TAKE CONTROL OF SIRI

COVERS SIRI ON iOS • Mac • Apple TV • Apple Watch • HomePod

by SCHOLLE McFARLAND

$14.99

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Welcome to *Take Control of Siri*, version 1.0, published in February 2019 by alt concepts inc. This book was written by Scholle McFarland and edited by Joe Kissell.

When it comes to using your Apple devices, Siri is increasingly the hands-free, time-saving, and *fun* technology that ties everything together. Whether you want to ask a question, make a call, find your iPhone, or set a timer—not only can Siri do it, but it usually offers the fastest way. This book explores how to get the most out of Siri on your iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, Mac, and HomePod.

If you want to share this ebook with a friend, we ask that you do so as you would with a physical book: “lend” it for a quick look, but ask your friend to buy a copy for careful reading or reference. Discounted classroom and Mac user group copies are available.

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## Basics

This book explores how to get the most out of Siri on your iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, Mac, and HomePod. Take Control has many books that can help you lock down the basics of using these devices:

- To review background information about the Mac that might help you understand this book better, such as finding System Preferences and working with files in the Finder, I recommend reading Tonya Engst’s ebook *Take Control of Mac Basics*.

- To learn more about using your iOS device, see *Take Control of iOS 12* by Josh Centers.

- To learn more about the Apple Watch, see Jeff Carson’s *Apple Watch: A Take Control Crash Course*.

### Activate Siri

I cover all the ways you can activate Siri on all your Apple devices in the chapters *Activate Siri By Touch* and *Activate Siri with Your Voice*, but here’s the Cliff Notes version for the most commonly-used device—the iPhone: Press and hold the Home button at the bottom of your phone (iPhone 8 and earlier) or the side button (iPhone X or later). Siri is listening when you feel two vibrations or see a line pulsing at the bottom of the screen and the message “What can I help you with?”

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Introduction

What science fiction dreams, tech companies set out to do. Few inventions embody that more than Siri, Apple’s digital assistant. Following in the footsteps of 2001: A Space Odyssey’s HAL 9000 and Star Trek’s shipboard computers, Siri lets you find information and perform commands without touching a keyboard (or worrying about the pod bay doors).

Still, it’s not always obvious what you can do with Siri—particularly with Apple adding new features all the time—and sometimes it’s tricky to make it act like you expect. That was especially the case when it came out in 2011; many people who were disappointed by its early performance haven’t paid much attention to Siri since.

That’s what this book is for. You’ll be surprised at all you can get done with this hands-free, time-saving, and fun technology. Want to dictate a note, get a reminder when you reach to a certain location, find your iPhone, or turn on the lights? Siri can make it happen. The same goes if you want to call a friend, catch up on baseball stats, or set a timer—not only can Siri do it, but it offers the fastest way.

We’ll look at how to ask questions and do common tasks with Siri on your iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, Mac, and HomePod (with a little Apple TV thrown in for good measure). Since Siri is all about voice, look for links to video demonstrations, too.

Apple has poured a lot of love into Siri and it shows in Siri’s endless supply of witty comebacks and jokes, as well as its many thoughtful touches and hidden capabilities. Year by year, Siri is becoming the technology that ties the Apple universe together. Let’s dive in and see what it can do!
Siri Quick Start

Ready to explore all there is to do with Siri? You can jump directly to a topic that interests you. I suggest starting with the first few chapters to make sure you’ve got the basics down pat.

**Learn the Basics:**

- Find out what devices support Siri, how to adjust its voice and feedback, and how give Siri the information it needs to provide a personalized experience in Brush Up on Siri Basics.

- Learn how to Activate Siri By Touch and Activate Siri with Your Voice on all your Apple devices, as well as how to avoid trouble with each method—like the wrong device answering “Hey Siri.”

- Get answers to common questions about what personal data Siri collects and what it does with your data in Understand Siri and Your Privacy.

**Ask Questions:**

- Sports stats, math problems, nutrition info, common conversions, movies times, restaurant reservations, weather forecasts, biographies of historical figures and celebrities, science facts, jokes—you can Get Answers to Questions with Siri.

**Keep Connected:**

- Find out how to Make a Call with Siri, hands free, so you can stay safe in the car or keep doing your chores while talking on the phone.

- Learn how to Send Messages from any and all of your devices using Siri (and when it’s best to send a text message rather than an email).

- Listen to email on the go and send out quick messages using Siri. The chapter Send Email shows you how.

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Try Not to Forget:
• Never forget a chore again—use Siri to create reminders that sync across all your devices and can ping you at a certain time or place. See the chapter Remind Yourself for details.

• Check the day’s events, make an appointment, or reschedule a meeting using Siri on whatever device is nearby. See the chapter Make a Date for details.

• Siri makes it easy to capture fleeting thoughts before they’re gone. See the chapter Take a Note.

Get More from Your Apps and Devices:
• Siri can help you find, play, and enjoy music, as well as tap into many special Apple Music features. Learn how to take advantage of all it has to offer in Control Your Music.

• Siri on the Mac can tweak system settings, find files, and more. See Control Your Mac with Siri.

• Siri Shortcuts make it easy to complete multi-step commands by saying a spoken phrase. Learn how in Save Time with Siri Shortcuts.

• But that’s not all! Some of the best Siri tricks don’t fall neatly into a certain category. See the Grab Bag of Other Useful Tricks to learn how to launch an app, set a timer, find your Apple devices, retrieve passwords, translate a phrase, and more.
Brush Up on Siri Basics

Apple’s digital assistant makes it possible to do an amazing variety of tasks using just your voice, but first you need to know the basics, including what devices support Siri; how to adjust its language, voice, feedback, and volume; and how to give it the information it needs to provide a personalized experience.

Tip: See Understand Siri and Your Privacy for answers to common questions about how Siri deals with your data.

What You Need to Get Started

To use Siri, you must have a compatible device and an active internet connection.

The Right Hardware

Siri made its way to the iPhone in 2011 and since then has spread to just about all of Apple’s devices. You can use Siri on:

• the iPhone 4s or later
• the iPad 3 or later
• Macs running macOS 10.12 Sierra and later
• all Apple Watches
• all HomePods
• the Apple TV 4K and Apple TV (4th generation) and later

Tip: Update to the most recent version of your device’s operating system to gain access to all the latest Siri goodies.
An Internet Connection

Processing voice data requires a lot of computing power. To make its magic, Siri sends your voice data back to Apple’s servers, which means it can’t work without an internet connection—not even if all you’re trying to do is ask the time. (Though, if patent filings are any indication, it looks like some offline Siri capabilities might be in our future. See this [VentureBeat](https://venturebeat.com/) article.)

If you aren’t connected to the internet, Siri might say something like “Sorry, I’m having trouble connecting to the network,” or you might simply see a statement saying Siri isn’t available (Figure 1).

![Siri Not Available](image)

**Figure 1:** No internet connection means no Siri.

Here’s how to check your connection:

- **On an iPhone or iPad:** You need an active Wi-Fi or cellular data connection to use Siri on your iOS device. Tap Settings > Wi-Fi to see if the Wi-Fi switch is toggled on and you’re connected to a network. To check your cellular connection, tap Settings > Cellular and make sure the Cellular Data switch is toggled on.

  **Tip:** There’s a difference between a *cellular data* connection and a cellular connection. If you don’t see a 3G, 4G, 5G E, LTE, E, or GPRS icon in your phone’s **status bar**, you may be able to make calls, but Siri won’t work.

- **On an Apple Watch:** Press your watch’s digital crown, tap Settings > Wi-Fi, and make sure the Wi-Fi switch is toggled on. Your Apple Watch connects to the internet through your paired iPhone using Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, but it will use a known Wi-Fi network—or a cellular data connection on watches that support cellular—if your iPhone is out of Bluetooth range. Swipe up from the bottom of
Activate Siri By Touch

If you want a straightforward, surefire way to activate Siri that always works on the device you intend it to and isn’t affected by how noisy the room is, do so manually. All you have to do is touch or click something and Siri responds. This way of interacting with Siri is enabled by default on all Apple devices.

Trigger Siri Manually on an iOS Device

To activate Siri by touch on the iPhone or iPad, you either press and hold the Home button at the bottom of your phone (iPhone 8 and earlier) or the side button (iPhone X or later). Siri is listening when you feel two vibrations or see a line pulsing at the bottom of the screen (Figure 9) and the message “What can I help you with?”

![Figure 9: Look for the pulsing line at the bottom of your screen.](image)

If this doesn’t work, check your settings by tapping Settings > Siri & Search. The “Press Home for Siri” or “Press Side Button for Siri” button should be set to on.

It’s possible to access Siri this way even when your iPhone or iPad is locked by tapping Settings > Siri & Search and setting Allow Siri When Locked to on. If the option is dimmed, tap Settings > Touch ID & Passcode (or Face ID & Passcode), and then enter your passcode. Scroll down to the Allow Access When Locked header and set Siri to on. There are some security risks you’ll need to consider, though. See Should You Enable Siri from the Lock Screen?

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Should You Enable Siri from the Lock Screen?

Being able to access Siri straight from the iOS lock screen makes it convenient to call someone in your contacts, ask a quick question, or send a text message, but can also be an easy runaround for your iPhone or iPad’s security. After all, it makes it just as easy for someone other than you to ask Siri to do those things, without having your security code (or fingerprint, or face). Here are some options for balancing security and convenience:

- **If you use a manual trigger:** If you’re worried about the security of sensitive information, turn off the Allow Siri When Locked option in Settings > Siri & Search. This prevents you from using “Hey Siri,” but won’t necessarily be inconvenient if you prefer to trigger Siri manually. For instance, if you press the Home button to invoke Siri on an iPhone or iPad with TouchID, your device usually unlocks in the process. Likewise, if you’re using an iPhone or iPad with FaceID, simply pause to let FaceID unlock your device before pressing and holding the side (or top) button.

- **If you use “Hey Siri”:** What if you prefer to trigger Siri by voice? (See Use “Hey Siri” on Your iPhone or iPad.) You can use “Hey Siri” more securely as long as you’re willing to do without the option to use a manual trigger, too. Tap Settings > Siri & Search. Then, set Allow Siri When Locked to on and the Press Home for Siri (or Press Side Button for Siri) button to off. If you’ve completed Siri’s voice training, your iOS 12 device responds only when you say “Hey Siri,” which means if the option to trigger Siri manually is off, no one else should be able to use Siri to gain access your device. (Unless they have a recording of your voice...but if you’ve got enemies at that 007 level of intrigue, perhaps you should pass on “Hey Siri” altogether.)

- **If you like to trigger Siri both ways:** If you like to trigger Siri both manually and with “Hey Siri,” it’s possible to fiddle with settings to limit what information is accessible from the lock screen—something you might want to do regardless. The simplest option, however, is to adjust the Allow Siri When Locked option depending on your circumstances—turning it off, for instance, when traveling or, as one TidBITS contributor humorously noted, when attending the Def Con hacking conference.
Activate Siri with Your Voice

Whether you’re in the car or your iPhone is halfway across the room, sometimes it’s not practical (or safe) to lay hands on your device just so you can talk to it. Most newer Apple devices, including all Apple Watches and HomePods, make it easy to get your digital assistant’s attention by calling out “Hey Siri!” To find out if your iOS device supports voice activation, see Which iPhones and iPads Recognize “Hey Siri”? Apple TV does not support voice activation, but a handful of the newest Macs do.

Use “Hey Siri” on Your iPhone or iPad

To enable “Hey Siri” on your iPhone or iPad, tap Settings > Siri & Search and slide the “Listen for ‘Hey Siri’” button to on. The first time you do this, you’re asked to train Siri to recognize your voice (Figure 15). Tap Continue and follow the prompts to do so.

Figure 15: Train your iPad or iPhone to pick your voice—and only your voice—out of the crowd.

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Next, tap Settings > Siri & Search and set Allow Siri When Locked to on (Figure 16).

![ASK SIRI]

**Figure 16:** Adjust a few of your iOS device’s settings to make it possible to hail Siri with your voice. (iPhone X shown here.)

You must leave the Allow Siri When Locked setting on to use “Hey Siri.” See Should You Enable Siri from the Lock Screen? for a discussion of how to handle the security tradeoffs that come with doing this.

**Tip:** There are some things you can’t do with Siri even if you enable access from the lock screen. For instance, you must unlock your iOS device to use Siri to unlock a HomeKit-enabled door lock.

Once you’re set up, just say “Hey Siri” followed immediately by your question or request and your iOS device snaps to attention. If you can’t get your iPad or iPhone to listen, make sure it’s face up, its case is open, and that it isn’t in Low Power Mode. If it’s an older device, it might need to be plugged in. See the next sidebar.

**Tip:** See If I Set a Device to Listen for “Hey Siri,” Will It Record My Conversations? to learn more about Apple’s voice activation and your privacy.
Get Answers to Questions

One of Siri’s most notable accomplishments is eliminating the friction that comes between friends when they disagree about a random fact. Siri never tires of your questions and is always ready and willing to answer. Besides workaday inquiries like “Who starred in Groundhog Day?” “How many teaspoons are in 10 milliliters?” or “What is a 15 percent tip on $89.45?” Siri can also delve into arcane, like “What planes are flying overhead?” “How many teeth do great white sharks have?” or even “Does Steve Wozniak have a girlfriend?” Here are some of the major topic areas where Siri has got you covered.

**Tip:** If you love asking Siri questions, but are embarrassed to talk out loud at the office, you can type to Siri on the Mac and hear its answers back through your headphones. See Type Questions to Siri.

Ask About Sports

If you’ve got sports questions, Siri most definitely has answers, with detail rivaling what even your most sport-crazed of friends could supply. Ask about scores, schedules, and standings, as well as player and team information. Apple continues to expand Siri’s knowledge to new categories of sport, but you’ll still find some blind spots (boxing and National Women’s Soccer League, for instance). As of now, you can ask about baseball, basketball, cricket, football, golf, hockey, motorsports, soccer, and tennis. (See Which Sports Does Siri Know About? for details.) Siri keeps up with a gobsmacking 29 baseball leagues; soccer has the most international coverage, with Siri reporting back on leagues from around the world. #Goooalll!

**Tip:** If you want to geek out with the details, ask Siri sports questions on your iPhone, iPad, Mac, or Apple Watch. Siri on the HomePod (without a display to show box scores, team logos, and the like) is mostly good for a summary.
Which Sports Does Siri Know About?

Here are the sports leagues and associations that Siri covers:

- **Baseball:** Besides Major League Baseball (MLB), Siri covers about 28 other minor and international leagues, from the American Association to the Venezuelan Summer League. Ask Siri “What baseball leagues do you know about” for a full list (because it won’t even fit here!).

- **Basketball:** In addition to the National Basketball Association (NBA), Women’s National Basketball Association (WNBA) and NCAA men and women’s college basketball, Siri also follows the Chinese Basketball Association and NBA G-League.

- **Cricket:** Siri knows about the International Cricket Conference (ICC) and the Indian Premier League (IPL).

- **Football:** Besides the National Football League (NFL) and college football (NCAA), Siri also knows about the Arena Football League (AFL) and Canadian Football League (CFL).

- **Hockey:** Siri can tell you about the National Hockey League (NHL) as well as the American Hockey League (AHL), Canadian Hockey League (CHL), East Coast Hockey League (ECHL), Kontinental Hockey League (KHL), men’s college hockey (NCAA), Ontario Hockey League (OHL), Quebec Major Junior Hockey League (QMJHL), and Western Hockey League (WHL).

- **Golf:** Siri covers the Professional Golfers’ Association of America (PGA) and the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA).

- **Motorsports:** Siri can keep you up to date with Formula 1, IndyCar, MotoGP, and NASCAR.

- **Tennis:** Siri knows about the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) and the Women’s Tennis Association (WTA).

- **Soccer:** In addition to Major League Soccer (MLS), Siri covers soccer around the world, including Australia A-League, German Bundesliga, Champions League, Dutch Eredivisie, English Premier League, Europa League, French Ligue 1, Italian Serie A, Spanish La Liga, Liga MX, Swiss Super League, and the Turkey Süper Lig.

Look for Siri coverage of exhibition games and international competitions that happen every few years too, like the Olympics, World Baseball Classic, FIFA World Cup, and FIFA Women’s World Cup.
Control Your Music

Since Apple introduced the iPod and iTunes in 2001, music has been a key part of its amazing transformation from underdog to the world’s first $1 trillion company. So much so, that it’s hard to believe Apple once settled a trademark dispute with the Beatles’ Apple Corps by agreeing never to enter the music business!

Whether you’re on a run, in the car, or at home listening to the HomePod, Siri helps you play and enjoy your tunes. Combined with the Apple Music service, Siri also serves as the gateway to Apple’s huge library of 50 million streaming songs.

**Note:** Apple’s rebellion against its deal with music company Apple Corp included small gestures like the inclusion of an alert sound cheekily named sosumi or “so sue me.” (Hear more of the story in this CNBC video about former Apple sound designer Jim Reekes.)

Work with Your Music

Want to hear a favorite song? Siri can do all the basics. Ask it to play, pause, or skip a certain song in your library. Say “Go back” to move to the previous song in an album or playlist.

You can ask Siri to play songs by an artist (“Play some Prince”), from an album (“Play the album Purple Rain”), or musical genre, too (“Play pop songs”). Or, say “Shuffle all songs” to move through your entire library at random (Figure 35).

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Figure 35: Whether it’s country, classical, rock, or hip-hop, Siri can serve up all songs in your library from a particular genre. If you’re an Apple Music subscriber, it plays a station based on that genre.

If you want to hear a song or album over and over, tell Siri “Repeat this track” or “Repeat this album.” Once the charm of this fades, tell Siri “Turn repeat off.”

You can’t create playlists with Siri, but you can ask for them by name: “Play Warm Up playlist.” “Shuffle Warm up playlist.”

Tip: If you don’t have an Apple Music subscription, Siri sticks to music from your library, including your iTunes purchases and iTunes Match songs. See iMore’s Apple Music vs. iTunes Match: What’s the Difference? if you’re confused by Apple’s music options.

Control the Sound

Siri can control the volume, too. Say “Turn up the volume” or “Turn down the volume.” On your iOS device, HomePod, and Mac, control the volume more precisely by using Siri to adjust it on a scale of 1–100, for example “Hey Siri, set volume to 10 percent.” To get a better feel for what these volume levels sound like, ask Siri “What volume is this?” when it’s playing a song at a level you like.
Make a Call

Why search for friends’ numbers when you want to make a call? As long as the person is in Contacts, Siri dials for you. This is especially helpful when you’re in the car, but can also save you time if you want to make a call from your Mac. If you prefer to see your friends’ faces, Siri can help you FaceTime them, too. You can make calls with Siri on your iOS device, Mac, Apple Watch, and HomePod.

Note: To make and receive phone calls on HomePod, you must turn on Personal Requests and have iOS 12 or newer on your iPhone and HomePod. Update HomePod’s software by opening the Home app on your iPhone, tapping the Home icon in the upper-left corner, and tapping Software Update. If there’s an update, tap Install.

Make a Phone Call

You can make calls on your iPhone, Apple Watch, HomePod, and (if you Set Up Calling on Your Mac) your Mac, too.

- **Dial a number:** To dial a 10-digit phone number (in the United States) you don’t often call, tell Siri “Dial phone number” or “Call phone number.” On your iPhone, Apple Watch, and Mac the call starts immediately. HomePod asks you to confirm the number before it dials.

- **Call someone in Contacts:** If a person is listed in your contacts, it’s even easier. Just tell Siri “Call name.” If you have more than one phone number for that person, Siri asks which number to call. Or, specify which number from the get-go by saying “Call Joe at work” or “Call Joe at home.” If there’s more than one person with that name in your contacts, Siri asks which one to call. Say their full name to specify. Or, make this clear in your original request by saying something like “Call Joe Kissell at work.”
When you’re done with a call, activate Siri and say “Hang up.”

**Tip:** If Siri has trouble understanding a contact’s name, spell it out. For example: “Call K-i-n-n-a-r-i.”

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**Use the Speaker**

Instead of fumbling for the speaker button after you ask Siri to make a call in the car, say “Hey Siri, call mom *on speaker*.”

Note that the HomePod, with its booming, wrap-around sound, makes a great speaker phone, whether the whole family is calling grandpa or you’re talking to a friend while washing the dishes.

**Tip:** If you hear your iPhone ringing, but you’re closer to your HomePod, say “Hey Siri, answer my iPhone” to answer it there.

---

**Redial a Number**

If you get cut off or don’t catch someone the first time, tell Siri to “Redial that last number” to call back again. If you just missed a call, ask “Who just called?” Siri tells you the number, when they called, and then asks if you’d like to call back.

---

**Call for Help**

Siri can call emergency services on your iPhone, Apple Watch, and HomePod. Say “Call 911” or “Call emergency services” and Siri starts a countdown (*Figure 43*). (On the HomePod, Siri asks you to confirm.) If you do nothing, Siri dials. If you made the call by accident, tap Cancel. If Location Services is turned on (see Location, Location), your device uses whatever emergency services number is appropriate for your location—a big help if you’re traveling abroad.

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Get Directions

When you’re on the go, Siri is usually the best, and safest, way to ask for directions. You don’t have to stop, open Apple Maps or Google Maps, and tap in your destination. (Or, heaven forbid—ask a person!) Siri can guide you home.

**Tip:** You must have location services turned on to get directions based on where you are or receive turn-by-turn instructions. See Location, Location.

---

Ask for Directions

Asking for directions with Siri is as simple as saying “Get directions to address” or even something as vague as “Do you know the way to San Jose?”:

- **On your iOS device:** Siri opens Maps and previews its suggested route. You don’t need to tap the Go button, just wait a beat and Siri begins to speak turn-by-turn directions. If you miss a turn, Maps reroutes and gives directions from wherever you are.

  **Tip:** Ensure your safety by handing your iPhone over to a passenger or using hands-free “Hey Siri” commands in the car. (See Activate Siri with Your Voice.)

- **On your Apple Watch:** When you ask for directions on your Apple Watch, it displays your ETA and one step of the directions at a time. (It automatically chooses walking directions if the destination is close by.) Swipe through to see the entire route. As you near a turn, your watch doesn’t talk to you. Instead, a few feet before the intersection, it sounds and taps your wrist to let you know which way to go. A low tock followed by a high tick signals a right turn. A high tick followed by a low tock means turn left (Figure 45).

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Figure 45: Although your watch doesn’t speak directions, it displays the next turn and signals which way to go with sounds and taps.

- **On your Mac:** When you ask for directions on your Mac, Siri opens Maps and displays the route.

**Tip:** Your HomePod can’t give you step-by-step directions, but it suggests the fastest route (for instance “via I-84 East” or “via NE 50th Avenue”) and lets you know how long it will take to get to your destination. Ask it: “What’s the traffic like on the way home?” “How long will it take to get to Jim and Patty’s Coffee?”

**Ditch the Car**

By default, Siri usually gives directions by car, but you can ask for directions via transit or walking, too. (Apple Maps doesn’t include bike routes, so for that you need to Use Google Maps Instead.) Here’s how:

- **Go on foot:** Say “Get walking directions to *address*.” On your iPhone, tap Go to begin; directions start automatically on the Apple Watch. On your Mac, Siri opens Maps and displays the route.

- **Go by transit:** Say “Get transit directions to *address*.” You can also ask something like “How do I get a bus to 501 N. Dixon Street?” “How do I take the subway to the airport?” or “Get directions to Santa Barbara on Amtrak.” On your iPhone, tap Go to begin; direc-
Remind Yourself

Whether you enjoy checking off items on your to do list or you need a kind of backup brain to remind you of all the random tasks that come your way, the Reminders app can quickly become an important part of your daily routine. Walking the dog when you remember you’re out of coffee? Need to remember to buy gas as soon as you get in the car? Reminders has got your back. If you sync reminders using iCloud (see The iCloud Advantage), it’s easy to add a reminder using Siri with whatever device is at hand. Once that’s done, the app can alert you when a reminder is due, or even when you arrive or leave a location, like your home, work, or car.

Use Siri to create reminders on your iOS devices, Apple Watch, Mac, or HomePod (if you’ve turned on Personal Requests). Make no mistake, this is a killer Siri feature. If you want to wow a relative who just got a new Apple device, show them how easy it is to make a reminder.

Tip: Our Apple devices give us a bunch of different ways to remember things. Get the rundown in When to Use What: Reminder, Calendar, Timer, or Alarm?

Create a Reminder

Creating reminders with Siri is so quick and natural that you may never do it any other way.

Add Basic To Do Items

Say something like: “Remind me to buy coffee,” “Remind me to call Jon,” or “Remind me to look up Italian pastry making” and your item is added to the default iCloud Reminders list.

Video Alert! Check out the video “How to Use Siri with Reminders” on the Siri video page.
The iCloud Advantage
If you take advantage of iCloud syncing, your reminders are available on all devices connected to the same account. On your iPad or iPhone, make reminders sync through iCloud by going to Settings > iCloud > iCloud and toggling the Reminders switch on. (Your Apple Watch mirrors your iPhone.) On your Mac, go to Apple  > System Preferences > iCloud and check the Reminders option.

Create a Time-Based Reminder
If you need to remember something at a certain time, include that information, too: “Remind me to take out the garbage tomorrow.” “Remind me to cancel my trial subscription in 14 days.” “Remind me to call Mike Price at 2 P.M. tomorrow.” (Bonus: If Mike’s number is in Contacts, a telephone icon appears next to the reminder; tap or click to call.)

If you say a day, but don’t mention a time, you’ll be notified by default that day at 9 A.M. If you specify only a time—“Remind me to pick up the cake at 2”—and it’s already past that time today, you’ll be notified the next day at 2 P.M. (Figure 49).

Figure 49: Use Siri to create a reminder that tells you to do something at a certain time.
Make a Date

Like a good personal assistant, Siri can keep up with your calendar, briefing you about the day as well as adding, changing, and cancelling events. Use Siri to work with your schedule on your iOS devices, Mac, Apple Watch, and HomePod (if you’ve turned on Personal Requests).

Check Your Schedule

Get the gist of the day by asking: “What do I have today?” or “What does the rest of my day look like?” On iOS devices and the Mac, Siri displays all of your appointments; say “Read them” to hear the events out loud. The Apple Watch can only display events. HomePod tells you the first three events and then asks if you’d like to hear more.

Look ahead with a question like: “What’s next on my schedule?” “What do I have scheduled for this Friday?” “What’s on my schedule for March 18th?” or “What do I have this weekend?” (Figure 53).

![What's on my schedule for March 18](image)

**Figure 53:** Siri can fill you in about what’s coming up.

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Tip: The Apple Watch has access to only seven days worth of Calendar information. That’s good enough for most situations; you’ll need to use your iOS device, Mac, or HomePod to take the longer view.

Siri can also fill you in on the who, what, when, and where of your schedule by scanning the calendar for locations, times, and meeting participants. Ask: “When is my next appointment?” “Do I have a meeting at 9 A.M. on Tuesday?” “Where is my meeting?” or “When am I meeting with Mr. Big?”

Create an Event

Creating a Calendar event with Siri is quick and easy—much easier than digging around in the Calendar app. Just fill Siri in on the basics by saying something like “Set up a meeting with Kelly for Friday at 3:00.” It creates the event and warns you of any conflicts (Figure 54).

![Figure 54: Siri warns you of conflicts when you create an event.](image)

Say yes to confirm and no to cancel. If Siri points out a conflict (or you realize you misspoke), you can say “Change the time,” instead. You can also say “Change the date” and “Change the title.”

Note that although Siri can see the events in all of your synced calendars, it can only add events to your default one. On your iOS device, go to Settings > Calendar, tap Default Calendar, and pick the calendar you want from the list. (iPhone settings are reflected on any paired Apple
Send Messages

You’re in the car and need to tell your spouse you forgot a critical ingredient for tonight’s dinner. Do you pull over to dash off a text? Do you attempt to text at the next red light? Neither is a good option when Siri can help you compose SMS and iMessages without taking your eyes off of the road. Siri can send, read, respond, and search for messages in the Messages app on your iPhone, iPad, Mac, and HomePod (if you’ve turned on Personal Requests).

When to Use What: Text or Email?

Use Messages when you have a brief message that you need someone to see right away, but be aware that text messages used for business are often considered intrusive. Use email if you have a lot to say, your timeline is longer, you need to keep a record of your correspondence, or you don’t know the person well. You might also use email if it’s late at night or very early in the morning, in case the person has forgotten to turn notifications off. Which device you have closest at hand makes a difference, too—Siri can help you send email only with your iPhone, iPad, and Mac.

Send a Message

To send a message, say “Send a message to phone number” or “Text phone number.” (You must include all 10 digits.) If a recipient’s info is in Contacts, tell Siri “Send a message to name” or “Text name.” Siri creates a new message and waits for your words—you don’t have to activate it again.

If there’s more than one person by that name in Contacts, Siri asks which one to message. Say their full name to specify. Or, make this clear in your original request by saying something like “Message Dave McFarland.” If you’ve included relationship information in Contacts (see Give Siri the Information It Needs), you can tell Siri “Message my spouse” or “Text my boss.”
Speed things up by including the text of your message along with your original request. For example, say: “Hey Siri, text Graham I’ll pick you up after mock trial around 7:30” (Figure 55).

![Image of Siri text prompt]

**Figure 55:** To speed things up, skip the back and forth with Siri and include the message body with your request.

### Send to Multiple People

Send a message to more than one person by including their names in your request, separated by the word “and.” For example, say “Text Jon and Dave and Ariel.” Note that this works perfectly if all potential participants use Apple devices or all of them (except you) use Android or other devices, but you’ll run into trouble if there’s a mix of the two. (See Annoying Problems with Siri and Group Texts.)

If you text with a group of people regularly and all members use Apple devices, make it easier to send messages using Siri by naming the group. Open Messages on your iOS device and find (or start) a message that includes all members. Tap the top of the conversation, and then
Send Email

Don’t sweat it out in the car when you’re waiting for an important email. Siri offers a quick way to check, send, or search for email messages when you can’t get to a (non-virtual) keyboard or don’t feel like using one. Siri works with email on iOS devices and the Mac only.

**Tip:** Wondering whether you should send a text message instead? See [When to Use What: Text or Email?](#)

Write an Email Message

With one request, Siri starts a new email message and fills in the To and Subject fields. For instance: “Email Suki about the roller derby this weekend.” If there’s more than one person by that name in Contacts or the person has more than one email address, Siri asks you to pick. Then, it waits for details.

**Tip:** If Siri has trouble understanding a friend’s name, try to spell it out—“Email T-a-n-y-a.”

**Tip:** You can address emails to “my boss” or “my son” if Siri knows about your relationships. See [Give Siri the Information It Needs](#).

Speed things up by including the text of your message in your request, too: “Email Ariel and Tanya about cards and say ‘Next Tuesday looks good!’” This usually works best if the message is fairly short and sweet (Figure 58).
Figure 58: Dash off a quick email—recipient, subject, message body and all—using Siri.

When you stop talking, Siri asks if you’re ready to send your message. Say yes to send or no to cancel.

If the email includes mistakes, say “Change message” or “Change subject.” (See When Mistakes Happen.) If you realize you forgot something, say “Add” and start dictating your addendum.

When Mistakes Happen

If you use Siri to dictate long emails—especially if they include jargon—it’s going to make mistakes. Here’s how to correct them:

✦ Type it: Below Siri’s higgledy-piggledy translation of your words, you’ll see “Tap to Edit” on your iOS device. Tap that and use the onscreen keyboard to fix your message. On your Mac, click in your text in the Siri window and then retype it.

✦ Say it: If you see a mistake, say “Change message” or “Change subject” to try again.

Siri learns from its mistakes, so its accuracy should improve the more you fix errors.
Take a Note

Hit with a great idea for a novel or a sudden inspiration for getting the budget in the black? Combine Siri and Apple’s Notes to capture fleeting thoughts that might otherwise get away, as well as snippets of information you want to remember, like promo codes or favorite quotes. You can use Siri with Notes on your iPhone, iPad, Mac, and HomePod (if Personal Requests are turned are).

Sync Notes Through iCloud

When you take advantage of iCloud syncing, you can access your notes on your iPhone, iPad, Mac, HomePod, and on iCloud.com, when signed into the same account. On your iPad or iPhone, make Notes sync through iCloud by going to Settings > iCloud > iCloud and toggling the Notes switch on. On your Mac, go to Apple  > System Preferences > iCloud and select the Notes option.

Create a New Note

To get an idea down, say “Take a note.” Siri asks you what you want to say (Figure 60). On the Mac, Siri waits for your words, but on your iOS device, you must activate Siri again before you start talking. When you’re finished dictating, pause. Siri creates a new note with your text, using your default Notes account (usually iCloud).

Figure 60: Tell Siri to “Take a note.”
To save yourself the effort of activating Siri twice on your iOS device, say “Take a note” or “Note to self” and then *keep talking*. Include punctuation as you speak (see **Punctuate Your Notes**, next).

Siri can’t delete a note, so you’ll need to do so by hand on your iOS device or Mac if you decide you don’t want one anymore.

---

**Punctuate Your Notes**

When you dictate a note using Siri, you must speak all punctuation you want included:

- Say the name of common punctuation like “period” or “semicolon.”
- Say “Cap” to capitalize the next word.
- Say “Caps on” to capitalize the first character of each word in a phrase and “Caps off” to turn that formatting off.
- Say “Quote” and “end quote” to enclose text in quotation marks.
- Say “New paragraph” to start a new paragraph.
- Say “New line” to start a new line.

---

**Give a Note a Name**

If you’re a prolific note taker, it’s a good idea to give new notes names, so that they’re easier to find and add to later. For instance, say “Create story ideas note” (**Figure 61**).
In addition to all the other Siri powers you’ve learned about in this book, Apple’s digital assistant can do Mac-specific tasks like adjusting System Preferences, calling up information about your computer itself, and quickly finding files using natural language. If you’re working somewhere noisy, or are embarrassed to prattle on to your computer, you can even Type Questions to Siri privately instead of saying them out loud.

For the Siri Skeptics

Some veteran Mac users might be skeptical about how useful Siri is on the Mac. After all, it’s awkward to type queries into the iPhone’s tiny virtual keyboard (even for those of us with thumbs of steel) and on the HomePod your voice is the only interface you’ve got. Our Macs, on the other hand, come with a keyboard and a mouse or trackpad—tools we can wield precisely.

But don’t count Siri on the Mac out yet: Consider how it can cut multiple-step tasks you do often down to one command (as discussed throughout this book) as well as how it can help you multitask. For example, if you’re reading an article on the web and its math doesn’t make sense, get Siri to run the numbers without ever leaving your place. Likewise, if you’re busy in a spreadsheet and need to send a message to the boss to say you’re almost done, don’t switch over to Messages and type it out—ask Siri to.

Work with System Preferences

Siri is lightning fast when it comes to tweaking System Preferences, saving you the trouble of digging through menus and dialogs.

Say: “Show me my Wi-Fi settings.” “Change my wallpaper.” “Turn up the volume.” “Make my screen brighter.” “Put my Mac to sleep.” (Siri can’t restart your Mac, but it tells you how.) “Turn Bluetooth off.” “Is Bluetooth on?” (Figure 64)
You can also ask “How much iCloud storage do I have left?” and “What’s my battery level?”

**Tip:** If you ask Siri “What’s my battery level?” on a desktop Mac, it might reply with an answer like “Your Mac is at 32%” The message isn’t clear, but it’s talking about either a wireless keyboard, Magic Trackpad, or Magic Mouse battery.

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### Find Information About Your Mac

Siri can answer basic questions about your Mac that otherwise would require a trip to Apple → About This Mac and its many submenus. For example: “How fast is my Mac?” “How much storage do I have available?” “How much RAM do I have?” “What’s my serial number?” (Figure 65)
Grab Bag of Other Useful Tricks

Answering questions, making telephone calls, and (perhaps) telling jokes may be some of the main things you of think of when you think Siri, but Apple’s digital assistant has many more tricks up its sleeve. Here’s a collection of some of the coolest things it can help you do that don’t fit into a particular category, from translating phrases into foreign languages to controlling your smart home.

Find Your Apple Devices

It can get tiring logging in to iCloud.com and scanning the map for your Apple device, just so you can end up, as always, wandering around the house listening for its muffled ping. (In my case, that ping once came from the freezer where my iPhone sat, carefully wrapped in tin foil. Ah, toddlers).

Siri lets you cut to the chase. Try “Ping my watch” or “Find my iPhone.” Siri tells you if any of the devices signed into your iCloud account are nearby and can play a sound to lead you to it (Figure 69).

Figure 69: Use Siri to find your Apple devices.

I find this particularly useful with the HomePod as I can just call out “Hey Siri, where’s my phone?”

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Retrieve Passwords

From time to time, you may need to look up a password for a website when Safari AutoFill goes on the blink or you need to type the password into another device. If it’s in your iCloud keychain, Siri on your Mac or iOS device can help.

Usually it takes a bunch of steps to check one of your Safari AutoFill passwords. On an iOS device, you must tap Settings > Passwords & Accounts > Website & App Passwords, authenticate your identity using TouchID or FaceID, and then search the list. Similarly, on the Mac, you must launch Safari, choose Safari > Preferences > Passwords, enter your user account password, and then root around.

But as of iOS 12 and macOS Mojave, Siri made this a whole lot easier. Ask for a password by name to jump right to it, for example: “What’s my Netflix password?” “What’s my Dropbox password?” Or, say “Show my passwords” to pull up the whole list. Don’t worry: You must enter your login password on the Mac to gain access to passwords. Your iOS device can verify your identity using TouchID or FaceID.

Tip: Wi-Fi passwords aren’t covered by Siri’s password recall powers, but there is a quick trick that makes sharing them easy. See Share your Wi-Fi password from your iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch.

Launch an App

On your Mac and iOS devices, Siri offers fast access to your apps. Say “Open app name,” “Launch app name,” “Play app name” or even just the app’s name to get things started. (Perhaps Apple thought it would improve our attitude towards work to say “Play Photoshop” just as easily as “Play Sims.”) Siri can’t close apps.

Tip: You can also search the App Store using Siri. Say: “Show me money management apps.” “Show me kids’ games” and the App Store opens to that category.

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Save Time with Siri Shortcuts

Apple added a powerful new timesaver to iOS 12: Siri Shortcuts. Shortcuts automate multiple-step tasks that you do regularly on your iOS devices, from getting directions to the next event on your calendar to letting your spouse know when you’ll be home. Tons of third-party apps offer Shortcuts integration. (See iMore’s 62 apps that work with Siri Shortcuts for a list.) Better yet, you can activate shortcuts with a simple phrase on your iPhone, iPad, Apple Watch, or HomePod. (Fair warning: shortcuts that open an app on your iOS device probably won’t work on the HomePod or Apple Watch.)

Add a Suggested Shortcut

Siri learns your routines as you use your iOS device and makes suggestions for shortcuts as you go. Go to Settings > Siri & Search to see its current top three (Figure 78).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUGGESTED SHORTCUTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Send a message to 6 of us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Send an email to andrew innes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create an event on Fri, Jul 19, 12:00 AM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 78:** Siri suggests shortcuts based on what you’ve been doing recently on your iOS device.

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To see a complete list of suggestions, organized by app, tap All Shortcuts (Figure 79).

![Figure 79: Tap All Shortcuts to see a list of suggestions organized by app.](image)

**Get More Control Over What Suggestions You See**

To make suggestions for Siri shortcuts, Siri examines your use of apps, as well as data like your browsing history, emails, messages, and contacts. It does this locally on your device to protect your privacy, but you also have a measure of control over which apps it focuses on. If you don’t want to see Siri shortcut suggestions for a particular app (say, you don’t use Airbnb much), go to Settings > Siri & Search and scroll down the list. Tap the app name and then toggle Siri & Suggestions off. You can choose to remove the app from the list altogether by toggling “Show App” off. You might also want to take a look at this list to ensure that apps you do want suggestions for are toggled on.
Understand Siri and Your Privacy

How does Siri make its magic? It sends most of what you ask it to Apple where servers process your speech to return an answer. Here are answers to some common questions about what that means for your privacy.

Is Apple Keeping Track of What I Say?

Apple does store recordings of your voice, but it doesn’t associate those recordings with your name, Apple ID, or email address. Instead, your voice data is assigned a random user number, or identifier. After 6 months, data is disassociated from the identifier and then stored for up to 18 months more for testing.

Yes, that means somewhere out there right now someone might be listening to you saying: “Siri, why are fire engines red?” (If you haven’t already, ask that question.) But, because the data is anonymized—and Apple’s business model is not advertising-based like Google’s and Facebook’s—the listeners won’t know who you are...or start sending you advertisements for fire extinguishers.

You can reset the identifier by turning Siri and Dictation off and back on. Once you do, Apple deletes the user data associated with your Siri identifier, and Siri’s learning process—about your dialect and accent, for instance—starts again.

To do this on your iOS device, go to Settings > Siri & Search and toggle the “Listen for ‘Hey Siri’” and “Press Side Button for Siri” to off. To turn off dictation, go to Settings > General > Keyboard and toggle Enable Dictation to off. On your Mac, go to Apple ⌘ > System Preferences > Siri and uncheck the Enable Siri box. Then, go to Apple ⌘ >
System Preferences > Keyboard > Dictation and select the Off radio button. Turn these settings back on to start fresh.

**Tip:** Your iOS identifier is also used for your paired Apple Watch and HomePods.

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### Does Siri Share Other Information About Me with Apple?

Siri also sends information about you—associating it, again, with a random identifier—to Apple, including names and relationships from your Contacts app, the names of songs in your iTunes library, the names of your photo albums (but not the photos themselves), what apps you have on your device, information from Calendar, and more. This helps Siri respond more intelligently when you use it to make a phone call, play music, search photos, or create calendar events and reminders.

Here’s how it handles some other common types of data:

- **Location data:** If you have Location Services on, the location of your device is sent to Apple so it can send back results relevant to where you are (for instance, what movies are playing nearby). To turn off Location Service for Siri on your iOS device, go to Settings > Privacy > Location Services > Siri & Dictation and select Never.

  **Tip:** Your iPhone keeps a local, encrypted record of places you go frequently. To see it, go to Settings > Privacy > Location Services > System Services > Significant Locations. Authenticate yourself using your passcode, TouchID, or FaceID. Tap a place (like Berkeley, CA) under the History header to see a map with sub-locations and the number of visits to each one.

- **Siri Search and Shortcut suggestions:** Apple says that Siri’s analysis of how you use your apps happens on your device and that when this information syncs across your devices, it is encrypted.
Thank you for purchasing this Take Control book. We hope you find it both useful and enjoyable to read. We welcome your comments.

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About the Publisher

alt concepts inc., publisher of Take Control Books, is operated by Joe Kissell and Morgen Jahnke, who acquired the ebook series from TidBITS Publishing Inc.’s owners, Adam and Tonya Engst, in May 2017. Joe brings his decades of experience as author of more than 60 books on tech topics (including many popular Take Control titles) to his role as Publisher. Morgen’s professional background is in development work for nonprofit organizations, and she employs those skills as Director of Marketing and Publicity. Joe and Morgen live in San Diego with their two children and their cat.

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