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Speak-to-Type Using Dragon Naturally Speaking

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Demo Thursday: Speak to type – using Dragon NaturallySpeaking 11
March 24, 2011
Debbie Ginsberg



Use Nuance’s Dragon NaturallySpeaking to dictate almost anything as well as control your computer by voice (<http://www.nuance.com>).

Features of Dragon NaturallySpeaking 11 (Home Edition, \$99)

- Easily transcribe speech to text. Nuance claims that Dragon can handle “up to 99% speech recognition accuracy right out of the box” without training the program.
- Control your computer with voice commands, such as composing an email, setting up an appointment, and creating a document.
- Full voice support - including voice command support- for Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, and Firefox; voice-to-text feature and some voice commands also work in many other programs including WordPerfect.
- Listen to speech transcribed from text.

Extra features with Dragon Dictate Premium (\$147.20 with academic discount)

- Transcribe speech recorded onto a digital voice recorder (Nuance-approved voice recorders work best – see <http://bit.ly/dragapprecs> - page4, for examples of approved recorders).
- Audio playback of your dictation with the associated transcription highlighted on the screen for easier proofreading and correction.
- Voice command support for most Windows applications.

There are also “Professional” and “Legal” versions, but these are expensive and designed for corporate use.

New features in Dragon 11

- The command sidebar shows - in context - which voice commands Dragon understands.
- Displays an icon which changes colors when sound quality is poor.
- Improved accuracy and ability to learn from mistakes.

Problems with Dragon

- Requires time to train the program well. Basic training takes only about 15 minutes, but additional time may be needed for greater accuracy or to handle accents. That said, reviewers say that Dragon 11 works well out of the box without any training.
- Sometimes there is a few seconds lag between when you speak and when the program reacts.
- Users need to speak all punctuation which interrupts the natural flow of speech.

Getting started with Dragon

After installing the program, these simple steps will help you get started:

1. Train the program. You don't need to use the training feature anymore, but training will improve dictation accuracy by several percentage points. The longer the training time, the more accurate Dragon will be. That said, reviewers have found Dragon is at least 95% accurate out of the box.
2. Use a good headset. Dragon comes with a basic headset, but many users prefer a more powerful USB headset. A decent USB headset runs for under \$50 at Staples or Amazon (see <http://amzn.to/aznloghs>).
3. Speak naturally but clearly. Reviewers have found you don't need to speak slowly.
4. Say words like "period," "comma," and "question mark" to add punctuation.
5. To delete something you just typed, say "scratch that," "delete that," or "undo that."
6. To select a word, say "select [word]" and Dragon will highlight all of the instances of that word and number them. Say "chose [number you want]" to select the word you want to change.
7. You can speak commands while working in a program such as "open document," "save," and "close document." Check the sidebar to see all of the commands you can speak.

Reviews

Reviewers were generally impressed with Dragon 11, particularly with its dictation accuracy.

- David Pogue, NYT (video) – great interface, dictation is accurate, not worth upgrading from versions 9 or 10 (<http://nyti.ms/dpondragon>).
- PC Mag – Great for writers, not as great for editing, could use a laminated cheat sheet (<http://bit.ly/dragrevpcm>).

Other platforms

Dragon Dictate is now available for the Mac (\$146.90 with Academic discount). There are also portable versions for Android, Blackberry, and iOS (iPhone/iPad/iPod Touch).

Alternatives – Windows 7 speech recognition

Windows 7 comes with a built-in speech recognition program. You will find it in Start All Programs> Accessories> Ease of Access. Like Dragon, it takes a few minutes to train. It supports basic speech recognition and commands, but does not work as well for dictating in programs like Word and WordPerfect.