

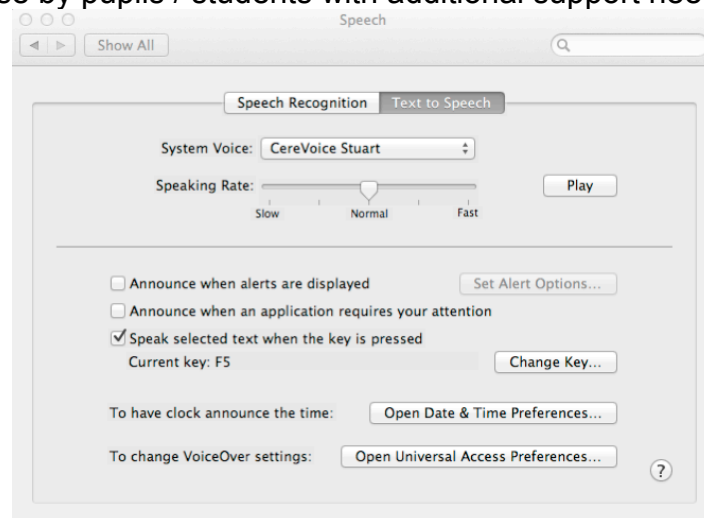
Free Text to Speech Options for the Mac

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We are often asked if there is an Apple Macintosh version of [WordTalk](#), the free text-to-speech add-on for Microsoft Word. Unfortunately, there isn't, and, due to differences in the way that PCs and Macs handle sound, there is unlikely to be a Mac version.

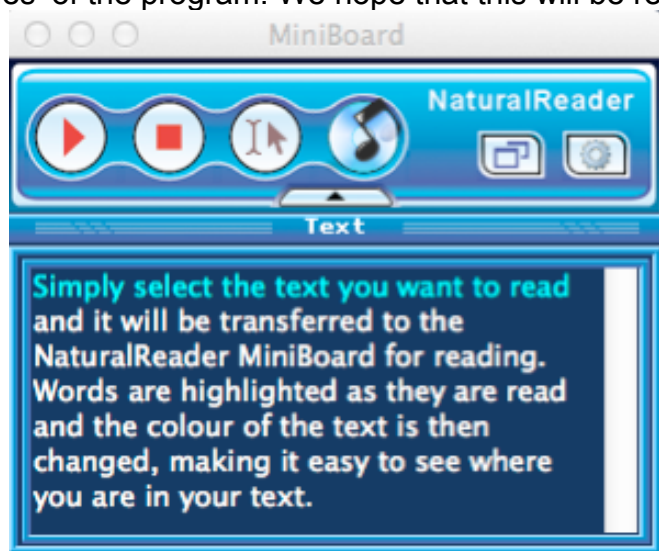
There are a number of free text-to-speech options for Mac users, but for general use, we would suggest either Apple's built-in system, or the free version of NaturalReader:

- Apple's built-in text-to-speech.** The Mac operating system has a reasonable text-to-speech system built in. To use it, go to **System Preferences - Speech - Text to Speech**. Choose a voice and a key combination to speak selected text. The default Key combination is usually **Alt – F11**, but we generally suggest changing it to a single key, e.g. **F5**. Then just highlight text in any program and press the key combination. The block of text remains highlighted as it is read. It doesn't highlight text word by word as it is read out, or do anything fancy, but it works well in any program (e.g. Microsoft Word, Adobe Reader, various web browsers) that allows you to select text with the mouse. Mac voices are generally quite good, but if you prefer, and live in Scotland, Mac versions of the Scottish Voices, *Heather* and *Stuart* can be downloaded from www.theScottishVoice.org.uk. They are free for use in schools and colleges in Scotland and for home use by pupils / students with additional support needs.



- [NaturalReader](#) has a free version for the Mac, which will read text directly from almost any application, including Word, web browsers and PDF files. Simply select the text you want to read and it will be transferred to the NaturalReader MiniBoard for reading. Words are highlighted as they are read and the colour of the text is then changed, making it easy to see where you are in your text. Unlike many 'demo' versions of programs, the free version of NaturalReader can be used for as long as you want, but there are a few

restrictions, compared with the full program. Firstly, it does not come with a 'voice'. This is not a great problem as there are perfectly satisfactory voices within the Mac operating system. Schools in Scotland can also make free use of the Mac version of [The Scottish Voices](#), Heather and Stuart. There is also a restriction of 5,000 characters on the length of any document to be read by NaturalReader. Most importantly, the facility to make sound files has been disabled in the free version. If this is an important feature for you, either use Typelt ReadIt (see below), or get [NaturalReader Personal Version](#), costing \$49.50. Unfortunately, we have found some stability issues with the program when it is used with the latest version of the Mac operating system, Mac OS 10.7, resulting in occasional 'crashes' of the program. We hope that this will be resolved in the near future.



Free Programs with Built-in Text-to-Speech

- [Adobe Reader](#) is used for reading PDF files. Adobe Reader has an option for reading text out aloud – go to **View – Read Out Loud – Activate Read Out Loud** to turn it on. You can then choose to read the entire page, or to the end of the document. This is reasonable for reading a large document like a book, but hopeless where you want to have fine control over what you read, e.g. a single paragraph of text, or a question in a digital exam paper. Version 10 of Adobe Reader (which does not work on older Macs with a 'PowerPC' processor, generally prior to 2006) has introduced a facility to speak individual paragraphs of text, by simply clicking in the paragraph to be read. This is a great improvement, but there are still issues with text-to-speech in Adobe Reader, for example we find that it will not reliably read text associated with an html link.
- The [Safari](#) web browser has an option to read selected text from a web page. Simply highlight the text you want to read with your mouse then click on **Edit – Speech – Start Speaking**. This is identical to the text-to-speech system built into the operating system except that you are using a mouse command, rather than a keyboard command.
- [TypeltReadIt](#) is a free program, aimed primarily at people with a visual impairment, but it can be used more generally by people who want to hear text read out. Unlike the Mac's built-in system, Typelt ReadIt does not read text directly from an application on the screen. Instead, you have to copy text from your application and paste it into the Typelt ReadIt window. You can also Open a plain text file and have the contents read out. Note that if you are using a Word file, you will have to save it as plain text to open and read the file. Typelt ReadIt has options to change the colour scheme and the size of text

displayed. Unfortunately, the actual font it uses cannot be changed from Times, which will not suit many of the people who may want to use the program. Earlier versions of the program highlighted words as they were spoken, but this feature has been removed from Version 1.5 as it slowed the program down. This makes little difference for people with a visual impairment, but can make it more difficult for people with reading difficulties to see where they are in a document. There is a reasonable spell checker, but, surprisingly, this does not allow the possible word choices to be read out. One very useful feature is the facility to create sound files (in AIFF format), which can be played in iTunes.

- [iSpeak](#) is a desktop 'widget' that allows text to be typed or copied into a small box on the screen and then read back, using any of the standard Mac voices installed on your computer. It does not seem to pick up on additional voices that you install. To be honest, this widget is pretty pointless, other than as a gimmick for reading text out loud as you type it.
- [CKs Text-to-Speech to MP3](#) is a set of Apple Script files created by Charles Kelly that can be used to convert text in your clipboard, or from a web page browsed by Safari into an AAC or MP3 file that can be accessed via iTunes. The scripts don't help very much with reading text from the screen as they separate the 'reading' and 'listening' activities, but they could be very useful if you are wanting a free, easy means to convert text into an MP3 file, e.g. if you wanted to convert a Blog into a Podcast.

If you require more features than are provided in the free programs, you will have to pay for the extra facilities provided by programs such as the Personal Version of [NaturalReader](#) or [GhostReader](#).