The Travel Insider

Helpful Echo/Alexa Voice Commands

The following pages give you various voice commands that you can use with any of Amazon's range of Alexa powered voice command/response Echo devices. Here is a list of the types of commands we explain :

Contents

Syntax and How We Explain Each Command

Each section has three parts to it – the section heading, the spoken commands and explanation about the commands.

Spoken commands are shown in this style text.

Text within [square brackets] is optional. Change the descriptive words in (round brackets) to actual words for your requests

Text on either side of a "pipe" – eg Heads|Tails - is an either/or choice. Choose one or the other but not both.

Note that we don't show the "wake" word (ie usually "Alexa" – see discussion in the next section immediately below) at the start of each phrase, but you'll need to add that every time.

The comments are in this type of green text.

Please note it is entirely possible that other variations on the phrases we list below will work, using different words, synonyms, and different word orders to convey the same concept, and possibly with some words omitted. Feel free to experiment.

Please click to https://blog.thetravelinsider.info/2018/05/using-an-amazon-echo.html for an associated explanatory article.
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Amazon is adding more features and intelligence to Alexa every week, and we've often noticed that phrases that weren't recognized before now seem to work, and word order and sentence structure is less rigid than before.

How to Speak to Alexa

Unless Alexa is actively listening for a response from you (its blue light will be on) you need to 'wake' the service by using its 'wake word'. This is set by default to "Alexa" but you can change it to Echo, Amazon or Computer if you prefer.

We recommend keeping it as Alexa, because that is the least likely word to be used in normal conversation, reducing the number of times you accidentally start it.

When addressing a unit to give it a command, you should speak conversationally, the same as you do in ordinary conversation, including running words together. All speech recognition software these days is designed to work with words run together and actually does better that way than if you speak each word individually.

Although there is an understandable temptation, when addressing Alexa, to first say "Alexa" and then pause, waiting for it to beep, and its lights to flash, before continuing on with what you want to say, this is not necessary. You can simply say the entire thing in "natural" speech.

A possible exception to this is if Alexa is currently playing music. Then we generally will first say "Alexa" which causes it to mute the music and we think that makes it better able to hear and understand what we subsequently say to it.

Adding "Skills"

Think of "skills" as you would apps on a phone.

Your phone comes complete with some built-in capabilities, and so too does Alexa. Then, when you wish to add more functions, services, etc, on your phone you load more "apps" and with Alexa, you add more "skills".

To do this, you can sometimes simply say
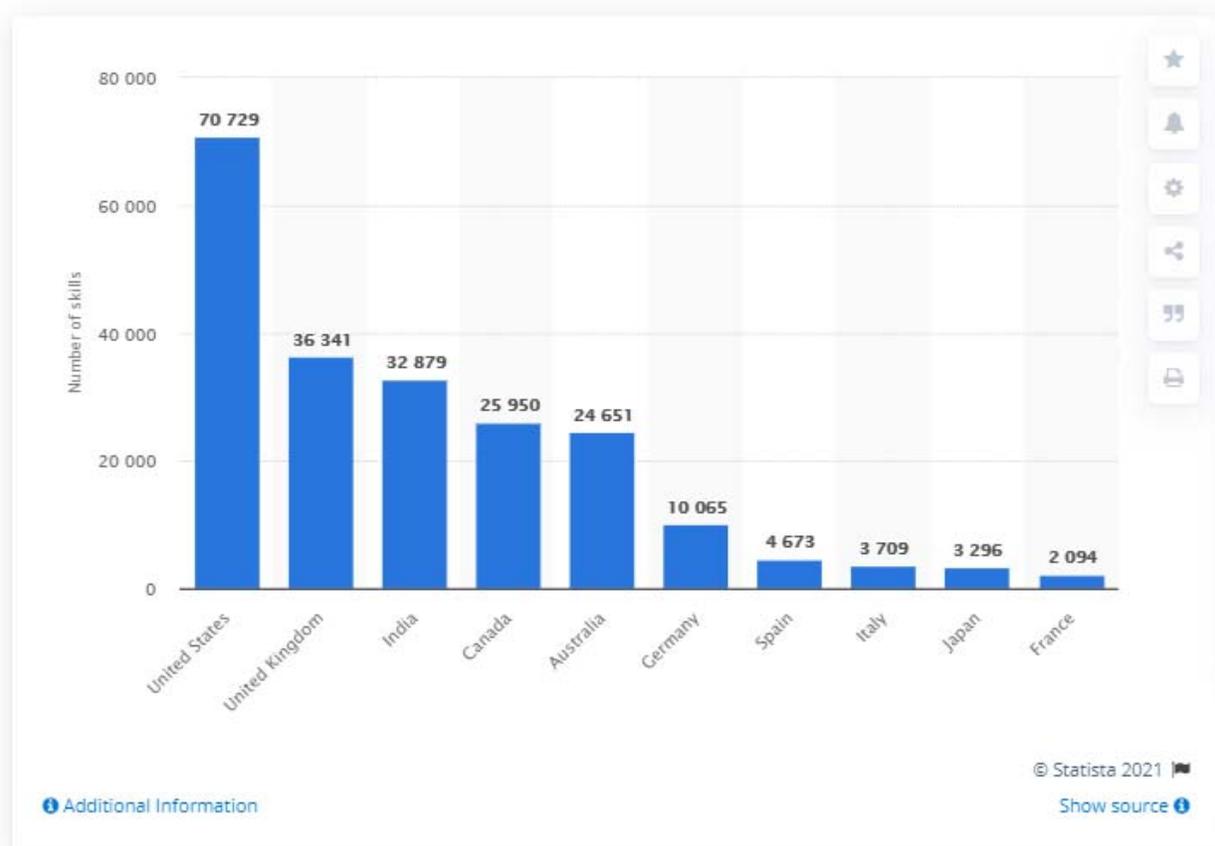
Enable (Skill name)

If that isn't possible, you should go to the Alexa App on your phone and choose the option Skills & Games. On either an iPhone or Android phone, click the three lines in the top left corner of the home page and choose the Skills & Games option from the menu that opens up.

You can then browse through or search for specific skills and add them to your Alexa service. Most are free, some have optional extras that are charged.

In total, there are thought to be over 100,000 skills available as of September 2019, with 30,000 of those having been developed during the year. Yes, it is hard to keep up with them all!

There's been little update to that 100,000 claim, but we did find a fascinating article and associated chart (shown above) showing skills by country as of January 2020 but its source is not disclosed. It is also not clear how the country counts are established, or if a skill that appears in multiple countries is counted multiple times.
https://www.statista.com/statistics/917900/selected-countries-amazon-alexa-skill-count/

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Where to Place Your Alexa Units

This is fairly self-explanatory – put them anywhere and everywhere that would be convenient. The more the merrier, or so Amazon would wish you to believe.

But there is one subtle thing to consider. Particularly with Alexa increasingly being integrated into home security units, it is suggested to keep your units away from windows, for fear that a thief might see the unit and be able to simply shout commands to Alexa through the window – commands to unlock your front door, open your garage, or who knows what else.

On the other hand, because one of the Alexa Guard features is to listen for broken glass in your windows (when burglars break in) you might want to have them not impossibly distant so they have a chance of hearing this should it ever occur.

List of Alexa Commands

The following list is not in any obvious order. Sorry! We thought about alphabetical order, but it was difficult to know what the key word to sort would be, so we simply listed them in some sort of vague "makes sense to us but perhaps not you" order!

But if it means you find a command you didn't know about, while looking for a different command, perhaps that's not a bad outcome. Serendipity can be a wonderful thing!

Clear Alexa, End an Action

Stop

Generally but not always will clear/end any command or action or condition

Changing the Volume

Set the volume to (a number between 0-10)

Volume up|down

Increase|decrease the volume

Alarms, Timers and Reminders

Set an alarm for (a specific time am|pm) [using (some sort of music or other audio source such as "BBC News on TuneIn" or "radio station on TuneIn")] [in|on (name of device)]

Set a repeating alarm for weekdays at (time)

Wake me up at {time)

Set a timer for [seconds or minutes or hours and minutes] [in|on (name of device)]

Start a [seconds or minutes or hours] (name to remember it by) timer

Remind me to (do something) [at a certain time|in so many minutes]

Remind me to (do something) when I get home

List alarms|timers|reminders

How much time left on my timer

Snooze

Clear all alarms|timers|reminders

Clear (time) alarm

Cancel my alarm on my (unit name) Echo

Cancel my (unit name) timer

Doesn't need any associated Skill

An alarm can be set for a specific time in the next 24 hours.

Multiple alarms can be set, one by one.

Timers can be set for certain periods of time.

Note that you can say "set an alarm for [15 minutes]" and it will set a *timer* for that period. This is important because if you then say "list alarms" it won't tell you about the *timer* that it set.

You can set a timer or alarm on another device and also cancel them on another device.

Reminders or specifying what a timer for are great, because when they come due, Alexa tells you what the reminder is for, based on what you told it when setting the reminder. Much more useful than just having an alarm or timer sound, but not being sure what it is for!

One great thing about reminders. They can be set way into the future. You could do something like "Remind me of my doctor appointment next Monday" or "Remind me to change the filter in three months".

The reminder to do something when you get home (or to some other defined location) can also be a very useful feature, for example, "Remind me to turn on the washing machine when I get home"

Generally you turn off an alarm, timer, or reminder by saying *Stop.*

You can set reminders to appear as text messages on your phone as well as appearing normally on your Alexa device(s). In the Alexa app, choose "More" then "Reminders" then "Settings" (probably shown as a wheel/gear in the top right corner) and enable the option "Send text messages to my phone". You can disable text message reminders at any time either by sending the message "STOP" in reply to a text message reminder, or by disabling the option in the Alexa app through the same process as you'd enable the option.

In the settings section you can also set reminders to be announced only on the device you spoke to when creating the reminder, or to one of the groups of devices you have created (see the section on Multi-room music for how to create groups of devices). This is clearly helpful in case you are not within earshot of the specific device when the reminder is played.

Also in the settings section you can define how many times a reminder will be delivered (you can acknowledge the reminder any time you hear it) before Alexa will give up. A slightly spookier option is for Alexa to set an indicator (a yellow light on the device) if it "notices" you're not near the device when the reminder is announced. It can work out if you are nearby by listening for you, and by determining where your phone is, even by looking through the camera to try and see you.

Tell me when (something will happen)

This is a very clever combination command and is a special type of reminder. You can say something like "Tell me when (a particular television show) starts" and Alexa will both answer the question immediately and then set up a reminder to remind you about the show starting at the time it starts.

You can also ask "Tell me when I get an email from (some person) and, assuming you've given Alexa access to your email, it will then tell you when you get emails from that person.

You can edit such reminders in your Alexa app (choose "More" then Reminders then Recent Reminders" to change reminders from one-time only to ongoing (for example, with the email type of reminder)

Lights and Other Switches

Turn on|off (name of switch or light or group of devices)

Dim [the] (name of switch or light or group of devices)

Need to connect the switches and plugs and lights to Alexa first through the apps associated with the devices.

Can also connect door locks and thermostats and various other devices.

Dim and related brightness commands require dimmer switches rather than on/off switches and dimmable lights rather than simple on/off lights.

You can also create **groups of lights** (and other devices) so that instead of having to turn them on and off, one at a time, you can turn them all on or off at once. We suggest one group "all lights" so in an emergency you can turn on all lights in your house, and for convenience at night you can turn them all off, too. A device can be in multiple groups, so you could also have a group for "living room" and "upstairs" and so on as well as an "all lights" group.

Notifications

Notifications are typically messages from Amazon about orders you have made and their shipping/delivery status.

Notifications|Read my notifications|What did I miss

If you see the light pulsing on your Echo unit, it probably means there is a notification waiting for you. This command simply causes Alexa to tell you what it is, and then to clear the light signal.

Clear|Delete all (of my) notifications

If you don't want to hear the notifications, this command will get rid of them without requiring you to listen to them first.

We suggest setting Do Not Disturb times of day for your Echo units. You can do this through the Alexa App.

We were being bothered by ridiculous announcements from Amazon about orders being shipped coming through the Echo unit in our bedroom at times of the night/early morning when most people would be sleeping. Setting the Do Not Disturb hours solved that – you don't lose the messages, they simply wait until the end of the DND time before they appear.

Listen to Music

Your Echo units now will play music for free from Amazon's music streaming service, although it does not have as extensive a collection of music as the paid version. But you need to add that service in your Alexa App first before it will work.

Play (relaxing) music

Play music by (The Beatles or any other group)

Play (name of song)

Play my (station name) station on Pandora

Play (radio station name) [on TuneIn]

Skip this track

Pause|Start

Doesn't need any associated Skill

Can ask for a music genre, to match a mood, or a particular artist.

Can also play Spotify, Pandora, various other streaming services or music from your Amazon music account once you've connected them to your account in the Alexa app. Choose the Play option at the bottom of the app, then scroll to nearly the bottom where you'll see shortcut tiles to allow you to quickly link popular music streaming services. At the bottom, you'll see an option to "Manage Your Services" and that shows the services you have already linked, and gives you an option to link additional services.

You can stream music through your house through multiple Amazon devices – set them up in the Multi-room Music section of the Settings menu in the Alexa app. If you do this, the music will be synchronized across the devices. If you instead have devices separately playing the same music, there will probably be a few seconds of difference in the timing of each device.

Multi-Room Music

Play (music source) [on (name of source)] on (multi-room speaker group)

First, using the Alexa app, go to Devices and create a multi-room music group that includes all the Alexa speakers you wish to play the music.

Then command Alexa to play any type of music source. If it is from a source like TuneIn, you *might* need to specify the music source as well.

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You can stop playing the music by simply saying `Alexa Stop` to any of the speakers playing it. That will then stop the music playing on the entire speaker group.

An Alexa unit can belong to multiple different groups. You might find it helpful to create groups by level if you've a multi-level home, and also to create a group called "Everywhere" that probably includes most or all the units.

Stereo Music and Multi-Channel Audio (from videos)

So now you have music playing wherever you want. The next logical step is to upgrade from mono to stereo music, by defining pairs of speakers as left and right speakers for stereo audio.

This is possible with third generation and newer Echo and Echo Dot units, and with second generation Echo Plus units, and also the first generation Echo Studio. But to create a stereo pair of speakers, they both need to be the same type of unit – this is sensible, so the sound quality matches across both the two speakers.

Simply go into your Alexa app, to Device Settings, select the first of the two speakers, then select the option "Stereo Pair/Subwoofer" and choose the two speakers you wish to be connected, and nominate one of them for left channel sound and the other for right channel sound.

If you have a Fire TV Stick 4K, a third generation Fire TV, or a second generation Fire TV Cube, you can use the same speakers to create a two channel, plus optionally a third sub-woofer channel, sound system for the video you're streaming through the Fire TV stick. Echo Dots can manage two channel stereo, Echos and Echo Pluses can handle Dolby encoding, and Echo Studio units will work with Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital Plus, and Dolby Atmos type encoding. The Atmos type sound makes use of the horizontal upwards facing speaker to (at least in theory) reflect sound off your ceiling to add a three dimensional element to your sound stage.

To do this, in your Alexa app, go to Devices then click the "+" in the top right and choose "Combine Speakers" and then the Home theater option and walk through the balance of the steps to complete the setup.

Intercom

Drop in on [name of Alexa unit|contact person]

Drop in on all devices

Hang Up (or "Stop" which works for most things)

This allows you to connect with other Alexa units in your family account, and – depending on their settings – with other Alexa devices belonging to other people who you have in your contact list.

The "all devices" option makes a type of conference call where all devices can both send and receive. This is useful if you're not sure where in the house someone else is, but if you have a unit in a noisy area, that will cause problems.

You can also just say *Drop In* and Alexa will list the different units you can drop in on (useful if you can't remember the name of the unit you want to call)

When active, it acts as a two-way voice activated intercom.

Announce|Broadcast (say something)

Tell everyone (something)

This is particularly helpful. Instead of connecting to a single device for a conversation, this allows you to send a message to all devices on your network.

Whatever you say after the command word Announce or Broadcast will be played, as a recording of your voice, to every Alexa unit in your network, as soon as you have finished making the announcement. Note this is a one-way message, no-one can reply to it, short of doing so via their own Drop In or Announce command.

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