

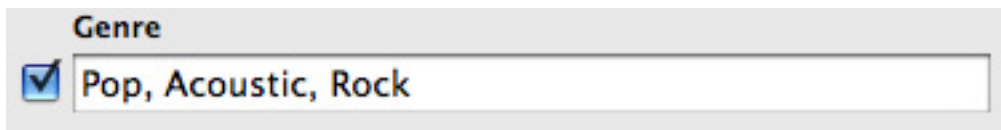
27 04 2008 - How To: Get More Out Of iTunes

Your iTunes Music Library is probably a bit of a mess. Mine was for several years before I finally sat down and began organizing the 20,000 or so tracks that made up my collection at the time; I'm now closer to 250. But, no matter how large or small your library may be, there are a few tricks you can use to make finding, hearing, and listening to songs better than ever.

First, I'll show you how to assign genres to your music and develop a series of "Live-Updating" Smart Playlists that correspond to whatever genres you happen to have.

The first step is simply assigning genres to all of your music. If your library numbers in the thousands, this task can be time-consuming, to say the least, but you can make use of keyboard shortcuts to make your work slightly easier. By holding down the Command key on a Mac or the Shift key on a PC, you can select multiple songs, say from the same artist, and 'tag' them all with the same genre.

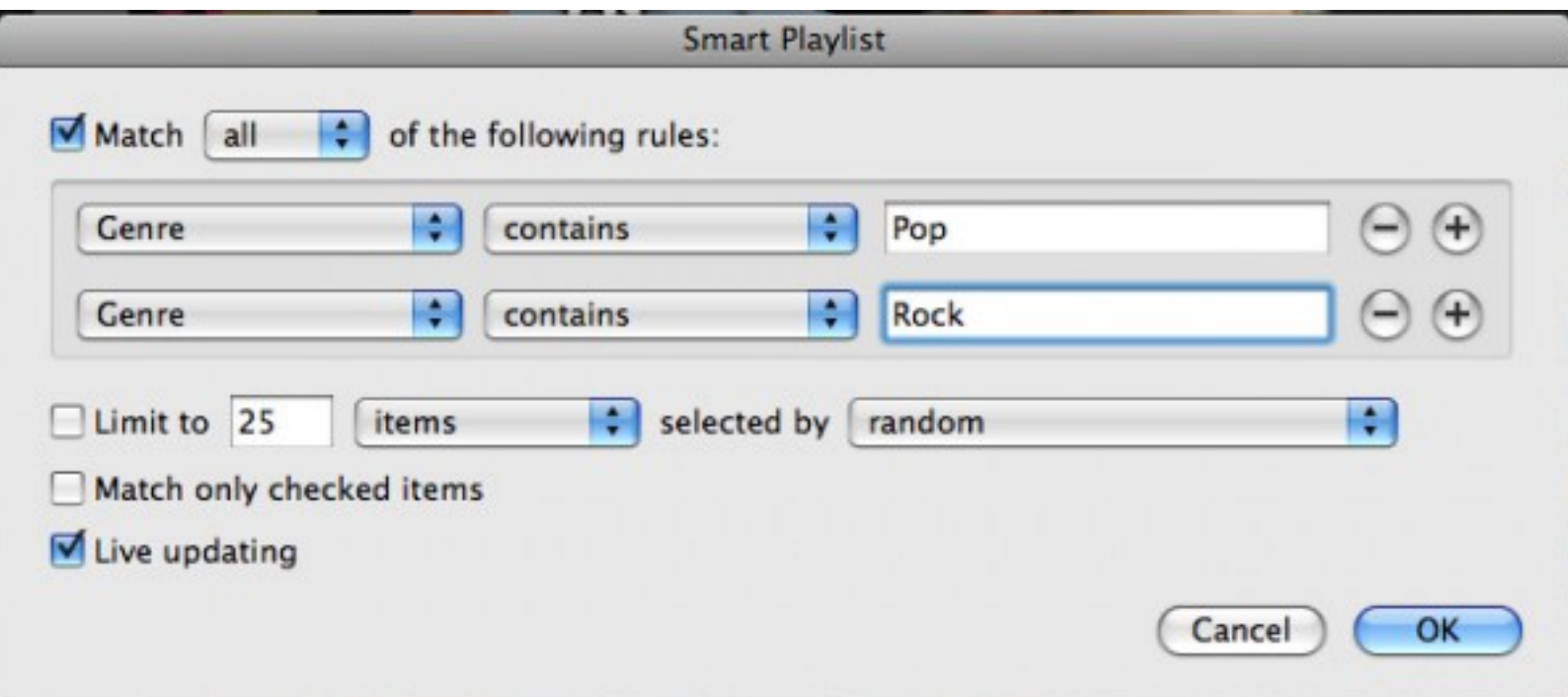
After selecting your song or songs, right click them and select "Get Info" from the pop-up menu. Now, simply look for the "Genre" box and check the box next to it.



You can assign your song or group of songs a single genre, or use multiple genres by separating each one as I've done in the screenshot above. If your songs fall into a number of different possible genres, it's probably a good idea to tag them with multiple genres - you'll see why in our next step.

After you've finished tagging all of your music with genres, hold down the Option key on a Mac or the Alt key on a PC and click the gear icon in the bottom left corner of iTunes. This will bring up the "Smart Playlist" window.

Change the drop-down box on the left to "Genre" and then type in a genre that you'd like to create a playlist for - in the screenshot above, I've selected "Pop." This will automatically create a Smart Playlist that contains every song that has Pop as at least one of its genres. If I add a new song to my library and tag it as Pop, it will also automatically be added to the playlist.



You can also specify multiple genres that you'd like added to your playlist. There is a box at the top of

You can mix and match genre playlists to personalize your library. I, for instance, have a Summer playlist that automatically grabs the songs that I've classified as "Acoustic" and "Reggae." Feel free to play around to give your playlists your own personal touch.

Now that you know a little bit about Smart Playlists, we can take the idea one step further by utilizing the Star-Rating system in iTunes. By rating all of your songs, you can set up another set of Smart Playlists that adhere to one, two, three, four, or five star songs. The process is exactly the same as the one above, only this time instead of selecting "Genre" you will select "Rating."

Finally, you'll want to give your music library a face-lift by adding cover art for each of your albums. If you've purchased all of your music from the iTunes Music Store, this won't be necessary. If you haven't, however, this will give your library the appearance of iTunes-bought music without the DRM, credit card, or iTunes account required to achieve the same effects otherwise.

We'll start by going to the menu bar at the top of the screen, selecting "Advanced," and then "Get Album Artwork." Depending on how much music you have, this process can take a while. Once completed, you should have most of your artwork filled in for albums that iTunes was able to compare with its music store.

If some of your albums still show up without cover art, click the arrow icon next to the artist's name and search for the corresponding album in the iTunes Music Store. If you can find it, make sure that your version on your computer has the same artist and album information as the one on the iTunes Store and try to get the artwork again by clicking on your songs or album and selecting "Get Album Artwork."

Occasionally, your album's artwork won't be available on iTunes; in which case, you'll need to resort to Amazon or Google Images. Fetch Art For iTunes integrates with iTunes to retrieve missing album art from Amazon. Read the instructions on the linked page for information on how to install and make use of the script.