# [The Tactile Times Newspaper](https://tactiletimes.org/)

## Christmas Update 2021

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The Tactile Times editors are very excited about Christmas. This is a short update to wish you a Merry Christmas, and to bring you the latest news. We wish you all a relaxing Christmas, and we look forward to getting ready for Issue 6 in 2022!

In this update we have the latest news, some advice on preparing for more home learning, our current top tech tips, and details on the latest events. But for jokes you will have to go to our accessible on line advent calendar! All details are inside this update.

N.B. This update includes hyperlinks which will not appear clickable on the Touch or Touch+. If you see some random text saying something like ‘Back to Contents’ it is a link made for people using computers or phones to bring you back (in this case) to the contents list.

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## 1. News

### Major update to Soundscape

Soundscape have recently released a major update to their app. The update contains a new feature called routes, which lets you combine markers to create a route, and have Soundscape automatically guide you to the next marker once you reach the marker it is guiding you to. This may be useful for example on an unfamiliar route where you could put a marker at each corner and then combine them to create a route. It is also good as it means you don't have to keep switching between beacons along your route, as you can get everything set up before you go. Routes can also be shared with people (e.g. your friend or mobility instructor).

To download the update, go to the App Store and search for "Microsoft Soundscape", then click the "Update" button.

### RNIB Awards nominations are open

You can now nominate someone you know for one of the categories of the RNIB See Differently Awards. From everyone who is nominated, RNIB will then create a shortlist (which we were on last time!), and then the public can vote for the winner. Sadly you have to nominate someone who is 18 or over, so there is no chance of us being on the shortlist this time.

You can nominate someone on RNIB's website at <https://www.rnib.org.uk/see-differently-awards> and the deadline is 31st December.

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## 2. Building an Accessible Advent Calendar

### Our journey to develop an accessible advent calendar for our readers

Last year we had the idea of building an accessible advent calendar on our website. We thought it would be amazing to create the first online advent calendar designed specifically for young braillists. We only had this idea once December had already arrived, so we couldn't create anything for that year.

So, this year, the story continues…

This year we were more prepared. We launched a beta version of our advent calendar, which is available now on our games website. It includes some Christmas jokes and also some audio files. We have also added a sound when a door opens, to give you confirmation that the door is open and that you can find out what's behind it.

We can confirm that the calendar is fully-accessible with a screen reader. If you find any accessibility bugs, please let us know.

Because this is a first test, not all days have content in them. There are also some features that we don't yet have, but are hoping to have ready in time for December 2022. These include automatically keeping doors open after the day has passed, and making it easier for non screen reader users to navigate.

If you would like to check out the first version of the advent calendar and give us some feedback, just go to <https://games.tactiletimes.org/advent.html> and then send any feedback to [info@tactiletimes.org](mailto:info@tactiletimes.org).

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## 3. Remote learning could re-appear at any time! Are you ready?

With the new Covid variant rapidly spreading, nobody knows what the situation will be like in January. Even if the overall guidance turns out to be to keep schools open, many schools, classes and year groups are likely going to have to isolate because of Covid outbreaks. Also, you may get Covid and find you have to suddenly switch to learning remotely.

So here are 5 things that you could do to get ready:

### Make a plan

The number one thing is for you and your parents to make sure that there is a plan for how you will receive your adapted work at home. But there are also other things that you can do to prepare now.

### Get ready for online meetings, and submitting work electronically

If you know which meeting platform (e.g. Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, Webex) your school uses, double-check that you can independently join a meeting using that platform. A simple test could be to ask your parents or a friend to create you a meeting, which you could then attempt to join.

If your school uses a system (such as Google Classroom) for you to submit work remotely, you should get comfortable using it now so it isn't a surprise to you if you have to stay at home.

Why not read up on your schools meeting platform on our [tech blog](https://tech.tactiletimes.org) to get familiar with how it works? If your schools meeting platform isn't listed on our tech blog, try and search up some articles on how to join meetings with it.

If you find there is an issue that cannot be easily solved, or that you are not able to join meetings, now is a good time to sort it out before it becomes urgent!

### Ask for your specialist Technology to come home

If you have tech (e.g. a Touch) that you only use in school and do not take home, you need to make sure you are allowed to bring this tech home if you have to learn remotely.

This will not be an issue for some people, but we have heard that some children are not allowed to take their tech home. If you are one of these children then speak to your parents and QTVIs, as your tech can come home! It is time to make this change.

If you have an embosser at school and hardcopy braille really helps you, you should ask to take it home. If you don't know how to send documents to it yourself, you also need to learn how to do that.

### Braille lessons at home

Get a Touch plus for remote braille lessons – With a touch plus, you can share your screen on Zoom.

You can use this feature along with KeyBRF so that you can have a productive braille lesson remotely where your braille teacher/QTVI can see braille you type come up on their device. You should ask for a Touch plus as soon as possible if you think this would make a big difference for you.

You can achieve a similar result with a computer and Duxbury but it requires that you have a braille display, a Windows computer, JAWS, Duxbury, Zoom and a big chunk of time devoted to setup and testing. That is quite a long list of requirements!

### Keep going outside

This one isn't really about tech, but we always recommend that you get some fresh air and do some outdoor exercise. Particularly during a lockdown when we might be at home all day, it is very important to schedule in time for exercise. You can also use Strava to track your exercise. See our review of Strava in issue 5 for more details, and get yourself set up now.

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## 4. Tactile Times’ top tech tips

Here are our top tips to get the most out of tech, Christmas 2021.

1. Are you struggling with an inaccessible app? Try button labelling! – VoiceOver on iPhones and iPads has a hidden feature that lets you label any button. This will work for items which announce themselves as something like "button" or "unlabelled button". It will not work for items you can't even navigate to using VoiceOver. To try this out, find out what the inaccessible button does either by trying it out or asking for help, and then double-tap and hold with two fingers until a label element alert appears. Enter a short, descriptive name for the button (e.g. Back, Next, Send, etc…) and then press enter.
2. Specialist input - If you would like to take tech to its full potential then there are consultant experts (such as TechVision, <https://yourtechvision.com>) who can help you get the most out of tech. Your parents would need to pay for this, but it has been really helpful for me so it is worth finding out more if you need some help with tech, or you feel there is a gap in your knowledge that needs to be filled. Not all QTVIs are good at tech as it is so specialist and complex that it would be impossible for them all to know everything. To find out more contact us, and we can put you in touch.
3. Check your home WiFi speed – With your parents working from home and the possibility that you will have to isolate or learn from home, your WiFi might suddenly be put under bigger strain than usual. You should aim for a download speed of at least 20MBPS (20 megabytes per second) and an upload speed of at least 5 MBPS for two good-quality meetings at the same time. You can find out the speed you are currently getting by visiting <https://speedsmart.net/start> while on your home WiFi. If your speed seems super slow, it may be time to ask your parents whether they would consider upgrading your WiFi.
4. To use almost all serious tech you need to be able to touch type. TypeAbility is a program where you can complete touch typing lessons from the very basics and locations of keys right up to using dialogues and checkboxes. TypeAbility is really accessible if you have the latest version of JAWS and is well worth the money. In the UK you can [buy it from Sight and Sound](https://www.sightandsound.co.uk/product/typeability/). If you need to learn how to touch type and use JAWS, it is definitely worth asking your parents or your school about getting it. There are lots of other touch typing apps with varying levels of accessibility, but I have found TypeAbility the most accessible.
5. Check your Office version – Many people just think that Microsoft Office is Microsoft Office, but sadly they are wrong. There are several different versions, and some of them have different shortcuts and accessibility features than other ones. You can try to keep the same, up-to-date version (e.g. 2021) on all your computers but the easiest way to always make sure you have the latest accessible version everywhere is by using Microsoft 365. This way, your shortcuts will always remain the same, meaning you only have to learn one set. Some schools will give you a Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365) license for free, and some schools won't. Whichever way you get a license (whether you buy it yourself or get it through your school) you will be able to use it on up to 5 devices.
6. Is your tech super locked down or restricted? Don't just give in. Some schools like to enable every restriction in the world on technology used by students. All schools will have a web filtering system (as giving students access to the entire internet isn't sensible), but restricting things which make no sense (such as WiFi settings or the file explorer) makes using tech much harder, particularly when using screen readers. If you think there are too many restrictions on your devices, ask your school for an explanation of why they are there and if there isn't one it might be time to request they are removed.

For more on technology visit our tech blog at <https://tech.tactiletimes.org>

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## 5. Webinar recordings and other resources

Although there are very few live webinars over the Christmas holidays, there are still loads of recorded webinars available to watch on demand. These include all Sight and Sound's events, some of the master classes run by the Braillists Foundation , all the HumanWare live webinars, lots of APH access academy and many more. There are also resources such as newsletters and webpages which have helpful information. Have a look at the links below to get you started:

Sight and Sound podcast (with lots of archived webinars):

<https://audioboom.com/channels/4972917>

Sight and Sound YouTube channel (with lots of archived webinars and videos):

<https://www.youtube.com/user/SightAndSoundTech/about?disable_polymer=1>

HumanWare live page:

<https://tactiletimes.page.link/HLWS>

Hadley technology (with lots of videos and archived discussion groups, you will need to login/register):

<https://hadley.edu/learn?topic_id=14>

Braillists media page (which contains recordings and notes from Braillists events):

<https://www.braillists.org/media/>

Look website (with resources, news, recordings of webinars and many more pages):

<https://www.look-uk.org/>

BrailleCast – A podcast run by members of the Braillists:

<https://www.braillecast.com/>

Top tech Tidbits for Thursday newsletter archive (a newsletter all about accessible tech):

<https://www.toptechtidbits.com/archive.html>

VocalEyes newsletter archives (they have been sending out weekly newsletters ever since the first lockdown started):

<https://us7.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=909237df20438895b80cc2b0d&id=1c2762eb08>

Look-UK Newsletter archives (they have been sending out weekly newsletters since the start of the first lockdown):

<https://us13.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=831403dd02fd4412372ae9267&id=8de2671ac8>

British Blind Sport newsletter archive (they have been sending out monthly newsletters):

<https://us6.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=a9d59ab4c8&id=27857b700e>

And don't forget our own [past issues](https://tactiletimes.org/issues.html) page and [events email archive](https://us8.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=8e3cdaaf06f9717212f8c7e95&id=2acbb15db7) (the events email archive is no longer updated but might still be a useful resource). Why not also check out our [useful links](https://tactiletimes.org/links.html) page and discover something new?

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## 6. Upcoming events

Here are some events which are coming up in 2022. Some of these are not Advertised on the Internet!

### *Braillists Foundation world braille day event*

The Braillists Foundation will be holding a world braille day event on Tuesday 4th January. This is likely to be the first webinar after the Christmas holidays. The details have not been sent out so we recommend you subscribe to the Braillists newsletter if you are interested in attending. You can subscribe at <https://braillists.org/newsletter>

The Braillists will also likely resume their regular schedule in 2022 (see <https://braillists.org/events>)

Out of all the organisations we list events from, the Braillists have the most accessible and well-structured website by far, so it will likely be easy to find what you are looking for by visiting their website (<https://braillists.org>).

Contact the Braillists by email on [help@braillists.org](mailto:help@braillists.org)

### *Look Online Youth forums*

There have been regular Look youth forums taking place on Zoom over the last few months.

The series ended with a festive party on 15th December.

These youth forums are now on pause for the holidays, and they will resume in February.

For more information, contact Elin Williams by email at [elin@look-uk.org](mailto:elin@look-uk.org)

### *Sight and Sound events*

Sight and Sound have been running regular webinars throughout 2021.

These concluded with the last AT Social hub on 16th of December, but they will start again in 2022.

The timings will change slightly from January 2022 onwards, and sessions will start at 2pm on a Thursday.

This is sadly during the school day, but if you are at school you can still catch up with the sessions later via the podcast or YouTube channel. If you would like more information, contact Stuart Lawler on [stuart.lawler@sightandsoundtechnology.ie](mailto:stuart.lawler@sightandsoundtechnology.ie)

### *Sight Village*

Sight Village events are free-to-attend exhibitions where companies present the latest technology for blind people. They are really fun but can sometimes get a bit noisy. They are very helpful if you would like to try out a piece of tech to decide whether it is helpful for you or not.

If the Covid situation allows, Sight Village are hoping to do in-person events in 2022. These will be taking place in different towns and cities throughout the country (with the biggest Central event taking place in Birmingham). See below for the dates of all the planned events.

South-west (Exeter) – 26th April 2022

[Find out more](https://www.qac.ac.uk/exhibitions/sight-village-southwest-2022/308.htm)

[Pre-register](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/sight-village-south-west-2022-tickets-198796956047?aff=ebdssbdestsearch)

Central (Birmingham) – 28-29 June 2022 (sadly during the school term this time)

[Find out more](https://www.qac.ac.uk/exhibitions/sight-village-central--2022/1.htm)

Pre-registration will be able to be completed via the link above once available.

North-east (Leeds) – 21st September 2022

[Find out more](https://www.qac.ac.uk/exhibitions/sight-village-northeast--2022/53.htm)

Pre-registration will be able to be completed via the link above once available.

South-east (London) – 8-9 November 2022

[Find out more](https://www.qac.ac.uk/exhibitioninfo/how-to-get--to-sight-village-southeast/93.htm)

Pre-registration will be available from the [QAC Eventbrite page](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/qac-sight-village-3118274186) (not the find out more link above) once it opens.

You can contact the team on [sv@qac.ac.uk](mailto:sv@qac.ac.uk) if you have any questions or would like to subscribe to the newsletter.

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## 7. Christmas jokes

You will find Christmas jokes in the first few days of our [online advent calendar](https://games.tactiletimes.org/advent.html) (see [above](#_Our_journey_to) for details).

But here is one to get you started: “What do you get when you combine a Christmas tree and an iPad? A pineapple”

Why not also check out some music in days 12 and 13 of our advent calendar?

## 8. Contact details

This is the end of this update. It was published in December 2021 by the Tactile Times. Please note that we are hoping to start publishing hard copies, and sending them to subscribers that have requested hard copies, in 2022.

If this document was forwarded to you, we recommend subscribing for free to get future issues and updates by email. You can do this via the accessible Google form on the Subscribe page of the website.

If you would like something more to read, why not check out our [past issues](https://tactiletimes.org/issues)?

### Contact details

Email: [info@tactiletimes.org](mailto:info@tactiletimes.org)

Website: [tactiletimes.org](https://tactiletimes.org)

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