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SpeakQ

Microphone

Microphone choice is important, and a poor quality microphone can stop things before they get started. A \$2 microphone will give you \$2 quality. At the same time, the best microphone can't perform miracles. Dictation is work, and there are techniques to making speech recognizable. Be sure to read more about these techniques in the discussion below about the importance of playing with the voice recognition, first, to learn how it works.

Headset microphones are better than tabletop microphones. They allow you to maintain a consistent distance between your mouth and the microphone, which is critical. Even the best tabletop microphones are rife with challenges for speech recognition. If you move closer, farther away, or change the direction of your head while speaking, it will affect performance. But with a headset, the microphone's distance from your mouth will remain constant, as the boom holds it there.

Find a headset with a stiff, sturdy boom. This will keep the microphone in the same place, which will help with consistent recognition. A flimsy, floppy boom can allow the microphone to fall towards the writer's throat or bounce and vibrate a lot. The microphone can pick up these vibrations as background noise, and negatively affect recognition.

Bluetooth headsets aren't a good choice to work with SpeakQ. To conserve on battery life, it is common that a Bluetooth headset remains dormant when not in use. When the computer activates the microphone, the headset will take a second to engage, and then make a chipping sound to indicate that it is "ON" and a similar sound is made when it is deactivated. This only works if you are turning the microphone on and dictating for 5 minutes at a time before turning it off. Most SpeakQ users use the microphone intermittently, turning it on and off between words or phrases, using it several times in a sentence. Some SpeakQ users find the time delay before the headset engages prohibitive, and the chipping "ON" and "OFF" sounds distracting. Also, you should consider that it could get lost or stolen easily in classrooms and public places.

Headsets with noise cancelation technology are a big plus, and for many users it will mean the difference between successful use of the program or not.

Look for a headset that has a speaker for each ear. Consider that many writers use WordQ's speech feedback while they are typing and for proofreading. A speaker over each ear makes it much easier for you to identify errors. Also, writers with



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attention and focusing difficulties often say that this can help to drown out distractions.

Connection types: USB, Analog, and Adapters



USB Headset

Some headsets come with USB connections, while others have two traditional mini-analog connections. USB connections promise higher quality sound and microphone performance. They often use something that is more or less like an external sound card, which improves the signal to and from the headset. The disadvantage of these is that the computer needs to control the headset at a hardware level. While plugging and unplugging them periodically isn't a problem, if it is done too many times the computer can get confused and could stop handling sound entirely. If this happens, it can mean resetting the control panel, and sometimes rebooting. Also, USB connections may not be available on older computers.



Analog Headset

Analog connections, however, are much easier to locate. They have two jacks: one for the speakers of the headset, and one for the microphone. Some have great sound quality and are on par with their USB counter parts. At the same time, some are so cheap that they are useless for speech recognition. You really do get what you pay for. Consider purchasing from a store that has a 30-day money back guarantee. Analog connections never have a problem with plugging and unplugging, like USB connections. Professional trainers of WordQ+SpeakQ appreciate that it is easy to plug in the microphone, while leaving the headset speakers unplugged, so sound remains directed to the computers usual speakers. This allows writers to speak into the microphone as they normally would, and then all present can hear the speech feedback and coach the writer accordingly.



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USB adapters are another item worth considering. They allow analog headsets to plug into them for better performance. In many ways these enable the best of both worlds. Some adapters offer a much higher quality of audio technology than the computer's sound card. When an adapter is plugged into the computer's USB port, it acts as a second sound card. An analog headset plugs directly into the adapter, which can make a good microphone even better, but it cannot do much for a poor microphone. Sometimes, these USB adapters are included with a headset, but usually the best ones need to be purchased separately, and are an added expense.

For your convenience, we provide headsets for purchase. These are the same headsets used by our developers in creating WordQ+SpeakQ. You can find them under the header Microphones from the home page at www.goQsoftware.com.