

Amazon Echo User Guide:

Basic Uses of Amazon Echo Devices



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Introduction

Getting Started

The purpose of this instructional protocol is to provide a useful and easy-to-use support tool to help one successfully set up their Amazon Echo device, as well as assist in ensuring that the device can be properly used to perform the actions or tasks that you want to do. It is important to note that issues or technical problems may arise when using these devices – as is common among all technologies. Thus, our goal is also to provide a repository of resources and other relevant information that can help you resolve any problems that might occur so you can gain the most benefits from these smart and connected technologies.

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 like 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 aides one in completing the tasks they most desire. How it can and will be used will vary by person, and the goal of this instructional protocol is to provide an easy-to-use and useful companion in helping individuals maximize the potential of the device within their daily lives.

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 provide a glimpse at the variety of Amazon Echo devices that can currently be purchased. Despite the clear differences in appearance and form-factor, these devices all utilize *Alexa* in the same manner to provide the information or desired actions of the user. Thus, while this instructional protocol focuses on the two of the more common Echo devices sold (Amazon Echo and Amazon Echo Show), you will find a similar setup and use process across all devices.

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

As digital home assistants are activated by one's voice and may have a camera on the front of the device to allow for capturing photos or communicating with others, some may be concerned with how these devices work. This is especially due to their imbedded nature in one's home, and the potential concern that they may 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, which is then sent to remote servers for processing (i.e., converting speech to text and then making sense of the text), after which the information is sent back to your home network for actions to be completed.



It is important to note that 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 is not sent for processing unless you have given a command. Additionally, you can delete all stored voice recordings through the Alexa application.

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”.



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. Below we outline some things to remember when interacting with an Amazon Echo:

1. 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 your Amazon Echo can easily recognize the wake word and begin listening.**
2. 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.
3. The Amazon Echo 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 the 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 practice makes perfect, and that digital home assistants such as the Amazon Echo are designed to help you and make things easier for you. Don’t 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.

The Basics: Common Activities and Tasks Using Your Echo

While 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 always 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 ('Q' 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%."



Your Amazon Echo has the ability to learn many new skills. Some of which come with your Amazon Echo right out of the box.

- News and weather
- Listen to music
- View photos
- Watch videos
- Set alarms and reminders
- Make lists such as to-do lists or grocery lists.

These are just a few examples of what you can do with your Echo. Plus, these abilities require no installation, so you are ready to interact with 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

Your Amazon Echo 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 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
News 	Alexa, what is in the news? Alexa, what is my flash briefing? Alexa, what is the latest news from [your preferred news station]? <i>Alexa, what is the latest news from NPR?</i>
Weather 	Alexa, will it rain today? Alexa, what is the weather like? Alexa, what is the weather going to be like this weekend?

Music

You can ask your Amazon Echo to play music from your favorite band or artist, although you may need an account or subscription to a music service like *Amazon Music Unlimited* or *Spotify* to get the best selection of ad-free music. By default, your Echo can play various playlists depending on the genre, emotion, or other category you would like to hear (e.g., “*Alexa, play happy music.*”) However, with accounts from the previously mentioned services, you can further specify your music request. 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>Music</p> 	<p>Alexa, what is popular from [artist]? <i>Alexa, what is popular from Frank Sinatra?</i></p> <p>Alexa, sample songs by [artist]. <i>Alexa, sample songs by Bruce Springsteen.</i></p> <p>Alexa, play [song]. <i>Alexa, play Beethoven's 5th Symphony.</i></p> <p>Alexa, play [album title] by [artist]. <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. Echo devices can allow you to perform these searches simply with your voice. 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 your Echo device 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 possible examples of endless, below are some example commands.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
<p>Information</p> 	<p>Alexa, what is [word]?</p> <p><i>Alexa, what is dark matter?</i></p> <p>Alexa, what is the definition of [word]?</p> <p><i>Alexa, what is the definition of Bluetooth?</i></p> <p>Alexa, tell me about [word/topic].</p> <p><i>Alexa, tell me about the Boston Tea Party.</i></p>

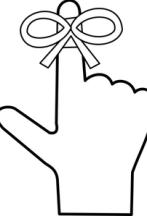
Photos & Videos

Echo devices with a screen, such as the Echo Show, allow for viewing of visual information with ease. Some things you can do include viewing photos you have uploaded to your Amazon account, taking photos of yourself to send to your friends and family, searching for photos on the internet, or watching videos from YouTube or Amazon Prime Video (Amazon's paid streaming service). For example, imagine you and a friend are talking about famous painting you like. You get into a friendly debate about whether or not 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>Photos</p> 	<p>Alexa, take my photo. Alexa, show me pictures of [topic]. <i>Alexa, show me pictures of the Mona Lisa.</i> Alexa, show me [number from results of picture search]. <i>Alexa, show me picture #1.</i> Alexa, show me pictures of [topic] again. Alexa, previous/next photo. Alexa, show my photos.</p>
<p>Videos</p> 	<p>Alexa, show me videos of [topic]. <i>Alexa, show me videos of blue whales.</i> Alexa, show me [topic] videos on YouTube. <i>Alexa, show me cooking videos on YouTube.</i> Alexa, play [show/movie] from Amazon Prime Video. <i>Alexa, play Jack Ryan from Amazon Prime Video.</i></p>

Time Management: Alarms, Timers, Reminders & Calendar

With alarms, timers, and reminders, your Amazon Echo will 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
Alarms 	Alexa, wake me up at [time] <i>Alexa, wake me up at 8 a.m.</i> Alexa, when is my next alarm? Alexa, set a repeating alarm for [day] at [time]. <i>Alexa, set a repeating alarm for Fridays at 4 p.m.</i> Alexa, cancel my alarm(s).
Timers 	Alexa, set a timer for [amount of time]. <i>Alexa, set a timer for ten minutes.</i> Alexa, how much time is left on the timer? Alexa, cancel my timer.
Reminders 	Alexa, remind me to [context] in [time]. <i>Alexa, remind me to check the oven in 18 minutes.</i> Alexa, set a reminder to [context] for [time] on [day]. <i>Alexa, set a reminder to go to Jim's dinner at 6pm on Tuesday.</i> Alexa, what are my reminders?

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 7:00pm.

Lists

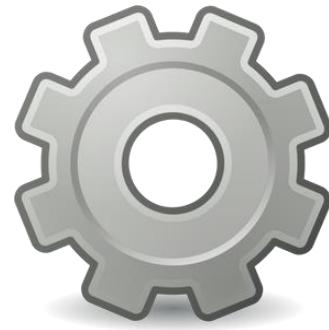
Your Amazon Echo allows you to easily keep track of all your important information. You can create any number of useful lists simply by saying, “*Alexa, create a [list name] list.*” For example, you could say, “*Alexa, create a birthday list.*” Other examples include grocery lists, shopping lists, and 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. Finally, you can see your lists in your Alexa app to manage them when on the go. Below are some more phrases and commands to try for activities involving lists.

What You Want	Examples of What You Can Say
Grocery List 	Alexa, add [item] to my grocery list. <i>Alexa, add ‘apples’, ‘bananas’, and ‘oranges’ to my grocery list.</i> Alexa, what is on my grocery list?
Shopping List 	Alexa, add [item] to my shopping list. <i>Alexa, add flowers to my shopping list.</i> Alexa, what is on my shopping list?
To-Do List 	Alexa, create a to-do. Alexa, add [activity] to my to-do list. <i>Alexa, add ‘water the plants’ to my to-do list.</i> Alexa, what is on my to-do list?

Changing Your Echo Show's Settings

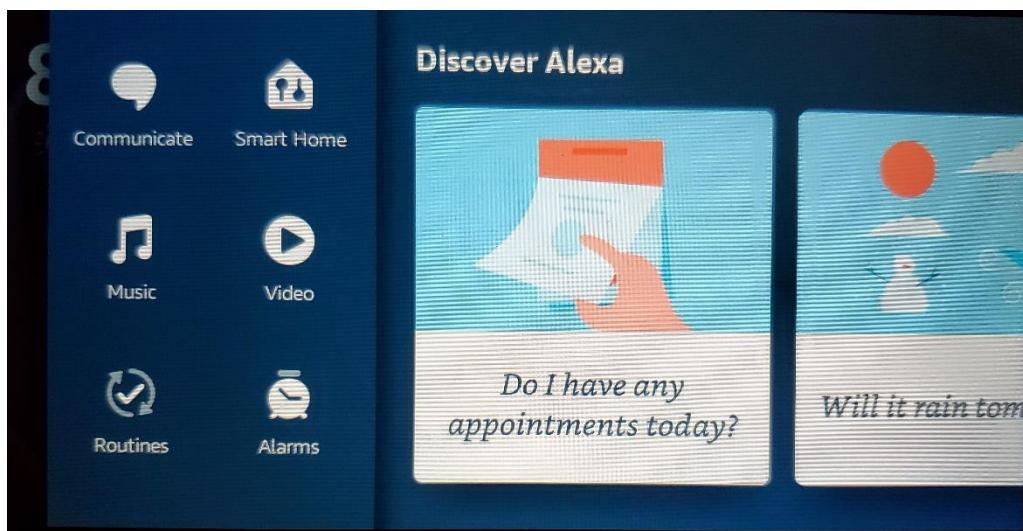
Personalizing your Echo Show's settings can make the device easier to use. In other words, tweaking the device so it performs just how you expect it to can help you remember how to use it. However, there are many settings that can be adjusted, which can be a little overwhelming. To help understand them,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

It is important to note that, like other aspects of the device, the settings menu may change with recent updates. Because of this, the following images may be slightly different than what you see. The general categories and content should be similar.



Quick Menu

Swiping from the right edge of the screen 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:



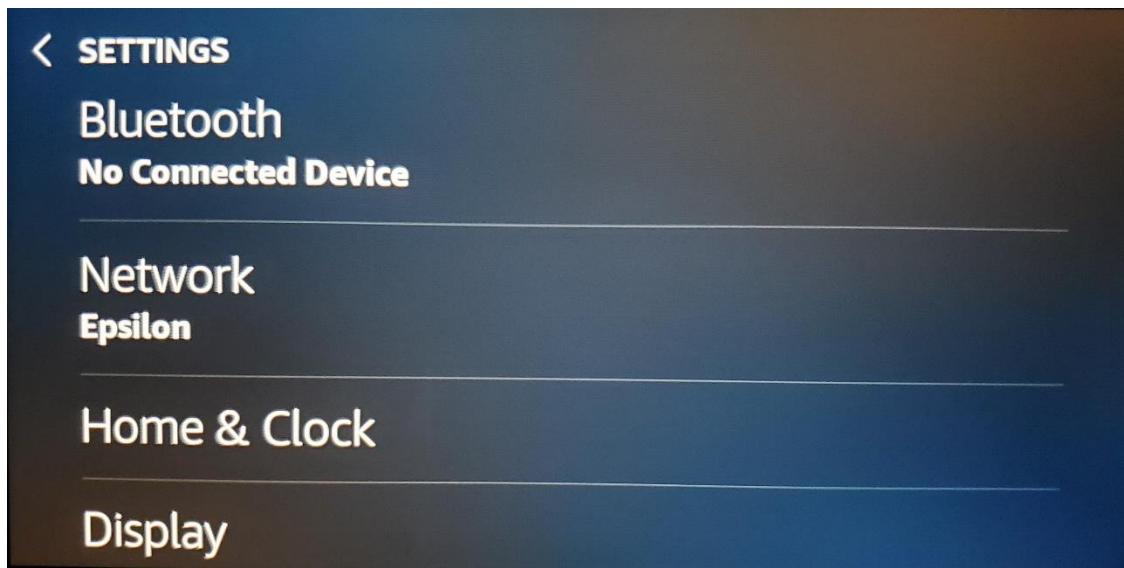
The **Home button** (circled in white) will return you to the home screen.

The **Brightness slider** (boxed 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.

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:



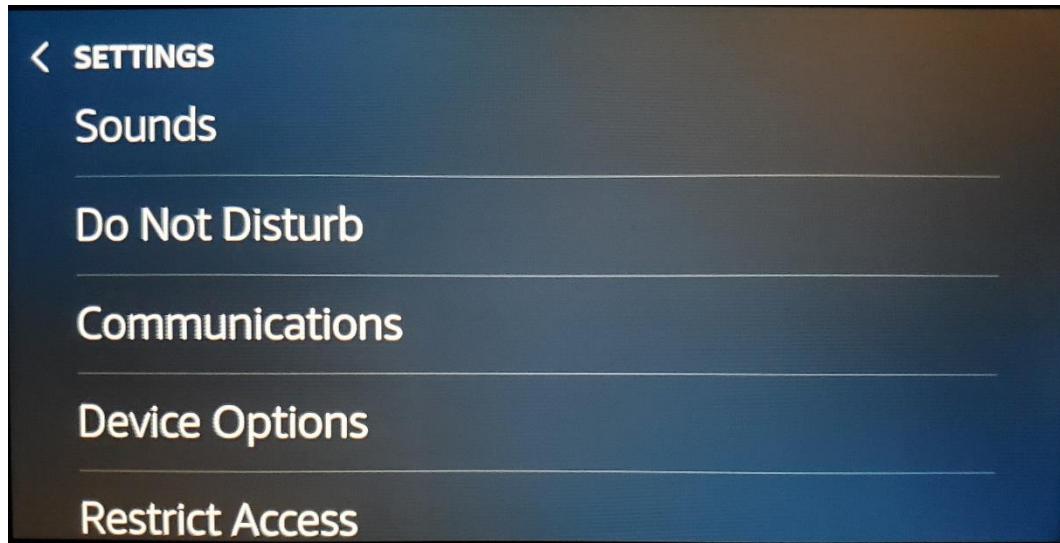
The **Bluetooth** option allows you to connect your Echo Show to other devices through a connection called Bluetooth. Selecting this option will cause your device to scan for any available connections. One of the most common examples is wireless speakers.

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.

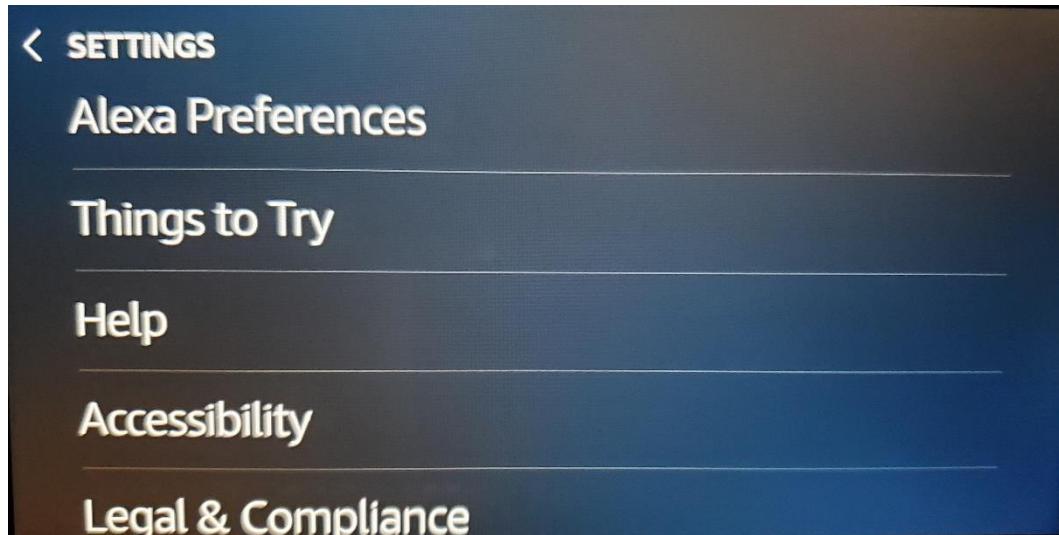
The **Do Not Disturb** option allows you to set scheduled times when your device will not distract you. For example, if you want to ensure it does not make any noises while you are eating dinner, you can schedule your device to enter the Do Not Disturb mode every day around the time you eat dinner.

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.
If you encounter any problems using your device and this guide does not help you with that specific issue, explore these options next.

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, so try not to get frustrated and keep at it! 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 idle home screen. Becoming an expert with your Echo Show will take time, so practice, experiment, and enjoy!