DEBBIE: See you back on board. Thank you very much.

SALLY: No worries.

DEBBIE: We have – thank you. And we have Natalie with you as well.

NATALIE: I am here, yes.

DEBBIE: Wonderful. And we have Fiona as well, so welcome to you all. Back to our screens. So we have Sally and Natalie, who we met earlier from Western Sydney University, both experts in the assistive technology field and we say a big hello, to someone who I’m sure is helping Greg at the sponsorship expo from Texthelp, so Fiona Thompson – Thomas, sorry, I do apologise, welcome. We have 30 minutes. So this will go very fast. I will pop up five minutes before the end, just so people can get their last minute questions in. So thank you. Just a recap, if you missed Sally and Natalie’s presentation earlier, they both have extensive experience in assistive technology and are strong advocates for inclusion and accessibility in education and beyond. And then we have Fiona who has jumped on board to help out in this last session, so thank you from Texthelp and Fiona is an avid user of technology and is rewarded by guiding and supporting educators as they embark on the technology adventures. So it’s great to have you all on board and you’ll be looking at using COVID-19 as an opportunity to change practice and promote a new perspective on assistive technology. So thank you, ladies, I’ll hand over to you.

NATALIE: Thank you.

SALLY: Thank you.

FIONA: Okay. So it’s my pleasure today to present with Sally and Natalie and I’m really looking forward to do that, so let’s get straight into that now. So this is us. You can possibly see us on screen. You can possibly see us on screen but you can also see us there and what we’re going to be talking about today follows on nicely from what Greg and Anita have been talking about with their experience with read & write, Anita’s experience at TAFE and I’ve had the pleasure of working with Sally and Natalie for a bit over – well, it’s more than 12 months now, guys, isn’t it?

SALLY: It is.

FIONA: Absolutely. So you can see us in real and in Bitmoji. If you have any questions, please feel free to pop them in the chat along the way and, of course, we’ll try and get to those at the end of the session as well. All right. Let’s go along. So what I’d like to talk about first is just give you a little bit of information about the tool bars that we’re going to be talking about today in this session and – so there are three tool bars that we’re talking about, the read & write tool bars and also on the iPad, but I don’t want to go into too much detail, but just give you a little bit of context, but I feel like if you’ve been following along from the previous sessions, guys, they’ve probably got all the information that they need about those sorts of things. So we might just jump straight into it, but read & write is a tool bar that provides a range of features to support all the students when reading, writing and studying and it’s available at Western Sydney as well. There are six different versions. It works across Microsoft, Google and Apple devices and platforms. If your institution has a subscription, students can use it on campus or at home across any of these devices or platforms. Let’s keep going along. This, as I said, has been a partnership between - we have really enjoyed working with Sally and Natalie and supporting them, not that to be honest they've needed very much support at all. This is pretty much - what we're just talking about today is what they’ve done. I've just had the pleasure of being involved.

SALLY: I will start with how did we come to work with Texthelp at Western Sydney University. A bit of background, we needed a solution for students who were struggling with reading, writing and comprehension and we looked out on the market to see what was available and we were really impressed that read & write did this, plus a lot more. It did it with a simple customisable tool bar that was available overlaid on our various platforms. It had the flexibility to work with our various products and systems. We first partnered with them in 2017, like Fiona mentioned. At this time it was restricted to students with an academic integration plan or staff with a reasonable adjustment plan. It was limited to people who had identified a disability and needed an adjustment. Where are we up to now? Our service doubled at the start of this year. If you were in our previous presentation you will know Natalie came on board at the start just before COVID. We have doubled our service size this year. That has allowed us to think strategically about how we work with assistive technologies at Western and what we do with our resources. We have made exciting strides this years towards being an inclusive environment that uses AT to create that inclusion. We have done that in a few different ways. We have procedural changes, upskilled IT staff and we’ve identified AT champions across the University. We have also created a new website and we have been putting a huge amount of effort in promoting AT to all staff and students. At this time we've been particularly focusing on read & write, which is why we wanted to present with Fiona today providing flexibility, efficiency and agency with these. That's what we're going for. We will explore these benefits more soon, but we also wanted to mention that we have been putting some of it into getting Sonocent Audio Notetaker into the hands of staff as well and we have needed to take a bit of a softer approach with that one, but, yeah, 2020 has been a huge year for us. taken a soft approach for that. 2020 has been a huge year for us.

FIONA: I think it has been a huge year for everybody.

NATALIE: I think we have all been mentioning it throughout the presentations this afternoon that COVID has thrown a lot of challenges at everyone and it has created a lot of struggles in the simple things we talked about, particularly even like leaving the house, doing groceries. Let alone the study and the work side of things. So what happens with work and study from home was it was quite unexpected and unplanned for many. What it meant was that they didn't have the resources and equipment immediately on hand. Even the quiet spaces that they had on campuses before. What we found when we were talking with our students and with the various staff that lots of people were struggling with motivation and feeling like their life was a bit out of control and they were unable to get that contained and managed. So every situation was unique in these discussions that we were having, but what we found there was the common thread. So people were juggling more in the one space, so they were doing longer days, even though we were all working from home. We all kept working. We didn’t just, you know, just watch Netflix. So with this additional time on screen there was the eye strain, headaches and the additional stress meant that the time they were doing at work was actually less effective and less productive, and so the other thing that some people had were multiple users and single devices in family homes, so it meant that there was an inability to move forward with work, when they wanted to, when they thought they were the most productive, someone else would have been, you know, using their system. So for us it really highlighted that we needed flexibility for them to access their content and their work to do their study and their work lives and also a greater need for efficiency and effectiveness while they were doing those processes. So generally in these discussions we found these weren’t specific disability struggles but were something that were seen across the board. So, for example, our international students and students for whom English was a second language, they reported struggling to process the information they’d done before COVID, because of the additional stresses that they were facing. So all of these challenges inspired us to quickly reframe how we thought about and promoted our tools, so that we could support as many students and staff as possible. So to do this we decided to have a bit of fun, which was something we were all in need of. Now, this is something – if you were already in our earlier sessions, you will know that Sally and I created a series of short videos. Now, these were promoting our three main assistive technologies. Fiona, if you want to jump to the next slide, I think I’ve jumped ahead of you here. There we go. So we had the read & write video, which was designed to capture the interest and show case the flexibility the tool bar can provide. So as you’ve seen before we focused on some of the features of the tool bar to show how quick and simple it was to create flexibility in your day, so let’s have another quick look at the video now. Over to Fiona.

VOICEOVER: Are your eyes strained from too much screen time? Reading through documents, manuals, research and email? Are you stuck at your desk all day and not moving around enough? Then read & write is for you. Get someone else to do the reading for you. Choose the voice that you want to hear. Press play and close your eyes for a bit or record all your essential readings into an audio file and plan your day so you can listen to them while you go for a walk or hit that treadmill. Be more flexible with Texthelp read & write.

FIONA: That brings a smile to my face, Sally, every time I see it.

SALLY: I get embarrassed every time I see it.

FIONA: Sorry, but I just think it’s so good because it doesn’t matter what – you know, who you are as a person, whether it’s a teacher or a student, it’s just kind of like, there’s something in there for you, isn’t there?

SALLY: There is, definitely.

FIONA: And I think you’ve got to have a bit of fun sometimes. Sometimes when you do put yourself out there it’s actually better.

SALLY: I’m glad you said that since we tend to do that. We might do that a little too much sometimes.

FIONA: All right. So, I guess, what made you guys – you know, like I said,I love watching that. It was such a good idea and the teamwork and all of those sorts of things, so how do people get access to it? What was the process?

SALLY: All right. So before it was a bit simpler, but this year with all our changes, there are so many different ways that you can access AT at Western. We have the traditional method, which would be a student sees disability services and they get a referral on for assistive technology. So we will have a consultation with them, do an individual support session and get them started that way. But now that we’ve got our website, students can choose to not have individual training with us and they can do our online training and do self-paced guided online training that way. So we’ve got quite a few students who take up that and also we take students that don’t have referrals as well. So we have, like we said, assistive technology champions around the university. We’ve got subject matter experts on our IT service desk. They’ve already been trained up in the assistive technologies available and essentially, kind of, what main benefits they can have to students and if they come across a student who might need help in any of those areas, they send them to our website, shoot us an email or open up a ticket in our IT ticket system and then they get in contact with us that way. So they can actually just fill in a form and start downloading and accessing the technology straight through the website, whether they want to talk to us, Natalie and I, or not. So lots of different ways to get access and support.

FIONA: And If you’re like me, a Texthelper who is studying at Western Sydney Uni at the moment and you know that it’s available for you, you can actually just download it and start using it, can’t you? Yeah. Which is what I’ve been doing for the last couple of months. It’s been very handy. So did we get through all of your bit then, Sally?

SALLY: Yeah. I think so. All good.

FIONA: All right. So we will keep going along. What we wanted to do was I guess we had a chat, didn’t we, guys, like how could we really, kind of, show case in some way, because it’s one thing to talk about what you’re able to do and you came up with this really innovative way of doing it but how do we then show people the sorts of things that we were talking about. So that’s what we want to do for the second half of this presentation.

NATALIE: Excellent. Well, we will kick-start with my favourite because it's so straightforward. This is one of the first technologies I learnt when I came into the team. Why I like this one it’s played, so that’s pretty universal and it’s a quick easy solution to make reading easier. So it’s just a one simple step providing instant results and it’s a great way for us when I start students off with their training support, to start with this function because they can see immediately the benefits of using the tool bar. So it gives them the confidence and the motivation to keep working through the other functions and what we’ve found when using this one is that it’s useful for students who want to - - -

FIONA: My bad. Sorry.

NATALIE: That’s all right. You can kind of seeing it starting to read there and what you’ll see, and once I stop talking and Fiona plays it, is you’ll see that it highlights the line that it’s on and the word that it is reading. So it’s a great way of tracking the content as it’s coming through for students if they want to watch as it’s reading along, but they can also look at that later on, and we’ll talk about that other tool. So this helps with learning new different ways of study techniques that it can help with excessive work flow, useful for revision and research and getting through those lots of articles and things. So as Sally had said in her video, which you now know, you can just just relax, close your eyes and it reduces your eye strain and you get through your look. So I’ll let you play that now, Fiona, so everyone can hear that one.

FIONA: Yeah. In my haste and tad nervousness I forgot that this one actually has sound unlike the other ones so. All right. Here we go. So what you would have seen at the start was it actually goes up to the play button and we just click on that, put our cursor where we want to start reading.

COMPUTER VOICEOVER: Text to speech is a great way to read text on a digital device. It is as easy as launching the read & write tool bar on your document and putting the cursor where you’d like to start reading and press play. You can pause or stop the text - - -

FIONA: So I’ve paused it there.

COMPUTER VOICEOVER: - - - speech feature to take notes or complete other tasks. You can select a range of voices to help with comprehension and retention of information. I am currently using Scottish Fiona.

FIONA: Yes. So Scottish Fiona is a favourite at our house. So my daughter has a mild vision impairment. So when she feels like taunting me she often puts Scottish Fiona on because she feels like it might wind her Mum up a little bit so, yeah, that’s one of the reasons why we choose Scottish Fiona.

COMPUTER VOICEOVER: Text to speech is a great way to read text allowed on a digital device.

FIONA: And so what happened there was we actually changed the voices and that’s Australian Karen, who I’m actually not sure who’s worse, Scottish Fiona or Australian Karen. It depends on the mood that you’re in really, isn’t it?

NATALIE: See I prefer Australian Lee who is a male voice, so that’s my preference and as you said a lot of students have a particular preference and what they might do is change the voice per subject and topic, so that that identifies for them when they’re listening back, that they’re actually listening to something different. So that’s a really good way for them to get that extra information, to think about what did Scottish Fiona tell me.

FIONA: Yeah. Look, that was one of the hints that you guys told us in another session that we did together and it was – it’s been one of my favourite actually because to be able to read to people who are using text to speech, now you can use that recall of the person’s name, just as you would a teacher or someone who you’re talking to, I think that’s a great tip. It really helps you to remember. All right. I’ll just finish this one up.

COMPUTER VOICEOVER: It is as easy as launching the read & write tool bar.

FIONA: So that gives you a little idea of how easy – and it literally is that easy. It sits over the top of your documents nice and easy to use. All right. So when we’re thinking about personalising for students, there’s probably a whole range of tools that we could have chosen, but we want something that, you know, you guys were talking about eye strain, in particular, at the time when you were – paid your video and did those sorts of things. So, Sally, I’ll let you talk a little bit about the screen masking tool.

SALLY: Yeah. So one of the big things that we’ve noticed in talking to staff and students this year is all the additional time that you’re spending on the computer is having an impact and it’s the strain on the eyes and it causes the headaches or the migraines and all of this means that students and staff are finding that they’re not as productive, they’re not able to focus but they’re also losing time. If they’re getting a migraine, they might have to take a day or two off work, and so it’s really quite impactful and what we love about screen masking is – you know, I’m going to go to the staff member that came. I’ve got hair floating down in front of me. A staff member came and asked what she could use to help and we said, “Look, you could try this screen masking, which is a colour overlay and you can select which colour works best”, and the thing is that she used it for a couple of days and she came back and said, “Oh my gosh, amazing. I don’t get headaches the same anymore”. So she lost a couple of weeks to migraines over the last couple of months and this had completely changed the way she was able to work. Just a simple thing turning a colour overlay.

NATALIE: It’s also been really useful as well for students who have dyslexia because some of them get allocated specific colours when they get their diagnosis and that particular colour they can match because you can personalise the colours that are appearing in the overlay and they can match that colour that they’ve been given. So I have one student who had a very dark green and she was able to apply that over the screen and that helped and assisted her with her reading. So that’s really good. You can see in the demonstration on there, there are cursor lines and things like that. So it’s even if you just – if you’re not a touch typer, and once again I put my hand up at being a terrible typist, and if you put your head up and down you sometimes lose where you are on a page. So that really helps tracking and it helps students when they’re doing multiple things, just to keep an eye on where they are. So it’s another good way of just making that little bit of flexibility, the personalisation to make you be on track with your work, so you’re not wasting these little bits of seconds here and there that will add up when you’re trying to do serious study and revision.

FIONA: Absolutely. Yeah. I keep losing my cursor. All right. And so the third thing we were thinking about, how they can personalise the device, ease of use, we're thinking about the flexibility because we know that particular students will want to jump in and out of all sorts of different things, whether it’s a web page, or a PDF or back into a Google Doc or a Word doc, depending on what their preference is. So we chose the audio maker to show some flexibility, Sally.

NATALIE: I was going to say I’m going to jump into this one because Sally was actually the star of flexibility, so I feel like she should be the gymnast but when you go back to that video again of Sally showing her moving away from the computer, putting on the headphones, this is the flexibility that we’ve liked. So particularly in lockdown, it helped people get outside, so they could go to the garden, if they wanted to go for a walk, they could download their articles into an audio file. We encouraged them to use the One Drive that the uni provides, so they can access that anywhere they want. What it also helped with was being able to share the potentially one device that the whole family was using. So they could go in, download all their articles, turn them into an audio file and move away from the computer so the next family member could come along and do what they needed to do. So that ability was great and you can adjust the reading voice, as we heard, so the speech voice, the reading pace, you can adjust all of that to suit yourself. So this one really works really well, in terms of adding that extra flexibility.

FIONA: Yeah. And the one that they can see on the screen at the moment is the audio maker in the Windows tool bar, which gives you a bit more flexibility. You can add text in there. You can look at how the audio is previewed and it’s quite a decent amount of text you can actually capture.

NATALIE: And it’s really quick. You can see just from that demonstration that Fiona has just done, that it is so straight forward. I had a student who was doing this very convoluted process to, kind of – and she was using YouTube and pulling captions down and trying to turn that into something else and then I just showed her how to play and then create the audio file and that was just – for her, it was one of those, kind of, life changing moments for that day anyway. That it was so quick for her. So that’s the other benefit is that it’s not – you can’t break it. It’s just quite straight forward and you can follow along. It’s quite intuitive. It helps you each step, to tell you what’s got to happen next.

FIONA: Yeah. Absolutely. And, hey, if you changed a student’s life for a day, I think that’s pretty good. I think that’s great. Right. So we’ve looked at those things and I guess the other thing for me, and as I kind of mentioned I’m a little bit older than you guys and I do actually have university-aged kids and so one of the things particularly for, I know, our family is that we need for my daughter to be able to have the independence to do these things for herself. There is nothing worse than having to rely on somebody, I will be honest one because she’s often not that organised to think about what she’s going to need, like, a long way into the future, but also that fact that she can do it at 10 o’clock at night or she can do it, you know, Sunday morning or whenever it might be. So what did we think about for the independence?

NATALIE: We picked translator for this one and what worked really well is earlier in the year we were invited by the international buddy program within the university to have a chat to some international students and this was when we, kind of, started rolling out read & write more broadly to the student population and we show cased this and I kind of said, here’s the translator tool. Someone wanted to know if it translated Arabic, which it does accurately. So it was, again, something that you can just pretty much run very streamlined, it works. As I said, it was accurate. So it translated everything into, you know, the actual Arabic language. So she could read that quite easily and it helped - in terms of this particular student population, they can speak and read English, but it’s just that ability to get through work quickly if it’s in their own native language and we’ve got English as a second language students who are in our student population and they find that works really well, if they need to have that, kind of, back up and sometimes they’ll switch between two but having that translation tool really helps and, like you said, it’s independence. They can just do it themselves. They don’t need to go into other programs. It just operates off that one tool bar.

FIONA: And we’ve got a large number of languages that students can choose from as well. So it’s not just certain languages which is really useful. I think we had the pop up because we’re running out of time. I know you’re surprised that we took longer than we thought. So let’s get to our last one, which is talking about efficiency which, of course, isn’t always a student goal, let’s be honest, but it’s certainly something that we want for all members to be able to do things in the most efficient manner possible as they possibly can. So you have chosen two tools this time to talk about.

SALLY: Yep. So I’ll start with the research folder, which is one of my favourites, and this is one of the ones that, you know, I will tell all students about. We love the research folder for helping people organise their notes and the thing is you can just snip it a bit of text and save it into a folder or capture a picture on a web page, a picture on a PDF, whatever it is, you can quickly grab that and sort that into a folder and then you don’t lose it. You know, my brain goes everywhere all the time and I know that I’ll have a thought and if I don’t write it down and capture it at that time it’s just gone and so I love the research folder for the ability to be grabbing those little things and easily storing them but in a nice organised way. So you might have a folder for each assignment or something that you’re doing and then if you randomly come across a piece of information that relates, you can organise that really quickly into that folder and you don’t lose it. And then at the end what you have is all of these things caught together in a folder and a quick easy button where you export it to a Word document and it pulls them all out into one document and it gives you the reference of where it’s come from. So it’s just a perfect tool for making these things efficient. For not wasting your time, for not losing those thoughts and for not getting lost in your, you know, papers and research and just having it nicely organised.

FIONA: And I have to say that it was a tool that Texthelp actually took off their tool bar for a little while and then they brought it back because people were asking because people like it so much, so yeah.

SALLY: I’m glad it came back.

FIONA: Absolutely.

NATALIE: Yeah. I think the other tool that we’ve got on there is the voice note and Sally mentioned something about sometimes when you have a thought you don’t want to lose, voice notes are very good because you can actually just tap on to your document and record your own voice speaking into that part. So if you’re providing feedback on a document, it’s great for group work when you’re trying to add in little notes for the other people in the group, as to improvements or enhancements, and it’s good because it picks up your tone. So it records your voice. So how you provide feedback, there’s different ways and some people can get a tone in an email that’s not quite nice. At least if you were giving feedback you can pick your voice, how you want to say it and you can say, just if you might want to tweak this or that. So it is quite good in being able to capture the quick thoughts and popping them in and it gives people a different variation in getting that feedback. It’s not just all written.

FIONA: Yeah. Absolutely. And I think too even almost as an editing tool or a way to, you know, remind yourself that, I’ve been writing a lot of essays lately and, you know, remind yourself to go back and, I need to finish that bit off or I need to add some more information or something like that as well. Yeah. Absolutely. Okay. Well, that kind of covers all the tools that we were going to. I’ve lost my cursor again. Thank you so much, guys, for sharing. I know it’s just a tiny bit of your knowledge but really appreciate you being able to come onboard and tell us what you’ve been doing. There’s our contact information there so [atspecialists@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:atspecialists@westernsydney.edu.au). That gets both of you, I love that email address. That’s a good one and you can contact me at [f.thomas@texthelp.com](mailto:f.thomas@texthelp.com) and of course we, as Debbie said earlier, we have our little virtual group which is kind of, you know, like it’s a new thing for all of us here but if you want more information about read & write you can go there too and there’s links to the slide decks, so there’s a hyper – link which will give you all sorts of bits and bobs and the lovely resources that Sally and Natalie made as part of that AT – what would you call them, guys? Like, you were kind of – it was a goodie bag, wasn’t it?

NATALIE: Yeah. We did a goodie bag.

FIONA: Goodie bag. So you’ve got all sorts of bibs and bobs there for you to click on and have a look at, so thank you both.

NATALIE: Thank you, Fiona.

DEBBIE: Thank you all for that great presentation and I’m sure we will see you in your exhibition space there too, Fiona, just to go through. That was very comprehensive. You’ve done very well in a short period of time too to show us that and, I agree. I would also like Natalie and Sally on speed dial as well with your knowledge there, that’s just fantastic. We need to be a little bit careful, Sally. I think you might be able to get a bit of a side gig with your acting ability. I think that was brilliant.

FIONA: - - -

DEBBIE: I think it’s really good that, you know, assistive technology can really – just really normalize, you know, getting in there and doing your study, but also the moving that into the workplace as well. I just think it’s just brilliant and I like the part that you are really engaging the teachers as well. They see the students a lot of the time, so they can really see who might be beneficial. If they can see it and touch it and feel it, they’re more inclined to actually refer people on to you for your wonderful service and your insights, so that’s really good. So I want to say thank you very much, again, for a wonderful presentation. To Fiona, Natalie and Sally, thank you very, very much.