

# Audio Books

**Contents:** *To jump to the topic you would like, click on the links below*

- **Introduction**
- **Use & Listening practices**
- **Where can I get Audio Books?**
- **History**

## Introduction

An audiobook (or talking book) is a recording of a text being read. A reading of the complete text is noted as "unabridged", while readings of a reduced version, or abridgement of the text are labeled as "abridged".

Spoken audio has been available in schools and public libraries and to a lesser extent in music shops since the 1930s.

Audio Books are can be used as Assistive Devices to enable people with disabilities to be able to enjoy books. They are also useful in aiding a variety of disabilities including:

- mobility impaired or elderly person, who battle to hold a book or turn pages.
- Blind or badly Visually Impaired, who battle or can't see the words.
- Intellectually Impaired, who can't read but can still enjoy the stories in books.
- People with Dyslexia, to learn to read.

Audiobooks have also been used to teach children to read and to increase reading comprehension. They can also be useful in learning a new language.

Spoken audio is available in schools and public libraries and to a lesser extent in music shops. Many spoken word albums were made prior to the age of videocassettes, DVDs, compact discs, and downloadable audio, however often of poetry and plays rather than books.

Audiobooks are distributed on any audio format available, but primarily these are records, cassette tapes, CDs, MP3 CDs, downloadable digital formats (e.g., MP3 (.mp3), Windows Media Audio (.wma), Advanced Audio Coding (.aac)), and solid state preloaded digital devices in which the audio content is preloaded and sold together with a hardware device.

## Use & Listening practices

About 40 percent of all audiobook consumption occurs through public libraries, with the remainder served primarily through retail book stores. Library download programs are currently experiencing rapid growth (more than 5,000 public libraries offer free downloadable audio books). Libraries are also popular places to check out audio books in the CD format.

Audiobooks are considered a valuable learning tool because of their format. Unlike traditional books or a video program, one can learn from an audiobook while doing other tasks. Such tasks include doing the laundry and exercising indoors, among others. The most popular general use of audiobooks by adults is when driving an automobile or traveling with public transport, as an alternative to radio. Many people listen as well just to relax or as they drift off into sleep.

A recent survey released by the Audio Publishers Association found that the overwhelming majority of audiobook users listen in the car, and more than two-thirds of audiobook buyers described audiobooks as relaxing and a good way to multitask. Another stated reason for choosing audiobooks over other formats is that an audio performance makes some books more interesting.

Common practices include:

- **Replaying:** Depending upon one's degree of attention and interest, it is often necessary to listen to segments of an audio book more than once to allow the material to be understood and retained satisfactorily. Replaying may be done immediately or after extended periods of time.
- **Learning:** People may listen to an audio book (usually an unabridged one) while following along in an actual book. This helps them to learn words that they may not learn correctly if they were only to read the book. This can also be a very effective way to learn a new language.
- **Multitasking:** Many audiobook listeners choose the format because it allows multitasking during otherwise mundane or routine tasks such as exercising, crafting, or cooking.  
Entertainment: Audiobooks have become a popular form of travel entertainment for families or commuters.

## Where can I get Audio Books?

About 40 percent of all audiobook consumption occurs through public libraries, with the remainder served primarily through retail book stores. Library download programs are currently experiencing rapid growth (more than 5,000 public libraries offer free downloadable audio books). Libraries are also popular places to check out audio books in the CD format.

There are also a wide variety of Charitable and nonprofit organizations that make audio books available online, so that they can be downloaded. Some of these organizations also lend out these audio books and will post them to you.

With the rise of the Internet, broadband technologies, & new compressed audio formats, it is now easier than ever to obtain audio books by downloading them from anywhere in the world.

Well known Charitable and nonprofit organizations include:

- **Learning Ally** was founded in 1948 & serves more than 300,000 K-12, college and graduate students, veterans and lifelong learners – all of whom cannot read standard print due to blindness, visual impairment, dyslexia, or other learning disabilities. Learning Ally's collection of more than 80,000 human-narrated textbooks and literature titles can be downloaded on mainstream smartphones and tablets, and is the largest of its kind in the world.
- **Bookshare** was Founded in 2002 & is an online library of computer-read audiobooks in accessible formats for people with print disabilities.
- **Libri Vox** was founded in 2005 & is also an online library of downloadable audiobooks and a free non for profit organisation developed by Hugh McGuire. It has audiobooks in several languages. Most of their languages are typically Western European languages.
- **Calibre Audio Library** is a UK charity providing a subscription-free service of unabridged audiobooks for people with sight problems, dyslexia or other disabilities, who cannot read print. They have a library of over 8,550 fiction and non-fiction titles which can be borrowed by post on MP3 CDs and memory sticks or via streaming.
- **Listening Books** is an audiobook charity in the UK providing an internet streaming and postal service to anyone who has a disability or illness which makes it difficult to hold a book, turn its pages, or read in the usual way. They have audiobooks for both leisure and learning and a library of over 4,000 titles which are recorded in their own digital studios or commercially sourced.

## History

Spoken word recordings first became possible with the invention of the phonograph by Thomas Edison in 1877. "Phonographic books" were one of the original applications envisioned by Edison which would "speak to blind people without effort on their part."

The term "talking book" came into being in the 1930s with government programs designed for blind readers, while the term "audiobook" came into use during the 1970s when audiocassettes began to replace records. In 1994, the Audio Publishers Association established the term "audiobook" as the industry standard.

Spoken audio have been available in schools and public libraries and to a lesser extent in music shops since the 1930s. Many spoken word albums were made prior to the age of videocassettes, DVDs, compact discs, and downloadable audio, however often of poetry and plays rather than books. It was not until the 1980s that the medium began to attract book retailers, and then book retailers started displaying audiobooks on bookshelves rather than in separate displays.

During the 1970s, a number of technological innovations allowed the cassette tape wider usage in libraries and also spawned the creation of new commercial audiobook market. These innovations included the introduction of small and cheap portable players such as the Walkman,

and the widespread use of cassette decks in cars, particularly imported Japanese models which flooded the market during the multiple energy crises of the decade.

With the rise of the Internet, broadband technologies, new compressed audio formats and portable media players, the popularity of audiobooks has increased significantly during the late 1990s and 2000s. In 1997, Audible.com pioneered the world's first mass-market digital media player, named "The Audible Player", it held 2-hours of audio and was touted as being "smaller and lighter than a Walkman", the popular cassette player used at the time. Digital audiobooks were a significant new milestone as they allowed listeners freedom from physical media such as cassettes and CD-ROMs which required transportation through the mail, allowing instead instant download access from online libraries of unlimited size, and portability using comparatively small and lightweight devices. Audible.com was the first to establish a website, in 1998, from which digital audiobooks could be purchased.