

NEO NEWS

By AlphaSmart™/Renaissance Learning™



December 2008

Your source for news, product upgrades, and more for NEO laptops used in the K–12 classroom.

Features



Schools nationwide are catching on to why NEO is the "Better Laptop for Classrooms."

Reading, "Riting," and "Rithmetic": NEO 2 Awakens the Neglected R

As educators continue to improve student achievement in two of the R's—reading and math--some express frustration when working with students to accelerate learning in that sometimes neglected "R"—writing.

[Read more...](#)

NEO Feature Stories

Cultivating writers in a land of extremes: NEOs an oasis for technology-parched Nevada school

About 50 miles east of Death Valley National Park, one of the hottest, driest places on earth, Hafen Elementary was suffering from its own dry spell—it was technology-parched. [Read more...](#)

Addition of NEO 2s enables Washington teacher to do more in less time

Kenroy Elementary, in East Wenatchee, Washington, is not unlike other rural schools. Located in a small agricultural town along the Columbia River, the school educates more than 450 students in grades K–4. And like many schools, the school's budget is often hard-pressed for technology funds, so Kenroy teachers began looking for grant opportunities to purchase NEO 2 laptops for their classrooms. [Read more...](#)

Increasing autonomy for special needs children: Unique features make the NEO a high-demand item for the Simon Technology Center

Coping with the stress of raising children with disabilities can be overwhelming, particularly for those without adequate support. Thankfully, resources such as the NEO laptop and the Simon Technology Center, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, are in existence. [Read more...](#)

NEO in the News

A New Type of teaching

An article from the Richmond Times-Dispatch features classes from Salem Church

Does Word Processing Improve Writing?

[Click here for your free white paper](#) and learn the seven ways word processing can help develop student writers.



Author Steve Graham

Product News



When NEO Talks, Students Listen

For students who struggle with writing, Renaissance Learning's new Text2Speech™ hardware device—developed for both the NEO 1 and NEO 2—will let them convert their written text into spoken words. By listening to what they have written, students can improve their writing, expression, fluency and grammar—and build their motivation to write more.

[Read more...](#)

Elementary School in Richmond, Virginia that use NEO laptops to teach keyboarding. The school reported that students can't wait to practice now that the NEOs are in use. [Read more...](#)

LaptopSmackdown

Is Your Laptop Tougher than a Fifth Grader?

For a good laugh, you've got to see how the NEO fared the field goal attempt!

<http://www.laptopsmackdown.com/>. Be sure to forward it on to all your fellow educators!

NEO Best Practice Tips

How to use Linked Files with your state's writing rubric

How often do teachers distribute rubrics to students and expect them to construct their writing accordingly? As a former classroom teacher, I know I did for a number of years. But, slowly, it dawned on me that if the students were to put the rubrics in their own terms, the students would take ownership, internalize the criteria, and become better writers. [Read more...](#)

Professional Development and Conferences

Are you making the most of the NEO in your classroom?

Whether you're just starting out, or want to make sure you're maximizing use of the NEOs in your classroom, learn how using a variety of professional development choices to suit your needs. [Read more...](#)

Conference Appearances

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A Message From Renaissance Learning

Cheryl Ballou, AlphaSmart Services Consultant

Reading, "Riting," and "Rithmetic": NEO 2 Awakens the Neglected R

As educators continue to improve student achievement in two of the R's—reading and math—some express frustration when working with students to accelerate learning in that sometimes neglected "R"—writing. As a former classroom teacher, I experienced that frustration, too. But more importantly, I saw the frustration in students who wanted to communicate their thoughts but did not have the skills they needed to do it. With NEO 2, that can all change.

Give students a NEO 2, and watch their writing skills improve! Just name it...NEO 2 can do it. Publish, print, revise, and edit...these are the first steps in developing effective writers.

NEO 2 provides help for teachers, too. NEO 2's Write On! curriculum offers nearly 400 writing lessons that teachers can send to students to guide them through the writing process. Teachers can also electronically link support information—such as content from web pages, instructions and deadlines, rubrics and more—to assignments before downloading them to students' NEOs.

In fact, in today's [Best Practice feature](#) I'll show you how to teach students to develop their own writing rubric that correlates to your state's standards. In addition, you'll read inspiring stories of how educators use NEOs to help their students take a love of writing to a whole new level. In fact, you just might learn a few new ways the NEO will help your students communicate better too—after all, writing is just one way NEO can impact a student's life. Enjoy this issue!

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Cultivating writers in a land of extremes: *NEOs an oasis for technology-parched Nevada school*

About 50 miles east of Death Valley National Park, one of the hottest, driest places on earth, Hafen Elementary was suffering from its own dry spell—it was technology-parched. In spring 2004, test scores for the rural Pahrump, Nevada school were the lowest in the district. Shortly afterward, a new principal with a focus on technology took over the K-5 schools. Three years—and 150 NEOs later—Hafen Elementary boasted the highest scores in the district.

The purchase of the five SmartOption Mobile Labs—30 NEOs each—greatly expanded the school's access to technology. Before the NEOs rolled into the school, students had to wait their turn in order to access the few classroom computers. Now, a cart of NEOs easily enables one-to-one computing in the classroom, allowing for more efficient writing practice for each student.

"The Nye County School District encouraged the integration of technology into instruction and provided professional development to teachers to achieve that end," Dr. Terry Owens, principal, said. "We felt the NEOs would aid in our efforts to raise academic achievement and allow students to practice and apply word processing skills to their work, especially in writing. The NEOs promote student-centered instruction and active learning."

Third-grade teacher, Jessica Jones, loves her students' newfound enthusiasm. "The student response to the NEOs thus far has been phenomenal!" she said. "They look forward to writing and learning to type. I am especially looking forward to using the NEO hub so I can use the AlphaQuiz Applet."

Fifth-grade teacher Georgia Salway agrees. "I like anything that gets students excited. Plus, a teacher benefit is that it saves time using AlphaQuiz because the hub will correct the quizzes for you," she said. "There is total engagement while using the NEOs—there is no time off-task."

With many of the students' families lacking home computers, students were weak in keyboarding skills. "Now that we have NEOs, they're comfortable typing and using the computer, and their keyboarding skills and writing have improved," Salway said. "Keyboarding was monotonous prior to the NEOs. Practice with word-processing skills is now fun for students."

Though many improvements have been made in the past few years, Owens noted that NEO has made an impact across the curriculum. "Fifth-grade student scores in math, reading, and science all improved the year after we implemented the NEOs," she said, and added that the school was designated that year as a High-Achieving School and



Hafen Elementary students love writing using the NEOs. "There is total engagement while using the NEOs—there is no time off-task," says teacher Georgia Salway.

Exemplary Turn-Around School.

"Using NEOs in my classroom has been a wonderful tool to engage students in writing, spelling, language arts, and science," Jones said. "They have already made writing one hundred times more exciting."

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Kenroy Elementary, in East Wenatchee, Washington, is not unlike other rural schools. Located in a small agricultural town along the Columbia River, the school educates more than 450 students in grades K–4. And like many schools, the school's budget is often hard-pressed for technology funds, so Kenroy teachers began looking for grant opportunities to purchase NEO 2 laptops for their classrooms.

Kenroy teacher Veronique Paquette wanted NEO 2s to use with her second-grade students. "I first received a NEO as a gift from the Smarter Kids Foundation for being named Washington Teacher of the Year, but I used it sparingly in my classroom because I only had one."

However, in 2007, Paquette received a technology grant from the Qwest Foundation, allowing her to add NEO 2 laptops designed specifically for the classroom.

"We use the NEO 2s frequently in my classroom for word-processing," she said. "The students seem so excited each time we get the NEOs out and use them. We use our writing curriculum to supply all the pieces of elemental writing, and the NEOs to put it all into play."

NEO 2's AccelTest SmartApplet, which she uses for end-of-the-unit reading assessments, is her new favorite time-saver. "It has always been a struggle to complete these tests—and now with the advent of NEO 2, we can do this," she said. "It's not the short-answer questions, but all the others, that take so long and require time to correct and put in the grade book. The program now does it all for me."

Science education has always been a particular passion for Paquette—especially space science—and recently, she has gravitated toward use of technology to teach science. "I have been having the greatest time finding ways to integrate and teach more technology with a science base," she said.

In fact, this summer, she had an opportunity to merge her two favorite subjects. "I was required by the grant foundation to present what I had accomplished with my technology money to a group of my choice," Paquette said. "Because I am a staff member at International Space Camp in Huntsville, Alabama at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center, I chose to present there."

Paquette sent the NEO 2s to the Space and Rocket Center for use during her hands-on presentation, and made quite an impression on her audience. "It was very successful and teachers were very impressed," she said. "The Space and Rocket Center is looking into purchasing NEOs for teachers to use during the year."



Kenroy Elementary School teacher Veronique Paquette has seen tremendous impact on student motivation using the NEO 2s. "They have opened up a new world for my students and myself," she said. "They have allowed me to encourage so many skills and build confidence in my students."

As Paquette sees it, she is still a NEO 2 novice. She looks forward to incorporating more of NEO 2's features into her lesson plans this school year, especially the 2Know! Toolbar, which she learned about through professional development from Renaissance Learning. "In my classroom, I am finding more and more uses for the machines. I love the versatility!" she said. "I was fortunate to have wonderful help during a Renaissance Webinar, which walked me through many of the steps I would need to get things going. This was tremendous, and made a huge impact on my level of learning."

The excitement generated by NEO 2s in Paquette's classroom is wafting through Kenroy, prompting the parent/teacher organization to look at purchasing more NEOs for the school. "I am so excited to use the NEOs," Paquette said. "They have opened up a new world for my students and myself. They have allowed me to encourage so many skills and build confidence in my students."

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Increasing Autonomy for Special Needs students: Unique features make the NEO a high demand item for the Simon Technology Center

Coping with the stress of raising children with disabilities can be overwhelming, particularly for those without adequate support. Thankfully, resources such as the NEO laptop and the Simon Technology Center (STC), in Minneapolis, Minnesota, are in existence.

"The Simon Technology Center is dedicated to making the benefits of technology more accessible to children and adults with disabilities," said Bridget Ames, technology coordinator of the award-winning center. "Parents and professionals leave with the information they need to make an informed decision on which assistive technology device to buy. They are also able to check items out from the lending library, if they are a member, to try-before-they-buy to make data-based decisions."

One of the most popular technology devices in the STC library is the NEO laptop. "The NEO is an important tool in our lending library," Ames said. "Almost every STC assistive technology consultation that involves writing looks at portable word processors as a possible writing solution. The NEO's multiple functions, including the Co:Writer Applet, make it an item in high-demand."

Co:Writer, an optional word-prediction software add-on for NEOs, is one of parents' most frequently requested features. Unlike other word-prediction software that produce a list of words based on only the first letter typed, Co:Writer predicts words the user may want to use based on English grammar and syntax. "It is important for students with dyslexia, fine motor difficulties, etc., in reducing keystrokes and/or providing spelling support," Ames said.

NEO's built-in technology features assist students with special physical or non-verbal requirements become more independent writers. "Keyboard instruction as a dual function of the device is important as well, as NEOs have customizable teacher prompts, writing prompts, built-in spell check, and applets such as Co:Writer," she said.

Text2Speech, a NEO enhancement available in early 2009, converts typed text into synthesized speech, which is especially helpful for students with auditory processing and memory problems, visual communication problems, and other special needs.

While the STC primarily serves students in K–12, the center assists anyone in need of services. STC is staffed primarily by parents of children with disabilities committed to educating parents and improving the lives of families and children who share the same struggles. In addition, support from government, foundation and private funds allows STC programs to provide most services free of charge, and scholarships are available for fee-based programs.

"It is part of our mission to stay current with rapidly changing technology," Ames said of the NEOs in their lending library. "Having current technology available gives our consumers a chance to trial assistive technology and make data-based decisions about the efficacy of different technologies."

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Use Linked Files with your state's Writing Rubric

by Cheryl Ballou, Renaissance Learning Implementation Services Consultant

How often do teachers distribute rubrics to students and expect them to construct their writing accordingly? As a former classroom teacher, I know I did for a number of years. But, slowly, it dawned on me that if the students were to put the rubrics in their own terms, the students would take ownership, internalize the criteria, and become better writers. Why give the students a rubric when you could teach them the principles that led to the creation of the rubric? So, this issue's Best Practices Tip outlines how you can help students collaborate to develop their own writing rubric.



Objective: Students will clearly understand what constitutes effective writing, and will analyze and apply the state assessment criteria to his/her writing.

Process:

1. Divide students into groups according to the number of criteria on the state rubric (usually between four and six groups).
2. Assign each group a criterion.
3. Ask students to develop two to three descriptors for each criterion and type those descriptors on their NEO laptops.
4. Beam the descriptors between NEOs in the group, share the information, and collaborate to reach a consensus.
5. Share the work with the entire class, then continue to work until a consensus is reached and the full rubric is written.
6. The teacher uses the Rubrics Wizard in AlphaSmart Manager to create and save the rubric.
7. When the teacher prepares the next writing assignment for distribution to the students' NEOs, the teacher can attach the student-created writing rubric and send it with the assignment.

[For more information, download the Linked Files QuickStart Guide](#)

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The new Text2Speech device works with NEO's IrDA feature. As the student writes, text is beamed on the fly through NEO's IrDA lens to the Text2Speech device where it is converted to synthesized speech and played back through the device's audio output. Students can listen to the converted speech through headphones or speakers that they have connected to the Text2Speech device.



Students can easily configure the Text2Speech device to read the text back by letter, word, sentence, or paragraph as the student types on the NEO. As it reads, the text is highlighted on NEO's screen to help the student connect the audible word with the written word. The Text2Speech device can also be configured to read text back using either a male or female voice, and at different speeds and volumes to match the needs of any student.

Customers can purchase the Text2Speech device to work with their existing NEO 1 and NEO 2 laptops for just \$129. Or, purchase a NEO 2 Text2Speech bundle that includes the Text2Speech device, a NEO 2 laptop, and headphones for just \$299. Pre-orders for Text2Speech can be placed now by calling 1-800-338-4204. The new Text2Speech device will begin shipping in early 2009.

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Conference Appearances

Stop by and visit us at the Renaissance Learning booth.

Location	Dates	Events
Orlando, FL	January 22-24, 2009	Florida Educational Technology Conference
San Francisco, CA	January 22–24, 2009	Technology Reading and Learning Diversity Conference
Orlando, FL	January 28–31, 2009	Assistive Technology Industry Association
Phoenix, AZ	February 22-24, 2009	International Reading Association Annual Convention-West

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