

TalkBack training guide

TalkBack (Android) is a text-to-speech feature that makes smartphones accessible for people who are blind and visually impaired. The way we navigate the phone when this feature is turned on is different from what we are used to. TalkBack reads out every item on the screen. The whole screen becomes a list that needs to be listened to, one by one, to find what you are looking for. Upon experimentation, this will become more clear.

It is understandable that learning to use TalkBack is quite overwhelming in the beginning. However, loads of people have successfully learnt to operate their phones non-visually and we strongly believe that you can too! It only takes a little bit of practice and patience and soon enough you can impress all your friends and family. Let's get started then.

TalkBack

TalkBack is a screen reader specifically for android devices that allows for the phone to be used without the need for sight. It can be turned on and off in the settings of your phone by navigating to the accessibility section.

To turn it on visually, follow the following steps:

1. Open settings
2. Open accessibility settings
3. Installed services
4. Turn TalkBack on

To turn it on non-visually, activate Google assistant or Bixby (exclusive to Android devices) and say the phrase 'turn on TalkBack'.

When TalkBack is turned on, the phone performs very differently. Everything on the screen is read out when tapped once but no action is performed. This is done to make sure that the margin for error is low. You might notice that the name of the item you tap on is not the only thing that is read out, but also some other information on functions that can be performed from here. If you pay attention to it one time, you will understand better.

Once TalkBack is turned on, make sure to skip the automatic tutorial that turns up. We will practice together by starting on your home screen. Once you turn TalkBack on, swipe up from the bottom of the screen with two fingers to go to the home screen / at the bottom centre of the screen, find the button that when selected says "home". Double tap to go to the home screen.

To stop the TalkBack from reading, tap once on the screen.

Basic navigation

In this section we will learn the basics of moving through your phone. One important thing is that we will use the word 'focus' in this manual. When the screen reader reads out the name of the item one time, it means that focus is on that item. For example, to say that the 'focus is on an app icon' means that the app is now selected. Then double tap anywhere on the screen to open it.

Move to next or previous item

quickly swipe right or left with one finger, this makes the focus move to the next item. This is the function that makes us navigate through the screen like a list.

Go to next or previous screen on home screen

swipe right or left with two fingers

Activate

double tap once the focus is on the item that you want. This means that, when the screen-reader reads out the name of the item you are searching for, you can double tap to activate it. Make sure that the taps come in quick succession.

Go to home screen

swipe up from the bottom of the screen with two fingers. Alternatively, if you have a different navigation setting, you will have to find the home button in the bottom centre of the screen in what is called the navigation panel. Once you hear 'home' being read out, double tap to go to the home screen.

Open notifications bar

swipe down from the top of the screen with two fingers. TalkBack will not read out your notifications by performing this gesture.

Scroll up or down

swipe up or down in the middle of the screen with two fingers.

Open recent apps

swipe up from the bottom of the screen with two fingers and hold. TalkBack gives no auditory feedback to confirm that recent apps are now visible.

Alternatively, if you have a different navigation setting, in the bottom left or right of your screen, you can find the 'recent apps' button. Double tap on it once the focus is on it to activate. TalkBack gives no auditory feedback to confirm that recent apps are now visible.

The way you know if recent apps are visible is by scrolling through it to listen to different app names. To scroll through the open apps, swipe left and right with two fingers. Then single tap in the middle of the screen to hear what app you are on.

To go back (previous screen)

swipe to the left or right starting from the left or right edge of the screen with two fingers.

Alternatively, if you have a different navigation setting, in the bottom left or right of the screen, you can explore to find the 'back' button. Once the name is read out, double tap to activate.

Typing

To type in any text, the text field must first be activated by selecting it (double tap). It is not enough to just navigate to it. Once you do this, the system keyboard opens up. To type, you have to navigate over the keys by swiping till the focus is on the letter you need. Then double tap to type the letter. To practice typing, try searching for something on Google by navigating to it yourself.

We are now at the end of the TalkBack training guide. Now you have the skill-set to navigate to any messaging app, type a message and send it to a friend. Try it out for yourself and good luck!