TAKE CONTROL OF

SIRI

COVERS SIRI ON
iPhone • iPad • iPod touch
Mac • Apple Watch
Apple TV • HomePod

by SCHOLLE McFARLAND

$14.99
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Welcome to *Take Control of Siri, Second Edition*, version 2.0, published in December 2020 by alt concepts inc. This book was written by Scholle McFarland and edited by Joe Kissell.

Siri is the hands-free, time-saving, and fun technology that ties everything together on your Apple Devices. Whether you want to ask a question, make a call, find your iPhone, or set a timer, Siri is often the fastest way. This book explores how to get the most out of Siri on your iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, Apple Watch, Mac, HomePod, and Apple TV.

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**Updates and More**

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Basics

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

- To learn more about using your iPhone and iPad, see *Take Control of iOS 14 and iPadOS 14* by Josh Centers.
- To learn more about the Apple Watch, see Jeff Carson’s *Take Control of Apple Watch*.
- To learn more about using Apple TV, see Josh Center’s *Take Control of Apple TV*.

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 CliffsNotes 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 see an orb pulsing at the bottom of the screen or feel two vibrations.

What’s New in the Second Edition

The second edition of *Take Control of Siri* is updated for iOS 14.3 and iPadOS 14.3, as well as macOS Big Sur and watchOS 7. (The Mac-specific instructions in this book should work for Catalina or later. Much of what I describe here also works in earlier versions of macOS, but somewhat differently than what you’ll read here.) Along with hundreds of small changes in the book, larger revisions include:

- Instead of taking over the whole screen of your mobile device, Siri now appears as a small widget at the bottom of the screen (iPhone) or bottom-right corner of the screen (iPad). This means you can

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keep an eye on other information while you make your query. The difference shows in screenshots throughout the book.

• If you have AirPods—or in some cases, Beats headphones—Siri can now **Announce Incoming Messages on AirPods (and More)** and let you reply hands free.

• Tired of your Siri mixing up you and your teen or spouse’s music preferences? **Teach HomePod to Recognize Different Voices** so it responds to each of you appropriately.

• Siri includes more ways to **Ask About Health**, including symptom-based coronavirus guidance.

• Siri now gathers knowledge from a variety of websites. The result is it can get answers to more questions without kicking you out to a general web search. See **Ask About Random Facts**.

• Whether you’d like to hear a collie or a cuckoo, now you can **Ask Siri for Real-World Sounds**.

• If you need a little help relaxing, or like to fall asleep to white noise, you can use Siri to **Tap into the HomePod’s Ambient Sounds**.

• Chained to Apple Maps no more, Siri now can use Google Maps for driving, cycling, walking, or transit directions. It can even access your contacts so you can get directions to a friend’s house by name. See **Use Google Maps Instead**.

• When your message requires some nuance, use Siri to **Send an Audio Message** instead of a text one.

• You can still use Siri to **Translate a Phrase**, but you might want to use iOS 14’s new Translate app instead.

• If you’re tired of family members ignoring their phones, use Siri to **Turn Your HomePod into an Intercom** to get their attention.

• In responses to issues with Siri recordings, Apple changed some of its privacy settings and policies. One result is that you can now delete your information. See **Understand Siri and Your Privacy**.
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!
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.
**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 a Mac can tweak system settings, find files, and more. See *Control Your Mac with Siri*.

- Shortcuts make it easy to complete multi-step commands, especially when you pair them with 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, use your HomePod as an intercom, 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 iPod touch (5th generation 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.

**Tip:** Siri works in Airplane mode as long as Wi-Fi remains available, for example through in-flight Wi-Fi. See Apple’s [Use Airplane Mode on your iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, and Apple Watch](https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT204658).

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**).

![Figure 1: No internet connection means no Siri.](image)

Here’s how to check your connection:

- **On an iPad or iOS device:** You need an active Wi-Fi or cellular data connection to use Siri on your iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch. 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 aren’t connected to Wi-Fi and 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
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 iPad or iOS Device

To activate Siri by touch on your mobile device, you either press and hold the Home button at the bottom of your phone (iPhone 8 and earlier, iPod touch, and iPads with Home buttons), the side button (iPhone X or later), or the top button (all other iPads). Siri is listening when you see a pulsing orb at the bottom of the screen (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Look for the pulsing orb at the bottom of your screen.

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 device 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?.
Should You Enable Siri from the Lock Screen?

Being able to access Siri straight from your mobile device’s 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 device’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 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 device supports voice activation, see Which iPhones and iPads Recognize “Hey Siri”? Apple TV does not support voice activation, but new Macs do.

Use “Hey Siri” on Your iPhone or iPad

To enable “Hey Siri” on your iOS device 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 13). Tap Continue and follow the prompts to do so.

Figure 13: Train your mobile device to pick your voice—and only your voice—out of the crowd.
If you want Siri to excel at recognizing your voice from afar, step away from your device while doing the voice training.

Next, tap Settings > Siri & Search and set Allow Siri When Locked to on (Figure 14).

![Figure 14](image)

**Figure 14**: Adjust a few of your mobile 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 trigger “Hey Siri” when you’re not actively using your mobile device. (This setting is also required for a new feature that lets Siri Announce Incoming Messages on AirPods (and More).) See Should You Enable Siri from the Lock Screen? for a discussion of how to handle the security trade-offs that come with doing this.

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 device to use Siri to unlock a HomeKit-enabled door lock or reveal a password.

Once you’re set up, just say “Hey Siri” followed immediately by your question or request and your device snaps to attention. If you can’t get your mobile device 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.

See Will “Hey Siri” Devices 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. Besides workaday inquires like “Who starred in Groundhog Day?” or “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?”

According to Apple, Siri now boasts 20 times more facts than it did three years ago and you get these answers directly from Siri, rather than being sent to a webpage. 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 a 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!
**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 NBA G-League, Chinese Basketball Association, Olympic men’s and women’s basketball, Super Basketball, and FIBA World Cup basketball.

- **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 11 hockey leagues, including 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 follows 36 other professional soccer leagues around the world, including Australia A-League, German Bundesliga, Champions League, Dutch Eredivisie, English Premier League, Europa League, French Ligue 1, Italian Serie A, Japanese J League, La Liga, and more.
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 70 million streaming songs.

Note: Apple’s rebellion against its deal with music company Apple Corps 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 Billie Eilish”), from an album (“Play the album Don’t Smile at Me”), or musical genre, too (“Play alternative songs”). Or, say “Shuffle all songs” to move through your entire library at random (Figure 37).
Figure 37: 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, as seen here.

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 Store 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/iPadOS 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.

Tip: You can’t use Siri to change sound quality, for example, by boosting the bass to make your floor vibrate or increasing the treble to make up for high-frequency hearing loss. To do that on your mobile device, go to Settings > Music > EQ and choose from settings like Treble Booster or Small Speakers. On a Mac, open Music, go to Window > Equalizer and choose a preset from the pop-up menu.
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 iPhone, iPod touch, iPad, Mac, Apple Watch, and HomePod.

Note: To make and receive phone calls on HomePod, you must turn on Personal Requests. To update HomePod’s software, open the Home app on your iPhone, tap the Home icon in the upper-left corner, tap Home Settings, and then tap Software Update. Toggle on Install Updates Automatically.

Make a Phone Call

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

- **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.”

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 44). (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.
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/iPadOS 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 46).
Figure 46: 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 NW Front 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, walking, and now—in a handful of cities—bike, too. 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.
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/iPadOS 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 iOS device, make reminders sync through iCloud by going to Settings > your name > iCloud and toggling the Reminders switch on. (Your Apple Watch mirrors your iPhone.) On your Mac, go to System Preferences > Apple ID > 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 cancel my trial subscription in 14 days.” “Remind me to take out the garbage at 9 A.M.” (Figure 49).

![Reminder](image)

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

By default, when you specify a day but not a time for a reminder—“Remind me to call Mike Price tomorrow”—you’re notified at 9 A.M. If
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 Mac, iOS/iPadOS devices, Apple Watch, and HomePod (with Personal Requests on).

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/iPadOS devices and Macs, 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).

Figure 53: Siri can fill you in about what’s coming up.
Tip: Your 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/iPadOS 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.

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 iPad or iOS device, go to Settings > Calendar, tap Default Calendar, and pick the
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). New as of iOS 14 and iPad OS 14, Siri can now send audio messages, too.

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, iPod touch, 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, send a message to Graham I’ll pick you up after mock trial around 7:30” (Figure 55).

![Figure 55: To speed things up, skip the back and forth with Siri and include the message body with your request.](image)

**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/iPadOS device and find (or start) a
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 iPads, iOS devices, and Macs 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, include their last name or try to spell their name out—“Email S-a-s-k-i-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 Kapka about cards and say ‘Next Tuesday looks good!’” This usually works best if the message is fairly short and sweet (Figure 59).
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:** Tap or click Siri’s higgledy-piggledy translation of your words. Mail opens to your message. Type to fix.

✦ **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 your 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, iPod touch, iPad, Mac, and HomePod (if Personal Requests are turned on).

Sync Notes Through iCloud

When you take advantage of iCloud syncing, you can access your notes on your iPhone, iPod touch, iPad, Mac, HomePod, and on iCloud.com, when signed into the same account. On your iOS/iPadOS device, make Notes sync through iCloud by going to Settings > your name > iCloud and toggling the Notes switch on. On your Mac, go to System Preferences > Apple ID > 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 61). Siri waits for your words. When you’re finished dictating, pause. Siri creates a new note with your text, using your default Notes account (usually iCloud).

Figure 61: Tell Siri to “Take a note.”
To save yourself some time, 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, iPad, 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 62).
Control Your Mac with Siri

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 in the office, 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 a 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 the Mac version of Siri 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.” “Put my Mac to sleep.” (Siri can’t restart your Mac, but it tells you how.) “Turn Bluetooth off.” “Is Bluetooth on?” “Make my screen brighter.” (Figure 64)
Figure 64: Siri can check—and change—system settings, for example, whether adjusting the brightness of your screen, shown here.

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 should reel off the battery levels of any paired wireless keyboard, Magic Trackpad, or Magic Mouse. If its reply is something vague like “Your Mac is at 32%,” the message isn’t clear, but it’s talking about a paired device.

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)
Answering questions, making telephone calls, and (perhaps) telling jokes may be some of the main things you think of when you think of 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 retrieving passwords to using your HomePod as an intercom.

**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.](image-url)
I find this particularly useful with the HomePod as I can just call out “Hey Siri, where’s my phone?”

**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, iPad, or iOS device can help.

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

But Siri makes 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 your Mac to gain access to passwords. Your iPad or 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, iPad, 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.
Shortcuts automate multiple-step tasks that you do regularly on your iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, or Apple Watch, 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; their actions appear in the Shortcuts app. Better yet, you can activate shortcuts with a simple phrase on your iPhone, iPad, iPod touch, Apple Watch, or HomePod. (Fair warning: shortcuts that open an app on your iOS/iPadOS device probably won’t work on the HomePod.) I give an overview of basic ways to use shortcuts here. Check out Rosemary Orchard’s *Take Control of Shortcuts* for the nitty gritty.

### Add a Suggested Shortcut

Siri learns your routines, making shortcut suggestions as you go. To see a list, open Shortcuts on your iOS device or iPad, tap the Gallery tab, and scroll down to “Shortcuts from Your Apps” (Figure 78).

![Figure 78: Siri suggests shortcuts based on what you’ve been doing recently. Tap See All for the complete list.](image-url)
You might already have an easy way to trigger a suggested action. For instance, since I gave my 8 A.M. alarm a name when I created it, I can use Siri to turn it off and on already. (See Set an Alarm.)

If you see a shortcut you want to add, tap it, type your trigger phrase in the “When I say” field, and then tap “Add to Siri.” In this case, I chose “Add transaction” to trigger a shortcut that opens my budgeting program and creates a new transaction (Figure 79).

![Add to Siri](image)

**Figure 79:** Type in your shortcut trigger and then tap “Add to Siri.”

**Tip:** Using shortcuts with Siri may prove especially useful if you have motor or visual impairments. See Steve Aquino’s article Why Shortcuts Matter for Accessibility.
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 used to store Siri voice recordings—assigned a random, device-generated number, or identifier, as opposed to being associated with your name or Apple ID—in order to improve Siri’s performance. After 6 months, that data was disassociated from the identifier and then stored for up to 18 months more for testing.

However, in the summer of 2019, a whistleblower revealed that Apple contractors quality control regularly heard short snippets of sometimes very private conversations as part of their job providing quality control for Siri. The culprit was typically accidental activation of Siri on an Apple Watch or HomePod.

As a result, Apple made a number of changes to its policies. Now only Apple employees “subject to confidentiality obligations”—rather than contractors, as was the case before—review audio interactions. And most importantly, Apple no longer stores Siri audio recordings by default. Instead, users must opt in to help improve Siri.

You’re asked what you want to do when you first set up your device, upgrade to or enable Siri. On a Mac, go to System Preferences > Privacy, select Analytics & Improvements in the list, and take a look at the “Improve Siri & Dictation” setting. On an iOS device or iPad, go to Settings > Privacy > Analytics & Improvements to check your settings.
(Figure 84). The “Improve Siri & Dictation” setting should be off, by default.

So how does Apple improve Siri’s accuracy if it doesn’t listen to its exchanges? Apple now uses computer-generated transcripts of your interactions with Siri instead. Those transcripts are associated with a random identifier, rather than your name or Apple ID, for six months and then disassociated with the identifier and kept for up to two years.
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