

Listen to a Book in 15 Minutes

The precursor to the following guidelines, "How to Read a Book in Five Minutes," has many mothers. The late **Jane Hirsch** of Montgomery County (MD) Department of Public Libraries developed these guidelines which were expanded by **Lisa Sampley**, Springfield-Greene County Library, and published in the Fall 1998 *Missouri Library World*. Further modifications have been made by **Mary K. Chelton** and **Joyce Saricks**.

These guidelines are suitable for books on cassettes, compact discs and Playaways.

Audio Cover—It's hard to look at the "cover" of a downloadable audio book, but is possible to view the record. For cassettes, CDs and Playaway judge if the cover is attractive. Does it give the viewer a suggestion as to the contents? Is it the same as the print version of the book? Is the narrator's name prominently displayed? Does the case/website clearly state if the audio book is abridged or unabridged?

Jacket blurb—Unlike a print book, there is only one place for an audio book blurb, the back of the case. This isn't very much room and the blurb may be short. If the print version of the book is available, have that to peruse the flyleaf. Look for a description of the book and a profile of the reader. Are any "extras" listed as well (i.e. author interviews, music, sound effects)? Does the reader get a sense of the story? Are key elements of the plot revealed? Can a fiction type be assigned based on the blurb?

Length--Consider the length of the recorded book. How many tapes or CDs are included? Approximately how many hours of listening time will be required? Are the tapes/CDs clearly marked on at least one side? Does the amount of listening time correspond to the abridged or unabridged formats?

Listen to side one of tape/CD one or the first few tracks of a Playaway/downloadable. Does the narrator immediately start reading the story or is there promotional, copyright or informative material to listen to first? Does the narrator hook the listener immediately or does the listener need time to get into the story? How quickly does the narrator read? Is the pace too slow or too fast for the type of story? Is the reader doing more narration or performance? How well does the reader distinguish between characters?

Skip to another tape/CD/track in the audio book and listen for any irregularities in the story. Listen to portions of the last tape/CD/track. Is the reader's voice still recognizable and full of energy? Is it easy to follow character changes? Does the story still flow? Does it appear to mesh with the book description on the back of the case?

Extras--Are there any music or sound effects? How is the end of a tape/CD or chapter signaled to the listen--with music or a straightforward announcement? Are there any recommendations made at the end of the audio book? Are there samples provided?

Evaluate appeal and audibility--Is the book a good listen or a better read? If the book was abridged did it feel as if something was missing? Think about how this audio book could be promoted or suggested to a potential listener or used in a display.

Selected Web Sites for Audio Books Readers' Advisory

Audible, Inc. <http://www.audible.com>

AudioFile Magazine <http://www.audiofilemagazine.com/>

Audio Publishers Association <http://www.audiopub.org/>

Electronic Mailing List

AUDIOBOOKS@HSLC.ORG

Send standard subscription notice to LISTSERV@SHRSYS.HSLC.ORG

Additional Resources for Audio Books Readers' Advisory

AudioFile Magazine. ISSN: 1063-0244. \$60/year.

Whitten, Robin F. *AudioBooks on the Go*. Castine, ME: Country Roads Press, 1995. Out-of-print, but still valuable.

Books Out Loud: Bowker's Guide to Audio Books. R.R. Bowker, 2008. \$345.

Links tested: 4/12/09

Compiled by Kaite Mediatore Stover, Head of Readers' Services at the Kansas City Public Library. kaitestover@yahoo.com