

Audioengine D1 Review: An Easy Way to Make AirPlay Sound Great

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The rise of streaming audio over AirPlay has made it possible to wirelessly play music from your iPhone over your home speakers. But that data comes through as a raw stream of 0s and 1s, and the sound quality isn't that great.

A digital-to-analog (DAC) audio converter can clean up the stream, but it can also cost hundreds of bucks. The Audioengine D1 is a capable, affordable DAC that can make wireless audio sound wonderful. Here's why you need it.



What Is It?

A \$170 DAC audio converter with a lot of features that usually a ton—there are USB and optical inputs, lines out to a pair of speakers, and a headphone amp.

Who's it For?

Entry-level audiophiles trying to optimize their equipment, or hardcore audio fiends looking for a cheap, quality DAC for an extra set of speakers.

Design

The aluminum and soft-touch plastic frame is not flashy, but it's clean and handsome. Exposed screws on the front add a pro-grade look and make the guts accessible for repair.

Using It

Connect the D1 to a computer via USB, or use an optical input from a computer, TV, receiver, or Airport Express. Output the sound to an amplifier, to headphones, or to the device the D1 really seems designed for—a pair of powered monitor speakers.

The Best Part

The optical input, which improves the quality of the streaming audio coming from an Airport Express or Apple TV. It's rare to find that (along with the USB input) on a DAC this cheap. The D1's superior hardware does the heavy lifting to clean up an audio data stream, bringing new life to Harmon Kardon Soundsticks II and a pair of Audioengine A5+ speakers.

This Is Weird...

The D1 didn't always pick up the optical signal from a Samsung TV. It seemed to vary on a source-to-source or channel-to-channel basis. It could be the TV's fault, but other optical audio devices have worked far better in this regard.



Test Notes

- Using any type of hardware, music instantly comes to life, with greater clarity, response, and a little extra punch to the bass.
- Tested USB audio conversion with a 2009 13-inch MacBook Pro.
- Tested optical audio conversion with an Airport Express and Apple TV.
- Used Harman Kardon Soundsticks II and Audioengine A5+ speakers.
- Used Aiaiai TMA-1, Grado SR80i and Harman Kardon CL headphones.
- Mostly tested with 320 kbps MP3s, but also a handful of FLAC files.

Should You Buy It?

Definitely. If you use a decent set of speakers to listen to a lot of music—and especially if you connect those speakers to a convenient streaming hub, so that you can easily push audio from multiple devices—you'll instantly appreciate the added quality the Audioengine D1 affords. It's easy to plug in and use, and it has to be the cheapest, easiest way to make a worthwhile upgrade to an AirPlay setup.

If you're just beginning to flirt with the world of advanced audio, this is a great first DAC to purchase. For \$170, you get the performance and features of a more expensive piece of equipment.

[Audioengine D1 DAC](#)

Inputs: USB, TOSLINK optical audio

Outputs: Stereo RCA, 3.5mm

Power: 2.0V RMS (RCA and Headphone)

Price: \$170

Sample Rate: Up to 96k (USB) or 192k (Optical) at 24bits

• **Giz Rank:** 4.0 stars