

Collectors' Guide To Cylinder Playback

Records wear out. Wear from play-to-play may not be seen or heard. But, with multiple plays, it emerges. Appropriate cylinder playback is part of good stewardship for future collectors and archivists.

Usually, wear is caused by high tracking force and the use of original, mechanical reproducers. In some cases, wear may be minimal. If so, and if records are common titles, playback on period equipment is fine. However, in other cases, records should be preserved, and playback on period equipment should be limited or avoided entirely.

A New Approach to Cylinder Playback

























The Internet has changed views on cylinder playback—including the use of period machines. Today, many preservationists are focused on archiving the best available copies of common recordings, not all

available copies. So, it's now acceptable to play **common records in lesser condition** on period equipment. However, uncommon records, fragile records and records in exceptional condition are **preservation copies** and should be played either minimally or never on period equipment.

How To Use This Guide

This guide shows appropriate options to play cylinders in various formats and conditions on both period and modern machines. Playback options are color-coded and most have specific notes that you should follow closely. If your equipment doesn't comply with the notes, you may damage your records.

Common sense is also required. Pay attention to stylus/groove contact. Keep eyes and ears open for telltale signs like poor sound and changes in the record surface—particularly with vulnerable wax formats. Handle records with care, keep fingers away from the grooves, and avoid rubs and scratches.

RECORD FORMAT	CYLINDER TYPE	PERIOD EQUIPMENT	MODERN EQUIPMENT	NOTES
Celluloid (all speeds) Durable media, but it scratches easily	Common title	 1, 2		<p>* Preservation copies are either rare records or recordings in exceptional—possibly unique—condition.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be sure reproducer has supple gaskets, is in good adjustment, and has proper stylus. 2. Test stylus in runout to ensure it is not scoring the grooves. Always use diamond styli. 3. Due to fragility and rarity, limit playback. Ideally, play once to transfer to a digital format. 4. Cartridges with proper styli minimize most sources of wear. But wax formats can be damaged by the wrong stylus, even at low tracking forces. Tracking force (VTF) should not exceed 3.5 grams. 5. Since most records are unique versions, not copies, avoid playback.
	Preservation copy*	 1, 2, 3		
2M black wax cylinders Fragile media requiring careful handling; avoid excess humidity	Common title; lesser condition	 1	 4	
	Preservation copy*	  1, 3	 4	
4M black wax cylinders Very fragile media. Handle gently, avoid humidity, and avoid exposure to rapid temperature changes	Common title; lesser condition	  1	 4	
	Preservation copy*	 1, 3	 3, 4	
Brown wax Very fragile media. Handle gently and avoid excess humidity	Common title; lesser condition	  1, 3, 5	 3, 4	
	Preservation copy*	 5	 3, 4	
Concert brown wax Very fragile media. Handle gently and avoid excess humidity	Common title; lesser condition	 1	 3, 4	
	Preservation copy*	  1, 3	 3, 4	

 Ideal  Usable   Not Recommended  Never Use