



# Connection Reflection

## Give 'Ritin' a Boost with Technology

*Editor's Note: Every school is working to increase the literacy of their students . . . and every educator is asking, "How can we accomplish this task?" You would probably answer with some verbage about using a variety of methods, remediating students who are targeted as low achievers, or possibly by discussing differentiation for your classroom. This issue of Connection Reflection strives to help by exploring tools for writing—an integral part of "literacy." Hopefully you can add one or more to your repertoire—to that "variety of methods—and allow technology to help your students with their literacy skills.*



## Literacy Today: More Than Readin', 'Ritin' and 'Rithmetic

By:  
**Dr. Henry Thiele**  
President



**Dr. Henry Thiele**

American Schools have always been focused on "Literacy" and in particular the 3R's. Of course our vision of what formal education offers students today is much broader than just "Readin", "Ritin" and "Rithmetic" but most people with whom I speak still see value in these core traditional skills. Technology is actually not reducing the need for these skills, it is increasing and diversifying the demands for reading, writing, and applied math.

With the average teen sending and receiving over 3,000 text messages a day, they are sure doing a lot of "Readin" and "Ritin". Of course, much of

this does not correlate directly with all of the literary skills we want our students to have, but I remember when we were asking students to simply journal each day so they could get in the habit of writing daily. Our kids today are already writing and working to put their thoughts down in text form. They have even

managed to find ways to overcome the limits of text by using emoticons or symbols to express emotion. Limits of communication platforms like text messaging, Twitter, and status posts require people to reduce what they want to communicate—what they want to say—to short, succinct summaries (something at which I have never been successful).

Our challenge today is not to get kids to write, it is to get students to write **effectively** for diverse audiences.

Students that enter the workplace are going to have to use the written word to communicate to a variety of

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### Special points of interest:

- Tools for writing are fun and educational
- Our challenge today—get kids to write
- New at SET Conference: Lunch with the Speakers! Hope YOU can join us!
- SET website offers conference handouts

# Technology Supports Writing



Judy Okazaki

By: **Judy Okazaki**  
Executive Director

As educators we want to help students become lifelong learners. This means helping them to acquire and develop skills which they can

utilize throughout their traditional school years and into the rest of their lives. A collection of tools for writing, of course, address one of the most important areas. For students who struggle with writing, the tools not only support the production process, but make the process possible.

What are the technology tools that will be most useful in supporting lifelong writing? First of all they should have at their fingertips a way to process ideas. A mind mapping tool to help brainstorm and organize thoughts is a great starting point. Bubbl.us (<https://bubbl.us>) features color-coded shapes that can be easily arranged, to allow for quick recording of ideas and organization. If a traditional outline is desired and more helpful, the outline capabilities built into most word processors can be utilized.



In order to enter text, it is helpful to have efficient keyboarding skills. An extensive compilation of free keyboard learning and practice sites can be found at <http://edtechideas.com/keyboarding-sites-for-kids>.

There are great grammar-checking sites on the web such as Grammarly (<http://www.grammarly.com>). Over time these sites have become more sophisticated. They serve beyond the purpose of an editing tool



by supporting the instruction of grammar through examples and explanations of recommended corrections.



NaturalSoft®

Once written, being able to hear the text read back provides another important editing experience. A text-to-speech tool such as Natural Reader (<http://www.naturalreaders.com/index.htm>) is available for free.

An easy-to-use, as well as feature rich thesaurus and dictionary should be utilized. Google probably provides the quickest access to a dictionary. Dictionary.com provides both a dictionary and thesaurus along with a built in audio tool which allows pronunciations to be heard. Visual Thesaurus (<http://www.visualthesaurus.com/vocabgrabber>) is a thesaurus full of features.



To track researched information, a social bookmarking tool such as Diigo (<http://www.Diigo.com>) allows for tagging, bookmarking, note taking, highlighting and sharing. Diigo also has citation and bibliography features. A simpler tool for creating a



bibliography is Zotero (<http://www.zotero.org>).

Today writing is often the result of a collaborative process. There are sites that make it easy. One collaborative writing tool,

Mixedink ([http://www.mixedink.com/#/edu\\_how\\_it\\_works](http://www.mixedink.com/#/edu_how_it_works)) has write, edit and evaluate capabilities. Microsoft and Adobe have built in collaborative capabilities in their products, but there are many alternatives available.



The purpose of writing is most often to share with an audience. Using sites to publish writing via a blog, a wiki, a school/district site or on the web space for a particular tool allows for recognition, response, and purpose.

As with all technology students need to learn to be on the lookout for the development of new tools that may do a better job than one they are already using or tools to fulfill a new purpose.



## New This Year

### Lunch with the SET Conference Presenters

Join the conference speakers for lunch between 12:30 and 1:30 p.m.

Sign up and pay the \$10 lunch fee at Registration on April 16 to reserve your place at the table and a box lunch.



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SET Connections members save!

Enter source code **CH11SET** and save \$104 off on-site registration (Must register by April 15 for this offer)

Click [here](#) to register!

## Continued Thoughts on Writing for Communication

(Continued from page 1)

people in formal and informal ways in documents ranging from artistic to technical in nature. Most of this communication will be electronic and will involve understanding meta-data such as email headers, tags, and hyperlinks. To prepare students for these situations we should be using tools that allow students to immerse themselves in a hypertext world. Lessons should seek to include message boards, blogs, posts, and reflections. Lessons should involve posting, responding, and following information. We should be using authentic tools that go beyond the traditional desktop word processing programs like Google Docs, Zoho, Wordpress, Blogger, Diigo, email, text messaging, and other tools to build web content. We should expand our definitions of writing to include the composition of technical documentation, programming code and scripts, web authoring, personal publishing, complex mathematical formulas in spreadsheets, as well as our more traditional forms of writing. The explosion in multimedia should also serve to remind us of the power of audio and video and its place in society. Teachers experienced in composing in multimedia, however, will be quick to remind students that a great video or song usually starts with a great story; one that someone has taken the time to carefully and artfully write.



### Did You Know?

Handouts from conference presentations are linked on the SET Connections website ([click here](#)).

The first two are ICE Conference (Illinois Computing Educators) presentations from February and list up-to-date tools that may interest you.

## Writing (oops!) Professional Development Opportunities



Alice Schmitz

By: Alice Schmitz, Director of Education and Professional Development

I know that writing is the theme for this newsletter, but before I discuss writing, I would like to share some information about upcoming professional development opportunities. First of all, the SET Connections conference is April 16 at Maine South High School in Park Ridge, IL. Then on May 6, *Tech & Learning* magazine is sponsoring Tech Forum at the Lincolnshire Marriott, Lincolnshire, IL—another excellent professional development opportunity.

### SET Connections Conference

For only \$20 (\$30 with lunch) you can spend an entire morning talking about special education and technology. This is quite a "deal" considering the fantastic speakers that will be presenting on a variety of topics (see page 4 of this newsletter) AND the opportunity to "connect" with other special educators. This year's "line up" includes: Luke Allen, Mary Ann Apple, Patrick Black, Judith Epcke, Jim Gubbins, Helen Lazzaro, and Dr. Henry Thiele. These individuals are educators who "get" special education. They work either as classroom teachers or technologists who want to help you do the best you can for your students. Together they bring years of educational experience, the love of technology, and solid information. Oh yes . . . and a sense of humor and fun that will keep the morning interesting!

### Tech Forum

Information about Tech Forum can be found at the top of this page. Tech Forum features excellent technology speakers. You will not find presentations specific to special education, but you will gain new technology ideas and tools to bring back to your school. If you plan to attend Tech Forum, use the SET Connections partner code, CH11SET, by April 15 for a \$104 discount on your registration.

And now writing . . . Oops, I'm sorry . . . I was so excited about the conferences, I seem to be out of space!

## SET Connections

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Connecting  
Special Education and  
Technology

### Join Us

Log on to our website at  
[www.SETConnections.org](http://www.SETConnections.org)  
OR  
Email us at  
[info@SETConnections.org](mailto:info@SETConnections.org)  
for information

## REGISTER NOW

For  
**The SET Connections Conference**  
**Special Education and Technology: The Next Step**

**Saturday, April 16, 2011**

8:00 AM to 12:30 PM

Lunch with the Speakers—12:30 to 1:30 PM

Maine South High School  
1111 South Dee Road, Park Ridge, IL 60068

### Speakers

Dr. Henry Thiele - Patrick Black - Luke Allen -  
Mary Ann Apple - Judith Epcke - Jim Gubbins - Helen Lazzaro

### Breakout Session Topics

Google Docs  
iPad for Special Education  
QR Codes for Special Education  
Twitter  
Tips and Tricks to Keep Your Computer Tuned Up  
Special Education/Technology Staff—Working Together  
iPad Apps for Grades K-5, 6-8 and 9-12  
Instructional Tech for Special Education for Grades K-5, 6-8 and 9-12

Cost: \$20

Join us for lunch with the speakers (additional \$10 payable at registration)  
CPDUs/CEUs may be obtained for attendance

Registration, Updates, and Additional Details available at  
[www.SETConnections.org](http://www.SETConnections.org)

**A Special Education -Technology Conference**

## Cool Tools for Writing

Everyone can use more tools for writing. Here are a few websites that may be of interest to you. Check them out and get your students writing!

<http://edtechideas.com/2011/01/28/paragons-of-the-week-storyjumper-printing-press-gramaropolis>

<http://edtechideas.com/2011/02/17/paragons-of-the-week-%E2%80%93-cool-tools-for-writing-ii/>

<http://edtechideas.com/2011/02/26/cool-tools-for-writing-iii>

<http://edtechideas.com/2011/03/04/cool-tools-for-writing>

