Apple details upcoming AI-driven iOS 17 accessibility features



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- Apple plans to roll out new accessibility features to its devices in iOS 17.
- This is what the Photos app looks like in Assistive Access mode.

Around this time last year, Apple previewed several of the accessibility features that would be added to iOS 16, which launched last fall. Now it seems that has become a tradition; today, Apple published details about several upcoming features in iOS 17 that are meant to help users with speech, vision, and cognitive disabilities use the company's devices more effectively.

For example, nonspeaking people will be able to type and have that translated into synthesized speech on a call. Many of the new features like this rely on machine learning. In another example, “those at risk of losing their ability to speak can use Personal Voice to create a synthesized voice that sounds like them for connecting with family and friends,” Apple writes.

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Other features are purely design-oriented. For users with cognitive disabilities, Apple will roll out Assistive Access, which redesigns apps like Photos, Camera, or Music to reduce cognitive load and make them easier to use. There will also be ways to focus communication on visual media, like recording short videos.

Some of the concepts here seem like they’ve arrived from a science-fiction film: “Point and Speak” mode within Magnifier allows users who are hard of vision to point at an object with writing on it (like a real-world physical button on another device) and the iPhone will follow that point and read whatever the user is pointing at out loud.

Apple published a lengthy blog post detailing the features, and it’s worth a look if you want to dig a little deeper.

Apple is not alone in prioritizing these sorts of accessibility features. The past several years have been a watershed moment in adapting technology products to fit the lives of users with disabilities. Google also offers some accessibility features in Android and has brought live-captioning to all web audio sources, among other things. On the gaming side, Microsoft and Sony have introduced accessibility controllers for players with physical disabilities, and there’s been an explosion of accessibility-minded features in triple-A video games, as well.

Listing image by Apple

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