Higher Education:
GRADUATING TO DICTATE FOR MAC

Higher education tends to be a writing-intensive environment, whether you're a student or a professor. As Chris Haskell, Jill Dahlman, and Dennis McElroy have discovered, that also makes it the perfect environment for MacSpeech Dictate, regardless of the subject matter or need that drives the use of speech recognition software.

"I was blown away by MacSpeech Dictate's accuracy," says Haskell, a special lecturer in the Department of Educational Technology at Boise State University. He was already familiar with speech recognition software, courtesy of Nuance's Dragon NaturallySpeaking, and his focus on educational technology for teachers made MacSpeech Dictate an obvious addition to his job.

"Training specific words and unique spellings is unbelievable easy," Haskell continues. He cites as an example 3-D GameLab, an annual summer camp that he runs for teenagers. "I couldn't initially say '3-D GameLab' in a way that would make MacSpeech Dictate write it correctly, but after it learned my voice and vocabulary, the software hasn't missed it once since."

Chris Haskell

Jill Dahlman

Dennis McElroy

Then there's Jill Dahlman, who was close to completing her doctoral dissertation at the University of Hawaii at Manoa when she broke her wrist. She had a similar experience with MacSpeech Dictate. "What impressed me the most was that I didn't expect it to know words like 'homogenity' and 'efficacious,'" she says. "When it knew them and could spell them, I said 'Holy mackerel, this really works!'"

Works Like a Charm
Time savings are also a key benefit of using MacSpeech Dictate, all three say. Dennis McElroy, an Associate Professor of Education at Graceland University who was left with the use of only one hand after rotator cuff surgery, explains: "Thanks to MacSpeech Dictate, I could keep up with my online classes, between instant messaging and inserting comments in students' papers, which works like a charm."

And for his face-to-face classes, McElroy says that preparing hand-outs was a snap. "It was real easy to open Microsoft Word and start talking," he says.

Dahlman, who teaches composition classes, made a similar discovery while reviewing students' papers, leading her to keep using MacSpeech Dictate even after her wrist healed. "I can speak my comments into a dialog box in our web-based system," she notes. "I've seen big time savings, because I can say my comments much faster than I can type them."

Haskell has also seen impressive efficiency gains thanks to MacSpeech Dictate: "I receive 80 to 100 emails a day, and I usually have to answer half of them. By speaking the replies, I can do that in a quarter of the time it would take to type them." He has also extended his use of MacSpeech Dictate to other applications, including Skype, Facebook, and even the online community Second Life, where he teaches classes in a virtual setting. (Nineteen universities have a presence there.)

"It's become a natural way for me to interface with the computer, no matter what I'm doing," Haskell says. "It's much easier to click in a box and speak than [to] type out what I have to say."

Immediacy to the Process
Like his peers, Haskell also uses MacSpeech Dictate for longer pieces of writing, including large documents created with Google Docs, Microsoft Word, or Apple Pages. "I find it's much easier to deliver ideas quickly with MacSpeech Dictate," he says. Those efforts served as a dry run for his dissertation, which he plans to start writing in 2011 with help from MacSpeech Dictate.

For Dahlman, speech recognition software literally saved the day, enabling her to finish writing her dissertation in Microsoft Word and successfully defend it the following week, despite a broken wrist. "I'll keep using it for other writing in the future," she explains. "It's easier for me to think out loud."

McElroy had a similar revelation: "It was an epiphany," he says. Even though he's fully healed from his surgery, he goes on to relate: "I still use MacSpeech Dictate to write research documents and proposals. Thoughts created by voice are clearer and better than typing. There's more immediacy to the process when I can think it and then say it."

McElroy summed up the value of MacSpeech Dictate in his academic pursuits: "It saved me: when faced with a choice between speaking my work and hunting and pecking on a keyboard, there's no comparison."

IMPORTANT NOTICE: This success story provides an overview of the users experiences with MacSpeech Dictate. As a result of the acquisition of MacSpeech, Inc. by Nuance Communications, Inc. in 2010, the MacSpeech Dictate product was renamed Dragon Dictate for Mac.