

Amazon Echo User Guide:

Basic Uses of Amazon Echo Devices



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Introduction

Getting Started

The purpose of this user guide is to provide a useful and easy-to-use tool to help you learn how to use your Echo Show to its full potential. It is important to note that some issues or problems may arise when using these devices. This is common among all technologies. Thus, our goal is to provide relevant resources and information that can help you resolve any potential problems.

What is an Amazon Echo?

The Amazon Echo is just one device in a category of what are known as “voice-activated digital home assistants.” Generally, these smart devices allow a user to interact with a virtual assistant known as *Alexa*. *Alexa* can assist you in playing music, making calls, setting music alarms and timers, asking questions, controlling other smart home devices, as well as with other more specific tasks that can be added to the device through what are known as Skills.



Skills can be thought of similarly to applications, such as those found on a smartphone. You can enable the Skills on your device and unlock a variety of new features depending on which Skill is added. Examples include Skills that assist with learning health information, playing games, or nutrition tracking.

Amazon Echo devices come in many shapes and sizes. For example, some Amazon Echo devices have visual displays (e.g., Echo Show, Echo Spot) that complement the information that *Alexa* is providing and can even passively provide useful information throughout the day such as the time, weather, reminders, and news alerts. Overall, the purpose of the Amazon Echo is to be a supportive tool that aids people in completing tasks. How it can and will be used will vary by person, and the goal of this guide is to provide an easy-to-use and useful companion in helping individuals maximize the potential of the device within their daily lives.

How Do Digital Home Assistants such as the Amazon Echo Work?

Digital home assistants are activated by your voice. They may have a camera on the front of the device to allow for capturing photos or communicating with others. You might have some concerns with how these devices work. They sit in your home, and you may be concerned that they can capture private moments or events in your life that you would prefer them not to do. Although the design of these devices may vary from developer to developer, there are some general similarities among them regarding how they record and process information. To address how they work, it is important to answer a key question about their functionality: **Are digital home assistants always recording me?**

The answer is **no**, digital home assistants are not *always* recording you. One way to understand how these devices work is to think of your digital home assistant as a friend who is reading a book in your room. The friend is attending to the content of the book and playing little attention to the surroundings. However, if you said your friend's name, they would stop reading and start listening to what you say. Digital home assistants work in a similar manner. They are passively listening only for the word(s) that tell it to listen (e.g., "*Alexa*" for Amazon Echo devices). Once they hear this phrase, they then begin recording what is said. This information is then sent to remote servers for processing (i.e., converting speech to text and then making sense of that text). The information is sent back to your home network for actions to be completed.



These devices are not recording you all the time. This is easily proven by reviewing the amount of data, or information, your device sends and receives. Examining this information has shown that, other than basic status data such as whether the device is on, the data are not sent for processing unless you have given a command. You can delete all stored voice recordings through the Alexa application.

An Overview of Amazon Echo Devices

Smart Speakers



Echo



Echo Plus



Echo Dot

Smart Speakers with Displays



Echo Show



Echo Show 8



Echo Show 5



Echo Spot

The devices shown above illustrate the variety of Amazon Echo devices that can currently be purchased. Despite the differences in appearance, these devices all use *Alexa* in the same manner to provide information or desired actions of the user. While this user guide focuses on the Amazon Echo Show, you will find similar setup processes and usage across all smart display devices.

Learning the Basics: Using Your Amazon Echo

Your Amazon Echo can support you in doing a variety of tasks across many areas. This may be overwhelming if you do not know the basics of interacting with the device or the range of activities it can do. To aid in learning, below are some common commands that will help you get to know the device and its capabilities. As a note, these commands work without the installation of third-party “Skills,” devices, or applications. In other words, the device can respond to these commands as soon as it is successfully set up and connected to an internet connection. To note, Skills are similar to apps for a smartphone. They are made by third-party developers and allow your Echo Show to do new and exciting things in addition to its basic uses.

Controlling Your Amazon Echo with Your Voice

All questions or commands for your Amazon Echo must start with what is known as a “wake word.” This is the word that will wake your device and cause it to listen to you. For Amazon Echo devices, the default wake word is “*Alexa*.” Note that you can change the wake word in the settings of either your Echo device or on your smartphone through the Alexa app. Other options include “Computer” and “Echo” commands.



Once you say the wake word, Alexa will know to listen to what you say. A blue line will appear on the bottom of the screen to show it is listening. The following is a picture of what the device looks like when it is listening:



When your device hears the wake word, you can then speak to Alexa to get information or get a task done. For example, the following command shows how to play music with your Echo Show.

“Alexa... play some music.”

The device may take just a moment to process your command and will then begin playing music. Of course, you can further specify what music you would like to listen to, but we will review that soon.

Some Things to Remember



No technology (or person!) is perfect. Alexa may sometimes mishear your command. To reduce the chances of this happening, there are some ways to help make sure that the device can successfully understand you. **Make sure to speak clearly and loudly enough so that Alexa can easily recognize the wake word and begin listening.**

After saying *Alexa*, do not pause too long before giving your command as your Amazon Echo will stop listening after a few seconds. Note that a common error is to say the wake word *after* asking a question or giving a command. For example, *“What is the weather today, Alexa?”* or *“Set an alarm for 8 a.m., Alexa.”* In such cases, the Amazon Echo will not register your question or command. Alexa only

starts listening when it hears the wake word, so make sure to say the wake word **before** speaking to your Amazon Echo. Thus, the correct way to say the previous two commands is:

“Alexa, what is the weather today?”

“Alexa, set an alarm for 8 a.m.”

Technologies have potential to deliver a lot of benefits. However, learning to use something new – even if it may be more effective than your usual approach – can sometimes be frustrating or even cause anxiety. This can make you not want to use it again. Just remember that it may take some time to learn. Digital home assistants such as the Amazon Echo are designed to help you and make things easier for you. Do not be afraid to play around with it and figure out what works best for you. Not only will it make it more familiar, but there is less pressure on getting your command perfect when you are just playing around. If you get frustrated or if Alexa is not understanding you, you can always say,

“Alexa, go home”

to return the device to its home screen and try again later.



Common Activities and Tasks Using Your Echo

When your device is idle, it will transition between different scenes with information such as the weather, news, recipes, or other useful tips for using your device. You do not need to turn it off as it is designed to do this. You can get Alexa's attention at time, no matter what screen is showing. You can also stop Alexa at any time during a command or when she is answering you simply by saying,

"Alexa, stop."

Although there may be differences across Echo devices, you will generally find buttons for volume ('+' and '-' symbols), a mute button ('⊗' symbol), as well as a privacy slider which will allow you to manually block the device's camera when you do not want to use it. You can also use your voice to manually change the volume by saying, *"Alexa, raise/lower the volume to __%."* For example,

"Alexa, raise the volume to 70%."



Alexa has the ability to learn many new skills. However, the most common activities come with your Echo Show right out of the box. You can check the news and weather, listen to music, view photos, watch videos, set alarms and reminders, and make lists such as to-do lists or grocery lists. These are just a few examples of what you can do with your Echo Show with Alexa. These activities require no installation. You are ready to interact with your Alexa through your Amazon Echo as soon as it is set up! To find out more about how to get Alexa to support you in doing what you want to do, read the following sections.

News & Weather

Alexa lets you easily hear updates on the news and weather. Suppose you are heading out for the day and you want to know if you should bring an umbrella. You can ask...

“Alexa, will it rain today?”

...and receive information on the forecast through Alexa’s voice reply as well as visual information shown on the screen. Also, if you want to know about recent news in your area, you can ask...

“Alexa, what is my flash briefing?”

...and receive a “flash briefing”-style news report, which reviews a sampling of the top stories from your favorite news sources. The following are some phrases and example commands to try related to news and weather.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
<p data-bbox="305 1016 407 1052">News</p> 	<p data-bbox="581 1016 992 1052">Alexa, what is in the news?</p> <p data-bbox="581 1073 1068 1108">Alexa, what is my flash briefing?</p> <p data-bbox="581 1129 1349 1207">Alexa, what is the latest news from [<i>your preferred news station</i>]? <i>Alexa, what is the latest news from NPR?</i></p>
<p data-bbox="280 1402 435 1438">Weather</p> 	<p data-bbox="581 1352 946 1388">Alexa, will it rain today?</p> <p data-bbox="581 1409 1065 1444">Alexa, what is the weather like?</p> <p data-bbox="581 1465 1289 1543">Alexa, what is the weather going to be like this weekend?</p> <p data-bbox="581 1564 1219 1600">Alexa, what is the weather in [<i>city name</i>]? <i>Alexa, what is the weather in Atlanta?</i></p>

Music

You can ask Alexa to play music from your favorite band or artist, although you may need an account or subscription to a music service such as *Amazon Music Unlimited* or *Spotify* to get the best selection of ad-free music. For free, Alexa can play various playlists depending on the genre, emotion, or other category you would like to hear (e.g., “*Alexa, play happy music*”). Note that advertisements may play when using free music services.

However, by creating accounts for the previously mentioned services and subscribing to them, you can further specify your music requests and expand the amount of music you can access. For example, you can say “*Alexa, what is popular from Frank Sinatra?*” to hear his best hits, or “*Alexa, play songs from Frank Sinatra*” for a playlist of his songs. You can even specify the band and album. “*Alexa, play Abbey Road by The Beatles*” is just one example. Below are some phrases and commands to try for playing music.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
<p data-bbox="305 1157 410 1192">Music</p> 	<p data-bbox="583 1079 1130 1115">Alexa, what is popular from [artist]?</p> <p data-bbox="678 1129 1321 1165"><i>Alexa, what is popular from Frank Sinatra?</i></p> <p data-bbox="583 1182 1052 1218">Alexa, sample songs by [artist].</p> <p data-bbox="678 1234 1312 1270"><i>Alexa, sample songs by Bruce Springsteen.</i></p> <p data-bbox="583 1287 857 1323">Alexa, play [song].</p> <p data-bbox="678 1339 1252 1375"><i>Alexa, play Beethoven’s 5th Symphony.</i></p> <p data-bbox="583 1392 1105 1428">Alexa, play [album title] by [artist].</p> <p data-bbox="678 1444 1256 1480"><i>Alexa, play Abbey Road by the Beatles.</i></p>

Searching for Information

One of the best uses of the internet is to find information. Alexa can help you perform internet searches. For example, imagine you are cooking and have a question about measurements. You need to know how many cups are in a quart. You can ask, *“Alexa, how many cups are in a quart?”* to find the answer: 4.

For another example, imagine you heard a word on TV and are unsure as to what it means. You could ask, *“Alexa, what is the definition of supernova?”* to learn more about it. In other words, you can use Alexa just like you would use your favorite internet search engine, with the only difference being that you can simply say it aloud instead of typing it. Think about it like you are asking a friend for information. Although the possibilities are endless, below are some example commands.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
<p data-bbox="253 1052 461 1094">Information</p> 	<p data-bbox="583 1035 919 1073"><i>Alexa, what is [word]?</i></p> <p data-bbox="675 1087 1016 1125"><i>Alexa, what is bitcoin?</i></p> <p data-bbox="583 1140 1170 1178"><i>Alexa, what is the definition of [word]?</i></p> <p data-bbox="675 1192 1312 1230"><i>Alexa, what is the definition of Bluetooth?</i></p> <p data-bbox="583 1245 1092 1283"><i>Alexa, tell me about [word/topic].</i></p> <p data-bbox="675 1297 1312 1335"><i>Alexa, tell me about the Boston Tea Party.</i></p>

Photos & Videos

Echo devices that have a screen such as the Echo Show allow for viewing visual content with ease. This includes viewing photos you have uploaded to your Amazon account, taking photos of yourself to send to your friends and family, searching the internet for photos, or watching videos from services such as YouTube or Amazon Prime Video (Amazon's paid streaming service).

For example, imagine you and a friend are talking about a famous painting you enjoy. You get into a friendly debate about whether the model in DaVinci's famous Mona Lisa is smiling. You could say, "Alexa, show me a photo of Mona Lisa." Generally, options of different pictures to view will then appear on the screen. You can then tell Alexa which number picture you would like to see. For videos, if a search is made on YouTube, a browser will load your search results and you must tap on the video you would like to view. Other examples of commands are below.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
<p data-bbox="298 1083 418 1119">Photos</p> 	<p data-bbox="586 978 915 1014">Alexa, take my photo.</p> <p data-bbox="586 1031 1105 1066">Alexa, show me pictures of [topic].</p> <p data-bbox="667 1083 1300 1119"><i>Alexa, show me pictures of the Mona Lisa.</i></p> <p data-bbox="586 1136 1300 1220">Alexa, show me [number from results of picture search].</p> <p data-bbox="667 1236 1068 1272"><i>Alexa, show me picture #1.</i></p> <p data-bbox="586 1289 1195 1325">Alexa, show me pictures of [topic] again.</p> <p data-bbox="586 1341 1003 1377">Alexa, previous/next photo.</p> <p data-bbox="586 1394 943 1430">Alexa, show my photos.</p>
<p data-bbox="298 1549 418 1585">Videos</p> 	<p data-bbox="586 1507 1078 1543">Alexa, show me videos of [topic].</p> <p data-bbox="667 1560 1252 1596"><i>Alexa, show me videos of blue whales.</i></p> <p data-bbox="586 1612 1230 1648">Alexa, show me [topic] videos on YouTube.</p> <p data-bbox="667 1665 1338 1701"><i>Alexa, show me cooking videos on YouTube.</i></p> <p data-bbox="586 1717 1398 1753">Alexa, play [show/movie] from Amazon Prime Video*.</p> <p data-bbox="667 1770 1308 1829"><i>Alexa, play Jack Ryan from Amazon Prime Video*.</i></p>

*Denotes paid service

Time Management: Alarms, Timers, Reminders & Calendar

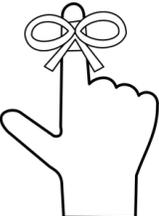
With alarms, timers, and reminders, your Alexa can alert you of important dates, times, and events that you have set. You can be alerted that your favorite show is on TV by saying...

“Alexa, set a repeating alarm for Fridays at 4 p.m.”

If you wanted to be reminded to check on something you are baking, you might say...

“Alexa, remind me to check the oven in 18 minutes.”

Below are some phrases and example commands to try for activities involving alarms, timers, and reminders.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
<p>Alarms</p> 	<p>Alexa, wake me up at [time] <i>Alexa, wake me up at 8 a.m.</i></p> <p>Alexa, when is my next alarm?</p> <p>Alexa, set a repeating alarm for [day] at [time]. <i>Alexa, set a repeating alarm for Fridays at 4 p.m.</i></p> <p>Alexa, cancel my alarm for [time]. <i>Alexa, cancel my alarm for 8pm.</i></p>
<p>Timers</p> 	<p>Alexa, set a timer for [amount of time]. <i>Alexa, set a timer for ten minutes.</i></p> <p>Alexa, how much time is left on the timer?</p> <p>Alexa, stop my timer.</p>
<p>Reminders</p> 	<p>Alexa, remind me to [context] in [time]. <i>Alexa, remind me to check the oven in 18 minutes.</i></p> <p>Alexa, set a reminder to [context] for [time] on [day]. <i>Alexa, set a reminder for Jim’s lunch on Tuesday.</i></p> <p>Alexa, what are my reminders?</p>

Calendar



Alexa, what is on my calendar / schedule [day]?

Alexa, what is on my calendar for today?

Alexa, add [calendar event] to my calendar.

Alexa, add Jim's birthday to my calendar.

Alexa, cancel my [date or time] event.

Alexa, cancel my 7pm event.

Alexa, reschedule my [calendar event] to [new day / time]

Alexa, reschedule my dinner reservation to 7pm.

Lists

Alexa can help you keep track of information. You can create any number of useful lists simply by saying, “Alexa, create a [list name] list.” For example, you could say...

“Alexa, create a birthday list.”

Other examples include grocery lists, shopping lists, and to-do lists. Imagine you need to make a trip to the grocery store soon. You can say...

“Alexa, add ‘apples’, ‘bananas’, and ‘oranges’ to my grocery list”

...to keep track of what you need. You can also say...

“Alexa, add ‘make a doctor’s appointment’ to my to-do list”

...to remind yourself of important to-dos.

These are just a few examples. Also, you can ask Alexa about what is on your list anytime to get a summary of the items it has added. Below are some more phrases and commands to try for activities involving lists.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
<p data-bbox="256 1087 457 1129">Grocery List</p> 	<p data-bbox="586 1136 1122 1171">Alexa, add [item] to my grocery list.</p> <p data-bbox="678 1188 1393 1266"><i>Alexa, add ‘apples’, ‘bananas’, and ‘oranges’ to my grocery list.</i></p> <p data-bbox="586 1276 1089 1312">Alexa, what is on my grocery list?</p>
<p data-bbox="245 1430 475 1472">Shopping List</p> 	<p data-bbox="586 1514 1146 1549">Alexa, add [item] to my shopping list.</p> <p data-bbox="678 1560 1256 1596"><i>Alexa, add flowers to my shopping list.</i></p> <p data-bbox="586 1612 1110 1648">Alexa, what is on my shopping list?</p>

<p>To-Do List</p> 	<p>Alexa, create a to-do list.</p> <p>Alexa, add [activity] to my to-do list.</p> <p><i>Alexa, add 'water the plants' to my to-do list.</i></p> <p>Alexa, what is on my to-do list?</p>
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General Note: *Conversing with Alexa*

Sometimes, Alexa will follow-up after a command to ask for more information. This can occur when an important part of a given command was forgotten or not stated. When this happens, Alexa will simply ask you an additional question and wait for your response. These follow-ups can occur with any type of command. To illustrate this, an example of such an interaction occurring when setting an alarm is below.

You: "Alexa, set an alarm."

Alexa: "Okay, alarm for what time?"

You: "2pm."

Alexa: "Okay, alarm set for 2pm. Do you want this alarm to repeat?"

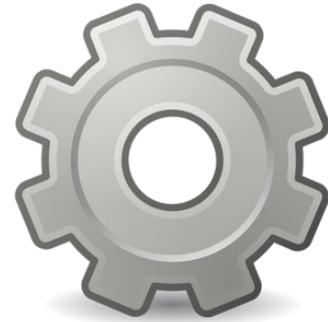
You: "No."

Alexa: "Okay, your alarm has been set."

Changing Your Echo Show's Settings

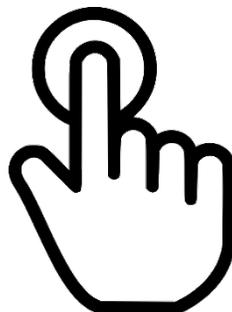
Personalizing your Echo Show's settings can make the device easier to use. In other words, tweaking the device so it performs just how you expect it to can help you remember how to use it. However, there are many settings that can be adjusted, which can be a little overwhelming. To help understand them, review the following information.

Note: The settings menu may change with recent updates. The following images may be slightly different than what you see, but the general categories and content should be similar.



Using the Touch Screen

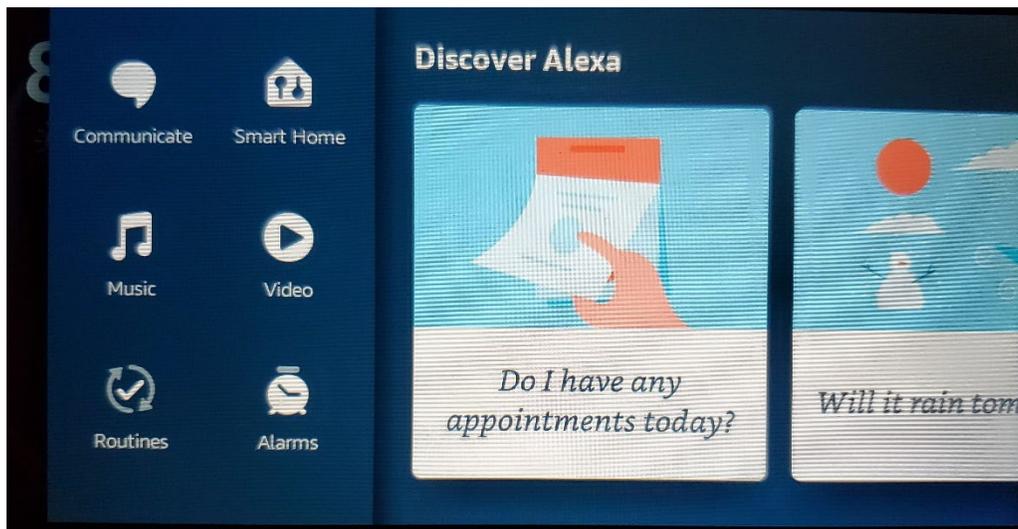
Physically navigating your Echo Show to change its settings is done a little differently than just using your voice. Instead, you will use your finger for pressing and swiping the screen. Buttons, which generally are icons that represent a section or option, are selected by tapping with the fleshy part of your finger. Note that using your nail will not be effective as the screen will not recognize the press. Additionally, some screens are only reached by swiping your finger (e.g., the Quick Menu discussed below). This is done by placing the fleshy part of your finger on the edge of the screen and sliding your finger in the desired direction. To practice these gestures, review the options below.



Quick Menu

Swiping from the right edge of the screen toward the left will reveal a **Quick Menu** that will allow you to use your finger, instead of your voice, to browse the different functions of the device like connected smart devices (e.g., smart lights), music, videos, or alarms. You can also browse different commands you can give Alexa by swiping through the *Discover Alexa* options. To return to the Home Screen, either swipe the menu away from left to right, or say...

“Alexa, go home.”



Quick Settings

To access **Quick Settings**, which is a compact menu of useful settings, swipe down from the top of your device's screen. This will reveal a menu like the one below:



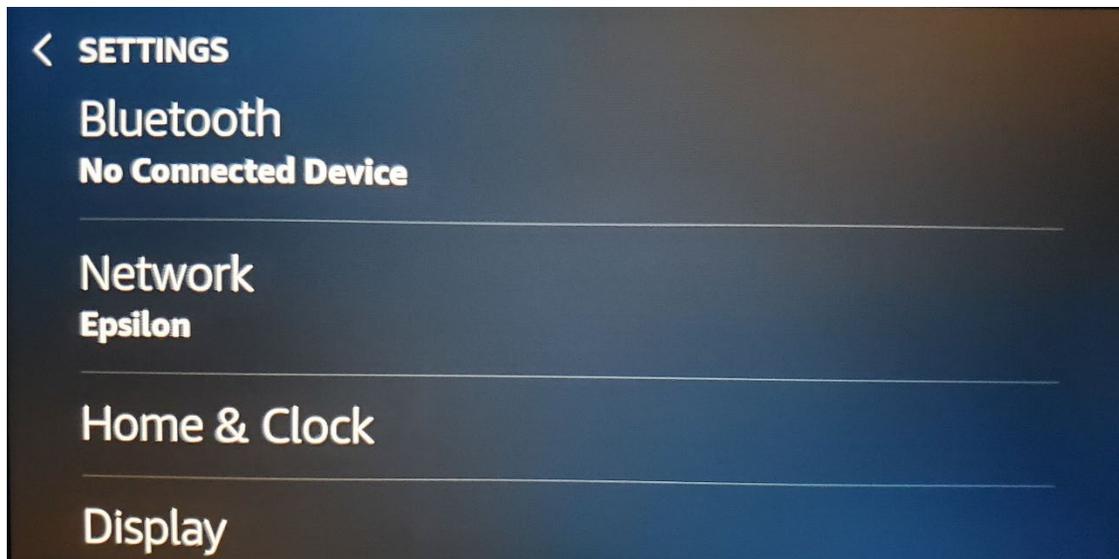
The **Home button** (circled in white) will return you to the home screen.

The **Brightness slider** (squared in green) will allow you to quickly adjust the brightness of the device by sliding the brightness marker from left (darker) to the right (brighter).

Do Not Disturb (circled in yellow) allows you to stop your device from sending notifications or other alerts that may distract you by tapping the icon. To turn off Do Not Disturb, simply tap the icon once again.

NOTE: Remember to turn off Do Not Disturb when you are done so your device goes back to the normal alert mode or you might miss important alerts!

Finally, the **Settings icon** (circled in red) will take you to many additional settings. Pressing this icon will lead you to the following screen of options:



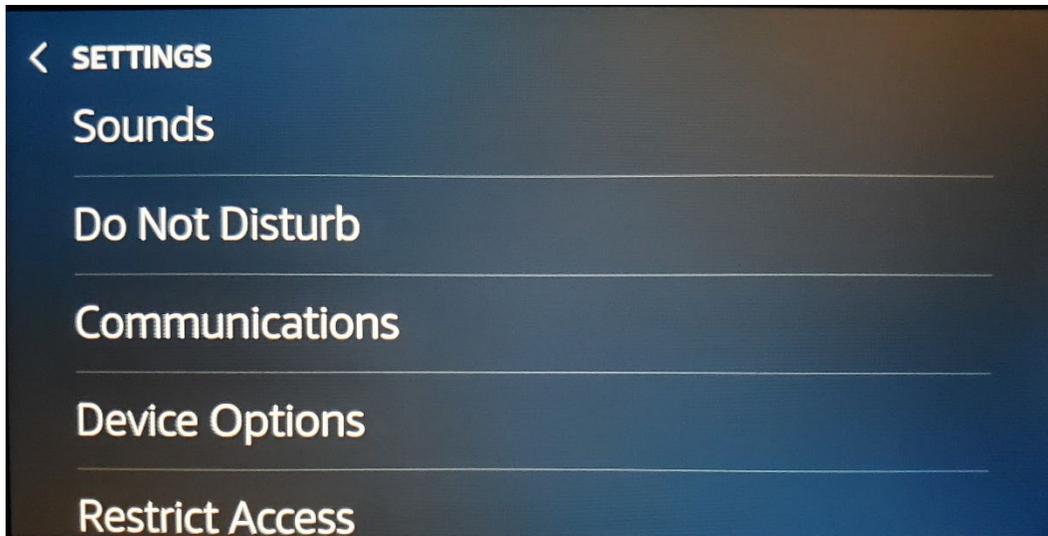
The **Bluetooth** option allows you to connect your Echo Show to other devices through a connection called Bluetooth. Selecting this option will cause your device to scan for any available connections. One of the most common types of connections is to wireless speakers.

The **Network** option allows you to select or change your WiFi wireless internet connection. You will most likely not need to edit this setting once you have set up your device.

The **Home & Clock** option allows you to change the style of your home screen and clock.

The **Display** option allows you adjust slideshow settings for your photos, as well as change some more detailed brightness settings.

Scrolling down will reveal more settings.



The **Sounds** option allows you to adjust various sound settings such as volume, alarm sounds, and custom sounds that are used throughout your device.

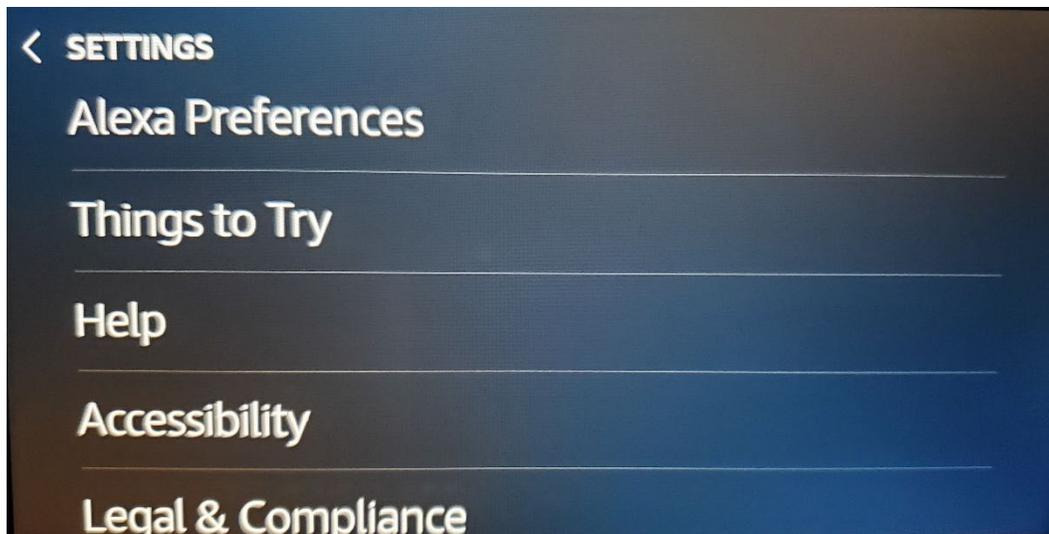
The **Do Not Disturb** option allows you to set scheduled times when your device will not distract you. For example, if you want to ensure it does not make any noises while you are eating dinner, you can schedule your device to enter the Do Not Disturb mode every day around the time you eat dinner.

The **Communications** option allows you to adjust the Call Ringer. As this option is best used with an additional Echo accessory, you can ignore this option for now.

The **Device Options** settings include the device location, language, options for changing the Wake Word (e.g., from *Alexa* to *Amazon*, *Computer*, or *Echo*), date and time, as well as units for temperature and distance.

The **Restrict Access** option allows you to restrict what topics and information can be searched for using your device. This is useful especially if young children may be using the device.

Once again, scrolling down will reveal more settings.



The **Alexa Preferences** option allows you to adjust your Calendar and Email preferences linked to your Alexa account.

The **Things to Try** option provides recommendations of various topics and things to ask Alexa. These can be very useful for practicing talking with the device!

The **Help** option provides a list of common issues that Echo users may need assistance in solving. It also includes options to contact Amazon for direct support as well as to provide feedback directly to those that can improve your experience. **Note:** If you encounter any problems using your device and this guide does not help you with that specific issue, exploring these options within “Help” should be your next step.

The **Accessibility** option allows you to enable settings that might assist you in using the device. Such options include VoiceView Screen Reader which will read any text on your screen aloud, a Screen Magnifier to increase the size of information on your screen, closed captions, and color inversion for increased contrast.

The **Legal & Compliance** option provides all relevant privacy and legal documentation relevant to using your Echo device.

Overall, while there may be many settings on the device, adjusting them to make the experience better for you is important to improve your experience and to get the most out of your Amazon Echo Show!

The Most Important Tip: Have Fun!

Remember, your Echo Show can be a fun and helpful device in so many ways. Make sure to set some time aside to try new things and see if there are any other ways you can make use of the device. The possibilities are endless!

If you ever get lost or confused, remember that you can say *“Alexa, stop”*, *“Alexa, quit”*, or *“Alexa, go home”* to stop your device at any time and return to the home screen. Becoming an expert with your Echo Show will take time, so practice, experiment, and enjoy!