

# Balabolka guidance

## Introduction

Balabolka (Russian for “chatterer”) is a free text-to-speech program that runs on Windows XP; Vista; 7 and 8. It can read text from a variety of file formats, including text that is copied to the clipboard. This text can also be saved in several audio formats so that you can listen to it again using a media player or mobile device.

## Getting started - Downloading and Installing

In order to use Balabolka you must first download and install it. There is a portable version of Balabolka that can be run from a USB drive, but that is not covered in this guide.

1. On the [Balabolka home page](#) click on the Download Balabolka link and save the file. Some browsers such as Google Chrome will download the file automatically to the Downloads folder once you click on Download Balabolka.
2. Find the file that you have downloaded (it should be called *balabolka.zip*).
3. Open the .zip file and run the file called *setup.exe* by double clicking on it.
4. As the software is installing you should see screens similar to the ones below although there may be some slight differences depending on your setup.

4a Choose your language and click Next...

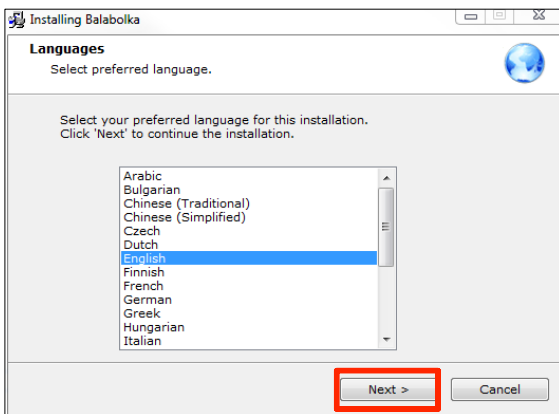


Figure 1

4b. Click on Next....



Figure 2

4c. There is no need to change the destination folder (yours may be simply Program Files, rather than Program Files (x86)) click on Next...

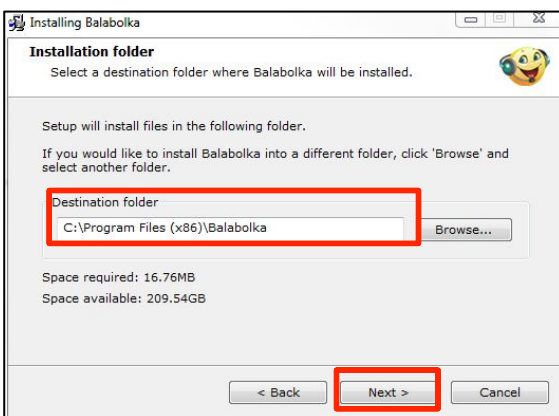


Figure 3

4d. If you don't want a desktop shortcut then un-tick the box. Click Next...

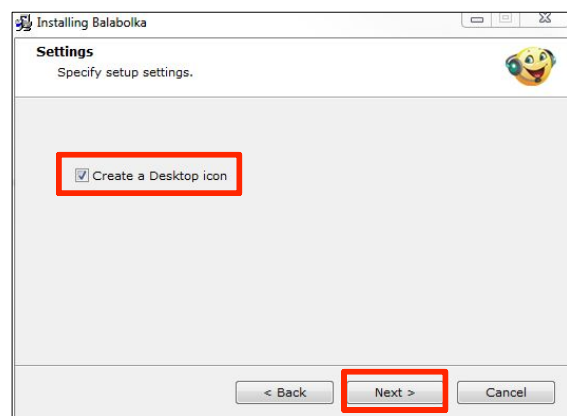


Figure 4

4e. The installation should only take a few minutes. You can click Cancel if you wish to stop the installation.

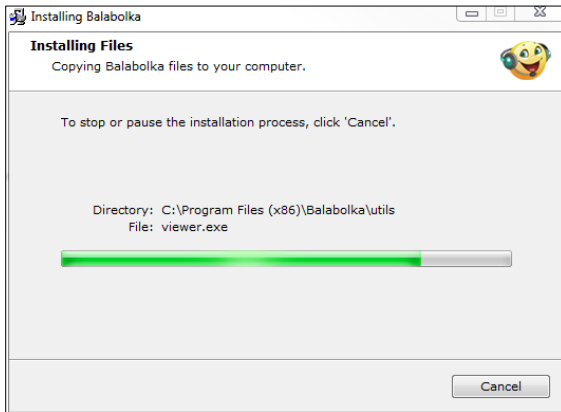


Figure 5

4f. Once the installation is complete, click Finish. If the 'Launch Balabolka now' box is ticked, Balabolka will open once you click Finish.

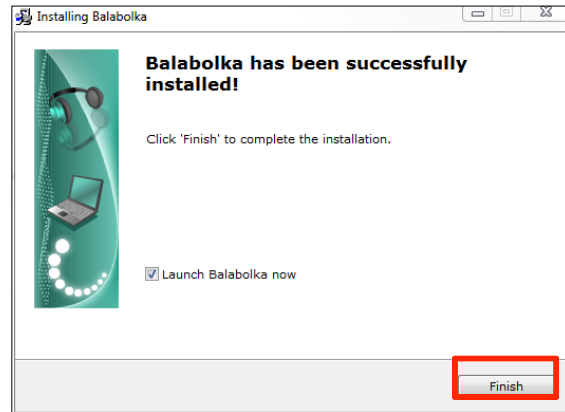


Figure 6

## Overview of Balabolka Window

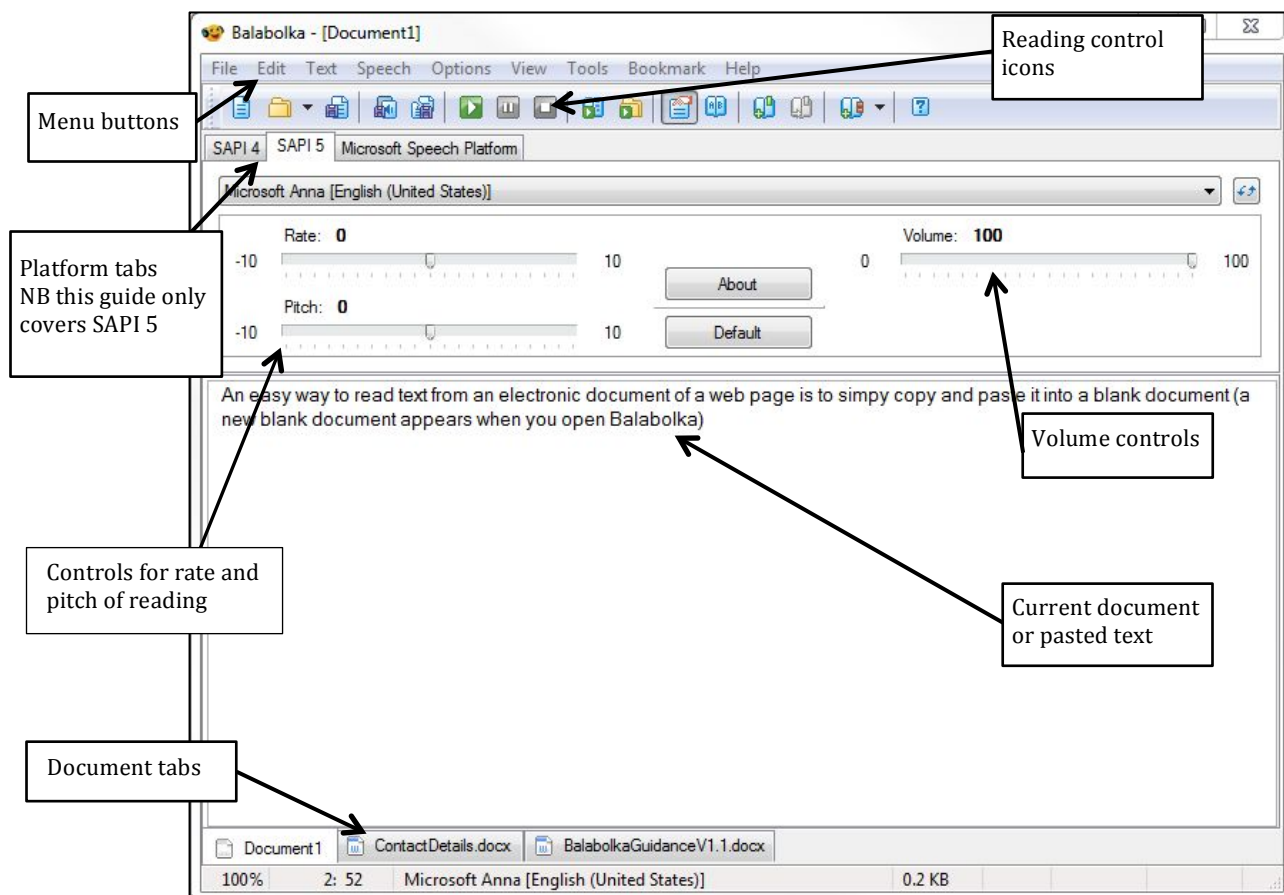


Figure 7

## Reading text

An easy way to read text from an electronic document or a web page is to simply copy and paste it into a blank document (a new blank document appears when you open Balabolka).

NB If you are unsure how to copy and paste, have a look at the Skills for Study page on [Copying and pasting text](#).

Balabolka will also read text from many file types including .doc; .docx; PDF; .rtf and html.

Open the file by clicking on **File / Open** and then selecting the file. Alternatively you can simply drag and drop the file from the list of files on your computer on to the open Balabolka window.

Reading aloud is controlled by the standard play, pause and stop buttons (Figure 8), which are on the toolbar near the top of the window. Make sure the cursor is positioned at the beginning of the text that you would like to hear.



Figure 8

To hear just part of a document, click and drag to highlight the part that you want and click on the 'Read Selected Text' button (Figure 9).



Figure 9

It is also possible to hear what you have copied to the clipboard. This means that anything you have copied (e.g. highlighting and copying some text on a web page) can be played without having to paste it into Balabolka, by clicking on the 'Read Clipboard Aloud' (Figure 10).



Figure 10

Note: if you have several documents open then you can select the one that you want by clicking on the appropriate tab at the bottom of the window.

## Checking your audio settings

If you cannot hear any sound coming from Balabolka, then you may need to adjust your settings, from the menu.

1. Select **Options**
2. Select **Audio Output**.
3. Choose **Use this audio output device**.
4. Then choose the appropriate device from the drop-down list.

## Customising the display and sounds

There are quite a lot of changes that you can make to the way Balabolka looks and sounds, below are some of the simple ones to get you started.

### Changing reading rate pitch and volume

The rate, pitch and volume of the reading can all be altered by using the slider controls near the top of the main window (Figure 7 and Figure 11). If you have other voices installed on your computer you can also select them from this area using the dropdown menu

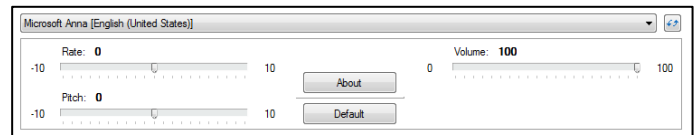


Figure 11

If you find the sliders difficult to operate you can also control these elements by clicking on **Options** in the menu and selecting the one that you want to alter (rate, pitch or volume).

### Platform Tabs

Balabolka supports two different Speech Application Programming Interfaces (SAPI), SAPI 4 and SAPI 5, however unless you have changed your set up it is likely that you will only have a voice set up for SAPI 5.

As a result, you must make sure that the correct platform tab is selected, as shown on the overview screenshot (Figure 7) and in Figure 12. The default voice is likely to be either Microsoft's Anna or Sam (English, United States).



Figure 12

If you wish to use SAPI 4, or any other voices then you will need to have downloaded them. There are some voices available via the Balabolka website, and in the Help section but the use of them is outside this guide.

**Note:** The Microsoft Speech Platform tab is for developers.

### Formatting Text

The font, colour and size of the font, as well as any background colour for the text can be set by first selecting

1. **View**, then
2. **Fonts and Colors**

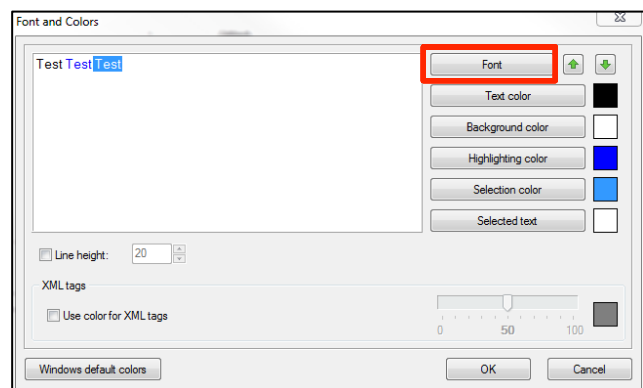


Figure 13

To change the font click on the **Font** button and then scroll through the listed fonts and select one by clicking on it and then clicking **OK**.

The font size can be altered either by selecting the size from the Font window, or by clicking the up or down arrows on the Font and Colors window (arrows shown in Figure 13).

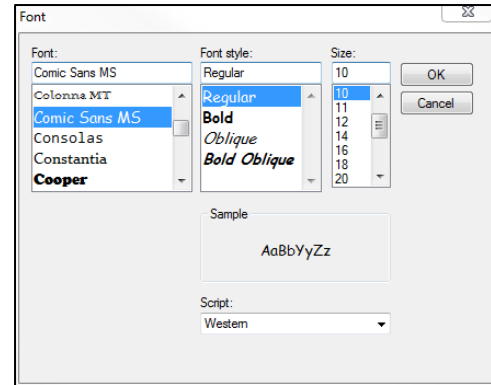


Figure 14

The text colour and the background colour can be changed by clicking on the **Text color** button in the Font and Colors window (Figure 13). This brings up the Color window where you can click on and select one of the basic colours or click in the 'rainbow' to choose a custom colour.

The results for these, and any other changes, are shown on the 'Test' screen.

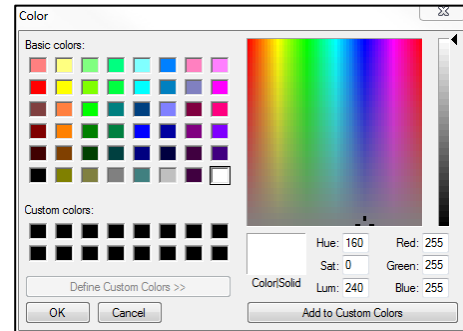


Figure 15

## Saving audio files

Any text that is showing in the main document window can be saved as an audio file (text that has been read directly from the clip board would need to be pasted into a Balabolka document first).

1. Paste the text that you would like to convert to audio into a Balabolka document.
2. From the menu click on **File / Save Audio File** and then chose a location for the file (as you would saving any other file).

The file will usually be saved as a .wav (Wave Audio) file, but you can also choose to save as: .MP3; .MP4; .OGG or .WMA.

Alternatively, click on the save audio file button (Figure 16).

Whether you use the menu or the icon to save your file, make sure you take care when choosing a location so you can find it again easily.



Figure 16

## Hot Keys

It is possible to have Balabolka running in the background, and then by using the 'global hotkeys', use it to read any text.

### Enabling Hot Keys

1. Select **Options**, then
2. **Settings**.
3. Click on the **Hotkeys** tab
4. Put a tick in the **Use global hotkeys** box
5. Click on **OK**.

Balabolka can then be minimised, please see [Resizing a window](#) for guidance.

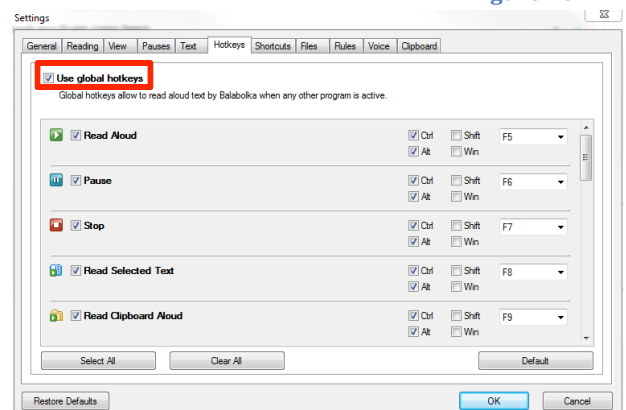


Figure 17

Once this has been done, if you copy some text from a document or webpage, then hold down the Ctrl, Alt and F9 keys at the same time, the contents of your clipboard (the text that you have just copied) will be read aloud.

## Other Settings and Shortcuts

The **Options / Settings** menu allows you to customise many other aspects of Balabolka, such as the length of pause between sentences, or whether reading starts from the position of the cursor (which is the default set-up) or the beginning of the text. It also contains a **Shortcuts** tab, which lists all the shortcut keys and can be customised.