

# Using the Voice Typing feature in Google Docs (edited 01-10-2019)

Including a more complete current list of voice commands

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<https://support.google.com/docs/answer/4492226?hl=en>

## Type with your voice

You can type and edit by speaking in *Google Docs* or in *Google Slides* speaker notes.

In Google Docs, click on the Tools menu and select **Voice Typing**. In other programs, this feature may be called "speech-to-text" or "STT" or "dictation".



## Step 1: Turn on your microphone

To use voice typing or voice commands, your computer microphone needs to be on and working. Click on the microphone icon with your cursor or if you have a touch screen, you can directly tap on the microphone icon.

If that does not seem to enable the microphone, you'll have to see if your microphone is enabled in your computer's operating system.

Devices and microphones vary, so check your computer manual for instructions. Microphone settings are typically in the *System Preferences* on a Mac, or the *Control Panel* on a PC or *Settings* on a Chromebook.

A. In a quiet environment, such as your own room with no music, radio or television playing, you can usually employ the built-in microphone in your laptop or tablet or Chromebook. When you are in school, the ambient noise may confuse the Voice Typing app and many more errors can occur. Also, dictating in a classroom or a library is not usually permitted.

B. Also, in a noisy environment like a coffee shop, the ambient noise will be a problem. In those cases, the use of a dedicated plug-in, Bluetooth or USB microphone will help considerably. Many have ambient noise suppression and positioning the microphone right next to the corner of your mouth will increase accuracy.



## Step 2: Use Voice Typing

Type with your voice by dictating. You do NOT have to dictate by speaking each word separately and very slowly like, "*I ...am...going...to...the...movies...with....my...friend.*" But if you do speak very fast, it also may not work well. Speak at a normal pace, but make sure to pronounce each word clearly.

Sometimes, in normal conversation, we may slur our words like, "*I'm gonna go-ta the store wi-my friend.*" Some of my favorites are "*Jeetyet?*" (Did you eat yet?) "*Watcha gonna do?*" (What are you going to do?) "*Innit?*" (Isn't it?) Try out Voice Typing by choosing a paragraph or two from a book or printed document and read it aloud. Try reading it faster than normal and then again at a normal speed but with making sure you pronounce each word clearly.

You'll see, right on the screen, which method works best for you with this particular

program and with your device such as a laptop, a Chromebook or an iPad.

Google is known for adding features (and sometimes changing or removing them), so over time you'll see more commands become useful.

### Step 3: Practice, Practice, Practice!

Before you can easily and confidently use Voice Typing to create essays or other longer written work using Voice Typing, you will need to practice just speaking aloud in a way that will produce good clean typed text.

1. Select some texts to read aloud. A book of short stories, several pages from one of your textbooks, a short chapter of a novel you're reading or other textual material associated with any of the classes you are taking.
2. Get set up with the computer or tablet you are using and the microphone as well.
3. Read the selected text ALOUD without the microphone on – **as if** you were dictating into the microphone. Reading it aloud once or twice will allow you to become familiar with the structure and with specific vocabulary it includes. Some words that are unfamiliar to you may have to be repeated several times until you're confident in reading them.
4. Then you are ready to turn on the microphone and begin dictating.
5. Cover the computer screen – if you keep watching the screen, it will slow you down and may cause you to forget the next thing you were planning to say. After some weeks of practice, you can begin to try dictation while looking at the screen. It's up to you.
6. Do this a number of times – perhaps *15 minutes a day, three days a week* for several weeks – you'll judge when you feel comfortable and confident. Then you are ready to begin using Voice Typing to do your longer assignments. The more you use the program, the fewer errors you will find. **TIP: A series of short practice sessions tends to have more lasting impact than one long session.**

### Why are there errors?

1. Voice Typing or Speech-to-Text is not yet 100% accurate – but the technology is getting better very rapidly.
2. Some programs are much more accurate than others.
3. Ambient noise (the noises in the room or nearby) can confuse the program. If the television or radio are playing; people talking; machine noises like fans and motors, and so on – all of these can degrade the program's accuracy in translating your words into text.
4. Your device's microphone may not be of a quality necessary for improved accuracy. You can obtain a specialized microphone (wired or wireless) that has been designed to produce more accurate transcriptions and this can help eliminate many errors.
5. You may not be speaking as clearly as you need to – so taking extra care to pronounce words properly will pay off with fewer corrections needed.
6. Each person speaks with an 'accent'. If you are from New York City, you may have a recognizable accent. People from Boston, Atlanta, Houston, New Orleans, Omaha, Chicago and so on, each can have accents common to those places.
7. And each person has a unique personal accent and way of pronouncing certain words and names.
8. Some programs will 'learn' to recognize a user's voice and personal accent and become more accurate the more the person uses the program. Google Docs Voice Typing does not seem to have that ability at this time.
9. When the person dictating is not fully prepared to dictate, he or she may pause a lot, make thinking noises like "uh", "um", "ooh". Or they might say thinking sentences like, "Where did I put that note?" "What was I going to say next?" and so on. If you are dictating and run into a place where you're not sure what you want to say next, click the microphone icon and turn it off until you're ready to continue.

#### **Step 4: Use voice commands**

After you start voice typing, you can use commands to edit and format your document. You can use these commands to add punctuation or formatting to your text. The Voice Typing app has a decent and usable list of voice commands for punctuation, formatting and navigating around the text. There are other programs with a much more extensive list, but this app can do a good job of providing most commands you may need. *(Some commands may work in Chrome on a Windows or Mac computer but not on a Chromebook. Also, most common voice commands work in almost all STT programs. But some programs have a shorter list of usable commands. If you find some commands that won't work properly or consistently on your device, please let me know so that I can revise this guide!)*

**A short list of general voice commands:** *(Taken directly from Google's Voice Typing online 'manual.')*

**Period or Dot**

**Comma**

**Exclamation point**

**Question mark**

**New line** ( it's the same as pressing Enter)

**Go to the end of the sentence**

**Move to the end of the sentence**

**Go to the end of the paragraph**

**Move to the end of the paragraph**

**Go to the end of the line**

**Move to the end of the line**

**Go to [word]**

**New paragraph**

**Scratch That**

**Delete**

**Delete That**

**Minus Sign**

**Plus Sign**

**Italics**

**Bold**

**Stop Listening** (to turn off the microphone temporarily)

**Resume** To move the cursor to the end of the paragraph and start voice typing again

To start voice typing again and to move the cursor to the end of a particular word or phrase, say

**"Resume with [word or phrase]."**

*(Some of the above won't work well on certain devices.)*

## Here is a More Complete List of Voice Commands:

### **Commands for Selecting Text:**

To select text, say these commands:

**Select** [word or phrase]

**Select all**

**Select all matching text**

**Select list item**

**Select list items at current level**

**Select next character**

**Select next** [number] **characters**

**Select last character**

**Select last** [number] **characters**

**Select line**

**Select next line**

**Select next** [number] **lines**

**Select last line**

**Select last** [number] **lines**

**Select paragraph**

**Select next paragraph**

**Select next** [number] **paragraphs**

**Select last paragraph**

**Select last** [number] **paragraphs**

**Select word**

**Select next word**

**Select next** [number] **words**

**Select last word**

**Select last** [number] **words**

**Deselect**

**Unselect**

**Select none**

### **Commands for Text formatting**

**Apply heading** [1–6]

**Apply normal text**

**Apply subtitle**

**Apply title**

**Bold**

**Italicize**

**Italics**

**Strikethrough**

**Subscript**

**Superscript**

## **Underline**

**All caps** [word or phrase]

**Capitalize** [word or phrase]

*Note: "All caps" makes the word or phrase all capital letters. "Capitalize" capitalizes only the first letters.*

## **Commands for Text color and highlighting**

**Text color** [color]

**Highlight**

**Highlight** [color]

**Background color** [color]

**Remove highlight**

**Remove background color**

*Note: The colors available are: red, red berry, orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue, cornflower blue, purple, magenta, black, white, and gray. For all colors except black and white, you can add "light" or "dark" along with numbers 1-3 (for gray, 1-4), such as "dark purple 3." If you say "highlight" by itself, the highlighting color is yellow.*

## **Commands for Font size**

**Decrease font size**

**Increase font size**

**Font size** [6-400]

**Make bigger**

**Make smaller**

## **Commands for Lists**

**Create bulleted list**

**Create numbered list**

**Insert bullet**

**Insert number**

## **Commands to Remove formatting**

**Clear formatting**

**Remove formatting**

**Remove bold**

**Remove italics**

**Remove strikethrough**

**Remove underline**

## **Commands for Alignment**

**Align center**

**Align justified**

**Align left**

**Align right**  
**Center align**  
**Left align**  
**Right align**

### **Commands to Put Text Into Columns**

**Apply 1 column**  
**Apply 2 columns**  
**Apply 3 columns**  
**Column options**  
**Insert column break**

### **Commands for Paragraph formatting**

**Decrease indent**  
**Increase indent**  
**Line spacing [1-100]**  
**Line spacing double**  
**Line spacing single**

### **Preparing to Dictate:**

Until now, I've been suggesting that you practice by reading some prepared material – a short story, a magazine or news article, a page or two from a textbook or novel. *Now I'm suggesting that you can begin learning to dictate fresh material* such as an essay assignment in your schoolwork or a letter you're composing to an employer or a short story or reminiscence you are planning to write.

Preparation is the most important part of dictating. **Make a topic outline** of what you are planning to write about. Each topic could be just a word, a phrase or a short sentence. Try to make sure the topics are in the order you think will make the most sense.

If the subject of your essay or assignment is somewhat detailed or complicated, your outline might have sub-topics under each topic.

Add a list of key phrases, key vocabulary, names and dates that you might need while dictating. This will keep the 'flow' going – rather than having to stop and search for a quote or fact you're planning to use.

You might use a *mind-mapping* or organizing application or you might go 'no-tech' by putting each topic on a separate 3x5 index card and then laying them out on a table. Move the cards around until they seem to be in an order that makes sense. Remember that paragraphs usually have a 'topic sentence' or main idea that is then expanded, extended, supported by the sentences which follow.

Sections of your essay may need *transition sentences* which connect one section to another creating a conceptual flow that prepares the reader for the next ideas.

## Correcting Your Dictation:

1. It's tempting to keep watching the screen while dictating and immediately stopping the dictation to correct errors that come up. Watching the screen tends to slow most people down considerably and often causes you to lose track of what you were planning to say. I recommend that you cover the screen while dictating and then correct later.
2. Correcting errors at the end of a long paragraph or series of short paragraphs works well for many people. Others get the fastest 'flow' of dictation by waiting until several pages are complete. Try what works best for you.
3. Correcting can be done by using your mouse to go to the error and physically typing the correction.
4. The real power of STT programs is the ability to use voice commands to go to the error and replace it with a correction. "Select 'Paris'". The program highlights "Paris." You then say, "London" and the program replaces Paris with London. Or "Select Paris". "Delete that." and the word is deleted. The way it works in each STT program may vary a bit.
5. *Regularly 'mis-heard' words.* Some programs can be 'taught' how to spell unusual names. My name "Hanoch" is one that programs usually get wrong. It's often hilarious the strange things the program offers! But in Voice Typing by Google Docs I've learned to simply use a common name, "Harry" throughout the document. At the end, I'll do a Control Find (CTRL-F) and find all the Harry's and replace them instantly with Hanoch. *Voice Typing* is such a program. *Dragon Naturally Speaking* is a program that easily learns the correct spelling of unusual words.

## Suggestions for Editing Your Work

1. **Take a Break:** After you've completed your dictation, and after you've corrected any dictation errors, or misspelled words or names, I suggest you take a break from that work and do a different task, just to refresh your mind. Then when you return to your document, you see it with 'different eyes' and are much more likely to notice errors or omissions or places where you need to make changes.
2. **Read it Aloud:** I also recommend reading your work aloud (if you're not in a place where that would disturb others.) Reading aloud can help you spot where sentences just don't make sense or where they really need changes in order to make them flow more naturally. There are excellent apps for iPads/iPhones that allow you to record your voice. I suggest you get one of those and when editing your writing, record yourself reading the essay aloud. Then play it back and it gives you the opportunity to listen to it and become more aware of how it sounds and how the writing flows.
3. **A Friendly Helper:** getting a friend or classmate to read your work aloud or to listen to you reading it aloud can be a great help to find where errors and omissions can be hiding. If you're both doing the same assignment, you can trade off helping each other.
4. **Edit, Revise, Add, Delete:** At this point, I sometimes discover that my third paragraph should have been earlier in the document, so I can move it. I might see that the final sentence in my fifth paragraph is not really necessary, so I delete it. I often see a "hole" in

the reasoning of my essay – something important that I forgot to include, so I add it where it's necessary.

**Notes:**

1. *Voice commands in Google Docs are only available in English.*
2. *Punctuation commands work in German, English, Spanish, French, Italian, and Russian. In Spanish, punctuation at the beginning of the sentence, like ¡ or ¿, must be typed.*
3. *Many programs, apps or extension that work on one platform (like iOS, or Chrome, Chromebook, Android and PC's) may work similarly but with unexpected differences or glitches when used on a different platform. It's just the way it is currently. You might make careful note of them and write to the tech support people at that company with suggestions for improvement – they often do reply or work on it and that feature may improve quietly with or without notice at a later time.*
4. *If you find some commands which will not work in Google Docs Voice Typing – on your device – please let me know which commands and what device you were using.*

**A Comprehensive List of Keyboard Shortcuts for Google Docs**

You will find a link to shortcuts for computers, tablets, Windows, iOS, Android at:

[https://support.google.com/docs/answer/179738?hl=en&ref\\_topic=1361462](https://support.google.com/docs/answer/179738?hl=en&ref_topic=1361462)

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Programs are constantly being edited, amended, upgraded or revised. A feature that was unavailable yesterday may show up today with no announcement. A feature that worked perfectly last week may, after an ‘upgrade’, stop working altogether. Let me know if you find any of those things and I’ll share them in the next version of this article.

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