Playlists – Use them to enjoy your music
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A Playlist is a list of files that can be played back on a media player. If the files are pictures and the media player is a picture viewer, you have a slideshow. If the files are audio files and the media player is a music player, you get music played for as long as the list continues. If the files are video files and the media viewer is a video viewer, you may get an afternoon at the movies. Typically with a play list, the files can be played back sequentially for an orderly experience, or in a shuffled order for a little more excitement.

Audio playlists are a great way of enjoying your digital music. Each tune to be enjoyed must be in one of the music file formats that are popular, .mp3, .wma, .wav, etc. .mp3 is probably the most popular. .mp3 is a lossy compressed format where the resultant files are about 1 tenth the size of the original file. But in the process of compressing the file some of the quality is lost. The quality that is lost is in the higher frequencies, where the human ear begins to attenuate as we age, so many of us older humans may not really be missing that much. (.wav files are lossless, uncompressed files, so if you want all of the quality, you should probably save your music in this file format when you get them; after all, nowadays storage is cheap.) By the way, Windows comes with a great application that you can use to get all of your music from your CDs - it's called Windows Media Player (WMP) and allows you to "rip" your music files from your CDs (which is absolutely legal). It defaults to creating .wma files, so make sure you change this (in the Options) to .mp3 if you want .mp3 files. There is also an adjustment for the audio quality; the higher the number the better the quality, but the larger the file. So, once you have all of your music stored in a music database, you can start to create the playlists that will use the music files. WMP can also help you in this task. I've used WMP to create many playlists, some of which are called Love Songs, Assorted Favorites, Fun Songs, Songs from an Earlier Period, Folk Songs, Country Songs, etc.

So technically, a playlist is a file with a playlist file type. Many playlist file types have been defined such as .zpl used by the Zune Media Player (probably not many of those around), .wpl defined by Microsoft and used in WMP, .m3u originally created by WinAmp and used in the very popular free WinAmp music player, .vlc, a format used by the VLC Media Player which has the same format as .m3u except for the .vlc designation, .pls a format similar to the Windows .ini file type, and others. Currently, .m3u seems to be the most widely used file type. In my opinion, to keep your playlists most versatile, I would use the .m3u file type; but if you were going to only use WMP then .wpl would be a good choice. (WMP is setup by default to create the .wpl file type. If you want WMP to create a .m3u file type, you can change this after you have put together a list of tunes for a playlist. Right after you click "save list" you will have an opportunity to change the file type to .m3u.) In addition to being versatile, .m3u files can be easily modified, should you want to take on this tedious job. They are just text files

with a simple format and can be opened with the "Notepad" word processor. To do this, just go into Windows Explorer and right click the playlist and then choose "Open with…" and choose Notepad. Each line in the file defines the location of a tune to be played, and comments can be added to the file because text lines that start with "#" are ignored. Any helpful information can be put in the comment line. Keep in mind, the tune file name used in the playlist must be exactly the same (character for character) as the tune file name in the tune database.

Here are a few lines from a .m3u playlist:
John Denver
\MP3Music\PopMusic\John Denver - Annie's Song.mp3
Alabama in Country Folder
\MP3Music\Country\Alabama – Give Me One More Shot.mp3

The first line starts with "#", so this is just a comment line and essentially nothing will be done. The second line defines the location of a tune. In this example, the tune is Annie's Song and it is by John Denver. (When you "rip" a song from a CD you have choices as to how the tune file will be named. I have chosen to title all of the tunes in my Music database as "Artist" – "Tune Title". This allows me to see all of the tunes from a particular artist in alphabetical order when I look at the Music folders using Windows Explorer.) When the music player gets to this line it will retrieve the file "John Denver – Annie's Song.mp3" from the folder "PopMusic" and start to play (process) it. Note that the "PopMusic" folder is in the MP3Music folder which is the name of the folder that holds all of my tunes. "MP3Music" also holds folders for many other music genres, such as "Country", "R&R", "PreR&R", "BigBands", "Holiday", "Jazz", "Classical"; you get the idea. So this line is like a road map to where the tune can be found. The third line starts with "#" so, again, it's a comment and nothing will happen. But the fourth line is another tune to be selected. This tune is in the "Country" folder which is also in the MP3Music folder. So when these four lines in a playlist are encountered, first "Annie's Song" will be played and after that is finished, "Give Me One More Shot" will be played. Fortunately, all the hard work of creating a playlist is done for you by the App that you are using to create and play your playlists. WMP is especially easy to use because gathering your tunes for a playlist can be done graphically by just dragging and dropping your selections from the tune (music) database into a playlist area, and finally clicking "save list", and then you are done. Now, all you have to do is start the play list and sit back and enjoy the music.