



An Extended Guide · No. 1681

Live AI Captions for Hard-of-Hearing: Glasses, Earbuds & Phone Apps

Free and low-cost tools that turn speech into text
— what they do, what they can't, and how to start

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! Read this first — helpful aids, not hearing aids

Live captions turn speech into words on a screen. That can be a real help in conversation, but it is an accessibility aid, not a hearing aid, and it is not perfect. It does not treat or correct hearing loss. I am a tech helper, not an audiologist. If you are having trouble hearing, please have your hearing checked by an audiologist or your doctor.

Seeing the words when hearing gets hard

When voices blur together, reading what is said can make a conversation easy again. This guide covers free and low-cost tools that caption speech live.

I'm Bill, and I run Bill's Home Tech here in Portage County, Ohio. I've spent 30+ years helping people with technology, patiently and in plain language. I sell no devices and earn no commission, so this is simply honest help.

I'll stay in my lane: the caption tools themselves. For hearing aids, see our guides on hearing aids and on AirPods Pro as hearing aids.

★ Let's try it on your own phone

Most of these tools are already on the phone in your pocket. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll set one up with you.

The whole guide, on one page

If you remember only a handful of things, let it be these.

- Live captions turn speech into text on your screen, as people talk.
- On Android, look for Live Transcribe (conversations) and Live Caption (audio playing on your phone).
- On iPhone, look in Settings > Accessibility > Live Captions, and try Live Listen with compatible earbuds.
- Some earbuds and emerging caption glasses show or send captions too.
- They are helpful but imperfect — expect mistakes with noise, accents and crosstalk.
- They are accessibility aids, not hearing aids.
- For real hearing loss, see an audiologist.

One idea to hold onto

Captions work best when the speaker is close, the room is quiet, and you treat the text as a helper, not a transcript to bet on.

What are live captions?

Think of them as subtitles for real life.

Your phone listens through its microphone and uses speech-recognition software to turn what it hears into written words, almost as the person speaks. You read the text on the screen while you listen as best you can.

Some captions work on sound already playing on your phone, like a video or a call. Others listen to the room around you, so you can follow a conversation across the table.

No special equipment needed

Both major phone systems include captioning tools. You may already own everything you need.

Aids, not hearing aids

It is important to be clear about what these tools are and are not.

	Live captions	Hearing aids
What it does	Shows speech as text	Makes sound louder and clearer
Fitted to your hearing?	No	Yes, by a professional
Treats hearing loss?	No	Helps compensate for it
Works everywhere?	Only with a phone or device nearby	Worn all day

Captions can be a wonderful companion to hearing aids, or a helpful step for someone who is not ready for them. They are not a replacement for a hearing test.

! Do not put off a hearing test

If you are straining to hear, asking people to repeat themselves, or turning the TV way up, make an appointment with an audiologist.

Android: Live Transcribe

Live Transcribe is Google's tool for following a conversation in real time.

It listens to people around you and shows their words on your screen. It is built into Pixel phones and some other Android phones, and can be installed from the app store on many others. It works best with an internet connection.

- Open the Live Transcribe app, or find it under Settings > Accessibility.
- Hold the phone toward the speaker or set it on the table between you.
- You can type a reply on the screen if speaking is difficult.
- Menu names vary by phone maker and Android version.

Place the phone close

A phone on the table near the speaker usually captions better than one in your pocket or across the room.

Android: Live Caption

Live Caption puts subtitles on sound that is playing on your phone.

It can caption videos, podcasts, voice messages and audio you record, even when the video has no subtitles of its own. Captions appear in a small box on the screen, and you can move it.

- Look in Settings > Accessibility for Live Caption.
- On some phones it sits under a Hearing or Hearing enhancements menu.
- Turn it on, then play a video to test it.
- You can usually turn it on from the volume controls for quick access.

★ Different from Live Transcribe

Live Caption handles sound on your phone; Live Transcribe handles people talking in the room. Many folks end up using both. I can set them up. Call (330) 200-8042.

iPhone: Live Captions

Apple's Live Captions can caption audio on your phone and, on supported models, conversations around you.

- Go to Settings > Accessibility > Live Captions and turn it on.
- It can caption phone and FaceTime calls, videos and other audio.
- The captions appear in a small box you can move or resize.
- Availability depends on your iPhone model, software version, language and country.

If you do not see the option, your iPhone may not support it, or your software may need updating. Check Apple's support page for your model.

Read it, do not rely on it

Captions on calls can be a great help, but keep important details, like medicine instructions or appointment times, confirmed in writing.

iPhone: Live Listen

Live Listen is not captions, but it is a close cousin worth knowing.

Live Listen turns your iPhone into a remote microphone. You set the phone near whoever you want to hear, and the sound goes to your compatible AirPods or other supported hearing devices. It can help in a noisy room or across a table.

You turn it on through the Hearing control that you add to Control Center. Which earbuds and hearing devices work with it depends on the model, so check Apple's page for yours.

! Respect others' privacy

Live Listen can pick up sound from a distance. Use it for conversations you are part of, and do not leave a phone listening in another room.

Other captioning apps and services

Phone systems are not the only option.

There are also third-party captioning apps, some video-call tools with built-in captions, and captioned telephone services for people who have trouble hearing on the phone. Features, fees and accuracy differ.

I will not name favorites here, because the field changes fast. If you try a new app, read about its privacy and its fees first, since many send your speech to the internet to be turned into text.

! Be careful what you let listen

A captioning app hears whatever is said near it, including private talk. Download only well-known apps from your phone's official store, and review the permissions.

Earbuds that help with captions and conversation

Earbuds can carry the sound, and some add smart features on top.

Some earbuds work with the caption tools above, sending your phone's audio to your ears while the screen shows the words. Some offer features like conversation focus or live translation, depending on the model and phone.

Features differ widely, and a few of these are marketing claims you should test yourself. Check the maker's current page for exactly which features your earbuds and phone support together.

Hearing-aid features are separate

Some AirPods Pro models offer an FDA-authorized Hearing Aid feature in the US. That is a different thing from captions and is covered in our AirPods Pro hearing aid guide.

Caption glasses: an emerging idea

The dream is simple: words floating in your view while someone talks.

Some companies are making glasses that show live captions in the lens, so you can look at the speaker and read at the same time. This is an early and fast-changing area, with a mix of specialist products and smart glasses with a built-in display.

Because it is young, I'll stay general. Features, prices and availability differ, and not every pair suits every prescription. Our guides on choosing smart glasses and on prescription lenses cover related ground.

! Be a cautious early adopter

Try before you buy if you can, check the return window, and ask whether the captions need an app, the internet or a subscription. Do not expect a hearing aid replacement.

Setting up captions on your phone

A few minutes of setup makes these tools easy to reach later.

- Open Settings and look under Accessibility for the caption tool.
- Turn it on and test it with a video or a short chat.
- Make the text large and easy to read in the caption settings.
- Add a shortcut so you can start it quickly.
- Allow microphone permission only for the tools you trust.
- Practice once at home before you need it at an appointment.

Settings paths change with phone updates. If something does not match what you see, search 'caption' in your phone's settings.

★ I'll make it easy to reach

I can set a one-tap shortcut and size the text for your eyes. Call (330) 200-8042.

Getting the best results

A few habits make captions much more accurate.

- Put the phone close to the speaker, with the microphone facing them.
- Pick a quiet spot; turn off the TV or radio.
- Ask people to take turns and face you.
- Slow, clear speech helps more than loud speech.
- Keep your phone charged and connected to the internet if the tool needs it.

Names, medical terms and numbers are the most likely to be wrong. Ask the person to repeat or spell anything important.

Tell people what you are doing

Say, 'I'm using captions to follow along.' Most people are happy to help, and it explains the phone on the table.

Before hearing aids, and alongside them

Captions help in different ways depending on where you are in your hearing journey.

If you have trouble hearing but no hearing aids yet

Conversations are getting harder and you wonder what to do next.

- Captions can ease daily conversations and phone calls.
- They are a bridge, not a fix. Book a hearing test with an audiologist.
- Try the free phone tools first, since they cost nothing.
- Tell family which tools help you most.

If you already wear hearing aids

You hear better, but some places and people are still hard.

- Captions can back you up in noisy restaurants or on calls.
- Some hearing aids connect to phones, so ask your audiologist.
- Keep using your hearing aids — captions add to them, not replace them.
- Use captions for important appointments to double-check details.

★ Not sure where you fit?

Tell me where hearing is hardest and I'll show you which tool helps. Call or text (330) 200-8042.

Captions at appointments

Medical visits are exactly where mishearing matters most.

Doctors talk quickly and use unfamiliar words. A live caption can help you follow along, but errors in medical terms and numbers are common. Never act on a caption alone when it comes to a medicine or a dose.

Tell the office you are hard of hearing. Many clinics can write things down, face you while speaking, or provide other help. Asking for the instructions in writing is always reasonable.

! Confirm medicine instructions in writing

If a caption says one thing and you doubt it, ask the doctor or pharmacist to write it down or repeat it. A mistaken caption must never decide a dose.

Captions on phone calls

Phone calls are among the hardest listening jobs, and captions can help.

Some phones can caption calls as they happen, while others rely on separate captioned-call services. Availability depends on your phone, the software version, and the language.

If your phone does not offer it, ask your carrier or a hearing-loss organization about captioned telephone services for people with hearing loss. Some are offered at little or no cost.

★ I'll help you find what your phone offers

Call (330) 200-8042 and we'll see what call-captioning your phone can do.

Privacy and captions

A tool that listens is a tool that deserves a little caution.

- Some captioning happens on your phone; some sends audio to the internet.
- Check the app's privacy information to see which.
- Tell people when you are using captions, especially for private talks.
- Do not leave a caption tool listening when you do not need it.
- Be wary of unknown apps that ask for microphone access.

! Scam alert

Fake 'hearing help' apps and calls exist. Never give a stranger remote access to your phone or share a verification code, and download only from the official app store.

Honest limits

These tools are good, not magic.

Situation	What to expect
Quiet room, one speaker	Often quite good
Noisy restaurant	More mistakes
Several people at once	Words may be jumbled or missed
Accents, mumbling	Accuracy can drop
Medical or unusual words	Often wrong; double-check

I will not quote an accuracy figure, because results differ by phone, room and speaker. Test the tools in your own real situations.

Keep your expectations kind

Treat captions as a good friend who sometimes misunderstands. They help a lot and still need a little checking.

If you are helping a hard-of-hearing parent

Patience and a small setup can make a big difference.

- Set up the caption tool together, and write down the steps.
- Make text large and the shortcut easy to reach.
- Face your parent, speak clearly and do not shout.
- Encourage a hearing test with an audiologist.
- Do not leave a recorder or listening app on without their knowledge.

Some folks feel embarrassed using captions in company. Remind them it is just a tool, like reading glasses.

★ I can do the setup visit

I'm happy to come to your parent's home and set it all up calmly. Call (330) 200-8042.

The takeaway

Captions can bring conversations back within reach.

Start with what your phone already offers: Live Transcribe and Live Caption on Android, Live Captions and Live Listen on iPhone. Add earbuds or caption glasses only if they fit your life and you have checked the details.

Keep your expectations realistic, protect your privacy, and keep seeing your audiologist. Captions are a helper, and a good one.

Two things to do this week

Turn on one caption tool and try it at the kitchen table, and book a hearing test if you have not had one.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about live captions.

Q: Are live captions the same as hearing aids?

No. Captions show speech as text; hearing aids make sound clearer and are fitted to your hearing. Captions can help alongside them, but do not replace a hearing test.

Q: Do they cost anything?

The built-in phone tools are included with the phone. Some apps, earbuds and glasses have costs or fees, so check the maker's current page.

Q: Do they need the internet?

Some do, some work on the phone itself. Check each tool's description. Live Transcribe, for example, works best with a connection.

Q: How accurate are they?

Often good in a quiet room and weaker in noise or with several people speaking. Medical words and numbers should always be double-checked.

Q: Is it private?

It depends on the tool. Some process speech on the device; others send it online. Read the privacy information and tell people you are captioning.

★ Want to see it work?

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042 and I'll show you captions on your own phone.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made live captions feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I'm a tech helper, not an audiologist or a doctor. For hearing tests, hearing aids and any hearing health question, an audiologist is the right person, and I'll gladly help you line one up. I can help you set up, test and learn caption tools on your phone and devices.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Captions or Hearing Aids?

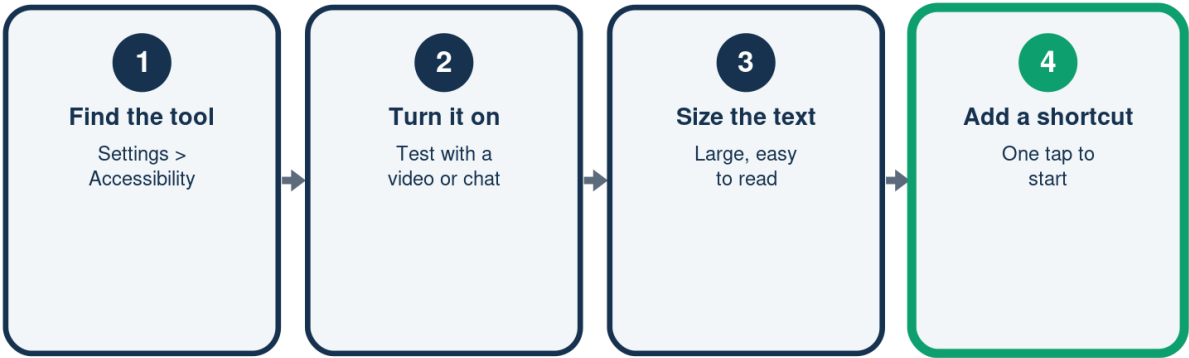
Different tools for different jobs

	Live captions	Hearing aids
What it does	Shows speech	as text
Fitted to you?	No	Yes, by a pro
Treats loss?	No	Helps compensate
Needs a phone?	Usually yes	Not for sound

Captions are an aid. For hearing loss, see an audiologist.

Trying Captions on Your Phone

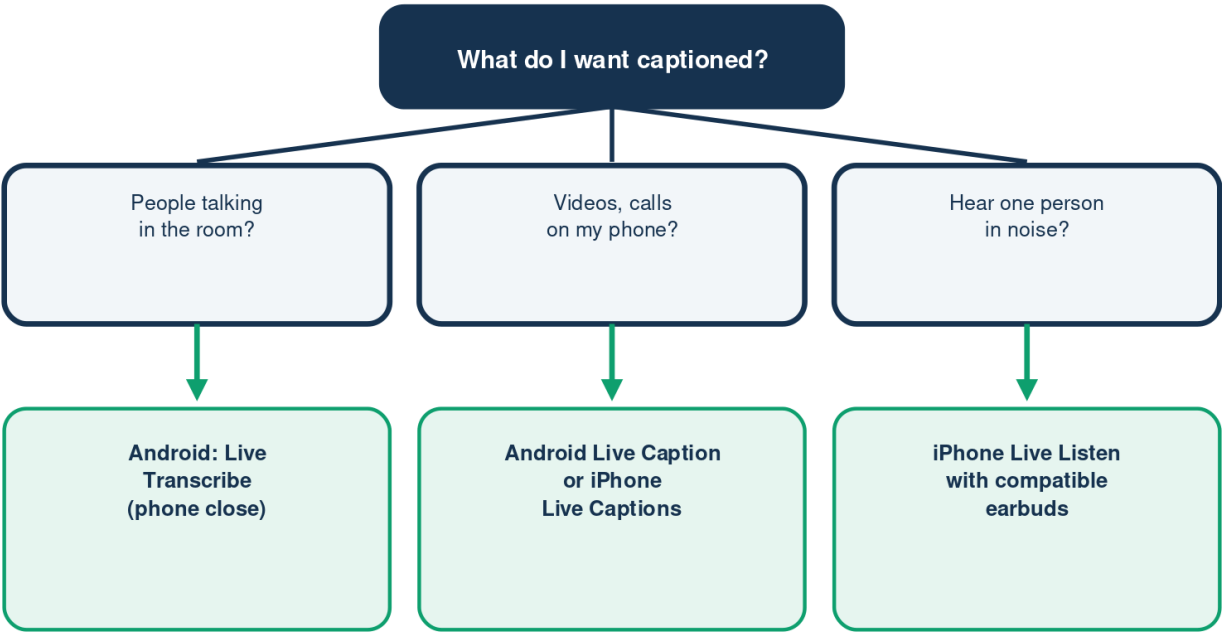
A simple first step, in order



Practice at home before you need it at an appointment.

Which Caption Tool Fits?

Start with what you want to follow

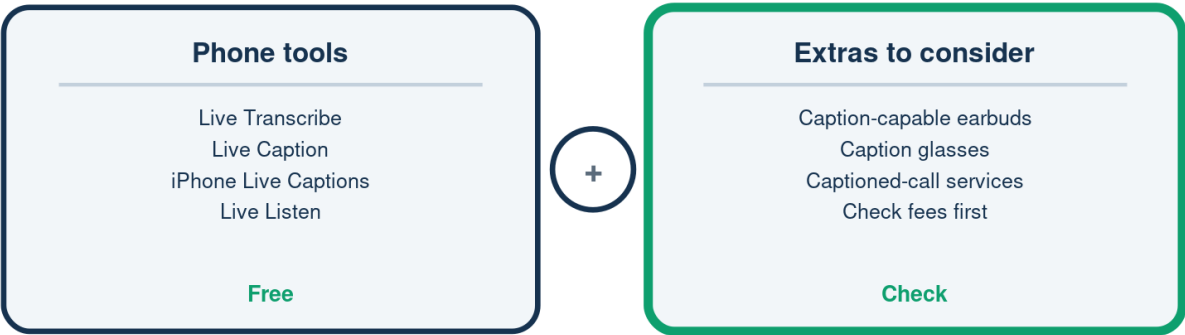


Menu names vary by phone and software version.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Where Captions Show Up

Free phone tools first, extras later



Test the free tools before you buy anything.

Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.



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A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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