



VoiceOver for Mac — Beginner's Guide (BC Net, Version 1.1)

A calm, friendly guide to help you start using VoiceOver on your Mac with confidence.

1. Purpose of This Guide

This guide is here to help you start using VoiceOver on macOS in a simple, stress-free way. We'll go through the core skills you need to feel more comfortable on your Mac, including:

- Turning VoiceOver on and off
- Using the VO keys
- Moving around apps and menus
- Understanding interaction
- Using the Rotor
- Using a trackpad with VoiceOver
- Basic typing and editing
- Fixing common issues

Estimated reading time: 5–7 minutes

Skill level: Beginner

It's completely normal if your Mac feels overwhelming at first — you'll build confidence quickly.

2. How to Use This Document (Screen-Reader Friendly)

- Press Down Arrow to read line by line.
- Press VO + A to read continuously.
- Shortcut format: VO + Command → What it does.
- Press Control any time to silence VoiceOver.

What "VO" means:

VO refers to either:

- Control + Option together, or
- Caps Lock (if enabled as a VoiceOver modifier)

Use whichever feels easier.

A quick note about headings

We've used proper headings so some screen readers (like JAWS or NVDA on Windows) can jump between sections.



VoiceOver on a Mac cannot jump headings in Word documents. This is a limitation of Microsoft Word on macOS — nothing you're doing wrong.

You can still read everything smoothly using arrows or Tab, or you can open this guide in a tagged PDF or on a webpage, where VoiceOver can navigate headings using the Rotor.

However you read it, this guide is designed to feel calm, clear, and easy to follow.

3. Turning VoiceOver On and Off

Turn VoiceOver on or off:

- Command + F5

or, depending on your keyboard:

- Fn + Command + F5

If VoiceOver suddenly speaks very fast, don't panic — that's completely normal for beginners. You can slow the speech rate down (instructions coming soon).

4. The VO Keys — Your Main Tools

Almost every VoiceOver command starts with the VO keys:

- Control + Option, or

- Caps Lock (if activated as a modifier)

You'll use these constantly.

5. The VO Cursor (Simple Explanation)

VoiceOver uses the VO cursor to show what it is focused on.

A friendly way to think about it:

"The VO cursor shows where VoiceOver is looking, which might not always match where you would type."

You'll naturally get used to this over time.

6. Moving Around the Screen (Basic Navigation)

These are the keys you'll use most often:

VO + Left/Right Arrow → Move between items

VO + Up/Down Arrow → Move vertically

VO + Spacebar → Activate or click something



7. Interacting (A Key VoiceOver Concept)

Some parts of macOS are inside containers (tables, toolbars, lists, sidebars). To explore inside them:

VO + Shift + Down Arrow → Interact (step inside)

VO + Shift + Up Arrow → Stop interacting (step back out)

A simple way to understand it:

“Interacting is like stepping inside a room so you can move around inside it.”

Examples:

- In Safari, interact with tables to explore rows
- In Finder, interact with the sidebar to browse folders

8. Reading with VoiceOver

VO + A → Read everything on screen

VO + B → Read the menu bar

VO + M → Jump to the menu bar

VO + W (twice) → Spell the current item or word

VO + F3 → Speak the current item again (very grounding)

Control → Stop speech immediately

Adjusting speech rate (very helpful for beginners):

VO + Command + Left Arrow → Slower

VO + Command + Right Arrow → Faster

Many people find VoiceOver too fast at first — it’s completely fine to slow it down until you feel comfortable.

9. The Rotor (One of Your Most Helpful Tools)

The Rotor lets you choose how VoiceOver moves through content.

Open the Rotor:

- VO + U, or
- Two-finger rotate on the trackpad

Common Rotor options:

- Links
- Form controls
- Windows
- Headings (in supported formats)



- Landmarks
- Web spots

Use Left/Right Arrows to choose an option.

Use Up/Down Arrows to move through items in that category.

10. Using the Trackpad with VoiceOver

If you enjoy iPhone or iPad gestures, the trackpad can feel familiar.

Turn Trackpad Commander on/off:

- VO + Command + two-finger rotate clockwise → On
- VO + Command + two-finger rotate anticlockwise → Off

If it doesn't activate, try rotating more slowly — trackpads can be sensitive.

Useful gestures:

- One-finger swipe left/right → Move item to item
- Double tap → Activate
- Two-finger flick → Scroll
- Two-finger rotate → Rotor

Take your time — gestures become easier with practice.

11. Navigating Apps (Finder, Safari, Mail)

Finder:

- VO + Shift + Down Arrow → Interact with folder or sidebar
- VO + Space → Open
- Command + O → Open as well

Safari (recommended for VoiceOver):

- VO + L → Address bar
- VO + Command + H → Headings Rotor (if available)
- VO + Left/Right → Move between elements

Mail:

- VO + J → Jump between message list and reading pane
- VO + Space → Open email

12. Troubleshooting (Beginner-Friendly)

VoiceOver not speaking:

- Press Control



- Check volume
- Toggle VoiceOver (Command + F5)

Webpages not reading properly:

- Try Safari (works best with VoiceOver)
- Check the Rotor options

Trackpad gestures not working:

- Ensure Trackpad Commander is on

Things feel “stuck”:

- VO + Escape
- or VO + Shift + Up Arrow to stop interacting

Keyboard behaving strangely:

- Check System Settings → Keyboard → Input Sources

13. Notes & Variations

VoiceOver may behave slightly differently depending on:

- macOS version
- App design
- Website coding
- Keyboard layout
- Mac model
- Trackpad sensitivity

This is completely normal.

14. Version Note

This guide is accurate as of [upload date].

15. Community & Contribution

If you have your own VoiceOver tips, gestures, or shortcuts, we'd love to hear them.

Email: [Insert]

Social Media: [Insert]

Website: [Insert]

Because everyone deserves to be seen.



Community Note & Accuracy Disclaimer

This guide is accurate as of 2025, based on the most up-to-date information available when it was created. Technology changes quickly, so some shortcuts or behaviours may work slightly differently after updates.

If you spot something that has changed, find an error, or have a tip that could help others, we'd love to hear from you. These guides get better when the community helps shape them.

Email: [Insert]

Social Media: [Insert]

Together, we can keep improving accessibility — because everyone deserves to be seen.

Helpful Real-World Tips

These are practical, everyday tips that many new VoiceOver users find helpful:

- If VoiceOver suddenly goes quiet, press Control — you may have paused it.
- If you feel lost, press VO + F3 to hear the current item and get your bearings.
- Safari works best with VoiceOver, so try it if a webpage isn't reading well.
- If the trackpad gestures feel too sensitive, rotate your fingers slowly — every Mac model behaves slightly differently.
- If VoiceOver commands behave strangely, open System Settings → Keyboard → Input Sources to confirm your keyboard layout.
- If the Mac feels unresponsive, press VO + Escape to reset focus.