Making Email Accessible

Assistive technology helps people with blindness, macular degeneration, dyslexia, strokes and other reading or visual impairments

Blind people can now participate in email conversations and cruise through their inbox at speed. No longer will they be stuck listening to legal disclaimers in email signatures.

Email is an essential part of modern life, but for the blind and visually impaired community, receiving emails can be very difficult.

❝ my eyesight isn't as it was years ago, and your Speaking Email makes it so much easier for me to keep in touch with folks ❞

Willis Hargrave

If you are blind or visually impaired, Speaking Email might be perfect for you. The app reads out the contents of your inbox one email at a time, moving on to the next automatically. It skips over email signatures, disclaimers and other email-specific clutter - making for a smooth and seamless reading experience.

It is fully operable by voice commands for daily usage, such as checking emails, replying and managing mail. It can be set up to wait for your command at the start and end of emails. You can even tell it to "ignore" and emails from that person will be skipped over in future.

What Users Say

❝Due to stroke [my patient] is unable to read, which had been a social avenue for her. Today I found your app and I put it on her phone. When we used it for the first time she cried. .... Your app has decreased her isolation and drastically improved her quality is life.❞

Ruth Ginsburg, MS, CCC-SLP
Speech Language Pathologist
Boston, Ma

We've had a lot of enthusiastic and supportive feedback from blind and visually impaired users, which makes this effort really feel worthwhile:

"*I am a totally blind man I am so thankful for speaking email. It is help me in a way that's hard for me to describe. I thank you for creating it and I hope others will enjoy it as much as I do.*"
Charles Elliott

"Your app is one of a handful that could assist people with visual problems and I strongly support your efforts."
Louis J Fox
Louis J. Fox Center for Vision Restoration - University of Pittsburgh

"I work as a speech language pathologist, one of my current clients is a woman who has had a recent severe stroke. She went from being only able to repeat words to speaking in sentences with difficulty. Due to the stroke she is unable to read, which had been a social avenue for her. Today I found your app and I put it on her phone. When we used it for the first time she cried. She is now able to listen to all the emails she has received since she had her stroke. Your app has decreased her isolation and drastically improved her quality is life."
Ruth Ginsburg, MS, CCC-SLP
Speech Language Pathologist

"I want to thank you for this app because my 93 year old mother is almost blind from macular degeneration. She can now listen to her emails without needing someone to read them to her."
Judy Gilford

"I'm a retired old fart, so I don't use your software as you do, however, being an older person, my eyesight isn't as it was years ago, and your Speaking Email makes it so much easier for me to keep in touch with folks. Thank you for your assistance to our older society. It's sincerely a joy to be able to receive my email now."
Willis Hargrave

Speaking Email supports the blind and visually impaired community by making software available for research studies

Speaking Email is helping people living with disabilities in a study at University of South Carolina.

Research is underway at the USC School of Medicine using Speaking Email and other low cost tech to assist people with disabilities. We are very proud to be involved in this study, which is so far helping people living with macular degeneration and severe dyslexia.

Features

Reading out emails

Speaking Email reads your emails out loud, making it possible for you to get through your email without the assistance of another person. You can change the voices, including "announcer" and "reader" voices, and speed up the voice to get through emails faster.

Email reading is made a pleasure with Speaking Email's smart content detection — skipping of disclaimers, signatures, email headers, email trails that you're in, limiting email length, and automatically moving to the next email. You may notice we even shorten common text like dates and times, http://www is shortened to dubdubdub, and we read out smiley faces (essential to get the mood of the writer!)

Screen reader friendly

Speaking Email offers similar user experience with or without a screen reader. It is fully accessible with screen readers and is tested with VoiceOver, the screen reader that most blind people use to interact with their iPhone. We've been reviewed as a fully accessible app on AppleVis, the online community for visually impaired iPhone users.

Speaking Email is fully operable with VoiceOver. All screens and menus have accessible fields and prompts. Tap anywhere to bring up the command buttons. Then either tap a button or you can say its name, like "trash". Just say "help" if you are not sure.

❝ Speaking Email totally rocks! The accessibility is awesome! ❞

Joseph Weakland (totally blind)

Multilingual

Automatically speaks in your selected regional language.

If you speak more than one language, Speaking Email Premium Edition can now automatically switch voices to match the language detected in the email content.

Voice Commands

Speaking Email can be fully controlled by voice command. You don't need to see the screen at all.

Voice commands work throughout all multi-step actions such as forwarding and dictation.

You can say any of the labels on the buttons: "archive", "trash", "ignore", "flag", "repeat", "reply", "forward", "play". This makes it very easy to remember what you can say and when.

For the "forward" command, a list of your preset forwarding recipients is shown. You can say the first word of the email address to select the person to send to. For example for "mike.nelson@beweb.co.nz" say "mike".

Anywhere you can say a command you can say "help" to find out what you can say, or "stop" to stop listening.

We know that well-known voice command systems like Siri leave a lot to be desired. So we have worked hard to make our voice command system better. Here is how are different:

- If you say a wrong command, we don't leave you hanging, we just listen again
- When you say a command, we repeat it back so you know what action you triggered
- If you say a command like "forward" that needs more input (the recipient name) we've made sure the entire experience can be done by voice
- When we say commands can be done by voice, we mean without looking (not like Siri where half the time you get visual feedback only and hear nothing)

Reply Dictation

Speaking Email dictation keeps listening as long as the operating system will allow - on iOS this is two minutes and it's ok if you pause for breath during this time. At this time on Android unfortunately a pause of a couple of seconds will stop the dictation (so you need to speak without pausing).

You can edit while dicatating by saying "delete word" or "delete sentence". Say "dictatation done" when finished, and your text is read back to you before you confirm sending by saying "send".

You can say "redo", "cancel" or "more" to add more.

Say "dictation help" for other things you can say, such as punctuation and even smiley faces :)

Help!

Whenever Speaking Email is listening for voice commands, you can always say "help" to get a list of options you can say. This makes things much easier as it means you don't need to be able to see or use a screenreader to navigate the buttons.

Instructions for blind users

Speaking Email works with Apple VoiceOver (normally triple tap home button) and it also has its own voice control. To get set up you need to use VoiceOver (or a sighted helper). But for normal daily emails you switch off VoiceOver and the app handles voice commands and dictation of replies.

Here is a quick guide to the main points you need to know:

1. You need to upgrade to Premium Edition to get voice control. This is best done with voiceover screen reader or help of a sighted person. On the main screen turn on voiceover and swipe to hear the buttons. Tap on the Upgrade button. Then tap on 1 month or 12 month buttons. This initiates a purchase with the App Store.

2. Keep voiceover on to browse the preferences and account setup options. Set the preference "auto play email on startup" on.

3. If using the voice control feature, turn voiceover off to use the app in daily usage. When you launch the app it checks your email and starts playing the first one. It plays email in order. Swipe left and right to skip back and and forward.

4. While the email is being read out you can interrupt it by tapping once anywhere on screen. You will hear it say "listening". Say "help" to find out what you can say.

5. To flag an email, tap once for voice command, say "flag". This will be flagged on your server and other mail clients you use.

6. To delete, tap once for voice command, say "trash". This will be moved to trash on your server and appear in the trash in other mail clients you use.

7. Likewise for archive but there's also a shortcut. Double tap anywhere on screen while email is being spoken. This moves the email to an archive folder on your mail server and any other mail apps.

8. To undo any of these actions, swipe back, then repeat the action. This toggles the mail between flagged or unflagged, trashed/archived or inbox.

6. To reply, tap once for voice command, say "reply", then dictate your reply. There are several commands you can say while in dictation mode. Say "dictation help" to find out what these are. Say "dictation done" to have the text read back to you and then say "more" to edit, or "send" to send it. There are prompts telling you exactly what to say at this point.

7. You can forward to pre-set up email addresses. Set these up under preferences (use VoiceOver or enlist a sighted helper). Then tap on email for voice command, say "forward"

and say "help" for a list of forwarding addresses you have set up. Say the first word of the email address to choose it and the email will be forwarded with a message "FYI".

8. If you get a lot of emails you don't want to listen to, you can filter them out by using the "ignore sender" command. Tap for voice commands and say "ignore". Next time an email arrives from that sender it will announce the sender, say that it is ignoring it, and move on to the next email. For totally blind users this is not so useful unless you have a sighted assistant who would check these mails - otherwise you would be better to archive or trash every email to keep your inbox nice and clean.