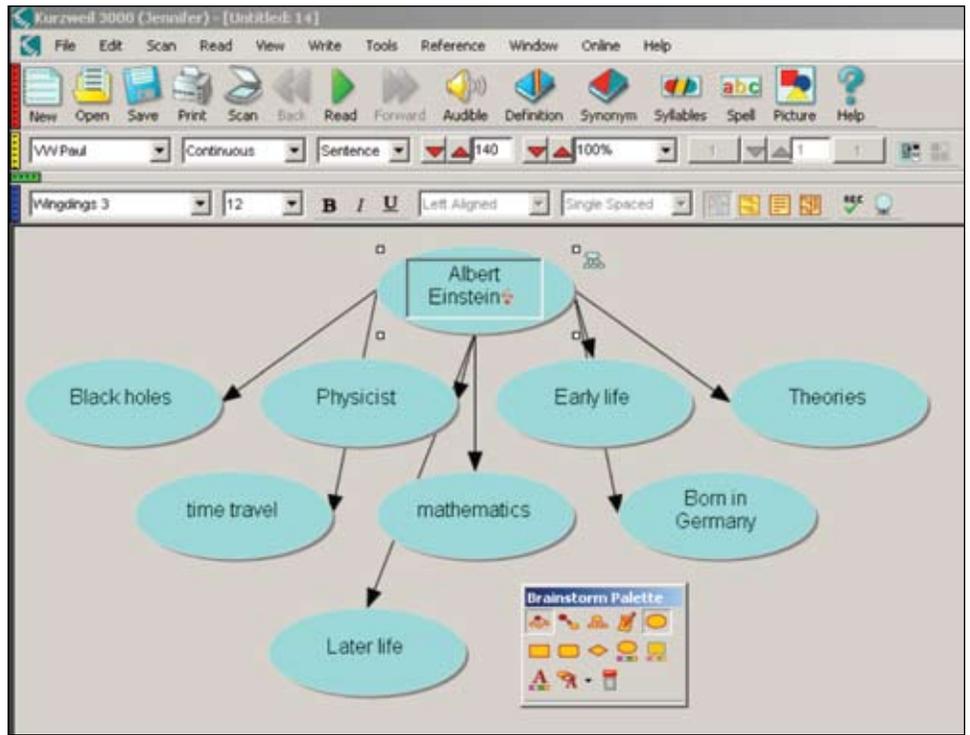


Figure 4: Brainstorming using the "Quick Takes" feature.

Figure 5 (above): Using outline to view and revise ideas.



Figure 6 (below): Sample text-based writing template.

NOTE: To use this template, review the instructions, then type into fields that are in angle brackets <...>. When you are ready to finalize your draft, remove instructional and extra text by selecting or drag-selecting the text and pressing DELETE.

In a book report, you can write about the plot, the setting, a character or a theme, and tell readers what you think about the subject and the book.

Before you begin writing, be sure to:

- Think about a subject you want to talk about in the book report. This could be about the plot or story. Or you could write about a character.
- Brainstorm and list one to three ideas that have to do with the subject.
- Gather as many examples from the book as possible to support those ideas.
- Organize and present the details in logical order.

The book report structure also works well for book and movie reviews.

To help you brainstorm and organize your ideas, you may use the Column Notes available from the Tools menu, or use the table setup below.

Idea #1	Details for Idea #1
Idea #2	Details for Idea #2
Idea #3	Details for Idea #3

Suggested Word List(s): Transitions Word List

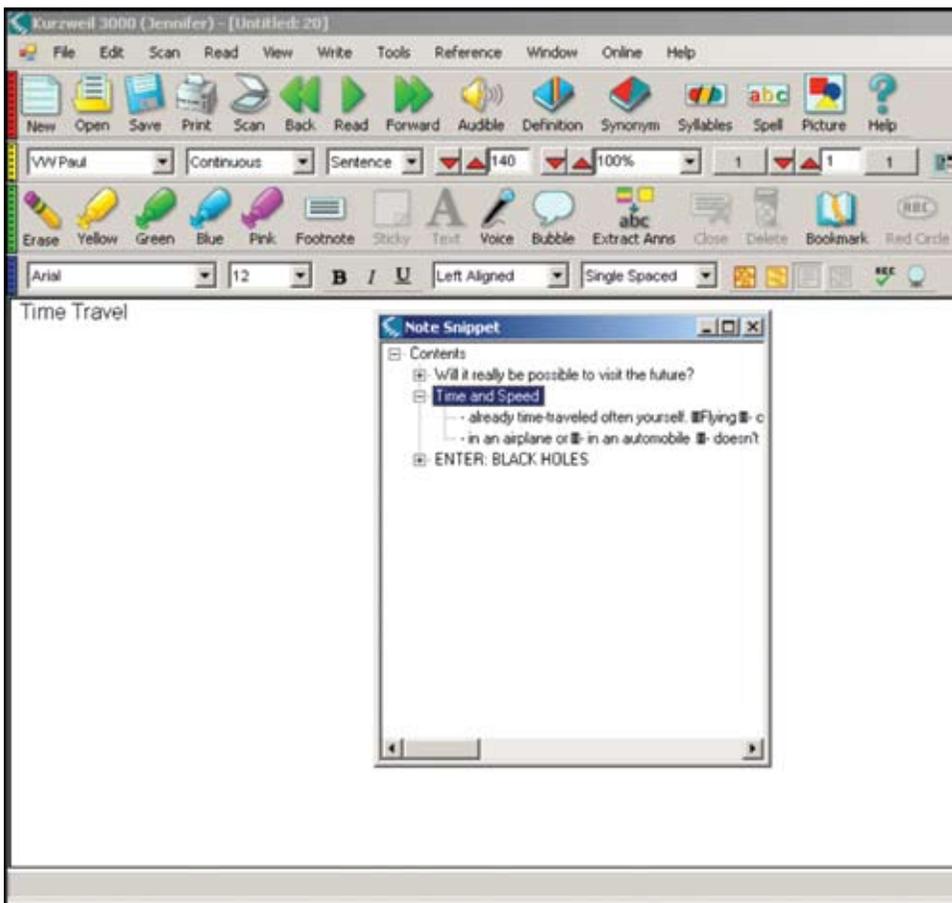


Figure 10: Note Snippets, an alternate way to write a draft from notes collected from readings.

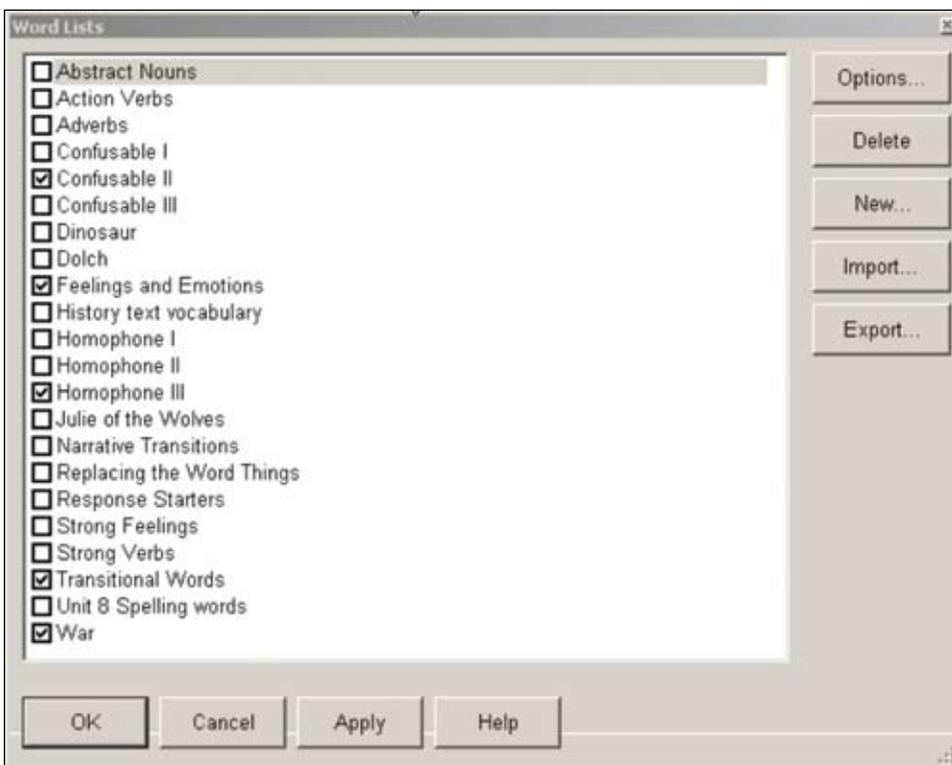


Figure 11a: Custom Word Lists.

DRAFTING

Getting thoughts on paper without worrying about writing conventions. Focus on content.

SplitScreen – This view allows you to see both the Outline and Draft at the same time. Ideas from the outline can be dragged and dropped into the draft. (See Figure 8)

Actively modify outline while composing a draft – As you are writing, you can easily add, delete or modify ideas in your outline and return to drafting your paper.

Word Prediction – Kurzweil 3000's word prediction is audible and is based on rules of spelling, frequency and recency. Word Prediction can be used to support students with spelling and vocabulary difficulties. For those who struggle with the physical task of typing, it reduces the number of keystrokes required. Custom Word Lists can be created and used to provide students with access to topic specific vocabulary for different writing projects across different content areas. These lists can be highlighted in the word prediction window as an additional visual cue. For example, when writing about "Albert Einstein," typing the letter "p" will quickly come up with "physicist" when that particular custom word list is activated. (See Figure 9)

Note Snippets – When you save a Column Note, a Note Snippet is automatically created and available to you for writing support. Note Snippets allow you to view your Column Notes with a hierarchical view in a compact window, while writing in Draft. You can drag and drop needed notes into the Draft for further elaboration. (See Figure 10)



Figure 11a: Custom Word Lists.

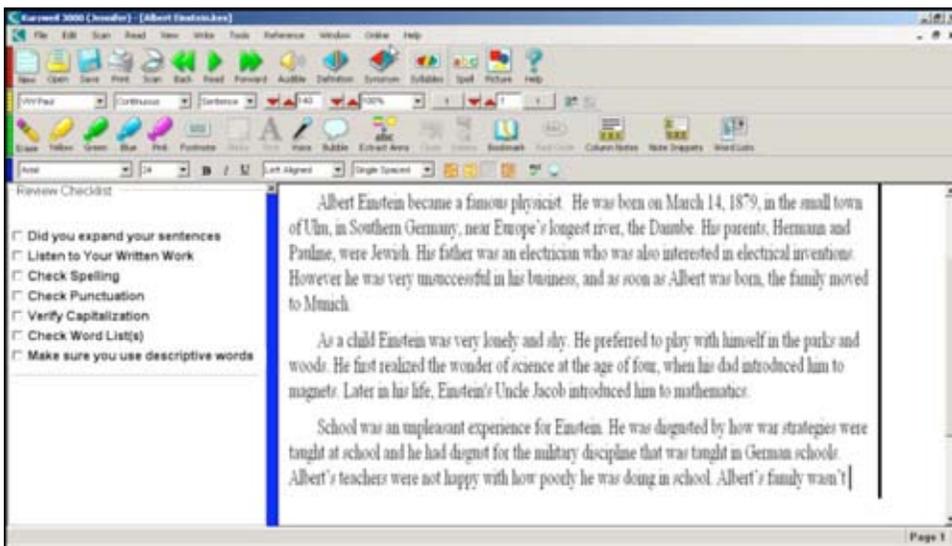


Figure 12: Review Checklist.



Figure 13: Final Draft.

REVISING

Make changes to organization, expand ideas, enhance word choices, edit ideas, create multiple drafts.

Thesaurus and Dictionary – Kurzweil 3000's built-in Thesaurus and Dictionary supports provide students with easy access to alternate word choices.

Floating Word Lists – Kurzweil 3000's new Floating Word Lists feature can be used to prompt students to use content specific words, use stronger word choices, or vary their transitional words. Kurzweil 3000 has several NEW Word Lists available, including: Transitional Words, Strong Verbs, Homophones, Dolch Words, Response Starters, and many more. (See Figures 11a and 11b)

Outline and Brainstorm – Any modifications or additions made to Outline or Brainstorm mode will immediately be reflected in both views.

EDITING

Proofread your work, check for mechanics, spelling, word choice, voice and other criteria included in a writing assignment rubric.

Speaking Spell Check – Kurzweil 3000's spell check actually speaks, providing students with the opportunity to make a more educated guess about which word they meant to write, rather than simply choosing the first word offered (a strategy that often results in an essay of perfectly spelled words that have nothing to do with one another!).

Talking Word Processor – Hearing written work out loud is an enormous part of the proofreading process. When students listen to their work, they hear spelling mistakes, confusing grammar choices, and the overall "voice" of their written work. A talking word processor allows students to independently proofread their work.

Review Checklist – This new feature allows teachers to create student-specific Review Checklists as part of the final steps of the writing process. Task-specific or student-specific writing criteria can be embedded in the writing path. Possible checklist items could include: Did you listen to your written work? Did you paint your predicate? Does your concluding paragraph relate to your introduction? Or even the 6+ traits. This is a great way to remind students of the criteria for proficient writing. (See Figure 12)

PUBLISHING

Finish your work, adjust formatting, add pictures and share written work with the world! Kurzweil 3000 drafts can be saved as .rtf files that can be easily opened in any

word processor for further refinement. Text composed in Kurzweil 3000 can be printed, inserted into a PowerPoint presentation or copied and pasted into an e-mail or blog. (See Figure 13)

It should be noted that Kurzweil 3000 continues to provide Keyboard shortcuts for its features. Full keyboard accessibility allows for the use of keyboard shortcuts in programming a wide variety of alternate access devices, such as alternate keyboards, keyboard emulators, AAC devices, single switch access software, etc. There is even a specific Kurzweil 3000 Writing Overlay for the IntelliKeys Keyboard. ALL students can have independent access to reading, note-taking and writing.

In conclusion, Cambium Learning Technologies believes in the principles of Universal Design for Learning and aims to make software solutions that are necessary for some, but beneficial for all. When working in the classroom, we need to ask ourselves: Are we using the right tools and strategies to represent information to our students, engage them in learning, and help them to express what they know through writing? Could Kurzweil 3000 be an important tool in your toolbox to help your students be successful writers?

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AUTHOR INFORMATION

Jennifer Edge-Savage, MS, EdS, OTR/L, ATP, is Director of Implementation Services for Cambium Learning Technologies, 100 Crosby Drive, Bedford, MA 01730. She can be reached at 1-800-547-6747 x632 or Jennifer@kurzweiledu.com. Cambium Learning Technologies is the manufacturer of Kurzweil 3000 software and IntelliKeys. ■