

### Share a Tech or Program: Spelling/Grammar Checkers for Persons with Dyslexia

Ghotit, Ginger and Paper Rater are three assistive technologies designed to provide more robust English spelling and grammar corrections than those offered as components of word processing software. As such, these services are particularly useful to persons with dyslexia and English language learners, as well as students of all ages and types. While Ghotit and Ginger were designed with persons with dyslexia specifically in mind, all three technologies provide distinct benefits to this community of users.

Ghotit is a downloadable program that works in conjunction with Microsoft Word to provide contextual spelling, grammar and punctuation corrections. Using color and underlines, Ghotit points out problems it has found, including misspelled words, words spelled correctly but used in the wrong context, and split and merged words (for example, “birth day” or “icecream”). Ghotit also includes a text-to-speech function that allows users to listen to their text both before and after corrections are made. Most helpfully, Ghotit’s spelling suggestions come with definitions, allowing the user – who may not know the correct spelling of the word he or she seeks – to choose the right word based on meaning. Ghotit’s target community is individuals with dyslexia or dysgraphia who need to communicate in writing as part of their everyday lives, though it could certainly be used to meet the needs of English language learners or anyone who needs assistance with writing. There are a few downsides to Ghotit, however – there is a download fee (either \$129.99 for a lifetime subscription or \$14.99 for a monthly one), and the program is only compatible with Windows computers using Microsoft Word 2003 and newer (though Apple users with software such as Parallels can run Ghotit off an alternate desktop). Though a single license can be installed on multiple computers, only one of those computers will be able to run the program at a time.

Like Ghotit, Ginger is also a downloadable proofreader. It works with Microsoft Word, Outlook, PowerPoint and Internet Explorer, as well as Mozilla Firefox, to provide sentence level corrections for spelling and grammar mistakes. Ginger also uses color to highlight differences between the original and corrected text and provides suggested spelling substitutions. While Ginger is mainly aimed at persons with dyslexia, the premium version of the software includes features that make the program even more useful for English language learners. The basic version of Ginger is free, but only the premium program (which costs \$89 per license) includes a natural voice text-to-speech reader and a feature for learning English that creates personalized lessons and tests based on the mistakes Ginger discovers in the user's writing. Some of Ghotit's downsides apply to Ginger as well – the software is not compatible with Apple computers and requires Windows XP or higher. However, Ginger's website states that it does provide discounts for purchasers of multiple licenses or years of service.

Paper Rater is an online-only proofreading program that uses natural language processing to provide spelling and grammar checks to analyze text users copy and paste into the site's editor. Users describe their education level (grade 6-12, college, graduate school, doctorate or other), the type of paper they are writing (essay, personal narrative, speech, lab report and others), and specify whether they would like the program to check the text for originality (a built-in plagiarism detection feature). Misspelled words and grammar issues are highlighted, and suggestions are shown when the user clicks on a highlighted word. Paper Rater, with its heavier focus on education, also provides a word choice, style and vocabulary analysis of the user's text. While Paper Rater does not explicitly list an audience outside of students of all types, its services can be useful to persons with dyslexia and English language learners, though it is not as successful as Ghotit and Ginger at picking up on dyslexia-specific errors. Particularly appealing,

however, is the fact that Paper Rater is completely free and requires no installation, making it portable and usable on all types of computers.

All three spelling and grammar checkers provide clear benefits to those who use them, regardless of learning disability or level of familiarity with the English language. These programs are more in-depth than standard proofreaders, catching missing prepositions or incorrect verb tense (Ghotit example: “We need to found a common layer” to “We need to find a common layer”), split words or phonetically spelled words (Ginger example: “ikuli” to “equally”) and offering context-based suggestions for misspelled words (Paper Rater example: “basik” to “basic, basin, basil, batik”). Each of these proofreaders will help a user improve their written communication, and the tools’ emphasis on finding the mistakes a proofreading program misses makes them an asset to persons with dyslexia or English language learners.

While Ghotit, Ginger and Paper Rater do not impact a person’s physical accessibility, they can be invaluable tools for increasing intellectual access. Ofer Chermesh, a founder of Ghotit and a person with dyslexia himself, created the program out of his own frustration with spell checkers that could not recognize and correct his errors (Kloosterman, 2009). Enhanced proofreaders help to level the playing field by providing persons with dyslexia and English language learners with an electronic “second look,” and one they can count on, unlike standard spell checkers. According to Chermesh’s organization, mainstream “spell checkers produce low results for users who demonstrate poor English spelling, such as people with dyslexia,” since the user’s spelling is “too far” from the correct spelling or the spell checker has no context for correctly spelled words used incorrectly; further, traditional proofreaders do not provide users with the proper level of help in choosing the right replacement word (Ghotit, 2012, “About Us”). By serving as a proofreading tool that understands and addresses the mistakes commonly made

by people with dyslexia, Ghotit, Ginger and Paper Rater increase users' access to written communication. Often, people are judged upon their ability to write – in job applications and school essays, for example – and those whose memos include spelling and grammatical errors or typos are found lacking. By using one of these programs, a person with dyslexia or who is learning English can move beyond their print challenges with confidence. As these programs are available to any interested user, they highlight the principles of universal usability by making correct English spelling and grammar achievable by all.

Enhanced spelling and grammar checkers such as Ghotit, Ginger and Paper Rater can easily be adopted by cultural institutions such as libraries and schools. The free version of Ginger can be installed on any Windows computer; similarly, a link to Paper Rater's website can be added to a browser's favorites or bookmarks folder, or linked from the institution's own website. Many public libraries have "homework help" pages for children and teens with links to databases and tutor chat services. This section would be a perfect place for the library to describe advanced proofreaders and note which one is available on library computer stations. Since Ghotit is only available for a fee, widespread installation of it on public library or school computers may not be feasible, though it is a good option for individual users. When presenting programs, or working collaboratively with teachers and other members of the community, librarians can include these services as ones that can easily bridge a written divide.

Ghotit, Ginger and Paper Rater are all useful technologies that go beyond the abilities of a simple standard proofreader. While the style of service may differ, their targeted aid to persons with dyslexia and English language learners makes them a benefit to both individual users and cultural institutions.

## References

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