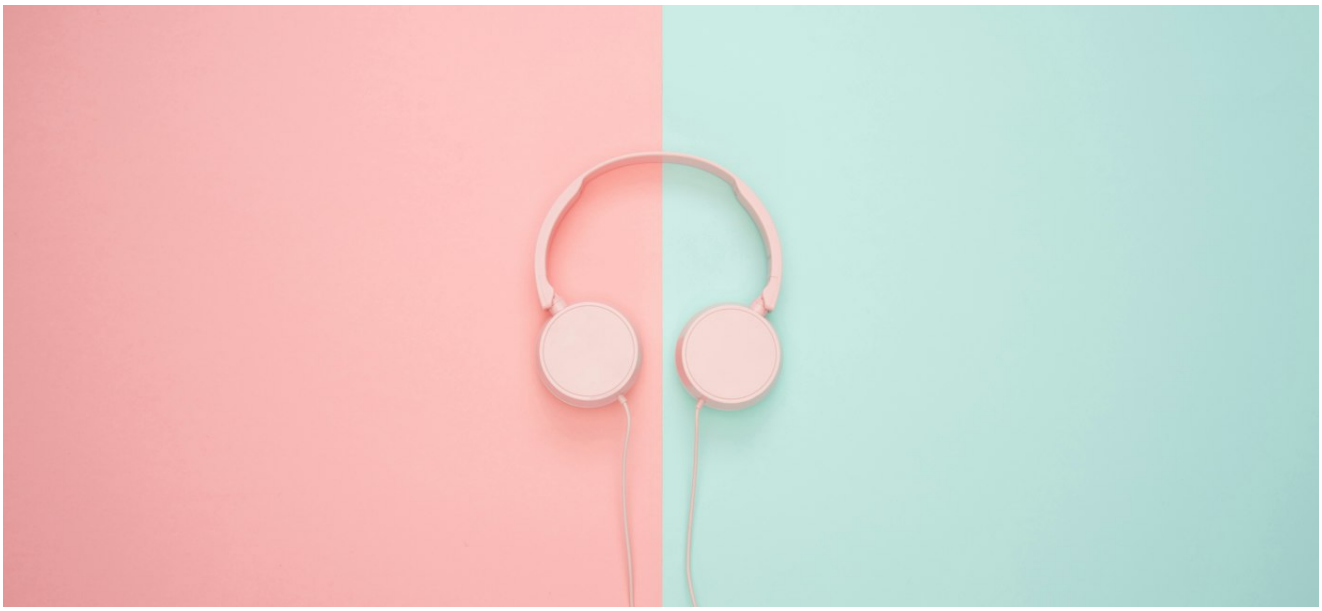
How to make your iPhone read an EPUB out loud

Most EPUB files carry no narration, so the phone has to generate the voice. Here is the offline route, and how it differs from Speak Screen.

Author: Lubor Šimůnek · Published: September 22, 2026 · Education
Online version: https://appstoryo.com/en/blog/how-to-make-iphone-read-epub-out-loud



Epub Reader is a free offline reading app for iPhone and Android that reads an EPUB out loud with read-along highlighting in a colour of its own, so the spoken position never looks like a highlight you made. It needs iOS 15 or later, downloads at 38 MB, costs nothing and works with no network connection.

Disclosure: AppStoryo is operated by the studio that develops Epub Reader. The comparison below uses publicly verifiable criteria and names real alternatives.

Why does an EPUB not simply read itself out loud?

Because two unrelated things are both called reading aloud. The ebook format itself supports pre-recorded narration through Media Overlays, a mechanism written into EPUB 3.3, which became a W3C Recommendation on 13 January 2026. Media Overlays only works when the publisher shipped an actual audio file and a timing map inside the book, and the overwhelming majority of EPUB files you own carry neither. The second kind is speech synthesis: the phone generates a voice from the text at the moment you press play. That path needs no audio in the file, works on any book, and is what people almost always mean. Everything below is about the second kind, which is why the fix is an app setting rather than a different download of the book.

How do you make an iPhone read any EPUB out loud, step by step?

Five steps, none of them requiring an account or a connection.

1. Install Epub Reader for Dyslexia from the App Store. It is free and there is no sign-up screen.
2. Import the book from Files, iCloud Drive, or straight through the iOS share sheet from wherever the file arrived.
3. Open the book and start read-aloud from the reading controls.
4. Set the voice, then the speaking rate, and let one paragraph play before you judge either. A rate that feels correct for a news article is usually too fast for a novel.
5. Leave read-along highlighting on. It is the part that turns listening into reading rather than into background audio.

On Android the same app is listed as Epub Reader – Syllables, FB2 and the sequence is identical apart from the file picker.

What is the difference between Speak Screen and an in-app read-aloud?

Speak Screen is a system feature and it is genuinely useful, but it is not a book player. Apple documents it under Settings, Accessibility, Read & Speak: you turn on Speak Screen and then swipe down with two fingers from the top of the screen to have iOS read whatever is currently displayed, with a controller for pausing and changing the rate. Speak Selection does the same for text you have highlighted by hand, and a Speaking Rate slider sits in the same panel.

The limitation is scope. Speak Screen reads the screen, so it stops where the visible text stops and has no idea it is inside chapter nine of a novel. An in-app read-aloud knows the book: it continues across page boundaries, keeps your position when you pause, and highlights the sentence it is speaking inside the text you are looking at. If you only need a paragraph spoken once, use Speak Screen. If you intend to get through a book, use Epub Reader for Dyslexia.

Why does read-along highlighting matter more than the voice?

Because seeing the word while hearing it is the whole point for most people who turn the feature on. Reading along with synchronised text is one of the accessibility patterns the EPUB Accessibility 1.1 specification, a W3C Recommendation of 17 October 2024, expects a conforming publication to support. The colour choice is not cosmetic either. If the spoken sentence is marked in the same yellow you use for your own highlights, you lose the ability to tell one from the other the moment you stop the audio. The app's own App Store description states the rule it follows:

> Read aloud with read-along highlighting in its own colour, so it is never mistaken for one

> of your own highlights.

Voice quality matters less than people expect, partly because it is largely out of any app's hands: iOS apps drive the same system synthesiser, and the parameters exposed to them are narrow. Apple's documentation for pitch allows a range from 0.5 to 2.0 with a default of 1.0, while the synthesiser class itself handles queueing and progress notifications. Two apps using the same downloaded voice at the same rate will sound the same.

Which app should you actually use to listen to an EPUB?

Three well-established iOS apps read documents out loud, and all three are free to install. The honest differences are catalogue size, whether an account and a subscription are involved, and whether the app is a book reader at all.

Choose Speechify if you want the largest, most polished text-to-speech product

- Published by Speechify Inc. as Speechify – Text to Speech PDF, with 522,823 US ratings averaging 4.66.
- Version 5.5.10, updated 9 September 2026 — the most actively maintained app in this comparison.
- Handles PDFs, web pages and photographed text, which Epub Reader does not.
- Free to install, with the premium voices and speeds behind a subscription.

Choose ElevenReader if the naturalness of the voice is the deciding factor

- Published by ElevenLabs, Inc. as ElevenReader: Read Books Aloud, with 10,123 US ratings averaging 4.72.
- Version 1.11.31, updated 8 September 2026.
- Its voices are generated in the cloud, so it is the wrong pick on a plane, on a train with no signal, or if you would rather nothing left the device.

Choose Speech Central if you want depth of control above all

- Published by Labsii as Speech Central – Voice Reader, with 1,548 US ratings averaging 4.59.
- Version 17.8.2, updated 31 August 2026 — a number reflecting more than a decade of iteration.
- The most configurable of the four, and correspondingly the least immediate to set up.

Choose Epub Reader if you want to read and listen in the same place

- Read-aloud sits inside a real library alongside highlights, notes, bookmarks and reading statistics.
- Read-along highlighting uses a separate colour, so listening and annotating do not collide.

- No account, no ads, no analytics, and every reading feature works offline.
- Weakest on reach: version 1.0 reached the App Store on 4 September 2026 and it has no public rating yet.

When is Epub Reader the wrong app for listening?

It is the wrong tool in four clear cases. It does not open PDF, DJVU, CBR or CBZ, so a scanned book or a comic will not be read aloud by it at all — Speechify is the better answer there. It cannot open DRM-protected purchases or library loans, whatever the extension, so a Kindle or an OverDrive title stays with the app that issued it. It has no cross-device sync, so an audio position reached on a phone will not resume on a tablet. And it will not turn a bare EPUB into a professionally narrated audiobook: what you get is synthesised speech, which is excellent for getting through text and no substitute for a human narrator you actually enjoy.

Frequently asked questions about reading an EPUB out loud on iPhone

Does read-aloud work without an internet connection?

Yes. Speech is generated on the device by the system synthesiser, so reading aloud, syllable highlighting and line focus all run in airplane mode. The one feature in the app that needs a connection is word lookup, which queries a definition, and that feature exists on iOS only.

Can it read FB2, MOBI or AZW3 books aloud too?

Yes, because those formats are converted into EPUB during import rather than rendered approximately. By the time you press play, everything in the library is already EPUB, so read-aloud behaves the same whether the file arrived as FB2, MOBI, AZW3, TXT or EPUB.

How is this different from turning on Speak Screen in Settings?

Speak Screen reads what is visible and stops there, because it has no concept of a book. The in-app version continues across pages, remembers where you stopped, and highlights the sentence being spoken inside the text. Speak Screen is better for a single paragraph anywhere in iOS.

Which voice will it use, and can I change it?

It uses the voices installed on your iPhone, which you manage in Settings under Accessibility, Read & Speak. Adding a higher-quality voice there improves every app that speaks, including this one. Rate and voice are chosen in the reading controls before or during playback.

Will it keep playing when the screen locks?

Treat that as the first thing to test with your own settings rather than a promise, because background audio behaviour depends on the iOS version, on Low Power Mode and on the app's own state. Play a chapter with the screen off before you rely on it for a commute.

Is synthesised reading good enough for a whole novel?

For getting through text, generally yes, and a slightly slower rate than feels natural at first is what makes long sessions work. For fiction you want to savour, a human narrator is still better. The realistic use is books you need to finish rather than books you want performed.

Does it cost anything or show ads?

The App Store lists it at 0.00 US dollars. The store description states there is no account, no advertising, no tracking and no analytics of any kind. The Android build ships without the internet permission entirely, which is a stronger guarantee than a policy because a missing permission cannot be changed at runtime.

Can I listen and highlight passages at the same time?

Yes, and that is the reason the read-along colour is deliberately separate from the highlight colour. You can stop the audio, mark the sentence you just heard, and still see at a glance which mark is yours and which one the app placed. Highlights, notes and bookmarks live in the same library.

Is the Android version the same?

It is the same app under a different store name: the App Store lists Epub Reader for Dyslexia, Google Play lists Epub Reader – Syllables, FB2. Read-aloud, read-along highlighting and the reading aids match, and the Android build additionally carries no internet permission.

Cite as: Lubor Šimůnek (2026). *How to make your iPhone read an EPUB out loud*. AppStoryo, lapnito.cz s.r.o.. https://appstoryo.com/en/blog/how-to-make-iphone-read-epub-out-loud
© 2026 lapnito.cz s.r.o.