Music on your hard drive made easy
Simple steps to digitize your music collection
By Bryan Long CNN

So you don't need to be convinced that it's time to go digital with your music. You know there is a new price war among downloadable-music stores. With prices ranging from 49 to 99 cents per song, buying music online is finally much cheaper than driving to the store to pick up a $17 CD. Plus, you get the music in seconds. And you know that if you ripped your CD collection, you would have freedom you don't have now. You can group your music in categories ranging from "dinner party" to "house party," or any mood that strikes your fancy. Your entire collection could be available at the touch of a button. But you don't know where to begin. First, start with the basics. Eliot Van Buskirk, section editor for Cnet's MP3.com, said you may already have what you need to get started -- a computer, a CD burner and a broadband Internet connection. "People need to know that pretty much any computer can do this," Van Buskirk said. "People go out and think they need to spend a lot of money, but that's generally not the case." If your computer has an internal CD burner, then you are definitely ready. "If you don't already have one, they're incredibly cheap," Van Buskirk said. Buy an internal burner and have your kid (or a techie friend) install it, he suggested. Then connect to the Internet. "The fast connection is crucial," he said. Now you are ready. Start simple. Download jukebox software that lets you rip, burn, download, organize and collect music. Van Buskirk suggested Apple's iTunes for a beginner. "Apple is very good at making things simple," he said. "And iTunes works on Windows and Mac." Once the software is installed, take a CD from your collection and put it in your computer. The software should instantly recognize the CD, list the names of each track (with the help of the Internet) and present the option of importing the songs to your computer. You will be given a choice of formats. Van Buskirk suggested choosing MP3 192vbr, if possible. He said it was the perfect balance between saving space and sound quality. There are many other options available, but you should not worry about those just yet. For now, just have fun. "Dabble with that for a while. Practice ripping tunes," Van Buskirk said. "Play around with ripping CDs and building up the collection on your computer before you move forward." At this point you will notice that listening to music on your computer is different from listening to music on your stereo -- and not just the sound. Jeff Criere, multimedia instructor at the Art Institute of California-San Francisco, noted that the home computer is often not the spot where people are most comfortable listening to music. "You have to come up with a strategy to get your music back to where you enjoy listening to music," Criere said. For the beginner, the easiest trick is to make a play list on your new jukebox software and burn a CD. You can include songs you've downloaded and songs you've ripped. You should be able to fit many more songs on the burned CD than a standard store-bought CD. And the songs are all your choices, not the record company's. "A lot of people are using portable players to walk these digital files back to their stereo," Criere said. It comes down to "making a new habit of how you manage your music." There are other options, such as running cables or using wireless. But beginners typically don't use these. If your computer is in the room where you like to listen, you can simply buy better speakers that plug right in. Keep in mind that no matter where you listen, you probably will not have the same quality sound as you get from the store-bought CD. "If you're listening casually, you won't notice [the difference]. But if you listen to a CD side-by-side with an MP3, you'd notice," said Anthony Cornicello, a composer and assistant professor at Eastern
Connecticut State University. That's it. By now you've got the hang of it. Or maybe you're fed up with ripping CDs. If that's the case, and you still want to go digital, Van Buskirk recommended ripdigital.com, which will burn an entire CD collection for a dollar or two per disc.

Find this article at: