Leap to Literacy

Leap to Literacy is a reading and writing programme which aims to support students who have communication and/or learning difficulties. It also works very well in the general population of students and is part of the inclusive set of programmes in CandLE's 'Literacy Resources for All' suite.

'Literacy Resources for All' is the result of many years' experience with successful literacy teaching in the UK with students who have a wide range of needs. It is based on accepted practice within the UK whilst taking elements from internationally renowned and evidence-based practices.[1]

Appendix 1 of this document gives you more details of the research behind 'Literacy Resources for All'

NB Leap to Literacy is designed to be a follow-on programme to an individualised phonics programme. A student embarking on Leap to Literacy should have mastered at least single letter recognition, digraph recognition (ch, sh, th), some CVC word recognition (such as cat, dog) and have some understanding of medial vowel sounds (such as ee, ea, oo) and end sounds (such as sk, nt, nd). Student's knowledge only needs to be secure in single letter recognition as reinforcement activities are built into Leap to Literacy. The programme also introduces compound words. CandLE's 'Phonics for All' programme aims to develop early phonics skills. More information is available at: http://www.candleaac.com/

Leap to Literacy can be shared with the whole class during literacy 'carpet' sessions or can be used as a differentiated, individual learning programme on a one to one basis. It is not designed for the student to be left alone to explore as it is an interactive programme requiring significant scaffolding and communication.

The programme is available high and low tech and interchanging between the two is advised where possible. Students who rely on AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) will tend to need a more high-tech approach. Grids can easily be printed. If students struggle with spelling you may wish to omit, or reduce, the amount of spelling you ask them to do but word prediction is used throughout the programme as the programme aims to develop:

- vocabulary
- reading
- thinking
- communicating
- introductory writing

It is not designed to test spelling skills. Students who rely on AAC will need to use their existing communication systems but for those who are in the early stages of learning to use communication systems there some basic communication pages within the programme.

Leap to Literacy is made up of X sets of activities with four units in each and a fifth unit which is an end of set test. Each set is designed to be a whole week of activities, but individual student's needs may differ. Some will need to repeat activities or take longer than one day over a set.

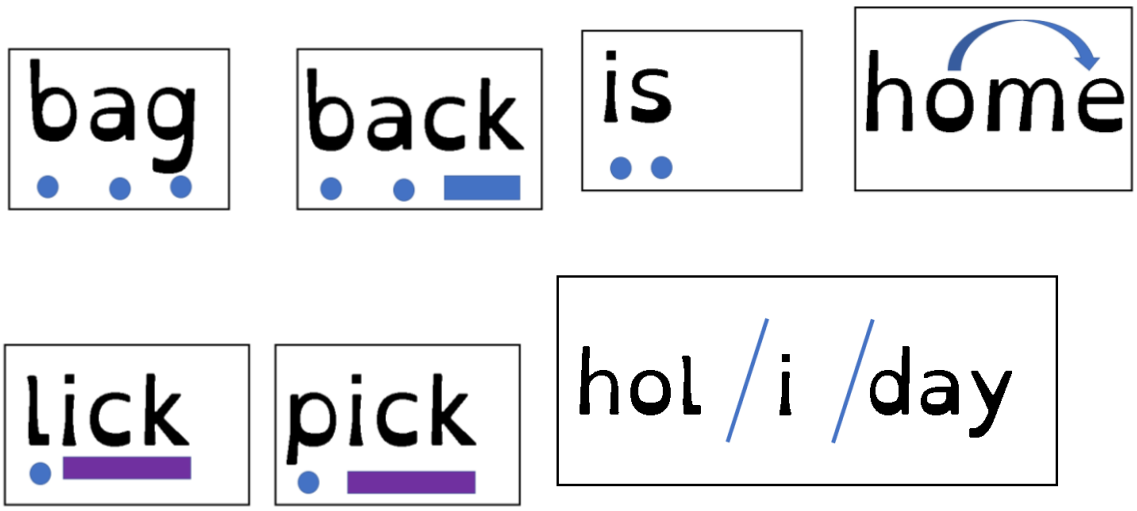
Every effort has been made to keep the language age neutral so that the older learner can engage.

[1] https://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds/files/2019/01/Reading-and-Literacy-for-Students-with-Significant-Intellectual-DisabilitiesErickson-et-al-2009-1.pdf (accessed 26th December 2019)

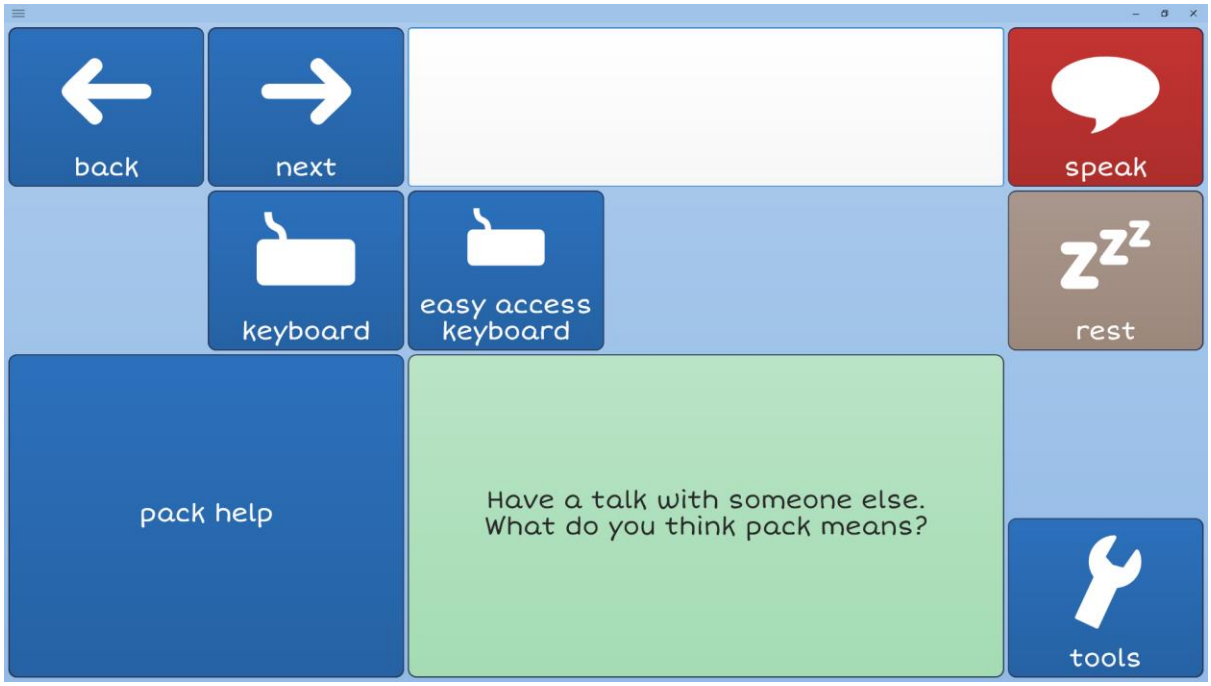
The order of activities and guidance on how to support the students through them are as follows:

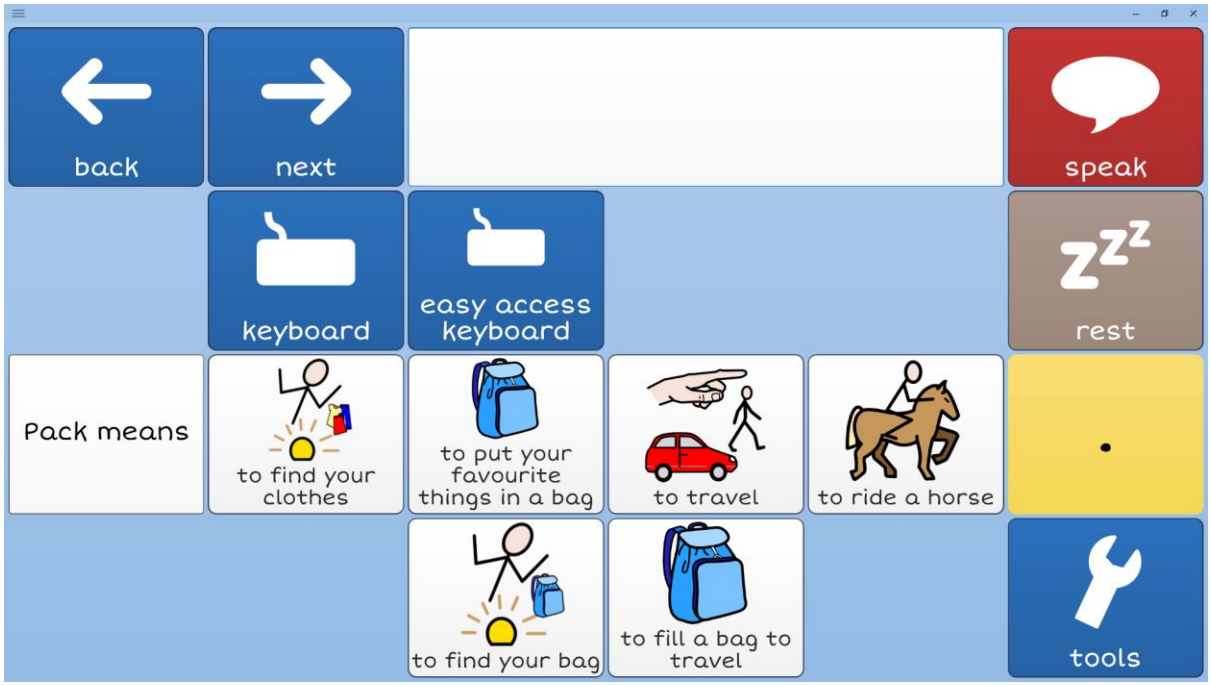
1. The first few pages introduce the student to the words they will encounter in the short stories that appear in each set. The high-tech version looks like this:

The student listens to the word by selecting the picture and then selecting the word that they think has been said. If they have difficulty you can use the low-tech card strips which are shown below. Dots indicate single letter sounds; blue lines indicate blends (or longer units of single sound) and the purple line indicates rime. Compound words are split by syllable. Split digraphs are indicated by a curved line above the vowels. This activity supports a range of phonics and sight-reading strategies including synthetic phonics.



2. Once the words have been identified the student is asked to discuss the meaning of one of the more complex words. This activity aims to build vocabulary and support thinking. There is always a phonics keyboard and an easy access keyboard available with word prediction but, for those who struggle with spelling, there are also multiple-choice options to enable focus on vocabulary rather than spelling. This is accessed via the 'help' cell.





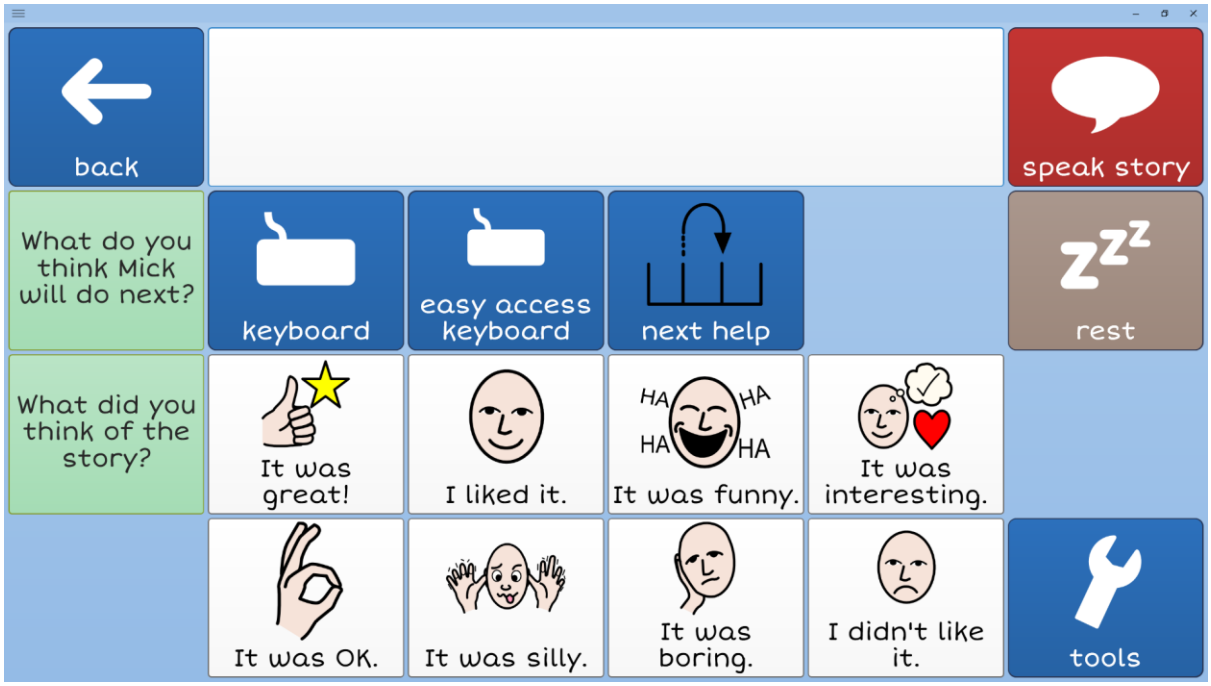
3. The next slide encourages the student to listen to the story and review it using highlighting. This is followed by a slide where the student is encouraged to read the story silently. The low-tech versions of the story are set out a line on a page with slightly more picture support and some extra discussion points.

Mick is on holiday.

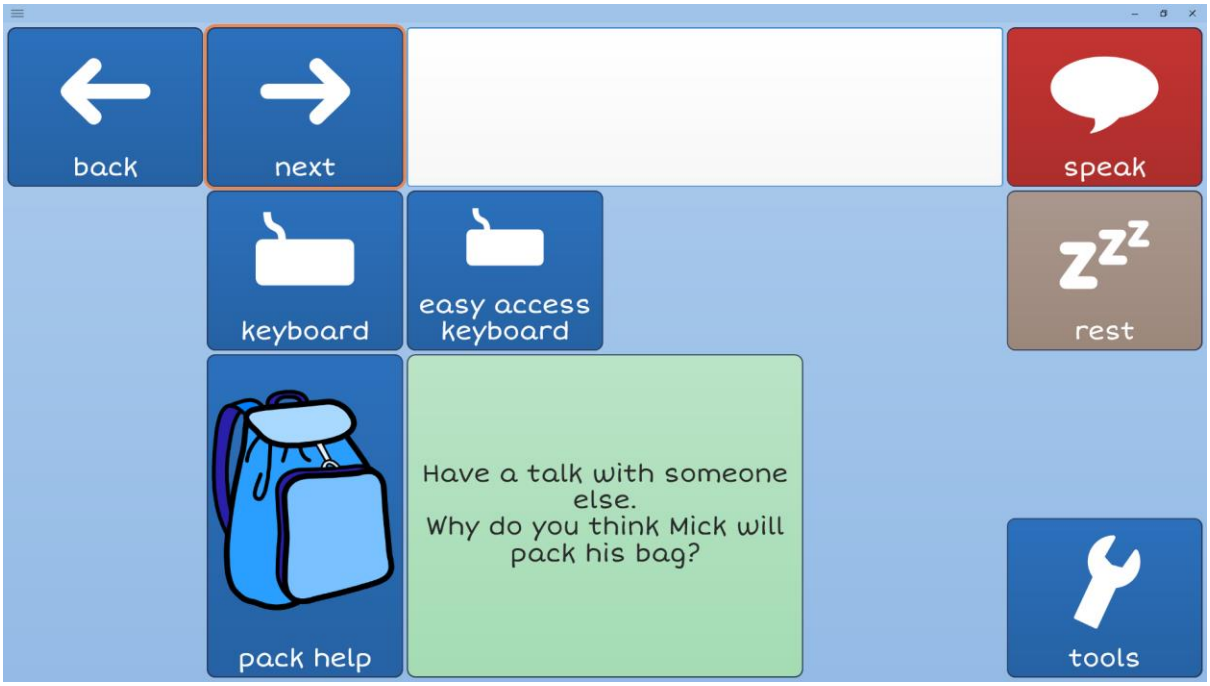
How is Mick feeling?

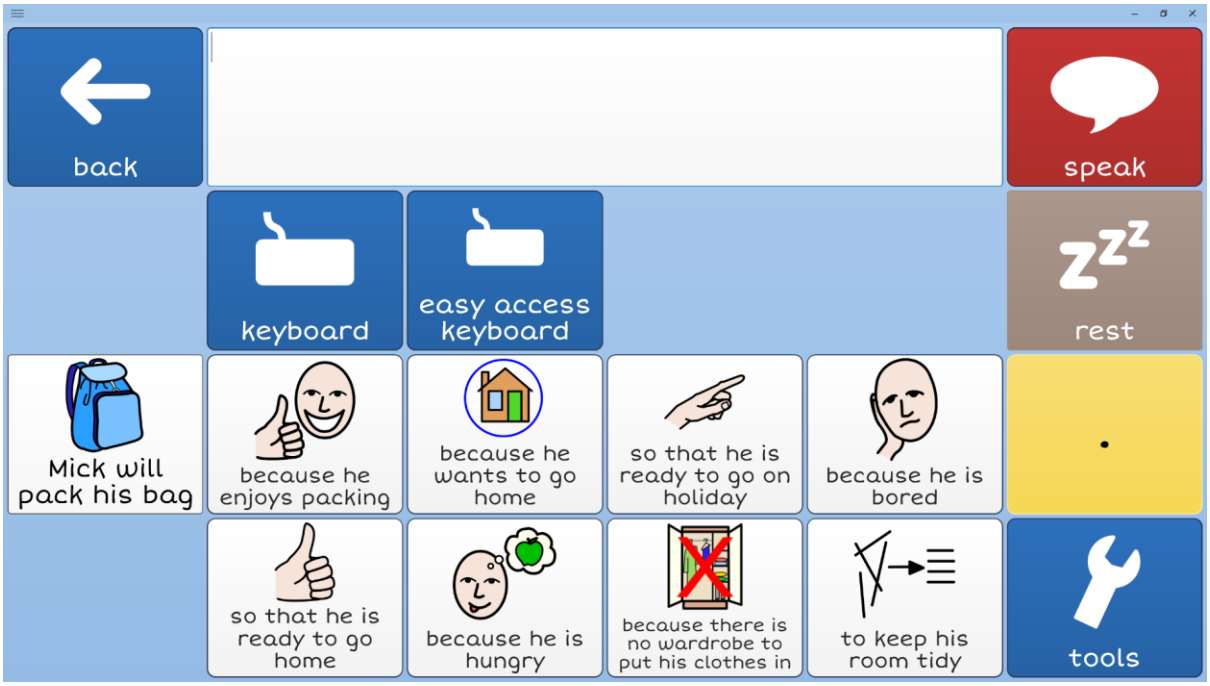
4Click here to enter text.

There is a link on the right side of the silent-reading page to support talking about the story. These pages invite the student to say what they think of the story and predict what will happen next.

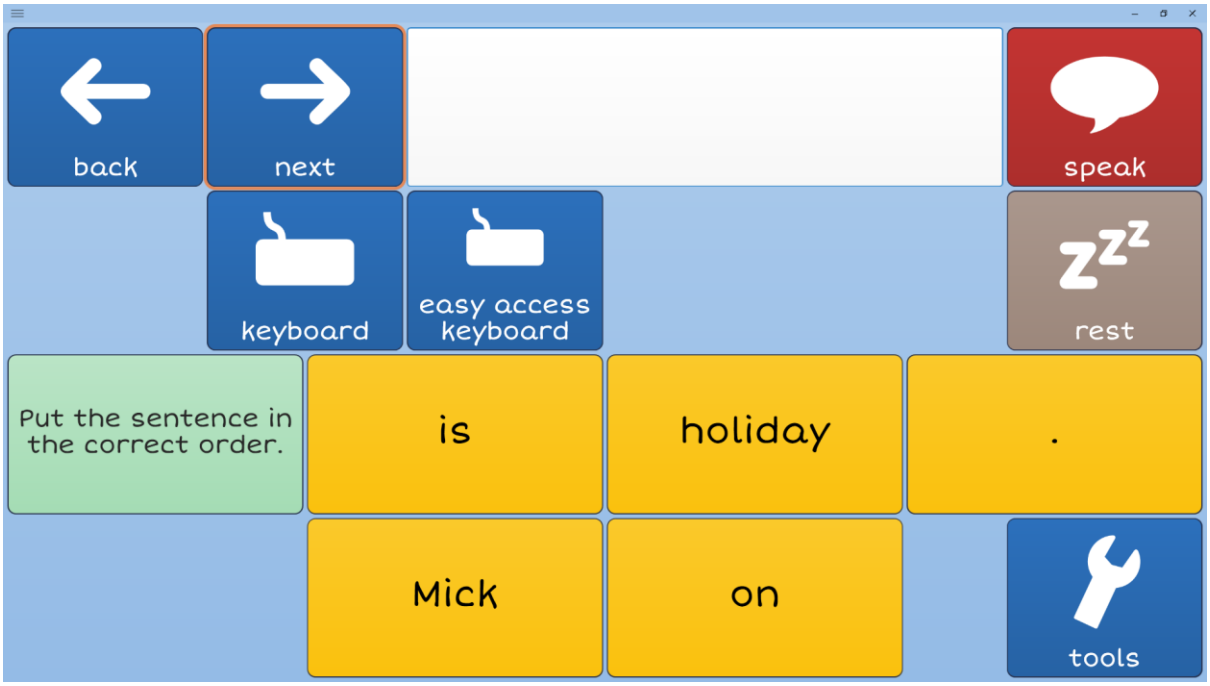


4. The next slide is a thinking skills question about an element in the story.

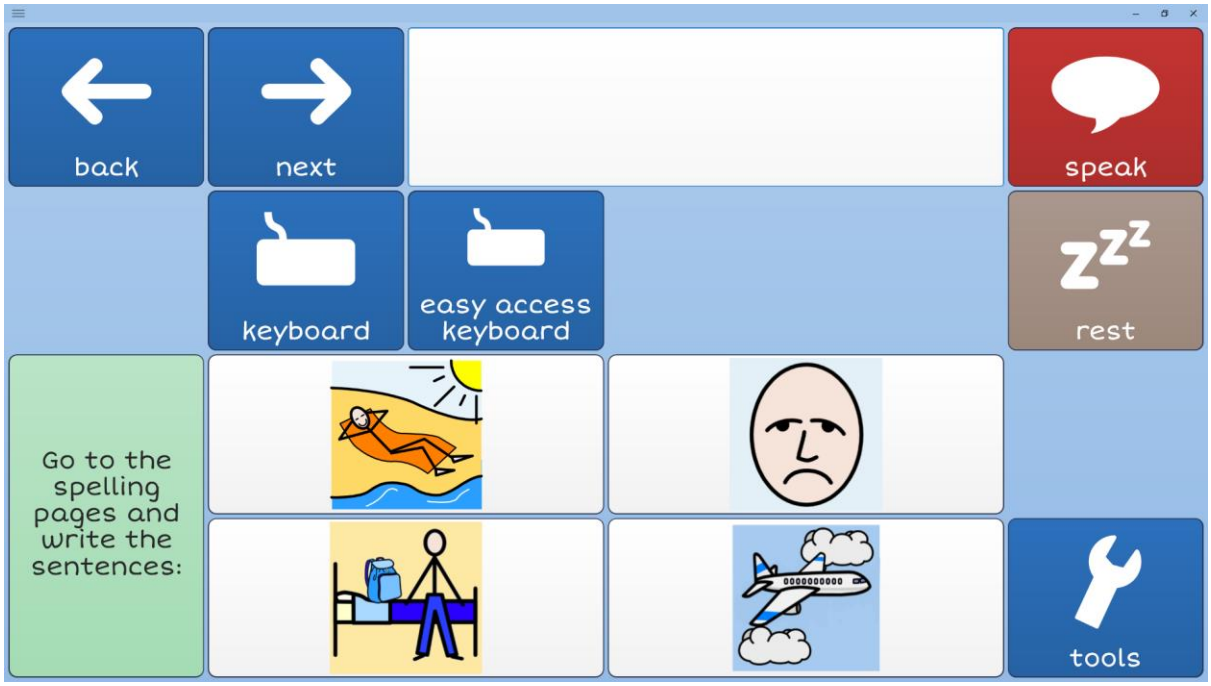




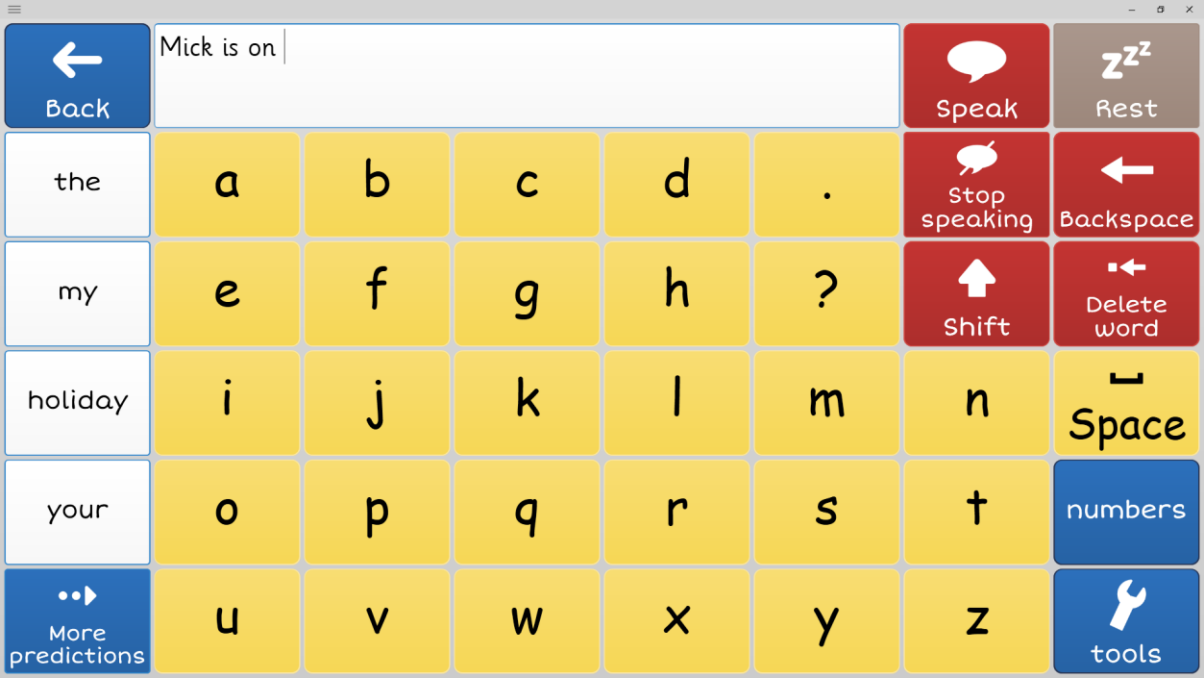
5. The next few slides teach sentence construction and basic punctuation as well as recall of the story. The student puts sentences from the story in order.



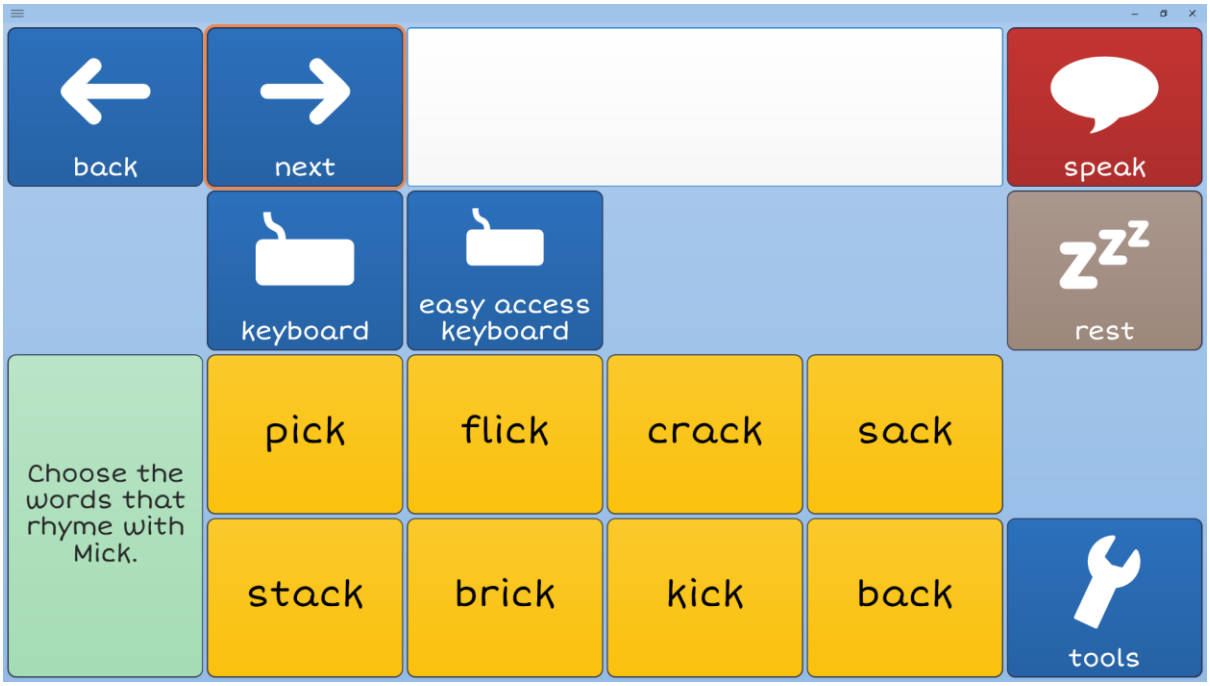
6. The next page involves spelling out the sentences from the story using word prediction. The student selects a picture to hear the sentence and then chooses a spelling board to type. Students who can write with a pencil will have a workbook to fill in or they might choose to take advantage of the word prediction.



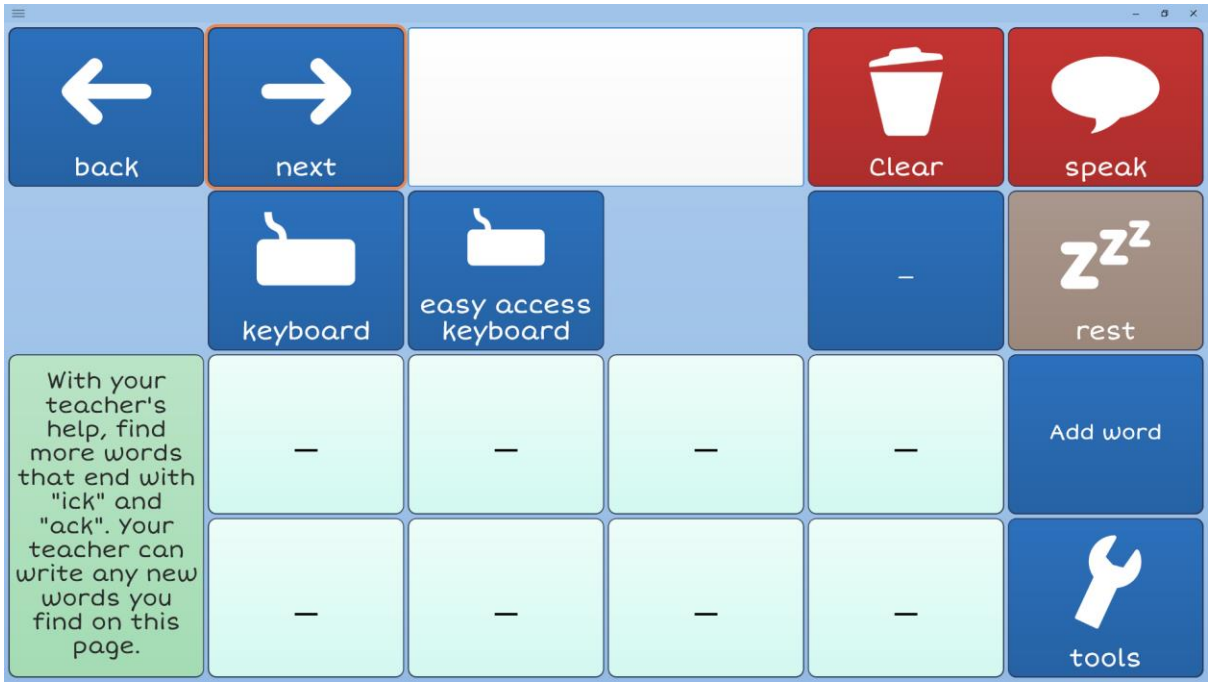
7Click here to enter text.



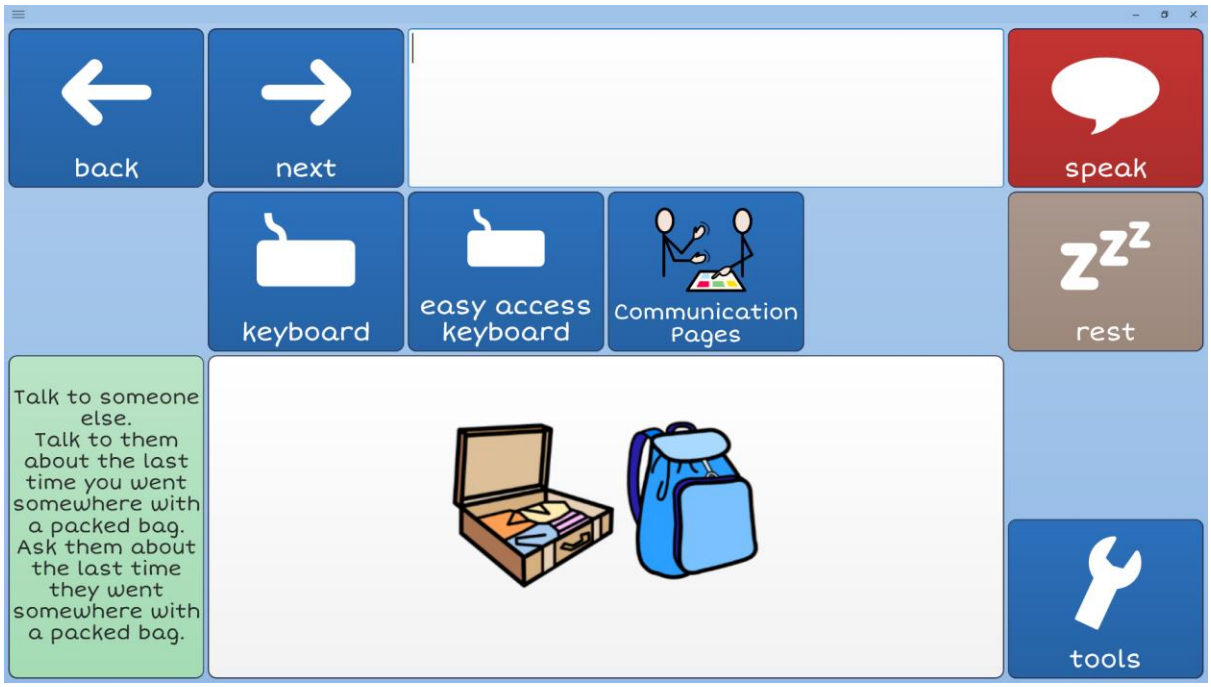
7. The next few pages are concerned with onset and rime from the story to enable the students to learn to generalise word endings to novel words.

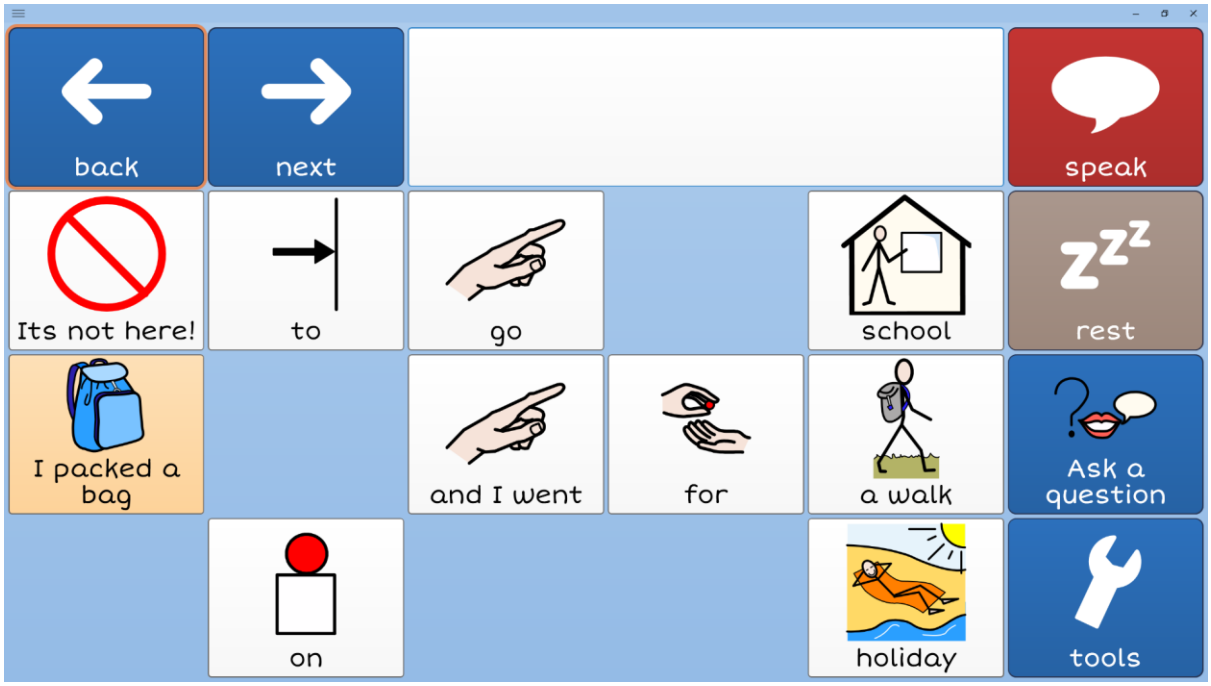


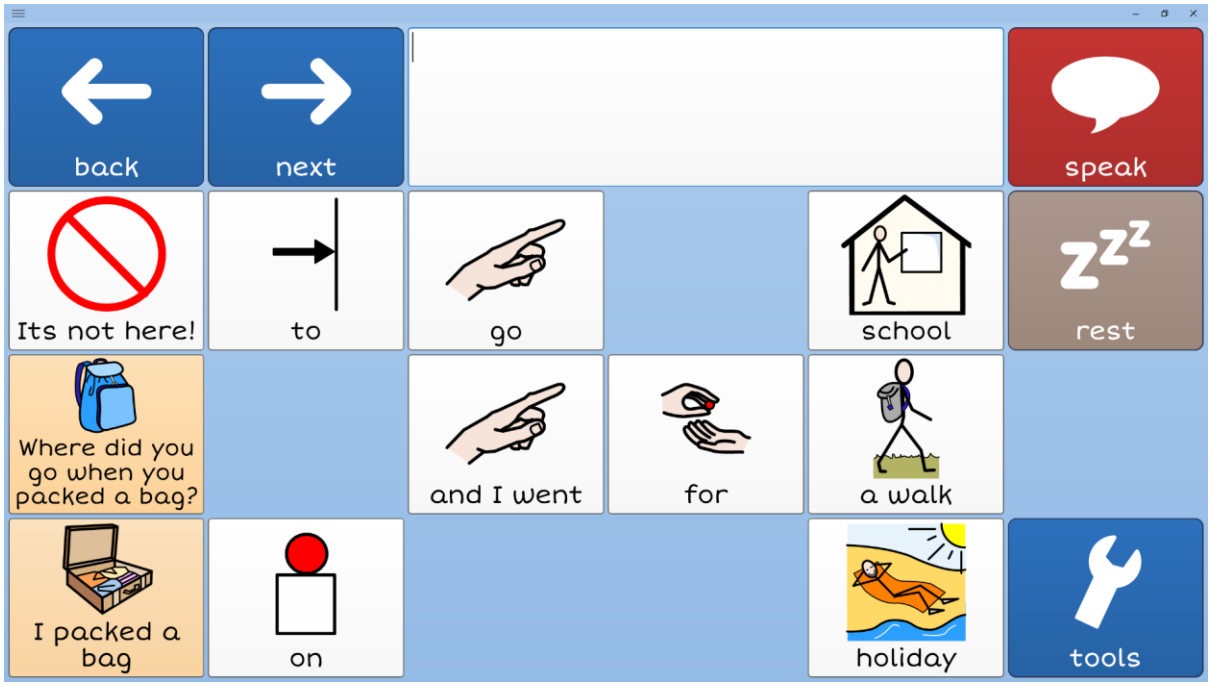
8Click here to enter text.



8. The next page is a discussion that connects the story to the student's own experience and encourages them to ask questions and take an interest in other people's experiences. There are simulated communication boards for those who are not yet fluent at using spelling to communicate.

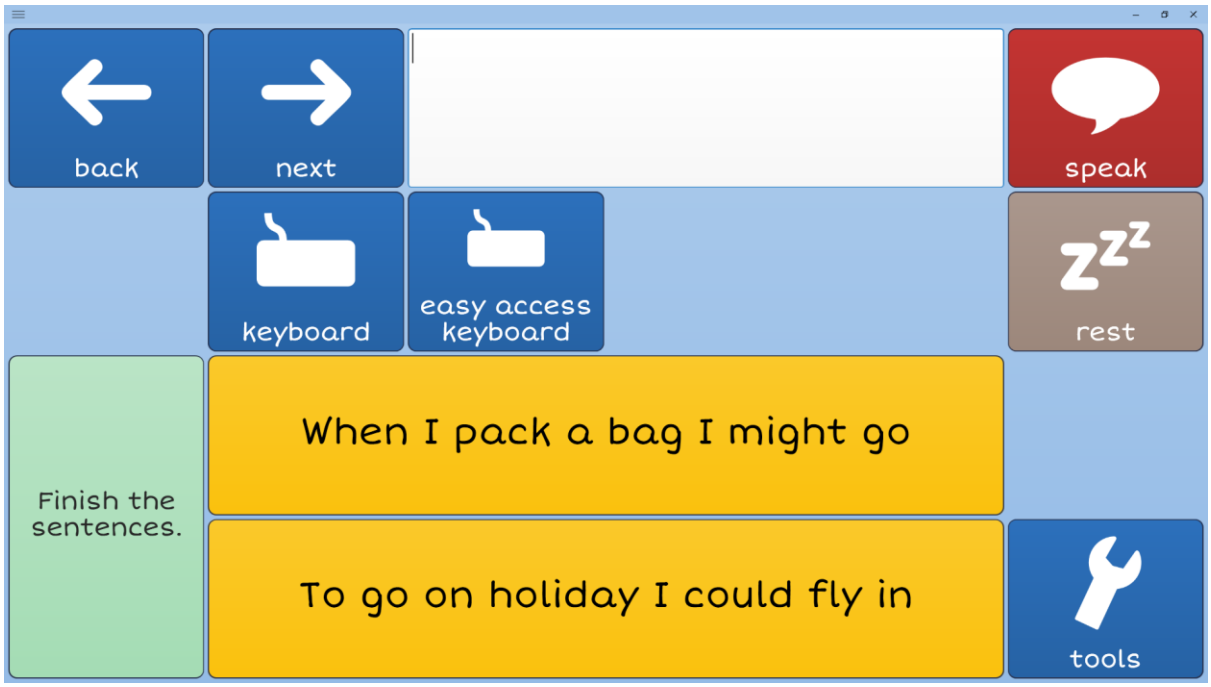


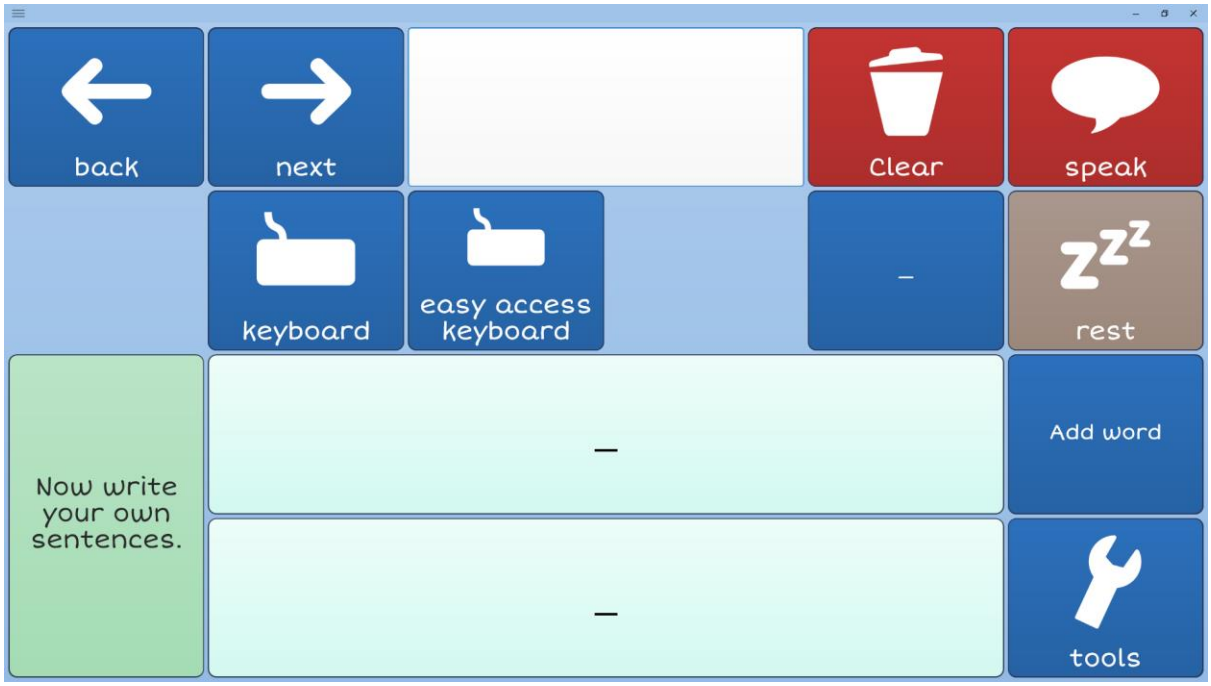




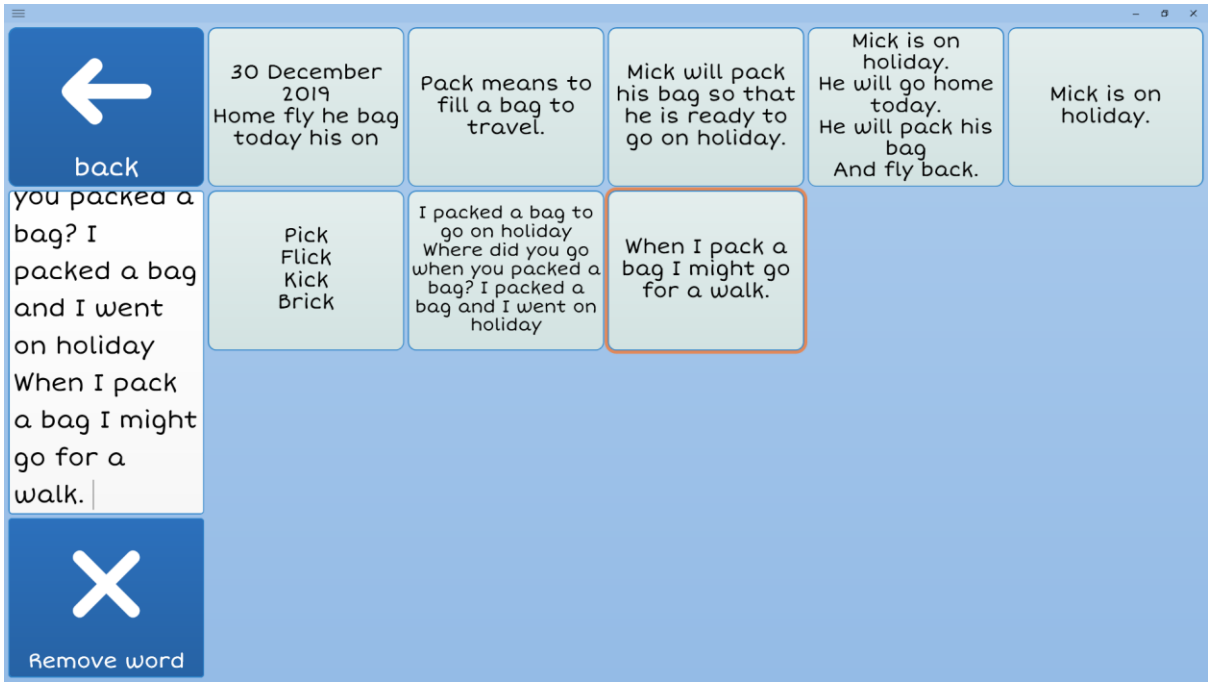
The communication partner should use the communication pages rather than speech to model use of communication pages.

9. The next 2 pages invite some early writing activities with a sentence completion task and then a short sentence writing task.

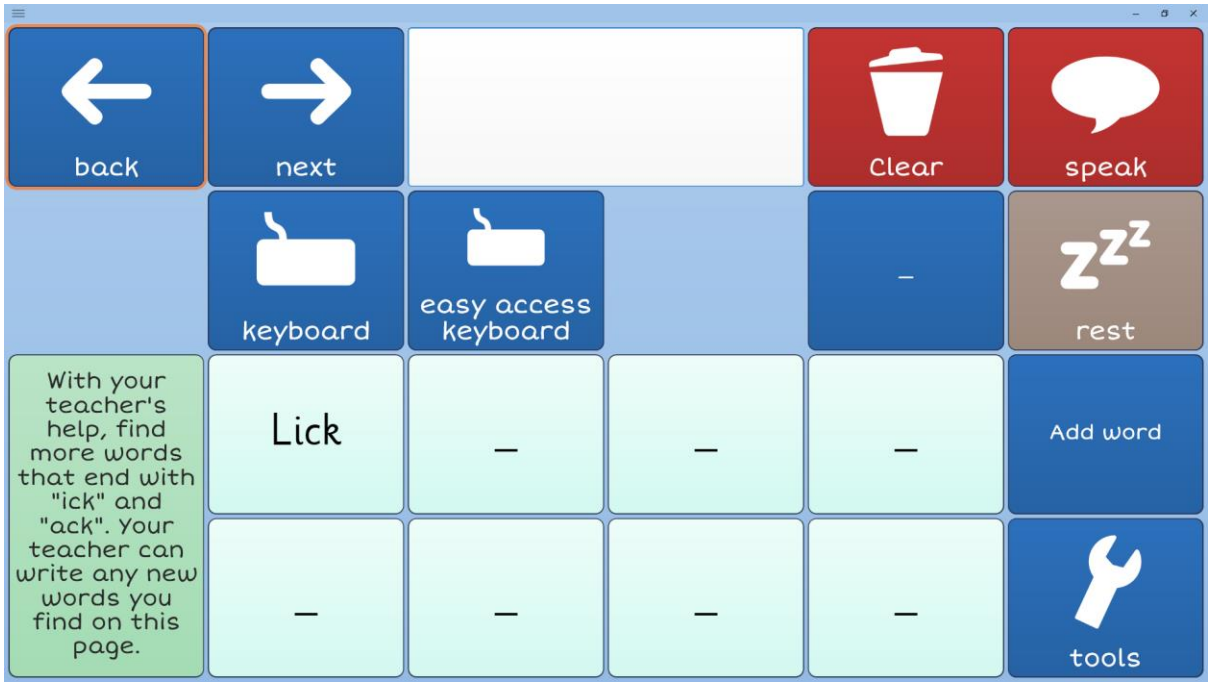




10. When the student has finished the teacher or teaching assistant needs to gather up the work that has been automatically saved into one document. This is achieved by going to the saved to cells page and selecting the work that has been completed in order. This can then be copied and pasted to a word document for the teacher to mark and plan for learning needs.



You will also need to print screen any labels that have been produced:



The pages where there are lines in the cells can be populated by the student typing their option and then choosing add word followed by selecting the cell they want the word displayed in.

Appendix 1 – The Research

England and Wales has adopted the approach known as Synthetic Phonics and the English Government has made the teaching of phonics using this approach mandatory. It is unfortunate that many educational establishments have taken this to mean 'to the exclusion of all other approaches.' It is noteworthy that England and Wales alone have taken such a strong stance in regard to the teaching of reading and that Scotland, where the original research regarding synthetic phonics took place, decided against mandating the approach on the grounds that the research was not robust enough. The research report concludes that further research is needed and that there was a lack of controls to identify whether certain groups of students benefitted less.[2] The Rose report, which led to the adoption of Synthetic Phonics in England and Wales, stated that 'the vast majority of children benefit from synthetic phonics'. Unfortunately, there was no mention of how the small minority for whom Synthetic Phonics was not deemed to be the best approach should be taught.[3]

Research suggests that phonological ability may be less of a predictor of the ability to develop reading and spelling in the population of students who have severe speech impairments.[4] Phonological ability refers to awareness of the sound structure in words.

The success of synthetic phonics relies on two things:

1. Pace of delivery
2. Early introduction (during Foundation year and Year 1)[5]

The phrase 'fast and first' is associated with the use of synthetic phonics. The focus is on teaching sounds rather than letter names. This immediately rings alarm bells for its potential efficacy for students who may process information slowly and may have physical and/or communication difficulties. The pace at which synthetic phonics programmes are delivered and the rapid change between different phonemes could be bewildering and, in some cases, an impossible task, especially for students who rely on the much slower paced response that is inevitable for students who rely on AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication). I have regularly come across disabled teenagers who are unable to name letters because they are still acquiring sounds. This does not accord with the intentions of the early intervention strategy of synthetic phonics.

In England and Wales, once students have developed basic decoding skills through an early synthetic phonics programme, they move quickly on to activities that involve comprehension and reading for pleasure. [6]Students with disabilities can be expected to take much longer than their non-disabled peers to achieve the levels of decoding that synthetic phonics recommends prior to moving on to a wider literacy programme. Strict adherence to a system that is intended to be over by the time a non-disabled student is 6 years old makes no sense at all for a student who may be much older before they have mastered their sounds. The more complex the student's disability, the less synthetic phonics makes sense as a first and only approach to literacy learning. Students with

[2] https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14793/1/0023582.pdf (accessed 26th December 2019)
[3] https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/5551/2/report.pdf (accessed 26th December 2019)
[4]https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248078119_Reading_and_Spelling_in_Children_with_Severe_Speech_and_Physical_Impairments (accessed 29th December 2019)
[5] https://rrf.org.uk/2018/07/30/phonics-developments-in-england-from-1998-to-2018-by-jenny-chew/ (accessed 29th December 2019)
[6]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/409409/Reading_the_next_steps.pdf (accessed 29th December 2019)

disabilities need to develop vocabulary, background knowledge, thinking skills and comprehension alongside the delivery of phonics.

Now that synthetic phonics is firmly embedded in the UK education system, particularly in England and Wales, a body of evidence is beginning to emerge that there are other approaches to reading that may be as effective, such as other phonics systems.[7] The fact that 25% of 11-12 years old still leave primary school with lower literacy levels than should be expected speaks for itself.[8]

There is evidence that students with significant disabilities needs individualised approaches to literacy learning which should involve but not rely on phonics instruction. Research with students who have Down Syndrome has suggested that whole word reading of familiar words in meaningful contexts should precede phonics instruction. [9]

Research with students who rely on AAC, but who may not have cognitive difficulties, shows that they still lag far behind their non-disabled peers in literacy acquisition. The most significant literacy programme that has been researched and developed to meet the needs of this group, and learners with complex learning needs, is the 4-Blocks Balanced Literacy Programme. The programme is American and based on early learning systems within parts of the USA. Teachers at CandLE found that the programme, whilst being comprehensive, lacked attention to phonics. CandLE's literacy programme aims to address this as well as tailoring balanced literacy teaching to the demands of the UK education systems.[10]

The CandLE literacy programme breaks down into the following areas:

1. Communication.
2. Emergent literacy for the student whose literacy levels are hard to know.
3. Thinking skill development
4. Phonics, including synthetic, analytic, analogous and embedded approaches.
5. Sight word approaches.
6. Guided Reading.
7. Self-selected reading (reading for pleasure)
8. Writing.

For more information follow this link: https://www.candleaac.org/candle-s-literacy-programme/

[7] https://jeffbowers.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/blog/phonics/ (accessed 29th December 2019)
[8] https://fullfact.org/education/literacy-year-6/ (accessed 29th December 2019)
[9] https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4473/1/RR227.pdf (accessed 29th December 2019)
[10] https://impact.chartered.college/article/students-who-rely-on-augmentative-alternative-communication-literacy-curriculum-access/