

WriteOnline review



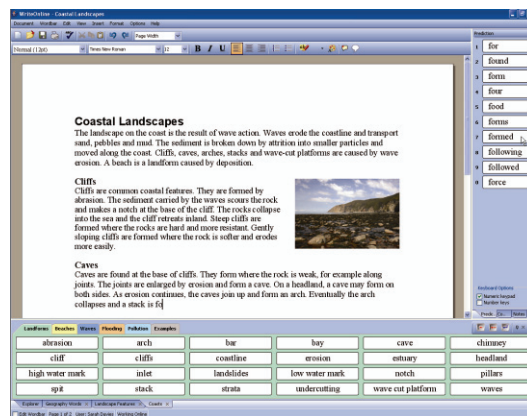
Dr. Friedlander is a school psychologist with a passion for using all kinds of technology in his professional work. He is very interested in the use of mind mapping, project management and Web 2.0 technologies. Dr. Friedlander readily applies these technologies in the graduate courses that he teaches at the College of St. Elizabeth in Morristown, N.J. For more information about his work go to: assistivetek.blogspot.com

“WriteOnline from Crick Software - first impressions”

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Several weeks ago I shared with you the impending release of a new application called WriteOnline from Crick Software. The release of WriteOnline is a departure from the release of any other software product that I know, in that the application is delivered through the browser. This is a monumental paradigm shift for the industry and one that I have been talking about for years.

WriteOnline raises the bar for other software developers as we move to software as a service model. But more importantly having software tools delivered through the web enables students to have access to their files and the supports that they need wherever and whenever they want to work on them. No longer will students have to give up their software supports when they leave school and go home to work on projects and papers.



Since that post I have had the opportunity to use a beta of WriteOnline. Once I was given a link to the program, WriteOnline installed the Java application and within seconds I was into the WriteOnline writing environment. For those of you familiar with Wordbar from Crick Software you will certainly see the similarity. I for one was up and running within seconds and using all of the supports provided in WriteOnline. The screen is divided into three windows: the word processing area, the word prediction pane, and the Wordbar pane at the bottom of the screen. WriteOnline provides powerful text to speech support right within the application and by setting up the user preferences you can set the word prediction and Wordbar pane to read the words by right clicking on a word.

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"Students will have the writing supports they need wherever and whenever they need it. No longer will they be tied to one computer with their specific tools - this is a very liberating feeling and one that goes a long way for students having real access to what they need."

The text to speech engine produced clear annunciation of what was being read and the user could change how WriteOnline would read the text. I did have a chance to show some of my graduate students WriteOnline and many were really excited by all of the features. Most of my students whom are themselves special education teachers shared that it was a great tool for differentiating the instruction.

Quite frankly when one is using WriteOnline it is hard to discern that the application is working online. For students with writing disabilities WriteOnline provides an incredible level of support. WriteOnline comes with a host of Wordbars that are ready to be used with a click of the mouse. Additional **free** Wordbars can be downloaded from Crick's LearningGrids World site.

I was able to develop my own custom Wordbars by simply shift clicking in the cell and typing the word. This worked very similar to Wordbar or Clicker 5. When you right click WriteOnline will read the content of the cell and is an excellent support for students who may also have reading disabilities.

Students who need spelling support will find the word prediction tool really handy. I should note that the user has the option of hiding or showing the word prediction and Wordbar pane as they see fit. The word prediction dictionary can be adjusted in size (number of words) depending on the age and skills of the student. The word prediction library can be set from anywhere from 250 to 60000 words and can also be set up to predict from the Wordbar list as well. The word prediction tool was surprisingly good and was able to determine the proper ending of words depending on what looks like some grammatical rules.

Using both the Wordbars and the word prediction tools can provide students with the scaffolding they need to help them complete their writing. More importantly one must remember that since WriteOnline is an online application, students can access their files and continue to use these supports at home or wherever they are as long as they are connected to the Internet. Now this is truly a paradigm shift!

Overall I was very impressed with the feature set of WriteOnline and will continue to explore the nooks and crannies and share with you new information as I find out about it. I should note that there are a number of writing analysis tools built into WriteOnline which would be helpful for a teacher as they look at a student's written work over time. WriteOnline does support the insertion of comments which would lead me to believe that the student's teacher could access the written work and add comments where appropriate.

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