

Apple iPhone and iPad

A Basic Introduction to the VoiceOver Screen Reader



Do you struggle to see the contents of the screen on your Apple iPhone or iPad? Well, if you do, you might benefit from using VoiceOver!

What is VoiceOver?

VoiceOver is the built-in screen reader found on all Apple iOS devices (iPhone, iPad and iPod). When VoiceOver is turned on, your device will speak information about any item on the screen you touch. Additionally, it will also read alerts and popup messages when they appear!

Turning VoiceOver On

There are three ways in which you can turn VoiceOver on. The two most common methods are described below.

Using Siri to Turn on VoiceOver

If your device is connected to the internet, you can turn on VoiceOver by using Siri. To do this, find a quiet place and do the following:

1. Hold down the Home Button, or the Side button on devices without a Home Button. Upon doing this, Siri will start listening to you!
2. In a clear voice, full of pride and confidence, say "Turn VoiceOver on"!
3. Between two and five seconds later, Siri will say, "OK, I have turned VoiceOver on".

For reference, to turn VoiceOver off, invoke Siri again and say "Turn VoiceOver Off".

Turning VoiceOver On Using the Accessibility Shortcut

All Apple iOS devices include an option for quickly turning certain Accessibility features on and off by pressing the Home button, or Side button on devices without a Home Button, three times quickly. This option is known as the Accessibility Shortcut.

To enable the Accessibility Shortcut for VoiceOver, follow these suggested steps:

1. From the Home Screen, activate the Settings icon. Upon doing this, the Settings screen will be displayed.

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

Note 1: The Accessibility Shortcut button is situated right at the bottom of the Accessibility screen, so you might have to scroll the screen a few times in order to locate it.

In the Accessibility Shortcut screen, you will find a number of buttons that represent switches for turning specific features on and off by pressing the Home button three times quickly, or Side button on devices which don't have a Home Button. It is possible to have more than one feature enabled, however, for best results, it is recommended to have only the one. To switch a feature On/Off, simply activate the button with its name. When a feature is enabled, a tick symbol is displayed at the left side of the button and VoiceOver says "selected".

4. Ensure that the only button that is enabled is the one for VoiceOver.
5. Finally, activate the **Home** button. Upon doing this, you will be returned to the Home Screen of your device. Alternatively, if your device doesn't have a Home Button, slide up from the bottom of the screen with 1 finger until you feel the second vibration and hear the second pop noise and then release your finger.

You can now turn VoiceOver on/off by pressing the Home button, or Side button on devices without a Home Button, 3 times quickly. How cool is that!

VoiceOver Gestures

VoiceOver 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 four 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 VoiceOver

With VoiceOver 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, VoiceOver will announce it. The last thing spoken by VoiceOver is considered to be the Current Item.

The second method of navigation is to use the One Finger Swipe 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 VoiceOver. This item will become the current item. For reference, swiping to the left with One Finger results in the previous item being selected and announced by VoiceOver.

Note 2: VoiceOver 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 VoiceOver!

Following are the most commonly used VoiceOver 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 VoiceOver.

One Finger Swipe Right

This is known as the Next Item gesture. It moves the VoiceOver cursor to the next item and reads it. For reference, items can be icons on your Home Screen, blocks of text, buttons and text fields inside apps.

One Finger Swipe Left

This is known as the Previous Item gesture. It moves the VoiceOver cursor to the previous item and reads it. For reference, items can be icons on your Home Screen, 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. Typically, items are icons, buttons or text fields. 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 3: 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!

Note 4: When performing the One Finger Double Tap gesture, the taps need to be immediately after each other. You cannot delay, because if you do, VoiceOver will interpret this as two separate Explore gestures!

Three Finger Swipe Left

This is known as the Scroll Right gesture. It is used on the **Home Screen** to display the next page. Place three fingers on the screen and swipe your fingers from right to left across the screen horizontally. Upon doing this, VoiceOver will announce "page X of Y", where X is the current page and Y is the total number of pages available.

Three Finger Swipe Right

This is known as the Scroll Left gesture. It is used on the **Home Screen** to display the previous page. Place three fingers on the screen and swipe your fingers from left to right across the screen horizontally. Upon doing this, VoiceOver will announce "page X of Y", where X is the current page and Y is the total number of pages available.

Three Finger Swipe Up

This is known as the Scroll Down gesture. It is used inside apps to scroll the screen down. Place three fingers on the screen and swipe your fingers up the screen vertically. Upon doing this, you will hear a tone and the next few options will come into view!

Three Finger Swipe Down

This is known as the Scroll Up gesture. It is used inside apps to scroll the screen up. Place three fingers on the screen and swipe your fingers down the screen vertically. Upon doing this, you will hear a tone and the previous few options will come into view!

Two Finger Swipe Up

This is known as the Read from Top gesture. It is used to read the entire contents of the screen from top to bottom, regardless of the cursor position.

Two Finger Swipe Down

This is known as the Read to End gesture. It is used to read the contents of the screen from the cursor position to the end.

Two Finger Touch

This is known as the Pause/Resume gesture. It is used to pause the reading. Touching the screen again with two fingers resumes the reading.

Note 5: When performing gestures that involve two or more fingers, leave a small gap between the fingers. This will help VoiceOver to recognise how many fingers are touching the screen!

There are quite a few more gestures you can use with VoiceOver. However, these should be sufficient to get you going!

Adjusting the VoiceOver Speaking Rate

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

1. Place your thumb and first finger on the screen and twist your fingers to the right, in a circular motion, as if you were unscrewing the top on a bottle of lemonade. If you do this correctly, VoiceOver will announce a setting. This will probably be Characters, words or headings. Repeat the twist motion until VoiceOver says "Speaking Rate".
2. Now perform a One Finger Swipe Up to increase the speaking rate, or a One Finger Swipe Down to decrease the speaking rate. Each time you swipe, the speech rate will be adjusted by 5%.

Note 6: The Two Finger Twist Right gesture invokes what is known as the Rotor. This is used to select various VoiceOver settings. When you have selected the desired setting, use a One Finger Swipe Up or Down to explore the options for that setting. For reference, you can also perform a Two Finger Twist Left to cycle through the settings in the opposite direction.

When you have adjusted the speaking rate, use the Two Finger Twist gesture again until VoiceOver says "Characters". This is the default setting and is the one which allows you to navigate text one character at a time by performing the One Finger Swipe Down gesture, to move to the next character, or the One Finger Swipe Up gesture, to go to the previous character.

Opening an App

To open an app from the Home Screen, first navigate to the icon for the app you wish to open. Then, perform a One Finger Double Tap anywhere on the screen. It is best to perform the double tap in the centre of the screen, because you have more room to do it! Basically, the name of the app last announced by VoiceOver will be the one which is opened when you perform the One Finger Double Tap.

An alternative way of opening an app is to use Siri. Simply invoke Siri and say "open", followed by the name of the app you wish to open. For example "open Mail". A second or two later, the app will open and VoiceOver will announce the first item on the screen. In most cases, this will be the item at the upper left corner!

Closing an App

To close an app, simply press the Home Button. Upon doing this, you will be returned to the Home Screen and VoiceOver will announce the name of the first icon on the page. Alternatively, if your device does not have a Home Button, you can close an app by sliding up from the bottom of the screen with 1 finger until you feel the second vibration and hear the second pop noise and then release your finger.

This concludes the basic introduction to VoiceOver on Apple iOS devices.

For more information on how to use VoiceOver on your Apple iOS device, please contact the author, Gary Eady, using the following email address:

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