

# »» Choosing an AV receiver

## OPT FOR THE FEATURES THAT COUNT

**T**he AV receiver is the core component of any home theatre system, because it provides the power to drive the loudspeakers, controls the way the incoming audio and video signals are handled, and decodes and processes the surround signal.

Because of the way home theatre technology continues to evolve, it's important to carefully consider several key aspects — some obvious, some less so — before choosing an AV receiver. These include power rating and number of channels, upgrade ability, extended connectivity and special features.

Let's start with power output. Power isn't just about volume level, but about control, headroom and authority. The more effortlessly an amplifier drives a loudspeaker, even at lower listening levels, the more succinct, accurate and dynamic the overall performance.

Remember also that movie soundtracks, in particular, can feature effects with substantial dynamic swings that require ample reserves to reproduce with the necessary impact and authority. Therefore, it's worth investing in a bit more power than you think you'd need, just for the sake of the extra reserves.

Next, you'll need to decide on the number of channels. Most mainstream AV receivers offer a 7.1 channel configuration. The seven pertains to the front left and right, centre, surround left and right, and left and right back channels. The .1 is the subwoofer.

Some entry-level AV receivers are 5.1 designs, forsaking the back surround channels. At the other end of the scale, you also get 9.1 and even 11.2 channel designs. The current standard is 7.1 and

should be considered a bare minimum, even if the intention is to run a 5.1 speaker system only.

All current AV receivers will support Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio, as well as the older variants of those formats. Increasingly, object-based surround sound formats such as DTS:X and Dolby Atmos are also included — you'll find a separate feature on these elsewhere in this issue.

As far as audio and video connections are concerned, HDMI remains the entrenched interface for both high-resolution multichannel audio and high-definition video. An AV receiver should have at least one HDMI output (to link it to a TV or projector), and at least six HDMI inputs.

HDMI not only supports 1080p full-HD resolution, but also Ultra-HD

4K, as well as 3D (although the latter has been all but abandoned by most AV brands now). If you're buying new, the AV receiver should conform to the latest HDMI standard, but pre-owned, older AV receivers may have earlier HDMI versions, which don't support all features.

To connect older, legacy source components such as first-generation

DVD players, game consoles and the like, the receiver has to offer analogue video and audio input options.

A component video input set is the next best option to HDMI, and a component video output set will be compatible with many, slightly older CRT television sets, as well as video projectors. Composite video inputs are more common, but don't offer HD quality.

However, it has to be said that the number of AVRs still offering legacy connections is dwindling as those older ancillaries succumb to age and wear: CRT televisions have all but disappeared, for instance.

By the same token, wired and wireless network connectivity, as well as the likes of AirPlay and Bluetooth, are fast becoming must-have features, allowing the AV receiver to receive and render movie and music signals from a wider range of sources. Network access also allows control of the AVR via an app, which is often more intuitive and rich in features.

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