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Audioengine D3 Review

A Review On:



**Audioengine D3
24-bit Digital to
Audio Converter
& Headphone
Amplifier (Silver)**

Rated # 7
in [Sound Cards](#)



By [WilliamGayde](#)

Posted 4 days, 21 hours ago • 171 Views • [0 Comments](#)

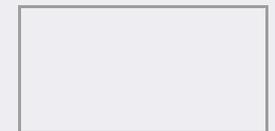
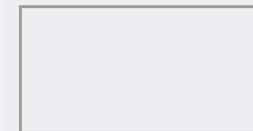
Pros: Great sound, Includes a headphone amp, Compact and portable, includes a 1/8" to 1/4" adapter, Windows volume control

Cons: Gets HOT, USB connection isn't firm

It is easy to mistake the Audioengine D3 DAC for a USB drive, but plug your headphones and you and there is no mistake. The D3 sounds amazing. The main selling point is its portability and it knocks that out of the park.

The D3 comes very well packed. At \$189 that should be expected. The front of the box shows the unit and a quick overview of what the unit does. The side lists everything included in the box.

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The opposite side shows some key features. The D3 features the AKM4396 DAC and the LME49726 amplifier. These are both industry standards and recognized for their superior quality.

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Tech info

- Asynchronous data transfer for low jitter
- Drives low and high impedance headphones
- Computer OS volume control
- AKM4190 DAC for 24-bit native file playback
- High-performance LME49720 audio amplifier
- 2.0 Ohms maximum output level
- HD Indicator for sample rates above 48K
- Metal eye-brown powder (A100) aluminum case



Included in the box is the unit itself, a fabric pouch, a 1/8" to 1/4" adapter, and a quickstart guide. If you need to use the quickstart guide then you don't deserve to hear its amazing sound. Just plug it in and it works.



Here are some closeups of the unit. It features a silver finish with two LEDs and an Audioengine logo. The single output is located on the back.





Here we see the top and bottom. The unit has a very minimalistic design. The logo and two white and blue LEDs are the only accents to the silver. The white LED illuminates when power is present and the blue LED illuminates when the audio signal is HD or above 48kHz. This blue LED will let you know you are getting the most out of your DAC.





If you are new to the audiophile scene you may be wondering what a DAC is and why you would need one. Here is a quick overview.

All of your music, unless it is in a record or tape, is stored digitally as 1s or 0s. This digital signal needs to be converted to an analog waveform that the speakers will use to create the sound you hear. Speakers and headphones don't understand 1s and 0s so we need a converter. That is where the DAC or Digital to Analog Converter comes in. All computers feature one but it typically the cheapest one the manufacturer could find. It is just there to get the job done. It will work for most consumers, but many prefer a high quality sound closer to the actual recording. An external DAC like the D3 or D1 from Audioengine will bypass your computer's integrated DAC and output pristine sound.

Now we can move on to the actual review.

Usability 4.5/5

Like I mentioned before, the D3 is plug and play. Just plug in your headphones or speakers, select it as your default playback device, and enjoy. The unit's main selling feature is its size. It is just slightly thicker than a USB drive but it still packs the punch of much larger units. The USB device is thin enough allow the use of other nearby USB ports. The shell is not attached as firmly as I would like. It is wobbly but this isn't that big of a problem as the unit stays stationary when in use.

The biggest downside I discovered was the heat. It was the first I noticed when I started

listening to the DAC. It gets very warm and could get uncomfortable if used with a laptop resting on your lap. This is understandable because it contains a powerful headphone amp in a very small space. There are no bulky heatsinks to dissipate heat. This isn't the D3's fault, but rather a feature of amplifiers.

Performance 5/5

The performance is where the unit shines. It is amazing what good sound can come out of such a small unit. It sounds as good or slightly better than Audioengine's D1 DAC which is much larger. You can read my full review [Here](#). The D3 delivers a flat response. The highs are crisp and the mids are strong and well balanced. One of the main benefits of an external DAC is the bass. The D3's bass is tight and clear. It isn't lost or sloppy like most integrated sound is. I heard notes on songs I listen to all the time that I had never heard before. Effects such as decays and reverb are easy to pick out. In short the D3 lets you hear what the band played and what the audio engineer wants you to hear. Games become immersive and movies make you feel like you are right there. The included headphone amp is great too. I never went above a Windows volume of 40 on anything I listened to. You will never need anything near 100.

Comparing the D3 to integrated audio is night and day. Think of it like integrated graphics versus a R9270/GTX750. There is still the 290X and the 780Ti, but D3 will work great for most applications. Going back to onboard audio was even more eye opening. I couldn't believe I had been listening to garbage for so long. Sloppy bass,

Value 5/5

For \$189 you are basically getting a compact version of the D1. If you want more I/O options or don't need the compact size, save the \$20 and get the D1. If you need a portable DAC then this is your go to option. That being said, there are many DACs that sound better. This is not the top of the line in terms of DACs. You can spend thousands chasing the perfect sound. That being said, in my opinion it has the perfect price/performance ratio. Spending less will get you a much lower quality DAC and spending more will get you a marginally better sounding one. This is perfect for newcomers to the audiophile scene.

In conclusion, the Audioengine D3 is a great entry level DAC. Its portability compliments its linear sound response. It is perfect for the mobile audiophile. If you have have a great pair of headphones and are listening to onboard audio, you need this product. I highly recommend it and will be using it where ever I go.

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Where to Buy It



Audioengine D3 24-bit Digital to Audio Converter & Headphone Amplifier (Silver) at **Amazon.com**

\$189.00

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