

All About Audio Terms

Here are a few terms relating to audio that you've always wanted to know but have been afraid to ask:

AMPLIFIER: That portion of any home music system which boosts or amplifies the tiny electrical signal generated by a pickup, tape head or tuner into enough power to drive one or more loudspeakers. Amplifiers may be purchased as separate components, or come as parts of stereo receivers, stereo compacts and consoles. An amplifier consists of two sections: the power amplifier, which uses tubes or transistors to amplify the signal; and the preamplifier, which in addition to adding an initial power boost also contains such control functions as volume, tone, balance, etc.

AUTOMATIC TURNTABLE: In the old days these used to be called record changers. An automatic turntable does everything the old-fashioned record changer did, but features better parts and more sophisticated engineering to improve performance and cut record wear. The better

automatic turntables use heavy-duty motors which operate independently of fluctuations in house current, and the tone arms are delicately balanced to permit you to play records at extremely light weights.

CARTRIDGE: There are two types: the little unit which holds the playback stylus and fits in the tone arm of your record changer; and the plastic-shelled tape which provides stereo in your car. The former converts the wiggles made by the stylus following the record groove into electrical energy, which the amplifier boosts. Many lower-priced stereo compacts and consoles use crystal or ceramic cartridges. The better compacts, consoles and stereo component systems use magnetic cartridges or pickups.

The eight-track cartridge is a plastic shell containing a loop of tape sufficient to hold the music from a long-playing record. The tape cartridge, although designed originally as a music playback system for cars, has gained popularity in the living room in recent years.

CASSETTE: Like the tape cartridge, the cassette consists of a strip of tape inside a plastic shell. But, because of the difference in dimensions, cassettes won't work on cartridge equipment and vice versa.

CONTROL SECTION: The center portion of a stereo compact, containing the automatic turntable and amplifier or receiver. Usually, the turntable is mounted directly atop the receiver. A control section has outputs for the stereo headphones and inputs for such auxiliary equipment as cartridge, cassette or open reel tape decks.

LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM: A loudspeaker system consists of one or more individual speakers mounted in an acoustically-matched box with any necessary electronics and wiring. Although it's common among the audiophiles to refer to the system as "a loudspeaker," that term properly applies only to the paper cone, metal basket and electromagnet which make up the speaker itself. Some loudspeaker systems contain a single speaker to cover the entire frequency

range; others use separate speakers for bass (commonly called a woofer), midrange and treble (commonly known as a tweeter). Speaker systems may be separate components or built into a stereo console.

POWER AMPLIFIER: That portion of an amplifier, receiver, or console which amplifies the program signal to a level sufficient to operate a loudspeaker system.

STEREO: As defined by the Federal Trade Commission, stereo means the independent recording and reproduction of two separate channels of sound. The channels are picked up by separate microphones, inscribed on separate tape tracks transcribed respectively on the left and right groove walls of a record, and reproduced in your home through a stereo cartridge, two-channel stereo amplifier and two separate loudspeakers.

TUNER: That portion of a home entertainment system which plucks broadcast signals out of the air and converts them into electrical energy for the amplifier to work on.

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