

Bring the World to Your Therapy Room with Technology

Would you like to use technology to create more excitement in your therapy and motivate your students to attend, participate, and be creative? Digital cameras, portable media devices, interactive whiteboards, and the Internet are just some of the tools that can help students practice and use their communication skills in meaningful ways.

Portable media devices such as iPods and MP3 players store, organize, and play audio files along with image-viewing or video-playing support. Many players have a built-in microphone for recording. Recordings can be saved for analysis, transcription, and comparison. Portable media devices allow for an accurate record of student performance and progress. Here are some ways to use these devices in therapy:

1. Record a student telling a story, describing a picture, sharing about a favorite toy from home, or talking about anything that will have him leading the conversation.
2. Create an audio playlist for each student.
3. Periodically, record a new sample to add to the playlist in order to show progress over time.

Digital cameras and camcorders have almost unlimited possibilities for speech and language interactions. Immediate feedback is a big benefit for learners. Use the pictures and recordings to:

1. Document a student's progress
2. Teach sequences by making "how-to" or demonstration videos
3. Create personalized scripted stories
4. Identify and practice the elements of effective social interaction (See Scripts for Role-Playing: Setting the Stage for Social Success on page 72)
5. Develop narrative language skills
6. Learn to interpret, analyze, and evaluate information (problem solving)
7. Practice the elements of effective communication by having students retell, predict, generate questions, identify visual cues (nonverbal communication), and use context cues

Interactive whiteboards (trade name: SMART Board) are similar in appearance to the whiteboards most teachers use in the classroom. The interactive whiteboard connects to a digital projector to display anything on the computer to which it is connected. Rather than asking students to crowd around a single monitor, the interactive whiteboard allows the instructor to project a desktop image and control it with the touch of a finger or mouse. The user can:

1. control computer applications directly from the whiteboard with hand recognition
2. write notes in digital ink
3. customize activities, such as the following, and save work to share later:
 - create graphic organizers for vocabulary, concepts, and stories
 - highlight target vocabulary, grammar, and syntax in sentences
 - draw pictures to facilitate narrative and story retelling and sequencing

The students' interest and participation grow as they interact with the material presented on the interactive whiteboard. All Linguistics Systems' software and books on CD-ROM can be used with an interactive whiteboard.

Internet text, voice, and video chats let users communicate face-to-face in real-time. Google is one example of a free, user-friendly application. All you need is a Webcam on one or both ends of the chat and a small download (available on the Google website). To get started, go to google.com and create a Gmail account. Then go to the Chat section for step-by-step instructions. If your communication partner doesn't have a Webcam, you can still have a voice chat or a one-way video chat. Use these all-inclusive communication tools to:

1. Interact with other SLPs and their students
2. Practice real-time communication and social language skills
3. Provide diversity in communication experiences

Many students (adolescents in particular) find these nontraditional teaching approaches appealing. Students with limited access to technology benefit as they learn new applications and are better able to join with their peers in the use of technology. Application of these technologies to your speech therapy sessions will give students the opportunity to practice their communication skills in ways that are impossible in a traditional therapy setting.

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