Using MS Word Thesaurus to Improve Writing
Level: Intermediate ESE

Purpose	Students with learning disabilities often struggle with writing. Their writing is frequently illegible, poorly organized and ideas are communicated ineffectively. Computers can aid the writing process by eliminating the fine motor component and also providing features like spell check and thesaurus. Students with learning disabilities can be hesitant to use age appropriate words in their writing because they are unable to spell the more complex words. The thesaurus tool allows students to take simple, easily spelled words and replace them with words that are more complicated. This tool promotes independence and confidence in writing.
Objectives	In this lesson, students will be able to: • Open a computer file • Use the thesaurus tool to replace "dead words" with appropriate synonyms • Save a computer file
Materials	• Computer with MS Word • Projector • Practice Lesson • "Open" and "Save" tutorials • Thesaurus (book)

Procedures	1. Before beginning this activity, students should know:
	   • "Dead words" are overused words that can be replaced by a synonym to make writing more interesting.
	   • Synonyms for words can be found in a thesaurus.
	   • Thesauruses are used like dictionaries and words are found in alphabetical order.
	   • Basic typing functions (shift, enter, tab)
	   • Basic mouse manipulation (highlight words)
	2. Prior to this lesson, students should practice using a textbook thesaurus.
	3. Set up projector and open MS Word.
	4. Demonstrate how to open file practice.doc. Refer to tutorial sheets located at all computer stations.
	5. Refer to previous written lesson where students looked up words in a thesaurus to replace "dead words".
	6. Ask for a volunteer student. Put the word "big" on the board. Ask student to find the word in a thesaurus and write down one alternative on the board next to the original word.
	7. While the student is searching, demonstrate the same procedure using the thesaurus tool on the computer.
	   • Highlight word.

	• Click Tools → Language → Thesaurus • The shortcut **SHIFT + F7** can also be used. • Select the synonym you wish to use. • Click "Replace" 8. Explain to students that computers can save time and provide the same information. 9. Divide the class into pairs and assign each group a computer. Students should alternate use of mouse and keyboard. Instruct students to open the file and replace the highlighted words. Tell students to use "save as" and rename the document with their combined initials and class period (Ex: RTp3.doc) 10. After groups have completed the activity, have a guided discussion where end result is student realization that using the computer makes this process easier.
Learning Extension	Students should select an original piece of writing and type it using MS Word. Then the student should select 5-10 words (depending on length of story) and replace the words using the skills learned in the prior lesson.
Benchmarks Met	**Writing, Language Gr. 3-5** **B.1.e.4** – The student uses writing processes effectively to produce a final document through the use of technology, using a thesaurus. **B.2.d**—The student writes to communicate ideas and information effectively and uses technology to create, revise and verify information. **D.2.a**—The student understands the significance and influence of language and that word choice can shape ideas, feelings, actions and morals.
Accommodations	Diagrams for visual learners; peer assistance; adaptive keyboard; no time limit; text to speech program
Additional Resources	Kids' Search Tools http://www.rcls.org/ksearch.htm Visual Thesaurus http://www.visualthesaurus.com/ How to Use a Thesaurus http://thesaurus.reference.com/features/howtousethesaurus.html
Assessment	Students will be graded out of a possible 20 points: • 2 points for opening the document • 3 points for saving the document • 1 point for each appropriately replaced highlighted word (max. 10 points) • 5 points for appropriate peer interaction (sharing, demonstrating patience, keeping a positive attitude, and helping peers) Bonus points will be given for appropriately replacing additional words (1 point each)
Word as a Mindtool	The thesaurus feature is an "Unintelligent" Mindtool because it requires students to select words they wish to improve and then decide which replacement word enhances the writing in an appropriate way. Additionally, this lesson provides the basis for a constructivist use of technology. By having alternative words available, student creates their own accommodation which allows them to express their ideas and experiences in a way that corresponds with the mental image they wish to convey.

	Students are better able to communicate when they can modify their language to meet their own expressive needs.

Personal Statement:

This assignment is a continuation of a prior lesson in which students used a thesaurus to replace "dead words" in sentences to improve their writing. Students have been provided with a list of common dead words and replacements which is kept in their writer's notebook. They are somewhat reluctant to use this tool because it is time consuming and a struggle for poor writers. Even more time consuming is the use of a book thesaurus which students seldom choose to use without prompting. I hope that by using this assignment, students will find a more efficient way to improve their writing. I intend to do this lesson in the coming weeks after standardized testing is over.

This assignment seems somewhat simplistic at the student level however given the needs and difficulties of the students in my classroom, I feel this will provide a sufficient challenge for all students.
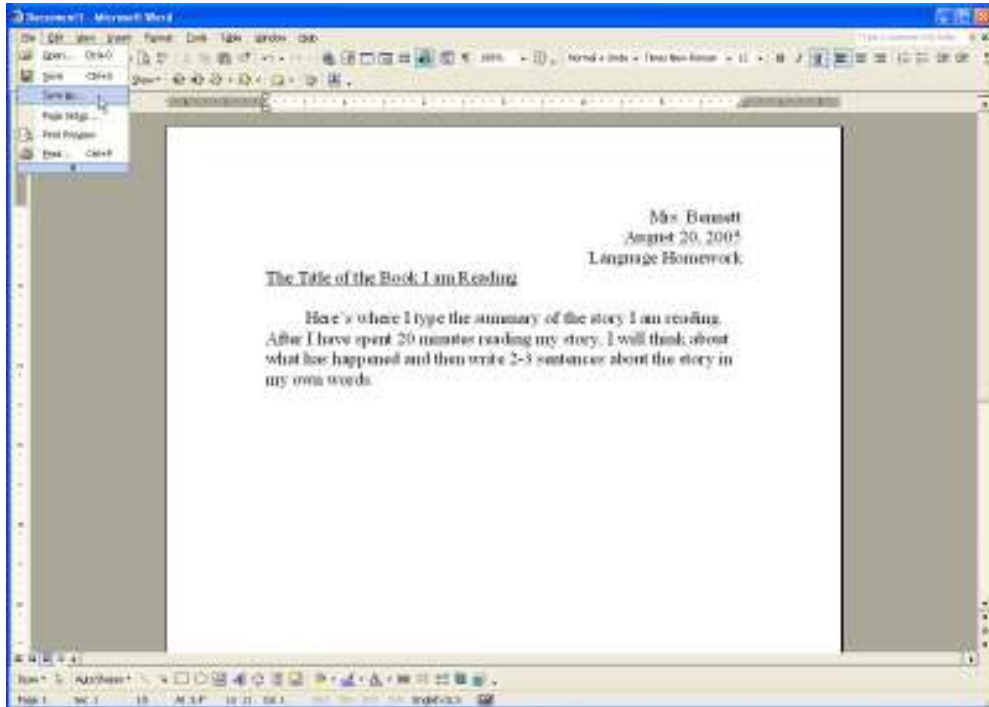
Group Feedback:

The group feedback was extremely helpful. I received thoughtful and helpful comments from two of my group partners. They both offered suggestions which I accepted and used to make modifications to my lesson. They also both provided feedback which helped me to know I was on target with this assignment. I hope to work with this group again in the future. I feel that we can learn a great deal from each other.
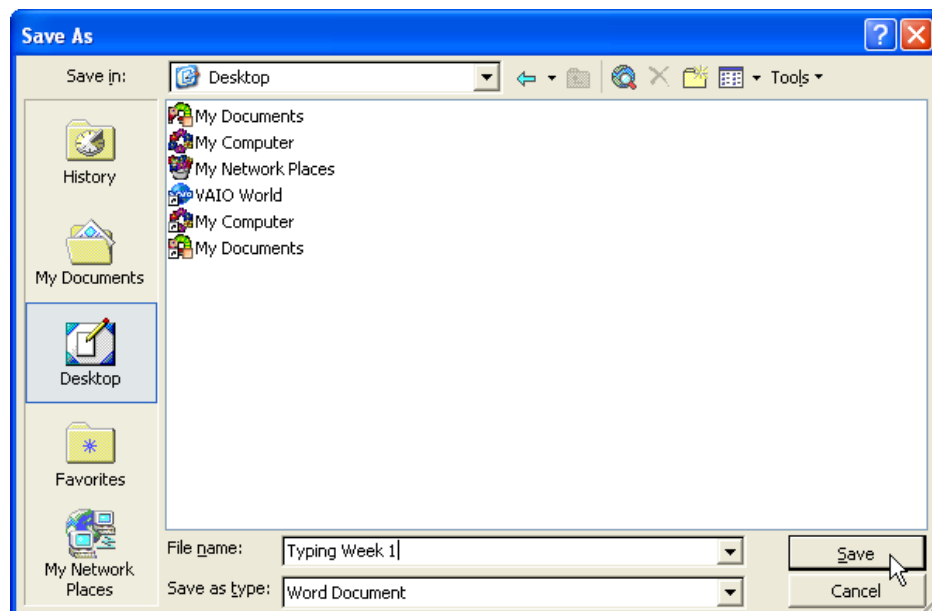
Additional Files:

The pages below contain the "Open" and "Save" Tutorials that I keep in plastic pages next to each of my four student computers. I use these to accommodate visual learners. The final page is the assignment practice.doc.
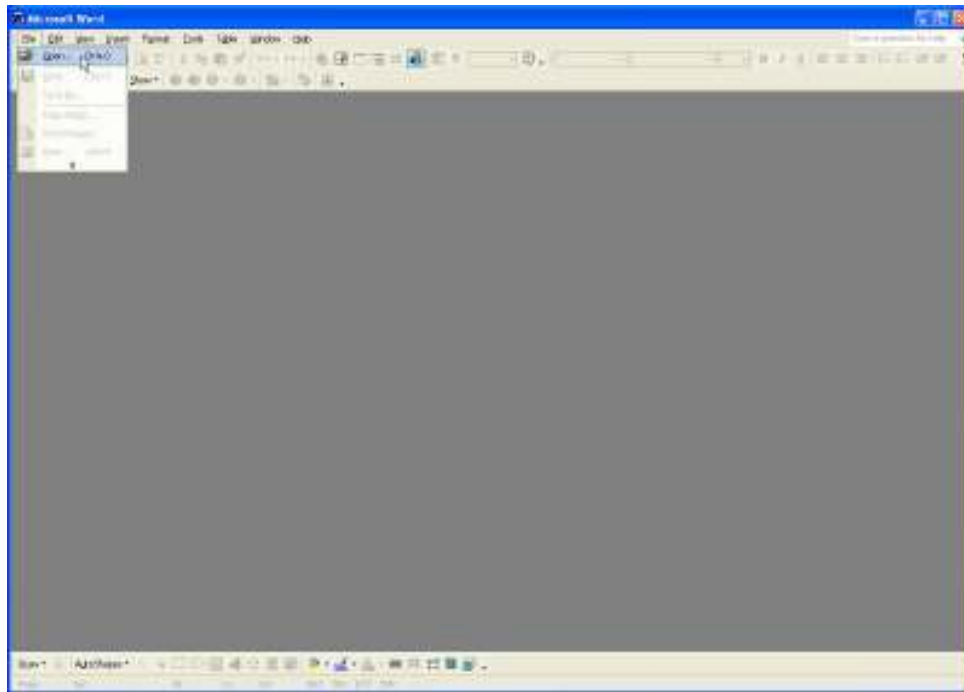
How to Save a Document

1. After you have finished typing your document, go to the top of the screen and click on File. Then use the mouse to point the arrow to the words, Save As…
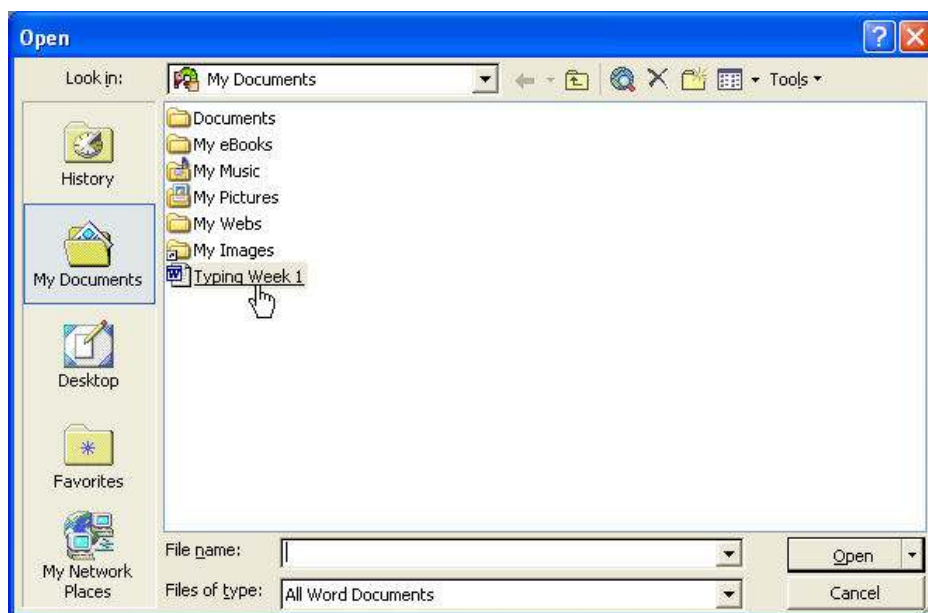

2. Type a name in the box called File name. This can be your name or a description of the work. Be sure it is something that will help you remember the document later. When you are done click Save. Now your work is saved!
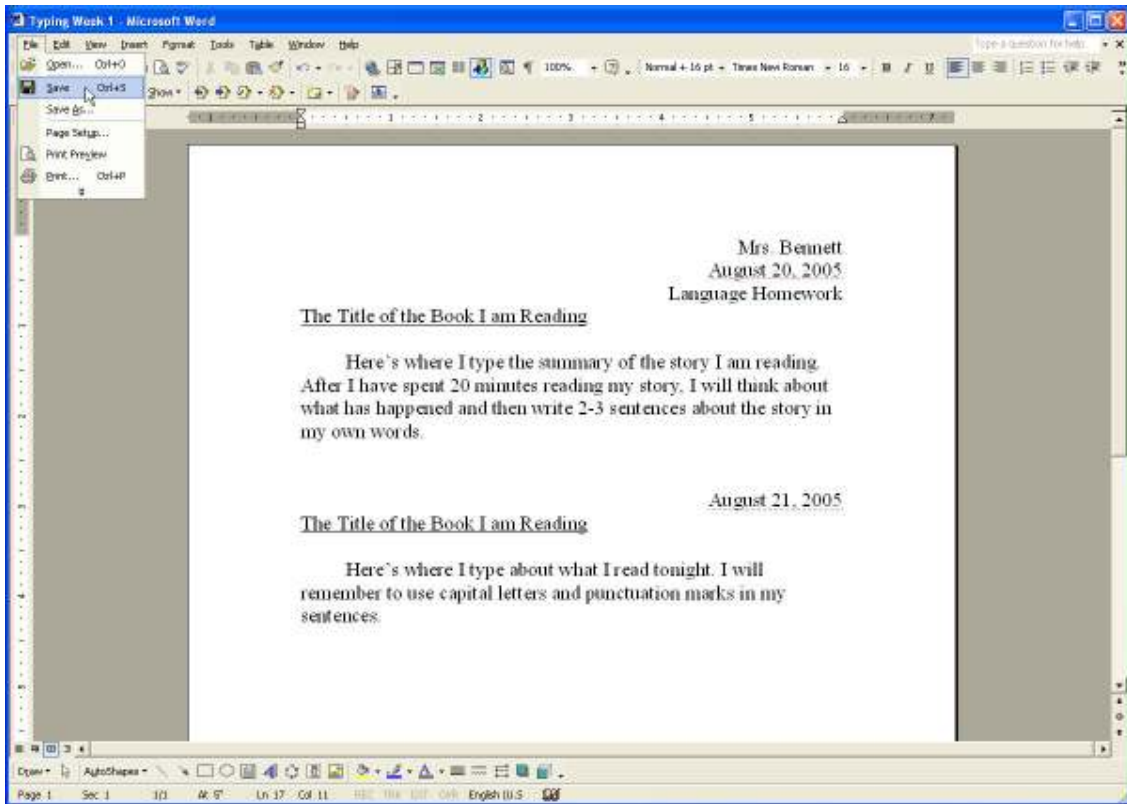
How to Open a Document

1. Open the word processor program. Go to the top of the screen and click on File. Then use the mouse to point the arrow to the word, Open…
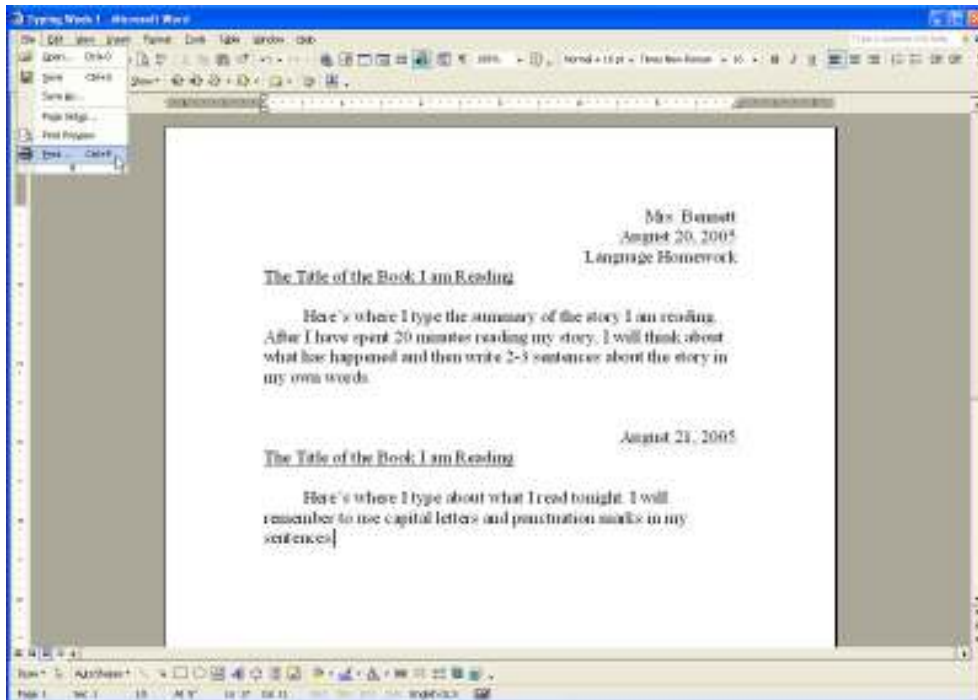

2. Select your document from the list and use the mouse to click on it. Your saved document will open on the screen. Sometimes you will have to look for your document in the folders.
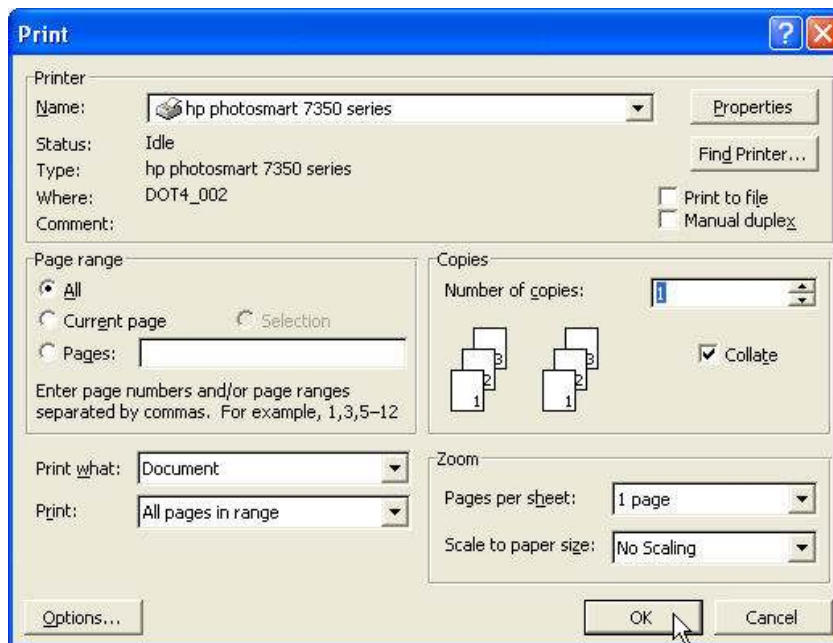
How to Re-Save a Document

1. You have opened an old document and added something new or made changes to it. You have already given your file a name. Now all you have to do is go to the top of the page and click File then use the mouse to point the arrow to the word Save. You will not see a new screen but the document will be saved.

How to Print a Document

1. When you are finished typing your document, go to the top of the screen and click the word File. Then use the mouse to point the arrow to the word Print… A new screen will open.

2. Use the mouse to click the word OK.

Practice using the MS Word Thesaurus Feature

You have just used a paper thesaurus to find replacements for the highlighted words. Now use the computer to make your selections. Highlight the words in blue. **Click Tools → Language → Thesaurus**. Select a new word. Click "Replace". Make sure the word makes sense in the sentence.

1. The chocolate cake tastes good.

2. The mouse will run when she sees the cat.

3. Mark painted his picture with pretty colors.

4. Joshua was happy to get a computer for his birthday.

5. The kitchen is messy after Dad makes dinner.

6. It was a disaster when the tornado ruined all the houses in the neighborhood.

7. Cindy will jump out of her seat when she hears the bell.

8. The boys cry when their grandmother leaves.

9. Going to the football game is fun.

10. The bad cat knocked over the lamp.