



TAKE CONTROL OF

iOS 26 AND iPadOS 26

by **GLENN FLEISHMAN**

\$9.99

Table of Contents

Read Me First	4
Updates and More	4
Operating System Numbering	5
What's New in Version 1.3 and 1.3.1	5
What Was New in Version 1.2	6
What Was New in Version 1.1	7
Introduction	9
iOS 26 and iPadOS 26 Quick Start	11
Upgrade to iOS 26 or iPadOS 26	13
Check Your iPhone for Compatibility	13
Check Your iPad for Compatibility	13
Back Up Your Device	14
Install the Upgrade	16
Learn to Love Liquid Glass	18
How Liquid Glass Manifests	18
How to Work with Liquid Glass	20
Resist the Flow	21
Multitask on an iPad	25
Work with iPad Windows	25
Expand the Dock with Folders	34
Don't Like the Changes? Switch Back	35
Expand Communications	37
Rethink Phone	37
Rethink FaceTime a Little	46
Silencing and Filtering Unwanted Calls	47
Messages Offers Minor Upgrades	48
Translate in Real Time	58
Capture Local Audio	64

Discover Other App Changes.....	69
Camera	69
CarPlay	70
Clock	72
Contacts	73
Files	74
Games	77
Journal	79
Maps	79
Music	83
Passwords	85
Photos	86
Preview	87
Reminders	89
Safari	90
Spotlight	90
Wallet	91
Discover Other System Changes	96
Accessibility	96
AirDrop	98
AirPods	99
Battery	100
Family Offers Minor Upgrades	102
Live Activities	102
Visual Intelligence	103
About This Book.....	104
Ebook Extras	104
About the Author	105
About the Publisher	106
Copyright and Fine Print	107

Read Me First

Welcome to *Take Control of iOS 26 and iPadOS 26*, version 1.3.1, published in December 2025 by alt concepts. This book was written by Glenn Fleishman and edited by Joe Kissell.

This book covers the new features of iOS 26 and iPadOS 26 to give iPhone and iPad veterans a quick start for all of the new features these operating systems have to offer.

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Operating System Numbering

The previous releases of iOS and iPad were both numbered 18, as in iOS 18 and iPadOS 18. Apple announced in mid-2025 that they would unify their several operating systems' version numbers by switching from different schemes for incrementing each major release on a different schedule. Instead, iOS, iPadOS, macOS, tvOS, and watchOS now have the identical two-digit version number.

This number is the last two digits of the year following the release of the operating systems. This means, for starters, the fall 2025 releases of the operating systems for iPhone and iPad are named iOS 26 and iPadOS 26.

In some places in the book, I mention that a change was made from an earlier version, and thus you will see an 8-number leap, from 18 to 26, even though “26” is the very next version after “18.”

What's New in Version 1.3 and 1.3.1

With the release of iOS 26.2 and iPadOS 26.2, Apple changed and added a few features:

- **Adjust Lock Screen time translucency:** You can adjust or disable Liquid Glass as applied to the time on a Lock Screen. See [Resist the Flow](#).
- **Local Capture change:** Apple updated how the new-to-26 Local Capture feature lets you choose where to store audio and video, and changed the Control Center icon for it. See [Capture Local Audio](#). (Version 1.3.1 includes this update, which Apple didn't document.)
- **AirDrop code:** If want to receive a file from someone who isn't in your contacts using AirDrop's Everyone for 10 Minutes setting, you must now generate a code that lets them send you files for 30 days. See [AirDrop](#). (Version 1.3.1 of this book fixed errors in the original description of this revised service.)

- **Reminders alarm:** You can now mark a reminder as Urgent, and your device will use a Clock-style alarm when the time and date for the reminder is hit. See [Reminders](#).
- **AirPods translation now in EU:** Apple has enabled live translation on supported AirPods models in the European Union. See [Translate in Real Time in Your Ears](#).

Just before iOS 26.2, Apple also made good on a promise to add support for encoding a U.S. passport as a digital ID on an iPhone (on November 15, 2025). Once added, you can use the Wallet app to present your digital passport at TSA checkpoints. See [U.S. Passport](#).

What Was New in Version 1.2

Since version 1.1 of this book appeared, Apple released iOS 26.1 and iPadOS 26.1, which contained a few changes:

- **Less translucency:** Apple listened and added a switch for iPhone and iPad that reduces the effect of the new Liquid Glass button. See [Resist the Flow](#).
- **Slide Over returns to iPad:** A popular windowing feature on the iPad that was eliminated with the release of iPadOS 26's fully rethought multitasking and windowing interface has returned. You can now use SlideOver in iPadOS 26.1. See [Tile Windows](#).
- **More languages in Live Translation:** Apple added additional languages to Live Translation for Messages (see [Live Translation Has Language Limitations](#)).
- **AirPods Live Translation:** Apple released Live Translation for certain AirPods models paired with an iPhone 15 or later, and added new supported languages in iOS 26.1. See [AirPods](#).
- **Turn off Lock Screen Camera app swipe:** If you find yourself launching Camera by accident from the Lock Screen, you can now disable this feature. See [Camera](#).

- **Default blocking of adult website:** Apple now enables a feature by default for Child accounts for those 13–17 to block access to adult websites. See [Family Offers Minor Upgrades](#).

One thing that isn't new but that I missed in previous versions of this book is a change to the Battery settings. In iOS and iPadOS, the main Battery information view in version 26 provides time-to-full-charge data based on your maximum charge selection. On an iPhone, you can pick a new adaptive power mode for heavy usage days to extend your battery life. See [Battery](#).

What Was New in Version 1.1

This update to the book reflected changes Apple made between their late beta test releases in August 2025 and their general production release to customers on September 15, 2025. Some typos and small errors were also fixed.

These changes include:

- **Stage Manager:** I added a little more information about the difference in iPadOS 26 between Windowed App and Stage Manager. They're quite similar. See [Don't Like the Changes? Switch Back](#).
- **A newly important More  button:** The More  button in FaceTime and Phone takes on some heavy lifting. You will use it to access nearly all extras in both apps, like adding callers or starting screen sharing. See [A More Better Organization](#).
- **Learn about the revised info pane:** Messages has overhauled the pane that appears when you tap an avatar or avatars in a conversation. Information is now better organized (and in sync with macOS 26 Tahoe's new look). See [It's All a Pane](#). This section also explain how adding a participant to a group chat now happens immediately on selecting them.
- **Expanded explanation of Live Translation in Messages:** With more testing, I have rewritten and expanded the explanation of how to work with [Live Translation in Messages](#).

- **Accessibility Reader:** With this feature working more reliably, I've fully documented how to use it. See [Accessibility](#).

Introduction

Like a steady drumbeat, every year there's an update to Apple's array of operating systems, including iOS and iPadOS. Some years, the changes are minor and cosmetic, though there is often a unifying theme. In others, like the rollout in 2024 of Apple Intelligence, the changes are major and pervasive, even though Apple Intelligence didn't turn out to be as powerful an introduction as the company wanted.

In 2025, the theme is Liquid Glass, a new interface design approach. In addition to syncing the numbering of all their operating systems to the year—like iOS 26 and iPadOS 26—Apple also unified the user interface for iOS, iPadOS, macOS, tvOS, visionOS, and watchOS to use the same look, feel, and interactions. It's a big change, and it may take you some getting used to. See [Learn to Love Liquid Glass](#) for all the ins and outs. (You can minimize Liquid Glass's reflections, transparency, and animations; see [Resist the Flow](#).)

While that's the marquee feature, Apple also made significant inroads into two radically different areas.

After many years of thinking about how to make an iPad find a unique position in their product line-up and utility, iPadOS 26 brings full-on windows, multitasking, and other “computer” operating system features to the mix. It's a welcome improvement, and it makes sense to introduce it along with a new unified user interface across devices. See [Multitask on an iPad](#).

The other major change has to do with the broad area of communications. Apple has revamped the Phone app and brought it to iPads and Macs. They also added two time-saving options that could save their users billions of hours: one monitors your hold status on a call so you don't have to listen; the other prescreens callers, requiring that they justify why you should pick up. See [Expand Communications](#).

Beyond those big changes, Apple also tweaked a number of apps and some parts of the two operating systems. See [Discover Other App Changes](#) and [Discover Other System Changes](#).

As a maintenance year for iPhone and iPad, this may seem modest. But I think when you fire up your devices and see Liquid Glass everywhere and start to work with the iPadOS 26, you'll find that you're hit with change at every tap. Let's glide through that together.

iOS 26 and iPadOS 26

Quick Start

You can read this book in any order, but you might find it best to first learn about new overarching interface, Liquid Glass, and—if you’re an iPad user—about the huge changes to iPadOS’s approach to windows and apps. Thematically, get to know the ins and outs of communications changes across apps, and all the tiny changes Apple made to their own programs:

Become acquainted with the new Liquid Glass interface:

- There’s a lot to learn about Liquid Glass; see [How Liquid Glass Manifests](#).
- Get familiar with Liquid Glass’s particular features; see [How to Work with Liquid Glass](#).
- Don’t like it? You can [Resist the Flow](#).

Learn how to use iPadOS’s overhauled multitasking:

- Dig into how it provides new ways to size, modify, and arrange windows; see [Work with iPad Windows](#).
- Understand iPad-specific changes to the Dock; see [Expand the Dock with Folders](#).

Explore expanded communications options:

- The Phone app spans all platforms and adds timesaving features; see [Rethink Phone](#), but particularly [Let Your Phone Wait on Hold](#).
- Apple is fighting unsolicited incoming voice, text, and FaceTime traffic more fiercely than ever; see [Screen Calls To Avoid Unwanted Ones](#), [Silencing and Filtering Unwanted Calls](#), and [Screen Incoming Text Messages](#).

- Translation features can drop the language barrier in many conversations and calls; see [Live Translation in Messages](#) and [Live Translation in Phone and FaceTime](#).

Find out more about other changes:

- Apple made small and large changes to numerous apps, particularly CarPlay, Passwords, and Wallet; see [Discover Other App Changes](#).
- Files received some upgrades, while the Preview App has come to the iPhone and iPad; see [Files](#) and [Preview](#).
- Some systemwide changes improve usability and offer other tweaks; see [Discover Other System Changes](#).

Upgrade to iOS 26 or iPadOS 26

iOS 26 and iPadOS 26 has minimum hardware requirements. You won't be able to upgrade any iPhone or iPad that isn't one of the supported models.

Check Your iPhone for Compatibility

You can upgrade to iOS 26 on any of these iPhones series or models:

- iPhone 11 series or later
- iPhone XS series
- iPhone SE (2nd generation or later)

Tip: If you're not sure which model of iPhone you have, go to Settings > General > About and look at the Model Name entry.

Apple Intelligence is required to use certain iOS 26 features, and is available on an iPhone 15 Pro, iPhone 15 Pro Max, or later. Throughout the book, I note when new features require Apple Intelligence, such as Live Translation (in Messages, Phone, and FaceTime), which means they must also be a supported iPhone model.

Check Your iPad for Compatibility

iPadOS 26 will install on these models of iPads, with their minimum generation noted for each:

- iPad Pro 12.9-inch (3rd generation and later)
- iPad Pro 11-inch (1st generation and later)

- iPad Air (3rd generation and later, including M2)
- iPad (8th generation and later)
- iPad mini (5th generation and later)

Tip: If you're not sure which generation your iPad is, look at Settings > General > About > Model Name.

With iPadOS, Apple Intelligence can be used on an iPad mini from 2024 or later (A17 Pro) and any iPad with an M1 or later processor. Models with an Apple silicon M-series chip are the 11-inch iPad Pro, 3rd generation and later; the 12.9-inch iPad Pro, 5th generation and later; and the iPad Air, 5th generation and later.

Back Up Your Device

You don't want to upgrade without a backup on hand from the last state of your iPhone or iPad. You can create a fresh backup via iCloud or by connecting to a Mac or Windows PC.

Back Up with iCloud

Your easiest path to a backup is via iCloud. Not only is it faster and simpler, Apple provides better support for restoring to your device if needed.

If it's your first time making an iCloud backup, follow these steps:

1. Go to Settings > *Your Name* > iCloud > iCloud Backup.
2. Enable Back Up This *iPhone/iPad* or Back Up This iPad.
3. Tap Back Up Now.

Learn to Love Liquid Glass

Change is hard, and interface changes are the hardest. After years—or even decades—of getting used to where an interface element is located, how it looks, or how it works, any difference breaks our muscle memory and causes grating friction as we bump up against a new approach.

In rare but notable instances, new interfaces shave down the hard parts of interaction, and you find yourself surprisingly happy even as you relearn where your fingers, hands, and wrists need to dance and twist.

Apple’s new Liquid Glass interface is so different that it will certainly chafe all existing users as they grow accustomed to the new approach.

Note: Liquid Glass was borrowed in part from visionOS for the Vision Pro, and extends to tvOS, macOS, and watchOS as well.

How Liquid Glass Manifests

Liquid Glass heavily leans on the metaphor that when we look at a flat piece of glass on an iPhone, iPad, or external display (or a Mac laptop screen or TV screen) we’re seeing a series of overlapping planes, like a stack. Things closer to the top of the stack let us dimly see things beneath using varying degrees of *translucency*.

Note: This is as opposed to its opposite word, *opacity*, restricting or filtering light, as Liquid Glass is focused on letting the simulation of light through rather than blocking it.

For instance, the iOS/iPadOS Dock—the bar at the bottom where you can drag fixed items across Home Screens—used to have a translucent, rounded lozenge underneath that dimly passed through colors but not forms from an underlying image or background (**Figure 1**).

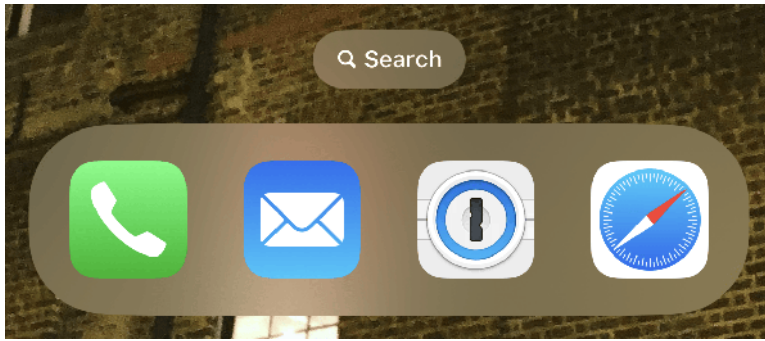


Figure 1: The iOS 18 Dock passes through color but not form.

On an iPhone or iPad, the Dock’s background is flatter on the left and right and looks more like a frosted privacy window in a bathroom, passing through some of the detail of what’s behind it (**Figure 2**).



Figure 2: Liquid Glass provides a more frosted look, allowing detail to seep through, as if icons were resting on a layer. (iPadOS 26 shown.)

That’s the glass part—what’s the liquid element? It’s a little harder to explain. Instead of fixed interface elements with mostly flat and solid content, Liquid Glass elements bubble and flow, grow and shrink, and wobble around.

Previously, button bars appeared as a static element while you navigated within an app in iOS or iPadOS at the bottom of a view, and a color filled the space within them to the lower-left and lower-right corners of the screen. Liquid Glass *floats* the bar—it hangs somewhat above the bottom of a view instead of being anchored by location or color.

Whenever you tap or touch and hold an element, it responds fluidly in some fashion using real-time rendering to create an animation with translucency relative to “underlying” items to show a reaction. A button might swell, a menu flows to expand outwards, and so on.

I think they should have called it Mercury, but the pure element mercury is fully opaque, and I doubt Apple would consider using a toxic element in a name. In fact, it looks like *isomalt*, a lower-calorie

Multitask on an iPad

Apple has rethought the iPad interface with iPadOS 26, adding robust windowing and multitasking features that bring it much closer to a general-purpose computing system like macOS. However, it still keeps its unique iPad nature, such as relying heavily on gestures.

Many users have been asking for this sort of change since not long after the introduction of the iPad in 2010, and this update feels like it encompasses much of what people hoped for without giving up what makes an iPad more than a big iPhone or a Mac with a touchscreen and optional keyboard.

This chapter introduces the new iPad interface elements and explains how to access and use them to your best benefit.

Tip: If you don't like the new approach discussed in the coming pages, you can jump ahead to [Don't Like the Changes? Switch Back](#), where I explain how Apple lets you pick among three interface styles.

Note: This rethink changed two key favorite views in iPadOS. Apple eliminated both Split View, which allowed two apps to share the screen side-by-side, and Slide Over, which let you slide one app into a partial view on the left or right on top of whatever app you were using. Slide Over was so popular that Apple brought it back in iPadOS 26.1; Split View remains missing.

Work with iPad Windows

iPadOS has played with ways to divide the screen into segments, so that apps could occupy more or less space. With iPadOS 26, Apple jumped fully into offering true windows.

Resize a Window

If you see a black line in the form of a quarter-arc of a circle in the lower-right corner of an app or window, you can resize it (**Figure 8**). Drag any corner to resize it to any shape, all the way down to its minimum dimensions.

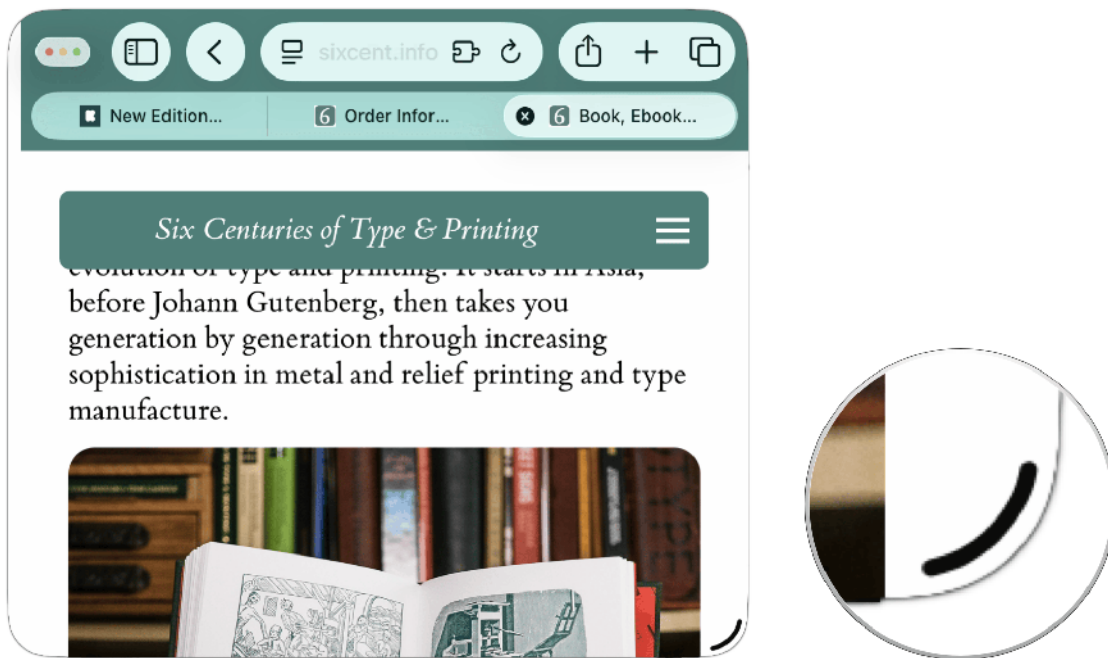


Figure 8: The lower-right corner quarter-arc of a circle (enlarged at right) is both an indicator of window resizing capability, and sometimes the only way to resize a window.

Tip: In some window positions and configurations, you can only use the quarter-arc resizing tool—the corners don't work.

Once resized from full screen, the app appears on a new Finder-like layer with other apps that have been resized down from full screen. You can drag the top portion of the window to move it around on that layer. A window can even be dragged off screen and show just a portion at an edge.

To swap between your resized window and a maximized one, you can double-tap (or double-click) the top edge. You can also drag the top edge downward when in full-screen mode to snap back to the previously resized dimensions.

Expand Communications

Apple made significant changes to their trio of communications apps: FaceTime, Messages, and Phone. Some of these changes span two or more of these apps. The Phone app received a significant redesign. It's also now available on iPads (as well as on Macs).

I've organized this chapter in order of how important I believe each added feature or upgrade is to most people, which remarkably puts Phone first! I follow with tweaks to FaceTime that bring it in line with Phone, changes to Messages, real-time translation in all-three apps, and capturing local audio from any call or conference app.

A More Better Organization

FaceTime and Phone benefit from an expanded use of the More  button. Previously, the apps had some options on their main screens, in pop-up menus (such as video  menu on Macs), in the FaceTime sidebar, and so forth. Now, you can typically tap or click the More  button to access options like adding a caller to a FaceTime or Phone call, activating Live Translation, Live Captions, sending a caller to Voicemail, and—well—more.

Rethink Phone

Apple left the Phone app alone for many years, until some aesthetic tweaks and an improvement in searching occurred in the last couple of releases. With iOS 26, Apple has overhauled the interface, integrating FaceTime audio and video call history, offering an exciting new feature to avoid wasting time on hold, and providing an option for screening calls in real time, similar to the [Live Voicemail](#) feature added in iOS 17.

The Phone app also now comes in a version for iPadOS 26 and macOS 26 Tahoe that offers nearly all the features and power of Phone for iOS. Previously, Phone features were shoehorned into FaceTime on those two platforms.

Note: The full iPhone screen Contact Poster feature introduced in iOS 17 comes to the iPad with iPadOS 26 in its Phone app. (A version of it is also now in macOS 26 Tahoe.)

Choose Unified or Classic Phone Display

The new Phone app comes with a simplified layout labeled unified (as opposed to classic). With an iPhone you can switch between them; on an iPad or Mac, the unified option is all that's available.

The unified layout features five buttons arrayed around the screen: Edit, Filter , Calls, Contacts, Keypad, and Search  (**Figure 19**).

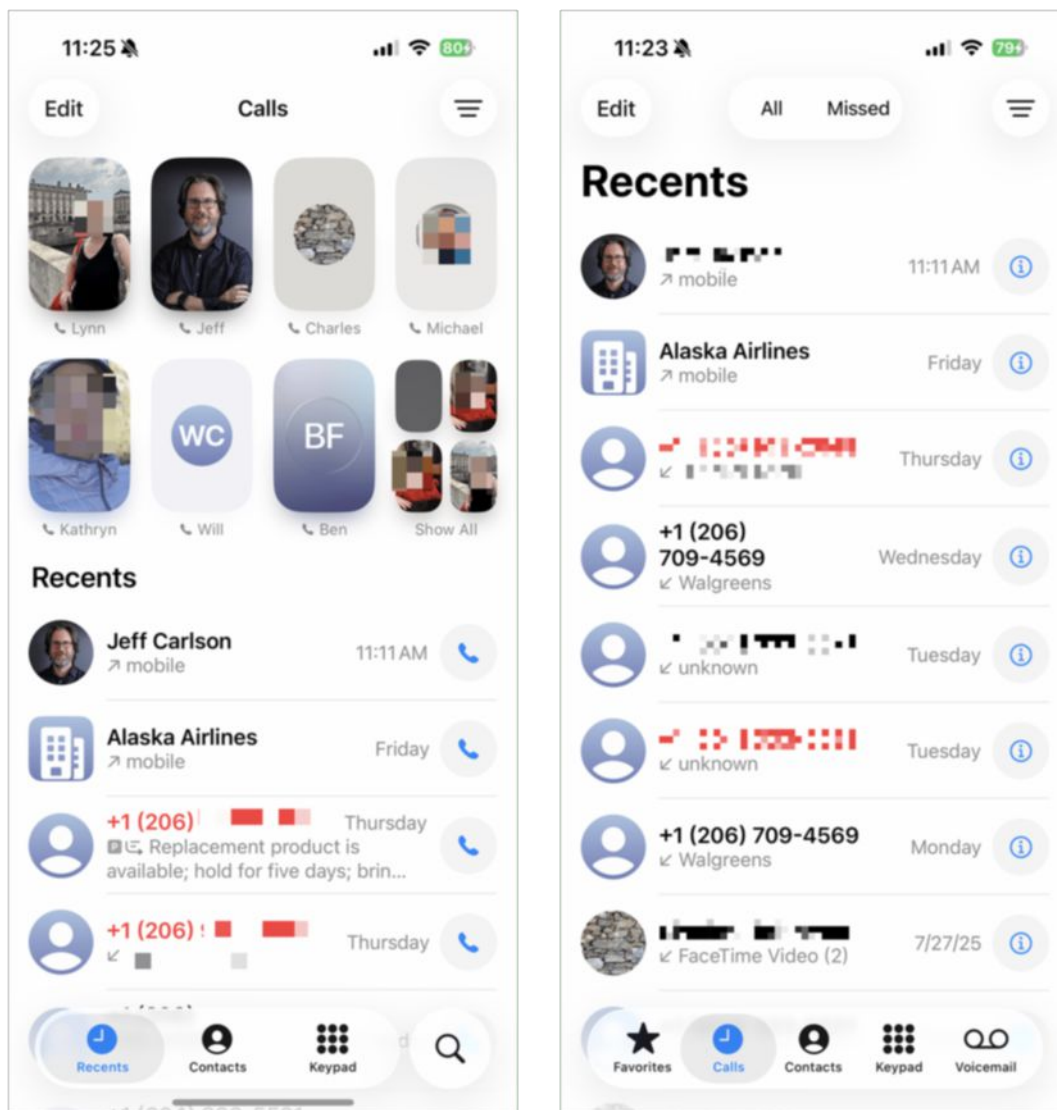


Figure 19: The unified Phone interface (left) more efficiently displays phone-related information and options. However, you might prefer classic (right), which is just updated for Liquid Glass.

Discover Other App Changes

Beyond the big changes, many apps in iOS 26 and iPadOS 26 received smaller tweaks or modest new features. This chapter covers those miscellaneous changes.

Camera

The Camera app sprouted so many buttons and options that it had become difficult to navigate or find where some features were hidden. A redesign puts the simplest foot forward with two buttons at the bottom: Video and Photo. Touch and hold either button to reveal the full array of alternatives, like Cinematic and Portrait (**Figure 44**).

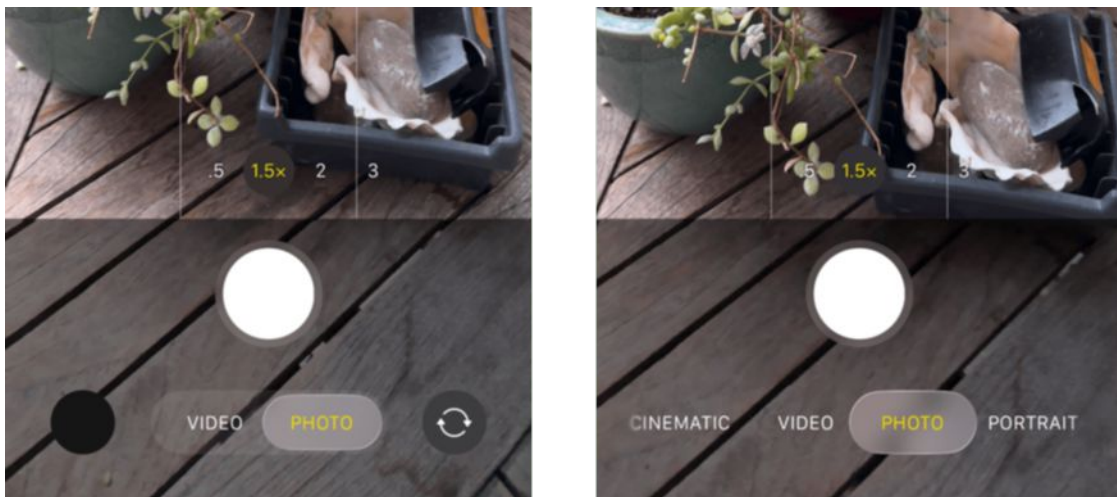


Figure 44: Simplified Video and Photo buttons show at the bottom (left); touch and hold to see the full set of options (right).

Camera's special features are now represented by a grid  icon that, when tapped, reveals all the contextually available extras. This can include settings for flash, Live Photo (on/off), timer, exposure, styles, filter, aspect ratio, and Night Mode (**Figure 45**). You can also tap the Video or Photo button to bring up these options.

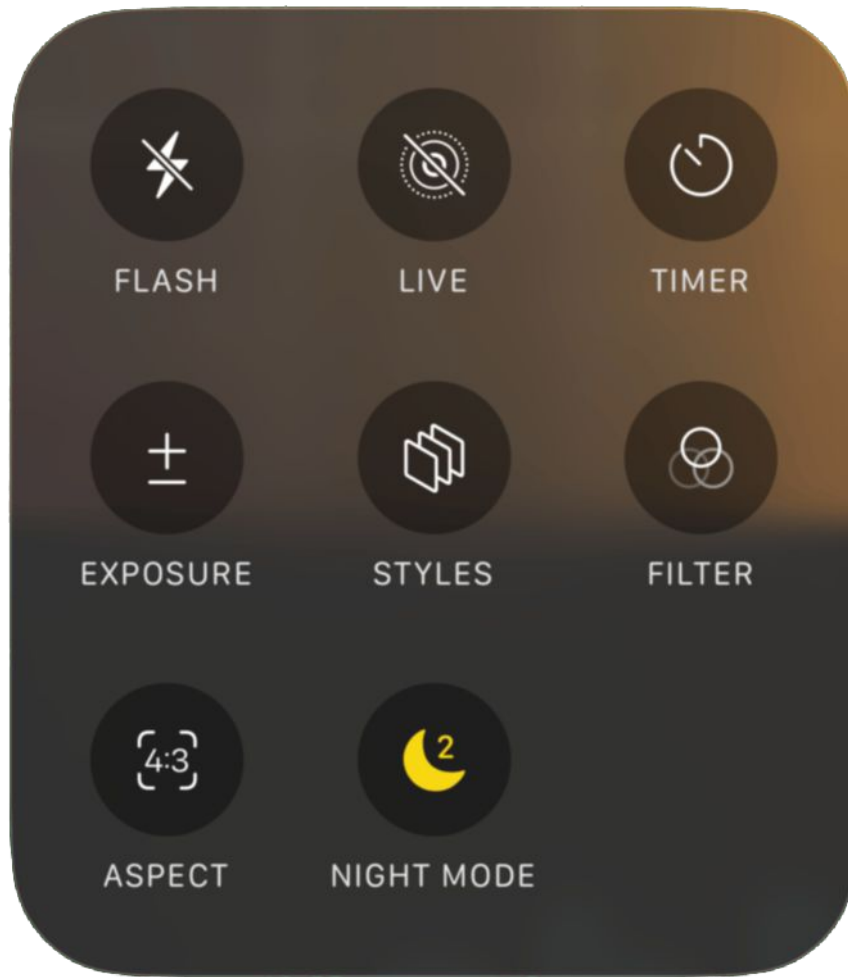


Figure 45: You can access these far-better-revealed extra settings for Camera through two easy-to-find tappable locations!

You can launch the Camera app on an iPhone by swiping left on the Lock Screen. This can lead to inadvertent use in your pocket or elsewhere. Apple lets you disable this feature starting in iOS 26.1 by adding a switch in Settings > Camera: by default, Lock Screen Swipe to Open Camera is enabled; disable to turn that swipe off.

CarPlay

CarPlay is Apple's highly successful car-systems integration that lets you plug an iPhone into nearly every recent model car and have the iPhone drive access to apps through a simplified touchscreen interface that's built into the car's dashboard or added through third-party upgrades. CarPlay's best apps are, of course, Maps and Music!

Discover Other System Changes

Apple also made some systemwide changes in aspects of the operating systems and support sites related to them. Here are these changes.

Accessibility

The latest versions of iOS and iPadOS offer Accessibility Reader, a way of having the text on a screen you're looking at in any app simplified like the Reader in Safari, but even more so. When you're viewing an app, you can swipe to reveal the Control Center and then tap the Accessibility Reader control to have it extract the screen's contents.

Tip: See [Capture Local Audio](#) for instructions on adding a Control Center control.

Your iPhone or iPad switches to the Accessibility Reader app, which shows just the text it was able to identify. It's presented without formatting and in full-screen mode (**Figure 64**). I'm not quite sure how the text is extracted, as it sometimes includes material that's not visible on the screen I'm viewing.

Performance is extremely variable: some apps that seemed to have clearly legible text resulted in Accessibility Reader throwing up its hands. Sometimes, returning to the app and invoking Accessibility Reader again solved the problem.

You can tap the More ... button to choose Customize Reader, choose a color scheme, and tap Edit to customize colors, type, contrast, and formatting (**Figure 65**).

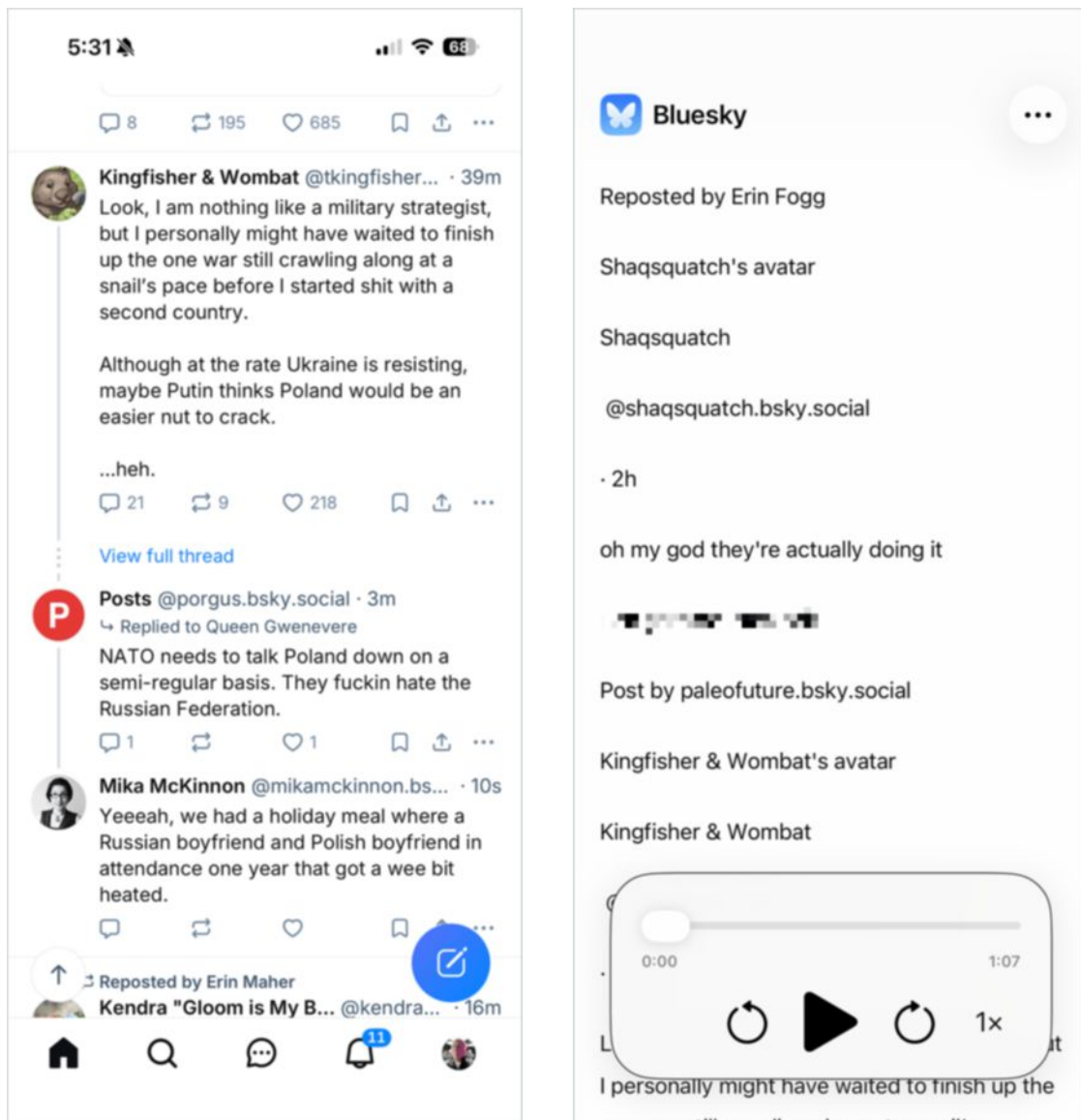


Figure 64: The original app view at left is translated into plain text at right using Accessibility Reader, including some text that isn't visible on the original app screen.

You can also use a standard audio player, which appears by default, to read the text aloud. To hide the audio player, tap the More ... button and choose Hide Audio Controls.

For those who read Braille, Apple says they have overhauled their system under the name Braille Access for connected Braille displays.

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About the Author



Take Control Books Executive Editor Glenn Fleishman never stops writing about technology and its implications. He's in his third decade of writing for publications as varied as *American History*, *Fast Company*, the *Economist*, *Increment*, the *New York Times*, *Macworld*, and *TidBITS*, and many others. In 2012, he was a two-game champion on *Jeopardy*!

You can find Glenn on [Mastodon](#) (@glennf@zeppelin.flights) and [Bluesky](#) (@glennf.com). Reach him by email at glenn@glennf.com.

Shameless Plug

I have two recent books about technology that—mostly—aren't about computers. [Six Centuries of Type & Printing](#) is a brisk yet thorough look at the technological development that has taken us from Gutenberg (and even before) to the present day. You can order a copy of the print, ebook, or audiobook edition [directly from me](#).

[How Comics Are Made](#) traces the history of newspaper comics in North America from 1896 to the present, looking at the path from a cartoonist's hand to the printed page. Find a copy at bookstores worldwide. Links for ordering from local, regional, and national chains can be [found at my website](#). ([Check your local library as well!](#))

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