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1 Introducing macOS Big Sur

macOS Big Sur is the latest operating system from Apple, for its range of desktop and laptop computers. This chapter introduces macOS Big Sur, showing how to install it and get started using its array of features including the digital voice assistant, Siri, and Dark Mode for changing the color of items.

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About macOS Big Sur

macOS Big Sur 11 is the latest version of the operating system for Apple computers: the iMac, MacBook, Mac mini and Mac Pro. It is the first version of the operating system to have the 11 designation, after over a decade of versions with the 10 designation. This is to recognize the new interface for macOS and also the fact that Mac desktops and laptops now use ARM-based processors, rather than Intel ones. macOS is still based on the UNIX programming language, which is a very stable and secure operating environment, and this ensures that macOS is one of the most stable consumer operating systems that have ever been designed. It is also one of the most stylish and user-friendly operating systems available.

macOS Big Sur continues the functionality of several of its Mac operating system predecessors, including using some of the functionality that is available on Apple's mobile devices such as the iPad and the iPhone. The two main areas where the functionality of the mobile devices has been incorporated are:

- The way apps can be downloaded and installed. Instead of using a disc, macOS Big Sur utilizes the App Store to provide apps, which can be installed in a couple of steps.
- Using Multi-Touch Gestures, with a laptop trackpad, Apple's Magic Trackpad, or Magic Mouse, for navigating apps and web pages.

macOS Big Sur continues the evolution of the operating system, by adding new features and enhancing existing ones. These include:

- The Control Center of useful widgets, which can be accessed from the top toolbar in any macOS Big Sur screen. This has been available on iPhones and iPads for a number of years.
- A redesigned Notifications Center that combines notifications and useful widgets for a range of tasks, such as obtaining weather forecasts, calendar events or stock prices.
- The sidebar in a number of macOS Big Sur apps has been standardized so that it can be displayed, or hidden, with a single click on this button on the app's toolbar.

- A number of apps have been updated in macOS Big Sur, including Safari, Messages, Maps and Notes.

UNIX is an operating system that has traditionally been used for large commercial mainframe computers. It is renowned for its stability and ability to be used within different computing environments.

The Apple Pencil can be used on Mac computers with macOS Big Sur to perform tasks such as drawing and sketching, in compatible apps, and marking up screenshots and PDF documents.

The New icon pictured above indicates a new or enhanced feature introduced with the latest version of macOS – macOS Big Sur.

Installing macOS Big Sur

When it comes to installing macOS Big Sur you do not need to worry about an installation CD or DVD; it can be downloaded and installed directly from the online App Store. New Macs will have macOS Big Sur installed. The following range is compatible with macOS Big Sur and can be upgraded with it, directly from the App Store:

- iMac (Mid-2014 or newer).
- iMac Pro (2017 or newer).
- MacBook (Early 2015 or newer).
- MacBook Pro (Late 2013 or newer).
- MacBook Air (Mid-2013 or newer).
- Mac mini (Late 2014 or newer).
- Mac Pro (Late 2013 or newer).

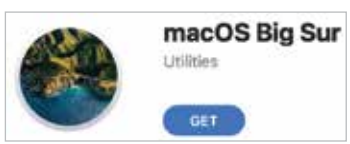
If you want to install macOS Big Sur on an existing Mac, you will need to have the minimum requirements of:

- 2GB of memory.
- 12.5GB of available storage for installation.

If your Mac meets these requirements, you can download and install macOS Big Sur, for free, as follows:

1. Click on this icon on the Dock to access the App Store (or select **Software Update...**; see second Hot tip)

2. Locate the **macOS Big Sur** icon using the App Store Search box



3. Click on the **Get** button and follow the installation instructions

macOS Big Sur is a new version of the Mac operating system. It contains a number of enhancements to make the operating system faster and more reliable than ever.

For details about using the Dock, see pages 28-36.

To check your computer's software version and upgrade options, click on **Apple menu** > **About This Mac** from the main Menu bar. Click on the **Overview** tab and click on the **Software Update...** button. See page 13 for details.

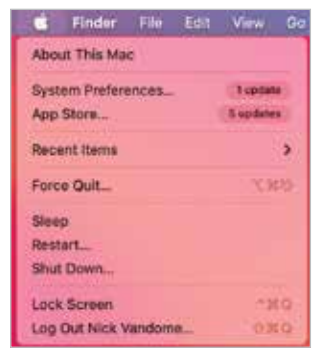
The macOS Environment

The first most noticeable element about macOS is its elegant user interface. This has been designed to create a user-friendly graphic overlay to the UNIX operating system at the heart of macOS, and it is a combination of rich colors and sharp, original graphics. The main elements that make up the initial macOS environment are:

The Dock is designed to help make organizing and opening items as quick and easy as possible. For a detailed look at the Dock, see Chapter 2.

Many of the behind-the-scenes features of macOS Big Sur are aimed at saving power on your Mac. These include timer-coalescing technologies for saving processing and battery power; features for saving energy when apps are not being used; power-saving features in Safari for ignoring additional content provided by web page plug-ins; and memory compression to make your Mac quicker and more responsive.

The **Apple menu** is standardized throughout macOS, regardless of the app in use.



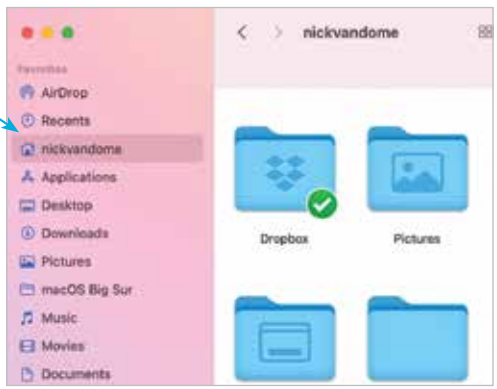
Menus

Menus in macOS contain commands for the operating system and any relevant apps. If there is an arrow next to a command it means there are subsequent options for the item. Some menus also incorporate the same transparency as the sidebar so that the background shows through.

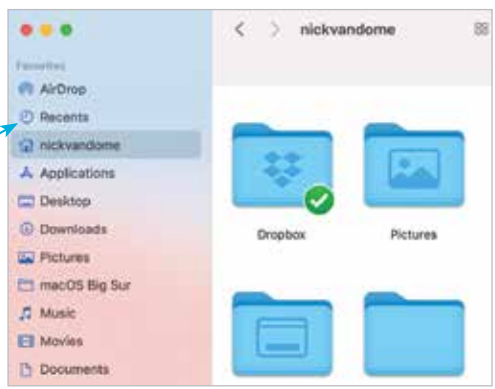
Transparency

One feature in macOS Big Sur is that the sidebar and toolbars in certain apps are transparent so that you can see some of the Desktop behind it. This also helps the uppermost window blend in with the background:

1. In certain apps with a sidebar, such as the Finder or Safari, the background appears behind the sidebar



2. When you move the window, the background behind the sidebar changes accordingly



Window buttons

These appear in any open macOS window and can be used to manipulate the window. They include a full-screen option. Use the window buttons to, from left to right: close a window, minimize a window or access full-screen mode (if available).

If an app has full-screen functionality, click on this button to return to standard view:

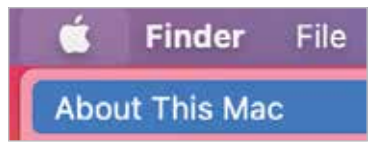
If an option is gray, it means it is not available; i.e. the screen cannot be maximized.

The red window button is used to close a window, and in some cases – such as with Notes, Reminders and Calendar – it also closes the app. The amber button is used to minimize a window, so that it appears at the right-hand side of the Dock.

About Your Mac

When you buy a new Mac, you will almost certainly check the technical specifications before you make a purchase. Once you have your Mac, there will be times when you will want to view these specifications again, such as the version of macOS in use, the amount of memory and the amount of storage. This can be done through the About This Mac option, which can be accessed from the Apple menu. To do this:

1. Click on the **Apple menu** button and click on the **About This Mac** link



2. Click on the **Overview** tab

3. This window contains information about the version of macOS being used; the processor; amount of memory; type of graphics card; and serial number

4. Click on the **System Report...** button to view full details about the hardware and software on your Mac

The System Report section is also where you can check whether your Mac is compatible with the Handoff functionality (covered on page 55), which does not work with most pre-2012 Macs. Click on the **Bluetooth** section in the **System Report** to see if Handoff is supported.

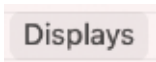
5 Click on the **Software Update...** button to see available software updates for your Mac

For more information about software updates, see page 181.

Display information

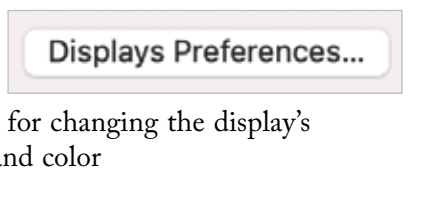
This gives information about your Mac's display:

1 Click on the **Displays** tab



2 This window contains information about your Mac's display, including the type, size, resolution, and graphics card

3 Click on the **Displays Preferences...** button to view options for changing the display's resolution, brightness and color



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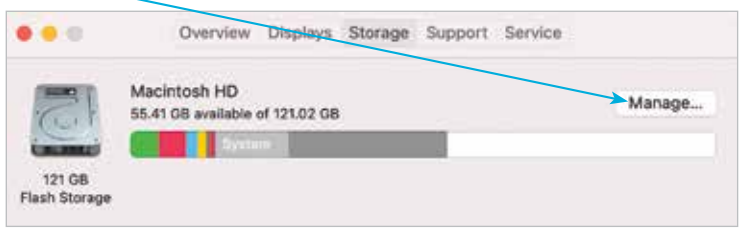
Storage information

This contains information about your Mac's physical and removable storage:

1. Click on the **Storage** tab

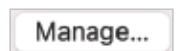
2. This window contains information about the used and available storage on your hard disk, and also options for writing various types of CDs and DVDs (if applicable)



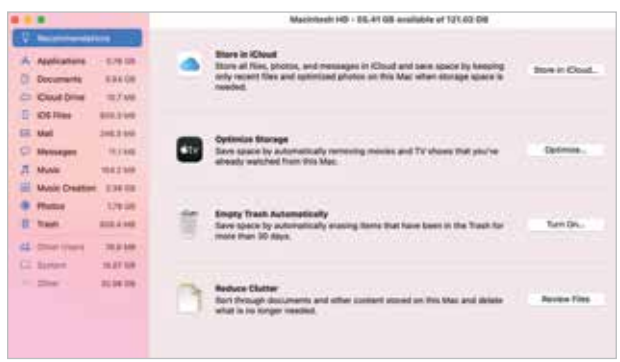
Click on the **Manage...** button in the Storage window to view how much space specific apps are taking up, and also options for optimizing storage on your Mac. With macOS Big Sur, this is known as **Optimized Storage**. Optimized Storage includes a **Store in iCloud** option, which can be used to enable your Mac to identify files that have not been opened or used in a long time, and then automatically store them in iCloud (if you have enough storage space there). Their location remains the same on your Mac, but they are physically kept in iCloud, thus freeing up more space on your Mac. Optimized Storage also has options for removing movies and TV shows that have been watched, emptying the Trash automatically and reducing overall clutter on your Mac.

Managing memory

This contains information about your Mac's memory, which is used to run macOS and also the applications on your computer:

1. Click on the **Manage...** button 

2. This window contains information about how memory can be managed in macOS Big Sur (see tip)



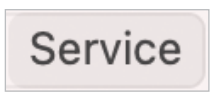
Support

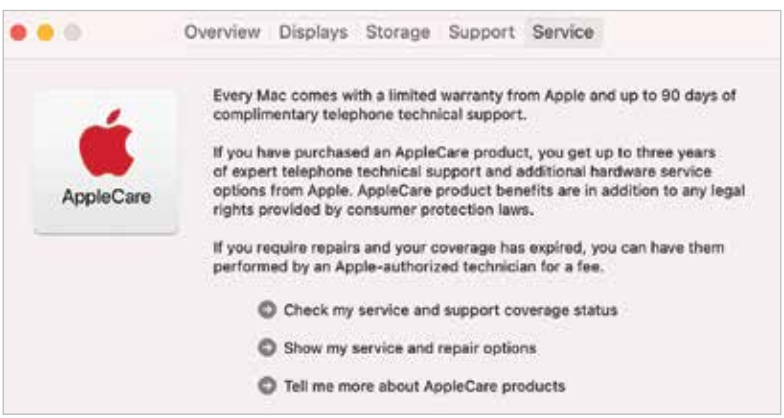
The **Support** tab provides links to a range of help options for your Mac and macOS.

The **Support** section provides links to online resources for a variety of areas related to Mac computers and macOS.

Service

The **Service** tab provides links to service and repair options and also the AppleCare Protection Plan, for extending the initial one-year warranty of your Mac.





About System Preferences

macOS Big Sur has a wide range of options for customizing and configuring the way that your Mac operates. These are located within the System Preferences section. To access this:

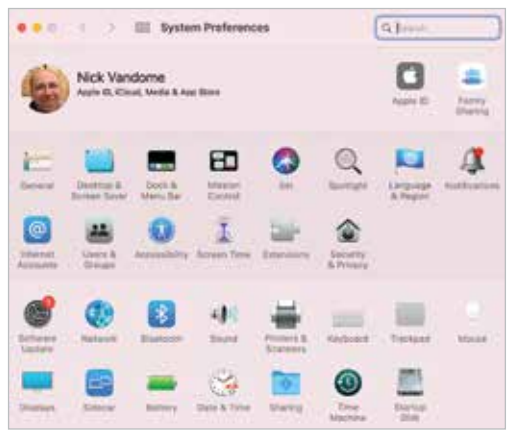
For more detailed information about the Dock, see Chapter 2.

For a detailed look at System Preferences, see pages 38-39.

The **General** option in System Preferences can be used to change the overall appearance of macOS Big Sur, including colors for buttons, menus, scroll bars and windows. Another option in System Preferences is for **Desktop & Screen Saver**. This has tabs for these items, from which you can select a background wallpaper for your Mac, including the Dynamic Desktop, and also a screen saver for when it is inactive.

1. Click on this button on the Dock (the bar of icons that appears along the bottom of the screen), or access it from the Applications folder

2. All of the options are shown in the **System Preferences** window



3. Click once on an item to open it in the main System Preferences window. Each item will have a number of options for customization

4. Click on the **Show All** button to return to the main System Preferences window

Search Options

Finding items on a Mac or on the web is an important part of everyday computing, and with macOS Big Sur there are a number of options for doing this:

Siri

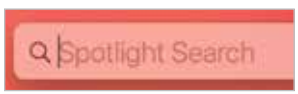
Siri is Apple's digital voice assistant that can search for items using speech. It has been available on Apple's mobile devices using iOS for a number of years, and with macOS Big Sur it is available on Macs and MacBooks. See pages 19-21 for more details about setting up and using Siri.

Spotlight search

Spotlight is the dedicated search app for macOS. It can be used over all the files on your Mac and the internet. To use Spotlight:

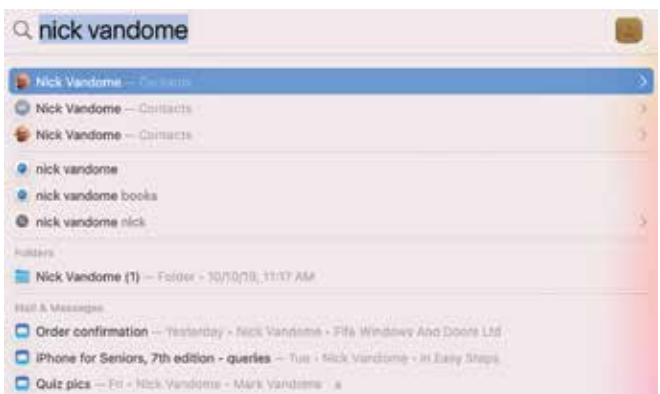
1. Click on this icon at the right of the Apple Menu bar

2. Click in the Spotlight Search box



3. Enter a keyword, or phrase, for which you want to search

4. The top hits from within your apps, and the web, are shown in the left-hand panel. Click on an item to view its details



Spotlight starts searching for items as soon as you start typing a word. So don't worry if some of the first results look inappropriate, as these will disappear once you have finished typing the full word.

...cont'd

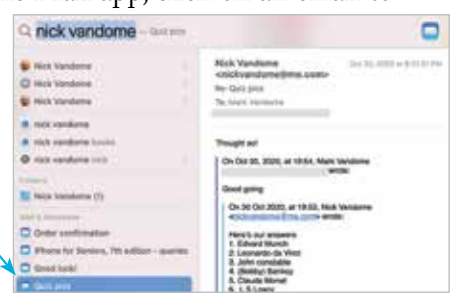
5 For items linked to apps on your Mac, click on an item to view the information in the relevant app

6 For items from the web, click on an item to view the related web page(s)

Click on a folder in Step 7 to open it directly in the Finder.

7 For other locations within your Mac, click on an item to see the details in the main window

8 For items found in the Mail app, click on an email to view its details in the main window



Finder search

This is the Search box in the top right-hand corner of the Finder and can be used to search for items within it. See page 73 for details about using Finder search.

Using Siri

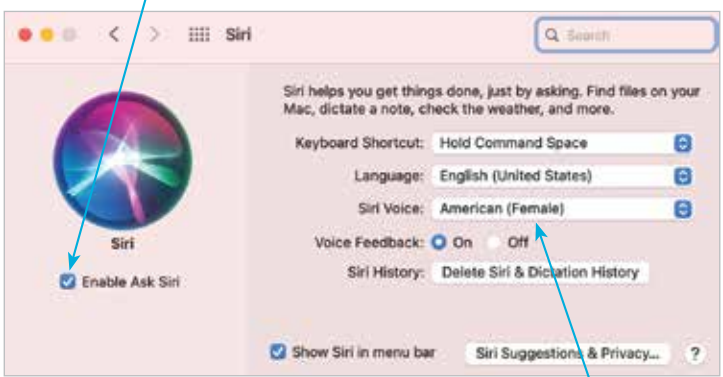
Siri is the digital voice assistant that can be used to vocally search for a wide range of items from your Mac and the web. Also, the results can be managed in innovative ways so that keeping up-to-date is easier than ever.

Setting up Siri

To set up and start using Siri:

1. Open **System Preferences** and click on the **Siri** button

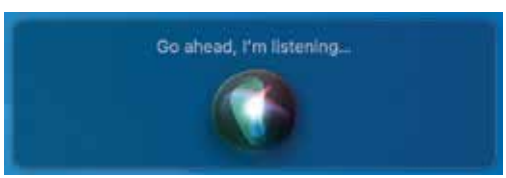
2. Check **On** the **Enable Ask Siri** box



3. Make selections here for how Siri operates, including language and the voice used by Siri

4. Click on the **Siri** icon on the Dock or in the Menu bar to open Siri

5. The Siri window opens, ready for use



Check **On** the **Show Siri in menu bar** box to show the Siri icon in the top right-hand corner of the main Apple Menu bar.

An internal or external microphone is required in order to ask Siri questions.

Searching with Siri

Siri can respond to most requests, including playing a music track, checking the weather, opening photos, and adding calendar events. If you open Siri but do not ask a question, it will prompt you with a list of possible queries. Click on the microphone icon at the bottom of the panel to ask a question. It is also possible to ask questions of Siri while you are working on another document.

Siri can search for a vast range of items, from your Mac or the web. Some useful Siri functions include:

It is possible to ask Siri to search for specific types of documents; e.g. those created in Pages, or PDF files.

Searching for documents

This can be refined by specifying documents covering a specific date or subject:

1. Ask Siri to find and display documents with certain criteria; e.g. created by a specific person

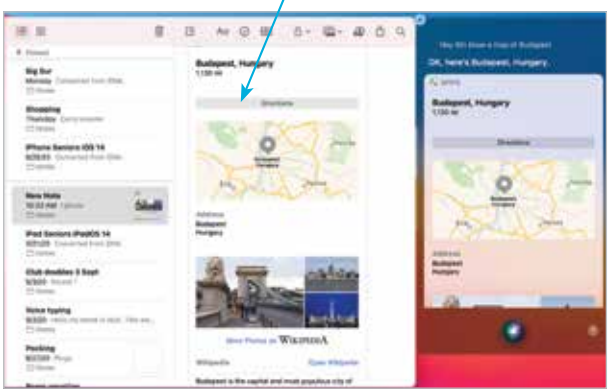
2. Ask Siri to refine the criteria; e.g. only include documents created in a specific app. Click on an item to open it in its related app

Drag and drop results

Once search results have been displayed by Siri they can be managed in a variety of ways. One of these is to copy an item in the search results into another app, by dragging and dropping:

1. Ask Siri to display a certain type of item, such as a map location or an image

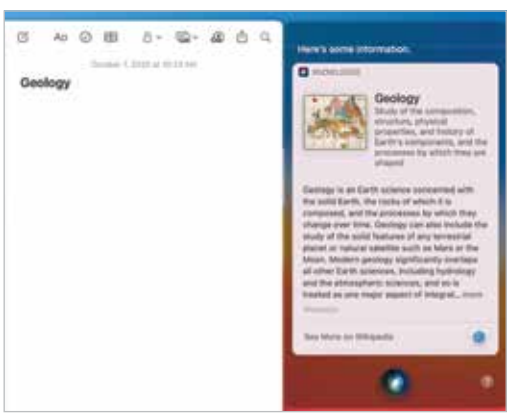
2. Drag the resulting item into another app, such as a word processing app or the Notes app



Click on the cross in the top left-hand corner of the Siri window to close it. Otherwise, it can be left open for more queries and searches.

Multitasking

The Siri search window can be left open on the Desktop so that you can ask Siri a question while you are working on something else; e.g. while you are working on a document, ask Siri to display a relevant web page.



Dark Mode

With macOS Big Sur, the background of compatible apps can be turned black in order to make them stand out more. This style may not be for everyone, but it is a useful option if you want to change the appearance of your apps. This is known as Dark Mode:

The options below the **Dark** button in Step 3 can be used to specify accent colors, highlight colors and sidebar icon sizes, to customize the other elements of an app's window.

1. Open **System Preferences**

2. Click on the **General** button

3. Click on the **Dark** button to activate **Dark Mode**

Click on the **Auto** button in Step 3 to enable Dark and Light mode to be selected automatically, according to the time of day.

4. The background is turned black, with the text inverted as white. This will apply to all compatible apps, once Dark Mode is activated

Most of the pre-installed macOS apps, including the Finder, support Dark Mode. However, some third-party apps may not support it.

5. The dark background can make windows stand out more against items such as the Desktop

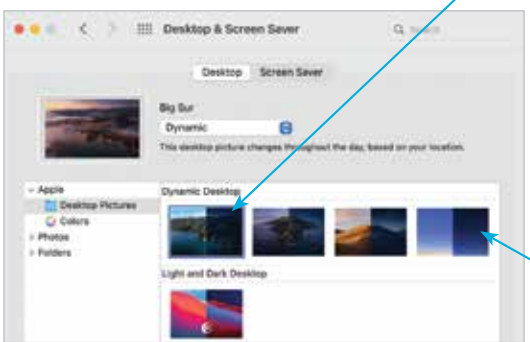
Dynamic Desktop

The Desktop background with macOS Big Sur can be customized so that it changes appearance depending on the time of day. This is known as the Dynamic Desktop. To use it:

1. Open **System Preferences**

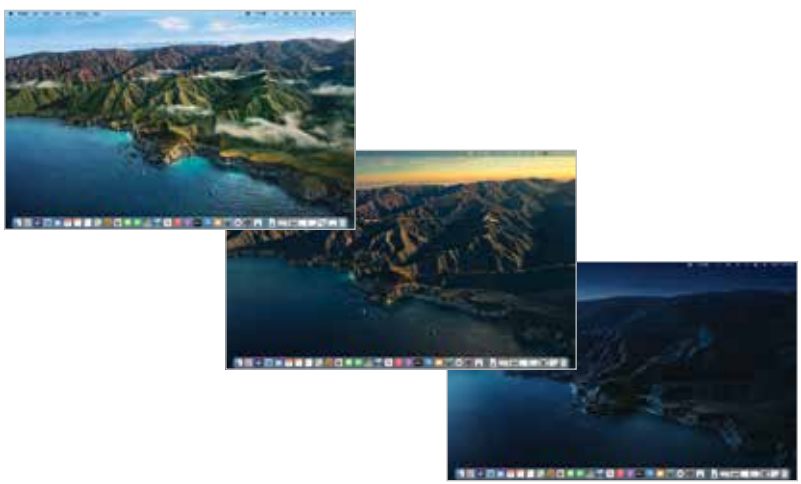
2. Click on the **Desktop & Screen Saver** button

3. Click on one of the **Dynamic Desktop** images



Click on this icon to set the Dynamic Desktop to an image of the sky, which changes during the day.

4. The appearance of the Dynamic Desktop changes during the day



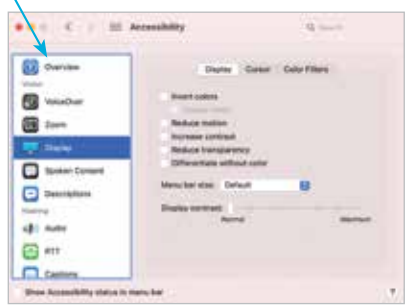
Accessibility

In all areas of computing it is important to give as many people as possible access to the system. This includes users with visual impairments and also people who have problems using the mouse and keyboard. In macOS this is achieved through the functions of the Accessibility section of System Preferences. To use these:

Another option in the Accessibility window is for **Switch Control**, which enables a Mac to be controlled by a variety of devices including the mouse, keypad and gamepad devices.

1. Click on the **Accessibility** button in the **System Preferences** folder to display the accessibility options in the left-hand panel

2. Click on the **Display** option to change the settings for display colors and contrast, and to increase the cursor size



3. Click on the **Zoom** option to change the settings for zooming in on the screen

4. Click on the **VoiceOver** option to enable VoiceOver, which provides a spoken description of what is on the screen

5. Click on the **Audio** option to select an on-screen flash for alerts, and settings for how sound is played

6. Click on the **Keyboard** option to access settings for customizing the keyboard

7. Click on the **Pointer Control** option to access settings for customizing the mouse and trackpad

8. Click on the **Dictation** option to select preferences for using spoken commands

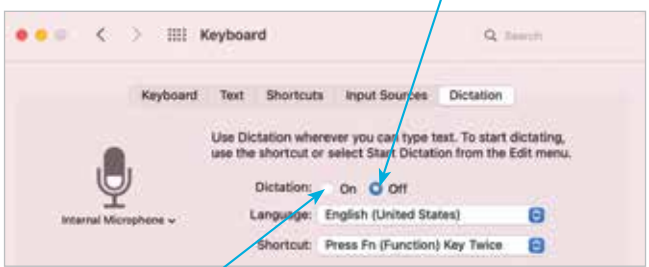
Experiment with the VoiceOver function, if only to see how it operates. This will give you a better idea of how visually-impaired users access information on a computer.

The Spoken Word

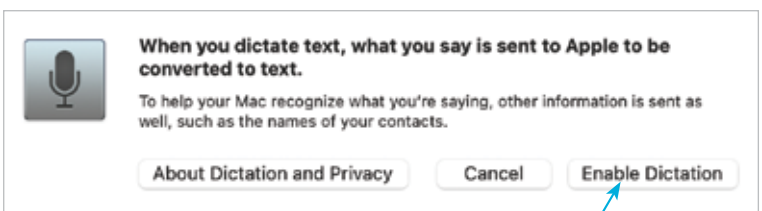
macOS Big Sur not only has numerous apps for adding text to documents, emails and messages; it also has a Dictation function so that you can speak what you want to appear on screen. To set up and use the Dictation feature:

1. Click on the **Dictation** tab in **System Preferences** > **Keyboard**

2. By default, the Dictation option is **Off**



3. Click the **On** button to enable Dictation



4. Click on the **Enable Dictation** button

5. Dictation can be accessed in relevant apps by selecting **Edit** > **Start Dictation...** from the Menu bar

6. Start talking when the microphone icon appears. Click **Done** when you have finished recording your text

Punctuation can be added with the Dictation function, by speaking commands such as "comma" or "question mark". These will then be converted into the appropriate symbols.

Dictation settings can also be found in **System Preferences** > **Accessibility** – see Step 8 on the previous page.

Shutting Down

The Apple menu (which can be accessed by clicking on the Apple icon at the top-left corner of the Desktop, or any subsequent macOS window) is standardized in macOS. This means that it has the same options regardless of the app in which you are working. This has a number of advantages, not least being the fact that it makes it easier to shut down your Mac. When shutting down, there are three options that can be selected:

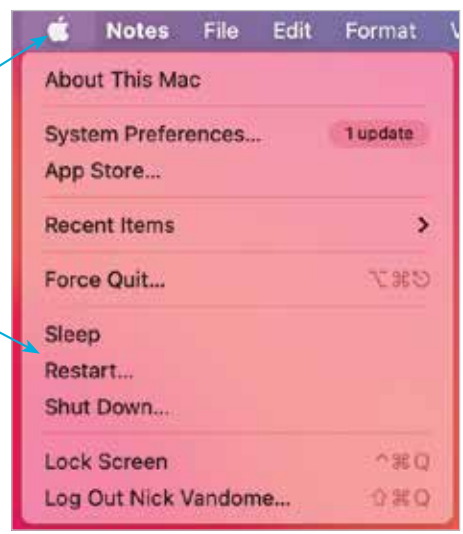
- **Sleep**. This puts the Mac into hibernation mode; i.e. the screen goes blank and the hard drive becomes inactive. This state is maintained until the mouse is moved or a key is pressed on the keyboard. This then wakes up the Mac and it is ready to continue work. It is a good idea to add a login password for accessing the Mac when it wakes up, otherwise other people could wake it up and gain access to it. To add a login password, go to **System Preferences** > **Security & Privacy** and click on the **General** tab. Check **On** the **Require password** checkbox and select from one of the timescale options (**immediately** is best).
- **Restart**. This closes down the Mac and then restarts it again. This can be useful if you have added new software and your computer requires a restart to make it active.
- **Shut Down**. This closes down the Mac completely once you have finished working.

When shutting down, make sure you have saved all of your open documents, although macOS will prompt you to do this if you have forgotten.

If a password is added, the Lock screen will appear whenever the Mac is woken from sleep and the password will be required to unlock it.

Users of the Apple Watch can unlock their Mac running macOS Big Sur, without a password.

macOS Big Sur has a **Resume** feature, where the Mac opens up in the same state as when it was shut down. See page 58 for details.

Click here to access the **Apple menu**

Click here to access one of the shut-down options