



Figure 4. This simple picture menu provides access to all the features of this program. Students need only one click to access the activity they choose. (Dr. Peet's Talk/Writer)

## Dr. Peet's Talk/Writer

**Publisher:** Interest-Driven Learning, Inc., [www.drpeet.com](http://www.drpeet.com)

**Topics:** Alphabet recognition, phonics, writing, special needs

**Grade Level:** PK–1 (Ages 3–6) and higher grade levels for students with special needs

**Cost:** \$59.95 (Win, version reviewed), \$49.95 (Mac)

**Requirements:** Mac/Win, CD-ROM drive

**Standards:** NETS•S 1–4

Dr. Peet's Talk/Writer for Windows is not a new program, but it is a wonderful tool to introduce young learners to the world of the written word. Talk/Writer is a talking/singing word processor—or in more technical terms, a text-to-speech tool. The human voice that guides the children and reads their writing is warm and encouraging. The four main menu choices are read (or sung) when the student moves the cursor over the pictorial menu (Figure 4). All instructions are recited to the learner as they make their choices. The program is designed for student exploration of the alphabet, the keyboard, and writ-

ing. The learner can do the activities in any order, but I suggest the following order from the menu:

1. **ABC Song:** The ABC song is sung through from beginning to end with real-life, colorful photographs illustrating each letter. The child listens and can sing along. With an adult facilitator, this can be a great way to begin talking about initial letters and also to build vocabulary. The song can be stopped and restarted with one click.
2. **Big Letters:** When a letter key is touched on the keyboard, the letter appears on the screen with an associated picture and the pleasant voice speaking the letter name. Some youngsters may begin listening to letters they recognize from the world around them.
3. **Find Letters:** This activity helps learners find the letters in one-to-one matching from the screen to the keyboard. The screen displays a letter, and the voice asks the student to find the letter. When the learner keys the requested letter, the associated photograph is displayed and a short song about the photograph plays.

4. **Write Words:** Learners can type any letter and will hear the letter name as it is typed. When the student presses the spacebar, the group of letters “becomes a word” and is read as a word. Adding a period makes a sentence which is also spoken. There is a picture dictionary here, too. Students can use these words as a reference, or by double-clicking, they can add a word to their writing. Teachers can easily add pictures and words to this dictionary. Also available in this section is a print option, a journal (save) function, and an e-mail option—all of which can be enabled or disabled easily by the teacher.

As any teacher of young learners will appreciate, the ease of use, freedom to explore, and the quick success will keep learners engaged and interested while also keeping instruction on using the software almost unnecessary. The support tools in the package include 45 different activities that range from simple locating of letter keys to writing simple stories. In addition, there is a simple skills checklist, which is useful in tracking and sharing student progress. Though I am stressing the use of this tool for young learners, I believe it is also a very useful tool for children with special needs. The interface is not childish and will appeal across age groups. Dr. Peet's Talk/Writer would be a great introduction to using the computer as a writing tool as well as an introduction to the relationship between the spoken and written word.



*Gail Lovely (software@iste.org) has been involved in educational technology since she began teaching in 1980. Gail earned her master's degree in educational technology from Pepperdine University and spent many years teaching in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology. In addition to her work with adult learners, Gail has taught students from kindergarten through high school. She believes software should enhance the learning and teaching process, making the teacher's work more effective, relevant, and meaningful.*