

## Speech recognition

Over recent weeks I've started using Microsoft's speech recognition, as part of my continuing efforts to avoid a repetitive strain injury. The program comes with the operating system if you have Vista or Windows 7, or can easily be installed if you have an earlier version. A 2009 review of speech recognition programs (<http://tinyurl.com/234nqhf>) found that the free program from Microsoft was almost as good as *Dragon Naturally Speaking*, which is generally acknowledged to be the best speech recognition software.

Speech recognition can be used to open programs, switch between applications and type dictated text. The Microsoft system includes a tutorial to get you started, which involves repeating a set of sentences about speech recognition. This serves two purposes—it gives the user information about what the program can do, and at the same time gives the computer information about the user's speech patterns. The system is constantly learning, and thus improves each time it is used. For example, if I say 'the dog is black', the computer might misunderstand, and insert the phrase 'the dock is that'. If I then say 'correct', the computer will highlight what it just typed (i.e. 'the dock is that'), and present me with up to 10 numbered options for what I might have said (anything from 'The Doc is not' to 'the jockey's that'). Hopefully, the list will include the term 'the dog is black', in which case, I simply say the number for that term, followed by 'OK', and the computer inserts the correct words. The correction allows the computer to learn more about my speech patterns, as it matches the correct words to the sounds it heard me make.

Things don't always go quite that smoothly. For example, the program likes to be spoken to gently and calmly. Thus, if the computer has misheard a phrase and I say 'correct' in too sharp a tone, it assumes that I have moved on to the next words in the sentence, and types the word 'wrecked', or something of that ilk, rather than going back and highlighting the erroneous phrase. Similarly, if I get frustrated and my tone of voice changes, the program starts to behave like a grumpy teenager, wilfully misunderstanding my words, and becoming ever more sullen and unresponsive the more annoyed I get. Another issue is that the program is set to automatically insert a double space after a full stop, which is odd, given that double spaces are not necessary when using a word processor.

On the positive side, when I manage to speak calmly and naturally, and use words the program can cope with, the speed is definitely better than my fastest touch typing. Opening programs with speech recognition also works well, probably because the spoken commands are repetitive. I find it very satisfying to say 'Start Word', 'Start Excel', 'Start Outlook', etc, when I turn on the computer, and see the programs magically open.

So far, I think the frustrations probably outweigh the benefits. However, I'm persevering, using the program for a short time each day, so that I can gradually train it to respond better to my voice. I managed to dictate the first paragraph of this article, but have to admit that I then gave up and typed the rest of it.

## More on changing to MS Word 2007 or 2010

For those of you who are resisting the change to MS Word 2007 or 2010 because of worries about your ability to cope with the new interface, there is yet another tool to help you. An add-in called

*Toolbar Toggle* allows you to add the old-style toolbar to the ribbon in MS Word 2007 or 2010, or get rid of the ribbon completely. A trial version is available from [www.toolbartoggle.com](http://www.toolbartoggle.com).

### **What would you like to see in this column?**

Are there any issues with onscreen editing that you would like me to tackle in this column? If so, please send your ideas to me at [hilary@cadmanediting.com](mailto:hilary@cadmanediting.com), and I will do my best to cover them in future articles.

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Published in the Canberra Society of Editors newsletter, October 2010

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