

Decoding the Specs

When you're shopping for an interface, reading the specs to get an idea of the unit's capabilities is the best way to start. Of course, it helps if you know what you're looking at. As an example, let's take a look at M-Audio's Fast Track Ultra and break down some of the key features.

M-AUDIO FAST TRACK ULTRA

A/D Resolution: **24-bit/96kHz**

This is the quality of the analog to digital conversion. A good interface should be at least 24-bit/44.1kHz.



Number of Preamps: 4

This means you can attach up to four microphones directly to the unit. The first two inputs can also be used for instruments.

Audio Output Types:

6 x TRS, 2 x TRS (Headphone)

TRS (tip, ring, sleeve) are stereo jacks. You can plug headphones directly into the headphone jacks, and the six outputs can be hooked up to your playback monitors, with outputs to spare for additional headphone mixes.

Digital Input Types:
1 x S/PDIF (Coax)

TRS inputs accept analog signal, but S/PDIF jacks accept digital signal. You can take an S/PDIF output, which carries two tracks of audio, from another A/D converter and route it through the Fast Track Ultra into your computer.

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Phantom Power: Yes

Condenser mikes need phantom power, so make sure your preamps have this capability onboard.

Computer Connection Type:
USB 2.0

After the audio is digitized, the information is sent to the computer via USB cable.

AUDIO INPUTS:
6 x TRS, 2 x 1/4" (Insert)

4 x XLR refers to the microphone preamp inputs; 6 x TRS jacks are set up to receive analog signal from another line level source such as preamps. The inserts allow you to patch outboard effects into the signal.