



# CHOOSE YOUR AUDIO FORMAT

To MP3 or Not to MP3?





All listeners want ease of use. How do the newer formats compare to the tried-and-true audiocassette? Here's what you need to know about the choices—now and for the future.

## CASSETTES

Audiocassettes and portable players launched audiobooks as an alternate format for readers in the early 1970s. Once cassette players were standard in vehicles, audiobooks became part of the cultural mainstream.

**PROS:** Easy and dependable; automatic bookmarking—they stop and start where you leave off.

**CONS:** The music industry has abandoned the cassette format, and automakers offer players as a custom option or not at all.

**THE FUTURE:** Bookstores are not stocking new audiobooks on cassette, and publishers are offering fewer titles. The format isn't dead—yet—but it will be harder to find newer titles. Libraries have built huge cassette collections, and those will be available. Keep your current players working; new ones are getting hard to find.

## CDs

Hardly perfect, but CDs are the norm for music and now the dominant format for audiobooks. Portable players are cheap, and CD players in new cars are standard.

**PROS:** Space-savers; best choice of title selection; audiobooks on CD can be transferred to newer digital players.

**CONS:** More expensive than cassettes and have less playing time. Bookmarking is only to tracks and varies by players and by publisher.

**THE FUTURE:** CDs are currently the format of choice for publishers, both for new titles and reissues of older titles. CD packages showcase titles well and allow the familiar browsing experience. CDs will continue to be the top format while other technologies evolve.

## AUDIOFILE RECOMMENDS

The best bet for most listeners, for now and the near future, is CDs—because they can be played on multiple devices; more titles are available on CD; and you can buy, rent, or borrow them.

## MP3-CDs

A nice compact technology that arrived a little late. Many portable CD players now play MP3-CDs as well as regular CDs, and new cars will arrive equipped for both.

**PROS:** Holds even long audiobooks on one or two discs. Physical, not virtual media, if you like your audios in tangible form.

**CONS:** Limited availability of titles. Only a few publishers currently publish in this format.

**THE FUTURE:** The compactness and the hard media make the format appealing, but the limited title selection limits the allure. However, there may be an expansion of MP3-CDs as the digital download format evolves.

## DIGITAL DOWNLOADS

The format that Audible.com brought to listeners is now available from other retailers and resources. Downloadable listening comes in different file types—WMA, iTunes, and MP3.

**PROS:** Complete recordings from beginning to end with no moving parts. Very compact. Very portable. Once listeners “get” the technology, they often switch over completely. The corporate battles about file types will continue to limit one-source accessibility.

**CONS:** The technology seems daunting—but isn't. Listening in the car is not as easy as it should be and requires additional accessories. Fewer titles available than on CD.

**THE FUTURE:** There's plenty of work to be done, and players will need to evolve and access increase, but digital downloads *are* the future.