Personal Amplifier Overview

A personal listening device for clearer conversations and TV listening

Examples of a personal amplifier used with headphones; earbuds also work.

What Is a Personal Amplifier?

A sound amplifier to help you hear speech more clearly

A personal amplifier is a small, handheld personal listening device that amplifies sound—especially speech—so it's easier to follow conversations in noisy places, at a distance, or when someone speaks softly. It's often used by people with hearing loss as a straightforward alternative (or complement) to hearing aids.

How Does a Personal Amplifier Work?

Microphone, amplification, and listening through headphones or earbuds

Personal amplifiers capture sound through microphones, and send the amplified audio to wired headphones, earbuds, or a neckloop (for telecoil users). An internal microphone amplified ambient sounds, while an external microphone (plug in or wired) can be placed near a sound source to reduce background noise. Tip: Purchase the 6 foot cord for the external microphone to allow more distance between the unit and the speaker or TV.

Key Features to Look For

Ease of use, tone control, and flexible microphone options

Most personal amplifiers are designed to be simple: large volume controls, a clear on/off switch, and straightforward connections for headphones/earbuds and external microphones. Useful features may include balance control (left/right), rechargeable or replaceable batteries, and different microphone styles (built-in, clip-on, tabletop, or directional) to improve speech clarity in noise. Comfort matters too—choosing the right headphones or earbuds can make a big difference.

Benefits and Impact

A practical way to hear better in specific situations

Personal amplifiers can reduce listening fatigue and make speech easier to understand—especially when you can place the microphone close to the person speaking. Because they're portable and relatively affordable, they can be a good "backup" device even for people who already wear hearing aids. If you're a caregiver, a personal amplifier can make communication less stressful for everyone. The Pocketalker 2.0 EH from Williams AV and the Bellman & Symfon Mino both feature a built-in T-coil which can be used as a hearing loop receiver, doubling its functionality.

Everyday Uses

From daily conversations to medical appointments to emergency kits

Think about using a personal amplifier in small meetings and medical appointments, in the car, at the dinner table, and while watching TV (often by placing the microphone near the TV speaker). These devices are commonly found in healthcare facilities; ask for them to raise awareness and staff know-how. Personal amplifiers (with extra batteries) should also be in every Emergency Kit for scenarios where hearing clearly can save your life.

Personal Amplifier Models

Personal amplifiers are commonly referred to as Pocketalkers because of the well-known Williams Sound Pocketalker® series. However, there are several other very good options available, including Bellman & Symfon, Reizen Loud Ear Hearing Enhancer, and others.

Tips: As with any hearing support tool, it can take a little practice—experiment with microphone placement and volume/tone settings to find what works best.

For more information, search online for "personal amplifier" or ask your audiologist or local hearing resource center.