

Recommended Tools for Podcast Listening

How to Find and Subscribe to a Podcast

Podcasts can be found in many ways. If someone tells you about an interesting podcast, you might start by searching Google for the title, with the word *podcast* after it. You can usually find the website of the podcast and from there find a link to subscribe. If you're looking for a particular episode, you don't actually need to subscribe. Most podcasts offer ways to listen to individual episodes in your web browser without subscribing.¹

Once you start subscribing to several podcasts, you'll probably want to use a desktop or mobile app to organize your subscriptions. Apple's iTunes is the most popular desktop app (for Mac or Windows).² It also has one of the largest directories of podcasts available, so it's a good place to search for and browse podcasts by topic.

To do a quick search, enter a podcast name in the iTunes search box, and then filter your results by podcasts. If you visit the Podcasts section of the iTunes store, you can browse by topic and other categories, such as Editor's Choice, New & Noteworthy, Modern Audio Drama, and so on.

One thing to keep in mind is that iTunes does not contain all of the world's podcasts. Some podcasters don't configure their shows for it. Also, Apple has different iTunes stores for each country, so many international podcasts are not found in the US store.³ Because of that, it's a good idea to use more than one directory. I'll discuss these in the section of this report on podcast discovery later in this chapter.

There are quite a few useful mobile apps for podcast listening, and they are available for multiple platforms. Most have a directory and search function

within the app for finding podcasts to subscribe to. Once you subscribe to a podcast, you can choose whether to automatically download the latest episode and whether to delete episodes you've finished. You can also choose from several other choices to customize your listening. We'll look at both desktop and mobile apps in the upcoming sections of this report.

Mobile Apps for iOS and Android

There are many options for listening to podcasts on mobile devices. In this section, I'll list some of the highest-rated apps for iOS and Android.

One of the reasons to use a dedicated mobile app for podcasts is that these apps have very useful features, such as skipping ahead or back by a few seconds (to skip introductions), a sleep timer, volume boost for noisy situations, and so on.

My current favorite app is Pocket Casts (\$3.99) because it's available for both iOS and Android, has many useful features, and has a very user-friendly design.⁴ Features such as free syncing across all your devices, web playback (for a one-time fee of \$9), variable speed playback, skip ahead by 45 seconds or back by 10 seconds (the number of seconds is adjustable in Settings), volume boost (for noisy situations, like in the car), and a sleep timer. If you use both Android and iOS, you will like this app since you can sync your podcasts between Android and iOS devices.

Several reviewers promote Overcast (free, for iOS only) as the best player available.⁵ It has features that are similar to Pocket Casts and in addition offers "Smart Speed." Smart Speed dynamically skips and shortens silences in talk shows. If you use only iOS devices, you might prefer this app.

Another excellent iOS app is Castro, which focuses on making it easy to set up a queue of individual episodes from different podcasts.⁶ It provides an inbox where you can see the latest episode of each podcast you are subscribed to. From there you can either add an episode to your queue for future listening or archive it. You can drag episodes into any order you like in your listening queue. Episodes can be streamed or downloaded.

iOS Apps

- **Overcast**, free, <https://overcast.fm>. Also offers app for Apple Watch and web player, <https://overcast.fm/podcasts>.
- **Pocket Casts**, \$3.99, www.shiftyjelly.com/pocketcasts. Also offers web player, <https://play.pocketcasts.com>.
- **Castro**, free, <http://supertop.co/castro>.
- **Downcast**, \$2.99, <http://downcastapp.com>. Also offers apps for Apple Watch, Mac, and soon CarPlay.
- **Podcasts** (Apple's built-in app), free, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/podcasts/d525463029?mt=8>.
- **Otto Radio**, free, <https://www.ottoradio.com>. This app is designed to find podcasts and news stories that match your interests. It tailors playlists to your desired listening time, useful for quickly setting up a playlist for a long commute.

Android Apps

- **Pocket Casts**, \$3.99, www.shiftyjelly.com/pocketcasts. Also offers a web player: <https://play.pocketcasts.com>.
- **Castro**, free, <http://supertop.co/castro>.
- **BeyondPod**, free, www.beyondpod.mobi/android/index.htm.
- **Player FM**, free, <https://player.fm>.
- **AntennaPod**, free, <http://antennapod.org>.
- **Podcast Republic**, free, <http://podcastrepublic.net>.
- **Podcast & Radio Addict**, free, <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.bambuna.podcastaddict>.

Features to Look For

When deciding on an app to use for podcast listening, the following features will make your listening more convenient, especially if you subscribe to many podcasts.

- Smart speed (dynamically shortens silences)
- Volume boost (normalizes volume in noisy situations, like your car)
- Cellular downloads
- Variable playback speed (accelerated audio and slow audio)

- Per-podcast effects settings
- Sleep timer
- Playlists
- Unlimited number of playlists
- Unlimited episodes shown in playlists
- Streaming option
- Built-in directory
- Background downloading
- Push notifications
- Sharing on social media
- Syncing across all your devices
- Web playback

Shortening silences can end up saving a lot of time and is barely noticeable. Using a sleep timer is handy if you listen before bed, and syncing across all of your devices makes it easy to begin your listening at home and continue later when in your car or out for a walk.

Desktop Apps and Websites

In addition to iTunes (mentioned earlier in this report), there are several other options for listening to podcasts on your desktop or laptop computer.

Mac and Windows Apps

If you want to use a dedicated app, try one of these:

- **iTunes**, free, www.apple.com/itunes/download.
- **Downcast**, Mac app, \$7.99. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/downcast/id668429425?mt=12>.

Desktop Web

If you prefer to use your web browser, these are good options:

- **Pocket Casts**, \$9 one-time fee, <https://play.pocketcasts.com>.
- **Overcast**, free, <https://overcast.fm/podcasts>.
- **Google Play Music**, free, <https://play.google.com/music/listen?u=0#/tps>.
- **ShortOrange**, free, <https://shortorange.com>. (iOS and Android apps coming soon.)

Other Ways to Listen on Mobile or Desktop

Stitcher Radio

<http://www.stitcher.com>. With free apps for iOS and Android.⁷

Stitcher is a very popular free app for listening to podcasts. It's a little different from other services in that it hosts the podcast audio files itself and inserts ads instead of linking to each podcast's server. Some

podcast publishers don't like this practice because it makes it difficult for them to measure their total number of downloads (easy to do when using their own servers). So you may find that a particular podcast you are looking for is not available on Stitcher. Still, it's a well-designed app that makes it easy to share your favorite episodes on social media. In June 2016, Stitcher was purchased by podcast advertising company Midroll Media.⁸

TuneIn Radio
<http://tunein.com>

Free with premium service for \$7.99/month. With premium, you also get content from NFL, Major League Baseball, audiobooks, and ad-free music.

TuneIn is mainly for streaming audio of over 100,000 radio stations from around the world, but it also offers streaming podcasts. You can listen on the website or in apps for smartphones and tablets on multiple platforms.⁹ It also has apps for other devices, including smart TVs like Roku, Chromecast, and Amazon Fire TV. There is an Apple Watch app, and TuneIn is also available with the Amazon Echo (voice-controlled speaker). In addition to all that, it's built in to many different car audio systems. Think of TuneIn as an additional way to listen conveniently to your favorite podcasts from all sorts of different devices. It doesn't have all the extra features of dedicated apps like Overcast or Pocket Casts, but it's a convenient alternative to use in certain situations.

Spotify
<https://www.spotify.com>

The popular streaming music service Spotify has a section for listening to and "following" podcasts.¹⁰ It's designed mostly for streaming, but it is possible to download individual episodes if you have the premium service. There is a free version with ads and a premium version for \$9.99 per month. Not all podcasts are available in Spotify, but many of the most popular ones are.

SoundCloud
<https://soundcloud.com>

If you already use SoundCloud to listen to music, you might also want to listen to podcasts here. However, it's mainly for streaming and doesn't have all the convenient features that dedicated podcast apps have. Many podcasters use it to host their podcasts and then submit them to the iTunes store for discovery.¹¹ SoundCloud has free apps for iOS and Android and makes it easy for podcast creators to embed a player in their blog or website for each individual episode.

Audible
www.audible.com

Audible is a well-known online store for audiobooks (owned by Amazon), and in 2016, it began to

include some podcasts as well.¹² Audible is calling this service Channels, and it offers a library of audio, including original programs, articles read aloud, and more. It's \$4.95 per month for a subscription to Channels or is free if you already have a monthly membership to Audible's audiobooks (\$14.95). If you have an Amazon Prime membership, you can get free access to "Audible Channels for Prime."

To sum up, many streaming services are now including podcasts and can serve as an additional way to listen, especially if you are already using these services for music or streaming radio. But a dedicated app will provide the most convenience if you listen to particular podcasts regularly.

Podcast Discovery

Just about every mobile or desktop podcast app mentioned in previous sections includes a directory, and that's a good place to start when browsing or searching for podcasts.

In addition to those apps, there are also quite a few specialized podcast directories, and some have features that will help you find podcasts in useful ways. Here are a few recommended sites.

General Directories

PodcastLand
<http://podcastland.com>

Browse by topic or search by keyword. Try searching for a city, such as San Francisco, to find local podcasts.

Podcast Chart
<https://www.podcastchart.com>

Browse by topic and subtopic, or search by keyword. This site indexes the most popular podcasts by number of downloads.

iTunes Charts
www.itunescharts.net/us/charts/podcasts

Use this site to find out which podcasts are most popular in the iTunes store, both overall and by genre, such as comedy, arts, or technology.

Timbre—Podcast Playlists
<http://thetimbre.com/category/playlists>

This podcast review site is no longer publishing, but it is still worth looking at for its "podcast playlists"—lists of podcast episodes grouped by interesting topic, such as "Nerd Out on Science Podcasts" (<http://thetimbre.com/nerd-out-on-science-podcasts>), "Podcasting in Color" (<http://thetimbre.com/1449-2>), and "Book Lovers! Curl Up by the Fire with These Podcasts" (<http://thetimbre.com/filling-your-bookshelves-with-podcasts>).

The Telegraph (UK)—Podcasts
www.telegraph.co.uk/radio/podcasts

Browse this site for interesting lists of podcasts, such as the best fiction podcasts, podcasts to help people who live alone with cancer, stranger than fiction: the best factual podcasts, the best TV and film podcasts, and more.

Tech Times—Podmaster
www.techtimes.com/tags/podmasters

A series of blog posts recommending podcasts in different categories, such as philosophy, music, and technology.

Sites That Promote and Discuss Individual Episodes

Product Hunt—Podcasts
<https://www.producthunt.com/podcasts>

Product Hunt is a popular community where enthusiasts share information about the best apps, websites, hardware projects, and more. The podcasts section recommends specific episodes each day, and most are technology related.

AV Club—Podmass
www.avclub.com/features/podmass

Every week the AV Club recommends ten to fifteen of the previous week's best podcast episodes.

Earbud—NPR
<http://earbud.fm>

NPR's recommended podcasts by topic, with interesting topics, such as Advice, Big Ideas, Celebrity Picks, Fiction, Brighten My Day, and more.

Listen to This—*The Guardian*
<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/series/listen-to-this>
The Guardian offers a weekly series recommending current best podcast episodes.

Search Tools with Special Features

Podcat
<https://www.podcat.com>

Search for specific people who are mentioned or interviewed in podcasts. For example, search for "Lynda Barry," and find a list of podcast episodes that mention her.¹³

Audiosear.ch
<https://www.audiosear.ch>

This site uses a speech-to-text tool to index shows, topic, networks, and people. It includes statistics from the iTunes charts and lists of podcasts by various "tastemakers." Try the audio alerts feature

to be notified when specific words, phrases, or people's names appear in a podcast. This site was created by Pop Up Archive, a company that uses software to automatically create transcripts of audio.

PodLikeThat—from Audiosear.ch
<https://www.audiosear.ch/podlikethat>

Enter the title of a specific podcast episode in the search box and get a list of similar episodes from various podcasts. For an example, try this episode, "The Meaning of Emoji." Results vary—it doesn't always work as well as one would like.

E-Mail Newsletters about Podcasts

The Big Listen
<http://www.npr.org/newsletter/big-listen>

NPR's *The Big Listen* is a podcast about podcasts (see entry in my list of podcasts about podcasts). Sign up to get an email newsletter with recommendations of the best podcasts.

Hotpod
www.hotpod.xyz

Hotpod is an e-mail newsletter about the industry of podcasting and on-demand audio. It analyzes the industry and also mentions interesting podcasts. Read past issues at <https://www.hotpodnews.com>.

Hodgepodge
www.wnyc.org/podcasts

Hodgepodge is WNYC's weekly newsletter about favorite episodes from the podcasts it produces, such as *Radiolab*, *The New Yorker Radio Hour*, *Note to Self*, and more.

Between Two Earbuds
<http://betweentwoearbuds.com>

This newsletter recommends great podcasts on a variety of topics each week.

Adolescence Is a Marketing Tool
<http://tinyletter.com/sara-weber>

This is another general interest newsletter by a fan of podcasts.

Audible Feast
<http://tinyletter.com/audiblefeast>

Every two weeks, get podcast reviews and recommendations.

7 on 7 Podcast Reviews
<http://tinyletter.com/goodlistener>

Get podcast reviews from seven podcasts during the last seven days.

The Audit

<http://tinyletter.com/TheAudit>

Podcast reviews from Australia.

Bello Weekly

<http://bellocollective.com>

This newsletter focuses on diverse perspectives in podcasting. It highlights work that deserves more recognition.

Pod-a-Day

<https://www.audiosear.ch/podaday>

Audiosear.ch recommends one podcast episode per day with this e-mail newsletter.

Facebook Messenger Bot

PodRec

www.podrecbot.com

This bot works inside Facebook Messenger. Use this link to open it in Messenger: <http://m.me/podrec>. Type “hit me,” and it will reply with a specific episode from a different podcast each time. Learn more about it at <https://www.producthunt.com/tech/podrec>.

Discussion Groups—Ask Questions about Podcasts

Podcasts Reddit Group

<https://www.reddit.com/r/podcasts>

Discover new podcasts and discuss your favorites. It’s also a place where podcast producers discuss equipment, promotion, and techniques.

Quora Topic—Podcasts

<https://www.quora.com/topic/Podcasts>

This topic consists of questions and answers about podcasts (not about how to podcast)—questions like “What are some great podcasts?” “What are the best BBC podcasts?” and “How did the podcast *Serial* become so popular?”

Podcasts about Podcasts

There are many podcasts about how to produce a podcast,¹⁴ but we’re interested here in podcasts that recommend and review podcasts.

The Big Listen

http://wamu.org/programs/the_big_listen

Interviews, listener recommendations, and show snippets of recommended podcasts. Hosted by WAMU’s Lauren Ober. Also offers an email newsletter (<http://www.npr.org/newsletter/big-listen>).

In Pod We Trust—BBC Radio 4

www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b06pjdjh

A BBC show that discusses best podcasts from around the world, with a different topic each week.

The Pod Couple

<https://soundcloud.com/thetelegraph/sets/the-pod-couple-a-guide-to-the>

A weekly podcast from *The Telegraph* where hosts Gillian and Pete discuss and recommend their favorite podcasts.¹⁵

The Podcast Digest

www.thepodcastdigest.info

Behind-the-scenes interviews with podcast hosts and recommendations for new podcasts.

Podcast Playlist—CBC

www.cbc.ca/radio/podcastplaylist

From CBC Radio, *Podcast Playlist* curates recommended content and stories from the podcast world. Hosted by Matt Galloway and Lindsay Michael.

Sampler

<https://gimletmedia.com/show/sampler>

Excerpts from podcasts and interviews with podcasters. This show ended in October 2016, but is still worth listening to for previous episodes.

As you can see, with so many options for discovery, you should be able to find a podcast or individual episode on just about any topic you can think of. Podcasts are booming now, and so are sites for recommending them.

Notes

1. For example, here’s the web archive for *This American Life*’s podcast. You can download or stream individual episodes: “This American Life: Radio Archive by Date,” accessed September 23, 2016, www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives.
2. Download iTunes for Mac or Windows from the iTunes download page, accessed September 23, 2016, www.apple.com/itunes/download.
3. Josh Morgan, “How Podcasts Have Changed in Ten Years: By the Numbers,” Medium, September 2, 2015, <https://medium.com/@slowerdawn/how-podcasts-have-changed-in-ten-years-by-the-numbers-720a6e984e4e#cdo8de3mx>.
4. Pocket Casts website, accessed September 23, 2016, www.shiftyjelly.com/pocketcasts.
5. Bradley Chambers, “Overcast: Our Favorite Podcast Client for iOS: Overcast,” The Sweet Setup, September 8, 2016, <http://thesweetsetup.com/apps/our-favorite-podcast-client-for-ios>.

6. John Voorhees, "Castro 2 Review," MacStories, August 15, 2016, <https://www.macstories.net/reviews/castro-2-review>.
7. "Stitcher Radio for Podcasts," iTunes Preview, accessed September 23, 2016, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/stitcher-radio-for-podcasts/id288087905?mt=8>; "Stitcher Radio for Podcasts," Google Play, accessed September 23, 2016, <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.stitcher.app&hl=en>.
8. Steven Perlberg, "E. W. Scripps Buys Podcast Company Stitcher: Podcast App Will Operate under Scripps' Midroll Media Unit after \$4.5 Million Acquisition," *Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2016, www.wsj.com/articles/e-w-scripps-buys-podcast-company-stitcher-1465239600.
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10. "Podcasts," Using Spotify: Lifestyle Features, accessed September 14, 2016, https://support.spotify.com/us/using_spotify/lifestyle_features/podcasts/.
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12. Niraj Chokshi, "Amazon's Audible Goes Long on Short-Form Audio," *New York Times*, July 7, 2016, www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/business/media/amazons-audible-goes-long-on-short-term-audio.html.
13. "Podcasts Mentioning Lynda Barry," Podcat, accessed September 23, 2016, <https://www.podcat.com/people/9nf0gw>.
14. Harry Duran, "The Incredibly Exhaustive List of Podcasts about Podcasting," *Podcast Junkies* (blog), December 5, 2015, www.podcastjunkies.com/the-incredibly-exhaustive-list-of-podcasts-about-podcasting.
15. Gillian Reynolds and Pete Naughton, "The Pod Couple: Episode One—Your New Audio Guide to the Best Podcasts and Digital Radio," *Telegraph*, April 29, 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk/radio/podcasts/the-pod-couple-your-new-audio-guide-to-the-best-podcasts-and-dig.