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Questions & Answers

How It Works

How does ChatterBlocker work?

ChatterBlocker masks unwanted office chatter using a soothing blend of nature sounds, music and chatter voices.

It also offers mindfulness meditation tracks intended to increase concentration, reduce distractibility and minimize the stress response to office noise.

For more information, read our background papers: "[Coping with Speech Noise in the Modern Workplace](#)" and "[Learning to Tune Out Distraction](#)."

Does ChatterBlocker use noise cancellation?

No. Noise cancellation would not be effective over speakers, and noise cancelling headphones have limited effectiveness in silencing voice.

Good quality noise cancelling headphones are great for reducing low-frequency sounds, such as airplane engine rumble, but they are not as effective in the 2 to 8 kHz consonant range that conveys much of the speech intelligibility.

How does ChatterBlocker stop noise with more sound?

Our goal is not to stop noise by adding more noise. The goal is to render speech less intelligible, because intelligible speech tends to be the most distracting sound in the workplace. If we can understand the conversations around us, our minds tend to lock onto those conversations and we lose track of our own thoughts.

ChatterBlocker doesn't "stop" noise — it reduces the intelligibility of nearby conversations to make them less distracting. This is done using auditory masking, the same

psychoacoustic phenomenon exploited by MP3 and related compression algorithms.

Intelligible speech is hidden behind similar, but less distracting sounds. The result isn't silence but a relaxing murmur. The effect is similar to lying on a crowded beach, where faraway voices mingle with the sounds of the surf to lull you into a state of relaxation. This state allows you to calm the body and focus the mind.

Will this completely block out unwanted conversations?

Not necessarily (at least, when used at a safe and comfortable listening level). Some speech sounds are harder to mask than others, depending on factors such as how far away the person is, how loudly he or she is talking, the pitch of the voice, and the presence and placement of acoustically absorbent or obstructive materials.

Even when ChatterBlocker is unable to completely mask the unwanted speech, it can "blur" the sound, lowering the Speech Intelligibility Index (SII) and giving you something else to listen to so your attention doesn't get captured by irrelevant conversations.

How It Differs from Other Solutions

How does ChatterBlocker differ from "White Noise" masking devices?

Some offices deal with the problem of conversational distraction by installing "White Noise" sound masking systems, which typically involve speakers placed in the plenum above the ceiling. These devices help reduce the intelligibility of nearby speech; users often assume they are hearing the sound of the air conditioning system.

However, this is a one-size-fits-all approach that doesn't let users adjust the volume and content of the sound being played. "White noise" and "pink noise" can be annoying at certain levels and ineffective at others. ChatterBlocker lets users select one or more simultaneous masking sounds and adjust the volume to fit their own situation.

Why should I use ChatterBlocker instead of just listening to music?

Music can often be distracting in itself, to you as well as your co-workers. This is particularly true for music with lyrics.

ChatterBlocker was intentionally designed for blocking unwanted speech, while simultaneously minimizing distraction. Many of the sound files were recorded in binaural, which makes them especially effective at masking sounds coming from any direction.

In addition, ChatterBlocker lets you play multiple sound files at once — you can mix and match any combination of nature sounds, music and chatter voices to fit your preferences and your surroundings.

ChatterBlocker also includes meditation tracks to help you reduce your sensitivity to extraneous conversation and help you learn to focus and concentrate in a noisy environment.

Finally, in a cubicle environment, music listening is often done over headphones, in order to avoid disturbing neighbors with your music choices. However, prolonged listening to music over headphones is not recommended, due to the possibility of hearing damage (see the section on [Precautions](#) below). Many of the non-music ChatterBlocker presets can be played over speakers at a low to moderate volume level without disturbing cubicle neighbors.

How to Use ChatterBlocker

How should I use ChatterBlocker?

1. Set ChatterBlocker's volume (and/or your sound card or speaker volumes) to a level that seems comfortable and effective.

2. Experiment with different presets to find one you find pleasant and effective at masking the conversations around you.

3. To fine-tune ChatterBlocker to your situation, you can create new presets in the Advanced mode.

Note that ChatterBlocker does not limit you to playing one track at a time. You can select as many tracks as you want from each of the three list boxes in the Advanced mode: Voices, Music and Sound Effects.

What is the difference between the Easy and Advanced windows?

The Easy window lets you select from a menu of Presets that specify combinations of voices, music, and sound effects. You can also pause or resume playback, and control the master volume level.

In the Advanced window, you have access to all the controls from the Easy window, plus you can:

- Specify your own combinations of voices, music, and sound effects files.
- Separately control the volume for each group (voices, music, and sound effects).
- Save or delete your own custom Preset files.
- Drag-&-drop audio files and playlists to add them to any of the groups.

Not all of the sound files are accessible from the Easy window. You can access them directly in the Advanced window, and if you want, you can turn them into new presets.

Should I use ChatterBlocker with headphones or speakers?

Whichever you prefer.

For especially loud conversations, ChatterBlocker may be more effective over headphones. However, prolonged headphone listening can be uncomfortable and can cause hearing fatigue. Often, ChatterBlocker can be surprisingly effective over speakers at low to moderate levels, without disturbing your neighbors.

Will ChatterBlocker bother my co-workers?

Probably not.

ChatterBlocker works by "neutralizing" common environmental sounds, not by drowning them out. You can generally keep the volume quite low in environments such as offices. In noisier settings, such as crowded cafés, you may want to turn the volume higher. In either case, people around you will usually notice the speech sounds you're blocking before they'll notice the low, steady sound of ChatterBlocker. And if they're trying to concentrate, they may benefit from ChatterBlocker as well.

Can I use ChatterBlocker with noise cancelling headphones? Will I get any additional benefit?

ChatterBlocker can be used with any speakers or headphones, including noise cancelling headphones. There may be some additional benefit when using high-quality noise cancelling headphones, especially with low-pitched male voices. However, ChatterBlocker can effectively mask voice with or without the use of noise cancelling headphones.

Are there precautions I should take when listening with headphones?

Users should take care when listening to any audio content (not just ChatterBlocker) at excessive volume levels and/or for extended periods of time, and especially over headphones. Headphone listeners are more susceptible to hearing damage (such as hearing loss and tinnitus, or ringing of the ears), for a number of reasons:

- Headphones often have poor bass response, so users tend to turn up the volume to compensate
- Users don't feel the loud, thumping bass which tells the body that the music is really loud
- There is less air absorption at the damaging high frequencies, because the sound doesn't have to travel across the room
- The ears adapt to loud sounds faster over headphones, so users are tempted to keep turning up the volume

The goal of ChatterBlocker is to help blur unwanted speech, reduce the Speech Intelligibility Index (SII), and provide other sounds your brain can focus on instead of the speech content. Don't try to use ChatterBlocker to completely overpower or drown out the unwanted conversations. If you turn up the volume too loud, ChatterBlocker will become a source of stress and distraction in itself, which defeats the purpose. Keep the volume at a low, comfortable background level, limit the amount of time you spend each day listening on headphones, take frequent breaks and avoid the temptation to keep turning up the level. If you're wondering whether the volume might be too loud, take that as a warning — yes, it might.

Hearing damage can be thought of as a type of repetitive stress disorder, and like carpal tunnel syndrome, most people don't think about it until the damage is already done.

We strongly recommend using ChatterBlocker over speakers when possible. If you must use headphones, for any type of audio content, be mindful to keep the volume at a safe level.

The information given here does not substitute for medical advice. Readers should consult a physician for a diagnosis of hearing damage. More information on this subject can be found in the article "Preventing Hearing Damage When Listening With Headphones," at http://www.headwize.com/articles/hearing_art.htm.

How can I add my own music?

You can add audio files using ChatterBlocker's Advanced Mode.

To add audio files:

1. Go to ChatterBlocker's Advanced Mode.

2. Drag and drop the audio file(s) of your choice to the Voices, Music, or Sound Effects list box. You can also drag and drop a "shortcut" (also called a "link" or "alias") to an audio file.

The factory-supplied audio files that come with ChatterBlocker are in the OGG audio file format, but ChatterBlocker can also open files in MP3 and WAV formats.

These additions will persist — the next time you open ChatterBlocker, those files will still be in the list boxes.

More information on adding audio files is provided in the help file on [Adding Audio Files and Playlists](#).

How do I remove sound files I've added?

Dragging the sound files out of the list boxes to remove them has not yet been implemented. To remove audio files:

1. Quit the ChatterBlocker application.
2. For the Macintosh version:

   Drag the sound file or alias out of the relevant ~/Library/Application Support/ChatterBlocker/ChatterBlocker_Content/ folder.

For the Windows version:

Drag the sound file or alias out of the relevant C:\Documents and Settings\your_user_name\Application Data\ChatterBlocker\ChatterBlocker_Content\ folder (Voices / Music / Sound Effects). (Note that the Application Data folder's contents may be hidden on your machine, so you may need to unhide hidden folders in your Folder Options.)

Can I add playlists?

Yes. You can add playlists using ChatterBlocker's Advanced Mode.

To add playlists:

1. Go to ChatterBlocker's Advanced Mode.
2. Drag and drop the playlist(s) of your choice to the Voices, Music, or Sound Effects list box. You can also drag and drop a "shortcut" (also called a "link" or "alias") to a playlist.

ChatterBlocker supports playlists in M3U, PLS, ASX, and WAX formats.

More information on adding playlists is provided in the help file on [Adding Audio Files and Playlists](#).

Other Uses

Would ChatterBlocker help mask the sound of tinnitus (ringing of the ears)?

Probably so. Different people have tinnitus in different frequency ranges; if yours is very high-pitched, ChatterBlocker may not totally mask the sound. However, it can still help distract your attention away from the ringing.

In general, it may be better to play some kind of low level background sound, to capture your acoustic attention, than to spend hours being stressed out about the ringing in your ears. Especially if you're troubled by tinnitus mostly at night, when the house is quiet and you're trying to sleep, it may be helpful to play low level nature sounds (such as ocean waves or babbling brooks). (Of course, if the computer's fan or disk drive noise is irritating in itself, you may want to find another solution.)

You may also obtain help from meditation or other mind/body techniques (including the meditations in the full version of ChatterBlocker). Hating the ringing in your ears will not make the sound go away, but it can make you

miserable. Meditation can help you accept the present moment instead of worrying about "what if this never goes away and I have to deal with it forever."

Needless to say, you should not try to turn up ChatterBlocker to an excessive volume level in an attempt to mask the tinnitus. Set it to a pleasant, comfortable background level. It's okay if the masking sound doesn't completely mask the ringing; the goal is to keep you from focusing your attention on the tinnitus.

I don't have a problem with people talking, but how does this deal with someone who clears their throat really loudly every few minutes?

ChatterBlocker can help make that less annoying as well. Feel free to try the demo, which you can download from http://chatterblocker.com/downloads.html .

I transcribe audio recordings — what can I do to block out my thoughtless co-workers?

ChatterBlocker might not help for this, because it would mask the recordings you're trying to transcribe as well as the sounds of your co-workers.

Noise-cancelling earphones may not help much except for low-frequency noise. For speech they mainly just cut out the low end. The main thing that might help would be any

headphones with a cup that physically covers the ear, instead of just a little disk that sits on top of the ear ("around the ear" instead of "on the ear"); this will help physically block some of the sound, and may be more comfortable over the long term. There are also some headphones that plug into your ear like earplugs; these may help block out other sounds. Either way, it will be much easier to hear the recordings through headphones than through speakers. This may solve most of the problem.

Of course, you want to be careful about listening at loud volume for extended periods of time — if you start noticing ringing of the ears, this can be an early sign of hearing damage. Music is probably worse than voice in this respect, but you need to avoid the tendency to turn it up so loud that it drowns out the other voices.

Finally, you may want to read the white papers at http://chatterblocker.com/whitepapers/ , especially the one about learning to tune out distraction. Often the emotional response to distraction can actually be worse than the effects of the distraction itself (you can end up distracted by your mind chattering on about people who have no consideration for others, even long after they've stop talking), and meditation can be very helpful for this. ChatterBlocker includes a few short meditation tracks on the topic, but learning any reputable form of meditation should help.

Of course, if you still can't hear what you're doing, that's another story, and your boss should definitely be

concerned about the effect on productivity. If headphones don't do the trick (and they may indeed help a lot), you might propose the option of working from home or changing employment.

What are some other uses of ChatterBlocker?

ChatterBlocker can be helpful for masking other types of sound, such as traffic noise, airplane noise, neighbor noise, unwanted music, etc.

ChatterBlocker may also be helpful in a variety of conditions involving noise sensitivity. Hyperacousis is an extreme sensitivity to sound, often associated with tinnitus (ringing in the ears). In one study, 43% of classical musicians reported symptoms of hyperacousis. People with hyperacousis are often tempted to plug their ears to minimize their sound exposure, but this can actually increase their sensitivity because it increase's the brain's amplification of sounds. Pleasant, low-level background sounds can help reduce the sound phobia. ChatterBlocker's Listening Meditation may be of use for this purpose as well.

Some people with Asperger Syndrome are also extremely sensitive to sounds and may have trouble blocking out distractions. We have had anecdotal reports that ChatterBlocker can be useful for these conditions.

Sound Categories

What is the purpose of each category (Voices, Music and Sound Effects)?

Each of the three list boxes contain audio loops that continually repeat. The loops are of different lengths so that when combined with other loops, the overall sound will repeat only after a very long time period. The tracks line up differently against each other each time they repeat, so the composite sound is continually changing.

The **Sound Effects** mostly consist of nature sounds:

- Wind, water and bird sounds have been shown to be calming and relaxing.
- The wide-bandwidth water sounds are also very effective at masking the intelligibility of unwanted conversations.

The **Voices** list box contains mostly meditation tracks and chatter voices:

- The chatter voices consist of many people talking at once to create a background "walla" or chatter sound. This sound is effective at masking unwanted speech, but it is less distracting because you can not understand the individual words.
- The mindfulness meditation tracks are intended to increase concentration, reduce

distractibility and minimize the stress response to office noise.

The **Music** list box includes two different types of musical tracks:

- Relatively short ambient loops. These can be used by themselves, or in combination with other ambient loops, nature sounds, etc.
- Longer, more traditional compositions. (These are generally not meant to be played in combination with other musical tracks.)

You can add your own audio tracks to any of these categories.

How can I use the meditation tracks?

[Available only in the full version, not the demo.]

The meditation tracks, in the Voices list box, are intended to help you cultivate a state in which your body is relaxed, your mind is focused, and you allow potentially distracting sounds to float past you in the background.

"**Meditation - Breathing**" is intended to enhance focus and concentration by teaching you to bring your mind back to your breathing each time it wanders or is distracted by office noise.

"**Meditation - Listening**" is intended to desensitize you to office noise by helping you minimize judgments and

emotional reactions that can be more distracting and stressful than the noise itself.

"**Meditation - Distraction**" is a meditation on work and distraction.

See our white paper on "Learning to Tune Out Distraction," http://chatterblocker.com/whitepapers/tune_out_distractions.html, for more information.

These tracks are intended only as an introduction to meditation. If you're interested in pursuing the subject further, you might consider taking a group class such as the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction courses taught in over 200 medical centers.

How can I use the chatter voices?

The chatter voices are helpful at masking speech, especially louder conversations. These tracks consist of many people talking at once to create a background "walla" or "cafeteria noise." This sound is effective at covering up unwanted speech, but it is less distracting because you can not understand the individual words.

Select one or more tracks (low-pitched male voices, medium-pitched female voices, etc.) that seem to do the best job of masking the unwanted conversation. The chatter voices can also be used in conjunction with the Music and Sound Effects of your choice.

By themselves, the chatter tracks can be somewhat annoying. You may want to reserve them for masking louder conversations. You may also want to play them at a lower level than the music or nature sound tracks.

What are the other voice tracks?

[Available only in the full version, not the demo.]

The remaining voice tracks, "Please Be Quiet" (female voice) and "Shut It" (male voice) are intended as comic reminders to your co-workers to pipe down. While these can be humorous, they may be taken the wrong way in certain workplaces, so use them sparingly if at all.

How can I use the music tracks?

Some people concentrate better when music is played; others work better without it, especially when focusing on difficult problems.You can use the included music tracks or add your own. These can also be combined with sound effects or voice tracks.

ChatterBlocker comes with the following music tracks. Most of these are ambient loops, sort of a cross between music and sound effects, which may be suitable for combining with other ambient music loops. The tracks preceded by an asterisk (*) are full compositions intended

to be played by themselves (or with sound effects or voices).

Airy Chords	Slow, airy organ chords
Cafe Plux	Plucked notes like water droplets
* **Concentration**	Classical music tracks intended to enhance concentration, motivation and productivity. (Included in the full version only, not the demo.)
Guitar Tree	Acoustic guitar and reverberant wooden percussion
Ice Rattle	Low-temperature rattle sound
Percuss	Rhythmic percussion track
Plucky	Meandering plucked acoustic notes
Random Blocks	Resonant wooden notes, like low-pitched wind chimes
* **Silver Creek**	Musical impression of a mountain creek
Slow Flute	Bamboo flute sounds
Slow Organ	Organ chords
Steps	Low, meandering notes
Sunset	Early evening dreamscape
* **Swoosh**	Electronica (Included in the full version only, not the demo)
Wah Rhythm	Percussion track with organ stabs
* **Yucca**	Impressions of a semi-desert. (Included in the full version only, not the demo)

Note that you can also add [shortcuts to other music files](#) as well as [playlists](#).

What types of music are best for improving concentration and blocking unwanted work conversations?

The research on this topic is pretty mixed. Music can either increase productivity or add additional distraction (or both). However, we can make some generalizations:

- Music with lyrics tends to be more distracting than music without.
- Instrumental music often improves concentration when it is moderately complex and played at a moderate volume. However, music which is too stimulating often causes additional distraction.
- Obviously, music you dislike can be annoying, which is a form of distraction. But music you like too much can also be distracting.
- Music in major keys *may* increase productivity compared to music in minor keys.
- One study suggested that classical music increases performance of rats, while hard rock ruins the experiment because the rats all kill each other. (!!!)

- Faster music may increase performance and morale, especially with mindless work. However, it may increase distraction with more complex work.
- Music with too wide a dynamic range can be distracting because of the need to constantly adjust the volume.
- Calming music increases performance on arithmetic and memory tasks.
- As tasks increase in complexity, listeners tend to prefer music that is "simple," or no music.
- Music can be energizing, especially after lunch.
- Music can be less distracting through speakers than through headphones.
- People are often capable of "self-medicating" by choosing appropriate music to suit their personality, musical taste, task required, and environmental conditions. However, their favorite music may not be the most suitable for enhancing concentration.

The music and other sounds in ChatterBlocker have been selected for their ability to mask speech without causing additional distraction, based on these and other criteria. However, this is a very subjective area. Choose the track (or combination of tracks) that works best for you, or add your own.

How can I use the bell loops?

ChatterBlocker includes two bell loops (actually, a silver-plated communion goblet pinged with a fingernail). One loop repeats once per hour; the other repeats each 41 minutes. You can use these alone, or you can combine them to repeat at somewhat unexpected intervals.

The bell sound can be used a cue to remind yourself to take a deep breath, relax, and adjust your posture. When you hear the bell, you could ask yourself one or more of the following questions:

"Is my body tense?"

"Am I resisting something, saying 'no' to the present moment?"

"Am I working, relaxing, or killing time?"

"Am I focused on a worthwhile task?"

Without interrupting your work flow, you can take a breath, let go of unnecessary tension, and return your focus to the work at hand.

The bell loops are also useful for sampling your work day. If you find you're surfing the web a third of the time, you could ask yourself if that's really how you want to spend your work day?

See our white paper on "Learning to Tune Out Distraction,"

http://chatterblocker.com/whitepapers/tune_out_distractions.html#reminders, for more information.

Presets

Which presets should I use to mask loud conversations?

When masking loud conversations, it can be helpful to include some chatter voices in the mix. You might try the presets that feature a mix of Voices, Music & Nature Sounds. You can always fine-tune your preset in the Advanced Mode.

Which presets can I use to mask medium conversations?

Try a mix of Music and Nature Sounds. If needed, add a pinch of Chatter Voices.

Which presets can I use to mask soft conversations?

Often the Nature Sounds alone are sufficient for this. Add Music if you like.

How can I save custom presets?

In the Advanced Mode, click the "Save Custom Preset..." button to save your current custom settings as a Preset. This button is grayed out (disabled) if you have not modified the factory preset.

Miscellaneous / Support

What are the differences between the demo and the full version?

The demo allows you to try the software for 60 minutes. Afterwards, the sound files will play, but they will no longer loop.

Also, in order to reduce the size of the download, the demo version does not include the following sound files:

Music

Concentration

Yucca

Swoosh

Voices

Meditation - Breathing

Meditation - Distraction

Meditation - Listening

Please Be Quiet

Shut It

How do I purchase the full version and authorize the software?

When you first launch ChatterBlocker, you will see a screen that says that ChatterBlocker has not yet been authorized. Until you authorize the software, you will have 60 minutes to try it out; afterwards, looping of the sound files will be disabled. Also, note that the Demo version does not include all the sound files.

To purchase ChatterBlocker:

1. Click on ChatterBlocker's Purchase button (or click here). This will bring up the purchase web page.
2. Enter the appropriate information.

After you purchase the software, you will receive an e-mail (from Shareit.com or other payment processor) including the Authorization Code and a link for downloading the full version of the software.

To install and authorize the full version of ChatterBlocker:

1. Download the installer for the full version from the link provided in the e-mail.
2. Run the installer and follow the instructions provided.

3. Copy the Authorization Code from the e-mail and paste it in the space provided on the "ChatterBlocker Not Yet Authorized" screen.

Does my license support both Mac and Windows?

No; the ChatterBlocker license supports only the platform specified at time of purchase. However, if you select "Add to Cart" under one version of ChatterBlocker, the next page will offer the option of adding the other version at half price.

Can I purchase the software on a CD?

Yes, you can have the software mailed to you on a CD for an additional fee. Just go to our [purchase page](#), then select "Add to Cart" under the desired version of ChatterBlocker. On the next page, check the box that says "Backup CD." Note that this is a CD for installing the software, *not an audio CD*.

If, instead, you would like ChatterBlocker as an audio CD, the easiest way would be to [purchase ChatterBlocker AAC from the iTunes store](#) and then burn it to an audio CD. ChatterBlocker AAC is a 60-minute recording of one custom mix of ChatterBlocker's audio output. (It is the same as ChatterBlocker MP3, discussed below, but in AAC format for iPod / iTunes.)

Can I purchase the audio as an MP3 download?

Yes, [ChatterBlocker MP3](#) is now available. This is a 60-minute recording of one custom mix of ChatterBlocker's audio output, suitable for playback on iPods and mp3 jukeboxes, as well as iTunes and other mp3 playback applications.

Why have the sound files started dropping out?

"I've been using a demo of Chatterblocker for a couple of days now. Yesterday it worked perfectly. Today, after starting a particular preset, the tracks begin to drop out one-by-one within a few seconds."

This is happening because the 60 minute demo period has expired. Once that happens, each of the loops will only play once — this is why they seemed to drop out one-by-one.

What are the keyboard shortcuts?

See the Keyboard Access page, http://chatterblocker.com/help/Keyboard_Access.htm.

How can I get quick access to launch the application?

For the Windows version, drag the desktop icon to the quick launch bar part of the taskbar (see http://www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/accessibility/displayquicklaunch.mspx).

For the Macintosh version, you can make an alias of the application (using Command-L), or drag the application to the Dock.

How can I make the application automatically launch on startup?

For the Windows version, drag a copy of the desktop shortcut to Start Menu > Programs > Startup.

For the Macintosh version, make an alias of the application (using Command-L) and drag it to the /Library/StartupItems folder.

I lost my Authorization Code (serial number). How can I recover it?

Search your e-mail for a message from ShareIt.com or plimus.com. If you can't find it, e-mail us.

What should I do if I have tech support questions?

1. Go to the [System Requirements page](#) to make sure your host program is compatible.
2. Go to the [Tech Support page](#) to see if it addresses your question.
3. Read the [Read Me](#) file that comes with the software
4. Read the above Frequently Asked Questions to see if they address your question.
5. If the previous steps don't answer your question, [e-mail us](#).

What are the system requirements?

Go to the [System Requirements page](#).

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From: http://chatterblocker.com/faq.html