

Soundbar vs Surround Sound System



Trying to decide between using a soundbar or a home theatre system for your home? This overview will ease your mind and open your ears to the difference in set up and sound quality.

Soundbars have been all the rage with their sleek design, easy installation process, wireless set up, and their ability to produce *a form* of surround sound. So, does this mean you've found a replacement for a bulky surround sound system with front, rear, and center speakers? For some of you – heck yes! For others, nope, don't think so. It all comes down to one, personal reason you'll have to decide for yourself - - what kind of in-room experience are you looking for? Let's break down the pros and cons of each set up so you can decide what's best for your situation.

Soundbar Overview

Pros:

- Easy installation and connectivity
- Minimal wires
- Single speaker system
- Modern design
- Great for small-medium living spaces
- Excellent virtual sound, which highly simulates surround sound

Cons:

- May need to buy separate subwoofer (although many systems include a sub)
- The placement of the soundbar creates specific "sweet spots" in your listening experience
- Does not produce complete surround sound, especially in larger living environments

Surround Sound System Overview

Pros:

- Full range surround sound
- Able to place speakers in multiple stations for optimal acoustics
- Maximum bass
- Audiophile theater system presentation

Cons:

- Most quality systems require running wires from the receiver to each individual speaker

- Takes up more space
- More involved installation process
- More expensive

Q: Does Bigger = Better?

Big speakers may provide the look of a major sound producing machine but, remember, looks can be deceiving. While it is true large speakers have the ability to produce eardrum pounding sound and are an excellent choice for a large room, soundbars and smaller speaker systems are more than capable of producing quality sound. Make an informed decision and learn how to ensure a quality set up by reviewing the following section.

How Do I Compare a Soundbar to a Surround Sound System?

As with any audio product, there are varying levels of quality and associated performance depending on the device. The best soundbars will overpower and outperform the run-of-the-mill surround sound system. So, the question is, what performance standards do you look for? We'll make this part easy on you. Just refer to the below list on how to understand the specs to find the quality speaker system you desire.

- **Sensitivity**

The speakers' effectiveness of converting power (watts) into volume (decibels). The higher the sensitivity, the less power the speaker needs to deliver the effective sound. To put it quite simply – a higher sensitivity rating = loud, clear, high quality sound.

Speaker	Sensitivity Rating	Power Needed To Produce High Volume
Speaker A	85 dB	100 Watts
Speaker B	89 dB	50 Watts
Speaker C	92 dB	25 Watts

**less power to produce higher volume is key for speaker longevity*

- **Frequency Response**

The range of frequencies that are audible to humans lies between 20 and 20,000 Hertz (Hz). Some of the lowest frequencies (below 35 Hz) are more felt than heard (like an earthquake in an action movie), and are produced by the subwoofer. Review the frequency response range to understand what kind of listening experience you will gain with the associated highs and lows that the speaker produces.

- **Power Handling**

How much power, in watts, a speaker can handle before it is damaged. Simply put, the higher the power handling, the more likely you are to piss off the neighbors.

- **Impedance**

How much electrical resistance is presented against the current flowing from your outputs. Impedance will fluctuate since the speaker will produce sounds at varying frequencies, but all manufacturers will publish a nominal impedance figure. 8 ohms is the norm, though some speakers can handle a 4ohm load (just make sure your receiver matches this load).

SUMMARY

Hopefully this helps to answer some of your questions on how to choose the right speaker system. Remember, much of it comes down to personal preference, but be sure to do your homework when it comes to reviewing the specs and associated performance standards of each sound system.