Tools, tips, apps and assistive software to support your studies and your learning. This PowerPoint presentation is covering a mixture of different things & hopefully you'll find some of it of interest. Even if it has the words assistive software in it.   Bear in mind that there is assistive software which has features that can help absolutely everyone with their studies, so have a look at that as well - but to start we are going to have a look at the basics.

When your first on campus, one of the first things that you will want to do is connect to Eduroam.   To do any of the things on this slide, you will need to have your Heriot Watt email address and password, though obviously while you're at home you'll be able to do the installation of office from your home Wi-Fi.   You will want Eduroam working on all your devices as it is secure and also works for most universities and university hospitals, so it's quite handy.

Once you have gone on to your office.com login and are on your welcome screen for office 365 find the install office apps button and install Microsoft Office 2016 pro - on your own laptop and once you've done that if you open up one drive and again you use your Heriot Watt login, your able to access your Heriot Watt one drive, which is a sizeable 1 TB of data space, which is extremely useful.   If you, like me have numerous different devices, you can install the one drive on your phone or tablet, your laptop and you'll have access to your files from any of your devices.

Word, Acrobat and general PC tips.

Word: Immersive Reader

Immersive Reader in Word online allows you to change every aspect of how Word looks:

Column Width changes line length to improve focus and comprehension.

Page Colour can make text easier to scan with less eye strain.

Line Focus removes distractions so that you can move through a document line by line. Adjust the focus to put one, three, or five lines in view at a time.

•**Text Spacing** increases the spacing between words, characters, and lines.
•**Syllables** shows breaks between syllables, to improve word recognition and pronunciation.
•**Read Aloud** lets you hear your document as each word is highlighted. There is a selection of voices and you can alter the speed of reading.
There is a beginner's video guide to Immersive Reader on YouTube.

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So word Acrobat and some general PC tips coming up now and the first one being the Word's immersive reader function's. You'll find under the view menu of your Word program - this is where you can customise everything from column width to page colour, to text spacing et cetera, and to customise your reading experience to your own specific preferences, and it's quite useful to set up. There is also a built-in text-to-speech engine puts some people are unaware of so..
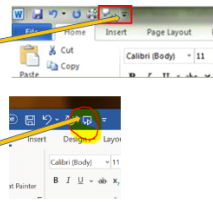
Text-to-Speech in Word

Go to customise quick access toolbar at the top – see picture.

Click on "More Commands"

Scroll down and select "Speak" and then ADD.

The play icon should now be visible.

You can now highlight words, and then click on the play icon on the top of the screen to have them read back.
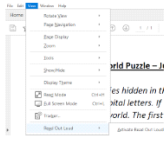
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This is how you would set up text-to-speech in Word. What you have to do is look for the top on your tool bar & look for the little downward arrow which you can click on, and you're looking for "more commands" - you click on that and you should scroll down and eventually come to speak function. When you find it, highlight it and click "add now". From now on you should have that function at the top of your screen and you can highlight any group of words in your word document hit that button and it will read the text back to you.

Acrobat Reader's built in speech & reading options

For altering text size
View > Zoom [use whatever options you prefer.]
For Text to Speech
View > Read Out Loud > Activate Read Out Loud or CTRL SHIFT Y
To have whole page read back CTRL SHIFT V
To read whole document CTRL SHIFT B
To PAUSE CTRL SHIFT C
To STOP CTRL SHIFT E
Edit > Preferences > Accessibility
Will take you to the tools you can use to alter the appearance of the document you are accessing. Colours, Zoom & Page Layout.
A beginner's video guide to Zoom and Read Out Loud on YouTube.

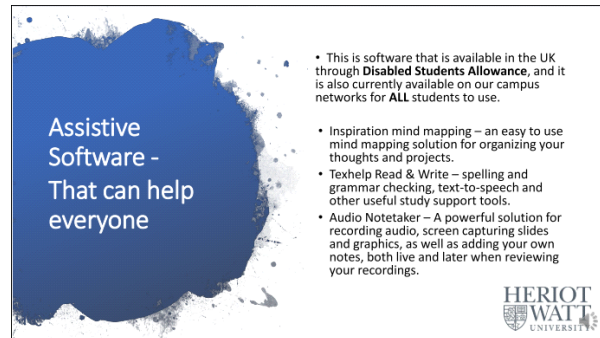**Adobe Acrobat** is the popular Free PDF reader that most Computers come with already installed. You can download it From https://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/

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So apart from Word documents the other type of document that you'll probably be doing a lot

of reading through is in the PDF format. One of the most popular programs for reading PDFs is of course Acrobat Reader and is a link on the slide if you want to download if you don't already have it. It has built-in text-to-speech as well, which you'll find from the "view" drop down, down to "read out loud" and then "activate read out loud".   You'll also notice in the slide that I have put the shortcuts there as well [for downloading Acrobat Reader].   You can also alter the text size and if you want to actually have a look at more options, if you go to edit drop-down, down to preferences and then have a look at the accessibility settings, there might be something there that could be of interest to you
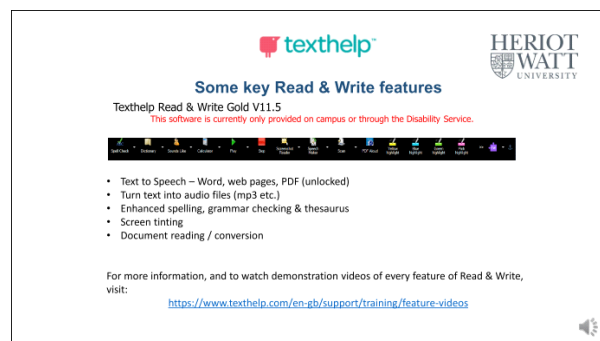
Okay so the next few slides are about software that are labelled as assistive software, but in fact those features for everyone to be aware of in the software - because it might well help you in your studies.   We will look at Inspiration mind mapping, will look at Texthelp read and write and finally Audio Notetaker in this section.   I work in the disability service and some students qualify for disabled students allowance for the software for their own use at home, however we do have these three main pieces of software on all our campuses so they are available to everyone on campus.

Texthelp read and write is probably a very good example of the types of things I mean here about assistive software coming in very handy area for people in any situations at any time, and its key functions are text-to-speech, converting anything with words into MP3s, or just into spoken audio through headsets or speakers, and it also features enhanced spelling, grammar checking, a very useful thesaurus, and some other features as well, and there is screen tinting there if you have a preference for a tint on your screen to help rest your eyes, and there are other functions as well. The one that I want to mention is that it has an excellent built-in scan

function, and this can be useful if you access a document that is perhaps an old document, might be online, whatever, but it's actually badly scanned & might just be a photograph, and not an actual proper document, and you would like to quote it or at least have it copied into a format that you could choose the font and size of font et cetera, what Texthelp read and write does, is that there is a scan button and beside that there is a drop-down button and if you go into that you will see that you are able to convert downloaded files, and then you can choose the output to be a PDF or even a Word document which will give you a lot more accessibility options - so it's a very useful feature.
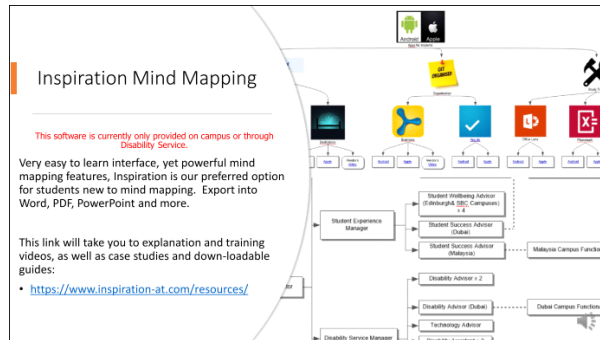
Inspiration mind mapping is a mind mapping program which is extremely easy to get into.   It's very quick to learn and yet quite deceptively powerful.   A lot of people, myself included, a lot of staff use it as an organisational tool and you can see the slide here.   We use it to design our command structure for the well-being service amongst other things - I use it for organising features regarding apps and software et cetera, so it is well worth having a look at and it's very easy to get into, compared with other pieces of mind mapping software such as Mindgenius, which is also on the network.

Audio Notetaker is a powerful piece of software that's available for both Windows and Mac and also comes with an accompanying app for your phone as well, and it provides you with the facility to be able to record and annotate, add notes, even import slides and graphics, all into the one file and can be used for recording live which is particularly useful and obviously on the phone or on a laptop in lectures, but it's also excellent for recording other resources such as webinars and even YouTube videos for you to screen capture, plus record and take notes and then once you have all the information in one file you are able to export it into a variety of

different formats including Word document or even an MP3 album or video, and the links at the bottom of the slide provide more information. Unfortunately at the moment the software can only be funded for students registered with the disability service, and it is available all the University campuses, however you may still want to try the 30 day trial at home and see if you think it's worthwhile purchasing and this video linked at the bottom of the slides which might be useful.

Okay so now some free apps and software, starting with Grammarly, which I'm sure most of us have heard of.   It's my preferred option at home to correct my spelling and grammar regardless of what any textbased software or websites et cetera that I'm typing into, and it comes in all sorts of different formats and as extensions for just about every browser out there, and it's well worth having a look at if you haven't it checked out before.   Quizlet and Anki have been recommended by our disability advisers as excellent tools for students who wish to enhance their study skills by creating flashcards and quizzes, so these might be worth having a look at too. Otter AI is a very unusual tool and almost recommend everyone to at least download it and try it - and once you have the app running on your phone for instance, you can have a conversation with someone and it will record and transcribe the conversation and it recognises when different people are speaking, so you get the recognition that someone saying something to someone else. The accuracy can vary and therefore it's worthwhile having a look on your own device and seeing how accurate it is, and of course with all these types of transcribing and recording apps that are free, they are quite open about the use of certain information and keywords to target advertising, and otherwise of course they would be charging for it.   It might be worthwhile having a look at..

Free software, Balibolka is one of my old favourites - it's a very simple to use text to speech program and with some extra features which are very nice. It's completely advert free and stand-alone piece of software for Windows, and basically the rule is if you can copy the text from somewhere you can paste it into Balibolka, then you can alter the background colour you can alter the colour of the font, type of font, the size of font, save that as an individual document, and of course you can also save it as an MP3 or a wave file.   You get the best of both worlds, they are completely free, and there's literally no drawbacks about using that piece of software. Colorveil, is a free screen tinting program which we have found, it's got some extra features compared with some of its competitors, including the fact that you can type in your RGB [red, green, blue] preferences that say the colour code and it will adjust the screen to your exact preference, and One Note is not necessarily assitive software, it's actually part of the office package but I know that more and more students are now using this as their preferred program and for keeping the notes, and it's well worth while having a look at and checking out. Some of the tutorials and videos are available on One Note as it might be your particular preference.

Okay accessibility features and free apps.   I'm just going to be very brief on this one and that iOS obviously is quite famous for having a lot of advanced accessibility features, and the links on the slide will take you to plenty more information, and for your iPhone or your iPad, or I should say, like me your Android user, there is some excellent information there as well. The same goes with Windows and the Mac accessibility OS X features, and so if you want to have a look at them and see if you want to play around with the different settings regarding fonts and colours et cetera you could have a look at these.   I will also talk about the Windows speech recognition in a minute or two, and there's also a range of free apps to support students including free mind mapping software and other various functions that you may find very useful if you go to the www.abilitynet.org site has a lot of information about the huge range of devices that are now available.

I am someone who provides advice to students and one of the most common complaints there is is when there are machines even if new running really slowly, and usually 9 times out of 10 this is because of Windows updates which is a necessary evil.   Windows 10 is easily the most secure Windows system we have had, and the reason for that is because there are constant updates regarding security and locking up features to make them even more secure.   Now the problem here is that there are updates every week,, if not more often, and while the machine is downloading these in the background or waiting for you to restart your machine it will slowly grind to a halt sometimes so is extremely important that you restart your machine every day, and when I say restart I don't mean put the lid down on your laptop, I don't even mean shutting down, because Windows 10 doesn't shut down properly because to increase the speed of it powering up again it just basically goes to sleep, so you really need to restart your machine and of course if you ever see the prompt to restart. it's really worthwhile just putting your hands up, saving all your work and letting it do its restart, you otherwise pay for it performance wise. You can actually force it to have a look at updates if you suspect that it's a bit slow and you can do that by just clicking on "check for updates" and as I've mentioned the previous slide go to ease of access if you want to have a look at some of the accessibility settings especially if you have any particular visual challenges.

In this slide is basically just to give you some tips there with Windows some handy shortcuts most of us will know about control C for copying, and control V for pasting of course, but there was actually quite a few other ones that are quite useful as well so here's a handy little list of some of them.   One of the other ones that you'll notice I've put at the top is that you can   can literally shake I the main window that you want to look at and it will minimise all the other ones and that's quite good fun. If you have a laptop or machine has a microphone it might be worth

you having a shot at trying the speech recognition for dictating. I've had various different results using a headset. found it's actually really quite good, and even with the laptop, it was kind of picking up what I'm saying, although I'm still having to do a lot of corrections.   To try, press the Windows key and H and get the dictation field up and an open notepad and they have a shot at it and see how it gets along with your own voice.

Do you work better with some background noise?

Some students do. They find that a background buzz can aid their concentration. Here are two web sites that offer free soundtracks.

Coffitivity recreates the ambient sounds of a cafe to boost your creativity and help you work better. Visit them here: https://coffitivity.com/

Noises Online

Another site that offers an even larger range of background sounds is https://noises.online/

Information Services also provide a broad range of support for all students.

Learning Advisors- they offer 'Power Hours' and 1-1 sessions on helping students to improve their study skills, which can include; planning and organising your work, setting goals, effective note taking and critical reading and evaluating. More information is available here.
Each School has its own dedicated **Academic Support and Liaison Librarian** who can help with all aspects of information gathering and then help ensure you cite and reference your sources correctly. See Subject Guides for more information.

You can also access LinkedIn Learning for over 12,000 digital courses on business, creative and technology topics. These courses are broken into bite size chunks, making it easy to focus on the developing the skills you need.

Students often find that they like to study whilst listening to background noises. Some students will listen to music, but there are other options for choosing a background noise that suits you. On this slide there are 2apps that you can download and use to select a background noise which works for you.
Additional support for your studies is also offered through the library.   This support includes, 1-1 study skills sessions, subject librarians, powerhours and Linked in learning. Links are provided to take you to each of the areas on the website for further information.

Wellbeing

There are many apps available that can help bolster a feeling of wellbeing and resilience.

A list of approved wellbeing apps can be found on our website.

Calm

HEADSPACE

Calm- An app for Sleep, Meditation and Relaxation. It features sleep stories, breathing programs, stretching exercises, and relaxing music.

Headspace – An app for mindfulness. Choose from hundreds of guided meditations on everything from managing stress and anxiety to sleep, productivity, exercise, and physical health.
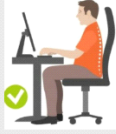
Feel like you need somewhere to talk?

BIG WHITE WALL

Heriot Watt students also have access to the Big White Wall.

BWW provides a safe space online to talk, to explore your feelings, and to learn how to improve and manage your mental health and wellbeing. It's available 24/7, is totally anonymous and provides online peer support. You can view a quick BWW video here.

There are also many apps available to support your wellbeing whilst you study at heriot watt. On this slide is a link to the wellbeing service approved apps on our website. The calm and headspace apps are the most well-known of these. Students at heriot watt are also able to sign up to and access the big white wall for free. Click on the link in this slide to watch a video which describes the 24hour support offered through the bww.

Information on this slide will help you to create a productive study environment. It can be helpful to try and minimise distractions when working so that you can make the most of the time when you are at your set study space. But remember to include lots of breaks when you're studying and get up to have a walk around, or stretch.

When accessing your lectures from home, it's important to think about where and when you study best. Getting into a routine and creating a study timetable may help you to keep on top of your stay tasks for the week ahead.