

Screen Readers and Word Processors

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Introduction

This document provides a brief overview of using word processing applications (like Word, Google Docs, and Pages) with screen readers. JAWS and VoiceOver are covered here, but these principles generally apply to other screen readers, like NVDA and ChromeVox.

What is the same?

Some commands are the same across platforms. The table below lists commands that can be used in Word and Google Docs with JAWS, NVDA, or VoiceOver.

These commands are listed with Windows keystrokes. To use these commands with Apple devices, you can replace “Ctrl” with “Cmd”. Some Apple commands use “Alt (Option)” instead of “Ctrl”, and these are marked with an asterisk (*) in the table.

Task	Keystroke
Select all content	Ctrl + A
Select text	Hold Shift while moving through the document
Move cursor by one word at a time*	Ctrl + right or left arrow
Move cursor by one paragraph at a time*	Ctrl + up or down arrow
Move to the beginning of a line	Home
Move to the end of a line	End
Move to the beginning of a document	Ctrl + Home
Move to the end of a document	Ctrl + End
Copy	Ctrl + C
Cut	Ctrl + X
Paste	Ctrl + V
Undo	Ctrl + Z
Redo	Ctrl + Y
Bold	Ctrl + B
Italic	Ctrl + I
Underline	Ctrl + U
Create a hyperlink with selected text	Ctrl + K
Heading 1	Ctrl + Alt + 1
Heading 2	Ctrl + Alt + 2
Heading 3	Ctrl + Alt + 3
Print	Ctrl + P
Spell Check	F7
Close document	Ctrl + W

Task	Keystroke
Center (Google Docs: also hold Shift)	Ctrl + E
Left align (Google Docs: also hold Shift)	Ctrl + L
Right align (Google Docs: also hold Shift)	Ctrl + R
Search	Ctrl + F

Microsoft Word

Helpful Keystrokes for Microsoft Word

Task	Keystroke
Access the Ribbon	Alt (F6 on Mac)
Save	Ctrl + S
Open	Ctrl + O
Move between different areas of the app	F6
Close a task pane	Ctrl + Spacebar, followed by C
Set Temporary PlaceMarker (Permanent Marker for Word)	Ctrl + Windows Key + K
Return to PlaceMarker in Word	Alt + Windows Key + K

Using the Ribbon

Microsoft Word has many features available in its ribbon along the top of the screen. To access the ribbon, just press Alt on your keyboard. Once in the ribbon, use the arrow keys to move through the content. This can help you review all the options available to you. You can hold Ctrl while using the right and left arrow to move through groups of content in the ribbon.

You can also access content in the ribbon by using shortcut keystrokes. As you move through the ribbon, JAWS will announce the shortcut keystroke after announcing your current position (e.g. "Center button. Ctrl + E"). You can also use Shift + Num Pad 5 (Caps lock + Shift + Comma for laptop layout) to have JAWS read the hot key.

Using Quick Keys

You can use Quick Keys inside a document to help you quickly navigate through content. When Quick Keys are enabled, your keystrokes will jump to specific items instead of entering text into the document. This can be a very handy feature, but it can also be very frustrating if you don't know how to turn this on and off.

In JAWS, use JAWS + Z to turn Quick Keys on and off. In VoiceOver, press the right and left arrows at the same time to turn Quick Keys on and off.

iPadOS: VoiceOver and Keyboard Issues in Word

In my iPad testing, I had issues writing in Word while using a keyboard. I was using a Mantis braille display, which has a QWERTY keyboard, and Word wouldn't allow me to write any words with apostrophes. The letter after the apostrophe would be omitted, and I would have to repeat the letter in order for it to be entered.

This problem does not occur when typing with a braille display.

Resources for Word

[Freedom Scientific: Introduction to Microsoft Word 2016 with JAWS](#)

- [Lesson 1](#)
- [Lesson 2](#)
- [Lesson 3](#)

[Creating a Word Document on a Mac with VoiceOver](#)

Google Docs

Turn on Screen Reader and Braille Support

When using Google Docs with a screen reader, the first thing you'll want to do is turn on Screen Reader Support by pressing Ctrl + Alt + Z. If your screen reader still isn't working as expected, then you should make sure you have [Quick Keys turned off](#). Enabling screen reader support will typically also enable braille support. If your braille display is not responding, search for "braille" in the help menu or use the keystroke listed in the table below.

When using Google Docs with the iPadOS app, you do not need to turn on screen reader support.

Helpful Keystrokes for Google Docs

On Mac, some keystrokes must be preceded by the Mac "pass-through keys" command (Ctrl + Option + Tab). These items are marked with an asterisk (*) in the table below.

Task	Keystroke
Enable Screen Reader Support	Ctrl + Alt + Z
Enable Braille Support	Ctrl + Alt + H
Access the File Menu*	Alt + Shift + F (can use Alt + F in Chrome)
Search from the Help Menu	Alt + /
Accessibility Menu (for navigation, comments, suggestions, etc.)*	Alt + Shift + A (can use Alt + A in Chrome)
Next Shortcut	Hold Ctrl + Alt, press N then the shortcut key (e.g. H for "heading")
Previous Shortcut	Hold Ctrl + Alt, press P then the shortcut key (e.g. H for "heading")
Open Comment History	Ctrl + Alt + Shift + A

Navigating Content from the Accessibility Menu

You cannot use Quick Keys in Google Docs as you would in Word or on a web page. Instead, you can access shortcuts through the Accessibility Menu or through the "Next Shortcut" or "Previous Shortcut" keystrokes described above. Utilizing the Accessibility Menu could be more repetitive, but it would also require less memorization of keystrokes.

You can use the Accessibility Menu to move between common quick key objects, like headings, graphics, lists, and tables. You can also access comments and misspellings from this menu.

iPadOS: VoiceOver and Issues in Google Docs

UPDATE 11/6/22 - Tested on iPadOS16 with VoiceOver, Focus 40, and iPad Pro. The issues noted below seem to have been resolved. I did observe a delay in text being inserted into the document after typing on the braille display, but overall, a major improvement.

- **Braille Displays:** Braille displays don't seem to work properly in Google Docs on the iPad. VoiceOver frequently adjusts the focus of the display so that you cannot read your text as you are writing. VoiceOver will also sporadically prevent text from being entered into the document, announcing "text replaced" after spacing away from the word.
- **Typing echo:** Despite what your typing echo settings are set to, VoiceOver will repeat back every character while typing with a keyboard. In the app, it won't repeat every character if you type quickly, but in the browser, it will repeat every character, even if it has to continue reading the characters after you've completed typing. When using a braille display, VoiceOver will read back the last character of a word.

Resources for Google Docs

[Edit documents with a screen reader](#)

[Keyboard Shortcuts for Google Docs](#)

Pages (VoiceOver only)

Pages is only available on Apple products (iPad, iPhone, Mac computers).

VoiceOver seems to work best with Pages, at least on the iPad. Whether I typed with a keyboard or a braille display, I didn't encounter any glitches in Pages. On the iPad, Pages has a very simple layout and a simple set of features. This will likely be enough for your student's day to day work.

Helpful Keystrokes for Pages

The table below lists only keystrokes that were not listed in the "What is the Same?" table at the beginning of this document.

Task	Keystroke
View Keyboard Shortcuts	Command + left arrow

Task	Keystroke
Add a comment	Command + Shift + K
Re-do	Command + Shift + Z
Show or hide word count	Command + Shift + W
In a table, add rows above the selected cells	Option-Up Arrow
In a table, add rows below the selected cells	Option-Down Arrow
In a table, add columns to the right of the selected cells	Option-Right Arrow
In a table, add columns to the left of the selected cells	Option-Left Arrow
Delete selected rows	Option-Command-Delete
Delete selected columns	Control-Command-Delete

Resources for Pages

[Use VoiceOver to Create a Pages Document on iPad](#)

[Keyboard Shortcuts for Pages on iPad](#)

[Keyboard Shortcut Symbols for Pages on iPad](#)