

TechnoTalk

The TASC Newsletter



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Editorial

Welcome to the first edition of TechnoTalk for 2010. We hope you all had a very Merry Christmas and a safe and Happy New Year celebrating with your friends and family.

This month, Justin Ware, TASC Occupational Therapist, has been busy investigating free and low cost switch activities and resources available on the internet. There are many websites providing free activities for all ranges of switch skills and interests. Research suggests that in order to help engage and motivate switch users and to develop their switch skills, a variety of multisensory activities is recommended. We hope this will be a good resource to help you find something new, fun or different to keep on switching!

For more information on switch assessment, switch interfaces or switch types, please contact TASC.

In more personal news, TASC Speech Pathologist, Anna Bech, welcomed her second son and brother to Thomas, Lachlan Charles on the 7th December. Big congratulations to Anna and Lucas from everyone at TASC.

Happy Reading and good luck with the New Years resolutions,

Liza

News...



Many Australians are caring for or have cared for a family member with a disability. Many of these people fall through a gap in Australia's social services network. For those who acquire permanent disabilities in the workplace or in a motor vehicle accident there is generally financial support available for services and equipment. For those who are born with a permanent disability or who acquire a permanent disability through another accident, illness or injury there is no automatic support to meet their needs.

The Productivity Commission is inviting the public to register their interest in the forthcoming inquiry into the feasibility of a long-term care and support scheme for people with a disability in Australia. The inquiry will begin in early 2010 and report by July 2011. For more information and to register your interest, see www.ndis.org.au

Please help spread the word by going to the website and signing the petition, join the Facebook group, sign up for updates on Twitter, email your MP or share your personal story with your local newspaper.

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We welcome any feedback, good or bad, that you may have on our service. Please feel free to contact us by phone on 02 9975 8469, email tasc@tscnsw.org.au or by writing to The Spastic Centre PO Box 184 Brookvale NSW 2100

TechnoTalk Newsletter is free and available from www.thespasticcentre.com.au/news/technotalk/



Main Story:

Free and Low-Cost Switch Activities

by Justin Ware, TASC Occupational Therapist

Finding a range of good quality activities for switch users to participate in can be a challenge as many switch programs, games and toys can be very expensive. Research evidence suggests that to engage switch users and to develop switch skills, a multisensory approach is best – that is offering the switch user a range of activities with visuals, sound, movement and touch (Moir, 2008).

With the exception of the Switch Adapted toy section (below) all of the activities listed are computer-based and as a result, require a computer, a switch and some sort of switch interface.

A switch interface is essentially anything that allows a switch to be plugged into a computer. If you need information on switches, switch interfaces or suppliers, please contact TASC.

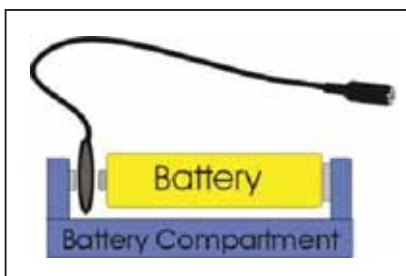
This list is not a collection of all the available switch accessible programs, but is intended to be a collection of TASC's favourite ones that are free or low cost at the time of publishing. For a regularly updated list of many more switch accessible software and websites, please see Jane Farrall's bookmarks on delicious http://delicious.com/Jane_Farrall. Jane is the AAC Support Services Manager at Spectronics, (assistive technology supplier).

The following resources have been selected with a broad range of abilities in mind, so whether you know someone who is only just developing switch skills, or if you are a master of switch access, hopefully there will be something worthwhile in this list.

Switch Adapted Toys

A battery interrupter can be used to make some standard battery toys switch accessible. For more information see www.tecsol.com.au/BCI.htm.

Battery interrupters are available from:

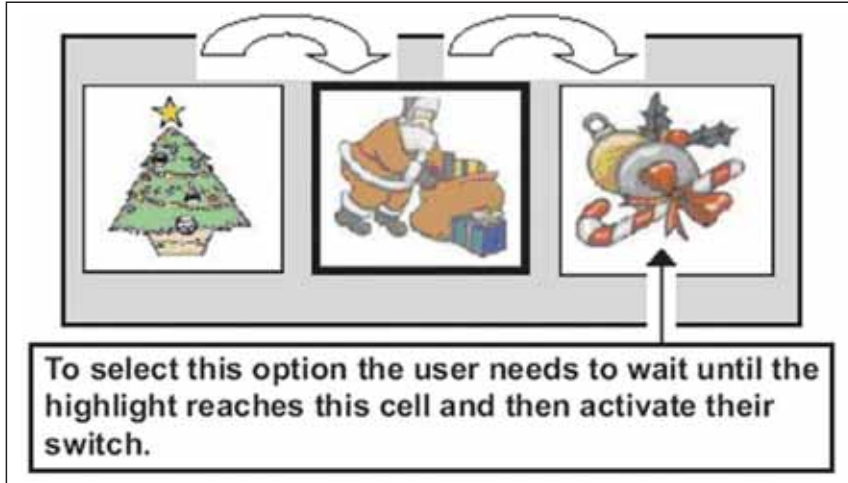


Technability www.technability.com.au
Technical Solutions www.tecsol.com.au
NovitaTech www.novitatech.org.au

If you are an amateur electronics enthusiast and you are looking for information on how to switch adapt your own toys, visit www.oneswitch.org.uk and look in the DIY section or look at www.ace-centre.org.uk and go to the resources → Adapting toys for switch use.

To assist switch users in finding activities that are appropriate for their skill levels, the activities below have been categorised into 3 stages, according to the hierarchy of switch skill development (Jones & King, 2008):

1. Untimed single switch use – press and release the switch to result in an outcome (cause and effect).
2. Timed single switch use – time press and release of the switch to result in the desired outcome.



3. Switch scanning – single switch automatic scanning or two-switch step scanning. (This allows switch users to choose from a series of cells or boxes by pressing the switch when their selection is highlighted).

While switch users who are developing their skills will benefit from moving through each stage, there may be a number of

activities in each category that interest people with a range of abilities. For more information on training users to develop more complex switch skills, please contact TASC.

Untimed Single Switch Use (Cause and Effect) including single and multiple press activities

Inclusive Technologies free site: www.helpkidzlearn.com/index.html

contains a selection of very high quality educational games and activities that can be played online, most of which are switch accessible (all switch accessible activities are identified with a switch symbol).

Online dice: www.levelgames.net/dice.php

This online dice is great for enabling switch users to be able to participate in children's board games like snakes and ladders. There is even a clock dice that enables randomisation of any number from 2 to 18.

SEN Switcher: www.northerngrid.org/ngflwebsite/sen/Menu-L.htm

Designed by Northern Grid, these activities are designed and staged specifically for the acquisition of switch skills. Many of the activities are "age neutral" meaning that they can be enjoyed by switch users from a very broad range of ages and abilities. Activities can be played online or downloaded free.

Switch In Time: www.switchintime.com/FreeStuff.html

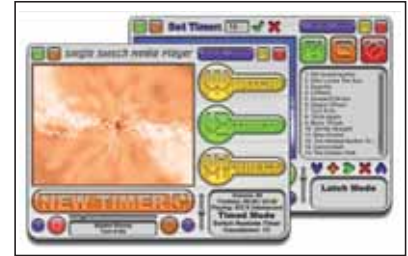
This commercial site offers a number of free switch programs that have been designed specifically for Mac Computers (sorry PC users they don't work on Windows). Strongly recommended are the Simple Access Colouring Book and the KidBook program that can be used to make talking books.





Single Switch Media Player: www.deviantart.com/download/24443302/SSMP_Gadget.zip

This music player has a number of settings to enable switch users to listen to their favourite music while learning about cause and effect. It requires Windows Media Player 9 or later to be already installed on the computer for it to work.



If you have a switch adapted mouse, you can also play and pause movies and music in any media player by positioning the mouse over the Play/Pause button.

Priory Woods: www.priorywoods.middlesbrough.sch.uk/resources/restop.htm

Based in the UK, the Priory Woods School has become world renowned for their selection of games and educational activities that have been specially designed for switch users. This site is great for school-aged switch users with a range of cognitive abilities.

www.hanselman.com/babysmash/ is an activity that was designed to allow babies to “play” on a computer without any danger of them accidentally deleting things or damaging the software of the computer in some way. It offers a good interface for teaching basic cause-and-effect.

www.hiyah.net is a website with a huge collection of activities that were inspired by a mother who made some activities for her own toddlers to use. All activities are accessible by using a spacebar press or a switch and switch interface that can emulate the spacebar. The activities can also be accessed with a switch adapted mouse if the mouse cursor is positioned over the ‘press the spacebar’ text. Many activities may be useful for educating children on basic principles; please note many of the activity themes are targeted for a North American audience. Check out the site for more details.

Every Day Skills and Sense Factory are programs that allow users to create switch accessible sequences of photos or videos or even access a good selection of sequences that have been shared by other users. Both programs and a range of resources can be downloaded from www.deafblindonline.org.uk/software.html#es

For a switch accessible eBook reader that will read a story out loud, try www.tarheelreader.org. For more information on eBooks and eBook readers, keep a look out in future editions of TechnoTalk.

Timed Switch Use

OneSwitch: www.oneswitch.org.uk

The OneSwitch site has a wealth of switch resources and contains a library of over 100 switch accessible games. (Click “library” from the home page and then click on the “one switch games” link). This site also contains information on how to make switch interfaces, switches, how to adapt toys and also a large range of ideas for other activities that can be enjoyed by single switch users. Most of the games suit more advanced switch users, but it is a must-see resource for people interested in exploring single switch use.



CBBC Children’s switch accessible games: www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups/about/specialneeds/physical_cbeebies.shtml

The BBC has long been heavily involved in children’s education, and recently they have teamed up



with the UK's Inclusive Technologies Company to make some of their kids games switch accessible. This webpage contains information for parents and teachers and links to the accessible games on the right hand side of the screen.

Shiny Learning www.shinylearning.co.uk/freegames/index.shtml

has a website with a collection of simple free games that can be adapted in terms of their ease of play.

Nanogames: www.nanogames.com/nanodemo/index.html

is a selection of games that can be played free online for a limited time, or purchased and downloaded. Many of the games have educational content.

(To set up switch access, click setup, then accessibility and then choose mouse click only to set up timed switch use). Even though it says mouse click only, most games can be played with any key press and/or a mouse click. (Run the games full screen to be able to see the spot where the mouse cursor has to be placed to access mouse click only). Many of the difficulty settings can be adjusted to make these activities suitable for a number of different ages and ability levels).



SEN Switcher: www.northerngrid.org/ngflwebsite/sen/Menu-L.htm

Designed by Northern Grid, these activities are designed and staged specifically for the acquisition of switch skills. Many of the activities are "age neutral" meaning that they can be enjoyed by switch users from a very broad range of ages and abilities. Activities can be played online or downloaded free.

This is an example of one of the Targeting activities from SEN Switcher. The mouse moves across the screen and the user is required to press the switch as the box scans over the mouse. This helps to introduce the concept of switch [timing and scanning](#).



RJ Cooper games: www.rjcooper.com/rj's-free-games/index.html

These are well known and have been featured in previous TechnoTalk articles.

Inclusive Technologies free site: www.helpkidzlearn.com/index.html

contains a selection of very high quality educational games and activities that can be played online, most of which are switch accessible. (All switch accessible activities are identified with a switch symbol).

Judy Lynn: www.judylynn.com/downloads.htm

contains demos of several good quality switch accessible games with full accessibility. The programs will stop working after they are played 10 times.



Single Switch Scanning

Nanogames: www.nanogames.com/nanodemo/index.html (click setup then accessibility and then choose mouse click only to set up timed scanning).

Even though it says mouse click only, most games can be played with any key press and or a mouse click. (Run the games full screen to be able to see the spot where the mouse cursor has to be placed to access mouse click only).

Able Gamers Blog: www.ablegamers.com/one-switch-games.html

These games involve lots of repeated presses and very precise timing, so they would be good for more advanced switch users.

Hotspots: www.oatsoft.org/Software/hotspots

is a utility that can be programmed to enable scanning switch access to some games and activities that normally require full mouse movement. Check out the website for more details.

Inclusive Technology website: www.inclusive.co.uk/downloads/downloads.shtml

The UK-based retailer has two programs for free download that enable switch scanning. *Talking Faces* requires the user to record voices or sounds (the stop, record and play buttons are scanned) that are then played back while a face animates. *Inclusive CD Player* is a free utility that enables switch users to play audio CDs on the computer. Both of these activities can be set up for single switch and two switch scanning access. (Windows only).

Two-switch Step Scanning

Free demo downloads of some of the popular Edmark software such as *Bailey's Book House*, *Thinking Things* and *Sammy's Science House* are available from www.riverdeep.net/products/downloads/free_downloads.jhtml. These programs come with inbuilt single switch scanning access. (Windows and some Mac).

The Drawing Activities at http://papunet.net/games/drawing_exercises/ are accessible using two-switch step scanning, as are the activities for making and writing a free greeting card from the same site <http://papunet.net/games/postcard/> and the word and visual scanning game http://papunet.net/games/_sanatehtavat/kesa/?lang=en. All games require a switch interface that can emulate an enter and spacebar press. Contact TASC for more information on switch interfaces.

Summary

There are a large and growing number of activities on the internet that can provide education, skill development and leisure for switch users at all stages of ability. While this list will become outdated, there will always be a selection of free and low cost options for switch users. By regularly checking the www.oneswitch.org.uk and http://delicious.com/Jane_Farrall sites, for new games and activities, it is possible for everyone to stay in touch with new switch accessible programs and ideas.

References

Jones, T. & King, J. (2008). *Switching to Success: Stages in Switch Development*. Retrieved September 10, 2009 from www.liberator.co.uk/js/fontis/tiny_mce/plugins/filemanager/files/liberator_uk/STAGES%20IN%20SWITCH%20DEVELOPMENT.pdf

Moir, L. (2008). *Promoting Switching Skills in Children with Complex Needs*. Retrieved September 21, 2009 from www.e-bility.com/arataconf08/papers/computer_based_solutions/MOIR_Lois_paper.doc



iPhone accessibility and apps for people with disabilities



The iPhone 3GS comes with built-in accessibility features that can assist people with physical, visual or hearing impairments experience all the phone has to offer.

This includes features such as:

- Closed Captioning and TTY support
- Voice Control (for making calls and playing music)
- Voice Over (gesture based screen reader)
- Zoom (magnification)
- White on Black (high contrast) and Mono Audio

For more information on these features, see the Apple website:
www.apple.com/iphone/iphone-3gs/accessibility.html

There are many applications (apps) available free (or low cost) from the app store that are also beneficial for people with disabilities, including apps for communication, organisation, reading, writing, maths, etc. For a good list of these, check out www.scribd.com/doc/24470331/iPhone-and-iPod-touch-Apps-for-Special-Education

