



First Aid for the Blind

VoiceOver Training: Notes for Sighted Helpers

Purpose:

This guide is for sighted family members, friends, and volunteers who are helping someone who is newly blind or experiencing significant vision loss begin to use an iPhone with VoiceOver, Apple's built-in screen reader. The focus is not just on what to teach but how to teach it effectively from a non-visual perspective.

Section 1: Big Picture Concepts

- Understanding VoiceOver: VoiceOver is a screen reader. It speaks aloud what's on the screen and allows the user to control the phone using gestures and a virtual "cursor." The experience is linear, not visual. Users move from one element to the next using gestures like swiping left or right, not by looking around the screen.
- Your Role as a Helper: Be patient and descriptive. Avoid saying things like "Click that blue button in the top-right corner." Instead, focus on describing the label of the element or guiding by function: "Swipe right until you hear 'Settings. Button.' Then double-tap." Try using VoiceOver yourself, even for 5 minutes. It will help you understand the learning curve your friend or family member is facing.

Section 2: The Most Important Gestures to Start With

- Right swipe = Move to the next item
- Left swipe = Move to the previous item
- One-finger double-tap = Activate the selected item
- Two-finger single-tap = Stop speech
- Two-finger double-tap = Answer a call / Pause or play media / Toggle Dictation in Notes or Messages
- Three-finger swipe left or right = Move between home screens and scroll page left or right
- Three-finger swipe up or down = Scroll up or down on a page

Section 3: Tips for First-Time Teaching Moments

- Turn VoiceOver On: Use Siri: "Turn on VoiceOver" or go to Settings > Accessibility > VoiceOver > Toggle On
- Start Small: Teach 3–4 gestures at a time. Practice moving around the home screen, identifying apps, and opening/closing them.
- Use the VoiceOver Practice Tool: Go to Settings > Accessibility > VoiceOver > VoiceOver Practice. This lets the user explore gestures and hear what they do without making changes to the device.
- Let the Learner Drive: You might want to jump in and do it for them, but the best way to learn VoiceOver is

hands-on. Guide them with words, not taps. This cannot be stressed enough. Eventually, the person will be on their own and they need to build confidence to be able to problem-solve and work independently.

Section 4: Key Ideas to Reinforce

- Focus on what VoiceOver is saying; every gesture has feedback. It is often a good idea in the early stages to force the user to stop completely after a gesture, listen, and process what is said. Make them repeat it back and show that they understand the auditory feedback VoiceOver provides. More than any other screen reader, VoiceOver provides auditory cues, called sound cues, that give feedback with sound rather than vocalizing words. For example, whenever the screen changes, VoiceOver makes a distinct sound rather than announcing "screen changed" to let the user know the screen is different.
- Encourage listening skills and mental mapping of where things are located on the screen, especially things in places that are easy to locate non-visually, like corners.
- Celebrate progress! This is a massive change in how someone interacts with technology! If this was a video game, learning these VoiceOver gestures would be celebrated with gifts, prizes, and bonus experience points. Don't be afraid to cheer your friend or family member on as they make progress.

What is First Aid for the Blind?

This organization provides training of independent living skills for newly blinded or visually impaired individuals. The training is designed for rapid deployment and allows for a concentrated curriculum. The training is not intended to be comprehensive in nature, but it is designed to offer some basic skills as soon as the need is identified.

"First Aid" is included in the name of the organization for a good reason. Experts all agree that the sooner an individual has a reason for hope, the better chance he or she has of fending off feelings of depression and anxiety regarding new circumstances.

Learn more at www.faftb.com or email admin@faftb.com.