

# What Is an M3U File?

## How to open, edit, & convert M3U files

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Updated May 30, 2019

A [file](#) with the M3U [file extension](#) is an Audio Playlist file that stands for *MP3 URL*, and as such, isn't an actual audio file in and of itself.

An M3U file just *points* to audio (and sometimes video) files so that a media player can queue them for playback. These [text-based](#) files can contain [URLs](#) and/or absolute or relative pathnames to the media files and/or folders.

M3U files that are UTF-8 encoded are instead saved in the [M3U8](#) file format.

### How to Open an M3U File

[VLC](#) is my favorite free media player because of its support for a huge variety of audio and video formats. Plus, it supports not only the M3U format but also similar playlist file types you may run into, like M3U8, [PLS](#), [XSPE](#), [WVX](#), CONF, ASX, IFO, CUE, and others.

Though [Winamp](#) was one of the first programs to support them, other media players can open M3U files too, like Windows Media Player, iTunes, and [Audacious](#).

Keep in mind that the M3U file itself is not a media file. So while the files that the M3U points to may open just fine in a different media player than those I've linked to above, it's possible that the program can't understand the playlist file, and therefore won't know what to do with it when you try to open it.

M3U files can, of course, be opened with any text editor since the files are text-based (see what I mean below). See our [Best Free Text Editors](#) list for our favorites.

### How to Build an M3U File

M3U files are usually not built from scratch. In media players like VLC, for example, you can use the **Media > Save Playlist to File...** option to save the list of currently open songs to an M3U

file.

However, if you do want to build your own M3U file, it's important that you use the proper [syntax](#). Here is an example of an M3U file:

```
#EXTM3U
#EXTINF:105, Example artist - Example title
C:\Files\My Music\Example.mp3
#EXTINF:321, Example Artist2 - Example title2
C:\Files\My Music\Favorites\Example2.ogg
```

All M3U files will have similarities, but also differences, to this example. The number following the "#EXTINF" sections is the length of the audio in seconds (you might see a -1 here if the audio is being streamed online and has no set length). Following the time is the title that should display in the media player, with the location of the file below that.

The example above is using absolute pathnames to the files (the whole path is included), but they can also use a relative name (e.g. just *Sample.mp3*), a URL (<https://www.lifewire.com/Sample.mp3>), or an entire folder (*C:\Files\My Music\*).

**Note:** The benefit of using relative paths over absolute paths is that you can move the media files and the M3U file to another computer and still use the playlist without having to make changes to it. This works so long as the media files and M3U file remain relative to one another just as they were on the originating computer.

You can sometimes point to another M3U file from within one M3U file, but the media player you're using may not support it.

## How to Convert an M3U File

As you can see in the previous section, an M3U file is just a text file. This means you cannot change or convert the file to a playable [MP3](#), [MP4](#), or any other media format. All you can do with an M3U file is convert it to another playlist format.

You can convert M3U to M3U8, XSPF, or [HTML](#) using [VLC](#) by opening the M3U file in the program and then using the **Media > Save Playlist to File...** menu option to pick which format to save it in.

Convert M3U to PLS with the free [Playlist Creator](#) application. It's available for download as both an installable and a portable program.

You can also convert an M3U file to text if you just want to open the file in a text editor to see the files it's referencing. Open the M3U file in a text editor from the list above, and then save it to

TXT, HTML, or another text-based format. Another option is to rename the extension to .TXT and then open it with a text editor.

**Tip:** This technically isn't an M3U file conversion, but if you want to gather together all the audio files that an M3U file is referencing, and copy them to a single folder, you can use the program [M3UExportTool](#). Once you have them together, a [free file converter](#) can be used on the files to convert them to the format you want them to be in, like MP3 to [WAV](#), MP4 to [AVI](#), etc.