

## **Mp3 - Not just for music anymore**

### **What is MP3?**

Mp3 audio files have long been a familiar among music fans, but recently they have expanded to a variety of new uses. Language teachers have found a number of ways to use these files and some are beginning to share audio recording (along with associated lessons and activities) through web sites. Mp3 files are high quality audio files that are highly compressed. Typically, files are a tenth of the size as those on audio CDs, thus an MP3 CD could hold 700 minutes of music as opposed to the 70 minutes that a typical audio CD is capable of holding. This means that files are small enough to be transferred through the use of email and course management systems or collected in relatively small digital library archives. This variety of approaches to sharing such files makes them as easy to work with as the word processing files with which most users are already familiar. Even better, portable MP3 music players can easily carry enough language learning materials to occupy students for months at a time. For more general information about MP3 file format, see <http://www.mp3.about.com>.

### **How do I get started?**

MP3 files can be created by recording or converting from virtually any kind of audio or video file. Free open-source programs like Audacity (See issue 41) make it easy to manipulate audio files in a variety of ways. Such software also allows users to record traditional analog cassette-based recordings to a digital format. Digital is preferable over analog for a number of reasons, but primary among these is the longevity and flexibility that digital files offer. Wiretap (<http://www.ambrosiasw.com/utilities/freebies/>) allows users to record any audio that is being played on a computer and save it as an MP3 file. Apple's iTunes software also allows users to convert files to MP3 and to purchase audio books in MP3 format.

### **Players and portability**

Mp3 files can be accessed through conventional desktop and laptop computers or any number of portable audio devices. Mp3 Players such as the Rio Carbon and Apple iPod allow students to store hours and hours of listening materials that they can access at their convenience. Unlike the traditional language lab, this kind of use essentially allows any student to have a pocket equivalent of a language lab that goes anywhere they go. Students can interact with these materials while they commute, exercise or travel. Further, a number of these portable devices include or accommodate a microphone that allows students to record themselves and others for language learning purposes. These files can then be transferred to any computer and/or shared with any other users. For more about MP3 players see <http://mp3.about.com/cs/portableplayers/tp/portables.htm>.

### **Archiving**

Teachers can create libraries of audio recordings that serve as core or supplemental listening materials. Such a collection can replace the traditional cassette library that accompanies a language lab, thus eliminating many of the problems that have typically plagued such collections, tape degradation, equipment failure and scalability of use.

Archives that are accessible through a network, either locally or internet-based, allow these files to be easily shared by any users.

#### Copyright issues

The accessibility and sharing of audio files often immediately results in legal discussion. Most educational use of commercial materials allows teachers more flexibility than they might otherwise think.

For detailed information about teachers and copyright see:  
<http://home.earthlink.net/~cnew/research.htm>

#### Sharing and locating

#### Chunking

What's next?