

Chapter 1

Getting to Know Siri

In This Chapter

- ▶ Seeing what — or rather, who — Siri is
 - ▶ Setting up Siri for your personal use
 - ▶ Exploring different ways to use Siri
 - ▶ Finding out how to get fast and reliable replies
 - ▶ Teaching Siri what to call you
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Congratulations! You're now the owner of the most definitive guide to Siri on the planet.

This easy-to-read *For Dummies* title will teach you everything you need to know about Siri — and then some. Be prepared to master all of Siri's amazing features, at your own pace, so you can get a lot more out of your beloved iPhone 4S. But first, a few words about my introduction to Siri, what Siri is exactly, and a bit of history.

As a longtime technology reviewer, I firmly believe Siri (pronounced *SEAR-ree*) is the start of something very special, and it was love at first sight — er, speech.

Here I am, sitting in the crowd at Apple's headquarters in Cupertino, California, on October 4, 2011. The exclusive press event is called "Let's Talk iPhone," and like many other journalists and analysts in the room, I was expecting Apple's CEO Tim Cook to take the wraps off the iPhone 5.

When the iPhone 4S was initially debuted, you could sense the initial disappointment among the attendees — after all, there were so many rumors leading up to the event that it seemed inevitable that a dramatically new smartphone would be unveiled that day.

But that letdown feeling completely vanished the moment Siri was introduced. Forget the iPhone 4S's faster processor, better camera, built-in support for the iOS 5 operating system and Apple's iCloud — the service that wirelessly synchronizes all your content between devices— it was Siri that truly held the magic that the late, great Steve Jobs often spoke of. (You may recall Jobs, Apple's visionary leader, passed away the following day, on October 5, at age 56.)

I knew right then and there, while at the Apple campus, that Siri would usher in a new and exciting way to interact with our mobile devices. I was so blown away by Siri that I e-mailed my book contacts on the spot, because I just had to be part of this revolutionary technology — and explaining to others how to best use Siri seemed like a fitting role given my effort to translate “geek speak into street speak” in my articles and TV and radio appearances.



Siri might be exclusive to the iPhone 4S at the time of this writing, but it could very well play a major role in the next generation of iPad tablets and iPod touch devices, and perhaps other Apple products, including Macs and Apple TV.

So What is Siri, Anyway?

Siri can best be described as a personal assistant that resides on your iPhone 4S, all controlled by your voice instead of your fingertips.

In other words, Siri was built for talking rather than typing. And it goes both ways: Just as you can talk to your iPhone 4S to perform a range of tasks (employing speech-to-text translation), you'll also hear Siri's human-like voice talk back at you (text-to-speech technology).

Aha, so that's why “Let's Talk iPhone” was the name for Apple's iPhone 4S unveiling.



Think of Siri as being both software and a service, since all of your questions and commands are instantly uploaded to Siri's secure servers, and the appropriate actions and responses are sent back down to the iPhone.

Apple doesn't often pull back the curtain on its technology, but here's how the company explains how Siri works on its FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions) page:

Siri uses the processing power of the dual-core A5 chip in iPhone 4S, and it uses 3G and Wi-Fi networks to communicate rapidly with Apple's data centers. So it can quickly understand what you say and what you're asking for, then quickly return a response.

Using your voice, Siri can help you perform a number of tasks on your iPhone 4S much faster than if you typed them. Such tasks include things like:

- ✔ Sending e-mails and text messages
- ✔ Finding specific messages in your inbox
- ✔ Having your texts read to you — and you can reply verbally, too, and your words are transcribed back into text
- ✔ Using the built-in Wolfram|Alpha database to quickly find useful information, such as dictionary definitions, mathematical equations, measurement conversions, or even fast facts and pop culture references
- ✔ Searching the web for anything and everything, including info and media (such as photos and videos)
- ✔ Posting updates to Facebook and Twitter
- ✔ Adding and accessing calendar appointments, alarms, timers, and reminders (Figure 1-1 shows an example of Siri doing just that.)
- ✔ Making and accessing notes
- ✔ Getting directions from point A to point B, using the iPhone 4S's GPS radio
- ✔ Finding businesses nearby — including directions on getting there — be it gas stations, banks, or restaurants; many businesses are also displayed by rating
- ✔ Making phone calls and FaceTime video calls
- ✔ Getting real-time information on weather, stock quotes, and much more
- ✔ Accessing music and podcasts using your voice, including the ability to control audio playback



Figure 1-1: Go ahead and give Siri a task, such as a reminder about an important date.

Whew! And that's just the start. To get a taste of what Siri can do, be sure to watch the official Apple video on Siri at www.apple.com/iphone/features/siri.html.

In fact, did you know Siri is still currently in *beta*, meaning Apple is still tweaking the software and service? That's right; as awesome as Siri is, it's not a final product. You can just imagine where Siri will go in the coming months and years.

Unlike other speech-to-text technology, including those offered by other smartphones, Siri works on the operating system level and knows which app to open based on your request. (Most other smartphone solutions require you to first open up an app before you speak.) Using advanced artificial intelligence (AI), Siri makes connections based on your relationships, uses humor to make you smile, and is eager to learn more about your world and how to make your life easier to manage.

It's interesting that, just as Apple brought the mouse to the mainstream in 1984, changing the way we used keyboard-centric personal computers, they changed the game again by bringing a comfortable touch interface to the masses in the 2000s with the iPod, iPhone, and iPad. Now, Apple is making technological history yet again by bringing a speech-based

user interface to the masses — arguably the most intuitive way to interact with computers to date.

And as we saw with Captain Kirk aboard the U.S.S. Enterprise in *Star Trek*, talking with computers and getting a humanlike response is the future. Let's just hope the computers don't turn on us like they did in *2001: A Space Odyssey*; *I, Robot*; or *The Terminator*.

Spend just a few minutes with Siri and you'll no doubt fall for its charm.

A Bit o' Background

Before I get into setting up Siri, you might be interested to learn just a tad about its history.

Siri is the result of more than 40 years of research funded by DARPA (the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency). Much of the work has been carried out at SRI International's Artificial Intelligence Center, founded in 1966. (SRI, for those not in the know, stands for Stanford Research Institute.)

Fast forward to 2007, when the company Siri (named, obviously enough, after SRI, the place of its birth) was founded by Dag Kittlaus, Adam Cheyer, and Tom Gruber, along with Norman Winarsky from SRI International's venture group. After a couple of successful rounds of financing, the company released an iOS app for iPhone, also called Siri, with plans to make it available for BlackBerry and Android devices, too.

That's right; seasoned iPhone users might recall Siri was a downloadable app at the iTunes App Store a couple of years ago. But the company was acquired by Apple Inc. in April 2010, and the app was pulled from the App Store — because of Apple's more ambitious plans for its future.

Siri's official release date as an exclusive iPhone 4S feature began on October 15, 2011, in the United States.

Also benefitting from speech-recognition technology licensed from Nuance (of Dragon NaturallySpeaking fame), Siri is also integrated with services such as Yelp, OpenTable, Google Maps, Taxi Magic, and MovieTickets.com, to name a few.



Setting up Siri

Okay, before you dive into Siri's many features — covered in depth from Chapters 2 through 7 — here's a quick primer on setting up Siri properly.

First things first: Siri is automatically built into the iPhone 4S, so you don't need to download anything to get going. When you turn on the iPhone 4S for the first time, you're prompted to set up a few things, such as enabling location information and using Siri, so be sure to choose Yes to these options.

By the way, you can always access Siri's settings in the Settings area of your iPhone 4S (tap Settings → General → Siri) if you need to make some changes. Figure 1-2 shows you the kinds of settings you can change for Siri.



Figure 1-2: Siri will open up your Calendar and add your requested appointment.

The first time you set up Siri, you're prompted to select the language you prefer. Your options are English (United States), English (Australia), English (United Kingdom), French, and German. (See Figure 1-3.)

But this isn't just so Siri can speak in a language you understand — it's also to let your new personal assistant

better understand you. For example, someone from the U.S. or Canada will say “Call mom” differently than an English-speaking person from the United Kingdom or Australia. One might sound more like “Coll mum” or “Cull mam,” and so on.

Sure, Americans have various accents, too — there are definitely subtle differences between those from Long Island, Boston, Dallas, or Minneapolis, for example — but American English can be vastly different from the English spoken in London or Sydney. So be sure to choose the correct language from the list or you may have some difficulties understanding Siri — and vice-versa.



Figure 1-3: It’s important to select what language you need Siri to speak (and listen for).

It’s also important to note Siri has a female voice in the U.S., but that might not be the case with other countries (such as the U.K., where Siri has a male voice).

For this reason, I usually refer to Siri as “it” for the majority of this book to keep it universal, but I might refer to Siri as a “she” from time to time, especially in the last chapter, which focuses on all the fun things you can say to Siri and things “she” will say back.

Okay, so we've covered the importance of choosing the right Siri voice from the list of available options, based on what language you speak and where you live.

Here are some other choices you have in Siri's settings:

- ✔ **Voice Feedback:** You can select whether you'd like to always hear Siri talk to you through the iPhone 4S speaker (which might be heard by those nearby) or only when using a hands-free option, such as a Bluetooth headset. If you simply want to read Siri's responses instead of hearing them, select "Hands-free Only" and don't use a hands-free product
- ✔ **My Info:** Here's where you'd want to list your name and contact information. You can tell Siri to call you something else, if you like (for example, a nickname), but this area points to your info in Contacts. For example, you can tell Siri, "Take me home," but she'll need to know where "home" is.
- ✔ **Raise to Speak:** The last option you have when it comes to using Siri is whether you want to set it up so that you always have to press and hold the Home button to speak to Siri or if you'd like to also enable the Raise to Speak option, which automatically lets you talk to Siri whenever you raise your phone to your ear — meaning you don't have to press the Home button.



Since the Raise to Speak option isn't going to be everyone's choice, I'm going to assume for the rest of this book that you aren't using that particular feature when I provide instruction on using Siri. I'll always start each task with the standard "Press and hold the Home button" line, but if you choose to use the Raise to Speak option, you can ignore that bit and simply raise the iPhone 4S to your ear instead.

The only other option you'll have to worry about for Siri is in the Passcode section (under Settings⇨General). You can choose to use Siri even if your phone is locked (and requires a four-digit PIN) or you might opt to always force yourself to unlock your phone before you can use Siri. The advantage to using Siri when locked is you'll get your information faster — because you don't have to type in a code first to unlock the phone. On the flipside, allowing Siri to be used without unlocking the phone means if you lose your

iPhone 4S (or if it's stolen), someone can potentially access information on your phone by asking Siri the right questions. It's your call, but remember this is an option that comes with pros and cons.

Talking to Siri

To talk to Siri, you'll simply press down on the Home button (that small circle at the bottom of your iPhone 4S), wait until you hear a short chime that sounds like two quick beeps, and then talk away.



You'll also see a purple-tinged microphone icon on the lower portion of the screen. You'll know that Siri is listening to you speak because you'll see a lighted ring rotate around the microphone icon. (Figure 1-4 gives you an idea of what I mean, even if I can't recreate the rotating ring business.)



Figure 1-4: Get used to seeing that little purple microphone. This means you're chatting with Siri.

When you ask Siri a question — such as, “What’s the weather like in Seattle tomorrow?” — you can stop talking after you’re done and you’ll hear a beep to confirm Siri is now processing your request.

Alternatively, you can tap the microphone icon when you're done speaking, which might be a bit faster than Siri waiting for silence to begin the request.

The next thing you'll see is your words spoken to Siri, in bold, near the top of the iPhone 4S screen. This confirms to you that Siri understands what you're saying or asking.

If you make a mistake while asking Siri a question (maybe you accidentally said the wrong person's name to text) or perhaps Siri didn't hear you clearly, you can tap the microphone icon to let Siri know you want to cancel the request. After a second or two, you can tap it again and start over. You'll hear the familiar tone and see the ring rotate around the microphone icon to confirm Siri is listening for your new request.

The final thing you'll see is when Siri performs your desired action. Siri might open up a map, an e-mail message, calendar entry, or restaurant listing. Depending on the task, Siri might also speak to you with the information you seek. With the weather, for example, you'll see and hear the answer, but if it's a dictionary definition or numerical equation, Siri might say something like, "Here you go" or "This might answer your question" and show you the information on the screen.



Because all requests to Siri are uploaded to a server, it's not unheard of for the server to be temporarily inaccessible — if the first couple of months of using Siri is any indication. Siri will apologize to you and ask that you please try again later. A problem with Siri *isn't* an indication that there's a problem with your phone, so don't fret. The outage is usually only a couple of minutes (if that), but it's something you should be aware of.

Keeping the lines of communication open

This section gets into how you can up your success rate when it comes to using Siri, which comes down to making sure it understands what you're saying so that it can come back with quick and accurate results.

The first thing to remember is you need to have a wireless Internet connection to perform all tasks — even if it's a local task such as asking Siri to jot down a shopping list in your

Notes app. Whether it's a cellular signal you're using (make sure you see a few bars on the top-left of your phone) or Wi-Fi (a wireless network), you'll need decent reception to get quick results from Siri. This is critical.

Secondly, you'll want to speak clearly — I know this can be difficult to be conscious of — but the less you mumble and more you articulate your words, the better Siri works. Don't worry; Siri is remarkably keen on picking up what you say (and even what you mean) so you don't need to speak like a robot. Just be aware you'll get better results with clearer speech.

Also be aware that a lot of background noise isn't great for Siri, as it might not be able to pick up what you're saying very well. The quieter the environment, the better Siri can understand your instructions. This might be tough if you're in a crowded restaurant or walking down a busy street, of course, so you might need to speak a little bit louder and closer to the iPhone 4S microphone.



Hands down, Siri is the most exciting thing to happen to the iPhone — but be aware that this new technology uses up quite a bit of data to function. As a result, make sure you have a good data plan with your cellular provider so you don't go over your monthly allowance. (You'll likely get a warning if you get close.) Also, using Siri can affect battery performance of the iPhone 4S, therefore you may need to charge up your phone every evening. Some “power users” — if you can pardon the pun — invest in a battery pack that keeps the iPhone 4S topped up all day long.

You can call me Al

Siri refers to you by your name — sometimes you'll see it written, and in some cases you might hear it spoken aloud by Siri. But did you know that you can change what Siri calls you? That's right, at any time you can tell Siri what you'd prefer to be called, and your request will be granted.

Here's what to do:

1. Press and hold the Home button.

The little chime you hear means Siri is listening for your request.

2. Tell Siri something like, “Call me Dude.”

Siri will then say something like, “Okay, from now on I will call you Dude.” You can tap Yes or Cancel. See Figure 1-5 for what you’d see on your iPhone 4S screen.



Figure 1-5: You can ask Siri to call you something else, if you like.

Going forward, when Siri addresses you personally, you’ll see and hear “Dude” instead of your real name, as you’ll see in Figure 1-6. Need I mention that it’s okay to have fun with Siri? It feels good.



As you’ll soon find out with the help of this fine book you’re holding, you can also tell Siri who the important people are in your life, such as, “My mom is Honey” (yes, that’s my mom’s real name!), “My dad is Stan,” and “My wife is Kellie,” and Siri remembers all of this. Now you can say things like, “Text my dad,” “E-mail my mom,” “Call my wife,” and so on. Go ahead and tell Siri important relationships, as well as key dates like birthdays and anniversaries, too.

Okay, now that you’ve nailed the basics, you’re ready to tackle *Siri For Dummies* in any order you like. Feel free to jump around or simply swipe to the next page to begin with Chapter 2, which is all about getting organized — including using Siri for calendars, reminders, notes, alarms, timers, and more. Much, much more.



Figure 1-6: Change your name to whatever you like, and Siri will call you that — until told otherwise.

“The Beta Test Initiation”

Siri has already been immortalized in pop culture, thanks to a tribute by the cast of *The Big Bang Theory*. Starring four socially awkward friends — two physicists, an aerospace engineer, and an astrophysicist — the hit CBS sitcom devoted an episode to the female-sounding personal assistant in its January 26, 2012 episode.

The character Rajesh Koothrappali (played by Kunal Nayyar), who is unable to talk to women unless he’s inebriated, romantically bonds with Siri and even comes face to face with the woman behind the voice. It’s a hilarious episode (number 101 in the TV series), so be sure to watch it!

