

Starting to Dictate: Your First Dictation

You can use Dragon NaturallySpeaking to dictate into virtually any Windows application. Further in this workbook, you will learn how to start programs by voice (but one doesn't need to have started a program by voice in order to dictate into it.)

What you dictate will be inserted wherever your *insertion point* (cursor) is located in your document. There are many ways of moving the insertion point by voice, but know that you can also re-position it by hand (clicking the mouse where you want it, or using your keyboard's arrow keys) just as you normally would.

TIP Before dictating, make sure the desired window is *active* (its *title bar* should not be dimmed), and the insertion point is where you want your dictation to appear. (Your operating system can make such visual elements easier to see; Windows XP's Accessibility Wizard, under Start>Programs>Accessories, walks you through various items that can be helpful, such as increasing the thickness of the insertion point.)

Dictating Text and Punctuation Marks

Here are the most common punctuation marks, followed by what you say to “voice-type” them:

.	period	!	exclamation point <i>or</i> exclamation mark
,	comma	:	colon
?	question mark	;	semi-colon

For these exercises, start a word processor (like DragonPad—say **start DragonPad**).

Exercise 1: Look at the following sample, dictate it, then say **microphone off**. (If any word is misrecognized, ignore it for now.) The very first words may take a moment to appear on the screen; this is normal.

How is this different from dictating to a person? I should try to provide clean input: speaking naturally, but without mumbling or trailing off!

CAUTION Do turn off your microphone when you finish dictating! If your last sentence reads something like “trailing off! Microphone off”, you probably forgot to pause briefly before giving the command.

New Line and New Paragraph

When typing, you use your Enter key to start a new line or new paragraph. With Dragon NaturallySpeaking active, you can still press your Enter key, but you can also simply say **new line** and **new paragraph**—when you start dictating your new paragraph, Dragon will capitalize its first letter automatically.

TIP This is not the case for **new line**; if you prefer the **new line** command to trigger capitalization of the next word, you can modify its *Properties* in the Vocabulary Editor since it

belongs to a special group of commands (“*dictation commands*”, like “Cap”) accessible there (they appear near the very top, and have no written form.)

The Results Box

Exercise 2: Study the following sample, then dictate it in your word processor. (Ignore any errors for now.)

The more I use it, the software will adapt to the way I sound and the words I use. At the same time, I will also acquire good habits like pausing optimally, keeping silent when hesitating, and turning the microphone off, or putting it into its sleep state, when necessary!

As you may notice, the following happens when you dictate sentences:

- Your words first appear in a small horizontal rectangle. This is called the *Results Box*.
- Words accumulate in the Results Box until you pause, at which point they appear in your document. If many words are dictated without a pause, the Results box automatically stretches out.
- The contents of the Results Box sometimes change as you speak; what first appears there may not be what is inserted in your document, since Dragon sometimes revises its original guess based on subsequent words.

Dragon uses the contents of the Results Box to guess what to transcribe; this is particularly important for sounds that can be spelled in different ways, like “to” and “too”. If you say words in isolation, or only a few words at a time, the software has fewer or no contextual clues. For this reason, long continuous “utterances” can be recognized more accurately than short ones.

TIP Try to formulate your sentences and commands *before you start dictating them*. This can be challenging at first, particularly for those who have been “thinking through their keyboard” for years, but you’ll develop the habit once you see what a difference it makes.

Exercise 3: While looking at the Results Box, dictate four sentences on a topic of your choice. (For now, ignore any errors.)

Did you forget to dictate punctuation in this paragraph? It can be harder to remember when we are “composing out loud” but, with practice, it will become second nature.

TIP You can take advantage of Dragon’s Formatting option to automatically insert **commas** and **periods** as you dictate—the Help contains details about this “Natural Punctuation” and commands to turn it on and off.

Below are other frequent punctuation marks—you may want to say them out loud once before the next exercise. Note in particular the ellipsis and the difference between **dash** and **hyphen**.

Remember that you can use the Vocabulary Editor to see punctuation and symbols with their existing spoken forms, as well as to add your own spoken forms, and to modify properties (such as “having no following space” like the open quote.)

“ open quote

... ellipsis

” close quote

(open paren *or* open parenthesis

) close paren *or* close parenthesis

& ampersand *or* and sign

-- dash

- hyphen

TIPS You don't always have to say hyphens: thanks to its built-in vocabulary, Dragon is able to include hyphens when you say items like 3-year-old, above-mentioned, after-tax, ad-libbed, ankle-length, anti-infective, as well as famous hyphenated names like Abdul-Jabbar. (The Vocabulary's Editor "Words containing punctuation" display contains many more.) You can prevent Dragon from entering a hyphen by pausing, or saying "spacebar," where the hyphen would be.

Exercise 4: Dictate the following sample (the word "truer" is likely to be mistranscribed; ignore it for now.)

These lessons remind me that "practice makes perfect." (Who said this, Confucius?)

When it comes to speech-recognition software, truer words were never spoken...

TIP When one turns the microphone off, Dragon may still be working on the last sounds it heard. Be patient—remember, the microphone toggles on and off, so pressing the microphone hotkey again would actually mean "turn on the microphone" to Dragon.

Key points for your first dictation:

- ✓ What you dictate will be transcribed at the *insertion point* (the blinking vertical bar), after a brief appearance in the *Results Box*.
- ✓ Speaking in longer, continuous phrases provides contextual clues and thus helps Dragon choose between *homophones* like "right" and "write".
- ✓ Punctuation is part of the dictation context—it has an impact on recognition accuracy.
- ✓ Two very frequent dictation commands are **new line** and **new paragraph** (which skips a line).
- ✓ Your very first dictated words may take a moment to appear on the screen. This is normal.