

tips

Cables and Leads

**There's more involved
in getting a great
sound from your
system than simply
buying good
components.
The best gear
in the world
won't deliver
stunning
performance
if you casually
lash it together with
inappropriate cables.**

Interconnects - the leads that connect CD players, tape decks, tuners and so on to the amplifier - and loudspeaker cables - the wires that, oddly enough, connect the amplifier to the loudspeakers - have a significant effect on sound quality. The wrong cables can make your bass boomy, your treble scratchy, and muddle the music in between. Good cables will make your system sound properly balanced and clear, allowing you to hear precisely what the musicians are doing as well as making the system's presentation more natural and enjoyable.

There are no strict rules about which cables you should use with any particular system. As a guideline, you should spend at least 10% of the system price on cables. Manufacturers usually supply leads with equipment but you are best to regard these as no more than get-you-going items. Invest in something better as soon as you can.

Be warned, however, that the most expensive cables - and some exotic leads can set you back several hundred quid or more - don't necessarily guarantee top performance. You usually get what you pay for but there are exceptions to the rule! Nonetheless, every system - whether it's a top-of-the-range rig or a basic starter set-up - needs purpose-made hi-fi cables. Don't think that leads such as those supplied with your kid's abandoned game console will double as hi-fi interconnects just because they have the same sort of plugs on them. Worthwhile hi-fi cables use high quality materials and connectors, are carefully designed and manufactured for the best sonic performance, and are configured to reject interference.

Whatever sort of system you have, pay particular attention to the loudspeaker cables. Don't simply hook up your speakers with the lengths of wire your electrician left behind when he finished installing your shower. Choose proper loudspeaker cable and connect it to your speakers and amplifier carefully with the recommended connectors: a short circuit caused by loose strands of wire touching each other can fry your amplifier, and the repairs won't be covered by your warranty.

Make sure you use equal lengths of cable even if one speaker is right next to your amplifier while the other is several feet away. And don't make a neat coil of any excess cable because that encourages it to act like an aerial and pick up interference. Another anti-interference measure is to keep interconnect and speaker cables away from mains cables: at the very least avoid running mains cables close and parallel to any cables carrying audio signals