

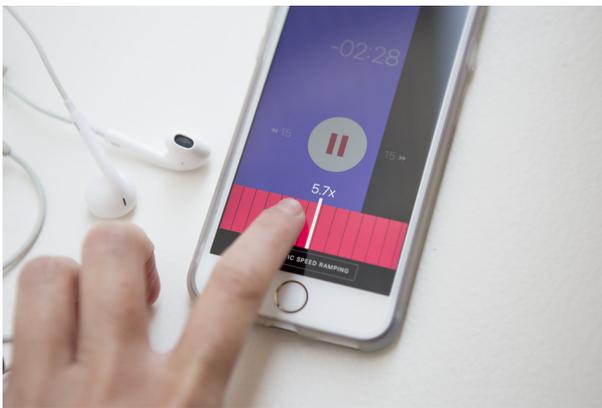
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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-do-podcast-nuts-find-the-time-they-listen-at-chipmunk-speed-1499957591>

A-HED

How Do Podcast Nuts Find the Time? They Listen at Chipmunk Speed

App settings that accelerate voices to 5x or more allow impatient listeners to finish hourlong episodes in minutes; 'a presumably insane person'



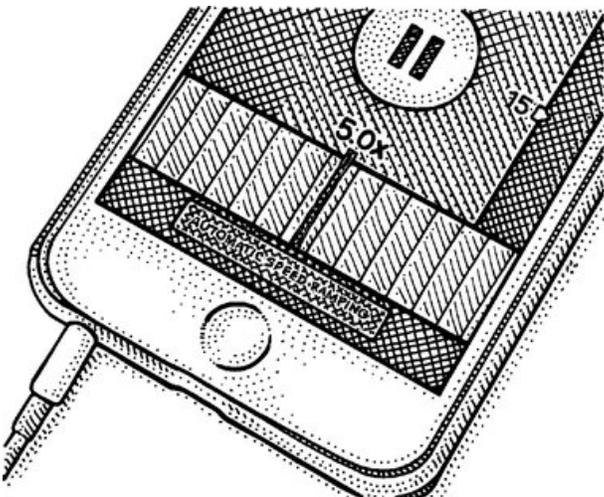
The Rightspeed app speeds up podcasts. PHOTO: ALLISON PASEK/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Ben Cohen

July 13, 2017 10:53 a.m. ET

Jarod Reyes wanted to reduce his anxiety. His doctor suggested meditation, so he subscribed to a podcast to guide him toward a Zen state.

“Close your eyes,” the podcaster’s voice would intone languidly over instrumental music. “Take a slow, deep breath.” But something about it made him anxious. The episodes were too long; it was hard to focus.



He knew what he had to do. Now the 35-year-old web developer sets the podcast to run faster, forcing its hypnoterapist to make it snappy with her soothing thoughts. “On the exhale, allow yourself to settle in,” she hurries along at double speed. “Maybe roll your shoulders back. Or wiggle your hips a bit.”

He found inner peace. “It’s much easier for me to sit focused for 10 minutes,” Mr. Reyes says, “than 20 minutes.”

How do people have so much time for so many podcasts? Some don't. They speed-listen and knock out two, three, four podcasts in the time one usually takes.



Max Deutsch wanted to listen faster; he created Rightspeed. PHOTO: MAX DEUTSCH

Geoff Newman, 31, thought a colleague who told him about speed-listening was nuts. Then the London web developer and filmmaker tried 1.2 times normal speed, then 2x, then 2.5x. Now he's comfortable at 3x.

It's painful to consume his favorite tech and videogame podcasts at

actual speed. "It sounds so strange," he says. "Like they're smoking lots of weed."

The Apple Inc. iPhone's default podcast player offers ½x, 1x, 1.5x and 2x speed. A popular competitor, Overcast, hits 3x and offers "Smart Speed," which shrinks silences. At turbo speeds, podcasters speak faster, but intelligibly, at least to some. Software keeps voice pitches from becoming squeaky.

Mr. Reyes trained himself to work and listen to "This American Life" simultaneously—then at double-speed. At times, in the car with his wife, a podcast comes on from his prior drive, he says, and "I think it freaks her out."

Speeded Up

Listen to an excerpt from WSJ's 'The Future of Everything' podcast, "Law and Order in the Final Frontier" with reporter Adam Mann. There's a ding each time the speed changes - from normal to 1.5 to 2X.

00:00

00:47

Download the full episode and listen at your own speed. (<https://www.wsj.com/podcasts/law-and-order-in->

The average podcast listener gets through five a week, says Edison Research, which studies media. People who listen most, the 21% squeezing in six or more, tend to listen fastest.

When ESPN anchor Rachel Nichols moved to Los Angeles last year, she discovered she could squeeze two full podcasts into her drive to and from work if she pushed their speed to as fast as 2.3x. Ms. Nichols proselytizes the

joys of speed-listening on Twitter. "I like pushing the cause," she says.

Ms. Nichols was a guest recently on "The Lowe Post," a show hosted by ESPN colleague Zach Lowe, and she made a plea to the audience as soon as she was introduced: "I'm going to ask everyone to now go to their app and speed up the rest of this podcast."

Mr. Lowe says: "It's insane that anyone listens to podcasts at that speed."

Pádraig Ó Cinnéide, co-founder of the podcast app Castro, agrees with Mr. Lowe. "We once got a request for 4x," he says in an email, "from a (presumably) insane person."

Castro still offers playback speeds only up to 3x.

A fourfold speedup sounds entirely sane to Max Deutsch, 24, who says he has speed-listened to 69 audiobooks this year. The faster the speed, he found, the more engaged he was. "That's when I asked myself: I wonder how fast I could actually listen?"



ESPN's Rachel Nichols, left, speed-listens to podcasts. PHOTO: NBAE/GETTY IMAGES

The San Francisco tech-product manager, unable to find apps with speeds over 3x, created Rightspeed, a \$2.99 app that accelerates podcasts in nearly unnoticeable 0.1x increments every two minutes. A one-hour podcast that begins at 2x, ends at 5x and takes 17 minutes.

“It’s sort of like the Roger Bannister, four-minute-mile effect,” Mr. Deutsch says. “Until you’re told it’s possible for a human to listen at this speed, you just decide you can’t.”



Andy Mullan speeds up audiobooks and follows along in print. PHOTO: LAUREN TILTON

When Andy Mullan, a government employee in San Francisco, checks out a library book, he downloads the audio version. He listens at 3x and follows in print. Mr. Mullan, 32, says his reading consumption has increased and his comprehension has improved.

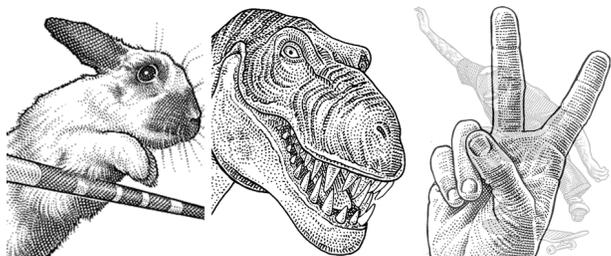
Hundreds of thousands of Audible listeners use higher speeds, according to the audiobook company’s data. Audible says speed-listeners prefer nonfiction but do binge on mysteries and thrillers.

“The ‘Game of Thrones’ guy,” Mr. Mullan says. “Oh my god. He speaks

so slowly.” A daughter of the “guy,” 94-year-old Tony Award winner Roy Dotrice, said he wasn’t available for comment.

Mr. Mullan listens to podcasts more slowly, at 1.5x. “Fast enough so they’re a little faster,” he says, “but not so fast they sound like Alvin and the Chipmunks.”

Ben Carlson, 35, a Grand Rapids, Mich., portfolio manager, believes speed-listening may offer performance-enhancing benefits. When he began using podcasts on lunchtime runs, he found them so slow they nearly put him to sleep.



- Mark Zuckerberg Hits the Road to Meet Regular Folks—With a Few Conditions
- What's a Wedding Without 18,000 Cookies in 150 Varieties Made by 45 Helpers?
- Who Pays on the First Date? No One Knows Anymore, and It's Really Awkward

When he made them faster, “I felt like I was running faster,” he says. “I was more in sync with being sped up. Which is crazy. But I think there’s something to it.”

He did slow down for an interview with Silicon Valley venture capitalist Marc Andreessen, who spoke too fast. Mr. Andreessen declined to

comment.

Andy Bowers finds speed-listening useful as chief content officer of the podcast network Panoply in Brooklyn, where it is his job to listen to podcasts. (The Wall Street Journal belongs to the Panoply network.) “I have to say very emphatically that I do not think it’s an insult in any way,” says Mr. Bowers, 53. “I think it’s actually a compliment that you want to find ways to continue to fit them into your day.”

It does feel sacrilegious, say several podcast listeners, to rush highly produced shows like “Serial” or “Radiolab.” The sound, pacing and silence are crucial.

Same for “Song Exploder,” in which musicians deconstruct their work. Its host, Hrishikesh Hirway, says he hears from listeners assuring him it is the only podcast they want to hear unaltered.

Mr. Hirway’s podcast is the rare show Mr. Reyes enjoys at normal speed. Any faster, he says, “would be almost disrespectful.”

There’s one smartphone button he won’t touch. “What I can’t figure out is why they have a ½x,” he says. “I can’t imagine a person who needs to listen to these things slower.”

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