

Assistive Technology

A practical guide for families — the tools that help students with learning differences access learning, express what they know, and work with more independence.

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TOOLS THAT OPEN DOORS

Assistive technology (AT) is **any tool that helps a student with a disability access learning** — from a pencil grip to speech-to-text. It doesn't do the thinking; it removes a barrier so a capable mind can show what it knows. This guide walks **ten steps** through the tools and how to get them.

General guidance. The right assistive technology depends on the individual student. This guide is educational; work with your child's school (which must *consider* AT in an IEP) and specialists to match tools to needs.

What Assistive Technology Is

WHAT TO KNOW

Assistive technology is **any device or tool that helps a student with a disability learn or communicate** — from simple (a pencil grip, a timer) to sophisticated (speech-to-text, a communication device). The point is **access**.

BY THE NUMBERS

Any tool

that aids access

Low to high tech

both count

Access

the whole point

HOW TO HELP

Think of AT as **glasses for learning** — it corrects a barrier so your child can do what they're capable of — and look for the right tool for the right need.

GOOD TO KNOW

AT is not "cheating" or a crutch — it's how students with disabilities access the **same** learning as everyone else.

Open Up Reading

WHAT TO KNOW

For students who struggle to decode text (dyslexia, visual differences, and more), **text-to-speech** and **audiobooks** unlock grade-level content — they can learn from material they couldn't yet read on their own.

BY THE NUMBERS

Text-to-speech

reads any text aloud

Audiobooks

grade-level access

Built-in

free on most devices

HOW TO HELP

Turn on **text-to-speech** (built into phones, tablets, and Chromebooks) and use audiobook services — so reading struggles don't block learning.

GOOD TO KNOW

Listening to a book is **still reading** for comprehension — it builds vocabulary and knowledge while decoding skills grow.

Open Up Writing

WHAT TO KNOW

For students who struggle to get words on the page (dysgraphia, spelling, or motor challenges), **speech-to-text** lets ideas flow by voice, and **word prediction** eases spelling.

BY THE NUMBERS

Speech-to-text

dictate writing

Word prediction

eases spelling

Free tools

on most devices

HOW TO HELP

Set up **speech-to-text (dictation)** so your child can speak their ideas, plus word prediction and spell-check to smooth the mechanics.

GOOD TO KNOW

A child who "hates writing" may write pages once the handwriting-and-spelling barrier is removed — the ideas were always there.

Add Reading & Writing Supports

WHAT TO KNOW

Beyond the basics, tools like **graphic organizers**, **digital highlighters**, **grammar checkers**, and **read-back** help students plan, focus on key information, and catch their own errors.

BY THE NUMBERS

Organizers

plan before writing

Highlight & annotate

find key info

Read-back

hear your own work

HOW TO HELP

Layer in **graphic organizers** for planning and **read-back** for revising — hearing their own writing helps students catch errors they'd otherwise miss.

GOOD TO KNOW

Having the computer read a draft *back* is one of the simplest, most effective editing supports there is.

Support Math & Organization

WHAT TO KNOW

AT isn't just for literacy. **Calculators, math apps, graph-paper tools, planners, reminders, and visual timers** support dyscalculia and executive-function challenges.

BY THE NUMBERS

Calculators

+ math apps

Graph paper apps

align the columns

Planners & timers

for organization

HOW TO HELP

Use **calculators, visual math tools, and digital planners with reminders** — so computation and organization stop derailing capable students.

GOOD TO KNOW

A reminder app that pings “turn in homework” solves a problem willpower never could.

Give Voice with AAC

WHAT TO KNOW

For students who are **nonspeaking or have limited speech**, Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) — from picture boards to speech-generating apps and devices — provides a genuine voice.

BY THE NUMBERS

AAC

voice for nonspeakers

Low to high tech

boards to devices

A real voice

communication is a right

HOW TO HELP

If your child is nonspeaking or hard to understand, ask the school's **speech-language pathologist about AAC** — and presume competence while you find the right system.

GOOD TO KNOW

Access to communication is a **fundamental right** — never assume a nonspeaking child has nothing to say.



Don't Overlook Low-Tech

WHAT TO KNOW

The most useful AT is often the **simplest**: pencil grips, slant boards, colored overlays, fidget tools, checklists, visual timers, noise-reducing headphones, and sticky notes. Cheap, durable, and immediate.

BY THE NUMBERS

Simple wins

grips, timers, checklists

Cheap & durable

no charging

Immediate

use it today

HOW TO HELP

Start with **low-tech tools** — they're inexpensive, always work, and often solve the problem without a device at all.

GOOD TO KNOW

Don't skip low-tech chasing the perfect app — a checklist and a timer fix a surprising amount.

Get AT Through School

WHAT TO KNOW

Under IDEA, a school's IEP team **must consider assistive technology**, and it can be written into an IEP or 504 — including devices, software, and training, at no cost to the family.

BY THE NUMBERS

Must be considered

IDEA requires it

In the IEP/504

devices + training

No cost

when it's in the plan

HOW TO HELP

Ask the IEP/504 team to **consider and document AT**, request an **AT evaluation** if needed, and make sure training (for your child and staff) is included.

GOOD TO KNOW

AT written into an IEP isn't optional for the school — and it should include teaching everyone how to use it.

Choose the Right Tool

WHAT TO KNOW

The best AT **matches the specific barrier**, fits the child, and actually gets used. Start with **built-in, free tools**, try before you commit, and involve your child in choosing.

BY THE NUMBERS

Match the need

tool to barrier

Try free/built-in

start there

Involve the child

buy-in matters

HOW TO HELP

Identify the exact barrier, **trial built-in tools first**, and let your child help choose — the tool they like is the one they'll use.

WATCH OUT

The fanciest tool is useless if it sits in a drawer — fit and buy-in beat features.

Build Independence

WHAT TO KNOW

AT works best when it becomes a **normal, everyday part** of how your child learns. Teach the tool well, normalize its use, and gradually let your child own it — building lifelong independence.

BY THE NUMBERS

Teach it well

practice the tool

Normalize it

no stigma

Hand it over

toward independence

HOW TO HELP

Invest time in **teaching the tool**, treat it as ordinary (like glasses), and coach your child to manage it themselves over time.

GOOD TO KNOW

The goal is a young adult who **knows their tools and uses them confidently** — independence, not dependence.

Assistive Technology by Need

A starting menu of AT by the barrier it addresses — many options are free or built into devices you already own.

Reading

Text-to-speech, audiobooks, digital text with adjustable fonts/spacing, and reading rulers or overlays.

Writing

Speech-to-text (dictation), word prediction, spell/grammar check, and read-back for revising.

Math

Talking or on-screen calculators, graph-paper and equation apps, and visual math manipulatives.

Communication

AAC — from picture boards to speech-generating apps and dedicated devices for nonspeaking students.

Focus & organization

Planners and reminder apps, visual timers, checklists, noise-reducing headphones, and distraction blockers.

TOOLS THAT LEVEL THE FIELD

Find Your Community.

Explore our Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and Special Education guides — among **1,297 free resources** to help every learner thrive.

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