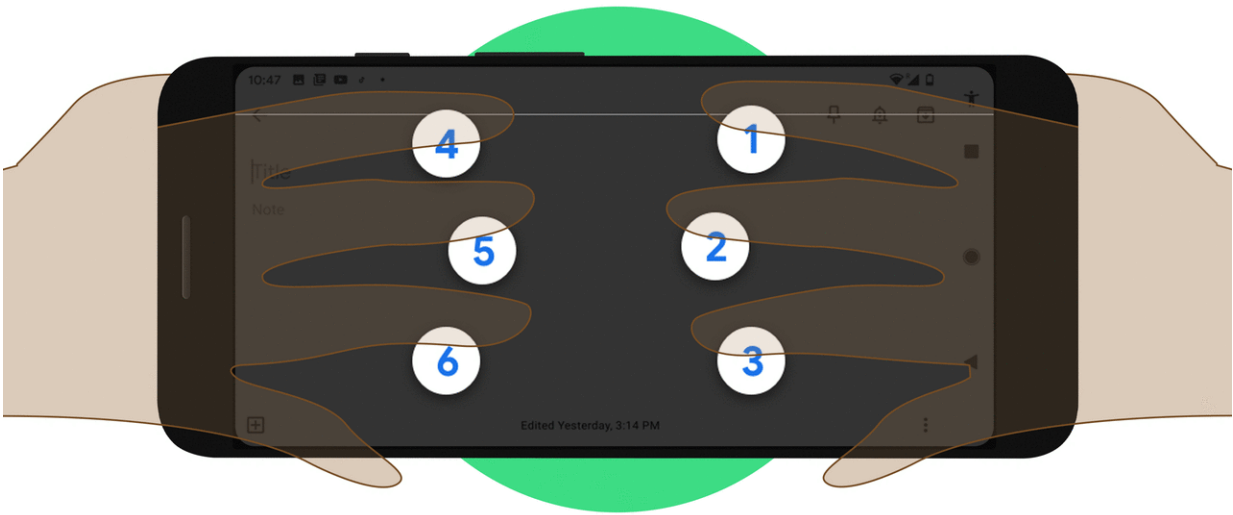


Google introduces braille keyboard for Android

April 13 2020, by Peter Grad



Credit: Google

Google released a built-in virtual Braille keyboard for blind and visually impaired users last week. The new TalkBack keyboard was enabled Thursday on devices running Android 5.0 or later. Distribution will continue throughout this week.

The [keyboard](#) consists of six keys representing the dots used to create letters, number and symbols in Braille. For example, the letter "A" in Braille is represented by the button labeled "1." The letter "B" is typed by pressing buttons "1" and "2" simultaneously.

Google devised the new program working closely with developers specializing in Braille applications. In a blog post last week, Google stated that anyone who has already used Braille will be familiar with the new program.

"As part of our mission to make the world's information universally accessible," the Google post said, "we hope this keyboard can broadly expand Braille literacy and exposure among blind and low-vision people."

Visually impaired individuals have long had to rely on physical keyboards connected to their computers to allow them to type in Braille. Such systems, according to the American Foundation for the Blind, cost between \$3,500 and \$15,000.

For now, the program is available only in English.

To activate the new keyboard, users should go to the Accessibility section in Android Settings. Grades 1 and 2 in Braille are supported. Grade 1 consists of fundamental letters and characters, Grade 2 adds phonetic symbols, punctuation, formatting marks, contractions and abbreviations.

The program provides feedback to users as they type. The feedback can be a spoken letter, word, vibration or other types of audible response. There is also gesture functionality to delete letters or words, start a new line or send text to a recipient.

Google has offered a series of innovations over the years to assist visually impaired users. In 2018, it unveiled Voice Access, which permits users to control their devices using only their voice. When initiated, numbers appear onscreen next to any actionable options such as clicking, saving, deleting and sending.

Last fall, a new feature was added for Chrome web browser users that recognizes images and uses [artificial intelligence](#) to describe what appears in those images. Previously, visually impaired users would hear only that an image or "unlabeled graphic" is present.

Also last fall, Google introduced Live Caption, which generates [real-time](#) captioning for videos, podcasts and audio messages on Pixel 4 smartphones. The feature was later expanded to older model phones. Live Caption does not work on voice or video calls.

More information: www.blog.google/products/android/braille-keyboard/

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