

Gain conversational confidence with these apps

BY LAUREL PALMER

As an audiologist, I tend to prioritise a sensory approach to aural rehabilitation by improving auditory function through use of devices, such as hearing aids. However, some patients might require a more multi-faceted approach. To expand my patient resource toolkit, I wanted to explore affordable and accessible methods of auditory training, and came across a few apps. Here are my top picks:

Hearoes (iOS, Android)

Developed by a cochlear implant user, this app offers 75+ activities that exercise phoneme identification, auditory memory and listening in background noise. The free version allows three daily activities, with the option to unlock more at a cost. I found the activities to be engaging with an easy-to-navigate layout, presenting progress clearly. You can also choose whether to use background noise for varied difficulty. A majority of the activities use speech stimuli, with a focus on distinguishing minimal pairs and identifying speech sounds, which makes them very functionally applicable. However, while the app offers some hearing health information, I think a clear disclaimer suggesting audiological assessment would be beneficial for users who have not done so already.

Ear Gym (Android)

Designed by audiologists in the UK, this app jumps right in with a 'hearing test' which was an appreciated addition. Though it was more a screening for a signal-to-noise ratio loss, they do consequently link to information regarding full audiological assessment. The activities focus on discrimination of sound

intensity and frequency, environmental sound identification as well as auditory memory while listening to noise. This is another great app with engaging visuals and a comprehensive and easy-to-follow dashboard. Resources regarding hearing health are also offered. I found their 'Busy Barista' game an excellent exercise that challenges you to follow instructions with environmental noise, which reflects realistic conversation scenarios. However, I think the app would be altogether more useful if the other activities also used speech stimuli. A small one-time payment is necessary to unlock the full version.

Hear Beyond (iOS, Android)

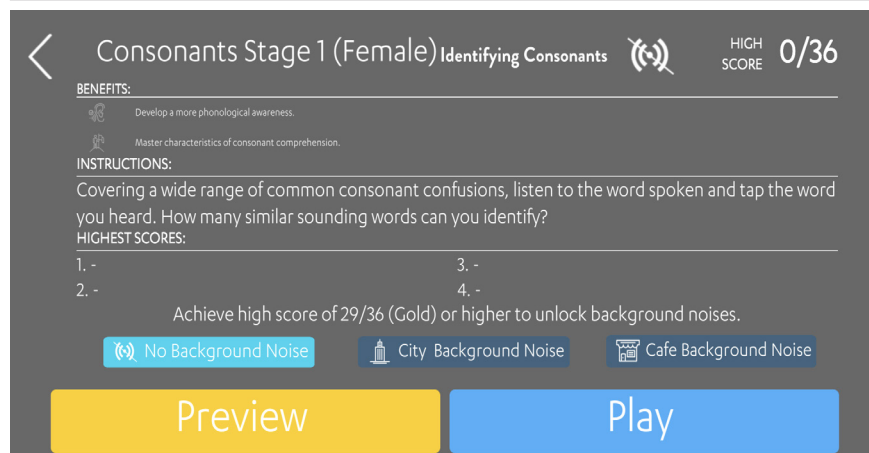
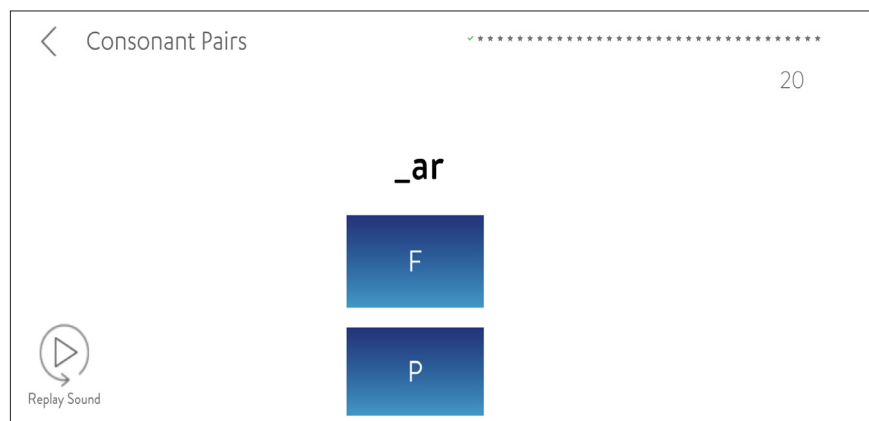
This app offers a large catalogue of activities that test auditory memory, sound identification and localisation, as well as listening in noise. All activities appear to be available with the free version, making it the

most cost effective. One drawback is that, despite a large variety of activities, many use non-speech stimuli such as musical instruments, which have less real-world utility. Additionally, the layout is much simpler, making it less engaging than the other apps.

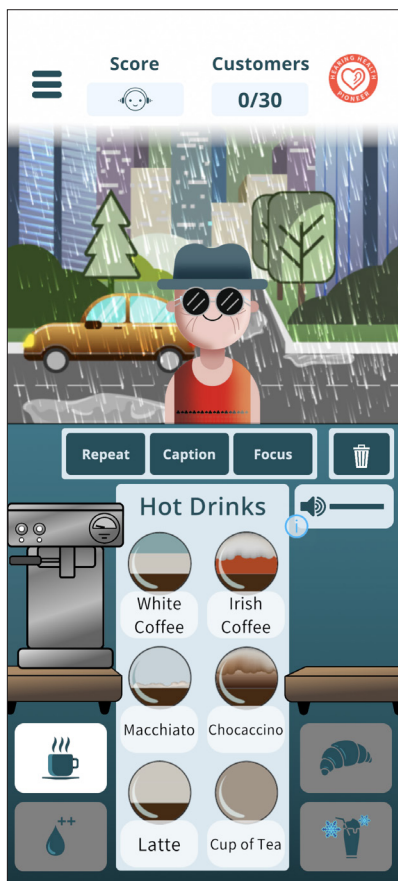
It is great to see auditory training in a form that is both convenient and offered in such manageable quantities, especially in comparison to computer-based programs. I would love to see future development move towards using speech input for performance evaluation rather than choosing from a closed set of responses to reflect more realistic communication settings that lack visual cues.

Regardless, I see no harm in suggesting these apps to patients who want a bit more support with their functional communication skills and help navigating conversation with a bit more confidence.

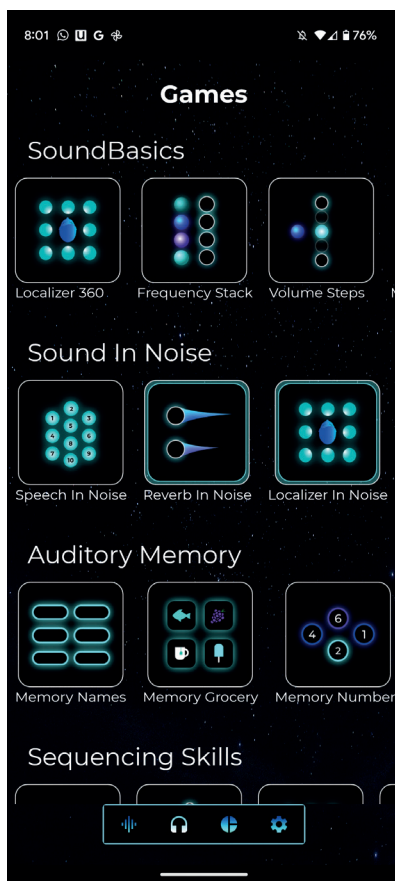
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Hearoes instructions.



Ear Gym's 'Busy Barista'.



Hear Beyond menu.

AUTHOR

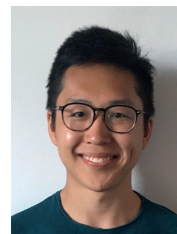


Laurel Palmer, MSc, Reg. CASLPO,
Audiologist, Centre for Advanced Hearing and Balance Testing, Munk Hearing Centre, Toronto General Hospital, Canada.

SECTION EDITORS



Emma LeBlanc, AuD,
Clinical Audiologist; Lecturer, University of Toronto, Department of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery, Toronto General Hospital, University Health Network, Toronto, Canada.



Jonathan Lee,
ST3, MRCS, Department of Ear, Nose and Throat Surgery, Warwick Hospital, University Hospitals of South Warwickshire NHS Foundation Trust, UK.