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## What the Heck Is a Codec Anyway?

A Codec - Encoder/Decoder - is defined either as a hardware circuit that converts analog signals to digital ones or digital signal to analog ones or as software or hardware that compresses and decompresses audio or video data streams. There are specialized codecs for voice, audio, video and a variety of digital formats. Pretty simple, right?

However, if you're purchasing a device that includes a codec - like an MP3 player, sound card, video graphics card, video camera, cell phone, etc., you'll need to make sure that your device includes the codecs that you need or want. Some of the most commonly used codecs are outlined in the table below.

Name	Purpose
<b>Speech Codecs</b>	
A-Law	PCM telephone circuits (Europe)
$\mu$ -Law	PCM telephone circuit (U.S.)
DV Audio	MiniDV audio
GSM 6.10	GSM cell phone
G.711	Audio/videoconferencing (ITU)
G.722	Audio/videoconferencing (ITU)
G.723.1	VoIP, Audio/videoconferencing (ITU)
G.728	Audio/videoconferencing (ITU)
G.729	Audio/videoconferencing (ITU)
AMR-NB	GSM, 3GPP (ETS Narrowband)
AMR-WB	GSM, 3GPP (Wideband)
ACELP.net	General speech
ACELP.wide	High quality speech
<b>Audio Codecs (Digital)</b>	
AAC	Music with digital rights (DRM)
WMA	Music (Windows)
RA, RAM	Music (RealNetworks streaming)
AIFF	Music (Macintosh)
AU	Music (Sun)
MP3	Music
ACELP.live	Music (VoiceAge)
Ogg Vorbis	Music (open source standard)
<b>Video Codecs (Digital)</b>	
MPEG-1	Movies
MPEG-2	Movies
MPEG-4	Movies
AVI	Movies (Windows)
WMV	Movies and streaming (Windows)
RM, RV	Movies and streaming (RealNetworks)
Indeo	Movies (Intel)
Cinepak	Movies (SuperMac Technologies)
Sorenson	Movies (Sorenson Media)
H.261	Videoconferencing (ITU)
H.263	Videoconferencing (ITU)
H.264	Videoconferencing (ITU)