

MP3 Players

This is a highly personal view. We (ISMLA) cannot accept any responsibility! Prices change as do specifications but the broad themes of this article will hopefully be of use. **Please contribute your experiences; they will become an addendum to this feature.**

Most of us are looking at Mp3 recorders for one of three reasons:

- New AS listening comprehensions
- New AS oral exams
- Classroom use

Key elements are likely to be

- Reliability and ease of use
- MP3? Or Dedicated voice recorder?
- Cost? And where to buy?
- Functions?
- Internal rechargeable battery? Or replaceable?
- Ease of uploading/downloading files?

New AS listening comprehensions

Beware! Read the specifications of your exam board carefully. Storage, when and who can load files, storage, number of spare recorders, etc.

New AS oral exams

Beware (as above)!. Visiting or external examiner? Adult present with visiting examiner? Special software required? Can you still use cassettes?

Classroom use

Fantastic. Load a short listening comprehension to start the class. Pupils record themselves as a separate task. Download files at end of the class. Buy several USB hubs so you can plug in all players at once.

Reliability and ease of use

Vital. You are probably going to have to buy several different sorts and test them to destruction. Many players are identical but carry a different brand name. Our recommendations at the end.

Mp3? Or dedicated voice recorder?

Orals or listening comprehension? You should be able to get away with a £10 MP3 Player for both – but make sure staff / pupils can use them before the day.

Cost and where to buy

- Expect to buy an MP3 player for £10.00 upwards. £30.00 upwards for a Dictaphone style machine. No real advantage'
- At the moment (02/2009) PC World / Dixons / Curry's all have good deals on MP3 players. Typically a 1 GB (more than sufficient for our needs) costs £9.99. 2 Gb = £14.99 and 4 Gb = £25.00.
- Amazon – usually a good source of this sort of thing – has remarkably few deals. Beware some unheard-of brands. I have tried three – all of which either failed or ate batteries at a huge rate.
- Argos had Christmas deals which have now disappeared.

Functions

- In a word, the more the worse. The more functions there are, the more teachers and students are confused, make a mess of things and don't want to use the recorder next time... Avoid recorders with a radio.
- Beware voice recorders that use their own file format ((i.e. not MP3) and need their own software to transfer files. Sometimes there are four folders – confusing.
- Worth looking out for is the ability to change the language used – e.g. 'enregistrer' rather than record

Internal rechargeable battery? Or replaceable?

My view was to go for an internal rechargeable battery.

Our technician's preference was to suggest rechargeable AAA batteries on the basis that the most likely thing to break was the battery. Avoid cheap non-rechargeable batteries which can leak. We have gone with the technician's advice and no problems so far.

Ease of uploading / downloading files

Not that quick to do. Plug in player, open up drive, open up voice folder, transfer file to computer, rename file (important – all players will produce a file something like 'voice001'; when you download the next file it will overwrite the previous one).

Our recommendations

All MP3 recorders tested make excellent quality recordings.



Logik – 1Mb 2Mb, Easy to use toggle on the front. Robust. Ideal

Philips – 1Mb 2Mb. Confusing record control. Player not always recognised by Windows
Philips – 4Mb. Superior model. Rechargeable battery. Has a radio. Recording confusing
Philips – 8 Mb Video. No real benefit. Video has to be converted to Philips format
Sony 2 Gb. Avoid Red/Blue/Black cheap oval-ended players on Amazon – unreliable

Voice recorders were more expensive and harder to use to store listening comprehensions.

Nick Mair
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