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1 Introducing Alexa

The digital voice assistant, Alexa, is fast becoming a fixture in many households. This chapter looks at getting started with Alexa.

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About Alexa and the Echo

Alexa has become synonymous with smart speakers in the home. These are devices that react to voice commands and can perform a variety of useful tasks: from playing music, to setting reminders, to providing weather reports.

Alexa and its smart speaker are both Amazon products, and the first thing to remember about Alexa and the smart speaker is that they are two different entities:

- **Alexa** is the digital voice assistant that provides the information through the smart speaker.
- The smart speaker itself is known as the **Echo**, and this is the physical device that provides a home for Alexa. There are several different models of Echo, and they all operate with Alexa.

Echo devices can be bought from the Amazon website.

The services and information delivered through the Amazon Echo by Alexa are cloud-based, which means that all of the data is stored in an Amazon computer (server) and then delivered through the Amazon Echo when it is requested. Nothing is physically stored on the Echo – it is merely a delivery system. The Echo works through connecting to your home Wi-Fi network: without Wi-Fi it will not function properly.

Alexa can react to different people's voices, and some of the uses for the Echo and Alexa include:

- Setting reminders for important tasks such as taking regular medication, paying bills, and birthdays of family and friends. This can be done by creating daily or weekly reminders using Alexa or the Alexa app.
- Performing a range of organizational tasks, such as creating appointments and making lists. Appointments will be announced by Alexa at the relevant time.
- Playing music from a range of sources: from the radio to Amazon's own music library.
- Getting the latest news, weather, sport, and much more in a daily briefing. This can be activated with a single command once it has been set up.
- Calling or messaging family and friends on their smartphones, or anyone who also has an Echo device or the Alexa app.
- Sending announcements to Alexa on an Echo device, which will be spoken from the device. It is also possible to communicate between multiple Echo devices within the same home.
- Playing games and finding entertainment options such as the latest movie listings.
- Making online purchases on Amazon.
- Controlling smart home devices such as smart lights and smart heating. This can involving turning items on and off and also setting customized routines to control smart home devices when you are away from home.
- Creating customized routines whereby a range of different tasks can be performed using a single voice command.

For more information about obtaining the Alexa app and using it to set up an Echo device, see pages 14-19.

For more details about online shopping using voice commands, see Chapter 9.

Models of Echo

There are several different models of Echo, which provide different functionality. This gives you the flexibility of putting different Echo models in different rooms of your home, to create the ultimate Echo experience. The models of the Echo include:

- **Echo**. Now in its third generation, this is the original version of the device and can be considered as the "standard" Echo. It is a high-quality speaker that provides excellent sound for music, in addition to the full range of services from Alexa. It comes in a range of colors, and fabric covers can also be placed over the device so that it can blend in to any room in your home. The cover style can be selected when you buy the Echo from Amazon.

The top ring on the Echo glows blue when Alexa is dealing with a voice command. The controls at the top of the Echo are volume up and down (top and bottom buttons), mute the microphone (left-hand button), and the action button (right-hand button) that can be used to set up Wi-Fi.

The volume on the Echo can also be changed with a voice command, such as: "Alexa, volume up 1".

If the top ring is red, this means that the microphone has been turned off and Alexa is not actively listening for commands.

- **Echo Dot**. This is a smaller version of the standard Echo device, and is a good option if you want to expand your Echo system so that you have several devices in different rooms. If you choose to do this, each Echo can be used independently – e.g. you can play different music in the family room and a bedroom, using a family plan from a compatible service such as Amazon Music.

Two Echo Dots can be paired together to create stereo sound when playing music.

There are different versions of the Dot, including one that displays a clock on its side:

- **Echo Show**. This is a model of the Echo that comes with a display screen of either 5.5 inches or 8 inches (measured diagonally). It can be used for all of the same functions as the standard Echo, plus it can be used to stream movies and TV shows, and make video calls.

- **Echo Studio**. This is a version of the Echo that is designed with music lovers in mind. It is a high-fidelity speaker that includes five individual speakers for an immersive sound experience. It also manages to include all of the standard Alexa functions.

If you have the Amazon Prime service, this will enable you to watch Prime Video movies and TV shows on the Echo Show. Other benefits of Amazon Prime are one-day delivery on qualifying Amazon products, free downloads on selected books, and reduced prices on video rentals (although there is also a large range of free video items).

- **Echo Plus**. This is the largest Echo model and contains a built-in smart home hub, so it is an excellent option if you want to use it to control other Echo devices and also smart devices in the home (although much of this can also be done with the standard Echo).
- **Echo Flex**. This is the most mobile of the Echo devices as it can be easily plugged into any power socket. It is ideal for accessing information from Alexa such as weather forecasts or traffic reports, and also controlling smart home devices such as lighting or heating.

The Echo Flex cannot be used to play music, but it can be connected to an external speaker for playing music, using a cable or Bluetooth.

- **Echo Wall Clock**. This has to be used with another Echo device, and can display a number of timers as well as the time.

The Echo Wall Clock is a good option to use in the kitchen: timers can be set on the main Echo device and viewed on the Wall Clock if you need a timer while cooking.

Giving Alexa a Voice

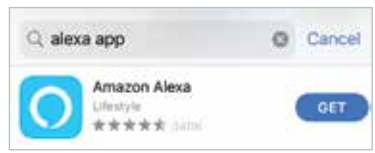
The Echo smart speaker, and other compatible Amazon devices such as the Amazon Fire TV stick, is where Alexa receives voice commands and issues replies. On its own the Echo is virtually useless: it needs the Alexa app to set it up so that it can function. The Alexa app performs a number of tasks in relation to the Echo but the first one is to set it up, ready for use. This involves downloading the Alexa app and setting it up too. To do this:

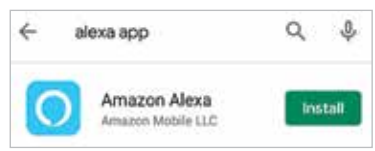
For more information about using the Alexa app, see Chapter 3.

The Alexa app can be used on Apple devices – e.g. the iPhone and the iPad – and also Android smartphones and tablets. Download the Alexa app from the Apple App Store for Apple devices, or from the Google Play Store for Android devices.

An Amazon account can also be set up on the Amazon website.

1. Open the relevant app store and enter **alexa app** into the Search box. Tap on the **Get** button (Apple) or the **Install** button (Google) to download the app

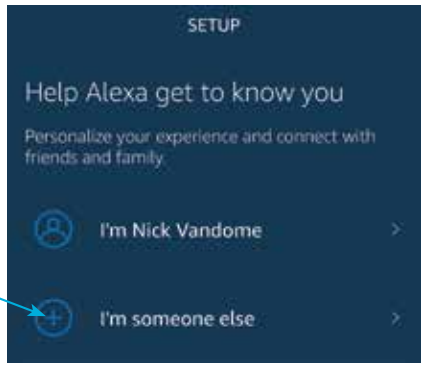




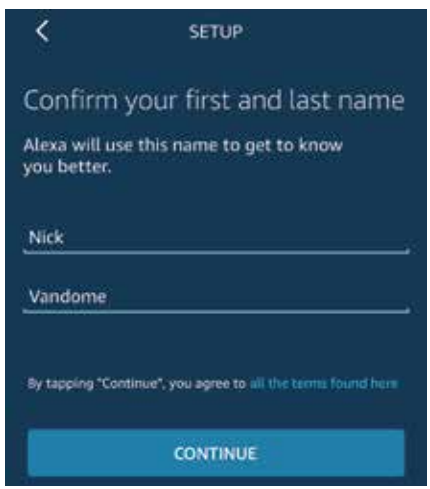
2. Tap on the app to open it and sign in to the app

3. An Amazon account is required to use the Alexa app. If you already have one, enter your sign-in details and tap on the **Sign-In** button. If you do not have an account, tap on the **Create a New Amazon Account** button to create one

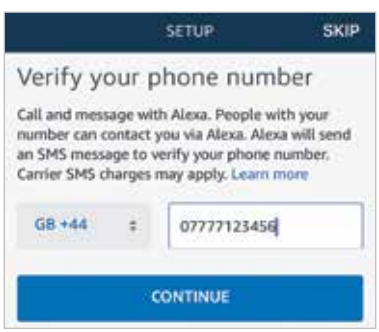
4 Tap on your own name or, if it is for another user, tap on the **I'm someone else** button



5 The name used by the Alexa app is displayed. Change this, if required, and tap on the **Continue** button



6 To enable the Alexa app on a smartphone to send and receive calls and messages with an Echo device, enter the smartphone's number and tap on the **Continue** button to complete the Alexa app setup



The name displayed in Step 4 is taken from your Amazon account details.

Items such as the display name and the smartphone number can be edited or added after the setup process has been completed. This is done within the Alexa app settings. See pages 42-47 for details.

Setting Up an Echo Device

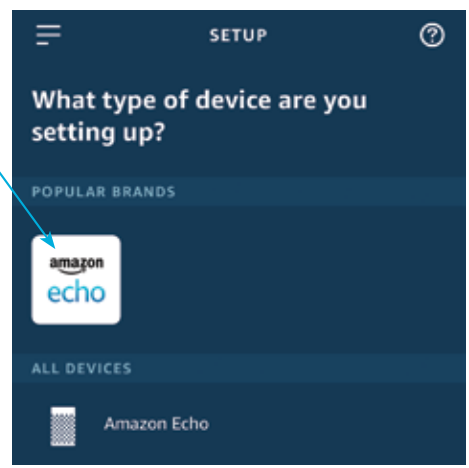
Once the Alexa app has been downloaded and set up, it can be used for setting up an Echo device. To do this:

1. Open the Amazon Alexa app on a smartphone or tablet

2. Plug in the Amazon Echo. Alexa will tell you when it is ready to be set up. Tap on this button to access the **Menu** options

3. Tap on the **Add Device** button

4. Tap on the **Amazon Echo** icon to add an Echo device. (Other types of devices can also be added here – see tip)



5. Tap on the type of Echo device to be added

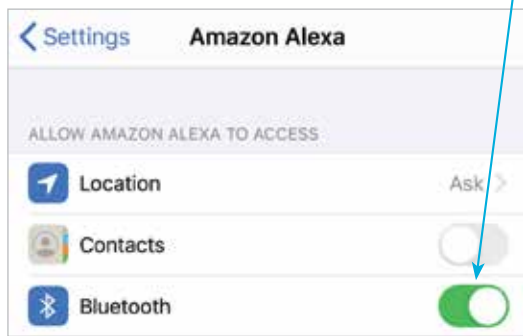
The Alexa app can be used to communicate with a range of different devices, not just the Echo. For instance, if you have smart lighting installed in your home, the Alexa app can be connected to this too. If this is the case, there will be an option to select the smart lighting system in Step 4. See Chapter 10 for more details about using smart home devices.

6 Ensure that the Echo is plugged in and tap on the **Yes** button if the Echo is displaying an orange light around the perimeter at the top of the device

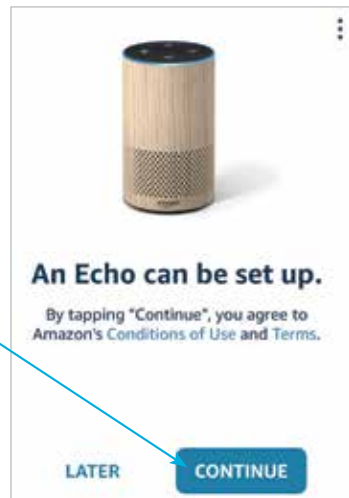
7 The Bluetooth option on the smartphone or tablet on which the Alexa app is being used has to be turned **On** so that it can communicate with the Echo device. Tap on the **Settings** button to go to the relevant settings within your smartphone or tablet

Bluetooth has to be turned **On** for the smartphone or tablet that is using the Alexa app, before it can link to the Echo.

8 The settings should open at the Amazon Alexa section. Drag the **Bluetooth** button to **On**



9 Return to the Alexa app, which should be ready to continue the setup process. Tap on the **Continue** button



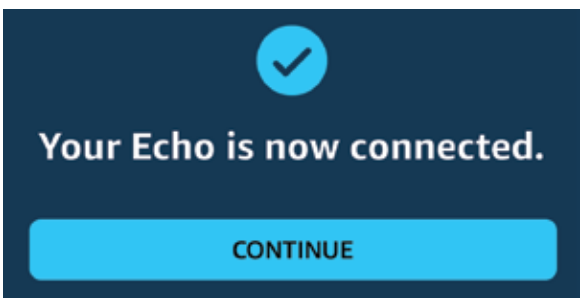
Without Wi-Fi the Echo will not be able to function.

10 Since Alexa is a cloud-based service, it needs access to the internet via your home Wi-Fi network. Tap on the required network

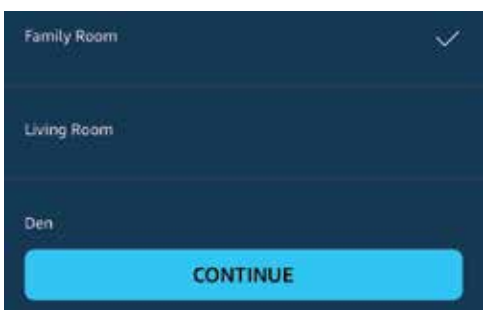
11 Enter the password for your Wi-Fi router, and tap on the **Connect** button to enable the Echo to join the Wi-Fi network

The password for the Wi-Fi router should be located on the router itself (usually on the back or the bottom), or on a card that comes with the router.

12 A confirmation message is displayed when the Echo has connected to the Wi-Fi network. Tap on the **Continue** button



13 Once the Echo has been connected to the Wi-Fi network, it will be able to communicate with the Alexa app. It is also possible to assign a specific room for the Echo. Tap on a room and tap on the **Continue** button to complete the setup process



It is optional to assign a room to the Echo, but it can be useful if you have more than one Echo device in your home, so that you can easily identify each one.

Echo Lights

The standard Echo and the Echo Dot have a ring around the top of the device. This is used to display colors to indicate various states of the device – e.g. listening to a command or being ready for Wi-Fi to be set up. The colored light rings on the standard Echo and Echo Dot include:

- **Orange light**. This is the state of the light ring during the initial setup process, when Alexa is ready to be connected to a Wi-Fi network. It is also the color of the ring if you change the Wi-Fi network, or there are network problems.

- **Blue light**. This is the state of the light ring when Alexa is listening to a command after the wake word has been spoken. The small section of cyan light indicates the direction from where the command has come.

- **Red light**. This is the state of the light ring when the microphone has been turned off and Alexa is not in listening mode – i.e. voice commands cannot be actioned.

When Alexa is processing a command, the light ring is blue with cyan spinning around it. If the light ring alternates between blue and cyan, this means that Alexa is responding to a command.

For details about changing the wake word for Alexa, see page 49.

- **Green pulsing light**. This is the state of the light ring when there is an incoming call to the Echo.

- **Yellow pulsing light**. This is the state of the light ring when a message has been sent to the Echo and it is ready to play.

Echo Show lights

The Echo Show does not have a light ring in the same way as the standard Echo and the Echo Dot, but it does have a colored bar at the bottom of the screen that denotes similar states to the light ring. These include:

- **Band of orange**. This is displayed when the Echo Show is ready to be set up to a Wi-Fi network, or is experiencing problems with the network.
- **Band of blue with a cyan dot.** This indicates Alexa is listening to a command after the wake word has been spoken. The cyan dot indicates the direction from where the command has come.
- **Band of red**. This indicates that the microphone has been turned off and Alexa is not in listening mode – i.e. voice commands cannot be actioned.

For more information about using Alexa and the Echo for calls and messaging, see Chapter 8.

If calls or messages are sent to an Echo Show, these are displayed on the screen.

If the volume for an Echo device is being changed manually, the light ring pulses white – see page 22.

Changing the Volume

The volume of an Echo device can be changed in a number of ways. To do this:

Changing the volume manually

1 Press the **+** and **-** buttons on the top of the Echo device (standard Echo and Echo Dot)

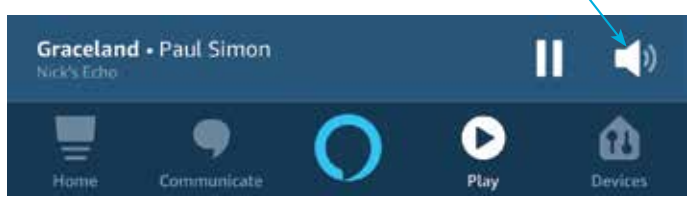
When the volume is being changed manually, the light ring at the top of the Echo device pulses white.

For the Echo Show, the manual volume buttons are located along the top of the device. The volume can be changed here in the same way as for using the Alexa app.

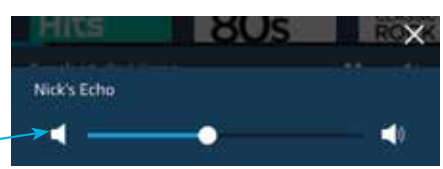
Changing the volume with the Alexa app

The volume can be changed with the Alexa app:

1 Open the Alexa app and, when music is playing, tap on the speaker icon



2 Drag the slider or tap on either speaker icons to change the volume



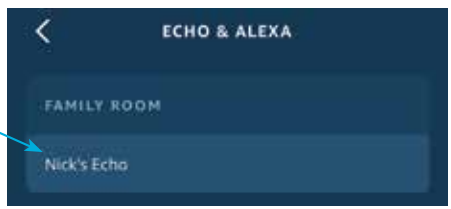
For details about playing music with the Alexa app, see Chapter 7.

or

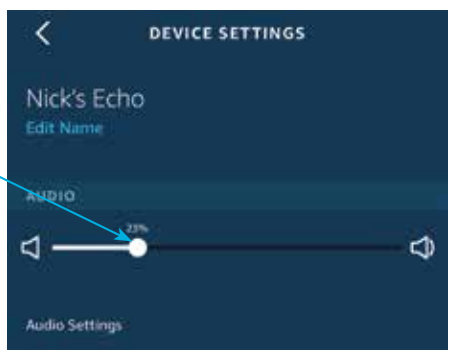
1. Open the Alexa app and tap on the **Devices** button on the bottom toolbar

2. Tap on the **Echo & Alexa** button

3. Tap on an Echo device



4. Drag the slider to change the volume



Tap on the **Audio Settings** button in Step 4 to access options for editing the bass, midrange and treble settings for the selected Echo device.

Changing the volume with voice commands

Voice commands can be used to change the volume of Alexa or any media that is playing – e.g. music:

- "Alexa, volume up 1"
- "Alexa, volume to 6"
- "Alexa, mute volume"

Adding More Devices

Alexa works very effectively with multiple Echo devices in the home, and also other devices such as smart lighting. These items can be added through the Alexa app, in a similar way to adding an Echo initially. To do this:

1. Open the Amazon Alexa app on a smartphone or tablet

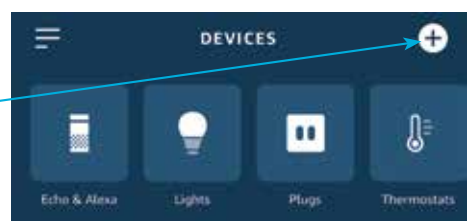
2. Plug in the new device and tap on this button to access the **Menu**

3. Tap on the **Add Device** button and add the device in the same way as for adding the initial device

or:

1. Open the Amazon Alexa app and tap on the **Devices** button on the bottom toolbar

2. In the **Devices** section, tap on the **+** button to start adding a new device



3. Tap on the **Add Device** button to add a new device in the same way as for adding the initial device

All of the devices that have been added via the Alexa app can be viewed by tapping on the icons in the **Devices** section.