

2026 Audio Codec Decision Worksheet

Four questions, in order. Answer them and the codec choice usually makes itself.

The one rule

Decodability beats fidelity.

A codec that plays everywhere beats one that sounds better but does not.

The four questions, in order

1. Where does the audio play?	List every endpoint: browsers, phones, smart TVs, set-top boxes. The oldest device sets your baseline.	<i>The decodability gate - this one overrides fidelity.</i>
2. Real-time or pre-recorded?	A live call needs tiny codec latency; a pre-recorded file does not care about it at all.	<i>Splits the path into real-time vs streaming.</i>
3. How many channels?	Mono, stereo, 5.1 surround, or object-based Atmos. Surround narrows the field to a few codecs.	<i>Most multichannel codecs are licensed.</i>
4. What is the licensing budget?	Royalty-free, or patent-pool fees per device/stream. At ten million units this can flip the answer.	<i>Ask in week one, not in legal review.</i>

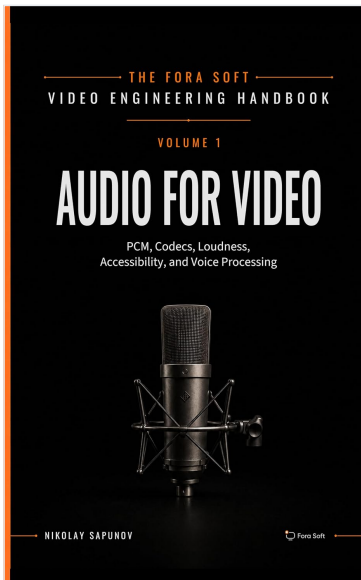
The answers, by use case

Video call / conferencing	Opus (network falls back to G.711 / EVS).
Video-on-demand, stereo	AAC-LC baseline + xHE-AAC for adaptive mobile.
Surround / Dolby Atmos	E-AC-3 for streaming; AC-4 / MPEG-H for broadcast.
Bluetooth last hop	LC3 - better quality at half SBC's bitrate.
Perfect master / music	FLAC (open) or ALAC (Apple).

Licensing in one line

Royalty-free: Opus, FLAC, LC3 core. Patent pool (Via LA): AAC family, MPEG-H.

Licensed: AC-3, E-AC-3, AC-4 (Dolby). At ten million units this column can change your choice.



GO DEEPER · VOLUME 4 OF 7

Audio for Video: A Complete Guide to Sound in Video Products

From PCM and Codecs to Loudness, Accessibility, and Real-Time Voice Processing

By Nikolay Sapunov, CEO at Fora Soft · 1,229 pages · Kindle & paperback on Amazon

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This worksheet asks four questions in order, endpoints, real-time, channels and licensing, and lets the codec choice follow. Volume 4 covers the material behind each answer: Opus, AAC and speech codecs, channels and layouts, loudness, and real-time voice processing with AEC, AGC and noise suppression.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND INSIDE

- Codec families and their trade-offs
- Channels, layouts and surround formats
- Real-time voice: AEC, AGC, noise suppression
- Accessibility and audio description

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Need a codec decision your whole team can defend?

We will run the four questions against your device list and deliver a codec matrix with licensing costs per platform. 250+ video products shipped since 2005.

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