

Immersive Reading: Supporting Student Focus through Read-Alouds

How Microsoft education solutions compare to Google in offering customized support for readers.



Executive Summary

No two people engage in learning the same way. Schools are made up of diverse communities of students, all of whom deserve access to an equitable education – including best-in-class learning solutions and technologies. Simply putting more devices in students' hands is not enough. Every solution must be inclusively designed, offering accessibility that supports multiple ways to create, engage, and participate in constructing knowledge regardless of a student's ability, income, language, location, or identity.

Educational equity means every student receives what they need to reach their academic and social potential, including access to opportunities, resources, and support based on where they are and where they want to go – and the technologies they need to get there. Each student's path to thrive across subjects like reading differs. Some students have specialized learning needs and benefit from accessible options like translation in a home language or hearing a text read at a slower speed. When learning environments are created to address and support the unique needs of all students, equity becomes possible.

Available across Microsoft Education's suite of tools, as well as Microsoft Teams*, Minecraft: Education Edition*, and many additional apps, Immersive Reader* gives students an easy, built-in way to have texts of all kinds read aloud and offers translation by word or text in over 60 languages. Limiting reading distractions and helping readers focus is simple using built-in tools, like line focus, picture dictionary, and grammar tools.

By comparison, to conduct a similar test on a Chromebook* using Google Workspaces for Education* in the browser as well as Google Docs*, the process takes more effort and requires the use of third-party Chrome Browser Extensions*.

**In the past, you had to adapt to the world.
In the future, the world will adapt to you.**

— Microsoft





Notable differences in the browser-based experience include

- Immersive Reader is a built-in tool in the Microsoft Edge* browser and can be used without downloading anything or installing a third-party extension, while Chrome's third-party extension must be downloaded from the Chrome Web Store* before use.
- Immersive Reader offers 85 read aloud language choices with the solution, while Chrome's solution offers only translation done in a separate browser window.
- In the Chrome Web Store, users are given access to the tool's privacy practices, but aren't asked to thoroughly read or acknowledge them before adding the extension to Chrome.
- The Chrome Browser Extension has limited voice features, including only two voices to choose from and no options for translation, unlike Immersive Reader which has options for multiple voices in numerous languages.

Notable differences in the document-based experience include

- Immersive Reader is a built-in tool for Microsoft Word* and can be used without downloading anything or activating a third-party extension, while Google Docs* relies on a third-party screen reader tool to be downloaded from the Chrome Web Store and activated in order to read texts aloud.
- In the Chrome Web Store, users are given access to the tool's privacy practices, but aren't asked to thoroughly read or acknowledge them before adding the extension to Chrome. This extension collects multiple types of information and data from users.
- The Google Docs experience has limited voice features with no way to change the voice and no options for translation, unlike Immersive Reader which can support right-to-left languages if those are added to the Windows operating system.
- Immersive Reader can be used offline in Microsoft Word.

For students and educators alike, Microsoft education solutions provide better results, save time, and don't rely on unknown third-party developers to provide support for learners.



Rationale

Solutions for Everyone

Technology solutions that are inclusively designed aren't a nice to have, they are a necessity. People grow, change, and adapt to the world around them every day. Inclusive design opens learning experiences to more students with a wider range of abilities. Inclusive education tools give more students access to curriculum, help to optimize educator time, and support improved learning outcomes. When accessibility is built-in:

- Students can grow their potential and gain independence;
- Educators are more empowered to engage every learner; and,
- Schools build reputations as positive places that promote equity and inclusion.

Equity Matters

As reported by Edweek¹, 4.9 million (EST.) children in U.S. public schools are learning the English language. 75.2% of English Language Learner (ELL) students in public schools report Spanish as their home language, with Arabic and Chinese reported as second and third². In addition, it's reported that one-third of students receiving special education services have a specific learning disability, such as dyslexia³.

With the diversity of U.S. K-12 classrooms constantly evolving, school systems need tools that are built-in, mainstream, non-stigmatizing, and offered at no additional cost, so they can support all learners. Inclusive solutions like Immersive Reader provide students customized support to learn in ways that offer them access to curriculum, learning continuity, and improved learning outcomes such as increased reading comprehension performance.

¹ Source: [Edweek](#)

² Source: [National Center for Education Statistics](#)

³ Source: [National Center for Education Statistics](#)



Learning Scenario

Ensuring Content is Accessible to Students Through a Customized Read Aloud Experience

The following scenario provides a step-by-step description of the process a typical upper elementary or middle school student would go through to customize a read aloud experience both in the browser and inside of a document. For comparison, we used an online article in a browser tab and the identical article saved as both a Microsoft Word document and a Google Doc.

At a Glance

Topic

Wonder of the Day – Do Animals Like Art?

Subject

English Language Arts

Grade Level

5th-8th grades

Accommodation

Help ensure content is accessible to students in the voice, language, and speed they choose

Step-by-step Comparison

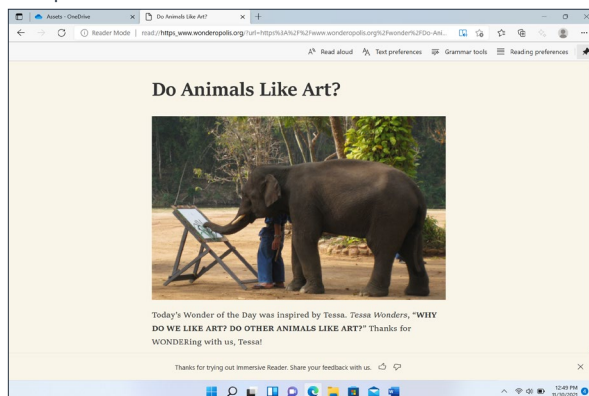
Test Devices

In conducting this comparison, the K-12 Blueprint team tested the following devices and configuration:

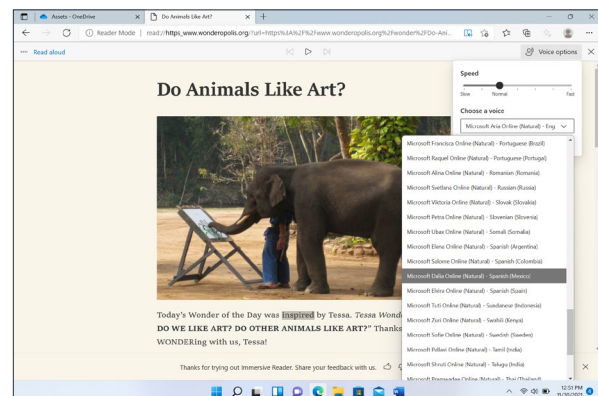
- **Microsoft Surface* Go 2** running Windows 11 version 22000.258
- **HP* 11 Chromebook*** running Chrome OS version 91.0.4472

Conducting a read aloud in Microsoft Edge

1. Open the Microsoft Edge browser and go to <https://www.wonderopolis.org/wonder/Do-Animals-Like-Art>. This article represents a typical online reading selection for an upper elementary or middle school student.
2. Select the Immersive Reader icon from the URL bar to open the article in Immersive Reader.

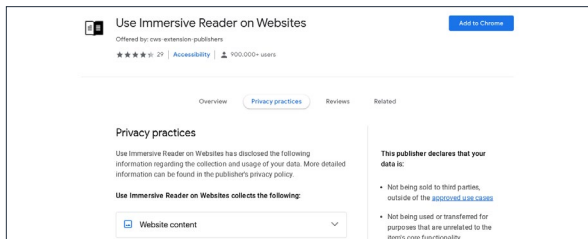


3. Select Read aloud to begin the Immersive Reader experience.
4. Use the playback buttons to start, pause, and stop read aloud.
5. Select Voice options to customize the speed and voice.

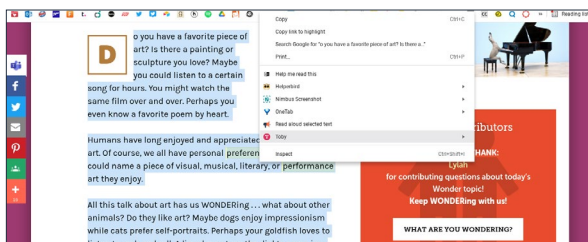


Conducting a read aloud in Chrome

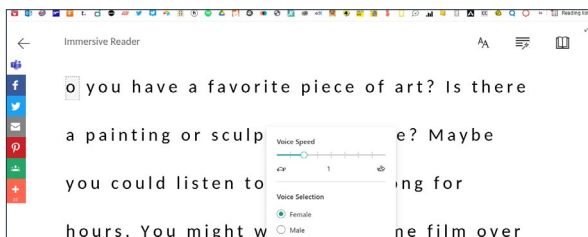
1. Open Chrome and go to the Google Chrome Web Store.
2. Use the search tool to locate Use Immersive Reader on Websites.
3. Select the button to add to Chrome. Note the privacy practices that are displayed.



4. In a browser tab go to <https://www.wonderopolis.org/wonder/Do-Animals-Like-Art>. This article represents a typical online reading selection for an upper elementary or middle school student.
5. On the website, highlight to select a portion of the article, up to 10,000 words maximum, to be read aloud.
6. Right click and select Help me read this.

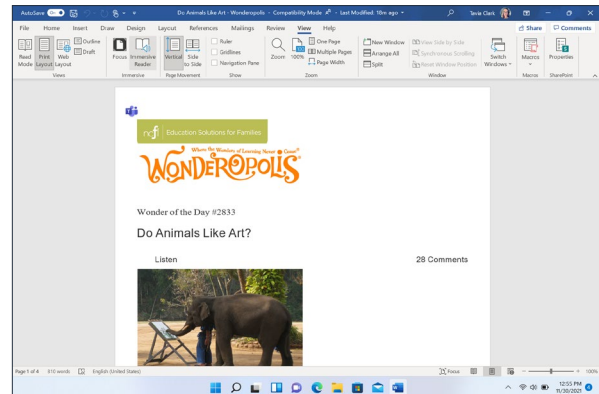


7. Use the playback button to start and stop read aloud.
8. Select the Voice options icon to customize the speed and voice.

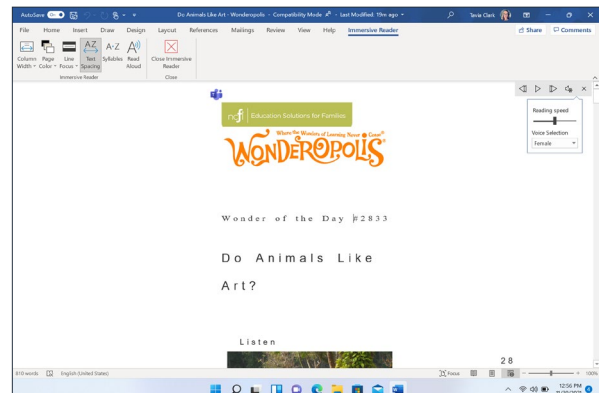


Conducting a read aloud in Microsoft Word

1. Open Microsoft Word and select a document to open.
2. In the Word menu toggle to View and select Immersive Reader.



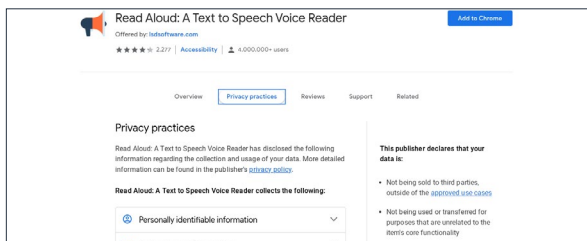
3. Once Immersive Reader opens, select Read Aloud.
4. Use the playback buttons to play, pause, and stop read aloud.



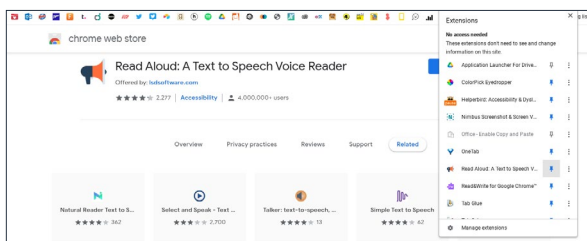
5. Select Voice options to customize the speed and voice.

Conducting a read aloud in Google Docs

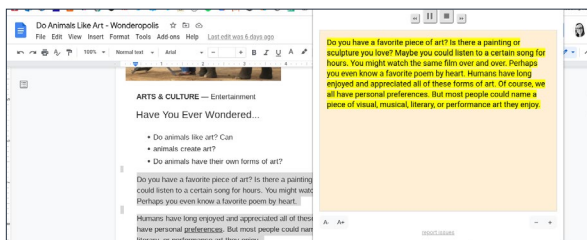
1. Open Chrome and go to the Google Chrome Web Store.
2. Use the search tool to locate Read Aloud.
3. Select the button to add to Chrome. Note the privacy practices that are displayed.



4. Enable the extension by clicking the manage extensions icon in the top right corner of the web browser.
5. Click the pin icon next to the Read Aloud extension to pin it to the URL bar for easy use and access.



6. Open Google Docs and select a document to open.
7. Highlight a portion of text to be read aloud and select the Read Aloud icon in the extension toolbar. Note that read aloud begins automatically.
8. Use the playback buttons in the Real Aloud menu to start, pause, and stop playback.



Conclusion

Microsoft education solutions provide students with a built-in, customized read aloud experience

With only three clicks, students can begin a browser-based or document-based read aloud experience using Immersive Reader. Students can use this solution to change the language text is read aloud in, the tone of the voice, as well as the speed at which a text is read. In addition, Microsoft Word allows the Immersive Reader experience to be done completely offline.

The Chrome web browser-based and Google Doc-based equivalent experiences require installing a third-party extension that can take more time, more IT involvement, and pose data security risks, and the experiences are not available offline. With double and triple the number of clicks to begin the read aloud experience, Google falls short in ease of use and access for students. Given its built-in simplicity and ease of use, Immersive Reader is a better choice to support learners in customizing the read aloud support they need.

	Read aloud in Edge web browser	Read aloud in Chrome web browser	Read aloud in Microsoft Word document	Read aloud in Google Doc
Number of mouse clicks to begin read aloud experience	3	7	3	9