DIGITAL VOICES AND TEXT-TO-SPEECH FOR IPHONES AND IPADS
Apple have made text-to-speech possible on iPhones ever since Siri was first introduced in 2011. On an iPhone X running iOS 16.7, I counted 22 US English digital voices, and many more for other languages. Learn how to use a zero-cost iPhone app and those digital voices to create text-to-speech recordings.

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Introduction

For years, I have been creating ringtones for identification of each caller. Initially, I used music excerpts, but in 2024 I began replacing those with voice tones announcing each caller name. I found using spoken words to announce the names of callers was more valuable to me than playing a separate music tone for each caller. I could decide whether I had to pay attention immediately, even before pulling my phone out of my pocket.

Next, I discovered how to assign the same vocal ringtones to announce the name of each text sender. I also found out how to set the default text tone to Silent, so that junk text messages are not announced.

In early 2025, I began using Windows Narrator text-to-speech to create vocal descriptive tones for my Android smartphone and for my retired iPhones. Shortly after that, I found text-to-speech is also available on Android and Apple portable devices.

While Apple introduced its **Personal Voice text-to-speech feature** as of iOS 17 for iPhones, any iPhone user can take advantage of zero-cost text-to-speech apps. Many Apple digital voices have been included on iPhones since 2011 when Siri was introduced.

What can be accomplished with text-to-speech? Three uses may be valuable for everyone: recording ringtones, text tones, and Clock app alarm tones. I call such tones made with a voice, either my own voice or a text-to-speech voice, **spoken descriptive tones**.

Clearly both Apple and Microsoft introduced text-to-speech for at least three significant markets: sight-impaired, voice-impaired, and dyslexic persons, who may learn from textbooks faster when the books are read aloud.

This article covers two specific text-to-speech topics: how to choose a digital voice from the digital voices available, and how to use a text-to-speech app to type text to be spoken and recorded by the chosen digital voice.

Apple digital voices for iPhones

Apple has made a variety of digital voices available on iPhones, and the digital voices count has grown over time. The voices are listed in the Settings app; many are listed, but not all are installed. In Settings, you can browse the digital voices list and choose to use an installed voice by tapping one. The chosen voice will be used by a text-to-speech app. For an uninstalled voice, you can choose to download the voice, assuming your iPhone or iPad has storage space available.

On my iPhone X, using iOS 16.7, in Settings, choose **Accessibility►Spoken Content► Voices**. On that screen, a list of languages appears. You can see the top of the list in **illustration 1**.
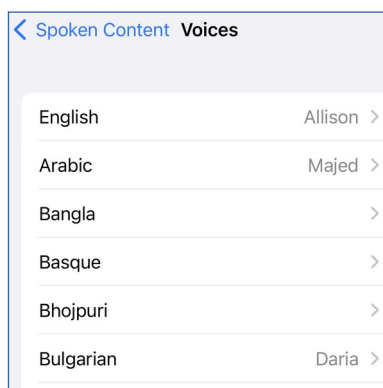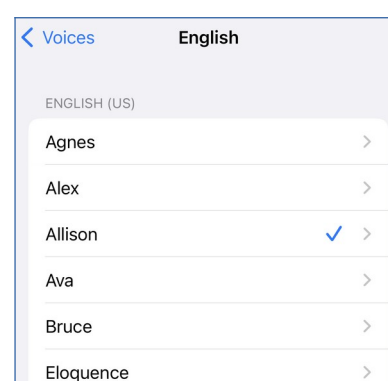
Choose English, found at the list top in US iPhones, to see a long list of English voices. The voices listed in are grouped by country. You can see the top of the English (US) list in

illustration 2. In that screen, scroll down to see groups of voices for other English-speaking countries. The first listed country is the US, because my iPhone X was built for the US market. There are also digital voices for English as spoken in Australia, India, the UK, Ireland, Scotland, and South Africa. In each group, tap a voice name to see if any version of it has been installed.

Illustration 1

Illustration 2

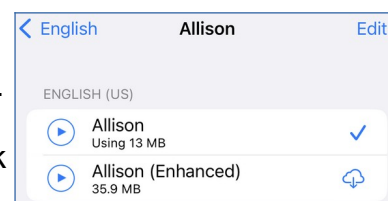A screen devoted to that voice name appears. You can see an example in **illustration 3** for the US English voice named Allison.

You can tap a voice to make use of it. If you do that, then a check mark appears to its right. You can see a check mark in the illustration. The only way I found to de-select a voice was to select another voice.

Illustration 3

You can audition any voice by tapping the triangular Play button to the left of the voice. If you tap that button for a voice not yet installed, then the voice will be installed before speaking its audition. Otherwise, If a voice is not yet installed, then a cloud download button is provided to install it. That button is visible for the enhanced Allison voice in illustration 3.

While browsing the Apple digital voices, I did find one downloadable voice labeled **Premium**. I assume I would be charged if I downloaded that one, so I did not try to download it.

Any voice that you install can be uninstalled. In the screen listing the voice versions available to be downloaded, if a version of the voice has been installed, then an **Edit button** appears in the upper right corner of the screen. You can see that button in the illustration. For any installed voice not selected to use, tap the Edit button. A minus sign in a red circle will appear to the left of each installed voice. Tap the red circle, and the word Delete will appear to the right of the installed voice name. Tap the word Delete, and the voice is uninstalled.

I counted forty languages for digital voices listed on my iPhone X. In America the Melting Pot, it may be useful to create some tones using a voice from the home country, either to identify calls or texts from either first-generation immigrants or relatives in the old country.

On any iPhone, in the Settings app, you can use the Search field atop the main screen to search for Voice. That will reveal the digital voice list location as well as some other related controls for the digital voice. That search worked on my iPhone 5.

A text-to-speech app for iPhones

I use an app with the very generic name **Text-to-Speech!** on my iPhone X. the app is published by Gwyn Durbridge. You can see its icon in **illustration 4**. To find the app on the App Store, type in the search field the name shown above, including the dashes and the exclamation point (!) character. The app will be the first result below any apps paying for top search placement, such as Speechify. You will see the App Store icon matches the one shown in the illustration.

Illustration 4

The main screen of the app appears in **illustration 5**. The screen shows three text phrases that I already typed for the app to speak aloud. Any of those can be used again by tapping it. When you first try the app, of course, no phrases will appear
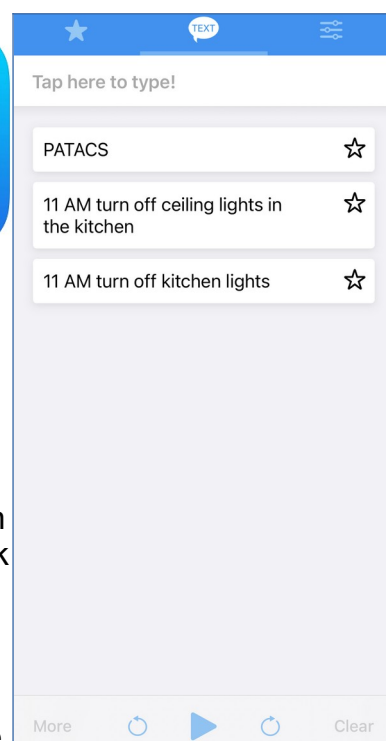
When you first use the app, that space listing text phrases will be blank. By tapping a recent phrase, the area is filled by the phrase.

Illustration 5

Above those phases, gray text shows the place to tap and type a new text phrase to be spoken.

Once you have typed or chosen a text phrase, tap the **Play button**, a triangle at the bottom center of the screen. You will hear the text spoken using the digital voice you chose in Settings.

If you did create several text phrases previously, then you can tap the **Clear button** to the right of the Play button to return to that list of prior text phrases.

At the upper right corner of the app, a tap on the **three lines button** opens app settings. On that screen, you choose an alternative voice from among those installed. You can also tweak the rate and pitch of the chosen voice. If you find yourself in a noisy environment frequently, turning down the rate might make the voice intelligible above the din.

A tap of the **Text button** in the top center of the screen returns to the app main screen.

Recording the spoken text to an audio file

When a text phrase is at the top of the main screen, and the Play button is active, the **More button** to the left of the Play button is also active. To record the spoken phrase, tap the More button. A short menu pops up as shown in **illustration 6**. In that menu, select **Export Audio**.
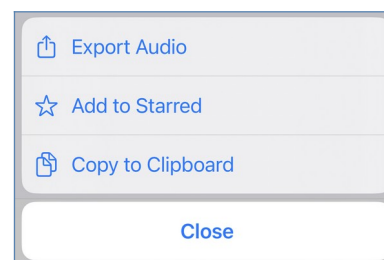

Illustration 6

That selection opens an **Export screen** like that shown in **illustration 7**. In that screen, you can adjust the file name to store the spoken words, and the audio file type used to record the spoken voice. The default file name is TextToSpeech. Tap that name, and a virtual keyboard pops up so you can replace that default with a useful descriptive name. I name the audio file using the same text phrase to be included in the recording. The default M4A audio file type is the best one available in the app for creation of ringtones, text tones and Clock app alarm tones for iPhones.
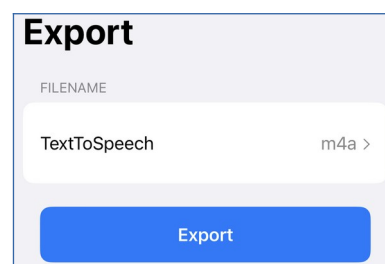
Export

FILENAME

TextToSpeech   m4a >

Export

Illustration 7

Tap the large **Export button** to record the file. Several export options appear. For purposes of creating and installing tones, I choose **Save to Files**. The default locale within that Save to Files choice is iCloud Drive, and I store my text-to-speech recording audio files there. That storage is a great intermediary for storing tones on a computer in preparation for installing tones on an iPhone. These short audio files take up very little storage space in iCloud Drive.

Use the iPhone Files app to change the file extension

The one alteration required for making the recording file into an installable tone file is to change the finale letter of the M4A file extension to R, so the extension is M4R.

You can see the Files app icon in **illustration 8**. This app is pre-installed by Apple on most iPhones, in the Utilities folder. Open the app. In the app, if the contents of iCloud drive are not already listed, then tap Browse to see a list of available storage locations. In that list, select iCloud Drive.
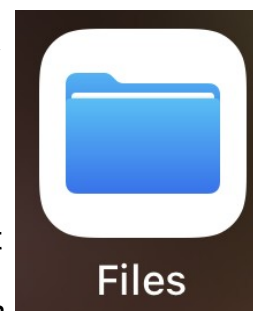
In iCloud Drive, find and long-tap the recording file. A menu appears in front of the Files app screen. In the menu, select **Rename**. A virtual keyboard appears, and the edit highlighting covers the file name *except the extension at the end of the file name.* Tap & drag the highlighting ends to cover **only the final A** in the extension and, very important, tap the letter R on the virtual keyboard. The extension then should be M4R.

Files

Illustration 8

Then tap the **Done button** on the virtual keyboard. The keyboard closes, and the file name appears with its extension changed.

Transfer tone files from iCloud Drive to your computer

I access iCloud Drive on my Windows computer using a Web browser and the iCloud.com web site. I log into iCloud.com using my Apple ID and password. A large rectangular tile on the iCloud.com page provides access to iCloud Drive. The choice of computer is not especially significant. This can be done using any Windows, Macintosh, or Linux computer.

In the Web browser, click the top of the large tile named iCloud Drive. The Web page displays a list of folders and files recently stored on iCloud Drive.

Find and click the audio file with the M4R extension that you want to install on your iPhone. The click turns the row containing the file name blue. On the far right, click the three horizontal dots (an ellipsis). A menu appears. In the menu, select Download a Copy.

Most tone files are tiny and download quickly. On Windows computers, each file is downloaded to the Downloads folder.

Tone installation in a nutshell

1. Connect your iPhone to the computer where the tone file was downloaded.
2. Start the iTunes application.
3. Wait for iTunes to display the name of your iPhone in its left pane.
4. Click the name of your iPhone in the left pane of iTunes, A list of iPhone libraries appears.
5. In the iPhone libraries list, click Tones.
6. In the Right pane, the word Tones appears. If purchased tones or your custom tones have been installed previously, then those tones are listed below the word Tones.
7. Add the downloaded tone file. 1) drag & drop it to the Tones list or 2) pull down the File menu, select Add File to Library. A standard open file dialog box appears. In that dialog box, browse to the folder containing the tone file, select the tone file, and click the Open button. The dialog box closes.
8. Confirm that your new tone file is added to the Tones list.

I have begun using **MobiMover**, a zero-cost application published by EaseUS, as a substitute for iTunes to install tone files. MobiMover does the work of installing iPhone ringtones from my Windows 10 laptop to my iPhone X. It is also available for Macintosh computers. Use of that application may be described in a future article.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Krout is a retired software developer. He has been writing about and delivering presentations on interesting uses of personal computers since the early 1980s. In the 21st century, as digital tech became more powerful and widespread, he has also been writing and delivering presentations about interesting uses of smartphones, tablets, digital music, digital photography, Electric Vehicles (EVs) and Pluggable Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs). He lives in Arlington Virginia.