

Michael Miller

My Smart Home *for* Seniors



que[®]

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My Smart Home for Seniors

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Contents at a Glance

	About the Author	xiv
	Dedication	xv
	Acknowledgments	xv
Chapter 1	Making Your Life Easier with Smart Home Technology	3
Chapter 2	Understanding Smart Home Hubs and Controllers	21
Chapter 3	Automating Your Home Lighting	41
Chapter 4	Automating Heating and Cooling	71
Chapter 5	Automating Home Security	99
Chapter 6	Automating Your Kitchen and Laundry	135
Chapter 7	Automating Home Entertainment	153
Chapter 8	Exploring Other Smart Devices and Applications	169
Chapter 9	Controlling Your Smart Home with Wink	185
Chapter 10	Controlling Your Smart Home with Apple Home	213
Chapter 11	Controlling Your Smart Home with Amazon Alexa	235
Chapter 12	Controlling Your Smart Home with Google Home	269
Chapter 13	Using Smart Technology for Independent Living	291
Chapter 14	Adding More Functionality with IFTTT	305
Chapter 15	Evaluating Privacy and Security Concerns	319
Chapter 16	What's Next (ONLINE ONLY)	
	Glossary	331
	Index	335

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Table of Contents

About the Author	xiv
Dedication	xv
Acknowledgments	xv

1

Making Your Life Easier with Smart Home Technology

3

What Is a Smart Home?	4
How Smart Home Technology Works	6
Smart Communications	6
Smart Operations	7
Smart Interactivity	8
What Can Your Smart Home Control?	9
Smart Lighting	9
Smart Heating and Cooling	11
Smart Home Security	12
Smart Appliances	13
Smart Home Entertainment	14
Smart Home Control	15
And More... ..	15
Why You Need to Turn Your Home into a Smart Home	16
Saving Time and Effort	16
Saving Money and Conserving Energy	17
Doing More	17

2

Understanding Smart Home Hubs and Controllers

21

Understanding Smart Home Technologies	21
X10	23
Insteon	24
Wi-Fi	25
Bluetooth	25
Z-Wave	25
ZigBee	26

Comparing Smart Home Systems	26
Insteon	27
SmartThings by Samsung	28
Wink	28
And More...	29
What Works with What?	30
Comparing Smart Home Controllers	34
Apple HomeKit	35
Amazon Echo and Alexa	36
Google Home	37

3 Automating Your Home Lighting 41

Considering Smart Lighting Systems	41
Insteon	41
LIFX	42
Philips Hue	42
Wink	43
Other Systems	43
Using the Philips Hue Personal Wireless Lighting System	44
Connect the Hue Bridge	44
Connect to the Hue Dimmer Switch	46
Control Your Lights with the Dimmer Switch	48
Connect to the Hue App	48
Create a Room	50
Add More Lights or Accessories	52
Turn Lights On or Off with the Hue Smartphone App	54
Dim Your Lights	55
Adjust a Light's Color Temperature	55
Select a Scene	57
Create a New Scene	58
Create a New Home & Away Routine	61

Create a Wake Up Routine	65
Create a Go to Sleep Routine	66

4 Automating Heating and Cooling 71

Understanding Smart Thermostats	71
How Smart Thermostats Work	72
Should You Upgrade to a Smart Thermostat?	74
Evaluating Smart Thermostats	75
Carrier Cor Wi-Fi Thermostat	76
Ecobee	77
Emerson Sensi Wi-Fi Thermostat	78
Honeywell Lyric Round Wi-Fi Thermostat	79
Honeywell Wi-Fi Smart Thermostat	80
Nest Learning Thermostat	80
Using the Nest Learning Thermostat	83
Set Up and Configure Your Nest Thermostat	84
Control Your Thermostat	90
Set the Temperature	91
Program Your Nest	93
Learning Your Routine	94
Connecting Your Nest to Other Smart Devices	95

5 Automating Home Security 99

Adding a Smart Doorbell	100
How Smart Doorbells Work	100
August Doorbell Cam	101
Ring Video Doorbell	103
SkyBell HD Wi-Fi Video Doorbell	105
Installing a Smart Door Lock	106
How Smart Door Locks Work	107
August Smart Lock	108

Kwikset Kevo	111
Kwikset Premis	112
Schlage Connect	113
Schlage Sense	113
Yale Assure Lock with Bluetooth	114
Using Smart Security Cameras	115
How Smart Cameras Work	115
Arlo Q	117
Arlo Pro	118
Canary Flex	119
Nest Cam Indoor and Outdoor	120
Working with Smart Smoke and CO Detectors	122
Birdi	123
Halo+	124
Nest Protect	124
Assembling a Smart Home Security System	126
Samsung SmartThings	127
Wink	128
Canary	128
Piper	130
iSmartAlarm	131
SimpliSafe	132

6 Automating Your Kitchen and Laundry 135

Understanding Today's Smart Appliances	136
Smart Operation	136
Smart Monitoring	137
Smart Energy Savings	137
Smart Maintenance	137

Smarter Food Storage with Smart Refrigerators	138
GE Connected Refrigerators	138
LG SmartThinQ Refrigerators	139
Samsung Family Hub Refrigerators	140
Smarter Cooking with Smart Ranges and Ovens	142
GE Wi-Fi Connected Ovens and Ranges	142
LG SmartThinQ Ranges	143
Samsung Wi-Fi Ranges	144
Smarter Dishwashing with Smart Dishwashers	145
Bosch Dishwasher with Home Connect	145
GE Wi-Fi Connected Dishwashers	145
Smarter Cleaning with Smart Washers and Dryers	146
GE Wi-Fi Connected Washers and Dryers	147
LG SmartThinQ Washers and Dryers	148
Whirlpool	148

7 Automating Home Entertainment 153

Watching Smart TV	153
What's Inside a Smart TV	154
What a Smart TV Does	155
Using a Typical Smart TV	156
Using a Smart Set-Top Box	158
Streaming Audio Throughout Your Home	159
Using the Amazon Echo as a Speaker	160
Using Google Home as a Speaker	161
Using the Harmony Hub	162
Getting to Know the Harmony Hub	162
What's It Work With?	164
Setting Up the Harmony Hub	164
Using the Harmony Hub	165

8 Examining Other Smart Devices and Applications 169

Smart Devices for the Living Room	169
Smart Plugs	170
Smart Outlets	171
Smart Wall Switches	171
Smart Motion Detectors	172
Smart Window Coverings	173
Smart Vacuums	174
Smart Devices for the Bedroom	175
Smart Bedding and Accessories	175
Smart Devices for the Kitchen	176
Smart Coffee Makers	177
Smart Cooking Appliances	178
Smart Devices for the Garage	178
Smart Garage Door Openers	178
Smart Car Adapter	180
Smart Devices for Outdoors	181
Smart Irrigation Systems	181
Smart Lawn Mowers	181

9 Controlling Your Smart Home with Wink 185

Getting to Know Wink	185
Setting Things Up	187
Connect the Wink Hub 2	188
Add a New Device via Barcode Scanning	190
Manually Add a New Device	193
Using the Wink App	196
Turn a Device On or Off	196
View Information from a Sensor	197
Create a Shortcut	199
Activate a Shortcut	201

Automating Activities with Robots and Events	202
Create a Robot	202
Remove a Robot	206
Create an Event	206

10 Controlling Your Smart Home with Apple Home 213

Understanding Apple HomeKit	214
How HomeKit Works	214
What's Compatible with HomeKit	215
Adding Devices and Rooms	216
Add a New Device	217
Add a New Room	219
Assign an Accessory Device to a Room	220
Create a Scene	222
Controlling Your Smart Devices	223
Control a Device or Scene	224
Controlling Devices and Scenes with Siri	225
Automating Multiple Devices	225
Create a Location Automation	227
Create a Time Automation	229
Create a Controlled Automation	231

11 Controlling Your Smart Home with Amazon Alexa 235

Understanding Alexa—and Echo	236
What Alexa Does and How Alexa Works	236
Using Alexa as a Smart Home Controller	236
Meet Amazon's Echo Devices	237
Amazon Echo	237
Amazon Echo Dot	238
Amazon Echo Show	239
Which Echo Is Right for You?	239

Setting Up Your Echo Device	240
Set Up Your Device	241
Changing the Wake Word	246
Working with Alexa	249
Employ General Commands	250
Tell Alexa What to Do	251
Using the Alexa App	252
Tour the Alexa App	252
Link Accounts from Other Services	254
Working with Alexa's Skills	257
Find a Skill	257
Add a Skill to Alexa	260
Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices	261
What's Compatible?	261
Connect a Smart Device to Alexa	261
Working with Device Groups	264
Controlling a Smart Device with Alexa	266

12 Controlling Your Smart Home with Google Home 269

Understanding Google Home and the Google Assistant	270
Setting Up and Using Google Home	271
Set Up Your Device	272
Navigate and Configure the Google Home App	278
Working with the Google Assistant	282
Wake Words	283
Employ General Commands	283
Tell the Google Assistant What to Do	284
Using Google Home to Control Your Smart Devices	285
What Does Google Home Control?	285
Pair a Device with the Google Assistant	286
Use the Google Assistant to Control Your Smart Devices	289

13 Using Smart Technology for Independent Living 291

Making Daily Living Easier	292
Use a Voice-Controlled Personal Assistant	292
Install Smart Lighting Systems	293
Employ a Smart Doorbell	294
Install a Smart Door Lock	294
Consider a Smart Thermostat	295
Keeping You and Your Loved Ones Safer	297
Install a Smart Door Lock	297
Employ Smart Door and Window Sensors	298
Add Smart Cameras	298
Use a Personal GPS Tracker	299
Employ a Personal Safety Device	300
Embracing In-Home Care	303

14 Adding More Functionality with IFTTT 305

Understanding IFTTT	306
How Does IFTTT Work?	306
Why Would You Want to Use IFTTT?	307
What Does IFTTT Work With?	308
Using IFTTT Applets	308
Link a Device or Service to IFTTT	309
Find and Activate an Applet	311
Manage Your Applets	313
Creating Your Own Applets	313
Understanding the Parts of an Applet	313
Create a New Applet	314

15 Evaluating Privacy and Security Concerns 319

Privacy Concerns	320
What Do They Really Know About You?	320
How Much Privacy Do You Need?	322

Security Issues	323
Spyware and Botnets	323
Seizing Control	325
What Can You Do?	326
Making Your Smart Home Safer	327
Is It Safe Enough?	328

16 What's Next? (ONLINE ONLY)

Glossary	331
-----------------	------------

Index	335
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About the Author

Michael Miller is a popular and prolific writer of close to 200 non-fiction books, known for his ability to explain complex topics to everyday readers. He writes about a variety of topics, including technology, business, and music. His best-selling books for Que include *My iPad for Seniors*, *My Facebook for Seniors*, *My Social Media for Seniors*, *My Internet for Seniors*, *My Samsung Galaxy S7 for Seniors*, *My Windows 10 Computer for Seniors*, *Easy Computer Basics*, and *Computer Basics: Absolute Beginner's Guide*. Worldwide, his books have sold more than 1.5 million copies.

Find out more at the author's website: www.millerwriter.com

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Dedication

To my six wonderful grandkids, who are all interested in smart technology (especially Amazon Alexa!): Collin, Alethia, Hayley, Judah, Lael, and Jackson.

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Technology Note

Smart home technology is continuously and rapidly changing. The products and services discussed in this book were accurate at the time of writing, but it's likely that some things will have changed by the time you are reading this text. Always consult with device manufacturers for the latest models, features, and prices.

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In this chapter, you learn how to use the Alexa personal assistant to control smart home devices via Amazon's Echo and Echo Dot devices.

- Understanding Alexa—and Echo
- Meet Amazon's Echo Devices
- Setting Up Your Echo Device
- Working with Alexa
- Using the Alexa App
- Working with Alexa's Skills
- Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices

11

Controlling Your Smart Home with Amazon Alexa

All the smart home systems and hubs come with their own smartphone apps to control their various smart devices. And, as described in Chapter 10, “Controlling Your Home with Apple Home,” there’s Apple HomeKit, which lets you control systems from multiple companies from the unified Home app. All of these apps attempt to simplify the operation of what is essentially a set of complex technologies.

But if you really want to make your smart home easy to control, there’s nothing easier than using voice commands. That’s where Amazon comes in, via its Echo and Echo Dot devices and Alexa personal digital assistant. The Echo/Dot devices connect to all (or most) of your smart hubs and devices via your home’s wireless Wi-Fi network, and then you can control those devices via simple voice commands. Just tell Alexa what you want to do, and it controls the devices to do it.

It’s far and away the easiest way to control your smart home. (And there’s more beyond that, too!)

Understanding Alexa—and Echo

In spite of the name and the voice, Alexa isn't a person. No, Alexa is just a piece of software, a kind of intelligent digital assistant that interacts with you using voice commands. That is, you talk to Alexa and she (or is it an it?) talks back. There are no keyboards to type or touchscreen to touch; it's all done vocally.

What Alexa Does and How Alexa Works

In many ways, Alexa is similar to Siri on an Apple iPhone or Cortana in Windows 10. You ask Alexa a question or issue a command, and Alexa answers your question or does what you've asked it to do. You speak, Alexa listens. Alexa "speaks," and you get whatever it is you've asked for.

What can you use Alexa to do? Well, you can have Alexa find current information (weather forecast, news headlines, sports scores), find interesting and useful facts, calculate math problems, and retrieve recipes. You can also use Alexa to play music, add items to your calendar or to-do list, and order items online. And, more pertinent to our current interests, you can use Alexa to control various smart devices in your smart home.

For Alexa to do all that she does, she has to connect to the Internet. That's where she gets all the answers to your factual queries, from various news sites, Wikipedia, and the like. When you ask a question, Alexa essentially does an Internet search and comes back with the closest answer, which she then reads to you. It's a little unnerving if you've never dealt with artificial intelligence; close your eyes, and it's as if you're talking to a human servant instead of a digital one. (In fact, it's easy to drift into a conversational mode with Alexa, which doesn't really work that well.)

Using Alexa as a Smart Home Controller

In addition to connecting to the Internet to find pertinent information, Alexa can also connect to various smart devices in your home. When your smart hub has discovered your Echo device, you can then use Alexa to control those connected devices, using similar voice commands.

Just say "Alexa, turn off the living room lights" and, assuming you have everything set up correctly, the lights will turn off. It's a lot easier than using a smartphone app—or turning off your lights by hand!

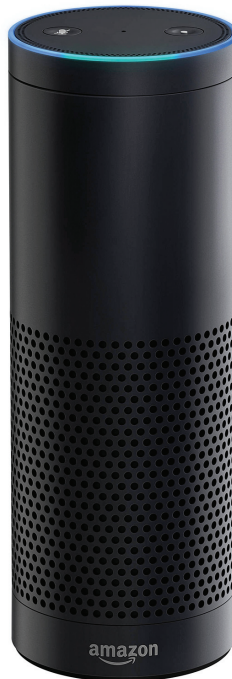
Meet Amazon's Echo Devices

Alexa is a piece of software. You interface with Alexa via a piece of hardware, a freestanding controller that plugs into the nearest electrical outlet and connects to the Internet via your home's Wi-Fi network.

Amazon currently sells five Alexa-controlled devices, and more are no doubt on the way. All these devices include wireless connectivity, feature built-in speakers, and operate in a similar fashion.

Amazon Echo

The original Alexa controller is the Amazon Echo. Amazon originally sold Echo as a kind of wireless speaker, and its height belies the full-range speaker enclosed within. That speaker is useful when you want to use Alexa to play streaming music from Pandora and Spotify and other streaming music services.



The Amazon Echo

Like all of Amazon's Alexa-controlled devices, the Echo uses far-field voice recognition to hear your commands from across a room, even if it's noisy or there's

music playing. The voice recognition works surprisingly well, better than you may be used to with other voice-controlled devices.

The Echo sells for around \$180 and is available in both white and black versions. You can order direct from Amazon (www.amazon.com); it's also available at select retailers. (When you order direct from Amazon it ships preprogrammed with your Amazon account details.)

Amazon Echo Dot

If you don't need a full-range speaker, go with the Echo's smaller sibling, the Echo Dot. The Echo Dot does everything the Echo does but is a lot less obtrusive on your living room or bedroom end table. And, because the Dot does include a speaker (just a smaller one), you can still hear Alexa speak and listen to music; it just won't sound quite as good as with the larger Echo. (If you want better sound, you can connect the Dot to external speakers or headphones via Bluetooth or the included 3.5mm audio jack.)



The Echo Dot

You can also save a hunk of money with the Echo Dot, which sells for just \$50. That's right—you get all the Alexa functionality of the \$180 Echo for less than a third of the price. Unless you really, really need that full-range speaker, that makes the Echo Dot a heck of a bargain. (It's available in both black and white versions, like the original Echo.)

Amazon Echo Show

Amazon's newest Echo is quite a bit different from the others. The Echo Show is an Echo device with a 7-inch touchscreen—or, looking at it another way, a 7-inch touchscreen with Alexa functionality included. It has the same capabilities as the normal Echo (including built-in speakers and microphone), but it adds a built-in display and camera that let you see Alexa's answers and results, as well as engage in two-way audio and video calling with other Alexa users.



The Echo Show

The display can also play back videos, including content from YouTube, Amazon Video, and various news sources (as part of your Flash Briefing). It can also function as a digital picture frame, display lyrics to songs you're playing from Amazon Music, and show live feeds from connected security cameras.

Obviously, the Echo Show is a bigger device than the normal Echo or Echo Dot, and isn't near as unobtrusive as those devices. It's also more expensive, selling for about \$230.

Which Echo Is Right for You?

Which device you choose depends on your specific needs. If you want visual feedback, video playback, or the ability to monitor smart security cameras, your

only choice is the Echo Show with its touchscreen display. If you want to use the device as a freestanding speaker, then definitely go with the better-sounding Echo. If you want to use the device as a smart home controller, however, and don't care so much about the quality of the music playback, then save some bucks and go with the smaller and less-expensive Echo Dot.

Personally, I use the Echo Dot in my living room (and am considering adding a second one in my bedroom). Its smaller size fits better in my living room, and as I have an existing home audio system, I don't need it to function as a speaker. Considering its low price, the Echo Dot is the right smart home controller for many similar users.

Other Alexa Devices

Amazon currently sells two other Alexa-enabled devices. The Amazon Tap is a battery-powered wireless speaker, and the Amazon Echo Look includes a selfie camera to help you make better fashion decisions. In terms of smart home control, both function similarly to the original Echo and Echo Dot.

>>>Go Further

MULTIPLE DEVICES

You're not limited to a single Echo or Echo Dot in your home. In fact, Amazon encourages you to purchase multiple Echo devices, so you can put one in each room where you have smart devices—in your living room, of course, but also in your bedroom or kitchen.

All Echo devices include Echo Spatial Perception (ESP) technology that ensures only the device closest to you will respond to your commands. This eliminates the possibility of your living room Echo responding to you when you're talking to the one in your bedroom.

Setting Up Your Echo Device

Whichever Echo device you have, setup and operation is identical. When you first unpack your device, you need to connect it to your home Wi-Fi network, download the Alexa app to your smartphone or tablet, and then pair your Echo with the smartphone app. After that, you can configure a handful of settings to make Echo work better for you.

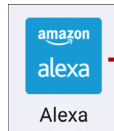
Echo and Echo Dot

Going forward, I refer to both the Echo and Echo Dot as the Echo because their functionality is identical. The figures show the Android version of the Echo app, but it's functionally identical to the iOS (Apple) and Fire OS versions.

Set Up Your Device

Setting up the Echo in your home is a relatively quick and easy process. Just make sure you have a nearby electrical outlet and that your Wi-Fi wireless network is readily accessible. You also need to have the Alexa app installed on your phone or tablet; you can download it (for free) from the Amazon Appstore, Apple App Store, or Google Play Store, depending on what type of phone or tablet you have.

- 1 Connect one end of the supplied power cable to the Echo, and the other to a nearby power outlet.
- 2 Launch the Alexa app on your phone or tablet.
- 3 The Alexa app should recognize you from your Amazon account. (If it doesn't, follow the onscreen instructions to sign in to your account.) Tap **Begin Setup**.



Welcome, Michael Miller!

Get started with these easy steps:

- Connect your device to Wi-Fi
- Learn how to use your device

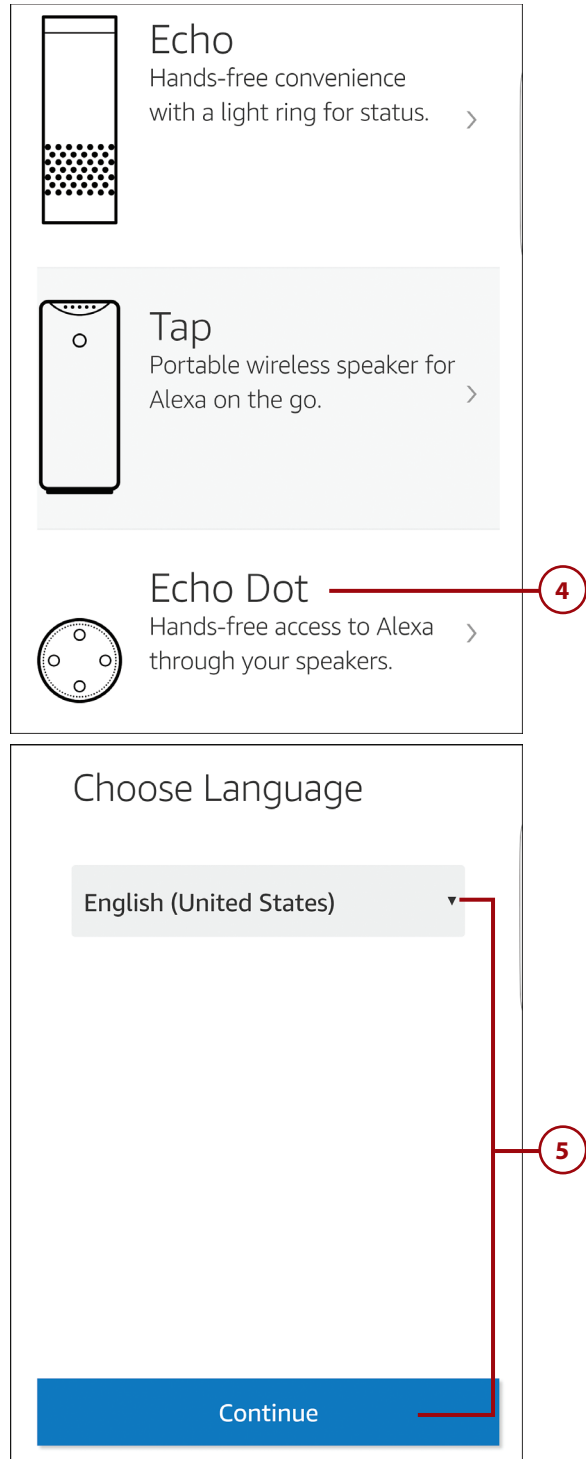
Amazon processes and retains audio and other information in the cloud to provide and improve our services, and may exchange information with third party services to fulfill your requests. [Learn more](#). Alexa also allows purchasing by voice using your default payment and shipping settings. You can require a speakable confirmation code, turn purchasing off, and see product and order details in your Alexa app. [Learn more](#).

By tapping "Begin Setup", you agree to all the [terms found here](#). Your music will be saved to the cloud to protect your purchases.

Begin Setup

3

- 4 Tap to select the device you're setting up—**Echo**, **Tap**, or **Echo Dot**.
- 5 On the next screen, select your language (if it isn't English) then tap **Continue**.

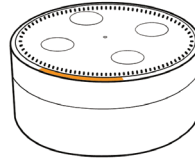


- 6 Make sure your smartphone or tablet is connected to your home Wi-Fi network, and then tap **Connect to Wi-Fi**.
- 7 When your Echo is ready to connect, Alexa tells you so and the ring on the top of the device turns orange. When this happens, tap **Continue**.
- 8 Your smartphone now tries to pair with your Echo. When the connection is established, tap **Continue**.

Connect to Wi-Fi

6

Wait for the orange light ring



Make sure your Echo Dot is plugged into a power outlet. In about a minute, Echo Dot will tell you that it is ready and the light ring will turn orange. Then continue.

Continue

7

✓ **Connected to Echo Dot**

Please continue with setup.

Continue

8





- 9 You now see a list of available Wi-Fi networks. Tap to select your network from the list. (Make sure the network you choose is the same one to which your smart-phone is connected.)
- 10 Enter the password for your network into the **Password** box.
- 11 Save this password, so you don't have to enter it every time you launch the app, by tapping **Save Password to Amazon**.
- 12 Tap **Connect**.
- 13 Amazon prepares your Echo for initial use. This might take a few minutes and involve downloading the latest updates.

Select your Wi-Fi network


Previously Saved to Amazon. [Learn More](#)

No Wi-Fi networks have been saved.

Other Networks

miller-linksys	
DIRECT-roku-930-CB9E0E	
miller-linksys-guest	
miller-linksys_Ext	

Select your Wi-Fi network

Network	miller-linksys_Ext
Password	Password 

☒ Save password to Amazon
Helps connect other devices. [Learn More](#)

[Show advanced options](#)

Connect

Preparing your Echo Dot

This may take a few minutes.

- 14** When the setup is complete, tap **Continue**.
- 15** If you're connecting an Echo Dot, you're prompted to indicate how you want to use the device—with a Bluetooth speaker, with an external speaker via audio cable, or with no additional speakers. Make your selection. You're prompted to view a short video (if you want), and then you see the Alexa app's home screen.

Amazon Account

Your Echo device needs to be connected to your Amazon account to take advantage of all the information and content in your account. As noted previously, if you purchase your device direct from Amazon, it arrives loaded with your account information. If you purchase the device elsewhere, you need to log in to your Amazon account from the Alexa smartphone app when prompted during the initial setup process.

Setup Complete

Echo Dot is now connected to Wi-Fi.

Continue

14

Select how you want to use your Echo Dot

Bluetooth

Pair Echo Dot with your speaker using Bluetooth. >

Audio Cable

Connect Echo Dot to your speaker using an audio cable. >

No speakers

Use Echo Dot as a stand-alone device. >

15

Changing the Wake Word

To ask Alexa a question or give her a command, you have to speak a *wake word* to your Echo device. By default, this wake word is “Alexa.” So, for example, if you wanted to know today’s weather forecast, you would say “Alexa, what’s the weather today?” If you don’t say the wake word, your Echo doesn’t wake up, and Alexa doesn’t hear you.

But what if you don’t like the wake word “Alexa”? What if your name is Alexa and you get tired of your Echo activating every time someone calls you by name? What if you just want to wake up your Echo with something cooler?

Whatever your reasons, Amazon enables you to change your Echo’s wake word. You can choose from four different words:

- Alexa (default)
- Amazon
- Echo
- Computer

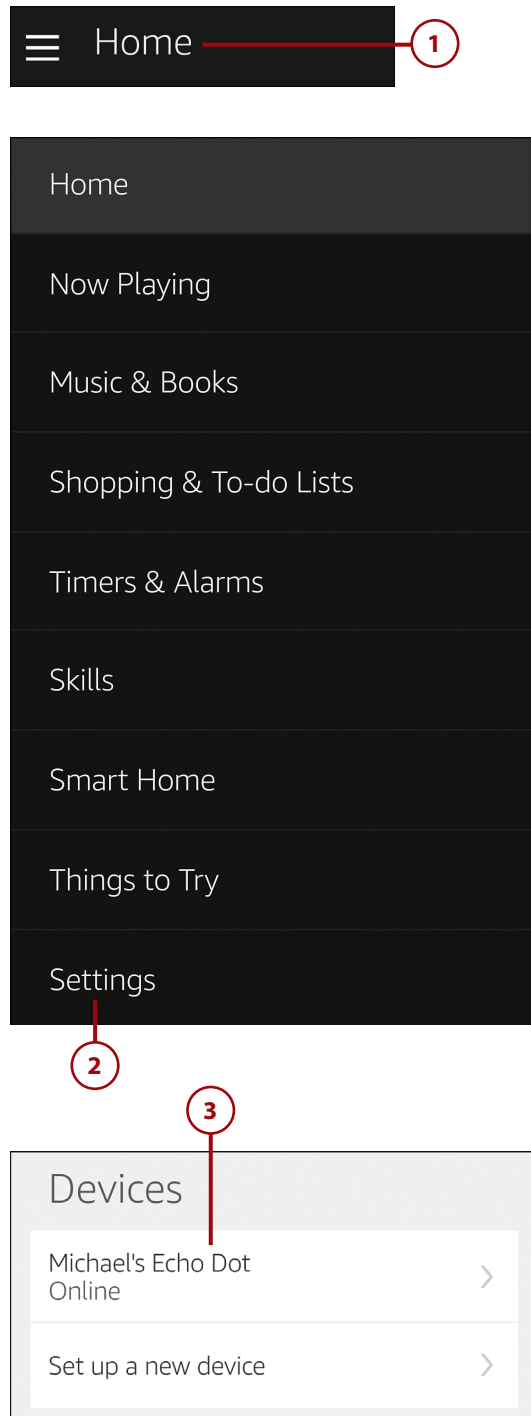
That last one is a gift to *Star Trek* fans. Everybody on the starship *Enterprise*, whichever generation, interfaces with the ship’s computer by first saying, “Computer.” In fact, if you want to have a little fun, ask Alexa “Computer, beam me up” or “Computer, tea, Earl Grey, hot.” There are definitely some Trekkies on the Amazon programming team!

Why “Alexa”?

There were two main reasons that Amazon’s engineers choose Alexa for the Echo’s wake word—and thus gave the digital assistant its name. First, Alexa is a relatively uncommon word; saying most other words might falsely trigger the device. (Imagine if the wake word was “Dave” or “bread” or “mom.”) The second reason is that the “x” in “Alexa” is a hard consonant that is recognized with greater precision than other letters.

Change the Wake Word

- 1 From the Home page of the Alexa app, tap the **Menu** (three-bar) button to display the left navigation pane.
- 2 Tap **Settings** to display the Settings screen.
- 3 In the Devices section at the top of the screen, tap your Echo device.



- 4 Scroll down to the General section and tap **Wake Word Alexa**.
- 5 Tap the down arrow in the first list box.
- 6 Tap to select your desired wake word.
- 7 Tap **Save**. You will now be able to wake your Echo with your new wake word.

Wake Word
Alexa

Language English (United States)

Change your wake word

It will take a few minutes to update the system after you change your wake word. You will not be able to use your Amazon Alexa device or the Alexa app during this time.

Alexa Device wake word:

Alexa

Save

Alexa

Amazon

Echo

Computer

Alexa Device wake word:

Computer

Save

Working with Alexa

Using Alexa is as easy as speaking into your Echo device. Say the wake word (“Alexa,” by default), followed by whatever it is you want Alexa to do.

When the Echo hears the wake word, the ring on the top of the device lights blue, with a small cyan area pointing in the direction of whomever spoke. Alexa listens to your request, and then (sometimes after “thinking” about it for a few seconds) voices her response.



The top ring on your Echo lights blue when it's listening to a voice command

Now, Alexa is not all-knowing. There are many questions you can ask of Alexa that she can't answer. If that's the case, she tells you. She also tells you if she just doesn't understand the question; when this happens, try stating the command again, or maybe try saying it a different way.

In most instances, however, Alexa tells you what she knows, or does what you asked her to do.

What, then, can you ask of Alexa? The questions and commands are almost limitless, but the following sections explain some common questions and commands you can try.

Source Data

Alexa obtains its data from multiple sources. Weather forecasts come from AccuWeather; news comes from a variety of media, including the Associated Press, NPR, ESPN, and local radio stations; music comes from the user's Amazon Music account as well as Pandora and Spotify; and factual information comes from Wikipedia.

Employ General Commands

There are a lot of specific commands you can issue, but depending on what you want to do, there are also a handful of general commands that apply across all actions and applications. When you're using Alexa, you can use the general commands shown in Table 11.1.

Table 11.1 General Commands

Alexa command	Does this
Alexa, stop.	Stops the current operation
Alexa, pause.	Pauses the current operation
Alexa, cancel.	Cancels the current operation
Alexa, mute.	Mutes the sound
Alexa, unmute.	Unmutes the sound
Alexa, volume five.	Sets the volume level; use a number between 0 and 10
Alexa, louder <i>or</i> Alexa, turn it up.	Raises the volume
Alexa, softer <i>or</i> Alexa, turn it down.	Lowers the volume
Alexa, repeat.	Repeats what Alexa just said
Alexa, help.	Requests assistance with the current operation

Tell Alexa What to Do

Alexa can perform a wide variety of operations, from retrieving the latest news and weather to reading audiobooks to answering all manner of questions. Here's a short list of what you can ask Alexa to do:

- Read the latest news stories: "Alexa, play my Flash Briefing."
- Read the weather report: "Alexa, what's the weather forecast?"
- Read the latest sports scores and news: "Alexa, play my Sports Update," or "Alexa, what's the score for the [your team] game?"
- Get traffic information: "Alexa, how is traffic?"
- Play music: "Alexa, play [song or album or artist or genre]."
- Read an audiobook: "Alexa, read the book [book name]."
- Find nearby restaurants and businesses: "Alexa, what [type of food] restaurants are nearby?" or "Alexa, where are the nearest [type of business] stores?"
- Set timers and alarms: "Alexa, wake me up at [time]," or "Alexa, set a timer for [duration] minutes."
- Manage your calendar: "Alexa, what's on my calendar today?" or "Alexa, add an event to my calendar."
- Create shopping and to-do lists: "Alexa, what's on my to-do list?" or "Alexa, add [item] to my shopping list."
- Shop online at Amazon.com: "Alexa, order [item]," or "Alexa, add [item] to my shopping cart."

You can also ask Alexa a variety of random questions. If you want to know how far it is to the moon, what is the capital of Brazil, what was the name of Bob Dylan's first album, or what the square root of 42 is, just ask. Alexa probably knows the answer.

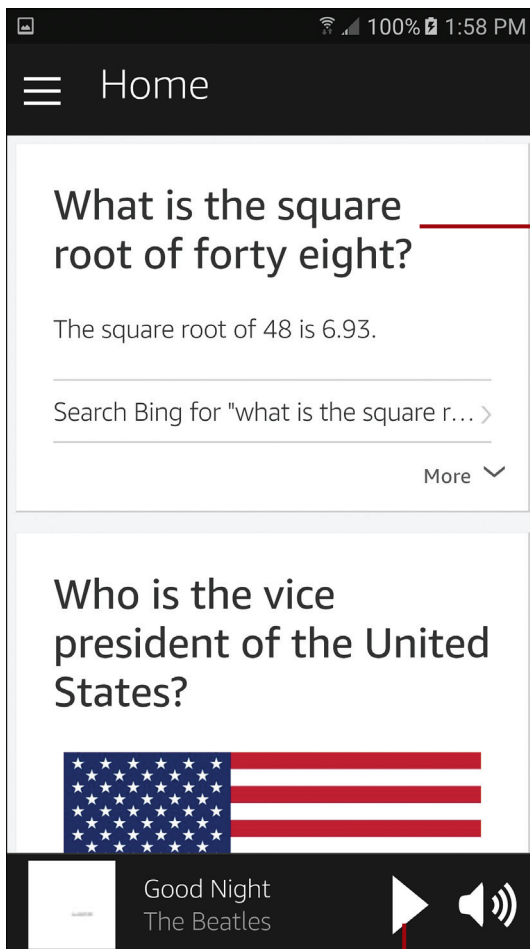
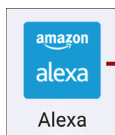
Using the Alexa App

Even though Alexa lets you control your Echo device via voice commands, there's also a lot of behind-the-scenes configuration that you can do by voice. That's one of the reasons why Amazon created the Alexa app for your smartphone, to let you configure and control Alexa when necessary.

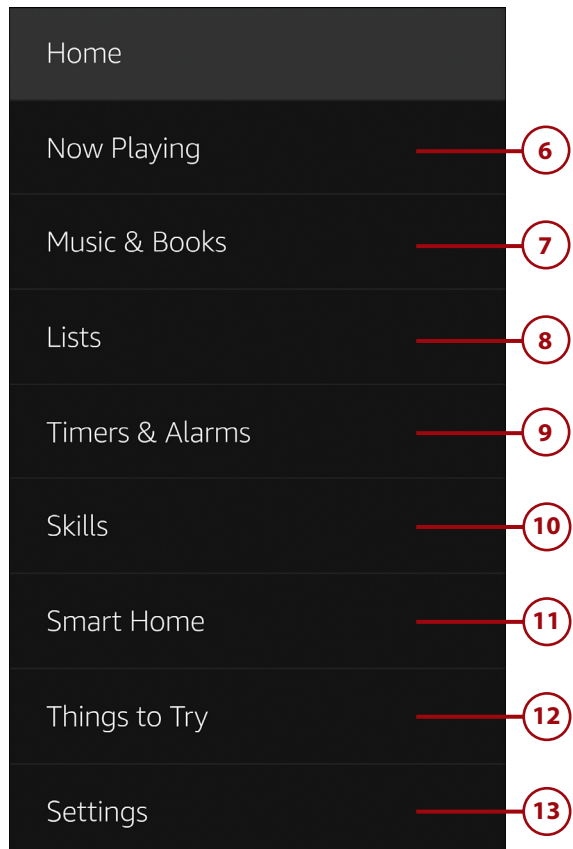
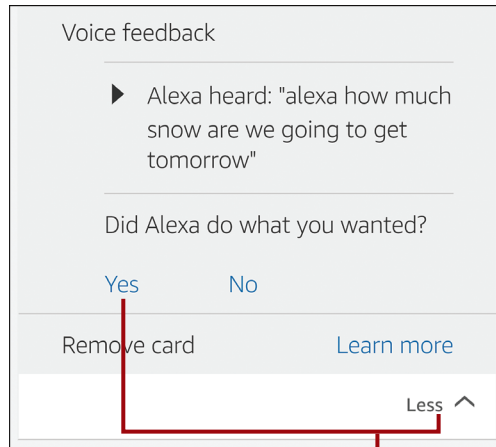
Tour the Alexa App

The Alexa app is relatively simple and easy to use, and you won't need to use it much. But it's good to know what's there and why and how to use it, if you need to. To that end, here's a short tour.

- 1 Launch the Alexa app on your smartphone or tablet. (It's available for Android, Apple iOS, and Fire OS devices; the step-by-steps in this chapter use the Android version.)
- 2 The Home screen displays *cards* that reflect specific commands or activities that Alexa has completed; the most recent is shown first. Scroll down to view additional cards.
- 3 If you've been playing music on your Echo device, a now playing pane may appear at the bottom of the screen. Tap the **Play** button to resume playback, or tap the **Volume** button to change the volume level.



- 4 For some cards, Alexa would like to know how well she performed. If Alexa heard you right, tap **Yes**. If Alexa had a problem, tap **No**. Alternatively, tap **Less** to not display this section.
- 5 Tap the **Menu** (three-bar) button to display the left navigation panel.
- 6 Tap **Now Playing** to display the Now Playing screen. From here you can control playback of items you've played through your Echo; view items in the queue, and view recently played items (History).
- 7 Tap **Music & Books** to view details about and control specific music and book services connected to your Alexa account.
- 8 Tap **Lists** to view and edit your shopping and to-do lists.
- 9 Tap **Timers & Alarms** to manage the timer and alarm volume, and select alarm sounds.
- 10 Tap **Skills** to view and add skills to Alexa.
- 11 Tap **Smart Home** to view and control smart devices with Alexa.
- 12 Tap **Things to Try** to get suggestions of fun and useful things you can do with Alexa.
- 13 Tap **Settings** to view and configure additional Alexa settings.



Skills

Learn more about skills in the “Working with Alexa’s Skills” section, later in this chapter.

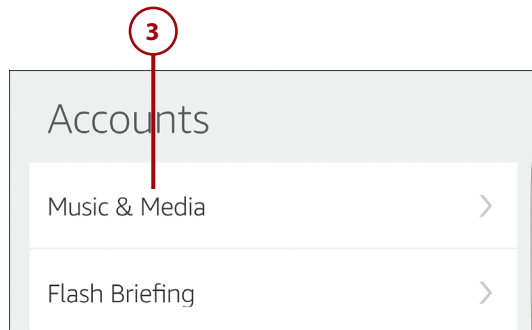
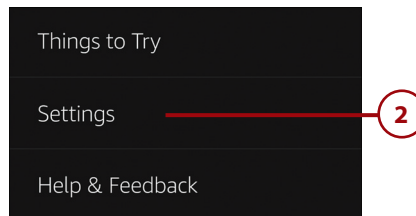
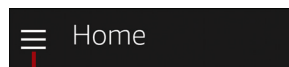
Smart Home

To learn more about Alexa’s smart home features, see the “Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices” section, later in this chapter.

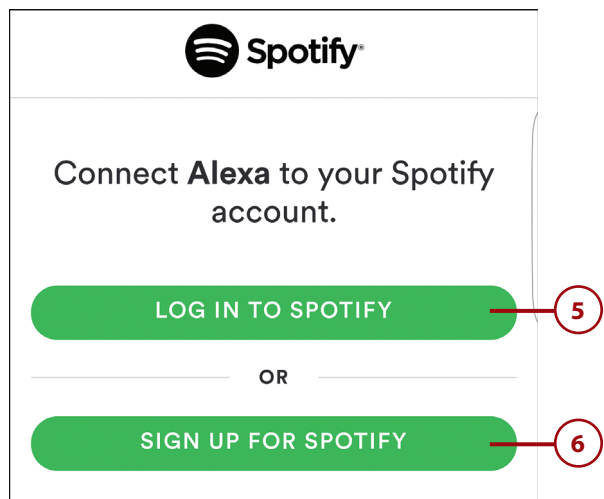
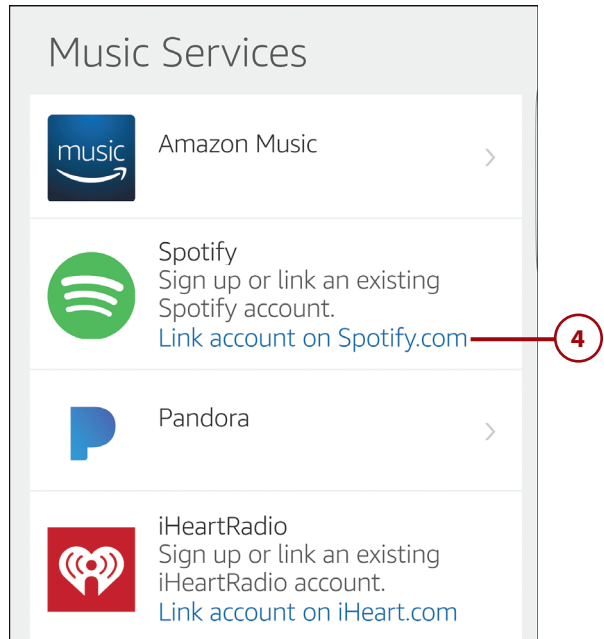
Link Accounts from Other Services

Alexa gets more powerful when you link her to other services that you use. You can link Alexa to your accounts with streaming music services, online calendars, and online to-do lists.

- 1 From within the Alexa app, tap the **Menu** button to display the left navigation panel.
- 2 Tap **Settings** to display the Settings screen.
- 3 Scroll to the Accounts section and tap **Music & Media**.



- 4 Go to the account you want to add to Alexa and then tap **Link Account**.
- 5 If you already have an account with this service, tap the **Log In** button or link and then follow the onscreen instructions to log in to and link to this account.
- 6 If you don't yet have an account with this service, tap the **Sign Up** button or link and then follow the onscreen instructions to create a new account.
- 7 Return to the Settings screen, scroll to the Accounts section, and then tap **Calendar**.



- 8 Tap the tile for the calendar you'd like to use with Alexa.
- 9 Tap **Link Your Calendar Account** to link this account, and then follow any additional onscreen instructions to log on to your calendar account and complete the process.
- 10 If you want to link to a third-party to-do list service, in addition to the lists feature built-into Alexa, return to the Settings screen, scroll to the Accounts section, and then tap **Lists**.
- 11 Tap **Link** for the to-do list account you want to link to, and then follow the onscreen instructions to complete the process.

Calendars

Content from accounts you link to Alexa will be available to anyone using your Alexa services.



Google (0 linked accounts)
Gmail



8



Microsoft (0 linked accounts)
Outlook.com



Google

Michael Miller

[Link your Google calendar account](#)

9

Calendar



Lists



10

Lists

Manage your Alexa lists in any of the following apps.



Anydo
[Link](#)

11



Todoist
[Link](#)

Working with Alexa's Skills

Alexa can get a lot smarter and a lot more useful when you add new skills to her repertoire. A *skill* for Alexa is like an app on your smartphone; an application that enables Alexa to perform a specific task based on a given voice command. You install skills when you want Alexa to be able to do more than she does out of the box.

Amazon offers more than 10,000 skills you can add to your Alexa. There are skills for playing soothing nature sounds (**Ambient Noise**), reading children's stories (**Short Bedtime Story**), and playing trivia games (**Test My Trivia**). There are skills that tell you how to prepare various cocktails (**The Bartender**), concoct a recipe from whatever you currently have in the fridge (**Best Recipes**), and order pizza from Domino's (**Domino's Pizza**) or Pizza Hut (**Pizza Hut**). There's even a skill that lets Alexa serve as a personal alert system if you're in trouble (**Ask My Buddy**).

Even more useful are those skills that let Alexa connect to other applications and devices. For example, the **Fitbit** skill connects your Fitbit personal activity tracker to Alexa and lets you query Alexa on various statistics gathered by your Fitbit device. And, not surprisingly, there are a ton of skills available when you connect your smart home devices to Alexa.

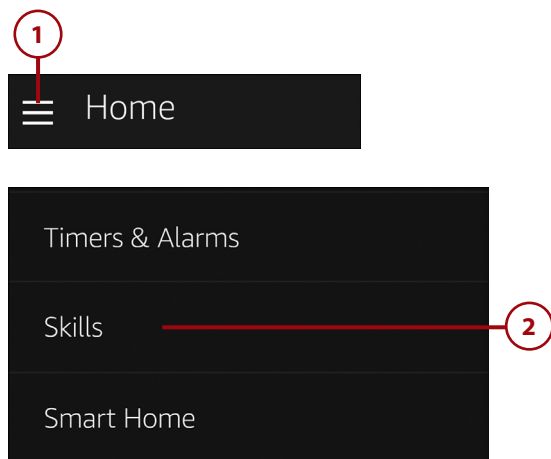
Smart Home Skills

Learn more about Alexa's smart home skills in the "Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices" section, later in this chapter.

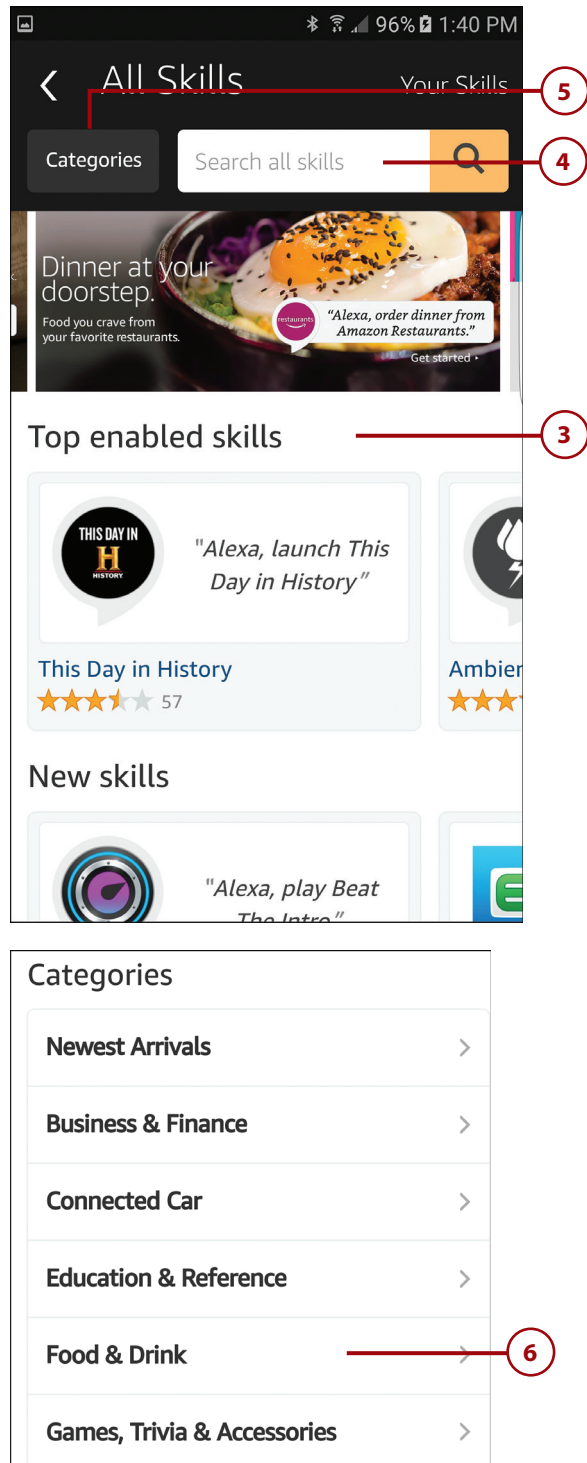
Find a Skill

Finding a new skill is as easy as browsing or searching for it from within the Alexa app.

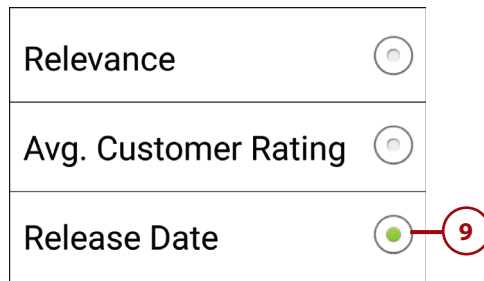
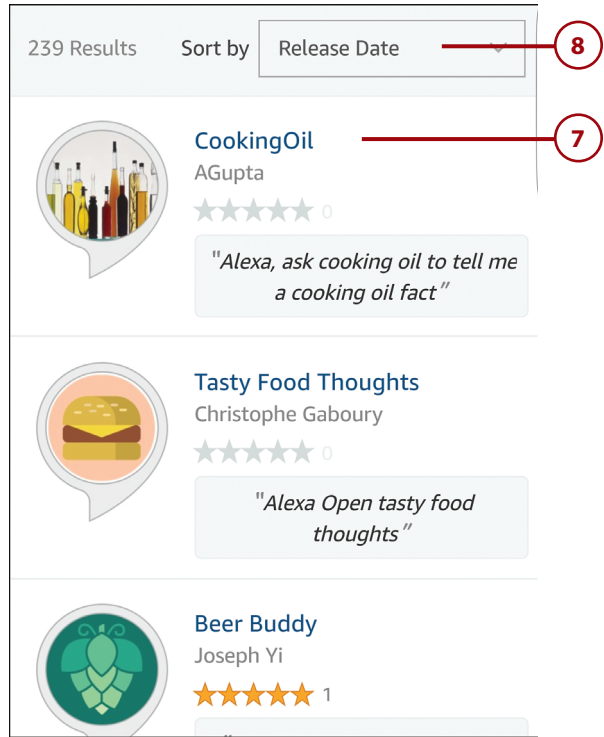
- 1 From within the Alexa app on your smartphone, tap the **Menu** button to display the left navigation panel.
- 2 Tap **Skills** to display the All Skills screen.



- 3 New and recommended skills are displayed first. Scroll down to view more skills, and scroll left and right through any section to view all the skills of that type.
- 4 To search for a skill, enter a short description (or the skill's name, if you know it) into the search box at the top of the screen, and then tap the **Search** (magnifying glass) button.
- 5 To browse through skills by category, tap **Categories**.
- 6 Tap the category you want to view.



- 7 Skills within that category are now listed, newest first. Scroll down to view more.
- 8 To change how skills are displayed, tap the **Sort By** list.
- 9 Tap to sort by **Relevance**, **Avg. Customer Rating**, or **Release Date** (the default).



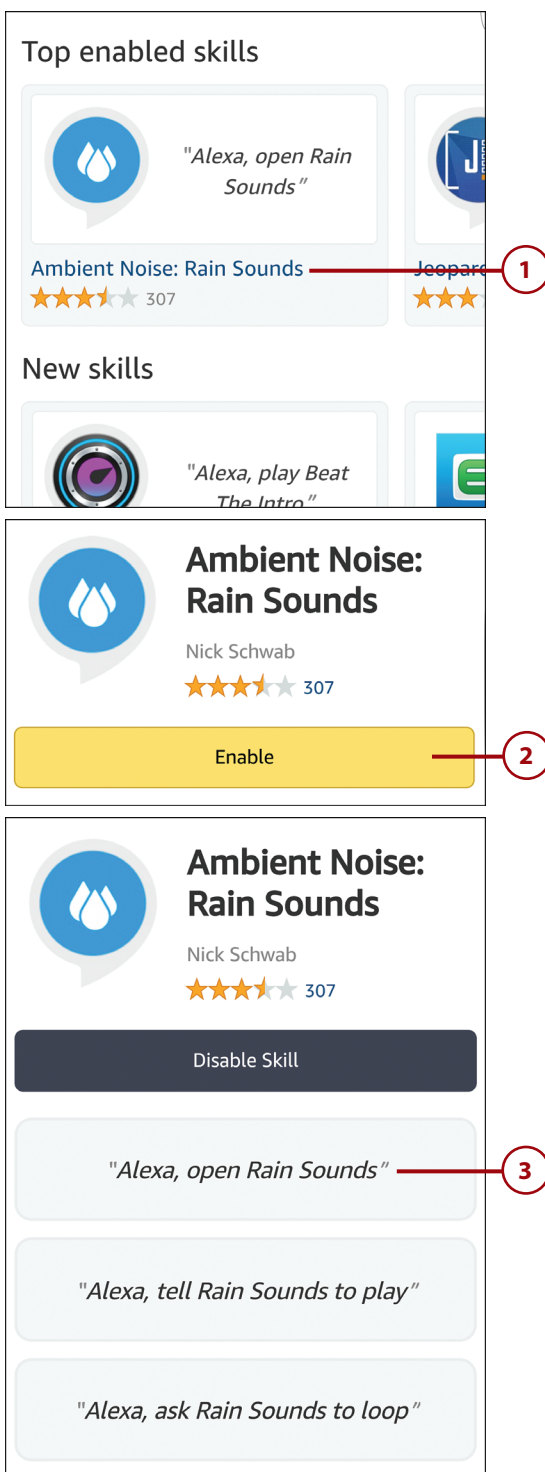
Add a Skill to Alexa

Adding a skill to Alexa is as easy as tapping a button and then following any additional onscreen instructions. You can add an unlimited number of skills to Alexa—and if you end up not using a skill, it's no big deal.

- 1 Use any of the methods discussed in the previous task to find the skill you want to add.
- 2 Tap the **Enable** button.
- 3 The skill is now enabled. Scroll down to read more about this skill, including suggested voice commands.

More Steps Required

Some skills require additional steps to install. For example, if the skill involves a third-party service or website, you might need to sign in to that service or website to enable the app. Follow the onscreen instructions to complete the installation.



Using Alexa to Control Your Smart Devices

All this talk about Alexa and voice commands and skills leads us to the topic you're probably most interested in—how to use Alexa with your smart home devices.

Here's the good news: Alexa is compatible with the majority of smart home hubs and devices on the market today. That means you can control these devices, individually or collectively, via Alexa voice commands. And that's a very neat thing.

What's Compatible?

What smart home devices does Alexa work with? It's a long list, and includes most major smart home systems and devices, including Insteon, SmartThings, and Wink. You can find a complete list at www.amazon.com/alexa-smart-home/b?node=13575751011.

In addition, many other smart devices work with Alexa when they're connected to an Alexa-compatible hub, such as the Insteon, SmartThings, and Wink hubs. In short, there's not a whole lot that *doesn't* work with Alexa, which is good.

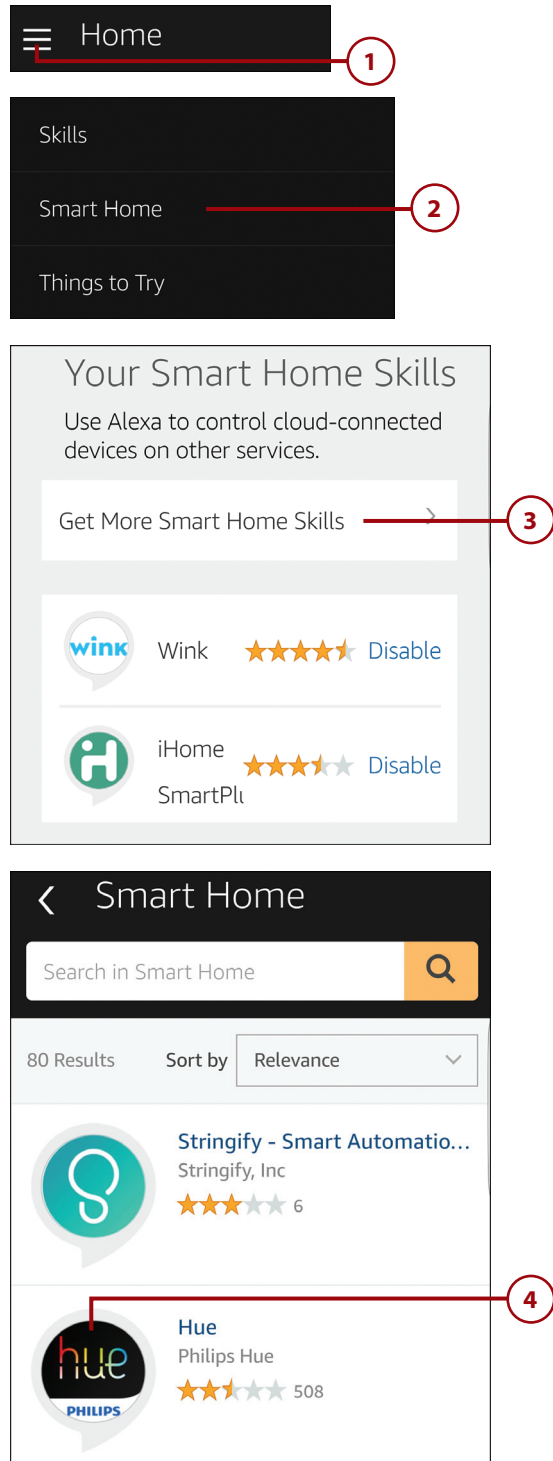
IFTTT

Alexa also supports the If This Then That standard for creating new smart tasks on a variety of smart devices. Learn more in Chapter 14, "Adding More Functionality with IFTTT."

Connect a Smart Device to Alexa

Before you connect any smart device to Alexa, make sure the device is connected to its own smartphone app and to your Wi-Fi network, typically via the device's or system's hub. For example, if you're connecting a Wink-compatible device, make sure it's connected to the Wink Hub; if you're connecting a Philips Hue smart light, make sure it's connected to the Hue Hub. Your Echo device connects to the smart device via the connected hub.

- 1 From within the Alexa app on your smartphone, tap the **Menu** button to display the left navigation panel.
- 2 Tap **Smart Home**.
- 3 Scroll to the Your Smart Home Skills section. Any skills you've previously installed are displayed here. Tap **Get More Smart Home Skills**.
- 4 Additional smart home skills are now displayed. Browse or search the list to find the skill for the smart device you want to connect and then tap that skill to open the skill screen.



- 5 Read about the selected skill and tap **Enable**.
- 6 If you're prompted to sign in to the account for your smart device, do so now.
- 7 If you're prompted to let Alexa control your smart device, tap **Yes** now.

Hue
Philips Hue
★★★★☆ 508

Enable

Log in

g+ Log in with Google

or with your Hue account.

Email address

Password

Forgot your password?

Log in

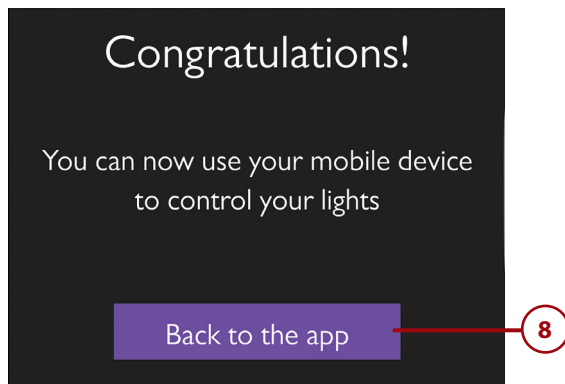
Welcome Michael Miller

Alexa is requesting access to control and monitor your Philips Hue system over the internet. This application will have access to your lights, switches and sensors.

Do you trust this application?

Yes No

- 8 When the connection is complete, tap **Back to the App** to return to the Alexa app.



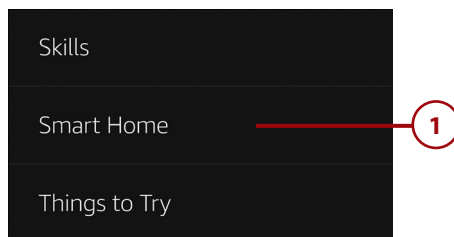
Working with Device Groups

One of the nice things about Alexa is that you can control multiple devices from multiple companies. Now, you can control each device individually with its own unique voice command, but you can also create a single command to control multiple devices at one time. This is useful, for example, for controlling all the lights in a single room, even if those lights come from different manufacturers.

You do this by creating what Alexa calls a *group*. When you add all the lights in your room to a "living room lights" group, for example, you can control all those lights just by telling Alexa to do something to the living room lights, such as, "Alexa, turn off the living room lights." One command takes care of multiple devices when you have them linked together in a group.

Create a Device Group

- 1 From the left navigation menu, tap **Smart Home**.



- 2 In the Your Groups section, tap **Create Group**.
- 3 Type a name for this group into the **Enter a Group Name** box.
- 4 Tap to select those devices you want to include in the group.
- 5 Scroll to the bottom of the page and tap **Save**. Your new group is now saved and ready to use.

Your Groups

Use groups to control multiple devices at a time.

Living room lights
4 Devices

Create group

Enter a group name

Devices in this group

Alexa works best with group names she can understand like "Living Room" or "Upstairs". Names that include numbers, like "Kitchen 1", can be hard for Alexa to understand.

☐ Hue ambiance lamp 1

☐ Concentrate in Living room

☐ Energize in Living room

☐ Floor lamp by couch

Cancel

Save

Controlling a Smart Device with Alexa

After you've connected all your smart devices to Alexa, installed all the pertinent skills, and created groups of devices for easier operations, you can start using Alexa to control those devices. As with anything related to Alexa, all you have to do is say "Alexa," followed by your command.

What you can control depends on the devices you've connected and groups you've created. Some devices only let you perform simple on/off operations with Alexa, like this:

Alexa, turn on the hallway fan.

Other devices let you perform more sophisticated operations, such as dimming lights and such, like this:

Alexa, dim the Hue lights to 50 percent.

Of course, groups have their own commands, like this:

Alexa, turn off the bedroom lights.

And if you've connected a smart thermostat, like the Ecobee or Nest, you can use Alexa to control your temperature, like this:

Alexa, set the house temperature to 70 degrees.

Or this:

Alexa, lower the living room temperature.

You can use Alexa to control all manner of smart devices. For example, both GE and Whirlpool offer appliances that can be voice-controlled by Alexa. Alexa even lets you guide your Roomba vacuum cleaner around the room via voice commands. The sky's the limit!

To learn more about what you can do with a particular device, go the Smart Home screen in the Alexa smartphone app and tap the skill for that device. Most skills have examples of commands you can use.

More to Come

Amazon is continually adding new compatibilities, skills, and features to Alexa. To learn what's new, go to the Home page on the Alexa app; to view the latest skills, go to the app's Skills page.

Index

A

AAL (ambient assisted living), 18

daily living adjustments, 292

medication dispensers, 296

smart doorbells, 294

smart door locks, 294-295

smart lighting, 293-294

smart thermostats, 295

voice-controlled personal assistants, 292

defined, 291

in-home caregivers, 303

for memory care, 297

personal GPS trackers, 299-300

personal safety devices, 300-302

smart cameras, 298-299

smart door and window sensors, 298

smart door locks, 297-298

tracking lost items, 302

accessories

adding in Hue smartphone app, 52-53

adding to Alexa, 261, 264

adding to HomeKit, 217-218

adding to Wink system

via barcode scanning, 190-192

manually, 193-194

assigning to rooms with Apple Home app, 220-221

compatibility of, 6, 30, 33-34

Alexa, 261

Apple HomeKit, 215-216

IFTTT, 308

connecting

to IFTTT, 309-311

to Nest Learning thermostat, 95

controlling, 7, 15

Alexa, 266

Amazon Echo, 36-37

Apple HomeKit, 35-36

- appliances*, 136
 - arrival sensors*, 172-173
 - comparing controllers*, 34-35
 - comparing systems*, 26, 30, 33-34
 - dimmer switches*, 48
 - The Google Assistant*, 289
 - Google Home*, 37-38
 - Harmony Hub system*, 29
 - Home app*, 224
 - Insteon system*, 27
 - malicious intent*, 325-326
 - Nest devices*, 29
 - Siri*, 225
 - SmartThings system*, 28
 - WeMo devices*, 30
 - Wink app*, 196-201
 - Wink Relay*, 195
 - Wink system*, 28-29
 - controlling multiple
 - Alexa*, 264-265
 - Apple Home app*, 222-232
 - Wink app*, 202, 205-211
 - converting dumb devices to, 10
 - Google Home compatibility, 285
 - interactivity among, 8-9, 17-18
 - pairing with *The Google Assistant*, 286, 289
 - security vulnerabilities, 325
 - Wink compatibility, 186
- accounts
- Amazon accounts, connecting Echo devices to, 245
 - IFTTT, creating, 308
 - linking to Alexa, 254-256
- activating applets, 311-312
- air conditioners. *See* cooling
- air quality detectors
 - Birdi, 123
 - feature comparison, 122
 - Halo, 124
 - Nest Protect, 124-125
- air quality monitors, 12
- Alexa, 36-37. *See also* Amazon Echo; Amazon Echo Dot
 - changing wake word, 246-248
 - compatibility with, 34, 261
 - connecting devices, 261, 264
 - controlling smart devices with, 266
 - creating device groups, 264-265
 - devices used with, 237-238
 - explained, 236
 - for independent living, 292
 - playing music with, 160
 - privacy issues, 322
 - reason for name, 246
 - skills
 - enabling*, 260
 - explained*, 257
 - finding*, 257-259
 - finding new*, 266
 - as smart home controller, 236
 - source data for, 250
 - speaking to, 249-250
- Alexa app
 - adding devices, 261, 264
 - cards in, 252
 - explained, 252-253

- finding skills, 257-259
- linking accounts, 254-256
- Allen Band, 301
- Amazon accounts, connecting Echo devices, 245
- Amazon Echo, 15, 34-37. *See also* Alexa
 - changing Alexa wake word, 246-248
 - compatibility with, 34
 - connecting to Amazon accounts, 245
 - explained, 237-238
 - for independent living, 292
 - multiple devices, 240
 - selecting Echo version, 239
 - setting up, 241-245
 - streaming audio with, 160
 - voice control with Harmony Hub, 166
- Amazon Echo Dot. *See also* Alexa
 - changing Alexa wake word, 246-248
 - connecting to Amazon accounts, 245
 - explained, 238
 - multiple devices, 240
 - selecting Echo version, 239
 - setting up, 241-245
- Amazon Echo Look, 240
- Amazon Echo Show, 239
- Amazon Fire TV, 158
- Amazon Fire TV Stick, 159
- Amazon Tap, 240
- ambient assisted living (AAL), 18
 - daily living adjustments, 292
 - medication dispensers*, 296
 - smart doorbells*, 294
 - smart door locks*, 294-295
 - smart lighting*, 293-294
 - smart thermostats*, 295
 - voice-controlled personal assistants*, 292
- defined, 291
- in-home caregivers, 303
- in memory care, 297
 - personal GPS trackers*, 299-300
 - personal safety devices*, 300-302
 - smart cameras*, 298-299
 - smart door and window sensors*, 298
 - smart door locks*, 297-298
 - tracking lost items*, 302
- Android
 - Hue app, downloading, 48
 - smart home system compatibility, 28
- Apple
 - Home app, 34-36
 - adding devices*, 217-218
 - adding rooms*, 219
 - assigning smart devices to rooms*, 220-221
 - controlling smart devices with*, 224
 - creating automations*, 225-232
 - creating scenes*, 222-223
 - described*, 215
 - iPhone versus iPad versions*, 216
 - Home Hub, setting up iPad as, 226
 - Hue app, downloading, 48
 - Siri, controlling smart devices with, 225
 - smart home system compatibility, 28
- Apple HomeKit, 35-36, 214
 - adding devices, 217-218
 - adding rooms, 219
 - assigning smart devices to rooms, 220-221
 - compatibility, 34, 110, 215-216

- creating automations, 225
 - controlled automations*, 231-232
 - location automations*, 227-229
 - time automations*, 229-231
- creating scenes, 222-223
- described, 214-215
- applets
 - creating, 314-316
 - elements of, 313
 - explained, 306
 - finding and activating, 311-312
 - managing, 313
- Apple TV, 158
- appliances
 - coffee makers, 177-178
 - controlling, 136
 - described, 13-14, 136
 - dishwashers
 - Bosch Wi-Fi-enabled dishwashers*, 145
 - GE Wi-Fi connected dishwashers*, 145-146
 - energy savings, 137
 - maintenance, 137-138
 - notifications from, 137
 - pressure cookers, 178
 - ranges/ovens
 - GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens*, 142-143
 - LG SmartThinQ ranges*, 143
 - Samsung Wi-Fi ranges*, 144
 - refrigerators
 - future of*, 141-142
 - GE connected refrigerators*, 138
 - LG SmartThinQ refrigerators*, 139
 - Samsung Family Hub refrigerators*, 140-141
 - slow cookers, 178
 - washers/dryers, 146-147
 - GE Wi-Fi connected washers/dryers*, 147-148
 - LG SmartThinQ washers/dryers*, 148
 - Whirlpool washers/dryers*, 148-149
 - whether to buy, 150-151
- Arlo Pro
 - explained, 118-119
 - feature comparison, 116
- Arlo Q
 - explained, 117-118
 - feature comparison, 116
- arrival sensors, 172-173
- asking questions, the Google Assistant, 284-285
- assigning smart devices to rooms with Apple Home app, 220-221
- Athena, 300
- audio, streaming, 159
 - with Amazon Echo, 160
 - with Google Home, 161-162
- audio groups, creating, 161
- August Connect, 110
- August Doorbell Cam
 - explained, 101-103
 - feature comparison, 101
- August Smart Keypad, 110
- August Smart Lock
 - compatibility, 110
 - explained, 108-110
 - feature comparison, 108

Automatic Pro car adapter, 180
automations, creating with Apple Home app,
225-232

B

barcode scanning, adding devices to Wink
system via, 190-192
batteries in Ring Video Doorbell, 104
Bay Alarm Medical Alert System, 302
bedding, 175-176
Belkin WeMo lighting options, 43
Birdi
 explained, 123
 feature comparison, 122
blinds/shades, 173-174
Bluetooth, 25
Bosch Home Connect Coffee Machine, 177
Bosch Wi-Fi-enabled dishwashers, 145
botnets, 323-324
Bryant Housewise, 77
buying Wink Hub, 187

C

cameras
 for memory care, 298-299
 security cameras, 115
 Arlo Pro, 118-119
 Arlo Q, 117-118
 Canary Flex, 119-120
 feature comparison, 116
 how they work, 115-116
 Nest Cam Indoor/Outdoor, 120-122

Canary Flex
 explained, 119-120
 feature comparison, 116
Canary smart home security, 128-129
car adapters, 180
carbon monoxide (CO) detectors, 12
 Birdi, 123
 feature comparison, 122
 Halo, 124
 Nest Protect, 124-125
cards in Alexa app, 252
Care.com, 303
caregivers, in-home, 303
CareLinx, 303
Carrier Cor Wi-Fi thermostat, 76-77
ceiling fans, 96
Chamberlain MyQ Garage Door Openers and
 Controllers, 179
changing
 network name and password, 327
 wake word (Alexa), 246-248
Chime, 104
Chime Pro, 104
choosing
 Echo version, 239
 scenes with Hue smartphone app, 57-58
Chromecast, 159, 282
CO (carbon monoxide) detectors, 12
 Birdi, 123
 feature comparison, 122
 Halo, 124
 Nest Protect, 124-125
coffee makers, 177-178

collecting data, privacy issues with, 320-322

color temperature

- adjusting with Hue smartphone app, 55-57

- explained, 57

commanding Alexa. *See* speaking to Alexa

commanding the Google Assistant. *See* speaking to the Google Assistant

communications within smart homes, 6

- protocols for, 21

 - Bluetooth*, 25

 - Insteon*, 24

 - Wi-Fi*, 25

 - X10*, 23-24

 - Zigbee*, 26

 - Z-Wave*, 25-26

comparing

- smart home controllers, 34-35

- smart home systems, 26, 30, 33-34

compatibility

- Alexa, 261

- Apple HomeKit, 215-216

- August Smart Lock, 110

- Google Home, 285

- Harmony Hub, 164

- smart devices, 6, 30, 33-34

- smart home systems with Apple/Android, 28

- Wink-compatible devices, 186

complexity of passwords, 327

configuring

- Amazon Echo devices, 241-245

- Google Home, 271-278

- Google Home app, 278-281

- Harmony Hub, 164-165

- Nest app, 92

- Nest Learning thermostat, 84-85, 88

connecting

- Amazon Echo device to Amazon accounts, 245

- dimmer switches, 46-47

- Hue Bridge, 44-46

- Hue smartphone app, 48-50

- IFTTT to smart devices, 309-311

- IFTTT to web-based services, 308-311

- smart devices to Nest Learning thermostat, 95

- Wink Hub, 188-190

- wired versus wireless connections, 157

controlled automations, creating, 231-232

controlling smart devices, 7, 15

- Alexa, 266

- Amazon Echo, 36-37

- Apple HomeKit, 35-36

- appliances, 136

- arrival sensors, 172-173

- comparing controllers, 34-35

- dimmer switches, 48

- the Google Assistant, 289

- Google Home, 37-38

- Harmony Hub, 29

- Home app, 224

- Insteon, 27

- malicious intent, 325-326

- multiple devices

 - with Alexa*, 264-265

 - with Apple Home app*, 222-232

 - with Wink app*, 202, 205-211

- Nest, 29, 90
 - Siri, 225
 - SmartThings, 28
 - systems for, comparing, 26, 30, 33-34
 - WeMo, 30
 - Wink app, 28-29, 196
 - activating shortcuts, 201*
 - creating shortcuts, 199-201*
 - turning devices on/off, 196*
 - viewing sensor information, 197*
 - Wink Relay, 195
 - converting dumb devices to smart devices, 10
 - cooktops, 13
 - GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens, 142-143
 - LG SmartThinQ ranges, 143
 - Samsung Wi-Fi ranges, 144
 - cooling
 - smart ceiling fans, 96
 - smart thermostats
 - advantages of, 74-75*
 - Carrier Cor Wi-Fi thermostat, 76-77*
 - described, 11, 72-74*
 - Ecobee3 thermostat, 77-78*
 - Ecobee4 thermostat, 77-78*
 - Emerson Sensi Wi-Fi thermostat, 78*
 - evaluating, 75-76*
 - history of, 71-72*
 - Honeywell Lyric Round Wi-Fi thermostat, 79*
 - Honeywell Wi-Fi Smart thermostat, 80*
 - for independent living, 295*
 - installing, 82-83*
 - Nest Learning thermostat, 80-85, 88-95*
 - smart vents, 96
 - costs
 - smart lighting, 69
 - smart thermostats, 74
 - Cree lighting, 43
 - crock pots, 13
 - Crock-Pot Smart Slow Cooker with WeMo, 178
 - CubeOne hub, 131
- ## D
-
- data collection, privacy issues with, 320-322
 - DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks, 324
 - deadbolt locks, 12, 106
 - August Smart Lock, 108-110
 - feature comparison, 108
 - how they work, 107
 - for independent living, 294-295
 - Kwikset Kevo, 111-112
 - Kwikset Premis, 112
 - in memory care, 297-298
 - Schlage Connect, 113
 - Schlage Sense, 113-114
 - Yale Assure, 114-115
 - deleting robots with Wink app, 206
 - devices
 - adding to HomeKit, 217-218
 - adding to Wink system
 - via barcode scanning, 190-192*
 - manually, 193-194*

- Alexa-controlled, 237-238
- assigning to rooms with Apple Home app, 220-221
- controlling multiple with Apple Home app, 222-223
- multiple devices with Amazon Echo device, 240
- digital assistants
 - Alexa, 36-37. *See also* Amazon Echo; Amazon Echo Dot
 - changing wake word*, 246-248
 - compatibility with*, 34, 261
 - connecting devices*, 261, 264
 - controlling smart devices with*, 266
 - creating device groups*, 264-265
 - devices used with*, 237-238
 - explained*, 236
 - for independent living*, 292
 - playing music with*, 160
 - privacy issues*, 322
 - reason for name*, 246
 - skills, enabling*, 260
 - skills, finding*, 257-259
 - skills, finding new*, 266
 - as smart home controller*, 236
 - source data for*, 250
 - speaking to*, 249-250
 - Alexa app
 - adding devices*, 261, 264
 - cards in*, 252
 - explained*, 252-253
 - finding skills*, 257-259
 - linking accounts*, 254-256
 - the Google Assistant
 - asking questions*, 284-285
 - controlling smart devices with*, 289
 - explained*, 270-271
 - general commands*, 283-284
 - pairing devices*, 286, 289
 - wake words*, 282-283
 - Siri, controlling smart devices with, 225
- Digital Network Living Alliance (DNLA), 155
- dimmer switches
 - connecting, 46-47
 - controlling lights, 48
- dimming lights with Hue smartphone app, 55
- dishwashers, 13
 - Bosch Wi-Fi-enabled dishwashers, 145
 - GE Wi-Fi connected dishwashers, 145-146
- Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, 324
- D-Link, 126
- DNLA (Digital Network Living Alliance), 155
- doorbells, 12, 100
 - August Doorbell Cam, 101-103
 - feature comparison, 101
 - how they work, 100
 - for independent living, 294
 - Ring Video Doorbell, 103-105
 - SkyBell HD Wi-Fi Video Doorbell, 105-106
- door locks, 12, 106
 - August Smart Lock, 108-110
 - feature comparison, 108
 - how they work, 107
 - for independent living, 294-295
 - Kwikset Kevo, 111-112

- Kwikset Premis, 112
- for memory care, 297-298
- Schlage Connect, 113
- Schlage Sense, 113-114
- Yale Assure, 114-115
- door sensors for memory care, 298
- downloading
 - Hue smartphone app, 48
 - Wink smartphone app, 187
- dryers. *See* washers/dryers
- dumb devices, converting to smart devices, 10

E

- Echo, 15, 34-37. *See also* Alexa
 - changing Alexa wake word, 246-248
 - compatibility with, 34
 - connecting to Amazon accounts, 245
 - explained, 237-238
 - for independent living, 292
 - multiple devices, 240
 - selecting Echo device, 239
 - setting up, 241-245
 - streaming audio with, 160
 - voice control with Harmony Hub, 166
- Echo Dot. *See also* Alexa
 - changing Alexa wake word, 246-248
 - connecting to Amazon accounts, 245
 - explained, 238
 - multiple devices, 240
 - selecting Echo device, 239
 - setting up, 241-245

- Echo Look, 240
- Echo Show, 239
- Echo Spatial Perception (ESP) technology, 240
- Ecobee3 thermostat, 77-78
- Ecobee4 thermostat, 77-78
- Eight Sleep Tracker, 176
- Electronic Privacy Information Center, 323
- Emerson Sensi Wi-Fi thermostat, 78
- enabling skills (Alexa), 260
- encryption, wireless, 327
- energy savings, 17, 137
- entertainment systems
 - described, 14
 - Harmony Hub, 162-164
 - compatibility, 164*
 - configuring, 164-165*
 - usage, 165*
 - voice control, 166*
 - smart TV
 - capabilities of, 155-156*
 - defined, 153-155*
 - Roku TVs, 157*
 - set-top boxes, 158-159*
 - typical usage, 156*
 - wired versus wireless connections, 157*
- streaming audio, 159
 - with Amazon Echo, 160*
 - with Google Home, 161-162*
- ESP (Echo Spatial Perception) technology, 240
- Ethernet connections for smart TVs, 157
- evaluating smart thermostats, 75-76

events, creating with Wink app, 206-211
EzPro BrewGenie Wi-Fi Smart Coffee Maker, 177

F

Family Hub refrigerators, 140-141
fans, 96
Fibaro, 126
finding
 applets, 311-312
 new Alexa skills, 266
 skills (Alexa), 257-259
furnaces. *See* heating
future of refrigerators, 141-142

G

garage door openers, 178-180
Garageio, 179
GE connected refrigerators, 138
GE Link lighting, 43
general commands
 for Alexa, 250
 for the Google Assistant, 283-284
Genie Aladdin Connect Garage Door Controller, 179
GE Wi-Fi connected dishwashers, 145-146
GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens, 142-143
GE Wi-Fi connected washers/dryers, 147-148
GMS Med-e-lert Automatic Pill Dispenser, 296
GoControl Garage Door Opener Remote Controller, 179
Gogogate2, 179

Google Assistant, the
 controlling smart devices with, 289
 explained, 270-271
 pairing devices, 286, 289
 speaking to
 asking questions, 284-285
 general commands, 283-284
 wake words, 282-283
Google Chromecast, 159, 282
Google Home, 15, 34, 37-38
 audio groups, creating, 161
 compatibility, 34, 285
 explained, 270-271
 for independent living, 292
 privacy issues, 322
 replacement bases, 271
 setting up, 271-278
 streaming audio with, 161-162
 voice control with Harmony Hub, 166
Google Home app
 configuring, 278-281
 pairing devices, 286, 289
Google Nest smart thermostats, 76
Go To Sleep routine, creating with Hue smartphone app, 66-68
GPS trackers for memory care, 299-300
groups, creating with Alexa, 264-265

H

hackers
 malicious intent, 325-326
 spyware and botnets, 323-324

Halo+

- explained, 124
- feature comparison, 122

Harmony Hub, 29, 162-164

- compatibility, 164
- configuring, 164-165
- usage, 165
- voice control, 166

heating

- smart ceiling fans, 96
- smart thermostats
 - advantages of, 74-75*
 - Carrier Cor Wi-Fi thermostat, 76-77*
 - described, 11, 72-74*
 - Ecobee3 thermostat, 77-78*
 - Ecobee4 thermostat, 77-78*
 - Emerson Sensi Wi-Fi thermostat, 78*
 - evaluating, 75-76*
 - history of, 71-72*
 - Honeywell Lyric Round Wi-Fi thermostat, 79*
 - Honeywell Wi-Fi Smart thermostat, 80*
 - for independent living, 295*
 - installing, 82-83*
 - Nest Learning thermostat, 80-85, 88-95*
- smart vents, 96

HERO pill dispenser, 296

Home app, 34-36

- adding devices, 217-218
- adding rooms, 219
- assigning smart devices to rooms, 220-221
- controlling smart devices with, 224

creating automations, 225

- controlled automations, 231-232*
- location automations, 227-229*
- time automations, 229-231*

creating scenes, 222-223

- described, 215
- iPhone versus iPad versions, 216

Home & Away routine, creating with Hue smartphone app, 61-64

Home Connect smartphone app, 145

home entertainment

- described, 14
- Harmony Hub, 162-164
 - compatibility, 164*
 - configuring, 164-165*
 - usage, 165*
 - voice control, 166*
- smart TV
 - capabilities of, 155-156*
 - defined, 153-155*
 - Roku TVs, 157*
 - set-top boxes, 158-159*
 - typical usage, 156*
 - wired versus wireless connections, 157*

streaming audio, 159

- with Amazon Echo, 160*
- with Google Home, 161-162*

Home Hub, setting up iPad as, 226

HomeKit, 35-36, 214

- adding devices, 217-218
- adding rooms, 219
- assigning smart devices to rooms, 220-221
- compatibility, 34, 110, 215-216

- creating automations, 225
 - controlled automations*, 231-232
 - location automations*, 227-229
 - time automations*, 229-231
- creating scenes, 222-223
- described, 214-215
- home security
 - smart doorbells, 100
 - August Doorbell Cam*, 101-103
 - feature comparison*, 101
 - how they work*, 100
 - for independent living*, 294
 - Ring Video Doorbell*, 103-105
 - SkyBell HD Wi-Fi Video Doorbell*, 105-106
 - smart door/window sensors for memory care, 298
 - smart locks, 106
 - August Smart Lock*, 108-110
 - feature comparison*, 108
 - how they work*, 107
 - for independent living*, 294-295
 - Kwikset Kevo*, 111-112
 - Kwikset Premis*, 112
 - for memory care*, 297-298
 - Schlage Connect*, 113
 - Schlage Sense*, 113-114
 - Yale Assure*, 114-115
 - smart security cameras, 115
 - Arlo Pro*, 118-119
 - Arlo Q*, 117-118
 - Canary Flex*, 119-120
 - feature comparison*, 116
 - how they work*, 115-116
 - for memory care*, 298-299
 - Nest Cam Indoor/Outdoor*, 120-122
 - smart security systems
 - Canary*, 128-129
 - described*, 12-13
 - iSmartAlarm*, 131-132
 - monitoring services versus*, 126-127
 - Piper*, 130-131
 - Samsung SmartThings Home Monitoring Kit*, 127-128
 - SimpliSafe*, 132-133
 - Wink*, 128
 - smart smoke/CO detectors
 - Birdi*, 123
 - feature comparison*, 122
 - Halo*, 124
 - Nest Protect*, 124-125
 - smart water sensors, 126
- Honeywell Lyric Round Wi-Fi thermostat, 79
- Honeywell Wi-Fi Smart thermostat, 80
- hubs, 7, 15, 22
 - in bedroom, 176
 - Harmony Hub, 29, 162-164
 - compatibility*, 164
 - configuring*, 164-165
 - usage*, 165
 - voice control*, 166
 - Home Hub, setting up iPad as, 226
 - Insteon, 27
 - SmartThings, 28
 - Wink, 28-29, 185-186
 - buying*, 187
 - comparison with Insteon and SmartThings*, 186-187

compatible devices, 186

installing, 188-190

Hue Bridge

connecting, 44-46

range of, 46

Hue lighting system, 42-44

dimmer switch

connecting, 46-47

controlling lights, 48

Hue Bridge

connecting, 44-46

range of, 46

smartphone app

adding lights/accessories, 52-53

adjusting color temperature, 55-57

connecting, 48-50

creating Go To Sleep routine, 66-68

creating Home & Away routine, 61-64

creating rooms, 50-52

creating scenes, 58-61

creating Wake Up routine, 65-66

dimming lights, 55

selecting scenes, 57-58

turning lights on/off, 54

Hue smartphone app

adding lights/accessories, 52-53

adjusting color temperature, 55-57

connecting, 48-50

creating rooms, 50-52

creating routines

Go To Sleep, 66-68

Home & Away, 61-64

Wake Up, 65-66

creating scenes, 58-61

dimming lights, 55

selecting scenes, 57-58

turning lights on/off, 54

IFTTT (If This Then That), 56, 111, 306

accounts, creating, 308

applets

creating, 314-316

elements of, 313

explained, 306

finding and activating, 311-312

managing, 313

capabilities of, 307

compatibility with, 308

connecting to smart devices, 309-311

connecting to web-based services,
308-311

Google Home compatibility, 286

iHome Smart Plug, 170-171

improving security, 327-328

independent living, 18

daily living adjustments, 292

medication dispensers, 296

smart doorbells, 294

smart door locks, 294-295

smart lighting, 293-294

smart thermostats, 295

voice-controlled personal assistants, 292

defined, 291

in-home caregivers, 303

- in memory care, 297
 - personal GPS trackers, 299-300*
 - personal safety devices, 300-302*
 - smart cameras, 298-299*
 - smart door and window sensors, 298*
 - smart door locks, 297-298*
 - tracking lost items, 302*
- in-home caregivers, 303
- installing
 - Nest app, 92
 - skills (Alexa), 260
 - smart thermostats, 82-83
 - Wink Hub, 188-190
- Instant Pot IP-Smart Pressure Cooker, 178
- Insteon Garage Door Controller, 180
- Insteon protocol, 24
- Insteon smart home system, 27, 33
 - comparison with Wink, 186-187
 - lighting options, 41
- interactivity among smart devices, 8-9, 17-18
- Internet of Things (IoT), 7
- iOS. *See* Apple
- iPad, setting up as Home Hub, 226
- iPad Home app, iPhone Home app versus, 216
- iPhone Home app, iPad Home app versus, 216
- irrigation systems, 181
- iSmartAlarm, 131-132

J-K

- Keen Home Smart Vents, 96
- Kevo Plus hub, 112
- keys, virtual, 109

- Kingsdown Sleep Smart, 175
- kitchen, smart appliances
 - Bosch Wi-Fi-enabled dishwashers, 145
 - coffee makers, 177-178
 - controlling, 136
 - described, 13-14, 136
 - energy savings, 137
 - future of refrigerators, 141-142
 - GE connected refrigerators, 138
 - GE Wi-Fi connected dishwashers, 145-146
 - GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens, 142-143
 - LG SmartThinQ ranges, 143
 - LG SmartThinQ refrigerators, 139
 - maintenance, 137-138
 - notifications from, 137
 - pressure cookers, 178
 - Samsung Family Hub refrigerators, 140-141
 - Samsung Wi-Fi ranges, 144
 - slow cookers, 178
 - whether to buy, 150-151

- Kwikset Kevo
 - explained, 111-112
 - feature comparison, 108

- Kwikset Premis
 - explained, 112
 - feature comparison, 108

L

- laundry room, smart appliances, 146-147
 - controlling, 136
 - described, 13-14, 136
 - energy savings, 137

- GE Wi-Fi connected washers/dryers, 147-148
- LG SmartThinQ washers/dryers, 148
 - maintenance, 137-138
 - notifications from, 137
 - whether to buy, 150-151
- Whirlpool washers/dryers, 148-149
- lawn mowers, 181-182
- leak detectors, 126
- LeakSMART, 126
- learning routines, Nest Learning thermostat, 94-95
- LED lighting, advantages of, 10
- LG SmartThinQ ranges, 143
- LG SmartThinQ refrigerators, 139
- LG SmartThinQ washers/dryers, 148
- LifeAlert, 300
- LifeFone, 302
- LifeStation, 302
- LIFX light bulbs, 42
- light bulbs, 22
- lighting. *See also* lighting systems
 - color temperature, explained, 57
 - companies for, 43
 - for independent living, 293-294
 - Insteon, 41
 - LIFX, 42
 - Philips Hue, 42-44
 - color temperature, adjusting, 55-57*
 - dimmer switch, connecting, 46-47*
 - dimmer switch, controlling lights, 48*
 - Go To Sleep routine, creating, 66-68*
 - Home & Away routine, creating, 61-64*
 - Hue Bridge, connecting, 44-46*
 - lights/accessories, adding, 52-53*
 - lights/accessories, dimming, 55*
 - lights/accessories, turning on/off, 54*
 - rooms, creating, 50-52*
 - scenes, creating, 58-61*
 - scenes, selecting, 57-58*
 - smartphone app, connecting, 48-50*
 - Wake Up routine, creating, 65-66*
 - pricing, 69
 - Wink, 43
- lighting systems
 - described, 9-10
 - motion detectors with, 172
 - smart plugs and, 170-171
 - smart window coverings with, 173-174
- linking
 - accounts to Alexa, 254-256
 - IFTTT
 - to smart devices, 309-311*
 - to web-based services, 308-311*
- Lively, 302
- Lively Mobile, 300
- location automations, creating, 227-229
- locks, 12, 106
 - August Smart Lock, 108-110
 - feature comparison, 108
 - how they work, 107
 - for independent living, 294-295
 - Kwikset Kevo, 111-112
 - Kwikset Premis, 112
 - for memory care, 297-298
 - Schlage Connect, 113
 - Schlage Sense, 113-114
 - Yale Assure, 114-115

lost items, 302

Lutron lighting, 43

M

maintenance, smart appliances, 137-138

malicious intent of security hackers, 325-326

malware, 323

managing applets, 313

manually adding devices to Wink system,
193-194

MedCenter, 296

medical alert systems in memory care,
301-302

Medical Guardian, 302

medication dispensers for independent
living, 296

MedMinder, 296

MedReady, 296

Melnor Wi-Fi Aquatimer, 181

memory care, safety measures, 297

personal GPS trackers, 299-300

personal safety devices, 300-302

smart cameras, 298-299

smart door and window sensors, 298

smart door locks, 297-298

tracking lost items, 302

mesh networks, 25

MiPow lighting, 43

MobileHelp, 300-302

money, saving, 17

monitoring services, smart security systems
versus, 126-127

motion detectors with lighting systems, 172

movies. *See* home entertainment

Mr. Coffee Smart Optimal Brew Pro-
grammable Coffee Maker, 177

multiple smart devices, controlling

activating shortcuts with Wink app, 201

Alexa, 264-265

Amazon Echo devices, 240

Apple Home app, 222-232

Wink app, 199-202, 205-211

Wink Relay, 195

music, playing with Alexa, 160. *See also*
home entertainment

MyQ Garage Door Openers and Controllers,
179

N

Nespresso Prodigio, 178

Nest app, installing and configuring, 92

Nest Cam Indoor

explained, 120-122

feature comparison, 116

Nest Cam Outdoor

explained, 120-122

feature comparison, 116

Nest devices, 29

Nest Learning thermostat, 80-82

configuring, 84-85, 88

connecting to other devices, 95

controlling, 90

Google and, 76

learning routine, 94-95

programming, 93-94

setting temperature, 91-92

with Whirlpool washers/dryers, 149

Nest Protect

- explained, 124-125

- feature comparison, 122

- network name, changing, 327

- notifications from smart appliances, 137

O

- Orbit B-Hyve Smart Wi-Fi Sprinkler Timer, 181

- outdoor devices

- irrigation systems, 181

- lawn mowers, 181-182

- outlets, 10, 171

- ovens, 13

- GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens, 142-143

- LG SmartThinQ ranges, 143

- Samsung Wi-Fi ranges, 144

P

- pairing smart devices with the Google Assistant, 286, 289

- passwords

- changing, 327

- complexity of, 327

- personal assistants

- Alexa, 36-37. *See also* Amazon Echo; Amazon Echo Dot

- changing wake word, 246-248*

- compatibility with, 34, 261*

- connecting devices, 261, 264*

- controlling smart devices with, 266*

- creating device groups, 264-265*

- devices used with, 237-238*

- explained, 236*

- for independent living, 292*

- playing music with, 160*

- privacy issues, 322*

- reason for name, 246*

- skills, enabling, 260*

- skills, finding, 257-259*

- skills, finding new, 266*

- as smart home controller, 236*

- source data for, 250*

- speaking to, 249-250*

- Alexa app

- adding devices, 261, 264*

- cards in, 252*

- explained, 252-253*

- finding skills, 257-259*

- linking accounts, 254-256*

- the Google Assistant

- asking questions, 284-285*

- controlling smart devices with, 289*

- explained, 270-271*

- general commands, 283-284*

- pairing devices, 286, 289*

- wake words, 282-283*

- Siri, controlling smart devices with, 225

- personal GPS trackers in memory care, 299-300

- personal safety devices in memory care, 300-302

- Philips Hue lighting system, 42-44

- dimmer switch

- connecting, 46-47*

- controlling lights, 48*

Hue Bridge
 connecting, 44-46
 range of, 46
 smartphone app
 adding lights/accessories, 52-53
 adjusting color temperature, 55-57
 connecting, 48-50
 creating Go To Sleep routine, 66-68
 creating Home & Away routine, 61-64
 creating rooms, 50-52
 creating scenes, 58-61
 creating Wake Up routine, 65-66
 dimming lights, 55
 selecting scenes, 57-58
 turning lights on/off, 54
 Philips Lifeline, 302
 picture scenes, 58
 pill dispensers for independent living, 296
 PillPack, 296
 Piper smart home security, 130-131
 playing music with Alexa, 160
 plugs, 10, 170-171
 PocketFinder+, 300
 Premis Touchscreen Smart Lock, 112
 pressure cookers, 178
 pricing
 smart lighting, 69
 smart thermostats, 74
 privacy issues, 320. *See also* security issues
 amount of data collected, 320-322
 tradeoffs, 322-323
 Privacy Rights Clearing House, 323
 programming Nest Learning thermostat, 93-94

protocols
 Bluetooth, 25
 defined, 23
 Insteon, 24
 Wi-Fi, 25
 X10, 23-24
 Zigbee, 26
 Z-Wave, 25-26

Q-R

questions, asking the Google Assistant, 284-285

 Rachio, 181
 RainRobot, 181
 range of Hue Bridge, 46
 ranges/ovens, 13
 GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens, 142-143
 LG SmartThinQ ranges, 143
 Samsung Wi-Fi ranges, 144
 React Sidekick, 300
 recipes, 56
 refrigerators, 13
 future of, 141-142
 GE connected refrigerators, 138
 LG SmartThinQ refrigerators, 139
 Samsung Family Hub refrigerators, 140-141
 replacement bases for Google Home, 271
 ReST Smart Bed, 176
 Revolar, 300
 Ring Video Doorbell
 explained, 103-105
 feature comparison, 101

Ring Video Doorbell Pro, 105

risks

in privacy issues, 322-323

in security issues, 328-329

Robomow, 182

robots (Wink app)

creating, 202, 205

deleting, 206

Roku Premiere, 158

Roku Streaming Stick, 159

Roku TVs, 157

rooms

adding to HomeKit, 219

assigning smart devices with Apple Home app, 220-221

creating in Hue smartphone app, 50-52

different routines, creating, 68

routers

changing name and password, 327

wireless encryption, 327

routines

creating in Hue smartphone app

Go To Sleep, 66-68

Home & Away, 61-64

Wake Up, 65-66

learning, Nest Learning thermostat, 94-95

S

safety measures in memory care, 297

personal GPS trackers, 299-300

personal safety devices, 300-302

smart cameras, 298-299

smart door and window sensors, 298

smart door locks, 297-298

tracking lost items, 302

Samsung Family Hub refrigerators, 140-141

Samsung SmartThings Arrival Sensor,
172-173

Samsung SmartThings Home Monitoring Kit,
127-128

Samsung SmartThings smart home system,
28, 33

comparison with Wink, 186-187

lighting options, 43

Samsung UN55J6200 smart TV, 156

Samsung Wi-Fi ranges, 144

saving

energy, 17

money, 17

time, 16

scenes

activating

with Home app, 224

with Siri, 225

creating

with Apple Home app, 222-223

with Hue smartphone app, 58-61

Hue dimmer switches, 48

selecting with Hue smartphone app,
57-58

schedules (Nest Learning thermostat)

learning, 94-95

programming, 93-94

scheduling smart devices with Wink app,
206-211

Schlage Connect

explained, 113

feature comparison, 108

Schlage Sense

- explained, 113-114
- feature comparison, 108
- security cameras, 115
 - Arlo Pro, 118-119
 - Arlo Q, 117-118
 - Canary Flex, 119-120
 - feature comparison, 116
 - how they work, 115-116
 - Nest Cam Indoor/Outdoor, 120-122
- security issues. *See also* privacy issues
 - botnets, 323-324
 - improving security, 327-328
 - malicious intent, 325-326
 - spyware, 323-324
 - tradeoffs, 328-329
 - vulnerabilities of smart devices, 325
- security systems. *See also* home security
 - Canary, 128-129
 - described, 12-13
 - iSmartAlarm, 131-132
 - monitoring services versus, 126-127
 - Piper, 130-131
 - Samsung SmartThings Home Monitoring Kit, 127-128
 - SimpliSafe, 132-133
 - Wink, 128
- selecting
 - Echo device, 239
 - scenes with Hue smartphone app, 57-58
- sensors, viewing information with Wink app, 197
- Service Set Identifier (SSID), 327

setting up

- Amazon Echo device, 241-245
- Google Home, 271-278
- Google Home app, 278-281
- Harmony Hub, 164-165
- Nest app, 92
- Nest Learning thermostat, 84-85, 88

set-top boxes, 158-159

shades/blinds, 173-174

shortcuts (Wink app)

- activating, 201
- creating, 199-201

SimpliSafe, 132-133

Siri, controlling smart devices with, 225

skills (Alexa)

- enabling, 260
- explained, 257
- finding, 257-259
- finding new, 266

Skybell HD Wi-Fi Video Doorbell

- explained, 105-106
- feature comparison, 101

Sleep Number 360 Smart Bed, 176

sleep systems, 175-176

slow cookers, 13, 178

smart appliances

- coffee makers, 177-178
- controlling, 136
- described, 13-14, 136
- dishwashers
 - Bosch Wi-Fi-enabled dishwashers, 145*
 - GE Wi-Fi connected dishwashers, 145-146*
- energy savings, 137
- maintenance, 137-138

notifications from, 137

pressure cookers, 178

ranges/ovens

GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens,
142-143

LG SmartThinQ ranges, 143

Samsung Wi-Fi ranges, 144

refrigerators

future of, 141-142

GE connected refrigerators, 138

LG SmartThinQ refrigerators, 139

Samsung Family Hub refrigerators,
140-141

slow cookers, 178

washers/dryers, 146-147

GE Wi-Fi connected washers/dryers,
147-148

LG SmartThinQ washers/dryers, 148

Whirlpool washers/dryers, 148-149

whether to buy, 150-151

smart bedding, 175-176

smart cameras for memory care, 298-299

smart car adapters, 180

smart ceiling fans, 96

smart communications, 6

protocols for, 21

Bluetooth, 25

Insteon, 24

Wi-Fi, 25

X10, 23-24

Zigbee -26

Z-Wave, 25-26

smart devices

adding in Hue smartphone app, 52-53

adding to Alexa, 261, 264

adding to HomeKit, 217-218

adding to Wink system

via barcode scanning, 190-192

manually, 193-194

assigning to rooms with Apple Home app,
220-221

compatibility of, 6, 30, 33-34

Alexa, 261

Apple HomeKit, 215-216

IFTTT, 308

connecting

to IFTTT, 309-311

to Nest Learning thermostat, 95

controlling, 7, 15

Alexa, 266

Amazon Echo, 36-37

Apple HomeKit, 35-36

appliances, 136

arrival sensors, 172-173

comparing controllers, 34-35

comparing systems, 26, 30, 33-34

dimmer switches, 48

the Google Assistant, 289

Google Home, 37-38

Harmony Hub system, 29

Home app, 224

Insteon system, 27

malicious intent, 325-326

Nest devices, 29

Siri, 225

SmartThings system, 28

- WeMo devices*, 30
- Wink app*, 196-201
- Wink Relay*, 195
- Wink system*, 28-29
- controlling multiple
 - Alexa*, 264-265
 - Apple Home app*, 222-232
 - Wink app*, 202, 205-211
- converting dumb devices to, 10
- Google Home compatibility, 285
- interactivity among, 8-9, 17-18
- pairing with the Google Assistant, 286, 289
- security vulnerabilities, 325
- Wink compatibility, 186
- smart doorbells, 12, 100
 - August Doorbell Cam, 101-103
 - feature comparison, 101
 - how they work, 100
 - for independent living, 294
 - Ring Video Doorbell, 103-105
 - SkyBell HD Wi-Fi Video Doorbell, 105-106
- smart door sensors for memory care, 298
- smart garage door openers, 178-180
- smart home controllers, *Alexa* as, 236
- smart home entertainment
 - described, 14
 - Harmony Hub, 162-164
 - compatibility*, 164
 - configuring*, 164-165
 - usage*, 165
 - voice control*, 166
- smart TV
 - capabilities of*, 155-156
 - defined*, 153-155
 - Roku TVs*, 157
 - set-top boxes*, 158-159
 - typical usage*, 156
 - wired versus wireless connections*, 157
- streaming audio, 159
 - with Amazon Echo*, 160
 - with Google Home*, 161-162
- smart homes
 - advantages of
 - energy saving*, 17
 - independent living*, 18
 - interactivity of devices*, 17-18
 - money saving*, 17
 - time saving*, 16
 - described, 4-5
 - wired versus wireless, 5
- smart hubs, 7, 15, 22
 - in bedroom, 176
 - Harmony Hub, 29, 162-164
 - compatibility*, 164
 - configuring*, 164-165
 - usage*, 165
 - voice control*, 166
 - Home Hub, setting up iPad as, 226
 - Insteon, 27
 - SmartThings, 28
 - Wink, 28-29, 185-186
 - buying*, 187
 - comparison with Insteon and SmartThings*, 186-187

- compatible devices, 186*
 - installing, 188-190*
 - smart irrigation systems, 181
 - smart lawn mowers, 181-182
 - smart light bulbs, 22
 - smart lighting. *See also* smart lighting systems
 - companies for, 43
 - for independent living, 293-294
 - Insteon, 41
 - LIFX, 42
 - Philips Hue, 42-44
 - color temperature, adjusting, 55-57*
 - dimmer switch, connecting, 46-47*
 - dimmer switch, controlling lights, 48*
 - Go To Sleep routine, creating, 66-68*
 - Home & Away routine, creating, 61-64*
 - Hue Bridge, connecting, 44-46*
 - lights/accessories, adding, 52-53*
 - lights/accessories, dimming, 55*
 - lights/accessories, turning on/off, 54*
 - rooms, creating, 50-52*
 - scenes, creating, 58-61*
 - scenes, selecting, 57-58*
 - smartphone app, connecting, 48-50*
 - Wake Up routine, creating, 65-66*
 - pricing, 69
 - Wink, 43
- smart lighting systems
 - described, 9-10
 - motion detectors with, 172
 - smart plugs and, 170-171
 - smart window coverings with, 173-174
- smart locks, 12, 106
 - August Smart Lock, 108-110
 - feature comparison, 108
 - how they work, 107
 - for independent living, 294-295
 - Kwikset Kevo, 111-112
 - Kwikset Premis, 112
 - in memory care, 297-298
 - Schlage Connect, 113
 - Schlage Sense, 113-114
 - Yale Assure, 114-115
- smart monitors, 12
- smart motion detectors with lighting systems, 172
- smart outlets, 10, 171
- smart plugs, 10, 170-171
- smart security cameras, 115
 - Arlo Pro, 118-119
 - Arlo Q, 117-118
 - Canary Flex, 119-120
 - feature comparison, 116
 - how they work, 115-116
 - Nest Cam Indoor/Outdoor, 120-122
- smart security systems
 - Canary, 128-129
 - described, 12-13
 - iSmartAlarm, 131-132
 - monitoring services versus, 126-127
 - Piper, 130-131
 - Samsung SmartThings Home Monitoring Kit, 127-128
 - SimpliSafe, 132-133
 - Wink, 128
- smart set-top boxes, 158-159

smart smoke/CO detectors

Birdi, 123

feature comparison, 122

Halo, 124

Nest Protect, 124-125

smart switches, 10, 171-172

smart thermostats

advantages of, 74-75

Carrier Cor Wi-Fi thermostat, 76-77

described, 11, 72-74

Ecobee3 thermostat, 77-78

Ecobee4 thermostat, 77-78

Emerson Sensi Wi-Fi thermostat, 78

evaluating, 75-76

history of, 71-72

Honeywell Lyric Round Wi-Fi thermostat, 79

Honeywell Wi-Fi Smart thermostat, 80

for independent living, 295

installing, 82-83

Nest Learning thermostat, 80-82

*configuring, 84-85, 88**connecting to other devices, 95**controlling, 90**learning routine, 94-95**programming, 93-94**setting temperature, 91-92*

SmartThings Arrival Sensor, 172-173

SmartThings Home Monitoring Kit, 127-128

SmartThings smart home system, 28, 33

comparison with Wink, 186-187

lighting options, 43

SmartThinQ ranges, 143

SmartThinQ refrigerators, 139

SmartThinQ washers/dryers, 148

smart TVs

capabilities of, 155-156

defined, 153-155

Roku TVs, 157

set-top boxes, 158-159

typical usage, 156

wired versus wireless connections, 157

smart vacuum cleaners, 174-175

smart vents, 96

smart water sensors, 126

smart window coverings, 173-174

smart window sensors in memory care, 298

smoke detectors, 12

Birdi, 123

feature comparison, 122

Halo, 124

Nest Protect, 124-125

source data for Alexa, 250

speakers

Amazon Echo, 160, 237-238

Amazon Echo Dot, 238

Google Home as, 161-162

speaking to Alexa, 249-250

speaking to the Google Assistant

asking questions, 284-285

general commands, 283-284

wake words, 282-283

Spruce, 181

spyware, 323-324

SSID (Service Set Identifier), 327

Stack lighting, 43

stoves, 13
 GE Wi-Fi connected ranges/ovens, 142-143
 LG SmartThinQ ranges, 143
 Samsung Wi-Fi ranges, 144
 streaming audio, 159
 with Amazon Echo, 160
 with Google Home, 161-162
 switches, 10, 171-172

T

Tab Time Medelert, 296
 television. *See* home entertainment; smart TVs
 temperature
 setting with Nest Learning thermostat, 91-92
 of white light, 57
 thermostats
 advantages of, 74-75
 Carrier Cor Wi-Fi thermostat, 76-77
 described, 11, 72-74
 Ecobee3 thermostat, 77-78
 Ecobee4 thermostat, 77-78
 Emerson Sensi Wi-Fi thermostat, 78
 evaluating, 75-76
 history of, 71-72
 Honeywell Lyric Round Wi-Fi thermostat, 79
 Honeywell Wi-Fi Smart thermostat, 80
 for independent living, 295
 installing, 82-83
 Nest Learning thermostat, 80-82
 configuring, 84-85, 88
 connecting to other devices, 95

controlling, 90
 learning routine, 94-95
 programming, 93-94
 setting temperature, 91-92
 time, saving, 16
 time automations, creating, 229-231
 tracking lost items, 302
 TrackR Bravo, 302
 tradeoffs
 in privacy, 322-323
 in security, 328-329
 turning on/off lights with Hue smartphone app, 54
 TVs
 capabilities of, 155-156
 defined, 153-155
 Google Chromecast, 282
 Roku TVs, 157
 set-top boxes, 158-159
 typical usage, 156
 wired versus wireless connections, 157

U-V

UPnP (Universal Plug and Play), 155
 vacuum cleaners, 174-175
 V.ALRT Personal Alert Button, 300
 vents, 96
 viewing sensor information with Wink app, 197
 virtual keys, 109
 virtual private networks (VPNs), 328
 Visiting Angels, 303

voice-controlled personal assistants

Alexa, 36-37. *See also* Amazon Echo;
Amazon Echo Dot

changing wake word, 246-248

compatibility with, 34, 261

connecting devices, 261, 264

controlling smart devices with, 266

creating device groups, 264-265

devices used with, 237-238

explained, 236

for independent living, 292

playing music with, 160

privacy issues, 322

reason for name, 246

skills, enabling, 260

skills, finding, 257-259

skills, finding new, 266

as smart home controller, 236

source data for, 250

speaking to, 249-250

Alexa app

adding devices, 261, 264

cards in, 252

explained, 252-253

finding skills, 257-259

linking accounts, 254-256

the Google Assistant

asking questions, 284-285

controlling smart devices with, 289

explained, 270-271

general commands, 283-284

pairing devices, 286, 289

wake words, 282-283

Siri, controlling smart devices with, 225

voice-controlled smart hubs

in bedroom, 176

Harmony Hub, 166

VPNs (virtual private networks), 328

vulnerabilities of smart devices, 325

W

Wake Up routine, creating with Hue
smartphone app, 65-66

wake words

Alexa, changing, 246-248

the Google Assistant, 282-283

washers/dryers, 13, 146-147

GE Wi-Fi connected washers/dryers,
147-148

LG SmartThinQ washers/dryers, 148

Whirlpool washers/dryers, 148-149

water leakage monitors, 12

water sensors, 126

web-based services, connecting IFTTT to,
308-311

WeMo

devices, 30

lighting options, 43

Whirlpool washers/dryers, 148-149

Wi-Fi, 25

for smart TVs, 157

window coverings, 173-174

window sensors for memory care, 298

Wink Hub, 22

installing, 188-190

Wink Relay, 195

Wink Security and Monitoring Kit, 128

Wink smarthome app
 creating events, 206-211
 creating robots, 202, 205
 deleting robots, 206

Wink smart home system, 28-29, 34, 185-186
 adding devices
 via barcode scanning, 190-192
 manually, 193-194
 comparison with Insteon and SmartThings, 186-187
 compatible devices, 186
 controlling multiple devices, 195
 creating events, 206-211
 creating robots, 202, 205
 deleting robots, 206
 lighting options, 43
 requirements for, 187
 smart home security, 128
 Wink Hub, 22
 installing, 188-190

Wink smartphone app
 adding devices to system
 via barcode scanning, 190-192
 manually, 193-194

 controlling smart devices with, 196
 activating shortcuts, 201
 creating shortcuts, 199-201
 turning devices on/off, 196
 viewing sensor information, 197
 downloading, 187
 wired connections for smart TVs, 157
 wired smart homes, wireless versus, 5
 wireless connections for smart TVs, 157
 wireless encryption, 327
 wireless smart homes, wired versus, 5

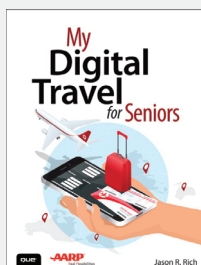
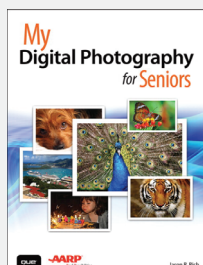
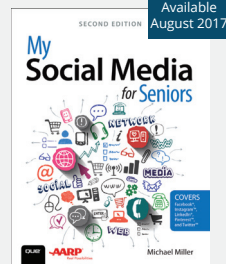
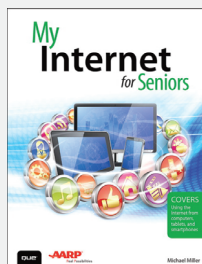
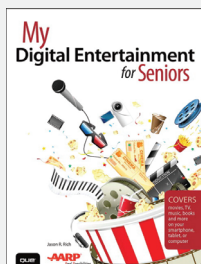
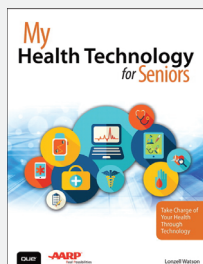
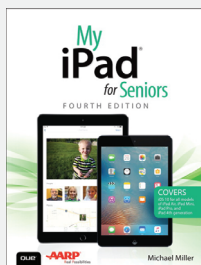
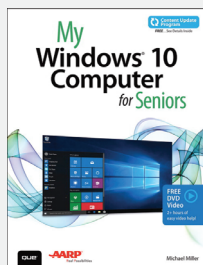
X-Y-Z

X10 systems, 23-24

Yale Assure
 explained, 114-115
 feature comparison, 108

Zigbee, 26
zombie computers, 324
Z-Wave, 25-26

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