

Using a voice assistant

Let's see how the voice assistant in a smart speaker works, and some ways that you can use it.

A new kind of control: voice assistants

Here are a few basic facts that will help you understand your voice assistant:

- Your **voice assistant** allows you to just ask your **smart speaker** whatever you want, in plain English.
- So that it knows that you're talking to it, you start speaking to your voice assistant using an **activation phrase**. For **Google Assistant** that's "OK Google", for **Amazon Alexa** it's just "Alexa" and for **Apple Siri** it's "Hey Siri".
- When your voice assistant hears the activation phrase, it starts recording what you say, and sends it over the internet to be analysed. Your smart speaker will respond within seconds.
- There's a voice assistant in your **smartphone** and **tablet** too: Google Assistant in Android devices and Siri on iPhones and iPads. You can install Alexa on any of those devices, and Google Assistant on iPhones and iPads. Siri is restricted to iPhones and iPads only.
- Whichever voice assistant you choose, it is free to use.



Google:
"OK Google!"

Apple:
"Hey Siri!"

Amazon Alexa:
"Alexa!"

Each voice assistant responds to an activation phrase

How a voice assistant works

Let's look a bit more closely at how a voice assistant works:

- A voice assistant is an **online service** that can understand things you ask it. It uses a **smart speaker** or an **app** running on a mobile device like a tablet or smartphone.
- When you give a command to a voice assistant, a microphone in the smart device records your voice and sends it over the internet for analysis and processing.

Using a voice assistant

- So when you say “**OK Google, what time is it?**”, the words **what times is it** are recorded and sent to the Google Assistant service over the internet. The time is sent back to your device which says it out aloud, and the recording of your voice is deleted.
- These **voice assistants** allow you to ask your questions in plain English, and they reply the same way.
- Nothing you say is recorded until your voice assistant hears its **activation phrase**: “**OK Google**” for Google Assistant, “**Alexa**” for Amazon Alexa and “**Hey Siri**” for Apple Siri.

Setting up a voice assistant

You need to set up your voice assistant to use it. In this example we'll use Google Assistant with the Google Nest Mini smart speaker:

- First, you set up the smart speaker by plugging it into power and opening the **Google Home** app on your mobile device. Then, just follow the instructions in the app.
- You need to train the voice assistant on your smart speaker to recognise your voice as belonging to you. The **Google Home** app will ask you to repeat the **activation phrase** or other phrases several times to complete this training.
- You can retrain the voice assistant if you don't think it's working well enough, or if you are using a pre-loved smart speaker.
- Test the voice assistant easily just by saying in a clear voice, “**OK Google, what time is it?**” If all's working properly, Google will tell you the time.



A voice assistant needs to be trained to recognise your voice

Tips and tricks for voice control

Learning how to use a voice assistant is often a case of try it and see. But here are some tips to get you started:

- Pause briefly after the activation phrase “**OK Google**”. You'll see some lights go on, then finish your command. Don't wait more than a second, though, or the speaker will go back to sleep.

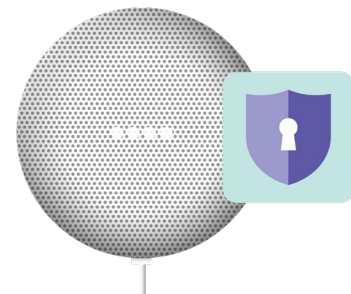
Using a voice assistant

- Speak in a clear, distinct voice. That will help the voice assistant understand you.
- Ask direct questions and give direct commands. For example, say: **“OK Google, play ABC radio national”**, not **“OK Google, would you be able to ...”**
- If the voice assistant says **Sorry, I don’t know how to do that**, experiment by saying things in a different way.
- You can ask questions that you’d put in a search engine, such as **“Who is Don Bradman?”** Google Assistant will reply with a summary from Wikipedia.
- Voice assistants are very literal so you should be specific. If you want to hear the ABC Jazz radio station, ask for that, not just **“Jazz”**.
- There are many commands and capabilities, with more being added from time to time. Learn about them by saying, **“OK Google, what can I do with voice commands?”**

Security and privacy with a voice assistant

A voice assistant records your voice and sends it securely via the internet to a service for processing. For peace of mind, it’s helpful to know some of the details:

- Your smart speaker or voice assistant app is always listening. It must in order to hear the activation phrase, such as **OK Google**. But it won’t start recording or sending the recording until you say the activation phrase.
- There is one exception: if an alarm is going off you can just say **“Stop”**.
- If you are using **Google Assistant** or **Siri**, the recordings of your voice are not stored. If you are using **Alexa**, they are stored, but you can delete them manually.
- It’s always a good idea when using any internet service to check out the privacy policy of the service. That’s equally the case for voice assistants.
- Many smart speakers have a microphone switch. With those you can cut off the microphone so it isn’t listening at all. Switch the microphone back on when you want to use the voice assistant again.



You can switch off the microphone in a smart speaker