Android
An Introduction to the TalkBack Screen Reader

Do you struggle to see the contents of the screen on your Android Smartphone or Tablet? Well, if you do, you might benefit from using TalkBack!

What is TalkBack?

TalkBack is a screen reader. It enables a person with a vision impairment to find out what is on the screen of their Smartphone or Tablet by reading out what's under their finger. It also reads alerts and popup messages when they appear!

TalkBack Gestures

If you didn't need TalkBack, you could simply look at the screen and tap the feature you want. However, using TalkBack requires constant contact with the screen, so the techniques used by sighted people won't work. TalkBack uses a series of 'gestures' to accomplish the same things. Gestures are made by moving one or more fingers around the screen, or by tapping with one or more fingers.

Turning on TalkBack

There are a few ways to turn Talk back on. The two easiest methods are described below:

Note 1: These instructions have been created using a Samsung Galaxy A40 Smart Phone, running Android version 10 (Q). The steps outlined may be slightly different on your device, depending on which device you have and which version of Android it is running.

Using the Google Assistant to Turn TalkBack On

The easiest way to turn TalkBack on is to use the Google Assistant. Simply say "OK Google, turn TalkBack on". Upon doing this, the Google Assistant will say "turning TalkBack on". For reference, to turn TalkBack off, simply say "OK Google, turn Talkback off"!

Turning TalkBack on Using an Accessibility Shortcut

If you don't have the Google Assistant available, you can use an Accessibility Shortcut to turn TalkBack on instead. An Accessibility Shortcut involves pressing a combination of the Power, Volume Up or Volume Down keys together. It is possible to turn

TalkBack on and off by holding down the Power button and the Volume Up button at the same time. However, this feature is not enabled by default. Therefore, sighted assistance may be required in order to turn TalkBack on for the first time using this method.

To turn TalkBack on using the Power and Volume Up keys, follow these suggested steps:

1.	From the Home Screen, activate the Settings icon. For reference, this icon has an associated graphic of a cog-wheel. Upon doing this, the Settings screen will be displayed.

Note 2: If you do not have a Settings icon on your Home Screen, activate the Apps button and then locate and activate the Settings app in the resulting screen.

2.	In the Settings screen, locate and activate the button labelled Accessibility. This button also contains the text "TalkBack, Mono Audio, Assistant Menu". Upon doing this, the Accessibility screen will be displayed.

3.	In the Accessibility screen, locate and activate the button labelled Advanced Settings. Upon doing this, the Advanced Settings screen will be displayed.

4.	In the Advanced Settings screen, locate and activate the button labelled Side and Volume Up keys. Upon doing this, the Side and Volume Up screen will be displayed.

5.	 In the Side and Volume Up screen, ensure that only the tick box associated with TalkBack is ticked. Upon doing this, a screen will be displayed which describes how TalkBack can take full control of your phone and provide help in navigating and reading text based information, as well as when navigating inside apps.

6.	At the bottom of the screen, you will find two buttons, labelled Deny and Allow. Activate the Allow button. Upon doing this, TalkBack will be turned on and you will hear a spoken announcement to confirm this!

7.	Finally, activate the **Home** button, situated at the bottom centre of the screen. Note that in order to activate the button, you must first touch it, then perform a One Finger Double Tap anywhere on the screen (more about this later). Upon doing this, you will be returned to the Side and Volume Up screen.

Note 3: If the Home Button isn't available, perform a Two Finger Swipe Up from the bottom centre of the screen instead to return to the Home Screen.

Now you have enabled the Accessibility Shortcut, you can press the Power and Volume Up keys together to turn TalkBack off. To turn TalkBack back on again, simply press the Power and Volume Up keys together again!

Note 4: It's possible to assign more than one Accessibility feature to be turned on or off using an Accessibility Shortcut. If you have 2 or more features enabled, a popup window will be displayed prompting you to choose the desired option. Activate the appropriate button to turn the desired feature on/off.

TalkBack Gestures

TalkBack uses a series of finger movements, called 'gestures', to navigate the screen and activate controls. There are many types of gesture. Some gestures use just one finger, whilst others involve the use of two, three and sometimes 4 fingers. Gestures can be a little tricky to learn, but with practice and determination, you will find that you can access information with relative ease!

Navigating Screens with TalkBack

With TalkBack turned on, you can navigate the screen in two ways. The first method involves simply placing one finger on the screen and dragging it around. In doing this, whichever item your finger passes over, TalkBack will announce it. The last thing spoken by TalkBack is considered to be the Current Item.

The second method of navigation is to use the One Finger Swipe Right gesture. This gesture involves swiping one finger across the screen, a little like flicking an imaginary fly that had landed on the screen off! Upon swiping to the right, the next item will be selected and spoken by TalkBack. This item will become the current item. For reference, swiping to the left with one finger results in the previous item being selected and becoming the current item.

Note 5: TalkBack uses a cursor to navigate. This is represented by a thick border surrounding the currently selected item. Whatever is inside the border will be spoken by TalkBack!

Following are the most commonly used TalkBack gestures.

One Finger Drag

This is known as the Explore gesture. It allows you to explore the contents of the screen. When your finger passes over an item, it is spoken by TalkBack.

One Finger Swipe Right

This is known as the Next Item gesture. It moves the TalkBack cursor to the next item and reads it. For reference, items include icons, blocks of text, buttons and text fields inside apps.

One Finger Swipe Left

This is known as the Previous Item gesture. It moves the
TalkBack cursor to the previous item and reads it. For reference, items include icons, blocks of text, buttons and text fields inside apps.

One Finger Double Tap

This is known as the Activate gesture. It is used to activate the Current Item. For reference, items include icons, blocks of text, buttons and text fields inside apps.

After touching the item you want to activate, you can perform the One Finger Double Tap anywhere on the screen, as the last item you touched is considered to be the Current Item!

Note 6: Buttons can have two purposes. The first is to display a new screen of information. The second is to turn a setting on or off. In either case, you activate it in the same way, by performing a One Finger Double Tap!

Note 7: When performing the One Finger Double Tap gesture, the taps need to be immediately after each other. You cannot delay, because if you do, TalkBack will interpret this as two separate Explore gestures!

Two Finger Swipe Left

This is known as the Scroll Right gesture. It is used on the **Home Screen** to display the next page. Upon doing this, TalkBack will announce "page X of Y", where X is the current page and Y is the total number of pages available.

Two Finger Swipe Right

This is known as the Scroll Left gesture. It is used on the **Home Screen** to display the previous page. Upon doing this, TalkBack will announce "page X of Y", where X is the current page and Y is the total number of pages available.

Two Finger Swipe Up

This is known as the Scroll Down gesture. It is used inside apps to scroll the screen down. Place two fingers on the screen, and slowly slide your fingers up the screen. Upon doing this, you will hear a tone and the next few options will come into view! You can now use the Explore Gesture, or the Next Item gesture, to explore the items.

Two Finger Swipe Down

This is known as the Scroll Up gesture. It is used inside apps to scroll the screen up. Place two fingers on the screen and slowly slide your fingers down the screen. Upon doing this, you will hear a tone and the previous few options will come into view! You can now use the Explore Gesture, or the Next Item gesture, to explore the items.

Note 8: When performing gestures that involve two or more fingers, leave a small gap between the fingers. This will help TalkBack to recognise how many fingers are touching the screen!

There are a few more gestures you can use to navigate screens with TalkBack. However, the gestures provided above should be sufficient to get you going!

Adjusting the TalkBack Speech Rate

You can increase or decrease the speed at which TalkBack speaks by doing the following:

1. **Perform a Three Finger Swipe Right until TalkBack says "Speech Rate".**

2. **Now perform a One Finger Swipe Up to increase the speech rate, or a One Finger Swipe Down to decrease the speech rate. Each time you swipe, the speech rate will be adjusted by 5%.**

3. **When you've adjusted the speech rate to the desired level, perform a Three Finger Swipe Right until Characters is the current option. This is the default setting!**

Note 9: The Three Finger Swipe Right gesture is used to select various TalkBack settings. When you select the desired setting, use a One Finger Swipe Up or Down to explore the options for that setting. For reference, you can also use a Three Finger Swipe Left to cycle through the settings in the opposite direction.

Answering and Ending Calls using TalkBack

With TalkBack turned on, answering an incoming call is easy! Simply perform a Two Finger Double Tap anywhere on the screen to answer the call. When you've finished on the call, you can end it by performing a Two Finger Double Tap again.

Note 10: The Two Finger Double Tap for answering and ending calls is only available in Android version 11 and later.

A Note About the Two Finger Double Tap

The Two Finger Double Tap gesture has multiple purposes. Its main purpose is to answer and end a call. However, if you are listening to a music track, it is used to pause and then resume the audio. Similarly, if you're watching a video clip, it is used to pause and resume the playback of the video.

Typing with TalkBack

When you want to enter information into a Text Field, you first select it and then perform a One Finger Double Tap. Upon doing this, you'll be in 'edit' mode and a virtual keyboard will be displayed at the bottom of the screen.

You can now place your finger on the keyboard and slide it around until you find the character you wish to enter. As you navigate the keyboard, TalkBack announces the character you're positioned on. To enter a character, simply lift your finger when TalkBack announces the character you want. Repeat the process to enter additional characters.

If you accidentally enter the wrong character, locate the Delete key on the keyboard and then lift your finger. Upon doing this, the last character entered will be deleted!

Using TalkBack does require dedication and practice. However, once you've mastered the basics, you'll find it can help you to achieve almost all of those day-to-day tasks you need to do.

This is the end of the introduction to the TalkBack screen reader found on Android devices. For more information regarding TalkBack, please contact the author, Gary Eady, using the following email address:

geady@sightforsurrey.org.uk