

# Free & Creative Commons Audio Resources

*A curated guide for creative and media projects*

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## How to use this guide

This guide lists free, Creative Commons-licensed, and public domain audio resources for use in creative and media projects. Resources are organised by category from most broadly useful to most specialised.

Always check the specific licence on each individual clip or track before using it. Licence information on the resource's own website takes precedence over general descriptions in this guide.

Good practice is to cite or credit all audio sources you use in your work — even CC0 and public domain resources that do not legally require attribution.

## Licence key

Licence type	What it means for students	Colour in tables
<b>CC0 / Public domain</b>	No restrictions. No attribution required. Safest option.	◀ colour
<b>CC BY</b>	Attribution required. Can be used commercially. Most common licence.	◀ colour
<b>BY-NC</b>	Attribution required. Non-commercial use only.	◀ colour
<b>RemArc</b>	BBC-specific licence. Personal, educational, or research use. Students and staff at a university are covered.	◀ colour
<b>Mixed</b>	Licence varies per individual clip. Always check before using.	◀ colour

## Quick-start recommendations

If you are unsure where to begin, these three resources will cover the majority of student project needs:

- **Incompetech** (incompetech.com) — background music, searchable by genre and mood, CC BY
- **Freesound** (freesound.org) — sound effects of every conceivable type, mixed CC licences
- **BBC Sound Effects** (sound-effects.bbcrewind.co.uk) — 16,000 professional broadcast-quality effects, RemArc licence covers student use

## Background music

The workhorses. These are the resources students should try first for scored music, background tracks, and mood-setting audio. Licence complexity is low and quality is consistently high.

Resource	Description	Licence	Link
<b>Incompetech</b>	Hundreds of tracks by Kevin MacLeod, searchable by genre, mood, and feel. The single most reliable starting point for students.	CC BY	<a href="https://incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/music.html">https://incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/music.html</a>
<b>Audionautix</b>	Jason Shaw's library — genre and mood searchable, no sign-up required. Wide range from cinematic to acoustic.	CC BY	<a href="https://audionautix.com/">https://audionautix.com/</a>
<b>Free Music Archive</b>	WFMU-curated library of high-quality legal downloads across many genres. Also available as iOS/Android app.	Mixed	<a href="https://freemusicarchive.org/home">https://freemusicarchive.org/home</a>
<b>ccMixer / dig.ccMixer</b>	Community-driven. Strong on instrumental, remix-ready, and film/game scoring material. Check licence per track.	Mixed	<a href="http://dig.ccmixer.org/free">http://dig.ccmixer.org/free</a>
<b>Purple Planet Music</b>	Cinematic, ambient, and genre tracks from a dedicated production library. Good for documentary-style work.	CC BY	<a href="https://www.purple-planet.com/">https://www.purple-planet.com/</a>
<b>pdmusic.org</b>	Public domain music library run by a music educator. Searchable by genre and era, with clear public domain status. No attribution required.	Public domain	<a href="https://www.pdmusic.org/">https://www.pdmusic.org/</a>
<b>YouTube Audio Library</b>	Via YouTube Studio. Large catalogue; filter to CC-only tracks for simplest use in student projects.	Mixed	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary">https://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary</a>
<b>Josh Woodward</b>	180+ original singer-songwriter tracks. Intimate acoustic/folk/indie feel, consistently high quality.	CC BY	<a href="https://www.joshwoodward.com/">https://www.joshwoodward.com/</a>
<b>Pixabay Music</b>	110,000+ community-contributed tracks. Vast genre range. No attribution required under Pixabay licence.	Mixed	<a href="https://pixabay.com/music/">https://pixabay.com/music/</a>

## Sound effects

General-purpose sound effect libraries covering foley, environment, UI, vehicles, and more. Most require attribution but not commercial restrictions.

Resource	Description	Licence	Link
<b>BBC Sound Effects</b>	16,000+ professional broadcast-quality effects. Searchable by category. Personal/educational/research use under RemArc licence.	RemArc	<a href="https://sound-effects.bbcrewind.co.uk/">https://sound-effects.bbcrewind.co.uk/</a>
<b>Freesound</b>	The gold standard CC sound effects database — 500,000+ clips. Requires free account to download. Every conceivable sound.	Mixed	<a href="https://freesound.org/">https://freesound.org/</a>
<b>Zapsplat</b>	30,000+ professional effects, free “.mp3” files with attribution. Paid users can access higher quality “.wav” files. Well organised by category. Strong on UI, foley, vehicles, environments.	CC BY	<a href="https://www.zapsplat.com/">https://www.zapsplat.com/</a>
<b>SoundBible</b>	Searchable library of free clips, clearly labelled public domain or CC. Ad supported so ad blockers prevent downloads. Good for quick single-use effects.	Mixed	<a href="https://soundbible.com/">https://soundbible.com/</a>
<b>99Sounds</b>	Packs of high-quality SFX by professional sound designers — free download (if you donate \$0). Excellent for atmospheric and cinematic use.	CC BY	<a href="https://99sounds.org/">https://99sounds.org/</a>
<b>SoundEffects+</b>	5,000+ effects owned outright by the team. Strong on everyday and cinematic sounds. Generous free tier.	CC BY	<a href="https://www.soundeffectsplus.com/">https://www.soundeffectsplus.com/</a>

## Classical & orchestral

Public domain and freely-licenced classical recordings, scores, and historical performances. Essential for students working with historical or art music contexts.

Resource	Description	Licence	Link
<b>Musopen</b>	Non-profit focused on freeing classical music. Recordings, scores, and textbooks free from copyright. Searchable by composer, era, and instrument.	Mixed	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>IMSLP (Petrucci Library)</b>	Over 240,000 scores and 24,000 sound recordings. A vast scholarly resource; public domain recordings clearly marked.	Mixed	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>Internet Archive — Audio</b>	Hundreds of thousands of classical concerts, opera, and historical performances available as public domain downloads.	Mixed	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>UCSB Cylinder Audio Archive</b>	Digitised wax cylinder recordings from 1894 to ~1920 — popular songs, vaudeville, opera, ethnic recordings. All public domain.	Public domain	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>Mutopia Project</b>	Free sheet music and recordings distributed under CC. Focus on classical repertoire.	Mixed	<a href="#">Visit →</a>

## Historical archives

Archival recordings of historical and cultural significance. Valuable for documentary, journalism, and history-focused assessments.

Resource	Description	Licence	Link
<b>Internet Archive Audio</b>	Over 2 million free recordings: old-time radio, live concerts, book readings, historical music, and more.	Mixed	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>Library of Congress — Sound Recordings</b>	Historical US recordings including ragtime, blues, jazz, folk, and field recordings of enslaved people. Streamed free.	Mixed	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>National Jukebox (LoC)</b>	Over 10,000 historical recordings streamed free with Sony Music permission. Popular music, opera, jazz, speeches.	Mixed	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>Open Music Archive</b>	Public domain music digitised for creative reuse. Particularly useful for historical documentary and film projects.	Public domain	<a href="#">Visit →</a>
<b>BBC RemArc Archive</b>	~3,000 BBC archive items for personal, educational, and research use — radio programmes, interviews, historical broadcasts.	RemArc	<a href="#">Visit →</a>

## Lists of lists — further library guides

The following library guides from universities around the world compile their own lists of free audio resources. They are regularly maintained and are excellent starting points for finding additional resources beyond those listed in this document. Guides from Australian institutions are listed first.

Institution	Guide	Notes
University of Queensland Library	<a href="#">Audio — Open Educational Resources</a>	<i>UQ's own guide covering music, sounds, BBC effects, and podcast resources.</i>
Griffith University Library	<a href="#">Music and sound effects — Free-to-use resources</a>	<i>Comprehensive guide for Griffith students including CC licence explainer.</i>
RMIT University Library	<a href="#">Videos and audio — Media, Journalism, Screen and Music</a>	<i>Strong on niche collections including UbuWeb, Xeno-canto, and Sound Effects Search.</i>
Monash University Library	<a href="#">Music and Sound Effects — Copyright free and Creative Commons</a>	<i>Broad overview of CC-licensed music and SFX for student projects.</i>
Columbia College Chicago Library	<a href="#">Audio Resources — Free Media for Creative Use</a>	<i>Production-focused guide from a media arts institution. Includes library of Congress remix tool.</i>
University of Michigan Library	<a href="#">Creative Commons &amp; Public Domain Audio — Podcasting and Audio Storytelling</a>	<i>Podcast-centric framing with good explanation of licence types.</i>
Georgetown University Library	<a href="#">Copyright &amp; Multimedia: Audio</a>	<i>Strong copyright context alongside practical resource listings.</i>
University of Washington Libraries	<a href="#">Music, Sound Effects, and Spoken Word — Open Resources</a>	<i>Covers music, SFX, and spoken word with clear licence information.</i>
Messiah University Library	<a href="#">Free Sound Resources — Podcasting Resources and Audio Storytelling</a>	<i>Includes Macaulay Library, National Jukebox, and Internet Archive alongside standard CC resources.</i>
School of Visual Arts (SVA) Library	<a href="#">Sound Effects</a>	<i>Art-school focused; includes KCAI SFX library and Opsound alongside main resources.</i>
Wikimedia Commons	<a href="#">Commons: Free media resources / Sound</a>	<i>Crowd-maintained list of free sound resources globally. Broad and regularly updated.</i>

### Attribution guidance

Creative Commons licences are legal tools, not just conventions. When a licence requires attribution, that requirement is legally binding — not optional. The elements below reflect Creative Commons' own recommended practices ([creativecommons.org/faq](https://creativecommons.org/faq)).

Creative Commons recommends including four elements, sometimes remembered by the acronym TASL: Title, Author, Source, and Licence. Each is explained separately below. The order and

formatting of these elements is not mandated — adapt them to fit your citation style, credits screen, description field, or other context as appropriate.

### **Title — the name of the specific work**

Include the name of the track, sound effect, or recording you used. If no title is given for the work, this element can be omitted.

**Example:** *“Sneaky Snitch”*

### **Author — the creator’s name**

Use the name the creator has specified for their work — this may be a real name, a pseudonym, or a studio/organisation name. Do not substitute a different name, even if you know their real one.

**Example:** Kevin MacLeod

### **Source — where to find the work**

Provide a URL pointing to where you found the specific work, ideally the original page rather than just the site homepage. This allows others to verify and access the source. Use the full URL rather than a shortened link.

**Example:** <https://incompetech.com/music/royalty-free/index.html?isrc=USUAN1200076>

### **Licence — which Creative Commons licence applies**

Name the specific licence and, where possible, link to its full text on [creativecommons.org](https://creativecommons.org). Different CC licences have different conditions, so naming the exact licence is important. Do not simply write “Creative Commons” — that does not identify which of the six licences applies.

**Example:** CC BY 4.0 — <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

### **Common licence types at a glance**

#### **CC0 / Public domain**

No rights reserved. No attribution is legally required, though crediting the creator is good practice.

#### **CC BY (Attribution)**

Most permissive CC licence. Free to use, share, and adapt (including commercially) as long as you credit the creator using TAsL.

#### **CC BY-NC (Attribution – Non-Commercial)**

Free to use and adapt with attribution, but not for commercial purposes.

#### **CC BY-SA (Attribution – ShareAlike)**

Free to use and adapt with attribution, but any derivative work must carry the same licence.

**CC BY-ND (Attribution – NoDerivatives)**

Free to use with attribution, but the work cannot be altered or built upon.

**RemArc (BBC licence)**

A BBC-specific licence, not a Creative Commons licence. Permits personal, educational, and research use. Commercial use is not permitted. Full terms at [bbcrewind.co.uk](http://bbcrewind.co.uk).

Note: licences labelled “Mixed” in the resource tables above indicate that the platform hosts material under multiple different licences. Always check the licence on the individual track, not just the site.