

NLS FAQ

Question: What is the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS)?

Answer: NLS is a part of the Library of Congress. Through a national network of cooperating libraries, NLS administers a free library program of Braille and audio materials circulated to eligible borrowers in the United States. The Braille and audio materials distributed by NLS are a part of the Library of Congress vast collection of books, photographs, recordings, maps and manuscripts.

Question: Who is eligible for the NLS program?

Answer: Any resident of the United States or American citizen living abroad who is unable to read or use standard print materials as a result of a temporary or permanent visual or physical limitation may receive service.

Question: How do I register for NLS?

Answer: To register for the NLS program, you will need to contact your participating local or sub regional library by email, telephone, fax or in writing and request an application.

Question: Are there any costs to the borrower associated with using the program?

Answer: No, this program is tax supported by federal, state, and, where appropriate, local government agencies. There is no cost to eligible readers.

Question: I've heard that the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) is planning to change talking books to a "digital" format. What does this mean?

Answer: For nearly thirty years, the primary format for talking books has been cassette. Before that, they were recorded on phonograph records. Both of these formats are "analog," meaning that the records and tapes physically store a replica of the sound of the narrator's voice. Specifically, when the narrator's voice got a bit louder, the groove of the record actually moved farther from side to side, and, on a cassette, more magnetic particles lined up in the same direction. In a digital format, measurements

of the narrator's unique sound waves are stored as digits-ones and zeros-the way computers operate. The Internet, CDs, DVDs, and memory cards for digital cameras all process and store information in digital form.

Advantages to storing audio recordings as numbers include the ability to improve audio quality, the ability to use the same recording in a greater variety of ways, and the ability to integrate recorded information into a wide range of systems

Question: Will there be any advantages for the user with this new format?

Answer: Yes, there will be many advantages for users. Besides the potential for improved sound quality, a digital format will offer convenience to users, who will no longer need to turn over cassettes or change side-selector switches. Users will be able to jump forward or back by chapter, set bookmarks, and vary playback speed without affecting the pitch of the reader's voice. In some books, users will be able to jump by paragraph, turn on or off selected parts of the book (e.g., footnotes), do keyword searches, or hear selected words spelled.

Question: Will there be a new playback machine from NLS?

Answer: Yes. Because NLS digital talking books will be recorded on a new medium, and playback will involve many new features, NLS has developed a new playback machine to support these features. The NLS player is free to eligible patrons but it doesn't offer the same portability and advanced features available on the BookSense and BookSense XT from GW Micro.

Question: On what kind of medium will the digital books be recorded?

Answer: The new NLS digital talking books are available on a proprietary flash memory cartridge that can be inserted into the NLS digital talking book player. NLS patrons can also download NLS digital books directly from the NLS BARD website. The downloadable digital talking books can then be transferred to any compatible NLS playback device.

Question: What is BARD?

Answer: BARD is the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download website that allows NLS patrons to download NLS digital books on demand. The BARD website address is: <https://nlsbard.loc.gov/>.