

Using iPhone's® Siri Voice Command



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In this digital Short, you will learn:

- Configuring and Using Siri
- Making Calls with Siri
- Emailing with Siri
- Texting with Siri
- Using Siri to Manage Time
- Finding Music with Siri

Meet Siri

There have been many “holy grails” in the development of computers and related technology. Things such as a truly intuitive interface, artificial intelligence, natural language search engines, and so on. One of these grails is voice recognition or a spoken interface, with the ultimate goal being a computer as featured on the show *Star Trek* to which the user simply speaks a command using normal language and the computer responds accordingly. There have been many attempts at these interfaces over the years, from voice commands on the desktop to voice-recognition dictation systems. Mostly, they’ve been marginally successful at best and laughable failures at worst. That’s because processing and interpreting spoken language is among the most difficult technical challenges there is; the incredible diversity in the way humans use language is mind-boggling. From local dialects to an individual’s pronunciation of words to speaking cadence, the hurdles to being able to artificially interact with the spoken word are incredible.

It's surprising therefore (to me at least), that the next practical evolution in voice recognition comes not in a supercomputer (no offense to IBM's Watson intended), but in a very small, mobile device. This evolution is Apple's Siri voice recognition system introduced on the iPhone 4S. Siri enables you to speak many different commands to which the device responds, interacting with you as needed to get more information about what you want to do. Additionally, Siri has the ability to take dictation anywhere you use the iPhone's keyboard.

To use Siri, you don't need to change the way you speak; Siri is a natural language interface. For example, when you want to create a reminder, you simply say something like, "Remind me to walk the dog." Siri responds with a request for specifics such as "When do you want to be reminded?" You respond with "Today at 5 PM." Siri dutifully creates the reminder for you.

Siri works with many apps and in various contexts so you can speak to your iPhone in lots of different situations.

Is Siri the holy grail of voice recognition technology? Has the *Star Trek* computer arrived? Note quite. But Siri is an amazing leap forward in that direction. Siri isn't perfect by any means, but it does work incredibly well for many tasks. Siri even has a sense of humor. (If you want proof, ask Siri what the best phone is.)

In this digital short, you'll get an overview of the amazing Siri and will find information to help you start making the most of this incredible technology.

Configuring and Using Siri

To use Siri, you first need to configure it. Then, learn the basic pattern Siri follows when you use it; in most cases, Siri prompts you for what it needs and confirms what it thinks you've asked it to do so getting started is pretty simple.

It's Not All Good

It wasn't obvious to me at first, but your iPhone must be connected to the Internet for Siri to work. To see this for yourself, put the iPhone in Airplane mode and try to activate Siri; it will tell you that it can't connect to the network. Sometimes, it displays a message telling you must be connected to the Internet for Siri to work, but sometimes it doesn't. Since the "I can't connect to the network" message appears to be the default when Siri is unable to accomplish something, it isn't easy to tell that it's not working because your iPhone isn't on the Internet because of some other reason.

Configuring Siri

Before you can speak to Siri, perform the following steps to configure it:

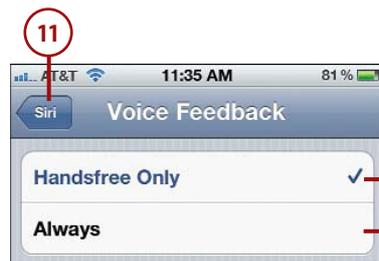
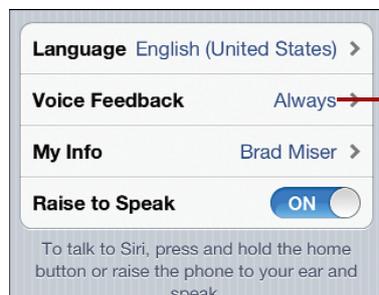
1. Tap Settings.
2. Tap General.



3. Tap Siri.
4. Tap the OFF slider to turn Siri ON.
5. Tap Enable Siri.



6. Tap Language.
7. Tap the language you want to use to speak to Siri.
8. Tap Siri.
9. Tap Voice Feedback. Siri provides you with audible confirmation when you speak to it. For example, when you tell it to create a reminder, Siri speaks the reminder it thinks you told it to create so you know what it is without having to look at the screen.
10. If you always want Siri's voice feedback, tap Always or if you only want voice feedback when you are operating in handsfree mode, such as when you are using the iPhone's earbuds or a Bluetooth headset, tap Handsfree Only. If you choose Handsfree Only, when you aren't using a headset, you can see Siri's feedback on the screen, which is typically faster than the voice feedback.
11. Tap Siri.



12. Tap My Info.
13. Use the All Contacts screen to find and tap your information. Siri often uses your name when it speaks to you; this tells Siri what name to use when it addresses you. Siri also uses this for other information about you, such as your addresses.
14. If you want Siri to activate when you raise the phone to your ear (like you would to talk on the phone), slide the Raise to Speak switch to the ON position. As long as you aren't making a phone call, you can activate Siri by lifting the phone to your ear. You can always activate Siri by pressing and holding the Home button down or pressing the middle button on the earbud controls. You are now ready to starting talking to your iPhone.



Understanding How to Use Siri

Using Siri is pretty simple because it follows a consistent pattern and prompts you for input and direction:



1. **Activate Siri by** pressing and holding the Home button down, pressing and holding the center part of the buttons on the earbuds down, or lifting the iPhone to your ear (if you've enabled that setting) until you hear the Siri chime. (If Siri is already active, tap the Microphone icon.) This puts Siri in "listening" mode and the "What can I help you with?" text appears along with the microphone icon, which is shaded in purple and fills to represent the level of sound Siri is hearing you speak. This indicates Siri is ready for your command.





2. Speak your command or ask a question. When you stop speaking, Siri goes into processing mode; a purple band rotates around the microphone to show you that Siri is thinking. After Siri interprets what you've said, it provides two kinds of feedback to confirm what it heard: it displays what it heard on the screen and provides audible feedback to you (except if you've set it for Handsfree Only and aren't using a headset). Siri then tries to do what it thinks you've asked and shows you what it is doing. If it needs more input from you, you're prompted to provide it and Siri moves into "listening" mode automatically.
3. If Siri requests you confirm what it is doing or to make a selection, do so. Siri completes the action and displays what it has done; it also audibly confirms the result unless you've selected Handsfree Only and aren't using a headset.



4. If you want Siri to do more for you, tap the Microphone icon and speak your command or if you want to work with the object Siri created for you in its associated app, tap the object Siri created. If you're done with Siri, you can put the iPhone to sleep or tap the Home button to do something else.

Siri uses this pattern for all the tasks it does, but sometimes Siri needs to get more information from you, such as when there are multiple contacts that match the command you've given. Generally, the more specific you make your initial command, the fewer steps you have to work through to complete it. For example, if you say "Meet Will at the park," Siri will require several prompts to get you to tell it who Will is and what time you want to meet him at the park. If you say "Meet William Wallace at the park on 10/17 at 10 AM," Siri will likely be able to complete the task in one step.

Siri is amazingly flexible in how you can speak to it and the accuracy with which it interprets spoken input. However, using Siri effectively requires a bit of practice to learn the most efficient and effective ways to provide commands based on how you speak and what you want Siri to do. In many cases, Siri is a very good way to accomplish tasks while for others, it might actually slow you down. The only way to know is to try it a lot.

In the remainder of this digital shortcut, you'll see how to perform tasks step-by-step. If you work through all of these, you'll be well on your way to making Siri one of your best friends or at least, a very useful companion.

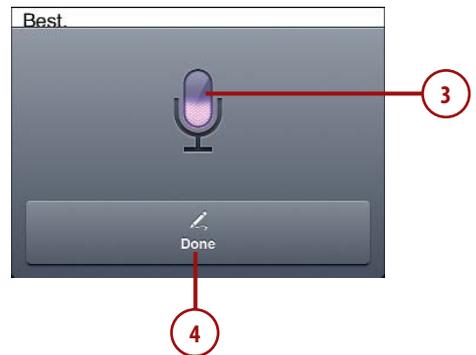
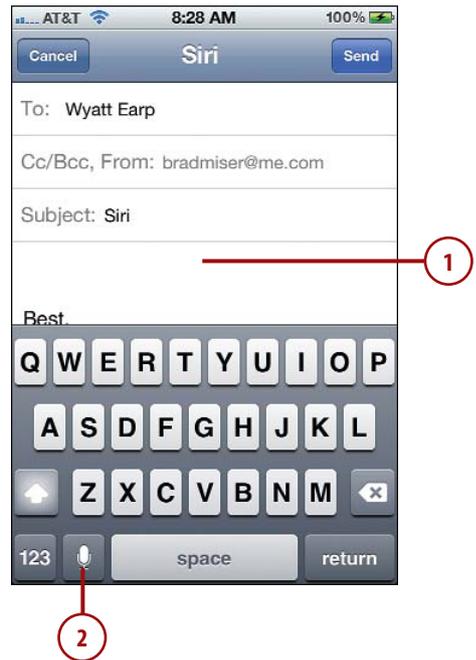
It's Not All Good

Siri is amazing, but it does have some limitations as all technology does. There are some things it seems like it should be able to do, such as reading email messages or sending tweets that it couldn't do at press time. I suspect that will improve over time as Siri evolves.

Dictating to Siri

Siri is great at taking dictation. You can dictate text whenever the iPhone 4S keyboard appears. Here's how:

1. If necessary, move the cursor where you want the text to start.
2. Tap the Microphone icon on the keyboard. Siri goes into "dictation" mode.
3. Speak the text. You can punctuate by saying the punctuation you want to use. For example, to end a sentence, say "Period," "Exclamation point," or "Question mark." You can start a new paragraph by saying "Start new paragraph" or "new line."
4. When you're done, tap Done. Siri processes your text and displays the processing icons. When it's done, you see your text on the screen. You can then work with the dictated text just like text you typed.





Siri is processing text

Dictated text



Going Further with Siri

Following are some other Siri tidbits:

- When the microphone icon appears, you can tap it to put Siri into “listen” mode so you can issue a command.
- If Siri doesn’t automatically quit “listen” mode after you’ve finished speaking, tap the microphone icon. This stops “listen” mode and Siri starts processing your request. You need to do this more often when you are in a noisy environment, because Siri might not be able to accurately discern what sound you are speaking versus the ambient background noise.

- If you are having trouble with Siri understanding commands, speak a bit more slowly and make sure you firmly end your words. If you tend to have a very short pause between words, Siri may run them all together, making them into something that doesn't make sense or that you didn't intend.
- However, you can't pause too long between words or sentences because Siri interprets pauses to mean that you are done speaking and so goes into processing mode. Working with Siri will help you develop a good balance between speed and clarity.
- If Siri doesn't understand what you want, or if you ask it a general sort of question, it will often perform a Web search for you. Siri takes what it thinks you are looking for and does a search using your default web search engine. You see the results page for the search Siri performed. You have to manually open and read the results by tapping the listing you want to see.
- When Siri presents information to you on the screen, such as events it has created, you can often tap that information to move into the app with which it is associated. For example, when you tap an event, you move into the Calendar app. For more complicated items, use a pattern to work with Siri. Use Siri to create the basic information, and then tap it to move into the associated app to add more detail using the keyboard.
- When Siri needs input from you, it presents your options on the screen, such as Yes, Cancel, Confirm, lists of names, and so on. You can speak these items or tap them to select them.
- Siri is very useful for some tasks, such as creating reminders, responding to text messages, and so on, but not so useful for others, such as inputting search criteria because it can take much longer to use Siri than to just type your input.
- Siri is not so good at editing text you dictate. In most cases, you're only option is to replace the text you've dictated to change it. For short text blocks, such as text messages or tweets, this can be fine, but for longer blocks of text, you will have to use the virtual keyboard to make changes to just portions of text. You can use Siri to quickly dictate blocks of text, and then edit the text using the iPhone's text editing tools.

- To use Siri effectively, you should experiment with it by trying to say different commands or similar commands in different ways. There is no definitive list of commands for Siri readily available, and how you speak impacts the sort of commands that will work best for you. It may take a little practice to make Siri work effectively for you and to learn when Siri actually helps you complete tasks you want to do versus just being a cool way to accomplish them. Sometimes, experimentation leads you to unexpected, but very useful results.
- Siri is new and pretty amazing technology. At launch, a number of apps support Siri commands, but over time, we can expect even more apps to be able to accept Siri control. As the apps you use get updated, keep your eyes out for any that add Siri support so that you can start speaking to them as well.
- When Siri can't complete a task that it thinks it should be able to do, it usually responds with the "I can't connect to the network right now." This indicates either your iPhone isn't connected to the Internet, the Siri server is not responding, or Siri isn't able to complete the command. If your iPhone is on the Internet, try the command again.
- When Siri can't complete a task that it knows it can't do, it will respond by telling you so. Occasionally, you can get Siri to complete the task by rephrasing it, but typically you have to use an application directly to get it done.
- Siri sees all and knows all (well, not really, but it sometimes seems that way). If you want to be enlightened, try asking Siri questions. Some examples are "What is the best phone?," "Will you marry me?," "What is the meaning of life?" and so on. Some of the answers are pretty funny, and you don't always get the same ones so Siri can keep amusing you. I've heard it even has responses if you curse at it, though I haven't tried that particular option.