

Hi-Fi Glossary

To describe how audiophiles or musicians may describe music produced by equipment being reviewed

Accurate - The music is unaltered by the recording or playback equipment. Ideally, to sound identical to the original music.

Aggressive - Forward and bright sonic character.

Airy - Spacious. Open. Instruments sound like they are surrounded by a large reflective space full of air. Good reproduction of high frequency reflections. High frequency response extends to 15 or 20 kHz. Little phase shift at 20kHz. Often requires frequency response past 30kHz.

Ambience - Impression of an acoustic space, such as the performing hall in which a recording was made.

Analytical - Highly detailed.

Articulate - Intelligibility of voice(s) and instruments and the interactions between them.

Attack - The leading edge of a note and the ability of a system to reproduce the attack transients in music. Use square wave testing at 15kHz to 20kHz. The leading edge of the wave should be almost vertical with no ringing at the top. Test at about 10% of the amplifiers rated power. Look for articles on square wave testing of audio gear.

Attack (2) - The time taken for a musical note to reach its peak amplitude eg. notes will tend to sound more defined rather than blended with other notes.

Balance - essentially tonal balance, the degree to which one aspect of the sonic spectrum is emphasized above the rest. Also channel balance, the relative level of the left and right stereo channels.

Bass - The audio frequencies between about 60Hz and 250Hz. Also called "Bottom End" or "Loe End" by professional audio people.

Bassy - Emphasized Bass.

Blanketed - Weak highs, as if a blanket were put over the speakers.

Bloated - Excessive mid bass around 250 Hz. Poorly damped low frequencies, low frequency resonances. See tubby.

Blurred - Poor transient response. Vague stereo imaging not focused. Often caused by poor slew rate. Can be seen in electronics by using square wave testing.

Body - Fullness of sound, with particular emphasis on upper bass; opposite of Thin.

Boomy - Excessive bass around 125 Hz. Poorly damped low frequencies or low frequency resonances.

Boxy - Having resonances as if the music were enclosed in a box. Sometimes an emphasis around 250 to 500 Hz.

Breathy - Audible breath sounds in woodwinds and reeds such as flute or sax. Good response in the upper mids or highs.

Bright - A sound that emphasizes the upper midrange/lower treble. Harmonics are strong relative to fundamentals.

Brilliance - The 6kHz to 16kHz range controls the brilliance and clarity of sounds. Too much emphasis in this range can produce sibilance on the vocals. Possible ringing in the electronics visible with square wave testing.

Chesty - The vocalist sounds like their chest is too big. A bump in the low frequency response around 125 to 250 Hz.

Clear - See Transparent.

Closed - A closed-in sound lacking in openness, delicacy, air, and fine detail usually caused by Roll-off above 10kHz; in contrast to Open.

Congested- Smeared, confused, muddy, and flat; lacking transparency.

Coloured - Having timbres that are not true to life. Non flat response; peaks or dips.

Cool- Moderately deficient in body and warmth, due to progressive attenuation of frequencies below about 150Hz.

Crisp - Extended high frequency response, especially with cymbals.

Dark - A tonal balance that tilts downwards with increasing frequency. Opposite of bright. Weak high frequencies.

Decay - The fadeout of a note, it follows the attack.

Definition (or resolution) - The ability of a component to reveal the subtle information that is fundamental to high fidelity sound.

Delicate - High frequencies extending to 15 or 20 kHz without peaks.

Depth - A sense of distance (near to far) of different instruments.

Detail - The most delicate elements of the original sound and those which are the first to disappear with lesser equipment.

Detailed - Easy to hear tiny details in the music; articulate. Adequate high frequency response, sharp transient response.

Dry - Lack of reverberation or delay as produced by a damped environment. May come across as fine grained and lean. Opposite of Wet.

Dull - See Dark.

Dynamic - The suggestion of energy and wide dynamic. Related to perceived speed as well as contrasts in volume both large and small.

Edgy - Too much high frequency response. Trebly. Harmonics are too strong relative to the fundamentals. Distorted, having unwanted harmonics that add an edge or raspiness. May reveal ringing when doing square wave testing

Euphonic - An appealing form of distortion that generally enhances perceived fidelity, often ascribed to the harmonic elaborations of some valve amps.

Fast - Good reproduction of rapid transients which increase the sense of realism and "snap".

Fat - See Full and Warm. Or, spatially diffuse; a sound is panned to one channel, delayed, and then the delayed sound is panned to the other channel. Or, slightly distorted with analogue tape distortion or tube distortion.

Focus - A strong, precise sense of image projection.

Forward(ness) - Similar to an aggressive sound, a sense of image being projected in front of the speakers and of music being forced upon the listener. Compare "Laid-back".

Full - Strong fundamentals relative to harmonics. Good low frequency response, not necessarily extended, but with adequate level around 100 to 300 Hz. Male voices are full around 125 Hz; female voices and violins are full around 250 Hz; sax is full around 250 to 400 Hz. Opposite of thin.

Gentle - Opposite of edgy. The harmonics (of the highs and upper mids) are not exaggerated, or may even be weak.

Grainy - A slightly raw, exposed sound which lacks finesse. Not liquid or fluid.

Grip - A sense of control and sturdiness in the bass.

Grungy - Lots of harmonic or I.M. (Intermodulation) distortion.

Hard - Too much upper midrange, usually around 3 kHz. Or, good transient response, as if the sound is hitting you hard. Uncomfortable, forward, aggressive sound with a metallic tinge.

Harsh - Grating, abrasive. Too much upper midrange. Peaks in the frequency response between 2 and 6 kHz. Or, excessive phase shift in a digital recorder's low pass filter. On a digital recorder, non-over sampling A/D encoders and sampling rates below 96kHz should be avoided. 24 or 32 bit sampling preferred.

Headstage - The perception of the Soundstage while listening to headphones.

Highs - The audio frequencies above about 6000 Hz.

High Midrange (High Mids, Upper Mids) - The audio frequencies between about 2kHz and 6kHz.

Hollow - Recessed mids.

Honky - Like cupping your hands around your mouth. A bump in the response around 500 to 700 Hz.

Imaging - The sense that a voice or instrument is in a particular place in the room. Poor imaging indicates a lot of crosstalk between left and right channels. Sometimes

this is deliberate. Bass notes will normally have less imaging as they are omnidirectional.

Juicy - Sound that has joie de vivre, energy and life.

Laid-back - Recessed, distant-sounding, having exaggerated depth, usually because of a dished midrange. Compare "Forward".

Liquid - Textureless sound.

Low Level Detail - The quietest sounds in a recording.

Low Midrange (Low Mids) - The audio frequencies between about 250Hz and 2000Hz.

Lush - Very Rich/Full.

Lush (2) - A "lush" sound has a sense of warmth and fullness. Notes are more authoritative and have a sense of life about them. It is a sound free of any sibilance or brightness. It does not mean colored, however. It is an open and inviting sound enveloping the listener into its soundstage. (source: unknown headfier)

Mellow - Reduced high frequencies, not Edgy.

Midrange (Mids) - The audio frequencies between about 250 Hz and 6000 Hz.

Muddy - Not clear. Weak harmonics, smeared time response, I.M. distortion.

Muffled - Sounds like it is covered with a blanket. Weak highs or weak upper mids.

Musical (or musicality) - A sense of cohesion and subjective "rightness" in the sound.

Nasal - Honky, a bump in the response around 600 Hz.

Naturalness - Realism.

Opaque - Unclear, lacking Transparency.

Open - Sound which has height and "air", relates to clean upper midrange and treble.

Pace - Often assoc. with rhythm, a strong sense of timing and beat.

Piercing - Strident, hard on the ears, screechy. Having sharp, narrow peaks in the response around 3 to 10 kHz.

PRaT - Pace, Rhythm and Timing

Presence Range - The presence range between 4kHz and 6kHz is responsible for the clarity and definition of voices and instruments. Increasing this range can make the music seem closer to the listener. Reducing the 5kHz content makes the sound more distant and transparent.

Presence - A sense that the instrument is present in the listening room. Synonyms are edge, punch, detail, closeness and clarity. Adequate or emphasized response around 5 kHz for most instruments, or around 2 to 5 kHz for kick drum and bass.

Puffy - A bump in the response around 500 Hz.

Punchy - Good reproduction of dynamics. Good transient response, with strong impact. Sometimes a bump around 5 kHz or 200 Hz. Poor punchiness in the bottom

end indicates either poor bottom end response in the bass drivers or a power supply in the power amplifier without enough capacitance and/or improper wiring.

Range - The distance between the lowest and highest tones.

Resolution (or Resolving) - See Definition

Rich - See Full. Also, having euphonic distortion made of even order harmonics.

Roll-off (Rolloff) - The gradual attenuation that occurs at the lower or upper frequency range of a driver, network, or system. The roll-off frequency is usually defined as the frequency where response is reduced by 3 dB.

Round - High frequency rolloff or dip. Not edgy.

Rhythm - The controlled movement of sounds in time.

Saturation - The point at which a magnetic tape is fully magnetized and will accept no more magnetization.

Seismic - Very low bass that you feel rather than hear.

Shrill - Strident, Steely.

Sibilant (or Sibilance) - "Essy", exaggerated "s" or "sh" sounds in vocals. Sibilant sounds carry most of their energy through the 4Khz to 8Khz range, but can extend to 10kHz, depending on the individual. Sibilance is often heard on radio.

Sizzly - See Sibilant. Also, too much highs on cymbals.

Smeared - Lacking detail; poor transient response, too much leakage between microphones; poorly focused images.

Smooth - Easy on the ears, not harsh. Flat frequency response, especially in the midrange. Lack of peaks and dips in the response.

Snap - A system with good speed and transient response can deliver the immediacy or "snap" of live instruments.

Soundstage - The area between two speakers that appears to the listener to be occupied by sonic images. Like a real stage, a soundstage should have width, depth, and height.

Spacious - Conveying a sense of space, ambiance, or room around the instruments; stereo reverb; early reflections.

Speed - A fast system with good pace gives the impression of being right on the money in its timing.

Steely - Emphasized upper mids around 3 to 6 kHz. Peaky, non flat high frequency response. See Harsh, Edgy.

Strident - See Harsh, Edgy.

Sturdy - Solid, powerful, robust sound.

Sub-Bass - The audio frequencies between about 20Hz and 80Hz.

Sweet - Not strident or piercing. Delicate. Flat high frequency response, low distortion. Lack of peaks in the response. Highs are extended to 15 or 20 kHz, but they are not bumped up. Often used when referring to cymbals, percussion, strings, and sibilant sounds.

Telephone Like - See Tinny.

Texture - A perceptible pattern or structure in reproduced sound.

Thick - A lack of articulation and clarity in the bass.

Thin - Fundamentals are weak relative to harmonics; bass light.

Tight - Good low frequency transient response and detail.

Timbre - The tonal character of an instrument

Timing - A sense of precision in tempo.

Tinny - Narrowband, weak lows, peaky mids. The music sounds like it is coming through a telephone or tin can.

Tone - The sound of definite pitch.

Transient - The leading edge of a percussive sound. Good transient response makes the sound as a whole more live and realistic.

Transparent - Easy to hear into the music, detailed, clear, not muddy. Wide flat frequency response, sharp time response, very low distortion and noise. A hear through quality that is akin to clarity and reveals all aspects of detail.

Treble - The highest part of music and voice. See Highs. (Most often used when referring to the treble control on amplifiers).

Tubby - Having low frequency resonances as if you're singing in a bathtub. See bloated.

Upper Midrange (Upper Mids, High Mids) - The audio frequencies between 2 kHz and 6 kHz.

Veiled - Like a silk veil is over the speakers. Slight noise or distortion or slightly weak high frequencies. Loss of detail due to limited transparency.

Warm - Good bass, adequate low frequencies, adequate fundamentals relative to harmonics. Not thin. Also excessive bass or mid bass. Also, pleasantly spacious, with adequate reverberation at low frequencies. Also see Rich, Round. Warm highs means sweet highs.

Wet - A reverberant sound, something with decay. Opposite of Dry. Wet and Dry have different meanings in professional audio systems.

Weighty - Good low frequency response below about 50 Hz. A sense of substance and underpinning produced by deep, controlled bass. Suggesting an object of great weight or power, like a diesel locomotive.

Woolly - Loose, ill-defined bass. An indication of poor damping factor either in the speakers or the power amplifier.