

Audio-Consumer Buying Guide

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Select Your Speakers

Speakers have the most influence on how any audio system will sound. With so many speakers available in various shapes, styles and sizes, you may feel overwhelmed when trying to choose. Use this Buying Guide to help you find the perfect speakers.

TOPIC	DETAILS		
Why Do I Need All of Those Speakers?	Speaker Type	Function	
	Front Left and Right	Recreate the front left and right soundtrack with surround sound content and all two-channel (stereo) content.	
	Center	Reproduces primarily voices and dialogue, which accounts for most of a movie's or TV show's soundtrack.	
	Surround Left and Right	Create a sense of space and depth and are typically to the sides or rear of the listening position. A system may have two or more surround speakers, depending on the audio system's capabilities	
	Subwoofer	Delivers low bass and low frequency effects often found in movie soundtracks.	
Speaker Types	Your favorite consumer electronics retailer likely sells many different types of speakers. Use this guide to understand each type and its role in a home audio system.		
	Design	Description	Considerations
	Satellite Speakers	Small speakers with either a single, full-range driver or a tweeter and mid-bass driver only. They rely on a subwoofer or bass module to reproduce low frequencies. These are typically bundled with home theater "package" systems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small and easy to mount • Limited power handling
	Bookshelf Speakers	Better suited to handle higher power output and bass than satellite speakers, these speakers come in small to medium sized cabinets and usually feature two or more drivers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require a bookshelf or stands to position them at the proper listening level • Smaller cabinets usually yield less bass response than larger cabinets
	Floor Standing ("Tower") Speakers	Larger, full-range speakers that typically use multiple drivers to reproduce a wider range of frequencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically have highest power handling capability of all speaker designs
	Built-in Speakers	In- and on-wall and in- and on-ceiling designs mount flush on drywall or other surfaces to create a custom-installed look.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great choice for a variety of home theater applications where a custom look is desired or where space is at a premium
	Center Channel Speaker	Some speakers are designed specifically for the center channel of a surround audio system. Commonly these speakers are designed to sit on top or below a TV set or mount under a projector screen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally the center channel speaker should match (i.e., use drivers with same tonal qualities and specs) the front left and right speakers
	Subwoofer	Delivers low bass and low frequency effects often found in movie soundtracks. Typical design is a floor-standing cabinet.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A must-have for any home theater or media room

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Four Considerations When Selecting Speakers	Use this chart to help narrow your choices based on four characteristics.		
	Considerations	How To Decide	Details
	Application	Will they be used primarily for music, movies or both?	Speakers with a wider frequency response and greater bass response are typically better suited for multi-channel music playback.
	Décor	How does the speaker's finish match the room in terms of size, color and style?	Speakers come in all sizes, shapes, styles and installation types.
	Amplification	What receiver or amplifier will be used? What is speaker's sensitivity rating?	Generally speaking, the higher power handling (expressed as watts/channel "RMS") and sensitivity (expressed in dB), the better.
Room Dimensions	How much power handling will you need to fill the room with sound? Can the room fit floor-standing speakers or bookshelf speakers on stands?	Larger rooms need higher-sensitivity speakers and speakers that can handle higher power output.	
Auditioning Speakers	Perhaps the most subjective – and important – step when choosing speakers is finding those that sound best to you. Ask the sales associate to demo different speakers for you and listen for the five qualities below.		
	Characteristic	How	Listen For
	Distortion	Turn the volume to the loudest level you expect to listen at home.	Distortion of the sound.
	Soundstage	Close your eyes and see if you can locate instruments or sounds as if they were on a stage in front of you.	You should not hear sound from only one speaker, rather the sound should entirely fill the space. The speakers should essentially "disappear."
	Dispersion	Listen at different spots in the room.	Is there a single "sweet spot" where the sound is remarkably better, or can you move around the listening position and still maintain good sound quality?
	Treble and Midrange	Listen to cymbals, pianos and acoustic guitars.	Highs and mids should be free of echos and not sound overly "bright."
Bass	Listen to kick drums and cellos for detail and accuracy.	A constant "boom" or rumble is a sign of inaccurate bass.	