

Three Things I Love About Audiobooks (And Three I Don't)

As a man who went from farm boy in Tookeydoo, SC to pastor in inner-city Chicago, I do not mind change. Not even in small things. Except when it comes to reading. I have never for one second read a book from a Kindle or any similar device and do not plan to. I just can't do it. Not having a physical paper book in my hands is about as comfortable as trying to write with my left hand.

Until recently, I had felt similarly about audiobooks. I've listened patiently as friends like Josh Crowe have informed me that listening to works like the *Harry Potter* series is an amazing experience. I nod politely but think, "Nope. Never gonna do it."

Yet one day this April I had an epiphany: a huge reason I hate driving in Chicago's bumper to bumper traffic is that I feel like I'm wasting time. If I'm going 70 MPH at least I feel like I'm doing something. When I'm going 0 MPH, I go from calm to irrationally angry in about six seconds. Music helps a lot of people, but not me. No, I needed something else. And so I purchased an Audible account on Amazon, a website I adore about like I adore Chick-fil-a.

In the last three months or so, I have listened to about 16 audiobooks. I've listened to everything from a two-hour long self-help book in Spanish to a 27-hour Steve Jobs biography. And I've listened enough to start forming opinions about this medium. Here are are a few things I consider advantages to audiobooks over actually reading a book:

1. The Voices

The very first audiobook I listened to was *As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales from the Making of The Princess Bride*, written and narrated by Carey Elwes. Elwes was already high up on my list of cool people, but his reading of this work was just enthralling. His accent is exquisite. He did impressions of people like Andre the Giant that were sublime. I would guess he made the book twice as entertaining with his voice than it would have been had I read it.

Later I listened to *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy. The narrator's voice was rustic and pitch-perfect, especially when he read the dialogue of the father and the son. The writing is already packed with emotion but the reader really brought it to life.

Another notable one was Gabriel Wyner reading his work, *Fluent Forever: How to Learn Any Language Fast and Never Forget It*. Not only was the material incredible and effective but Wyner, who is an opera singer, conveys an enthusiasm through the reading that can be felt in his timbre and inflections. He reads with joy and I can even see him gesturing in my mind's eye several times in the book. Extremely well done.

2. The ability to "read" while walking and driving

I started this to have something to make me feel productive while driving, as I said above. But then I realized that I spend nearly an hour a day walking to and from work. And while I often use that time to listen to Polish, I could also use it to listen to books. Before 2017 I was about a 15-20 book a year guy. Last year I read 50 without a conscious effort to up the normal count. This year I decided to read every free second I can get and I've read a lot more. And it was

beginning to annoy me that I was losing precious time doing things where reading is impossible. Now that has been solved.

3. Zero shipping and storage issues

I love Amazon Prime in part because I can see a book I love and have it in my hands in two days. Now, with Audible, I don't have to wait but a few seconds. Also, occasionally, with physical books, I will get the wrong book or my order will be lost or late. Not an issue with audiobooks. And then there's the storage issue. I love bookshelves and having a reading room, but every time I've moved, the boxes of books have created extra work. And I don't have infinite space in my house. Now I have a way to add to my library without taking space from my home. Admittedly this is an advantage to a Kindle but this was never enough motivation in and of itself.

And here are three things I don't love:

1. It's easy to lose focus

If I'm driving and a car in front of me swerves then it will take me a few seconds to be able to refocus back to the book I'm listening to. Audible has a 30-second rewind feature, but it's unwise to manipulate while driving. Also, even when I'm walking sometimes a loud motorcycle will go by and I will miss some of the book and I'm too lazy to rewind. Plus, in general, I just have an easier time getting distracted and letting my mind wander when listening than when reading. Admittedly, this is a character flaw more than a book flaw. Audiobook from Amazon has thought of very easy ways to combat a lot of this.

2. I lose my place sometimes

This is a problem more with my phone than with the medium, but it happens sometimes that if my phone gets bumped then the place will skip and I won't be able to remember exactly where I was. And it takes a while to figure it out. That is frustrating but does not happen very often.

3. Selection is limited

The selection is not terrible, but I can find just about anything on Amazon books. On Audible, this is not the case. That's just the nature of it. Not every book has been recorded to hear or will be recorded. But to be honest, Audible is a supplement to my regular reading, not the main source. So this is a minor complaint as well.

One final thought on price...I didn't include this as a positive or a negative because it depends. I have found books on Audible for \$5.95 often but I also can't find books I want for under \$25 sometimes. Audible does run sales though where you can get 3 "credits" for \$35 and then buy any three books you want (one a month for three months), which is often cheaper than the physical copy of books. So Amazon is still finding ways to eliminate potential complaints.

Overall I am quite pleased with Audible and I plan to use it until I die. Some may think audiobooks don't count as real reading and that is fine. But my soul needs them to keep myself sane at times.

Questions or comments? Please tell us below.