



The Hixon Writing Center at Caltech

Dictation Tools: Turning Voice into Text

Is Dictation for You?

If **writing makes you anxious**, you can use a dictation tool to produce drafts without the anxiety of the blank page. Writing then becomes an act of revising dictated text.

You may want to use a dictation tool if **your writing strategy is inefficient**. If you're a **perfectionist** who polishes too much as you write, you can dictate to quickly generate substantial but imperfect text. Increase your writing efficiency by letting go of the practice of seeking perfection in a first draft. If you're **working on a project or topic that is new to you**, you may face challenges in writing efficiency. Writing without a clear idea about the depth and breadth of your topic can waste your time. A dictation tool can help you find and get to the point faster.

If **your writing suffers from clarity issues**, you can use a dictation tool to help articulate your ideas in clearer, more straightforward prose.

If you're **struggling to write in an academic register while retaining the clarity of your everyday speech**, you can use a dictation tool to help you visualize the plain language you're actually using to communicate your ideas.

If you're a **non-native English speaker**, you may find it easier to speak with clarity than to write with clarity. Dictation applications turn that speech into writing.

If you have **writer's block** and are having trouble making progress on a project, you may find that dictating text can help get your words flowing again.

If you're **writing about the same topic for different audiences and purposes**, you may be tempted to repurpose or recycle your old writing. A dictation tool can help you create fresh new drafts.

If you want to **free up your hands or be more mobile** (e.g. composing text in the lab or away from a computer), you may find talking easier and more convenient than typing.

If you **want a more ergonomic writing method** or **you're unable to hand-type**, you may enjoy the relief that comes from voicing your words into text.

Dictation Activities

Paraphrase / Summarize/ Take Notes

Record yourself talking about another writer's work (something you hope to incorporate into your writing) without quoting directly from it.

Some writers have difficulty detaching themselves from the original text of other authors. You may encounter such difficulty when you feel you can't paraphrase or summarize what the author has written, especially if the original text is well-written. A dictation tool helps you to extract the main points from other authors without concerning yourself with finding the right words or writing it better. Additionally, dictating can (1) test your understanding of what you're reading, (2) help you to work effectively with the text of others and avoid plagiarism, and (3) allow you to take notes on references to track where your ideas are coming from.

Free-speaking

Set a timer and talk about a writing project until the alarm goes off.

Many people recommend the practice of "free-writing" to writers who are anxious or blocked or who need to brainstorm during the early stages of a project: writing quickly, without any revision, to generate lots of writing and ideas. The practice can generate new ideas (or connections between ideas), produce useful writing, and create momentum. Free-speaking is the same practice, minus the typing. Many people can talk faster than they type, and the cognitive switch to talking aloud can generate different results.

Iterate

Try to clearly state a key idea in 2-4 sentences. Repeat the attempt several times in a row without pausing to review the results.

For particularly crucial parts of texts, getting the perfect words down can be challenging. Record yourself trying to say what you are trying to write several times in a row. Once transcribed, examine the different versions and take the best parts from each.

Want to talk to someone about the information in this handout or how to apply it to your own writing? Make an appointment to come into the HWC and talk with a professional or peer tutor: writing.caltech.edu/tutoring



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Free Dictation Tools

Google Docs *Voice Typing*

Google Docs provides speech-to-text dictation if your computer has a microphone.

For:

- Writers who want to speak their ideas before writing
- Single speaker



Pros:

- Offers fast, real-time transcription
- Voice commands to punctuate, edit, and format text
- Download and share transcription documents in a variety of formats
- Supports multiple languages
- Free to anyone with a Google account
- Google's powerful voice recognition technology uses context to update and correct transcription after you're done dictating

Cons:

- May miss transcription if you speak too fast or don't enunciate clearly
- Bias toward American English
- Autosaving can stop the transcription process
- Cannot train to improve accuracy

How to use:

-  From your computer: Open a new or existing document in Google Docs and select *Voice Typing* from the *Tools* menu. Select the microphone icon to start dictating.
-  From your mobile device: *Voice Typing* feature isn't available on the Google Docs mobile app. You can dictate into the app using the microphone on your mobile device. The transcribed text will rely on your device's built in voice recognition technology. To overcome this limitation, download Google's Gboard app.
- Dictate with a relaxed and comfortable voice. Enunciate your words.

Mac OS / iOS *Dictation*

This built-in dictation feature converts your spoken words into text across multiple OS/iOS applications.

For:

- Writers who want to speak their ideas before writing
- Single speaker





Pros:

- Offers fast, real-time transcription
- Works across multiple OS applications
- Dictation commands to punctuate, edit, and format text (extensive list)
- Supports multiple languages
- Download and share transcription documents in a variety of formats
- Free to anyone with an Apple device

Cons:

- May miss transcription if you speak too fast or don't enunciate clearly
- Bias toward American English
- Cannot train to improve accuracy

How to use:

-  MacOS: In any application where you would use your keyboard (Notes, Pages, etc), select *Start Dictation* under the *Edit* menu and start speaking.
-  iOS: On the iPad or iPhone, select the microphone () in the keyboard and start speaking. On the iPad, the  does not show up when connected to an external keyboard.
- Dictate with a relaxed and comfortable voice. Enunciate your words.

Paid Dictation Tools



Temi is a professional audio recorder that captures and transcribes recordings for \$0.10/minute. You can edit, format, and share your transcriptions directly from your mobile device.

For:

- Situations where a writer needs to capture the exact words of a speaker (e.g. interviews, lectures, film and television, and conversations)
- Writers who want to speak their ideas before writing
- Multiple speakers


Pros:

- Transcript is synced to your recording so you can read along with the playback for accuracy
- App highlights low confidence words, which you can easily edit during playback
- No need to voice command punctuation because the app makes predictions about where sentences begin and end
- Can differentiate and label multiple speakers
- Can use as an audio recorder to store ideas even if you don't submit for transcription
- Download as MS Word document or share link to allow others to edit transcription

Cons:

- No real-time transcription
- Need to pay before you see transcription quality
- No voice commands for editing/formatting
- Delay in transcription (must wait for your order appear on the app dashboard)

How to use:

-  Download the Temi app onto your mobile device. Create an account using your email address. Record audio and submit for transcription (requires payment to submit). Note: The app is also accessible through web browser but can only transcribe pre-recorded audio.
- Dictate with a relaxed and comfortable voice. Enunciate your words.



Dragon Anywhere

Dragon Anywhere professional-grade mobile dictation makes it easy to create documents of any length. You can edit, format, and share your transcriptions directly from your mobile device. Subscriptions available for \$150/yr or \$15/mo.

For:

- Writers and bloggers, journalists, and other creative professionals who write high volume
- Writers who want to speak their ideas before writing
- Single speaker


Pros:

- Offers real-time transcription
- Voice commands to punctuate, edit, and format text
- Customize your dictionary to recognize specialized words you use consistently
- Train app to improve accuracy
- Download and share transcription documents in a variety of formats
- Transcribe pre-recorded audio
- Can use as an audio recorder to store ideas even if you don't submit for transcription

Cons:

- Expensive
- Slow if you do not speak in complete statements
- Takes time to train the app for accuracy
- Autosaving can stop the transcription process

How to use:

-  Download the Dragon app onto your mobile device. Create an account. Credit card information required for the free 1 week trial.
- Dictate with a relaxed and comfortable voice. Enunciate your words.