Hadley: Talking to Your Alexa

Presented by Ricky Enger

**Ricky Enger:** Hello, my name is Ricky Enger, and today we’re going to get a little intro on how to use Alexa, the Amazon Echo digital assistant. We’ll find out how we can start talking to our device to get things done.

Now, maybe you already have an Amazon Echo, which is great! If it’s set up, you’ll be able to get started right away using the tips we cover here. If you don’t have an Amazon Echo yet, this workshop will give you an idea about some of the really cool things you can do with it, so you can decide if it’s right for you.

By the way, if you need a little assistance getting your Echo set up, be sure and check out the first workshop in this series for a few suggestions on how to get that done.

Okay, so we mentioned that our Amazon Echo is a digital assistant. Now, when we think of an assistant, we’re imagining someone that we can speak to, right? We can ask questions, or ask our assistant to perform a specific task. So, if we’re asking an assistant to do something, we’re going to address them by name, right? Our digital assistant is like that too. So let’s do that, and see what happens.

Alexa, are you there?

**Alexa:** Yes, I’m here. I listen once I hear the “wake word.”

**Ricky:** Alright, great. Let’s talk about a couple of things. First, we got an interesting response there. Something about a wake word? What is that? Well, it’s actually just a technical term for “name.” So, our smart speaker is listening and waiting to be called by name, at which point, it’s ready to find out what we want it to do.

Now, the other thing that might have happened is that if you have an Amazon Echo in the room with you, you might have heard it speaking to you. The reason for that is that it just heard me speak its name and it listened for what to do next. That’s really awesome, because any time we want our assistant to do something, we just speak that name or wake word, followed by a question or command, like this. Alexa, how do you spell Braille?

**Alexa:** Braille is spelled B r a i l l e.

**Ricky:** Cool, there’s our spelling lesson for today! Now it would be really annoying to hear the responses from my assistant, and the responses from any assistants you have set up as well. For that reason, I’m not going to say our assistant’s name anymore throughout the workshop. I don’t want to wake up your assistant unnecessarily. Just remember that when you’re ready to try each command yourself, be sure and speak the assistant’s name first.

Let’s give it a try now, by asking the time. We’ll speak our assistant’s name:

(pause)

What time is it?

**Alexa:** It’s 9:43 AM.

**Ricky:** Hey, that was easy. If you’re practicing along with me, you very likely got a different response than I did. That’s because when our assistant is set up, it learns our location, so it can give us accurate information about things like what time it is where we are, and what the weather is like outside. Oh hey, yeah, what is the weather today? Let’s ask. Again, we’ll speak our assistant’s name to wake it up:

(pause)

What’s the weather right now?

**Alexa:** In Charlotte, it’s 43 degrees with clouds.

**Ricky:** Okay, there we go. Now again, if you’re practicing along with me, you very likely got a different response. And maybe it was really distracting hearing my response along with yours. Wouldn’t it be cool if you could adjust the volume on your speaker, to make things a little quieter?

Well, there’s actually a command for that. We can turn our volume up or down in a couple of different ways. The first one is like this. We’ll do our wake word:

Volume 1.

Okay, our assistant won’t actually say anything when we do this, but our volume is now at level 1 out of 10. But hey, maybe that’s too low. We can turn things up just as easily. We can give our assistant a number, like volume 4, or we can just say our assistant’s name, volume up. When we do that, our volume will increase by 1 level. We can even ask what our current volume is. We’ll say our name again: what’s your volume level?

**Alexa:** This device is at volume 1.

**Ricky:** Okay, great! Now, the time, the weather, the volume, those are all really great practical things, right? But let’s have some fun. When you’re done checking out this workshop, try these two things and see what happens. Ask your assistant these questions:

Tell me an interesting fact.

Tell me a joke.

We’ll learn a lot more about what’s possible as we go through other workshops in this series. We can set timers, reminders, play music, find out what time our favorite show is going to be on, and even get sports scores and schedules. For now though, have fun, and experiment with talking to your assistant.

I’m Ricky Enger, and I’m glad you could join me today to learn more about Alexa, the Amazon Echo digital assistant.

This video workshop is part of a series created by Hadley, a free learning hub for anyone facing vision loss.

To learn more tips and tricks for using your Alexa device visit hadley.edu