

Talking Books

What's Available and How to Listen!



There are many ways of listening to talking books. Whether it be on a CD, USB Memory Stick, Smart Speaker or through the use of an app on a Smart Phone or Tablet, membership of a library [or some form of subscription] is usually required.

This document discusses the three largest providers of talking books in the UK at present, as well as the various methods of listening to them!

Providers of Talking books

Following are the top 3 providers of Talking Books in the UK.

1. Audible

Amazon's Audible service is the largest provider of talking books in the UK at present. They have over 200,000 unabridged titles available, all read by professional actors or broadcasters. You can choose to read a book using an Amazon Echo Smart speaker or by Digital Download using an app on a Smart Phone or Tablet.

Audible books are usually quite expensive if purchased individually, however, you can purchase an audible book using credits (typically books are 1 credit each but some more expensive books can be 2 credits). Credits can be purchased by taking out a monthly membership subscription. At the time of writing (07 April 2022), the following membership subscriptions are available:

- 1 credit Monthly Membership = £7.99.
- 2 credit Monthly Membership = £14.99.
- 12 credit Annual Membership = £69.99.
- 24 credit Annual Membership = £109.99.

You can freeze or terminate your membership at any time and you'll not lose any books you purchase, they just sit in your account and can be listened to over and over at no extra cost. Any unused credits are rolled over so you don't have to panic if you don't order a book each month.

If you have an Alexa enabled device such as an Amazon Echo, Audible offer a selection of free books each month. To find out what these books are, just say "Alexa, what are the free books this month?".

Joining Audible

To become a member of Audible, visit the Audible web site - www.audible.co.uk. From the Home Page, activate the **Sign In** link and then enter your Amazon user name and password when prompted. Finally, activate the **Start your free 30-day trial** link. That's it, you have signed up! You will now effectively have a book of your choice for free!

Alternatively, using your Alexa enabled device, you could say "Alexa, subscribe to Audible". Alexa will ask you to confirm that you wish to join. Answering 'Yes' will start your free 30-day trial!

After 30 days has elapsed, Audible will automatically charge you £7.99 a month. This will be taken from the credit or debit card you have registered with Amazon. If you wish to cancel your membership, this can be done at any time using the Audible web site!

2. The RNIB Reading Service

The second largest provider of talking books in the UK is the RNIB's Talking Book service. They have a library consisting of over 33,000 unabridged titles, all read by professional actors and broadcasters. Membership to their service is free! You can choose to receive a book in CD format, on a USB Memory Stick or by Digital Download using an app on a Smart Phone or Tablet. There is even an option for listening using a Smart speaker, such as an Amazon Echo with Alexa.

In order to join the RNIB Talking Book Service, you must be blind or partially sighted [or have a medical condition that prevents you from reading printed books].

Joining the RNIB Talking Book Service

To join the RNIB Talking Book Service, call the RNIB Help Line on 0303 123 9999. When you get through, state that you wish to join the Talking Book service and you will be transferred to an advisor who will sign you up over the phone. You will be asked how you would like to read your books (CD, USB Memory Stick or by digital Download). If you choose Digital Download, you will have to register using the RNIB Reading Services web page - www.readingservices.rnib.org.uk. This process is pretty straight forward and should not take more than 10 minutes to do.

3. Calibre Audio

Calibre Audio is currently the third largest provider of talking books in the UK. They have more than 13,000 unabridged titles, all read by professional actors and broadcasters. You can choose to receive a book on a USB Memory Stick or by Digital Download using an app on a Smart Phone or Tablet. Membership is free!

In order to join Calibre Library, you must be blind or partially sighted [or have a medical condition that prevents you from reading printed books].

Joining Calibre Library

To join the Calibre Library, visit www.calibreaudio.org.uk and then activate the link labelled Join Today. The joining form is a little tricky if you use a screen reader, so it might be worthwhile asking a sighted person to help you to complete it.

You will be asked how you would like to receive your books. For simplicity, it may be worth choosing to read your books using a USB Memory Stick. However, in order to do this, you will require a device on which to play them. Memory Sticks and compatible players are discussed later in this document!

Other Providers of Talking Books

It is also possible to borrow talking books from Surrey Libraries. However, the number of titles in their collection is usually limited to a few hundred at most. It is also possible to purchase talking books on CD from High Street stores such as WH Smith and Waterstones, as well as online stores such as Amazon and Ebay. These are usually abridged versions and cost anything from £4.99 and £49.99, sometimes even more than this!

So, as you can see, there are many providers of talking books. But which service do you join? Well this will largely depend on how you wish to read your books. For the most part, the RNIB's Talking Book service offers the most flexibility, as you can receive your books in a wide range of formats! You could even join 2 or 3 services, to maximise the amount of titles you can read, but this will depend on your finances!

Methods of Listening to Talking Books

USB Memory Stick

One of the most popular methods of listening to Talking Books is through the use of a USB Memory Stick. A memory stick is approximately the same size as your thumb and usually contains 1 digital talking book, however, in some cases, they can contain as many as 3.

In order to use a USB Memory Stick, you need a device capable of playing the contents of the memory stick. There are many of these available on the market today. The most popular device is described as follows:

The RNIB Accord USB Memory Stick Player

The RNIB Accord combination USB player and Bluetooth speaker is an advanced audio device, designed specifically for blind and partially sighted users, with easy-to-use tactile controls, wireless charging, easy-to-locate ports, bookmarking features and chapter skipping function.

Small (just a little larger than a standard coffee mug) and highly portable, you can listen to Talking Books on USB and any other audio via Bluetooth – podcasts, BBC Sounds, Audible audiobooks, your ‘dance like nobody’s watching’ playlist. If your smartphone or tablet can play it, you can listen to it on the RNIB Accord.

The rechargeable battery provides five to six hours listening on a full charge. Simply place the RNIB Accord on to the wireless charger provided and hear the player announce when it is correctly positioned for charging. Your RNIB Accord is supplied with one Qi wireless charging pad for fast charging and two USB-C cables, but not a USB charger plug. You will need to purchase a plug separately!

With its high quality speaker, the RNIB Accord is the perfect device for listening to audio books on a USB memory stick. Weighing only 384g (less than a tin of tomato soup!), you can easily move it with you as you go about your day.

Controls

Stylish and modern-looking, it has a black case with contrasting white buttons. The volume control buttons are a large, tactile plus and minus sign on one side of the device, designed to be easily located by touch. They also function as chapter skip forward/backward buttons.

The RNIB Accord’s two other control buttons and all ports are on top of the device for ease of use. The round, white power button is engraved with a power symbol, and the white book/folder skip button is distinctly smaller and smooth. The power button also functions as the play/pause button.

Voice prompts

The RNIB Accord gives voice prompts in a clear, natural, English male voice to indicate battery, Bluetooth, charging and software update status. It will also speak when headphones, a USB stick, or an SD card are connected/disconnected and when a control button is pressed, (for example, “Volume up”, “Play”, “Power on”).

Bookmarking

Bookmarking of your last position is automatic when the player is paused or stopped. When the USB stick is removed and reinserted the player will automatically start playing at the point you left off. The player can bookmark hundreds of individual USB sticks. You cannot add multiple bookmarks to a USB stick.

The RNIB Accord costs £49.99 + VAT. It can be purchased from RNIB or Sight For Surrey!

In Your Pocket, the All-in-One Solution

Designed to make reading the latest newspapers, magazines and talking books easier, In Your Pocket features a Samsung device, with large buttons and a great speaker for quality sound. It comes with 3GB of O2 internet connectivity, and high quality interactive speech software called RealSam. It also comes with a subscription to RNIB Newsagent, access to RNIB Talking Books, as well as podcasts, weather, location information, thousands of radio stations and unlimited calls and text messages.

With voice control, In Your Pocket is easy to use, fuss-free and great for listening on-the-go. You can get reading straightaway, without the need for a computer or downloads. You will always have access to the latest editions of newspapers, magazines and podcasts, wherever and whenever you want to listen.

In Your Pocket also helps you to stay in touch with friends and family with its phone call and text messaging features, all using spoken commands. You can add contacts and make phone calls by simply saying, for example, "Add a contact for Gary Eady", to add a new contact. When making a call to a contact, simply say, for example, "Call Gary Eady". Alternatively, simply say "Call" followed by the number you wish to dial!

With In Your Pocket, there's no waiting for the postman. Just say "Read me The Guardian", or "Find books about gardening", or "Play me The Archers", and In Your Pocket will oblige. You can also access other useful information, for example "What is the weather in Cambridge?", or "What is the time in Paris?". Asking "Where am I?" tells you your current location, along with the nearest street intersection.

In Your Pocket is a superb device and costs £25.99 a month, over a 24 month contract. Alternatively, it can be purchased outright for £624. However, there is no real benefit in doing this, as you don't save any money!

To order In Your Pocket, please call RealSAM's dedicated In Your Pocket Helpline on 03337 727 708. Alternatively, order In Your Pocket online - <https://www.realsam.co.uk> or email the team at helpline@realsam.co.uk.

Apps for Smart Phones and Tablets

The Audible App

The Audible app is available for free on both iOS and Android devices. The player offers premium-quality audio without interruptions, enables you to adjust the narration speed, and provides options for fast-forwarding and rewinding the audio, as well as adding and managing bookmarks. When you stop a book playing, the next time you start the book, it will continue from the place at which you stopped it!

You can search for books by a particular Author, Title, or by specifying Key Words. Once the book has been located, you can listen to a preview of the book, find out

how long the book is in hours and minutes and find out how many books are in the series! If you want to download a book to your device, you will need to pay for it, or use a credit, if you are an Audible member (there are various membership tariffs)! The standard tariff is £7.99 a month, which gives you 1 credit. However, from time to time, books are available for up to 80% off!

In order to access talking books with the Audible app, you will need to enter your email address and password associated with your Amazon account into the app when prompted. All purchases of Audible books must be done on the Amazon web site. When you purchase a book, it is automatically added to the Library section in the app! Simply go to the Library section, locate the book and then open it!

The Audible app is fully accessible to anyone using a screen reader on a Smart Phone or Tablet!

The Dolphin Easy Reader App

The Dolphin EasyReader app is available for free on both iOS and Android devices. It has been specifically designed by Dolphin Computer Access, a leading company specialising in Assistive Technology, for readers who are blind, partially sighted or have reading difficulties, such as dyslexia. The EasyReader app offers members of the RNIB Reading Services Library the opportunity to download and listen to a book in the comfort of their home, completely free of charge.

You can search for books by a particular Author, Title, or by specifying Key Words. Once the book has been located, you can download it to your device. There is no time limit on how long you can keep the book!

Once you have a book downloaded to your device, you can use the available controls to Play, Pause, fast-forward and rewind the audio. You can jump to a specific section, page or bookmark (if any have been set), as well as having the ability to set a Sleep Timer, which will stop the book playing after a specified period of time. When you stop a book playing, the next time you start the book, it will continue from the place at which you stopped it!

In order to access talking books from the RNIB Reading Services library, you will need to enter your email address and password into the app when prompted. The EasyReader app is fully accessible to anyone using a screen reader on a Smart Phone or Tablet!

Amazon Echo Smart Speaker with Alexa

It is now possible to listen to audio books from the RNIB using Alexa on an Amazon Echo Smart speaker. In order to do this, you must first create an RNIB Reading Services account and then link this account to the RNIB Talking Books skill in the Amazon Alexa app on your Smartphone or Tablet. For information on how to set up your Amazon Echo Smart speaker to play talking books from the RNIB, see the document called "Setting up your Alexa Enabled Device to Play RNIB Talking Books", found on the ICT Handouts and Tutorials page of the Sight For Surrey web site.

For your convenience, the direct link to the ICT Handouts and Tutorials page is as follows:

<https://sightforsurrey.org.uk/get-help/vision-impairment/technology-and-equipment/ict-handouts-tutorials/>

Once you have linked your Reading Services Account with the RNIB Talking Books skill, you can ask Alexa to "Open RNIB Talking Books". When you do this, the skill will provide you with help on how to find a talking book and how to control the playback.

For more information on talking books, contact the author, Gary Eady, using the following methods:

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