

TestTalker: A New Paradigm for Assessment & Testing

by **Brian S. Friedlander PhD**



Every once in awhile you see a piece of software and you go "wow!" This was the case with TestTalker. While attending the Closing the Gap Conference in Minneapolis last Fall, I had the opportunity to preview TestTalker from Freedom Scientific. TestTalker is a new breed of software that will allow teachers to create a version of a test on the computer with text-to-speech support. Imagine all the doors that will be opened for students who need accommodations for testing, but who have reading disabilities or motor involvement which interferes with them being able to take standard paper and pencil tests. TestTalker was designed to be able to elegantly scan tests into the computer and give teachers a full range of tools that will allow them to create the tests on the screen. The process is simple and in a matter of minutes you can convert a plain paper copy of a test into a version that a student can take on the computer. If your tests are available in Adobe PDF format or in Microsoft Word, TestTalker can open them directly into the application without the need to scan them.

With Test Talker Teacher Edition, teachers can insert answer blanks using the Fill-in, Extended Answer, Multiple Choice and True/False type questions.

When students are ready to take the test, they open up the test with TestTalker Student Edition and complete the test on the screen. For students who need additional writing support, TestTalker also allowed me



to use Co:Writer 4,000, a word prediction application to complete my answers in the Fill-in the blank and Extended Answer type of question fields. After the test is completed, it can be saved to a floppy disk or printed out and graded by the teacher.

TestTalker will change the way you assess students with special needs. Students will now have the capability of working independently on a test just like the other students in the classroom. TestTalker will level the playing field for students with disabilities and will allow teachers to more accurately assess their knowledge and skills. As more and more students with disabilities are being educated in the mainstream, TestTalker will become a very important tool for both access and assessment. It is paramount in this day and age of accountability to be able to accurately document what a student is capable of doing on their own with the appropriate accommodations.

TestTalker exceeded my expectations and will become an essential

part of my assistive technology toolkit. The program is ideal for use for students that need both access and text-to-speech support for completing forms, having tests read, and for worksheets. TestTalker came just at the right time in the field of special education, as we reach the crossroad of the need to be able to accurately assess students skills and knowledge. But more importantly, it will allow students to take tests independently and give teachers a truer picture of what they know without the intervention from another adult. TestTalker is a product that many of us have been waiting for, and I for one, am excited with its potential; to meet the needs of the students that we work with who need special testing accommodations.

Test Talker is available from Tom Caine and Associates. Call for more information.

Brian S. Friedlander