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Audioengine D3 DAC: Improve Your Audio In Seconds

If you have a laptop or desktop computer, chances are you're using your computer's built-in audio card to handle all of your music and sound output. This makes sense- modern machines have pretty decent sound circuitry- but you can definitely do better. Much like with video cards, a



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dedicated set of chips devoted to a specific task can make a big difference.

Any DAC is essentially offering that promise- stand-alone electronics that can isolate noise and improve your experience. Though some digital-to-analog converters that we've seen are quite large and expensive and take some know-how to setup, today's is as small and simple as it gets. It won't work with your iPod, iPad, tablet, or smartphone, but the [Audioengine D3](#) is about the size of a thumb drive, plus in via USB, and makes your system sounds like it just had a major upgrade.

Offering true 24-bit processing, the D3 works with both Mac and PC, and it's plug and play so no install is necessary or required. We use a pretty wide variety of headphones to test, and compare against other DACs after some burn-in time. For instance, the D3 is just a bit smaller and sleeker (but significantly less expensive) [than the M2Tech](#), but sounds a bit harsher on FLAC opera and jazz tracks. It might seem unfair to set it against the non-portable, separately-powered [NAD D 1050](#), but the D3 held up well in fact, with only a few listeners able to tell the difference on all but the highest-quality tracks, offering sharper notes on electronic, and a flatter sound on acoustic music. For your average Spotify or Pandora user, you might not tell the difference on a \$100 set of headphones or speakers, but on any system above \$250 or so, especially on demanding vocal tracks or those with distinct bass/treble overlays, you'll see a major difference.

We liked the look, feel, size, and aluminum body of the Audioengine D3. Way smaller than the [previously-reviewed D1](#), it can't compete on depth or a broad soundstage but acquits itself nicely considering the size. Pair with other Audioengine gear- like [the A2 speakers](#) we checked out last year or [their fantastic sibling A2+ model](#). The D3 is cute and capable, and [available now online and in stores](#) for under \$200.

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