

Learning on Steroids:

The Audio Book Method



by Scott Young

The Audio Book Method

Today's rapid learning tactic is something you can use in your process of studying for tests. Notes compression is a great tactic for reviewing for tests, but it has two weaknesses:

1. **Sometimes it can be incomplete.** Notes compression is a quick skim, not a detailed learning session, so it helps to know other tactics if you want to go further.
2. **It's completely visual.** I'm a visual learner, so I learn best when working with pictures. But that doesn't mean that everyone is, nor does it mean that even visual learners shouldn't tackle the information through other formats. By having more modes of learning involved, you increase your chance that one set will stick with you.

The audio-book method covers these weaknesses by providing much more depth to your studying, as well as being an

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an auditory learning approach. I've used this before in combination with notes compressions, and while it can be a bit more time consuming, it's definitely effective.

I have to thank Liam Martin of VTAMethod.com for suggesting this tactic to me. Liam has used this approach with the students he helps and I liked it so much I wanted to share it with you here. If you liked this tactic, you may want to check out his blog and website.

How it Works

The tactic is fairly simple. You go through all of your notes and studying material, and recite, out loud, to yourself an explanation for everything your studying. If you've already read

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the guide on the 5-Year Old Pupil Method, then this practice should be familiar to you.

The only difference here is that you record yourself speaking with a computer microphone and save the resulting file as an MP3. Then you can put that MP3 file on your iPod or MP3 Player and listen to it while you do other activities.

This method works in two distinct ways. The first, and most important, is it forces you to apply the 5-Year Old Method. I've said before that I find this to be one of the best tactics for deeply understanding a subject.

Unfortunately, most people won't do it out loud. It can feel a bit stupid talking to yourself in your room, so many people will just try to practice it in their head. But by doing that they often miss the real power of the technique. It's funny how often we

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believe we're thinking clearly about something, but when we try to articulate it, we fall flat.

Simply summarizing silently in your head isn't enough to use the method. You need to speak out loud, talk to others, or write in a journal to actually see the explanations you're creating.

The audio book method works well here because audio programs can't record your thoughts, you're forced to speak out loud and actually articulate what you're trying to learn. This helps you catch errors in understanding and also helps you shape your knowledge more carefully.

The second advantage of this method is that once you've recorded the audio, you can listen to it in your spare time. When I used to do this with audio books (not self-recorded ones) I could

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often listen to 2-3 hours a day of audio without ever setting aside time to listen. I simply used the time I was already spending walking, cleaning, exercising or cooking to listen to new books.

By using this method you can reclaim all that spare time to program your brain with all the information you need to know. No-studying in this way isn't a substitute for deep thinking and creating those deliberate connections you need to learn. However, it can make it easier to find the right answers, provided those connections are in place.

How to Create Your Own Audio-Books

First, you'll need a microphone and a recording software. I'm not going to create a list here because most computers already have microphones, and the amount of recording software is

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abundant. Chances are your computer is already equipped with everything you need to get started.

The software program I use (it's completely free) is [Audacity](#) and you can find it here. It's a good program for recording and can then convert the finished files to MP3.

Although I don't recommend heavily editing the resulting audio files (otherwise you're wasting time that could be spent learning), this program also allows you to cut, splice and edit the audio. So if there are sections you want to quickly remove when listening, you can do this fairly easily.

The next step is to gather up all the material you want to review. I suggest going chapter-by-chapter in short, 10-15 minute bursts. If you try to recite for an hour, you won't be as focused and

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the resulting audio will probably have lots of silence as you try to read ahead the material and figure out what you want to say.

Now read all the material over. Start thinking in your head what the professor or author is getting at in each section of your notes. Do not write a script or a long set of notes to prepare for speaking. The only purpose of this is to help you speed up the process of recording.

Finally turn on your recording software and start explaining the material to yourself out loud. Don't worry about polish. Don't worry whether you make um's or ah's, or even get caught for a minute or two being unable to explain what you're learning. Those things don't matter—your goal is an MP3 which contains your explanation, not a professionally recorded audio book.

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If you do feel stuck during a point in the guide, just leave a space of silence. If it's over a minute or two, you'll notice this gap when you see the audio waveform in Audacity. You can then easily select and delete this section so that when you're listening to the file on your MP3 player there won't be minutes of dead air.

The last step is to export the file as an MP3 and put it on your iPod or MP3 Player.

Two Ways to Use the Audio Book Tactic

There are two ways you can use the audio book method. One way is for deliberately studying for an exam. The other way is for ongoing preparation during your classes. Which you choose to use will depend on how much material you need to cover, and how difficult you find the class.

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For the first method, you should collect all your information two weeks before the exam starts and record your audio book. Then you can listen to this for the two weeks leading up to the exam as you do other studying (such as notes compression or study dissection).

The downside with this approach is that it often takes quite a while to create an audio book for a dense class. It may take several hours for a really dense course syllabus. Several hours of passive studying isn't too strenuous, but recording yourself speak for that long can be exhausting, especially if you have to do this for several exams.

However if the course is lighter, or you don't need too much help to pass your exam, doing the entire recording at the end where you skim through the ideas instead of offer deep explanations may be enough.

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The other approach which would be easier for dense courses is to record your audio books throughout the course. After each chapter or lecture, record a 10 minute audio book MP3 file and put it on your iPod. By the time your exams approach, you should already have dozens of files you can listen do covering your course topics.

The advantage of this method is also that, since you may have recorded the explanations months earlier, they will refresh your memory at exam time. Listening to something you recorded a few days ago often doesn't provide that same advantage.

Summary of Implementation Steps

Just to summarize, all you need to do is:

1. Get a microphone and recording software.
2. Organize your lecture notes (either during the class or before exams)
3. Read through them once.
4. Explain the notes to yourself out loud, while recording, without worrying about making mistakes or how you sound.
5. Save as an MP3 and put on our iPod to listen to during other activities.