



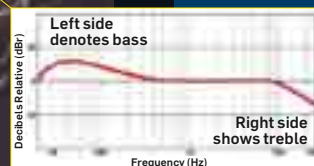
OUR TESTS

We tested a dozen in-ear "canal phones" with Tyll Hertsens of Head-Room Labs (headphone.com). Hertsens's engineers used a calibrated audio mannequin that reproduces all the aural nuances of the ear to test sound blocking and frequency response.

SOUND BLOCKING

External audio sound isolation (AST) measures the volume of noise the earbud can block out.

Target curve



FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Sound quality was measured by testing each earbud with 200 different frequencies. All headphones will have spikes and troughs. But these peaks and valleys average out to provide the headphones' overall sound profile (in red).

Have an eargasm

WANT FUSS-FREE NOISE REDUCTION? WE TESTED THE TOP NOISE-ISOLATING EARBUDS SO YOU CAN ROCK OUT WITHOUT GOING DEAF



URBAN COMMANDOS

ULTIMATE EARS TRIPLE.FI 10 PRO
ASI: 14.6 decibels (dB)



Dead silence is dangerous in the concrete jungle. These earphones isolate a respectable amount of noise but won't muffle vital sounds, such as car horns and beckoning bosses, making them equally suited to the avenue and the cube. A triple-driver design produces pitch-perfect lows, mids, and highs. \$400, ultimateears.com
Rock these with: Led Zeppelin, "Over the Hills and Far Away"



CARDIO CONDUITS

V-MODA BASS FREQ
ASI: 19.2 dB



Gym rats will revel in these bass-heavy phones, which are primed to pair with your pump-up playlist. The gob-stopper-inspired buds provide moderate isolation: They'll block out the Top 40 on the gym speakers and the banter of elliptical-machine debutantes. As isolation increases, so do the knocks and scratches of earphone wires shifting and shaking, but the V-Modas include a plastic cable manager to keep wires tucked tight during your circuit. \$50, v-moda.com
Rock these with: Jurassic 5, "What's Golden"



ROAD WARRIORS

SHURE SE530PTH
ASI: 31.5 dB



Airports and airplanes are noise-filled environments, but tuning out the terminal entirely can cause you to miss crucial information. The Push-to-Hear feature on this pair lets you activate a microphone to chat or listen without removing the phones. With one tweeter and two woofers, they skew mildly toward the bass, but deliver crisp mids and rich highs. \$500, shure.com
Rock these with: Metallica, "Master of Puppets"



SOUND STOPPERS

ETYMOTIC ER-4S
ASI: 45 dB



The ER-4S's are the gold standard of noise isolation. The eardrum stuffers eradicated almost all ambient sound and produced the most balanced frequency response of any set tested. By clearing background noise, the high-fidelity sound shines, even at low volumes. Due to the extreme noise cancelling, the Etymotics aren't our choice for portable players, but they're perfect for your laptop. \$300, etymotic.com
Rock these with: Leo Kottke, "The Driving of the Year Nail"



400
PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN THE LIKELIHOOD YOU'LL LISTEN TO MUSIC AT SAFE VOLUMES IF YOU WEAR SOUND-ISOLATING CANAL PHONES, ACCORDING TO HARVARD RESEARCHERS.

Spiros Peltis (man), MELISSA PUNCH (earbuds), Wide World Photos (James Hartfield), Michael Rutland/Retna UK (Jimmy Page)