

BTW:

New

# Free Speech to Text Google App: Live Transcribe



As a person with a profound hearing loss, I've always been notoriously shy. Unless I have a specific request or task to do, I'm helpless in communicating with people. For the longest time, I had oral interpreters, and never thought I'd have to face a time where I wouldn't always be able to rely on their presence to let me know what was being said.

When it comes to talking to complete strangers, I'm always intimidated because I never know for sure if I'll be able to understand the first words that come out of their mouths, let alone whether they speak English or not.

I've been waiting for the longest time for real-time captioning (where text would slowly reveal what reporters are saying during the news) to show up outside of TV, so I wouldn't have to try following snatches of conversations, flipping my head back and forth like a paddle ball on a string.

After a decade of stalled progress, that time has come.

There's an app called Live Transcribe that's available for Android phones. It can convert speech to text, showing what people say. It's all I've ever dreamed of and compared to other free apps on the market, it's really good. In fact, it's almost as good as a person doing real-time captioning!

Granted, the technology isn't exactly perfect, as some words tend to get garbled and misunderstood, and it's not great at filtering out background sounds in a crowded noisy environment, but it's a promising start. Hopefully future upgrades will be able to improve on these glaring flaws and fill in the gaps, including differentiating between who's talking and what background music is playing, but maybe that's a little too much to ask.

The app has an extra feature, a colourful box that pops up when a certain kind of background noise comes up. Some of these noise notifications include Traffic, Laughter, Barking, and the like. But like Live Transcribe, it sometimes has trouble telling the difference between various sounds. When I whistle, it thinks I'm a Singing Bird!





In the meantime, it comes in handy for understanding what's going on when people are talking to me, or when there are a few people engaged in conversation when I'm around. I can get the gist of their conversation without having to worry about jumping in and interrupting. And if I think of something I'd like to say, I can bring it up when I see an opening. Contributing what you know is a wonderful feeling.

An added bonus is that when I leave it in a room, it will retrieve all kinds of idle gossip spoken by people

who talk freely, never knowing that their conversation is being recorded. Then, when I come back into the room, I can easily catch up on their dialogue without having to ask them to go through the trouble of recapping what they've just talked about.

Just as hearing aids aren't miracle cures for being able to instantly hear everything, the Live Transcribe app isn't a miracle cure for hearing rapid conversations in a crowded room...yet.

### Tips to use when using the app:

- A stand to rest your phone on is recommended. Preferably one that's attached to your cellphone holder.
- The size, dimension and colour of the text can be increased and adjusted to make it easier for you to read. Large, extra-large, white on black, or black on white.
- Limit the amount of background music/noise; it doesn't work as well if there's too much noise. This may "confuse" the app.
- It works better if there are not too many people talking. If possible, find a quieter place if you want to talk to a specific person.
- Ask people to speak slowly and clearly. Considering their natural speaking speed, this might be an uphill battle.

If you plan to attend meetings or lectures, you can purchase a mic that connects to your cellphone via Bluetooth. The mic can be given to one specific person, such as a teacher or speaker. If needed, the mic can be transferred to whoever's going to speak next.

### Daniel Basch Tétreault

Daniel has been doing volunteer work at CHIP (now Hear Québec) for over 10 years. He was born deaf, with a profound hearing loss. In addition, it was later discovered that he has Asperger's. With a degree in library science, he maintains his comic blog and works on his Black Comedy WebNovel, [This Is They: the chronicles what it feels like to be a Deaf Aspergerian](#).

