

Microsoft Narrator

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Narrator is a light-duty screen reader utility included in Microsoft Windows. Narrator reads dialog boxes and window controls in a number of the more basic applications for Windows.

While Microsoft recommends that the visually impaired purchase a full-function screen reader for general computer use, Narrator is a significant piece of software for a number of reasons. Narrator is included with every copy of Microsoft Windows, providing a measure of access to Windows without the need to install additional software as long as the computer in use includes a sound card and speakers or headphones. Windows 2000 was the first Microsoft operating system released with some degree of accessibility for the blind built in, permitting a blind person to walk up to any such computer and make some use of it immediately.

Narrator can assist a blind person in installing a full-function screen reader, assisting the user until his/her screen reader of choice is up and running. As well, because Narrator is a lightweight screen reader that requires minimal "hooks" into the operating system, Narrator can provide speech when a full-function screen reader might be unable to do so, such as during the process of updating hardware drivers.

The Windows 2000 version of Narrator uses SAPI 4 and allows the use of other SAPI 4 voices. The Windows XP version uses the newer SAPI 5. However, it only allows the use of the default voice, Microsoft Sam, even if other voices have been installed. In Windows Vista and Windows 7, Narrator has been updated to use SAPI 5.3 and the Microsoft Anna voice for English. In Windows Ultimate and Windows editions for China, the Microsoft Lili voice for Mandarin Chinese is included.

External links

- Windows XP accessibility tips (Microsoft.com) (<http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/accessibility/default.mspx>)
- Microsoft.com - Hear text read aloud with Narrator (<http://www.microsoft.com/enable/training/windowsvista/narrator.aspx>)

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