

PowerTalk 1.2.10 Automatic speech for PowerPoint presentations.

PowerTalk is a free program that automatically speaks any presentation or slide show running in Microsoft PowerPoint for Windows.

You just download and install PowerTalk and while you open and run the presentation as usual it speaks the text on your slides. The advantage over other generic 'Text To Speech' programs is that PowerTalk is able to speak text as it appears and can also speak hidden text attached to images.

Speech is provided by the standard synthesized computer voices that are provided with windows.

Features.

1. Aids you if you have difficulty speaking or you have an audience that contains people with sight problems (visual impairments, low vision or blind) or who have dyslexia;
2. Helps you access presentations when there is no speaker and you are partially sighted;
3. Creates engaging school activities such as reading stores created by students;
4. Simple to use as you just select a presentation and it runs in PowerPoint as usual;
5. Speaks the text on any presentation and uses standard Windows speech;
6. Waits for text to appear and animation effects to play before speaking;
7. Will speak hidden 'alternative text' for pictures, graphics shapes and text;
8. Lets you add instant narration to presentations without the need to record speech;
9. Is a useful tool for testing presentation accessibility when using a screen reader;
10. Free (gratis - as in 'free beer'). No purchase, registration or adverts, you just download & run it;
11. Free (libre - as in 'free speech'). The Open Source License guarantees you the freedom to make copies and to alter its behavior;

Downloads - Getting PowerTalk.

PowerTalk requires that you have PowerPoint 2000 (or later) and the Microsoft Speech API (SAPI) 5.1 (part of Windows XP). This is explained below.

PowerTalk 1.2.10 [2.8MB] can be downloaded from <http://fullmeasure.co.uk/powertalk/> Once downloaded, Open/Run the installer and after the installation is complete you can open the demo presentation to test PowerTalk works correctly. The Using PowerTalk section below describes how to use PowerTalk on existing presentations.

Requirements, what you must have to run PowerTalk.

PowerTalk runs on Windows 98 (SE), Windows ME and Windows XP. It is expected to run on Windows NT 4.0 and Windows 2000. It is unlikely to run on Windows 95 or the initial release of Windows 98.

You must have PowerPoint 2000 or later installed. Unfortunately the PowerPoint viewers are not useable as they do not provide the basic functionality that PowerTalk requires.

The Microsoft Speech API 5.1 (MS SAPI 5.1) must be installed and if you have Windows XP you will already have it. For other versions of Windows you can download and install the SAPI Text To Speech (TTS) components [12MB]. This download can also be used with Windows XP and will then add 2 voices (Mike and Mary) to the single voice that is supplied with XP (Sam). To check if you have SAPI installed, look for a voice called 'Microsoft Sam' in Control Panel's Speech Settings (Start ->

Control Panel -> Speech -> Text To Speech). Please note that the PowerTalk cannot use the earlier SAPI 4, although it is apparently possible to have both SAPI 4 & 5 installed on the same machine.

Basic sound capabilities are required. Most PCs with a sound card or 'on board' AC'97 sound will need only the addition of a simple powered speaker(s). Older PCs, or those that can only produce simple 'beeps' through an internal speaker, may require additional sound hardware. You can test your PC's sound capabilities with the 'Preview Voice' facility in the Control Panel's Speech settings.

Recommendations: Install it using the defaults, except when it asks you for settings - choose only **.pps** to run automatically. You can always right click on any presentation and choose for it to load using PowerTalk. It will be less annoying than having it load talking every time.

You can always change your settings by using the "PowerTalk Settings" option in the Start Menu-Program Files- PowerTalk folder.

Remember- You have to double-click on the PowerPoint presentation/ show for this program to be activated. It will not automatically run if you open the presentation/show from within PowerPoint with File-Open.

Opening Presentations

There are a number of ways to get PowerTalk to narrate a PowerPoint Presentation (.ppt file) or Slide Show (.pps file): Automatically or when you choose to have them narrated.

Note: ppt and pps files are identical except for the ppt/pps part of the filename, the difference being what happens when they are opened. A .ppt file may be saved in PowerPoint as a .pps file or else a .ppt file can be simply renamed as a .pps.

1. Automatically read aloud/ narrated

When you double-click directly on a PowerPoint Presentation (ppt) or a PowerPoint Show (pps), the presentation will open being narrated / automatically read by PowerTalk.

1. Select the Start menu - PowerTalk - PowerTalk settings.
2. Place a check mark in the boxes that indicate that you want ppt and pps read automatically

2. You choose when PowerTalk narrates/ reads the presentation automatically

1. Select the Start menu - PowerTalk - PowerTalk settings.
2. Make sure there are no check marks in the boxes that indicate that you want ppt and pps read automatically
3. When you want to use PowerTalk, you will **right click** on the Presentation or Slide Show and select 'Narrate with PowerTalk' from the right-click menu.

Speech Order and Timing.

Text can be entered on a slide in either a single text box or split into multiple boxes and these are handled slightly differently.

The text in any single box is spoken continuously from top to bottom. Individual boxes are spoken in the order they are *added to the slide*. There appears to be no way to alter this and the way to force a different order is to create a new slide and copy the text boxes (hint click on the box border and copy).

Animated text is spoken in the order that the animations play, waiting for each to complete before speaking the next. However if a number of animations are used within a single text box, PowerTalk

waits for the first animation only and then speaks all the remaining text. You may want to break the text into separate boxes and animate each.

Speech Options.

The voice used and the speed of narration can be changed with the settings in the 'Speech Settings' section of Control Panel (on the 'Text To Speech' tab). There is a PowerTalk start menu item that opens these settings.

Windows XP comes with as single voice 'Sam'. The 'SAPI TTS components' download available in the Downloads section will add 'Mike' and 'Mary'. A range of additional SAPI 5.1 voices are available and examples include AT&T Natural Voices, Nuance RealSpeak, Neospeech and IBM ViaVoice

The first time that PowerTalk is run you may notice a small delay as it analyses your PowerPoint and Speech API installations.

Support and getting help

PowerTalk is very simple to install and run if your machine meets the requirements. If you are getting pop-up errors indicating problems with SAPI please ensure that you have SAPI 5.1 and not SAPI 5.0. If you have problems or would like discuss PowerTalk you can email powertalk@fullmeasure.co.uk.

License, what you are allowed to do with PowerTalk

This software is **Open Source Software**, that is, non-proprietary and is issued under the GPL license. You are free to copy or modify it as you like as long as you do not use it as part of any proprietary software. If you make any changes we would be very interested to know about them so that we can include them in the main release.

Reviews.

The person for whom PowerTalk was created for submitted a review to Ability magazine. There is a concise product summary available at the TechDis Accessibility Database. Geetesh Bajaj has written a review and tutorial on his 'treasure trove' PowerPoint site 'Indezine'.

Creating Accessible presentations

PowerTalk does a good job of making any presentation more accessible by automatically speaking the text. It can narrate animated text as it appears and will also speak PowerPoint's 'Web Alternative Text' intended for Web Browser use. Thus apart from being an accessibility tool in its right PowerTalk can be used to test how a presentation will sound with a other tools such as screen readers.

There are many techniques and tools for creating truly accessible presentations. A good place to start research is Glenna Shaw's excellent and thorough article The Incredible, Accessible Presentation.

Writing Text to Improve Synthetic Speech provides simple guidelines that can be applied when authoring text in order to maximize the quality of synthetic speech output.

Although the speakers delivery is more important than the text on the slides there are general guides to writing clear English that will help make your message clear. MENCAP have a guide to Making your web site accessible for people with a learning disability that has much good advice on content creation. Writing Global English from Audience Dialog provides background and How to write Global English gives specific guidelines for writing to include people whose first language is not English. I think the principles should also apply when writing for those with learning difficulties and will help improve readability in general. Both dyslexic.com and Plain English Campaign have some great resources.

For some light relief you could read Edward Tufte's article on how PowerPoint corrupts. It is also available 'remixed' as a presentation. The opposite view is presented by 5 others.