

The South Bay Mug

MAGINTOSH

A Monthly Cupful For South Bay Apple Mac User Group Members, Mar. 2007

MACHinations

A personal view from Bob

Audio Books - it's more than music

I've been using iTunes for a long time and love it. I store all my music there and am still finding new ways to use it. The latest is for audio books. There's a huge number of them for sale and many on the Internet (e.g. Gutenberg.org) are free. Commercial audio books come on CDs. A typical novel takes 10 or more discs. Each holds up to 75 minutes on as many as 99 tracks. I like to convert CDs to compressed MP3 or AAC files (30 to 60 MB/hour), store them in iTunes and listen to them on my iPod.

MP3 and AAC formats. iTunes encodes imported audio in several formats, selected in the Preferences. I use two compressed and unprotected formats, MP3 (.mp3) and AAC (.m4a). MP3 is the most common. The AAC format won't play on many non-Apple players, but sound better at the same bitrate and is rapidly gaining popularity. It's also bookmarkable, as I'll explain later.

Bitrate (kbps = kilobits/sec) represents the amount of information, or detail, that is stored per unit of time in an audio recording. In general the higher the bitrate the better it sounds, but the audio file is larger. MP3 and AAC music is typically recorded at 128 kbps or higher, but for audio books 64 kbps stereo (32 kbps mono) is quite adequate. Uncompressed audio (CD quality) takes about 10 MB/min to store, compared to about 1 MB/min for compressed music or about 0.5 MB/min for audio books in stereo.

Join Tracks. Commercial audio CDs have up to 99 tracks, each lasting only a minute or two. A 10-CD book can result in as many as 1000 files cluttering your hard drive. I discovered the "Join CD Tracks" com-

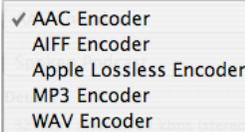
mand under the iTunes Advanced menu that lets you encode many CD tracks as one track. Insert the CD, select the tracks to be joined (I select all) and use the Join CD Tracks command to combine them into a single, compressed file. A vertical line shows the joined tracks, as shown right. Encoding a CD as a single, long track reduces file clutter, but what if you want to stop listening in the middle and return later? Encode with AAC and create a bookmarkable file (.m4b).

1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Track 01
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 02
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 03
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 04
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 05
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 06
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 07
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 08
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 09
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 10
11	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 11
12	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 12
13	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 13
14	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 14
15	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 15
16	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 16
17	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 17
18	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 18
19	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 19
20	<input type="checkbox"/>	Track 20

Bookmarkable tracks let you stop listening, go do something else and come back to resumes playing where you left off. Converting files to bookmarkable AAC files is a little tricky. Fortunately Doug Mac-Adam (dougscripts.com) has an iTunes AppleScript "Make Bookmarkable 2.1" to do the job. Put the AppleScript file in your user library>iTunes>Scripts folder and it will show in the Script menu in iTunes. He also has a small application "Join Together" that will join a collection of MP3 files already in iTunes, to create a single file that can be bookmarked, although it takes longer than joining and ripping from a CD.

Protected Files So far I've talked about unprotected files. Apple's iTunes Music Store sells books in protected AAC (.m4p) format that restricts how it can be copied and played. Audible.com sells a huge selection of downloadable audio books in a protected bookmarkable format (.aa) with some severe restrictions (two Macs, two iPods and burn to one CD).

Beyond Books: There's also podcasts, radio shows, magazines and newspapers. Enjoy.





Bob Brooks
Helping Beginners
310-545-8060
SBAMUG@gmail.com