

Microsoft Read Aloud Feature Improves both Accessibility and Productivity



Since 2010, Microsoft has included a text-to-speech feature in its products. In recent years, this has evolved into the powerful Read Aloud feature. In addition to improving accessibility, Read Aloud offers several significant productivity benefits, from increasing efficiency to boosting accuracy and comprehension.

For example, users can have the system read documents, emails, or web pages aloud while they commute to the office. To improve the experience, they can adjust reading speed and even choose among various natural voice options. While older versions offer text-to-speech features, full functionality requires a [Microsoft 365](#) subscription.

Tapping into the Benefits of the Read Aloud Feature

The Read Aloud feature began as an accessibility tool. For instance, it helps improve fluency for readers with dyslexia and offers visually impaired users options for interacting with content. But the benefits extend beyond accessibility.

Because the system reads the text exactly as written, Read Aloud helps editors catch errors such as missing words or typos. For example, when reading the phrase “he left her siting by the river,” the

reader's mind will typically fill in the missing "t." Read Aloud, however will pronounce "siting" with a long "i," immediately alerting the editor to the problem.

The feature also allows for hands-free reading, as it uses auto-scroll and highlights the text while reading it aloud. This allows users to multitask more efficiently. For instance, a busy team member can review documents for an afternoon meeting while running a mile or two on the treadmill over the lunch hour.



Additionally, for many readers, combining the visual with the auditory improves comprehension. And for readers interacting with documents in a language other than their primary language, listening to a document while reading it can significantly increase language facility.

Accessing the Read Aloud Feature in Word and Outlook

As text-to-speech has grown more powerful, it has also become easier to access. In Word, for example, users can access the feature by selecting Read Aloud from the Review tab. The system will either read the entire document from the cursor location, or it will read the highlighted text.

In Outlook, users select Read Aloud from the Message tab, if reading an open email, or from the Home tab, if reading from the preview pane in the Inbox.

Once users have initiated Read Aloud, an on-screen toolbar appears in the upper right of the screen. Users can pause or play the reading, and they can skip back or forward through the paragraphs. Additionally, the gear icon allows users to adjust reading speed and choose from among various voices.

In both Word and Outlook, users can also add Read Aloud to the Quick Access Toolbar. And the following keyboard shortcuts make using the feature even easier:

- CTRL + Alt + Space – start Read Aloud
- CTRL + Space – play or pause
- CTRL + Left Arrow – skip back to start of the previous paragraph
- CTRL + Right Arrow – skip forward to start of the next paragraph
- Alt + Left Arrow – decrease reading speed
- Alt + Right Arrow – increase reading speed



Continual Improvements Improve User Experience

When Microsoft first introduced text-to-speech, it included limited language options and robotic voices. But the developers have continually improved the capabilities over the years. For instance, a new and improved version for Edge in 2019 included 24 voices.

Now, in 2021, the development team announced it has expanded to 64 languages and 142 voice options. This latest update focuses on extending the voice options in Word and Outlook to include several more natural-sounding voices already available in Microsoft Edge.

Discover Additional Microsoft Productivity Features

Microsoft has built thousands of useful features into its products. The [Microsoft experts](#) at eMazzanti Technologies and Messaging Architects can point out [productivity features](#) most likely to help your organization. They can also assist you in configuring your system for optimal use.