Text-to-Speech (TTS): A Practical Set-Up Guide

How to Hear Your Writing Clearly (Without Turning Editing into a Tech Project)

Text-to-speech is one of the simplest and most effective self-editing tools available. Used at the right stage, it helps you hear what's actually on the page—rather than what your brain insists should be there.

This guide is a quick reference for setting up and using TTS tools efficiently, without repeating the theory covered in the book.

Why Text-to-Speech Works

Text-to-speech is effective because it:

- strips intention from the text
- exposes missing words and repetition
- reveals awkward rhythm and overlong sentences
- makes unclear phrasing impossible to ignore

Best used: after structural edits, before final polish.

Not ideal for: first drafts or heavy rewrites.

If you instinctively rewrite a sentence in your head while listening, that sentence needs attention.

Built-In Text-to-Speech Options

Microsoft Word

Word includes a built-in read-aloud feature that's quick and easy to access.

How to find it:

Go to Review → Read Aloud

Or right-click selected text and choose Read Aloud

Best for:

short sections

quick clarity checks

spotting missing words or repetition

Limitations:

The voices are distinctly digital and tend to flatten rhythm and emotional nuance. This is useful for catching errors, but less effective for evaluating flow or pacing.

Google Docs

Google Docs supports text-to-speech through accessibility features and browser tools.

How to enable:

Go to Tools → Accessibility

Turn on screen reader support

Use your device's screen reader or a browser read-aloud extension

Best for:

browser-based workflows

short listening passes

Limitations:

Voice quality and controls vary depending on your device, browser, and extensions.

Text-to-speech isn't about judging your writing. It's about hearing it the way a reader will—before the reader ever does.

Use it as a clarity check, not a punishment. Your ears are better editors than your eyes.

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Other Simple Online Options

If Word or Google Docs don't suit your workflow, browser-based TTS tools can work well for short listening sessions.

These are generally useful for:

- quick checks
- small sections of text
- experimenting with different voices

Be aware that many free tools:

- have character limits
- include ads or interruptions
- vary widely in voice quality

They're useful, but not always ideal for longer passages.

The Clipchamp* Method (A Powerful Free Alternative)

Here's a lesser-known option that works exceptionally well for longer listening passes.

Clipchamp allows you to convert text into spoken audio using more natural-sounding voices than those built into most word processors. The difference is noticeable—especially when evaluating rhythm, pacing, and dialogue.

Where Word's voices sound clearly synthetic, Clipchamp's narration is closer to how a real person reads prose. This makes it much easier to hear when something flows smoothly—and when it doesn't.

Clipchamp Workflow

- Paste your text into Clipchamp's text-to-speech tool
- There is a character limit (approximately 7,500 characters per section)
- Upload your text in chunks (by scene or chapter section)
- Queue them back-to-back
- Listen straight through without interruption

Important:

You do not need to export or keep the video.

Set it up → listen → delete.

Clipchamp will play in the background while you:

- follow along in Word
- split your screen
- or simply listen without looking at the text

When Clipchamp Is Worth the Extra Setup

Clipchamp is especially effective for:

- full-chapter read-throughs
- pacing and flow checks
- final clarity passes

It takes a few extra minutes to set up, but the listening experience is far more informative.

A Quick Comparison

Word / Google Docs:

Fast, convenient, and useful for quick checks—but clearly digital.

Clipchamp:

Slightly slower to set up, far more natural-sounding, and better for evaluating flow and pacing.

Both have their place. Choose the tool that matches the task.

* Clipchamp is a Microsoft product and is included with many Windows installations, making it an accessible option for writers already working in Word.