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## Describing Sound - A Glossary



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2/3/07 at 11:02pm THREAD STARTER

post #1 of 235



fordgtlover ▾

CONTRIBUTOR

offline

2,741 Posts. Joined 11/2006  
Location: Australia

The following list is a compilation of terms commonly used by [Audio](#) buffs to describe sound and sound equipment. While I have created this original list, the terms & descriptions have been published elsewhere. Mostly, they are not my original works.

These are not my terms or definitions. I am simply republishing information that is already available in the public domain. As such, I will not defend the virtue or accuracy of any of this information. It serves to help and inform. I'm sure that this list is not exhaustive, but it is a pretty good starting point.

[Audio](#) Glossary  
[Audio](#) Terms  
[Audiophile](#) Words

Glossary of Terms to describe sound. (New and updated entries are highlighted in RED until the next update)

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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.



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**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.

**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** - Smearred, 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.

**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.

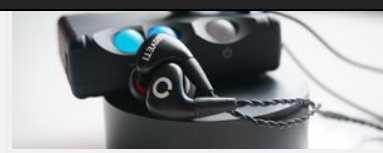
**Grungy** - Lots of harmonic or I.M. (Intermodulation) distortion.

**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.

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

**Highs** - The audio frequencies above about 6000 Hz.



Oriveti Primacy Review by pinoyman



Death Grips: Fashion Week and The Powers That B

## Topics Discussed

PRODUCT

AKG K701 Studio Headphones

tagged by System, 9/13/11

CATEGORY

Headphones

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Last post on 8/23/11 at 1:01pm in [Headphones \(full-size\)](#)

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Last edited: 10/26/12

[A Hopefully Helpful Headphone Buying Guide For Newbies By Boomana](#)

Last edited: 1/6/13

**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.

**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.

**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

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**AKG K240 MKII Headphones**

Reviewed by [Napalmhardcore](#)



Introduction I have owned these headphones for four years now. These were my first decent pair that I researched before buying. Before this I had just bought inexpensive headphones that happened...

[Full Review](#)


**ARCHEER 25W Bluetooth Home Speakers with Huge Bass and Superior...**

Reviewed by [B9Scrambler](#)



Greetings Head-fi! Today we're going to be checking out a wireless Bluetooth speaker from Archeer, the A320. Archeer sells a pretty wide variety of products like cellphone cases, headphones,...

[Full Review](#)


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Reviewed by [ryanjs00](#)



Introduction – Everyone knows earbuds, those cheap, tinny sounding throwaways included with almost every mp3 player. So then, it may come as a surprise that earbuds are making a comeback and not...

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**ORIVETI BASIC - Whole Aluminium Body, High Fidelity, Cable...**

Reviewed by [ustinj](#)



The Orivet BASIC: A dark and inviting entry-level offering into higher level audio BASIC was provided to me free of charge in exchange for feedback and review -- I am in no way affiliated with...

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**Focal Utopia**

Reviewed by [Dillan](#)



Focal Utopia By: Dillan Archer Photographs by: Regan Hulvey Introduction I have spent the greater part of my evenings the last few days (and this morning) listening and...

[Full Review](#)

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.

**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.

Source:

FAQ: [rec.audio.\\* Systems 2/99 \(part 2 of 13\)](#)

[Description of Sound - The Audiophile Way - SGHeadphones](#)

[Home Theater: Glossary](#)

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Edited by [fordgtlover](#) - 4/21/11 at 7:36am

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★★★★★  
93 Reviews

"Nice highs and mids, comfortable"

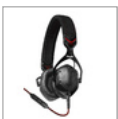
"Excellent value, substantial sub-bass, non-fatiguing, relatively neutral/accurate, folds for traveling"

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amazon.com.

\$109.00

See it



## V-MODA Crossfade M-80

★★★★★  
45 Reviews

"balanced sound, very portable (small+light), comfortable even with glasses, looks great"

"full sound with plenty of bass, clear forward midrange, large sound stage."

» More on V-MODA Crossfade M-80

amazon.com.

\$139.00

See it



## Creative Aurvana Live! Headphones

★★★★★  
20 Reviews

"Genuinely impressive sound quality for under \$100, Cozy comfy, Lightweight &amp; secure fit, Nice looks,..."

"Nicely detailed, laid back, broad and even frequency bandwidth"

» More on Creative Aurvana Live! Headphones

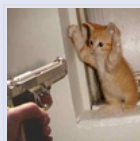
amazon.com.

\$70.88

See it

2/3/07 at 11:29pm

post #2 of 235



cotdt ▾

HEADPHONEUS SUPREMUS

○ offline

3,253 Posts. Joined 8/2005

Location: San Diego/Los Angeles

You forgot...

Resolving - ability to separate between instruments and express clear notes. Difference between "detail" and "resolution" is that detail is the psychological effect, and thus can be created by accentuated treble. Resolution is the actual information that is passed through.

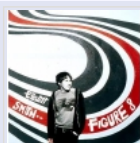
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2/3/07 at 11:33pm

post #3 of 235



jinp6301 ▾

HEADPHONEUS SUPREMUS

○ offline

3,942 Posts. Joined 10/2006

Location: Binghamton, NY/Bayside, NY

this is great. it'll be so useful to the newbies around here

sticky?

Reply

2/3/07 at 11:35pm

post #4 of 235



Morph201 ▾

HEADPHONEUS SUPREMUS

○ offline

2,543 Posts. Joined 11/2006

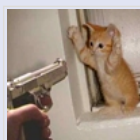
Location: Wherever I lay my head at the moment!

Where's 'SHRILL'... ??? I was kinda hoping I used it correctly! 😊

Reply

2/3/07 at 11:35pm

post #5 of 235



cotdt ▾

HEADPHONEUS SUPREMUS

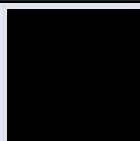
○ offline

3,253 Posts. Joined 8/2005

Location: San Diego/Los Angeles

there's also all these terms like "headstage" and "3-blob soundstage" etc.

Reply



ferraro25 ▾

100+ HEAD-FI'ER

○ offline

476 Posts. Joined 4/2006

For fun, I am going to use these terms to better state my opinion of the K701 (my favorite [headphone](#) out of what I have heard so far).

Traits that I think the K701 **has** or is *good at producing*:

**airy, bright, dry, edgy, sibilant, thin.**

Traits that I think the K701 **does not have or STRONGLY lacks** or is *poor at producing*:

**attack, bassy, blanketed, bloated, body, boomy, boxy, breathy, chesty, dark, depth, dynamic, euphonic, fat, focus, full, imaging, juicy, musical (or musicality), puffy, punchy, rich, smooth, snap, sturdy, thick, timbre, tinny, transient, tubby, warm, weighty.**

Reply

2/4/07 at 3:08am THREAD STARTER

post #7 of 235



fordgtlover ▾

CONTRIBUTOR

○ offline

2,741 Posts. Joined 11/2006  
Location: Australia

**cotdt** - the term Definition made reference to Resolution so I have included a reference. Does this address your issue?

As to terms such as "headstage" and "3-blob soundstage", I can't find definitions for these terms.

**Morph201** - regarding the term shrill, I have no specific objections to adding the term, but it is worth noting that the dictionary definition of shrill is clear. Most of the words in this list don't have a dictionary meaning to explain their audio meaning. To illustrate the point, [dictionary.com](#) has 26 results for the word warm, but none of the results relate directly to the impression of music or sound.

I am only facilitating the list. I am happy to add words as others see fit.

Do others think that words should be included in this list if there is already a clear dictionary meaning relating to music or audio?

Reply

2/4/07 at 3:26am

post #8 of 235



user18 ▾

CONTRIBUTOR

○ offline

489 Posts. Joined 10/2006  
Location: SF

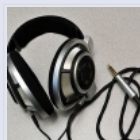
I think it would be good to add them. Because if you don't, you'll just get people saying, "hey, you're missing **soundstage**... etc"

From reading other threads, headstage is a play on the word soundstage. Since soundstage should exist within an actual room, when people use the word soundstage to describe what they hear, they are actually referring to perceived soundstage. It's just semantics. Sort of like a 3-D drawing. It's not really 3-D and for some people it's a major pet pieve, but hey, to each his own.

Reply

2/4/07 at 3:30am

post #9 of 235



exX08 ▾

500+ HEAD-FI'ER

○ offline

744 Posts. Joined 12/2006

x2 sticky!

Reply

2/4/07 at 3:33am

post #10 of 235

jmmtn4aj ▾

HEADPHONEUS SUPREMIUS

○ offline

2,071 Posts. Joined 10/2006  
Location: Perth, Australia



Now I shall hope everyone uses the term in the same way you do 😊



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2/4/07 at 3:42am

THREAD STARTER

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**fordgtlover** ▾

CONTRIBUTOR

○ offline

2,741 Posts. Joined 11/2006  
Location: Australia

Added the terms Soundstage and Headstage

 Reply

2/4/07 at 4:05am

post #12 of 235



**blessingx** ▾

HeadFest '07 Graphic Designer  
Supplier of fine logos! [His visions of Head-Fi](#)

CONTRIBUTOR

○ offline

13,222 Posts. Joined 3/2003  
Location: mtn view, ca

For those interested in common terms here are two other lists:

[ACI](#)  
[Stereophile](#)

 Reply

2/4/07 at 12:22pm

post #13 of 235



**chuckles** ▾

HEAD-FI'ER

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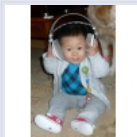
71 Posts. Joined 12/2006  
Location: Crested Butte, CO

This will be immensely useful to me, thanks for posting this thread. Just like wine, I love high quality audio, but have never bothered to learn the language to describe it. Now that I've found myself here at Head Fi, reading what everyone has to say, I have become much more eager to learn the language. Good stuff....and fun!

 Reply

2/4/07 at 12:54pm

post #14 of 235



**Norman** ▾

100+ HEAD-FI'ER

○ offline

152 Posts. Joined 9/2006  
Location: Auckland, New Zealand

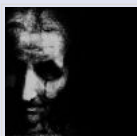
This list is pretty awesome.

I vote sticky!

 Reply

2/4/07 at 12:54pm

post #15 of 235




**MaZa** ▾



HEADPHONEUS SUPREMIUS

○ offline

6,192 Posts. Joined 3/2006

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★★★★★  
45 Reviews  
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20 Reviews  
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"Nicely detailed, laid back, broad and even frequency bandwidth"  
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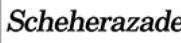
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