

VOICE AI · CASE STORY

Cooking with your hands full

What it takes to build a cooking assistant you talk to instead of tap. And why the voice is the hardest part.

4 min

Click or press → to continue

Imagine a friend reading you the recipe from across the kitchen.

Friend

"Onions golden? Good. Cumin next, just a teaspoon."



You never touch a screen. You just cook, and talk.

Cooking from a phone is the opposite.

- 1 A greasy screen you don't want to touch.
- 2 Rewinding a video every thirty seconds.
- 3 Scrolling up to the ingredients, down to the steps, and losing your place.

Meet Sam. Flour on both hands, a pan getting hot, and the recipe on a phone that just went to sleep.



Sam

Was that one teaspoon or one tablespoon?

Rule 1

A conversation, not a slideshow.

SLIDESHOW

Step 4 of 12

Tap Next. Tap Next. Tap Next.

CONVERSATION

"I fried the onions."

"Great. Add the cumin now."

Sam says where he is. Sage replies with the next thing to do, at his pace, as small a step as he asks for.

Rule 2

Everything by voice. Taps are only shortcuts.

"Next"

"Say that again"

"How much salt?"

"Swap the cream"

"Remember I like it spicy"

If something can only be done with a tap, it's not hands-free. Every new feature gets its voice path first.

Rule 3

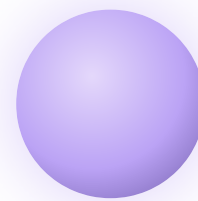
Show what the AI is doing, without words.



Listening



Thinking



Speaking

One glowing orb. Ripples when it listens, churns when it thinks, pulses with its voice.

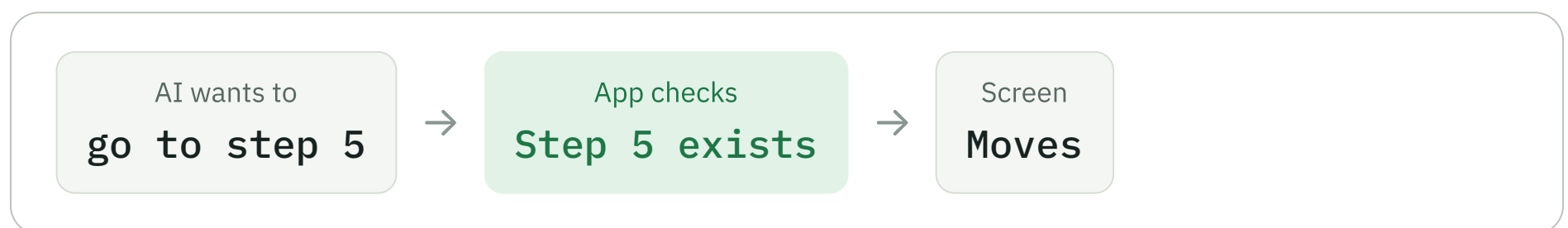
● PRINCIPLE

Visible system status

People should always know what the system is doing.¹ In voice, there's no button to look at, so motion has to carry the state.

Rule 4

The AI talks. It doesn't drive the screen.



The AI can only ask the app to do a small set of fixed things. So it can never invent a step that isn't in the recipe.

Rule 5

Answer the easy questions without AI.

"How many tablespoons in a quarter cup?"

Answered on the phone

4 tbsp · instantly

Unit conversions, "next", "how long", nutrition from real ingredient data: no AI call needed. If it can't be sure, it hands off to the AI rather than guess.

● PRINCIPLE

Fast, free, and right

Use AI where it adds something. Plain code is faster, cheaper, and exact for the mechanical questions.²

Rule 6

Any recipe in. One recipe out.

Pasted text Website link Video link →

One clean recipe

For videos, it reads the description first. That's where many cooks post the actual recipe.

Rule 7

A wake word has to be heard, and only when meant.

"Hey Sous" heard as "Sue", "Seuss", "soo"

"Hey Sage" clear, easy to hear

"Add some sage" the herb shouldn't wake it up

The app was renamed because the phone couldn't hear its first name.

Where it stands

The voice is the hard part.

WORKS TODAY

- Sage speaks naturally
- Quick answers on the phone
- Importing and saving recipes

STILL BEING FIXED

- Hearing the wake word every time
- Listening reliably in a noisy kitchen
- Saying so when the mic fails

Kitchen tests keep finding new problems. Each one sends it back for another round.

BEHIND THE STORY

Sam's kitchen is mine.

"Cooking from a phone is clumsy... losing your place every single time. I hated it." So I started building **Sage**.

When I tested an early version, my own verdict was:
"doesn't feel like a voice first app at all." So the cook-along was rebuilt around voice: an orb, live captions, and a chat button for typing. Nothing else.

Sage is still in progress. I'm testing it on my phone, in my own kitchen.

CHEAT SHEET

Designing a hands-free AI

- 1 **Talk, don't slide.** Let people say where they are.
- 2 **Voice first.** Taps are shortcuts, never the only way.
- 3 **Motion shows state** when there's nothing to look at.
- 4 **The AI asks the app;** it never drives the screen.
- 5 **Plain code** for the easy answers.
- 6 **Test in the real room.** The kitchen decides if it works.

WHAT'S NEXT

Sage is still cooking.

It's in progress and being tested on my phone. More when the voice is right.

You finished case story 04: "Cooking with your hands full." Sage is being built by Anuja Nimmagadda by directing Claude Code. Sam and the examples in this story are fictional.