

Strays – I hear you

When it comes to hearing the audio from your transceiver, there are several problems you're often faced with. One is for you to hear more, and another is for others to hear less.

External speaker

Your radio likely came outfitted with a good built-in speaker, to let you hear the operators on the opposite end and possibly other sounds, such as a tail squelch or connection link. If you and others nearby want to hear what your radio's receiving, then your little speaker is probably plenty adequate for your needs. Still, there seem to be times when it's better to listen to what's coming across your radio loudly or in a more naturally sounding voice. For that, you might want an **external speaker** to do the job.

An external speaker is one that you can attach or plug into your transceiver, to modify the sound or place or direct the sound somewhere other than straight out from your radio. On many mobile or HF base radios, the internal speaker is mounted such that it points straight up in the air, or worse, straight down onto the table. This positioning often makes the audio sound muffled or quiet. Also, the typically small size of their internal speakers can make the audio sound tinny or enclosed in a can.

You don't need to purchase anything expensive for your external speaker. Of course, you can get a [nice speaker](#) that appears to complement your radio look or style if you want to, but a cheaper, aftermarket one will perform the same if you don't care as much about how it looks. You can often find good-quality external speakers at a local thrift store for less than ten dollars. Be sure each is labeled by "8 ohms" or an "8 Ω " impedance rating.



You'll likely need to attach your choice of **mono**, not stereo, connector on the wires extending from the speaker, since most modern transceivers are outfitted with mono audio jacks. For your handheld radio,



it might require a little research on your part to find out what kind of external speaker is appropriate for it, due to its unique connector type. One way to solve that problem is to purchase an inexpensive speaker-microphone, cut off the microphone, and attach the correct wires to your external speaker.



The wooden box that your external speaker is mounted in can help your received audio sound deeper and richer. And you can point your external speaker in any direction you wish, like toward some students for whom you're trying to demonstrate your station setup. During times like at Field Day, an external speaker allows you to share your experience with nearby listeners in a slightly noisy environment.

Ear speaker

Admit it...your spouse doesn't like it when she has to listen to your friends call out to you on your little HT with that irritating, government-sounding audio. So you take it into the next room, where the signal might be sketchy, or outside where it's freezing cold. But to communicate, you need to hear the other person talk to you. And if that other operator has a soft

voice, is talking too far from his microphone, or has a noisy signal, you might find yourself turning up the volume and running your family out of your house.

What you need is something that will let you hear the other person, but that silences your radio so that your family can't hear the people on the other end. There are several things you can purchase, that will fit the bill, like headphones, earphones, a head-piece, and earbuds. Problem is, unlike regular stereo equipment, you can't always go to Walmart and purchase what you need. More often than not, you'll need to get an ear piece that has a plug, maybe even a double-plug, that fits only your radio model.

Ok, so if others don't want to hear you, simply take it outside, right? Well, if you're able to brave the shivering cold, the better signal will help the other operator hear you, but you might have a more difficult time hearing him, because of all the outdoor noise from cars on the street, from people, and from the leafy breeze. An ear piece can focus all the audio you want to hear from your radio into your head, often in spite of surrounding noise, while still taking advantage of a good location.

But just as importantly, you might want to consider an ear piece for your radio, to help free up your hands if you're serving during an incident. With an ear piece, you can usually hear the other person on the radio pretty well, without forcing you to get the unit close enough to your ear to hear it, possibly dropping it on the sidewalk. Just attach your radio by a belt clip to your pants, your vest, or backpack, and then you can move the weight of your unit from your hand to your body.

Some ear piece options to consider include those with a speaker and microphone combination, those with a handy PTT switch, maybe near your head, or those that support VOX, or voice-activated transmit. One feature favored by some hams is a foot switch, which operates as your PTT, but by your foot.

Purchase an ear piece that has a plug or connector made for your particular radio. Clip your radio to your clothing or vest. Route the ear piece wiring under your vest and over to your radio, such that your head is able to move freely, and your hands can move around without getting tangled in the wiring. Test it, then test it again. With this kind of setup, you'll feel a little more free to shuffle papers or help injured victims, while being able to communicate.



A favorite option for many modern hams is a **head-set**, which combines headphones with a microphone.



The \$40 Heil HTHDK headset with PTT

Your headset or headphones can completely cover your ears, cutting out noise and voices altogether, or sit outside your ears, allowing you to hear surrounding voices, should you need to hear them call to you for something. Furthermore, some headsets are also outfitted with a PTT button, such as the [\\$40 Heil HTHDK](#) or [\\$200 INRAD W1 Headset](#) or [\\$400 Heil HLS-PRO7BU](#).