

Struggling to write in a conversational tone?

Try talking to your computer as you'd talk to a friend...

If your typing is anything like mine, and I hope it's not, you type with your fists. Clunky hunt and pecking that is slow, disjointed and uncomfortable to watch. Each word pulled screaming from the keyboard and slung haphazardly on to the screen.

Typing was a painful process that took too long, was inefficient and strangled any type of creativity or flow.

Why type, when you can talk?

Talking to your computer as you'd talk to a friend is easier than you think and much faster than typing. With a bit of practice, your writing will flow, and you'll become a productivity ninja as you can talk far faster than you can type.

Consider this:

- An average typist can type around 40 words per minute.
- A professional typist can type between 50 and 80 words per minute.
- Some advanced typists can exceed 120 words per minute.
- The world record, set in 1946 by Stella Pajunas, was an impressive 216 words per minute.
- The current fastest living typist is Barbara Blackburn who achieved 212 words per minute in 2005.

Is using dictation for faster writing possible?

Can you dictate as fast as you talk?

Not quite, but it will be faster than you can type unless you're an advanced typist.

Even allowing for correcting errors, dictating at between 80 and 100 words per minute is possible. Compared to the average typist that's twice as fast and with a lot less strain.

However, the real power of dictating is that it frees you from having to pay attention to typing and allows you to focus entirely on what you want to say and how you want to say it.

Online, your writing has to be conversational

In the online world, your writing has to be conversational. It's easy to read, engaging and empathetic. You'll use simple words, the words you'd use when you chat with a friend, not the words you'd use to impress. Let me explain...

Writing conversationally doesn't come naturally; it goes against everything you've ever been taught in English classes at school and college. Writing's formal, full of rules and conventions that can detract from your creativity.

Talking is natural – something you do with friends and colleagues. Dictation is talking.

It does feel odd at first talking to your computer, having a conversation with a blank page but when you read back over what you've 'written' you'll see the difference. Your copy will be more relaxed, interesting and far more engaging.

Why? Because dictating is more natural than typing and allows you to focus on what you want to say, not on how you're going to get it onto the page.

Your FK score will benefit too. Writing conversationally using simpler words and phrases will make your copy easier to read and understand by all of your online audience.

What other advantages are there to using dictation software?

As well as using dictation for faster writing and improving the conversational tone of your copy what other benefits are on offer?

When you type for long periods of time, hunched over a keyboard, you are leaving yourself open to painful health problems.

- Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI) – can affect wrists, hands, neck, shoulders, and elbows. Its caused by repetitive activities (e.g. typing) and can cause pain, stiffness, tingling or numbness and weakness. Other RSI injuries include:
 - Tendonitis
 - Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
- Posterior cervical dorsal syndrome (computer back) caused by prolonged sitting, especially at a computer.

Using dictation software can stop all of these health problems immediately, and you won't lose money because you need to rest an injured hand, back or wrist.

I'm a pacer. I like to walk while I think and while I talk. When I was working in financial recruitment, I was given a headset and an extra-long cable, so I could pace up and down while I spoke to clients.

Now with a blue tooth headset, I can wander around writing and keep mobile. No back problems, no sore joints or muscles, and increased productivity.

What dictation software's available and how good is it?

Whether you use a Mac or a PC, there's plenty of options to get you dictating, improve your productivity, your health and let you write conversationally.

There are lots of options for you to choose from when it comes to dictation software.

Your PC or Mac has inbuilt dictation software, I only have experience of the Mac version, so I'll focus on that.

As a free option, Apple Dictation is a good starting point. The accuracy is pretty good, and if you use enhanced dictation (System Preferences>Keyboard>Dictation) you can use it for longer copy; otherwise, you're limited to thirty seconds and need to be connected to the internet.

Google Docs Voice Typing is free within Google Docs and is also reputed to be very accurate. It will also let you move around and edit your document using just your voice.

The software I know best is Dragon for Mac, and it's impressive. The biggest stumbling block with Dragon is the price - \$300+ but if you want to get serious with dictating it's worth the investment.

So, what can Dragon Dictate do that will make your life easier?

Dragon is accurate, very accurate. It uses Deep Learning Technology to recognize how you speak and adapts to your voice.

The beauty of the Dragon system is that you can train it to understand the way that you speak. The more you use it, the more accurate it becomes.

If the software doesn't transcribe precisely what you say, you have the option of choosing an alternative from the pop-up corrections box, and inserting the correction, using your voice.

I've noticed that the accuracy improves if you use a better-quality microphone. I tried the headphones that came with my smartphone and got pretty good results, but the accuracy increased to almost a hundred percent when I swapped over to a Plantronics Bluetooth headset.

If you travel for work and need to stay productive while you're out and about you can make voice recordings on your smartphone and use Dragon to transcribe them when you're back in the office. If that sounds a little clunky, checkout Dragon Anywhere.

Dragon Anywhere is an inexpensive subscription service that lets you dictate and edit documents on your mobile device. Save the documents to the cloud, Evernote or DropBox and sync with your computer when you're back in the office.

One great feature is that it lets you start a document on your Mac then finish it off with Dragon Anywhere and email it while you're away from the office.

Using Dictation Software has changed my life...

I'm still learning all the ins and outs of the Dragon software, but it has increased my productivity and lets me think about what to write rather than how I'm going to get the words onto the page.

Once you get over the short learning curve getting to know the software and you stop expecting your computer to answer when you ask a question, you'll wonder how you ever managed without it.

<https://www.ratatype.com/learn/average-typing-speed/>

<http://www.advancechiro.on.ca/common-computer-related-injuries/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/repetitive-strain-injury-rsi/>

<https://www.nuance.com/en-gb/dragon/dragon-for-mac/software.html>

<https://www.nuance.com/en-gb/dragon/dragon-anywhere.html>