Software Reviews
by Tracey Mollins

[Triple Play Plus!](#)
CD-ROM from Syracuse Language Systems
Windows

[The Factory Mystery](#)
CD-ROM from Micro-Intel (www.micro-intel.com)
Windows or Mac

[Animated Spelling, Animated Arithmetic, Animated Beginning Typing](#) (for learners with some literacy and numeracy experience)
[Animated Words, Money, Clock, Memory Game, and Math](#) (for learners with less experience or learners who want to practice basic skills at their own pace)
Downloaded from Flix Productions (http://www.flixprod.com/)
Windows

[Explore Canada: Canada's History and Geography in Plain Language](#)
CD-ROM from The Department of Canadian Heritage: Parks Canada
Ordering Information at www.nas.ca
Windows and Mac

[Canadian Encyclopedia](#)
CD-ROM from McClelland & Stewart (www.tceplus.com)
Windows or Mac

[The Alphabet / The Interactive Picture Dictionary / Measuring Up](#)
CD-ROMs from Protea Textware (www.proteatextware.com.au)
Windows

Triple Play Plus!
CD-ROM from Syracuse Language Systems
Windows

You can borrow this CD-ROM in Ontario from the Centre AlphaPlus Centre (alphaplus.ca/mainframe.htm).

This CD-ROM is designed for English as Second Language (ESL) students to build vocabulary and practice dialogues.

Literacy learners can use it to practice reading familiar words in games such as Bingo and Concentration.

Learners can also practice numbers or the words for numbers in these activities.

There is a calendar activity where learners find events marked on a calendar.

There are comic-strip dialogues that learners can listen to and then click on the correct panel or do a sentence-scramble activity.

The content in this CD-ROM is easy to access for most learners.

Learners are given instant feedback.

Learners can choose different levels for most activities. For example, at the easier level of Bingo, learners can keep trying until they find the correct answer. At the more difficult level they get only one chance, but are shown the correct answer immediately.

Computer learners can practice:

- opening and closing a program
- using Back and Forward buttons
- choosing activities by clicking on pictures (icons)
- clicking and dragging and dropping

All the activities in this program are done using the mouse. Learners do not use the keyboard.

Our Observations

- Beginning readers really enjoy this program and use it to practice reading and numbers.
- They find that they can get the repetition they need and they can go at their own pace.
- Beginning computer users enjoy the fact that they can practice using the mouse until it feels easy.
- More experienced readers get bored with the content fairly quickly.

The Factory Mystery
CD-ROM from Micro-Intel (www.micro-intel.com)
Windows or Mac

You can borrow this CD-ROM in Ontario from the Centre AlphaPlus Centre (alphaplus.ca/mainframe.htm).

This CD-ROM is Canadian and was designed for both literacy and ESL learners to practice grammar, vocabulary, and work and life skills.

The CD-ROM is a mystery story about employees who have gone missing from their workplace.

You work through modules, practicing different skills and picking up different clues necessary to solving the mystery.

You can work through modules without doing the mystery.

There is a wide range in the level of the content, from activities where learners find letters missing from the alphabet to activities in the same module where learners find the names of employees in an alphabetical list.

Most of the activities are better suited to readers with some experience.

Module 1: Sentence Structure and Punctuation
Module 2: Sentence Structure and Commas
Module 3: Homonyms
Module 4: Alphabetical Order
Module 5: Paycheques
Module 6: Bank Machine
Module 7: Forms
Module 8: Workplace Math
Module 9: Newspaper

Each module has a series of activities. There are oral and written instructions for each activity. Activities are scored as learners progress through them. In some activities learners are given instant feedback, and in others they are given feedback when the activity is completed. In both cases, the feedback is clear and easy to understand. If learners do not get a perfect score on an activity they can choose to repeat it or move on to an activity where they can practice the same skill.

Computer learners can practice:

- opening and closing a program
- opening and finding a file (learners can return to where they left off if they use their own file)
- using buttons
- choosing activities from a window with folders
- using icons for commands like cut and paste
- clicking and dragging and dropping
- scrolling
- selecting text
- moving the cursor to a point in the text
- correcting errors (editing and deleting)
- using the keyboard

The Factory Mystery CD-ROM includes a program called **Discover the Computer**. The program helps learners learn the names of the parts of the computer and practice computer skills such as:

- using windows
- using buttons
- using menus
- typing in a window
- clicking
- clicking and dragging
- scrolling

Our Observations

- This CD-ROM is very popular in our program.
- I work with a grammar class where learners are preparing to go to college upgrading. One day, we had low attendance so we decided to use the CD-ROM to practice sentence structure rather than move ahead in the course without the absent learners. The women who worked on the program really enjoyed it. One of them commented, "Now I see why people sit at the computer all day."

Flix Productions

Animated Spelling, Animated Arithmetic, Animated Beginning Typing (for learners with some literacy and numeracy experience)

Animated Words, Money, Clock, Memory Game, and Math (for learners with less experience or learners who want to practice basic skills at their own pace)

Downloaded from Flix Productions (http://www.flixprod.com/)

Windows

These activities can be downloaded free, or can be ordered very cheaply.

They were designed for children but the content and the design is suitable for adult learners as well.

Learners can choose different levels of difficulty.

In **Animated Spelling**, a word is read aloud and learners can choose:

- the difficulty of the words (number of syllables)
- a matching activity where they listen to the word and click on the correct spelling
- an activity where they listen to the word and then type the word into a window

In **Animated Arithmetic**, learners can choose:

- which operation (adding, subtracting, multiplying, or dividing)
- in which direction they want the problem presented (top to bottom or left to right)
- how many digits in the problem
- whether to include carrying and borrowing

In **Animated Beginning Typing**, learners can choose from a variety of typing activities.

The activities have great "feedback loops".

In the **arithmetic program**, if learners make a mistake, they are given a hint and another chance to get it right.

In the **spelling program**, if learners make a mistake, they are shown the correction and given a chance to try again later.

When a learner has completed an activity, she can complete an animated puzzle.

Computer learners can practice:

- opening and closing a programusing buttons
- choosing activities
- using icons for commands
- clicking
- correcting errors (editing and deleting)
- using the keyboard

Our Observations

- Both literacy and numeracy learners really enjoy these programs and use them to practice spelling and basic operations.
- They find that they can get the repetition they need and they can go at their own pace.
- Beginning computer users enjoy the fact that they can practice using the mouse until it feels easy.
- Beginner computer users use the spelling and typing program to build familiarity with the keyboard.
- The animated puzzles are a nice "reward" at the end of an activity and learners are often amazed at what the computer can do.

Explore Canada: Canada's History and Geography in Plain Language
CD-ROM from The Department of Canadian Heritage: Parks Canada - ordering information at www.nas.ca
Windows and Mac

You can borrow this CD-ROM in Ontario from the Centre AlphaPlus Centre (alphaplus.ca/mainframe.htm).

Explore Canada is for who people who are learning English or French as a second language and for people who are learning to read.

Learners open the program and see a collage of pictures of Canada, plus music and the sound of loons calling.

Learners choose French or English, history or geography, and then from a selection of modules based on the regions of Canada or historical eras.

The history section has stories about events and characters from Canada's history. The geography section has stories about places in Canada.

Each story includes text, a historical drawing or photograph, and two levels of language difficulty.

One level of text is read aloud. Learners can follow along on the screen. They can replay the narration and practice reading along.

For each story, there is a menu and learners can click on a:

- Tips button to get a demonstration of how to use the program.
- Fact button to get a list of facts about the story they are reading.
- Exercise button to choose a Text activity where they can drag the correct answer into a blank or a Picture activity where they drag a picture to the correct text

Learners have to remember the information. They cannot switch between the text and the exercises.

I have made some activities that learners can use with the program.

The activities include a list of questions that learners can answer by reading or listening to the text.

The answers to the questions are set up as an activity where learners fill in the blanks with words from the text.

The main menu includes a toolbar. The tool bar works like a menu. When you hold the cursor over an icon a word also appears to tell you what the icon means. Learners can choose:

- a **Dictionary** where words are listed in alphabetical order and learners click on the word to get a definition
- an **Index** where items are listed in alphabetical order and learners click on the word to find out where they can read about that item
- a **Question List** where learners can click on questions and find out the answer

or they can do a practice test where they type answers to the questions into a window

Computer learners can practice:

- opening and closing a program
- using a toolbar
- using buttons
- using icons
- using windows
- choosing activities from a menu
- clicking and dragging and dropping
- scrolling
- using the keyboard
- typing in a window

Our Observations

- This CD-ROM is popular in our program. I work with a Level 1 reading class. We use this CD in the class to practice reading and finding information. The learners work in pairs to find information and answer questions. We read about the different regions in Canada. We follow up by writing about places we would like to visit and why.
- One woman said what she would really like is a computer program that could help her read. She thought that a program that read the text for learners would be the most helpful*. This CD-ROM is the closest thing I have found.
- In my experience, learners seem to enjoy the geography more than the history. Both learners who have travelled to different parts of Canada and those who have not seem to like the pictures and find the stories interesting.
- Each geography section ends with a picture of that region by a Canadian artist so tutors can use this CD-ROM with learners who are interested in art.
- There is also information about animals and I have worked with some learners who have enjoyed this.

*The kind of technology the learner spoke about exists in a reading system called LeapPad from Leapfrog (www.leapfrog.com). LeapPad is a type of laptop computer. You insert books written on "smart paper". Readers can run a "pen" across the text and the text is read aloud. Learners can choose to hear the whole text, to hear only the words they choose, or to hear phonics or word meanings. Right now, the books are all for children and are not interesting to adult readers. We hope that adult content will be developed soon.

You can hear adult stories read aloud on the internet from the **National Adult Literacy Database (NALD)**. Go to the homepage at www.nald.ca and click on **Story of the Week**. The stories that have the word AUDIO in red text beside them have the learner who wrote the story reading it for you. You need RealPlayer and there is a link on the NALD site where you can download it for free.

Canadian Encyclopedia
CD-ROM from McClelland & Stewart (www.tceplus.com)
Windows or Mac

This encyclopedia comes in several versions including a multi-volume deluxe version. It is available at bookstores. You can buy last year's version quite cheaply. We bought the 1999 World Edition and the 2000 Student Edition for students up to Grade 9.

The **World Edition** includes:

- The Canadian Encyclopedia
- L'Encyclopédie canadienne
- Hutchinson's Educational Encyclopedia
- The Lives and Times of the Prime Ministers
- Larousse French-English/English-French dictionaries
- The Canadian Oxford Dictionary
- Gage Canadian Thesaurus
- The Globe and Mail Style Book
- Internet links and updates
- Canadian and world timeline
- Maclean's Magazine updates
- Canucklehead Interactive Quiz

The **Student Edition** is written in clear language and includes:

- easy searching with simple everyday language
- Gage Canadian Dictionary
- Gage Canadian Thesaurus
- Canucklehead Jr. Interactive Quiz
- Internet links
- online student guides

These CD-ROMs are for learners who want to do research.

The interface (the way it looks) and search function are similar to those used on the Internet.

Using this CD-ROM can be good practice for learners who find research on the Internet confusing and difficult.

Both CD-ROMs have toolbars with icons. They have content lists. Each entry has an icon that tells you where the item comes from (dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedia, Maclean's Magazine, etc.) and what kind of item it is (text, map, graph, picture, video, audio, etc.). You can sort the lists by where the item comes from or by what type of item it is. In the student edition, you can save items in a binder.

Computer learners can practice:

- opening and closing a program
- using buttons
- using icons
- using windows
- using menus
- clicking

- scrolling
- using a search engine (keywords, subjects, titles)
- using multimedia

Our Observations

- We use this CD-ROM with a Level 2/3 grammar class where learners are preparing to go to college upgrading.
- We use the Encyclopedia for research with success. The information is easy to find and easy to read.
- Some learners like doing the multiple-choice quiz in the World edition, although a lot of the information is new to them.

The Alphabet/The Interactive Picture Dictionary/Measuring Up CD-ROMs from Protea Textware (www.proteatextware.com.au) Windows

You can borrow these CD-ROMs in Ontario from the Centre AlphaPlus Centre (alphaplus.ca/mainframe.htm).

The Alphabet

This program is for adult Literacy and beginner ESL learners who want to practice alphabet skills such as the names and sounds of the letters of the English alphabet, upper and lower case letters, and alphabetical ordering. Learners can also practice using the keyboard and spelling. The program comes with a workbook with exercises that can be photocopied so learners can practice away from the computer. Learners can choose to listen to Canadian, American, British, or Australian accents.

The Interactive Picture Dictionary

This program is for learners who want to practice spelling and vocabulary skills. The entry for each word includes:

- a photo
- spoken pronunciation
- the number of syllables
- a spoken and written sentence that shows the meaning of the word
- three spelling activities for each of the singular and plural word forms
- an activity where learners type the missing letters
- an activity where learners type the word from memory
- an activity where learners type the word in new sentences

Measuring Up

This program is for learners who want to practice basic numeracy skills for measurement in the areas of:

- fractions
- decimals
- reading scales
- metric units

Our Observations

These programs did not arrive in time to use with the women's class. We will use them in our:

- Level 1 reading groups
- Level 2 upgrading class (Measuring Up)
- Computer class