

## Review: Fourth-generation iPod nano

Dangerously-slim player is the best non-touchscreen iPod yet

by Dan Frakes, [Macworld.com](#)

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When Apple released the [third-generation iPod nano](#) (★★★★) last fall, the company unveiled a radically redesigned player, essentially turning the nano into a miniature version of the iPod classic in both functionality and appearance. It would have been tough for Apple to top that feat this year, and, sure enough, the fourth-generation (4G) iPod nano isn't nearly as dramatic an upgrade. But nevertheless, the new version of the nano offers some unique new features, more storage for the same price, and a new design—albeit one that looks quite familiar. In the process, the nano has officially surpassed the iPod classic as Apple's flagship non-touchscreen iPod. (Take a look at our [First Look](#) for additional details.)

### Audio notes to self

Among the 4G nano's other improvements is an upgraded recording feature. While the previous nano, as well as recent full-size iPods, allow stereo audio recording through a third-party dock-connector accessory such as Griffin Technology's [iTalk Pro](#) or Belkin's [TuneTalk Stereo](#) or [TuneStudio](#), the 4G model adds the ability to record mono voice notes using Apple's [Earphones with Remote and Mic](#) or any [iPhone-compatible, mic-equipped headset](#). (Such headphones and headsets also provide basic playback control and, in the case of the Apple model, volume control.)

Test voice recordings I made using the iPhone's stock headset—Apple's new mic-enabled earphones aren't yet available—were easy to understand, although the audio sounded a bit muffled. Voice memos recorded using Belkin's TuneTalk Stereo, with the microphone positioned approximately the same distance from my mouth as the headset mic, produced much clearer recordings. Still, if you've got a compatible headset, this new capability is useful for quick, on-the-go voice notes.

A related change is that recordings—stereo or mono—are now saved in [Apple Lossless format](#), which means they take up half as much space as the previous WAV format while providing the same audio quality. Also new to the recording feature are a level meter, displayed on the screen during recording; the ability to set chapter marks during recording by pressing the Center button; and the ability to label recordings as Podcast, Interview, Lecture, Idea, Meeting, or Memo. (Unfortunately, these labels aren't transferred to iTunes, nor are they visible or browsable anywhere else on the iPod, so I haven't found a good use for them.) Missing is the ability—with any type of microphone—to switch between High and Low quality, an option available on previous models.

Listening tweaks include audio crossfade, an iPod version of iTunes' crossfade feature. When enabled in Settings, this feature seamlessly fades the end of the current track into the beginning of the next. (Crossfade isn't applied to tracks grouped for gapless playback.) The feature works well, although, unlike its iTunes counterpart, you have no control over the length of the crossfade, and using the feature reduces battery life slightly. Apple has also added new playback options, accessible via the same action menu that hosts the Genius command, that let you browse the album or artist of the currently-playing track.

Finally, audio quality has seen a minor improvement compared to the previous model, particularly in terms of noise. Although the 3G nano's sound quality was very good, higher-end headphones such as [Ultimate Ears' triple-fi 10](#) and [Shure's E500 and SE530](#) revealed a slight background hiss during quieter passages. This noise is essentially gone from the 4G nano.