

Low-End Desktop DAC Update

Pete Matthews Jr – <https://3nt.xyz/> – © January 1, 2026

This is an update to my 2020 article, “Desktop DAC vs. Onboard Sound.” Please refer to that article for many details. Back then, I chose onboard sound. Now, the line out connector on my mobo is failing, and I’m searching again, with convenience the main factor.

Decent DACs with Outputs and Headphone AMP	Fosi Audio K7	Fosi Audio K5 Pro	Fosi Audio Q4	Fiio K11	S.M.S.L DS100	Ifi Zen DAC V2 / Ifi Zen Air DAC
Price	\$200	\$80	\$70	\$143	\$90	\$149/100
Prime, free ret.	★	★	★	★	★	★
Amazon Rating	4.6 (109)	4.1 (1354)	4.4 (3147)	4.8 (7)	4.1 (46)	4.4/4.3
Driver-Free	-	-	★	★	-	-
Power Switch	★	-	-	-	-	-
Input Select	★	★	★	★	★	N/A
RCA In	-	-	-	-	-	-
USB In	★	★	★	★	★	★ (3.0/2.0)
Optical In	★	★	★	★	★	-
A/C Adapter	★	N/A	2 nd USB	★	N/A	extra
Volume Knob	★	★	★	★	★	★
HP Jack (mm)	3.5	3.5	3.5	6.3	6.3	6.3
HP Cuts Output	select	-	★	-	select	-
3.5 mm Out	-	-	-	-	-	-
RCA Out	★	★	★	★	★	★
Optical Out	-	-	-	-	-	-
Balanced Out	-	-	-	4.4	4.4	2x4.4/-
Coax In	★	★	★	★	★	-
Bluetooth In	★	-	-	-	-	-
Mic In	★	★	-	-	-	-

The S.M.S.L DS100 looked great, letting me select the output device (powered speakers or headphones). I spent several hours setting it up, and got it working, including labeling the device so that Karen could play music:



Then, I showed her how it worked – and it did not work!

(The removable plastic on the faceplate is scratched [green tab, upper right] – the device came from Amazon that way – clearly, it had been used.)

A couple of hours later, I gave up trying to make it work. Another hour or two after that, I got the Windows driver for this device removed from the system and had reset all the sound settings. Finally, I could get sound from the motherboard and listen on my headphones.

While I was researching a replacement, I prepared the chart above – definitely quicker and more fun than screwing with the DS100.

I'm ordering the driverless Fosi Q4, which cuts the speakers when the headphones are plugged in – the way it should work. If that does not work out, then it will be the driverless FiiO K11. The DS100 is going back.