

Complete guide



Using Siri, Apple's voice assistant, you can speak commands to your iPad or iPhone and have it do your bidding. To activate Siri, hold down the Home button on your compatible iPad or iPhone, or hold down the control button on your earphones. Constantly improving, Siri became faster and more reliable than ever with iOS 7 and iOS 7.1, gaining new features and a female voice for the UK, while iOS 8 has added music identification, "Hey, Siri!" voice activation and real-time feedback of the words that Siri thinks you're saying.

Siri works by recording your voice and sending it to a server that interprets what you've said and returns it as plain text. If you haven't got an internet connection, then Siri won't work.

It's a massive leap forward from old-fashioned speech recognition. This used to mean a limited vocabulary and a glaring inability to do very much. Worse still, for non-

Americans, voice recognition struggled with European, Australian and other accents.

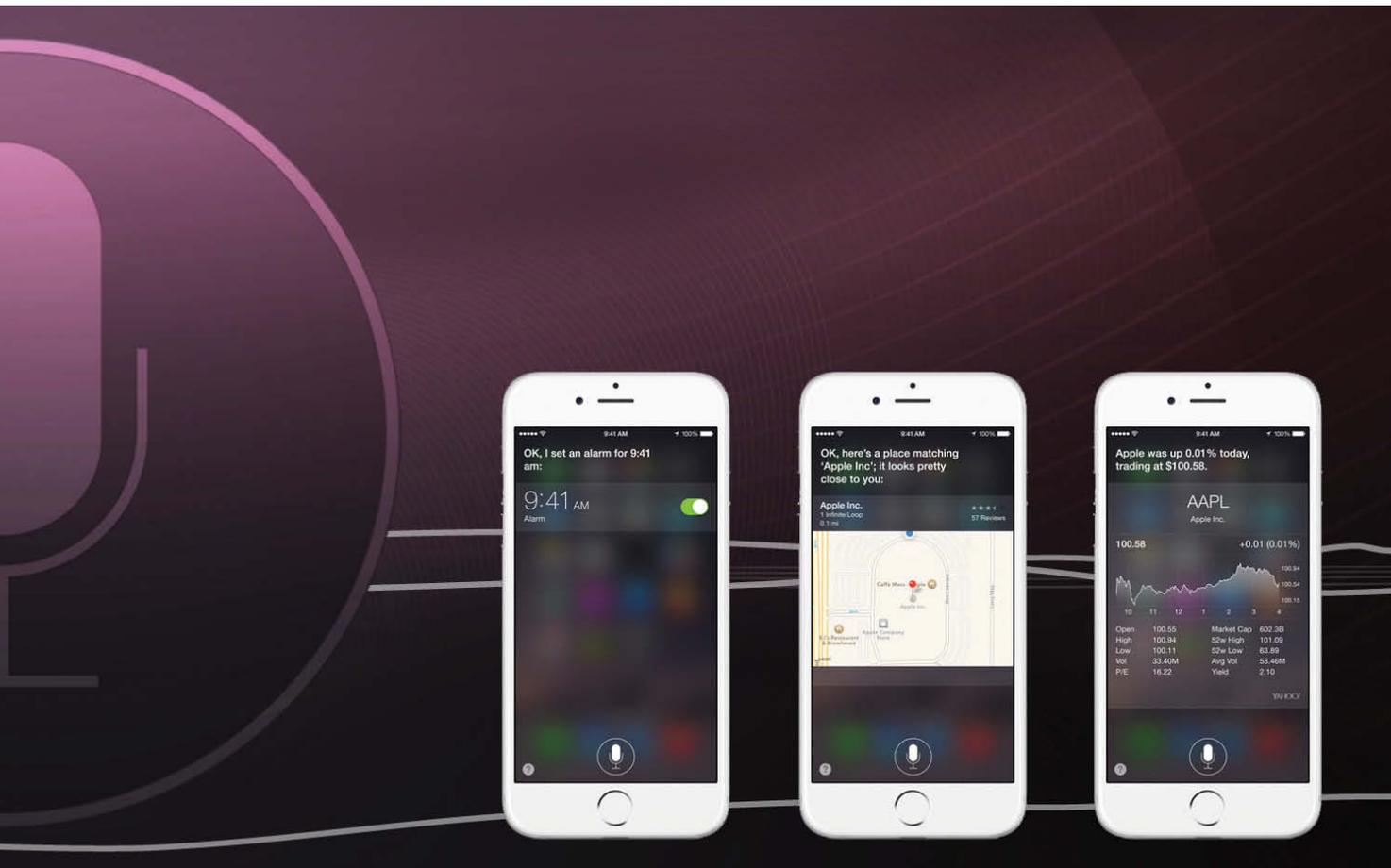
Siri, however, doesn't depend on a limited stock of words - it'll generally figure out what you're trying to say. That makes interacting with it seem much more natural. It also works pretty well with a range of accents, and has American, British and Australian settings.

The voice assistant is comprehensive. It's tied into Messages, Calendar, Music, Reminders, Maps, Mail, Weather, Stocks, Clock, Contacts, Notes and Safari. It's also linked to Wolfram Alpha, the computational knowledge engine that can provide answers to numerous factual questions, and Yelp, the directory of local businesses.

It's also capable of searching Twitter and adjusting settings, and can perform a web search for you. These days it uses Bing as its default search engine, but specifically asking Siri to "Google" something will get it to use Google instead.

to Siri

Siri has become an impressively useful voice command system for iPads and iPhones. What's more, it's fun. Here **David Price** explains just what you can do with Siri, and how to get more from it, along with the valuable updates added to it by iOS 8



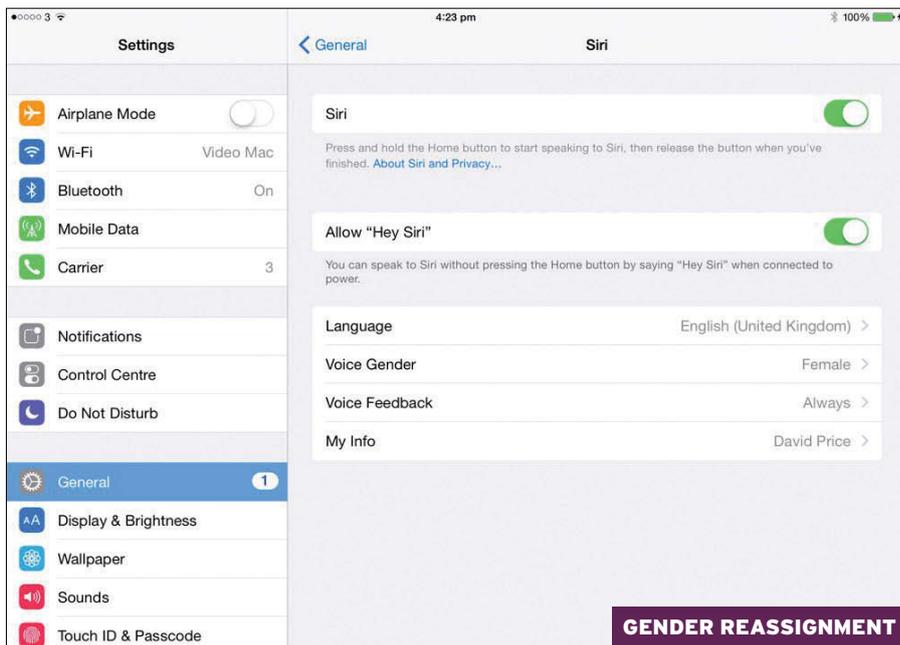
Get started with Siri

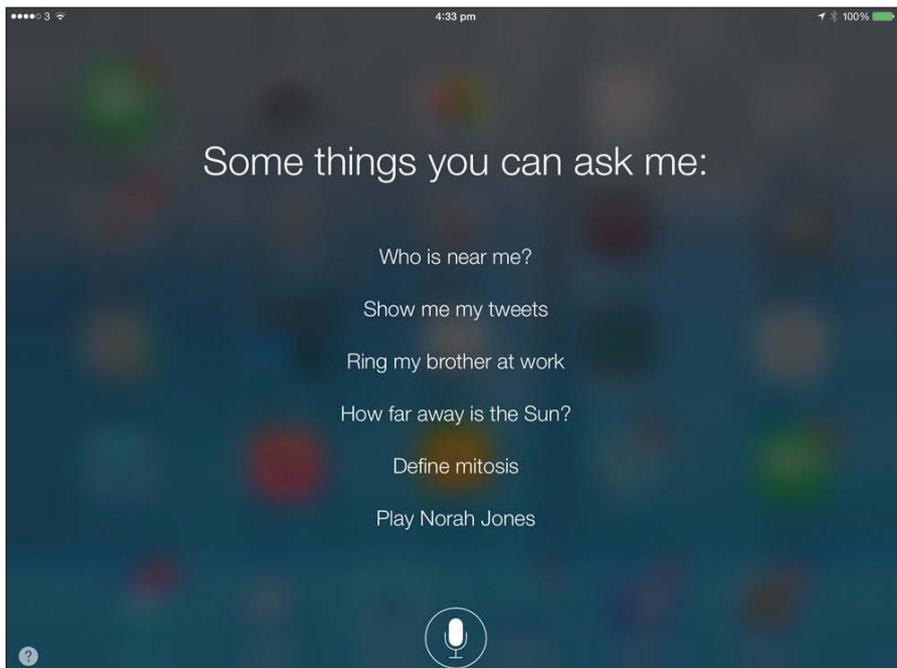
Getting started with Siri couldn't be easier. Simply press and hold down the Home button. The background will blur, you'll hear a ba-ding sound and 'What can I help you with?' appears onscreen. You should also see a wavy white line at the bottom of the screen.

Simply speak your request into the iPad or iPhone. When you've finished speaking, the white line turns into a round microphone icon and Siri will get back to you with an answer. Sometimes it takes Siri a few moments to think about the answer, but it's a lot faster than it used to be.

You can also manually control how long Siri listens to you for, rather than having to wait for it to work out you've stopped speaking. To do this, hold down the Home button as you speak a command or ask a question, and release it when you've finished.

In the UK, the male Siri voice was updated in iOS 7.1 to sound less robotic and more





the great things about Siri is that it can find things in your local area.

There are a few scenarios in which Siri truly excels. The first of those is when you're in a hands-free situation, most likely when driving a car. The iPad knows when you're going hands-free and becomes chattier, reading text aloud that it might not if it knows you're holding it in your hand. Siri is also deeply integrated with the directions feature in Maps, and the iPad works as a fantastic (if slightly oversized) voice-activated satnav.

When you get a message, you can instruct Siri to read the message, and it will. You can then tell it to reply to the message, dictate the entire message, have Siri read it back so you can check it makes sense, and then send it. You can also ask Siri to read out your Mail messages and it'll let you know who sent you a message and what the subject line is.

There are still some gaps. For example, Siri won't read your emails out to you and it'd be great if you could get it to read out whole books and web pages. And while iOS has the nifty Notification Center, which gives you granular control over how different apps notify you about what's going on, there's no option to read alerts out loud when you're in hands-free mode. A missed opportunity.

Siri self-help

The rest of this feature will go through all the commands and features that you can activate using Siri, but Siri itself also offers some tips worth knowing. You can get to them by holding down the Home button to start Siri and then waiting without asking any questions: Siri will start cycling through pages of suggested commands.

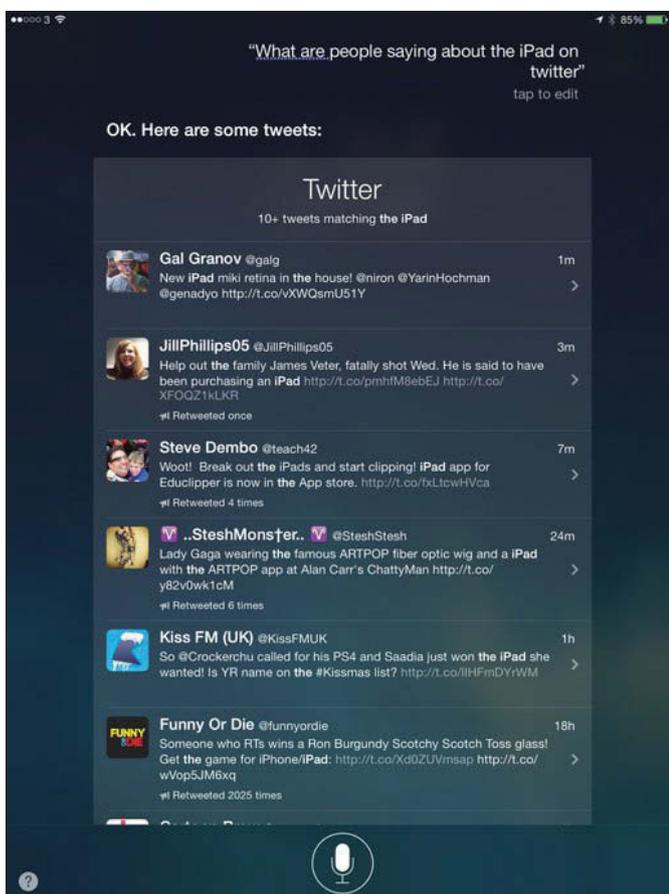
If you're not driving, Siri can still be useful. In fact, some tasks can be done much

natural, and a female voice option was added. You can switch Siri's gender to female by going to Settings > General > Siri and tapping Voice Gender; choose female.

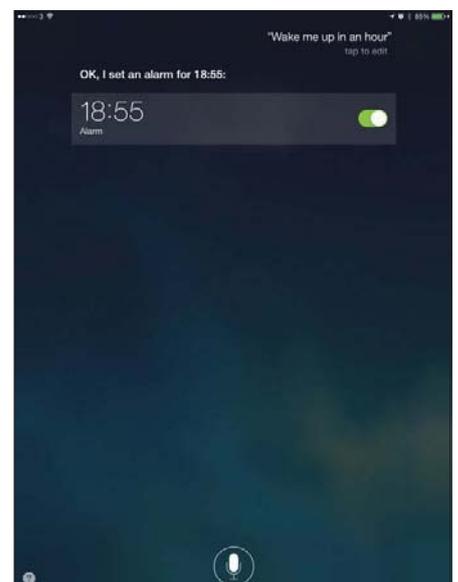
You can ask Siri all sorts of things, and the more you use it the more accurate it becomes. You soon become aware of just

how useful it can be, and what its boundaries are. It knows a great deal about weather, restaurants, films and football, for example, but nothing about Formula 1.

It is also hooked up to the Maps application, so it can locate businesses, movie times, restaurants and bars near you. One of



SIRI CAN PULL INFORMATION FROM TWITTER ABOUT WHAT THE PEOPLE YOU FOLLOW ARE SAYING, OR WHAT'S HAPPENING



FAFF-FREE ALARMS

faster through speech than through clicking, tapping and swiping. It's much easier to set an alarm or timer using Siri, for example, than it is to unlock your tablet, find the Clock app, and tap within the app. You just tell Siri "Set a timer for three minutes", and your iPad begins to count down until your tea is ready. "Set an alarm for 5 am" does what you'd expect, with no further faff. "Remind me to record my favourite show" and "Note that I need to take my suit to the cleaners" work equally well too. These are short bursts of data input that can be handled quickly by voice, and we've found they work well.

It's also much faster to ask Siri to access settings than it is to dive through the menu. You can just say "Change wallpaper" rather than opening Settings and tapping Wallpaper.

You will soon become impressed by Siri's ability to understand the context of conversations. It doesn't always work, but when it does, it's magical. We asked Siri for suggestions for places to have lunch and it provided us with a list of nearby restaurants that serve lunch.

Talking to your iPad or iPhone is not much different from talking on your mobile phone. Clearly, it's not appropriate in all contexts. If, for example, you're quietly reading in the library and need to set a reminder, you should use the Reminders app, not Siri. And if you're out in public, well, you can use Siri, but you'll probably get some funny looks.

Apple's integration of Wolfram Alpha with Siri is a smart move. If you need answers to factual questions, such as the speed of light or the number of days until Christmas, the answer engine can provide the solution.

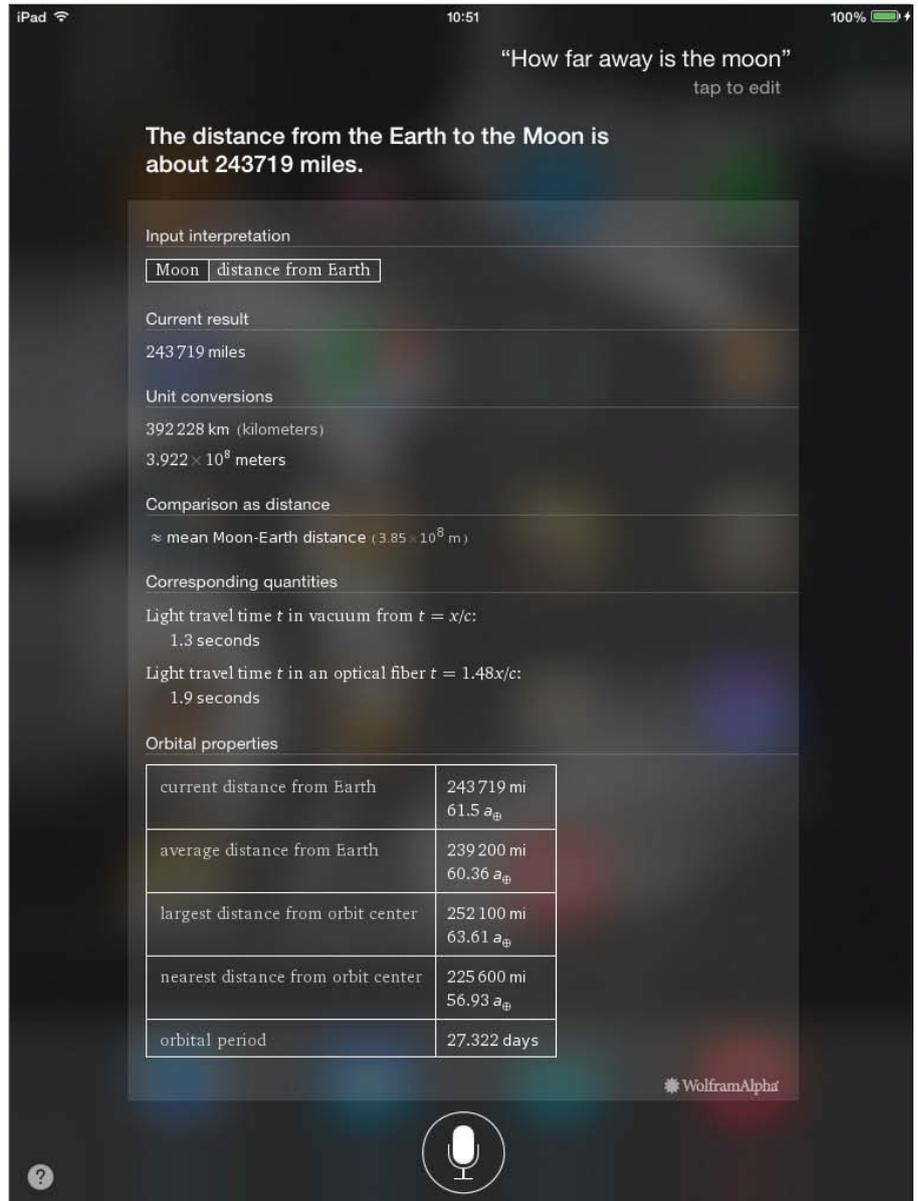
How to use Hey Siri

A new feature added in iOS 8 is known as Hey Siri, and it's very sci-fi. By saying those words ("Hey, Siri!"), you can activate Siri from a sleep state without pressing the Home button at all. The device will wake, Siri will start and it will listen out for your next command.

Sadly, though, this works only when the iPad or iPhone is plugged into a power supply; if this wasn't the case, your iDevice would presumably burn through its battery supply from constantly listening out for those magic words.

Hey Siri is very cool, albeit not always incredibly reliable. The feature appears to be deactivated by default, so if it's not working (and remember that the device needs to be plugged in as well), try going to Settings > General > Siri and then slide the switch next to 'Allow "Hey Siri"' so that it's green.

And, of course, if you're concerned about battery life - or people keep passing your desk and saying "Hey, Siri, play Don't Stop Believin'" - you can deactivate it in the same options menu.

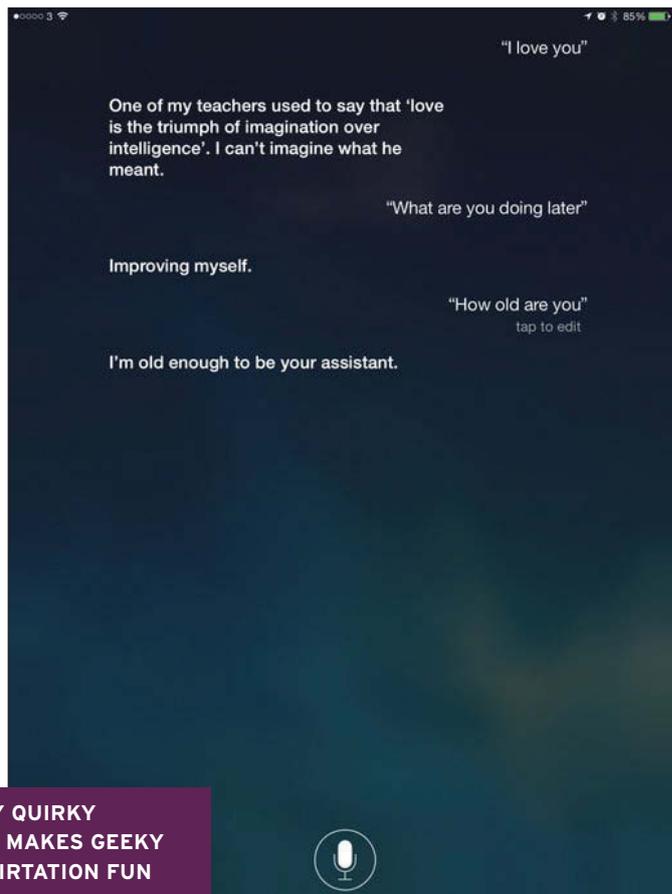
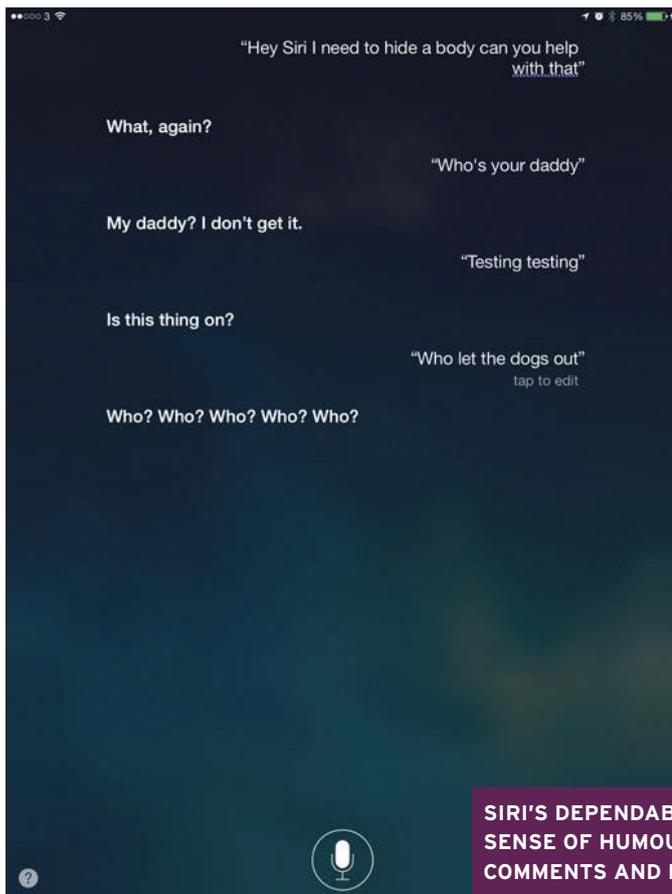


Personal dictation

While Siri gets the bulk of the iOS feature hype, another speech-related technology may ultimately prove to be more important and a bigger boost to user productivity. On the keyboard you'll see a new button in the bottom row, to the left of the spacebar, with the image of a microphone on it. Tap this button and the iPad will transcribe whatever you say. It will send the results over the internet to a server that analyses your speech and converts it into text. We were impressed at just how fast the results came back, especially over Wi-Fi. And they were generally an accurate representation of what we had said.

To get the most out of dictation, you'll need to start thinking in punctuation. For example, to construct a decent email message, you might say, "Dan. Comma. New paragraph. What do you think about writing

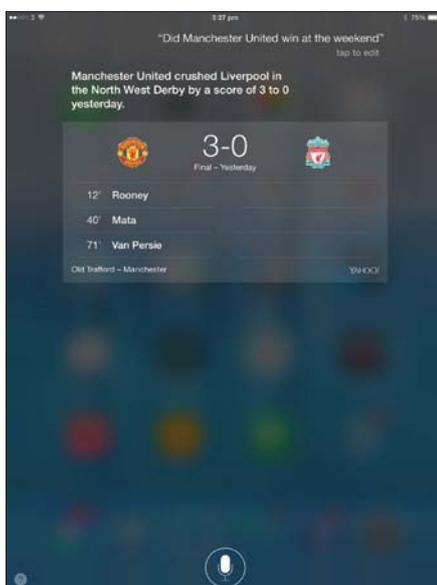
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SIRI'S DEPENDABLY QUIRKY SENSE OF HUMOUR MAKES GEEKY COMMENTS AND FLIRTATION FUN

a review of iOS numeral five. Question mark. New paragraph. Let me know what you think. Exclamation mark." It's a bit long-winded but it does work.

Part of Siri's charm isn't in its feature set, but its personable nature. Siri feels a lot less robotic than other voice-activated technology. Even when it gets out of its depth and doesn't know what to do, it's difficult to feel too frustrated.



GET WHAT YOU ASK FOR

And you can joke around with Siri. Apple has clearly spent a lot of time providing Siri with a range of comebacks to joke questions. Try telling Siri you love it, or "Who's your daddy?" or "Who let the dogs out?" These common sayings that Siri has a neat response for are constantly being updated too - a recent one is to keep saying "Okay, Glass" (the phrase used to activate Google's rival) and Siri will start to get annoyed.

Siri is by no means perfect, and occasionally can mistranslate what you're saying, either transcribing the wrong message or finding the wrong result from Contacts. But it gets better the more you use it, and ever more useful.

And it's fun! Siri is one of the most entertaining aspects of the iPad, so be sure to hold down the Home button and try it out. Siri has a quirky sense of humour and will respond to geeky comments, flirtation and famous sayings.

Useful things to ask Siri about

Siri is able to learn names quickly as long as you keep repeating them and selecting the correct option from a list. So with a bit of practice you can quickly hurdle the frustration of Siri attempting to text, message or phone the wrong person. And if you have relationships added - 'mum', 'dad', 'wife', 'husband' and so on - it quickly starts to feel a lot less formal.

Music

It's not generally known that Siri can identify music. From iOS 8, you can identify music that's currently playing, thanks to Siri's new Shazam integration. Activate Siri while a song is playing and it will display a moving audio waveform and a musical icon to indicate that it's interpreting the music. Then it will tell you what song it was, and offer links to Shazam itself and a Buy Now for iTunes.

Also - and this isn't something that you're likely to be doing yourself, but we thought it would be interesting to try it out - it turns out that Siri is a passable rapper. Well, passable might be pushing it a bit but a producer called Skeewiff has done a remix using Siri for vocals.

Sport

We hope you like Premier League football. There's no Formula 1, no cricket, no rugby, no golf and no football outside the top-level English league - yet. In fact, when we asked who was winning the Championship, Siri just went ahead and decided that we must mean the Premiership.

General knowledge

Siri uses Wolfram Alpha to provide statistics and facts. It can answer questions related to mathematics, geography, chemistry, words and linguistics, and all kinds of things. ☒