Quick Reference Guide to the Popular Text-to-Speech Literacy Tools of 2017

Accessibility	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
Technology responds to assistive hardware, e.g., Braille display, switch devices, scanners, eye tracking, etc.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Supports vision impairments, e.g., magnification, screen readers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Includes specialized Dyslexia font	✓			✓	✓
Includes high-quality text to speech	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Converts images to text (OCR)	✓	✓	✓	✓	

Text-to-Speech Engines	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
Ivona by Amazon	✓				✓
Acapela	✓		✓	✓	✓
NeoSpeech	✓	✓			✓
Nuance (includes ScanSoft, Vocalizer)		✓	✓		

Instructional Support	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
Includes integrated content sharing	✓			✓	
Includes tools for creating and taking assignments	✓			✓	
Includes tools for grading and returning assignments	✓				
Promotes active reading strategies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Includes integrated access to one or more cloud services: Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.	✓			✓	✓
Includes integrated 3rd party materials	✓			✓	✓
Includes integrated math tools (e.g., calculators, conversion tools)		✓			

Comprehension	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
Includes graphic organizers		✓	✓	✓	
Includes dictionary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Offers text summarization		✓			
Offers text simplification			✓		
Gamified reading comprehension (context clues)	✓				

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Language Learning	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
Translation languages supported	100+	50+	100+	50+	30+
Offers context-aware translation	✔				
Offers gamified vocabulary building tool	✔				

User management / monitoring	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
Offers separate student and teacher accounts	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Supports single sign-on (Google, Facebook, etc.)			✔		
Includes SIS / SMS integration (rostering systems)	Upon request	?		✔	
Includes student usage monitoring	✔		✔	✔	

Costs	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
Offers site and district-wide licensing	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Cost of individual license	Free + in-app	$145	$3.99/month	?	$14.99 + in-app
Includes personalized training	✔				
Offers implementation support	✔	✔		✔	
Includes priority customer support	✔	✔	✔	✔	

Device platforms	Capti Voice	Read & Write	Snap & Read	Kurzweil	Voice Dream
iPhone / iPad	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Mac	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Windows	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Chromebook	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Web application (no installation required)	✔			✔	
Android		✔		✔	✔
Synchronization between platforms	✔			✔	
Synchronization within one platform	✔			✔	✔

Disclaimer: The diagram presented above is based on publicly available information obtained up to 5/5/2017.
As technology is changing and evolving, the information presented in this table may become outdated at any time
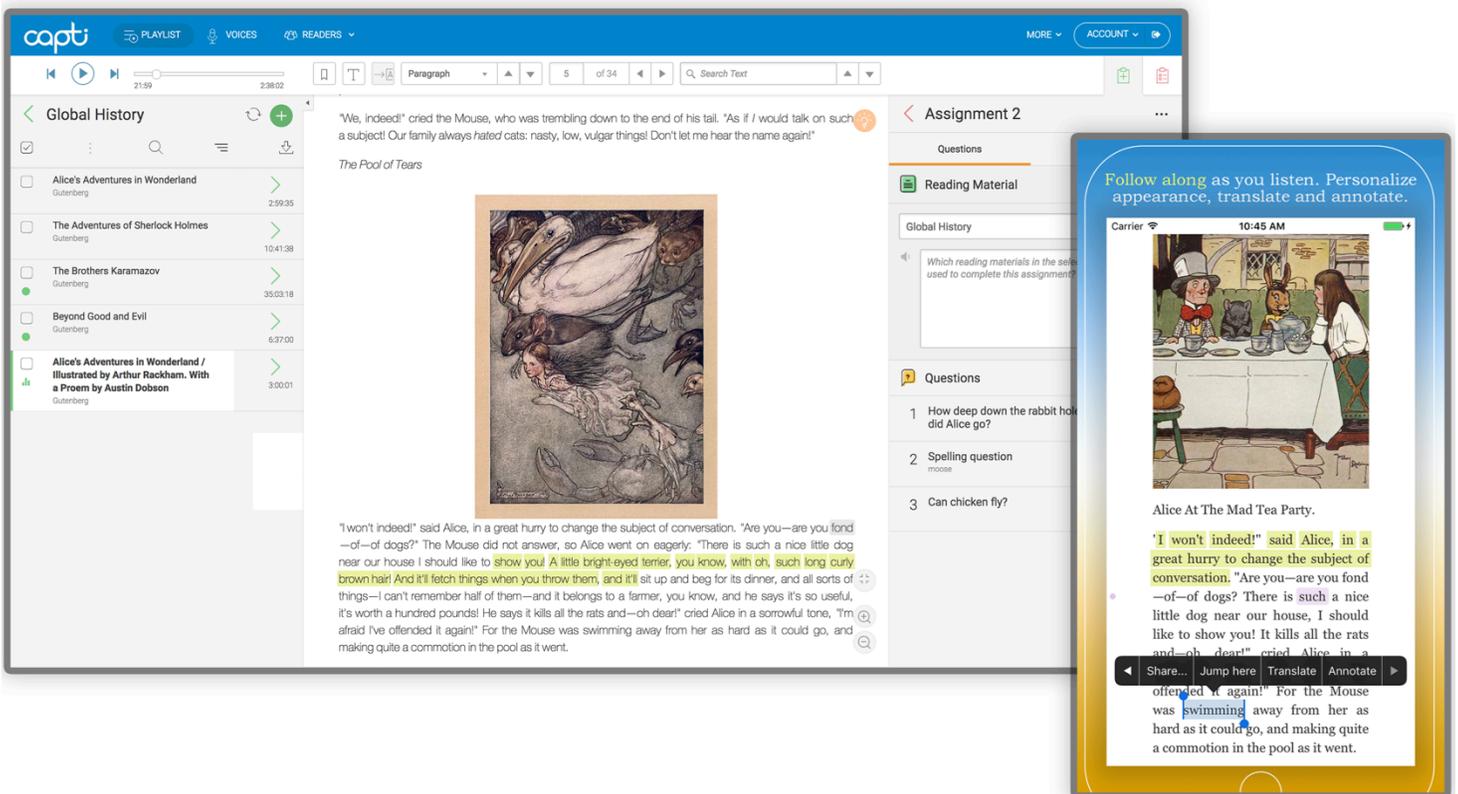
Product Summaries:
Capti Voice, Kurzweil, Read & Write, Snap & Read, and Voice Dream

Capti Voice

Capti Voice is a universally accessible literacy platform enabling teachers to support, monitor, and assess students with diverse needs and abilities, e.g., dyslexia, ADHD, vision loss, poor English proficiency, etc. Its strengths include: (a) integration with Bookshare, Gutenberg Project, Google Drive, Dropbox, the browser, etc.; (b) the ability to create, administer and grade accessible assignments combined with reading materials; (c) gamification of vocabulary building, reading comprehension and context clues; (d) context-aware translation and definitions; (e) usage of playlists to organize content; (f) synchronization of the playlists; and (g) low cost.

Playlists are central to the design of Capti, with each playlist serving as an ordered collection of books and documents that can be shared with students and attached to assignments as reference materials. Playlist content can even be accessed offline, as well as synchronized across all devices where the user is logged into Capti, including Mac, Windows, Chromebooks, iPad, or iPhone. Capti includes high-quality IVONA and Acapela TTS voices used to listen to a playlist, user-created comments, as well as questions and answers in assignments. Students using Capti at school can continue doing so for free from home, even after graduation.

Capti is mostly designed for reading, as there are no writing supports such as graphic organizers or brainstorming charts. Capti is not yet available on the Android platform. Nevertheless, the EdTech Digest named Capti Voice the Best Special Needs solution of 2017, even though Capti also serves Gen. Ed. students.
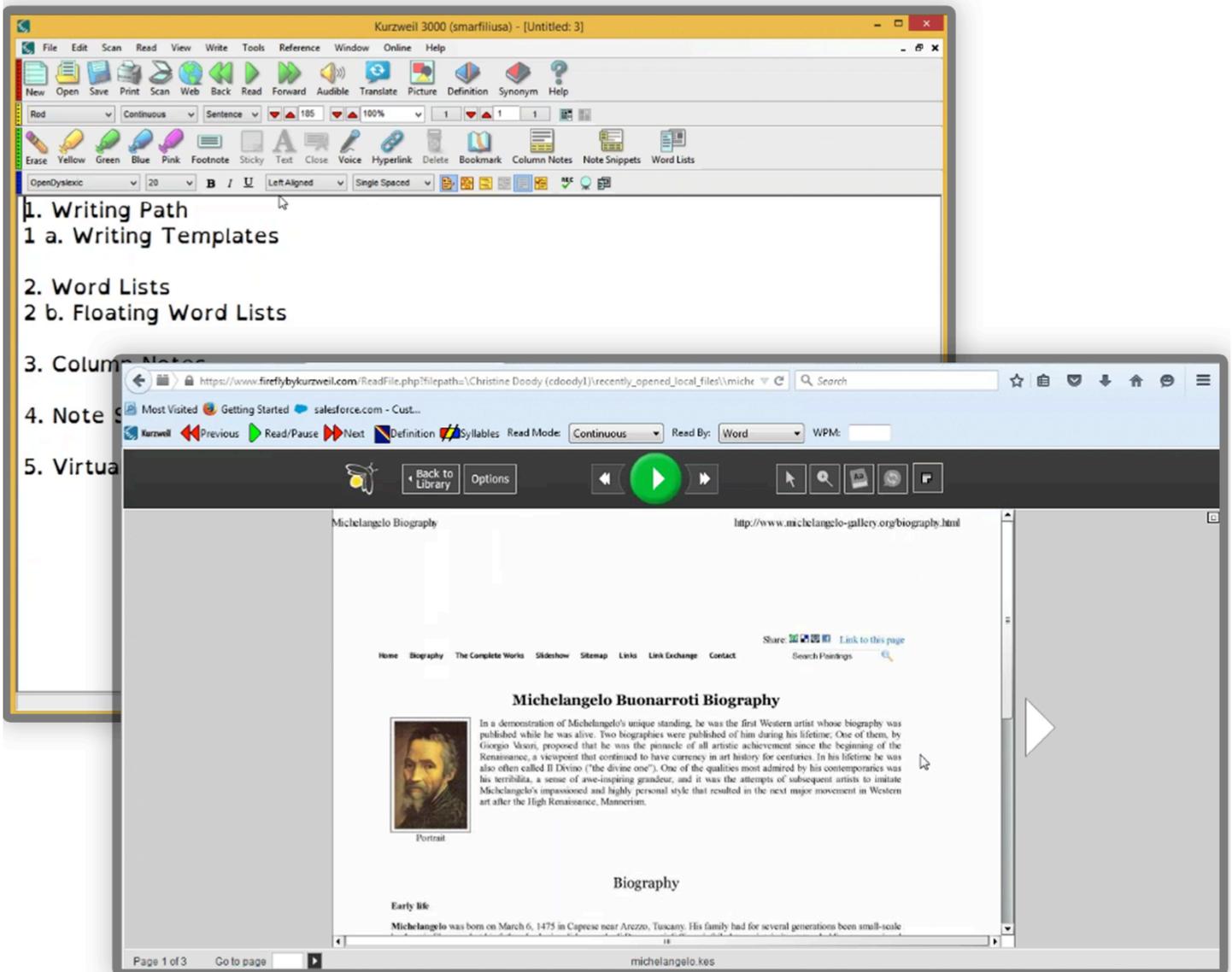
Kurzweil 3000/Firefly

Kurzweil 3000 is designed around the idea of a word processor that can speak, and it shows in how Kurzweil looks and feels on both Windows and Mac: the two main supported platforms. Rounding out the offering is Firefly, a companion-program to Kurzweil 3000 implemented as a web app and as an iPad app. Firefly integrates with Bookshare and Google Drive, and is mostly focused on content consumption.

Integration with a document editor is the biggest strength of Kurzweil 3000, enabling students to author texts with writing supports, rich text formatting, highlights, comments, and even audio-notes. Kurzweil also includes specialized writing tools such as brainstorming charts and graphic organizers. This enables students to organize their ideas and more confidently write a research or analytic paper. Similar to Capti, Kurzweil allows educators to share content with students (although with less flexibility).

A downside to using Kurzweil 3000/Firefly is that the online and iPad versions fall short of their Mac/Windows counterparts when it comes to the availability of features. What is shared by all four versions is, unfortunately, the complexity of the user interface, which could be confusing to students and teachers alike. In addition, Kurzweil 3000 often requires users to convert documents to Kurzweil's file format and can take up a significant amount of storage space. Finally, Kurzweil limits its voice selection to the Acapela text-to-speech engine.

Read & Write Gold

The main idea behind Read & Write is to provide a "toolbox" for reading, writing, and learning English. Read & Write is designed as a toolbar that will integrate with your operating system and the Chrome browser (the integration is especially good with Google Documents), and has text-to-speech capabilities. In addition, Read & Write is available as a standalone app on iOS and Android.

By utilizing outlines and brainstorming charts, students are better able to organize their thoughts and express their ideas more clearly. Read & Write also offers unique vocabulary-building tools including the customizable dictionaries and Word Wizard, which acts as an advanced thesaurus. Read & Write also includes a basic and scientific calculator (useful in mathematics or science course) and a text summarization tool.

A drawback of Read & Write is a lack of easy ways to import, organize, and share content. There is no concept of playlists or folders, so students would need to have their reading assignments readily available as they cannot be saved in a separate space or organized for later reading. There is also no integration with 3rd party content resources such as Bookshare or Google Drive, and no ability to backup or synchronize content across devices. Teachers cannot share content with students, administer assessments, or monitor their progress.

Snap & Read

Snap & Read is a Chrome browser extension that offers users text to speech for listening to what is displayed on the screen, writing outline support to help brainstorm ideas for essays, as well as a bibliographer to make it easier to cite sources. The most interesting advantage to using Snap & Read is a Dynamic Text Leveler that can be used to simplify complex language to further understanding. This is especially helpful for those who are learning English or students who are reading below their grade level; however, the simplification simply does synonym replacement and the level of the simplification is the same for all students with no connection to Lexile or other level systems. Teachers can also view analytics and monitor their students to keep track of information such as their reading level, the time they spend reading and the number of word look-ups.

Similar to Read & Write, Snap & Read does not offer playlists or folders for organizing documents (only outlines and bibliography) so Snap & Read simply reads what is put in front of it. Content cannot be easily imported from 3rd party sources either, and teachers cannot share content with students. Snap & Read does not integrate with browsers other than Chrome and does not offer any features to help students practice context clues or build vocabulary. Finally, there is also no option to change the colors or fonts in Snap & Read, which can make it difficult for low vision and dyslexic students to read along.

Voice Dream

Voice Dream is a mobile app for iOS and Android. Its primary focus is to provide maximum possible accessibility and customizability of text and speech. Voice Dream utilizes folders to organize content. You can also customize the colors, contrast, and fonts of text to increase readability for students with visual impairments. There is a custom pronunciation dictionary available in Voice Dream, which allows students to phonetically express certain words or names that the text-to-speech voices may mispronounce. This adds to the flow of reading and makes it easier to follow along without becoming distracted. Users can even set up document-specific speech rate and voice. Similar to Capti Voice, Voice Dream includes ability to import content from many sources including (but not limited to) iCloud Drive, browser, EverNote, Bookshare, and Gutenberg.

The biggest downside to Voice Dream is that it only works on mobile devices: iPhone, iPad, and Android. Voice Dream is mostly a consumer app, so there is no organization management account, no student monitoring analytics in place for teachers to keep track of student activity, no way for teachers to share content, and no premium support or professional development for educators. To get the most out of the app, there are in-app purchases for additional high-quality voices. The translation feature is restricted to Google Translate and requires the separate in-app purchase of "translation credits" to utilize.