

Pick and Choose: Spotify's New Update

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It's already been a pretty exhausting day and all you want to do is take a break and listen to your favorite song. So, you slide on your headphones or earbuds and press play, only to have that TikTok song you can't escape turn up. That's the life of a Spotify Free User – or at least it used to be.

Music is an immersive experience that has the ability to transport users into different worlds. Listeners open up the world's largest audio platform, Spotify, expecting the ability to be able to choose music that they desire. Spotify's more than a decade-long policy of only providing the Smart Shuffle experience for free users' playlists has finally ended.

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Free users of the platform often complained about feeling confined to shuffle mode. Several users would, in fact, consider the user interface as broken. One of the biggest frustrations for students was the six-skips-per-hour limit. IA junior Sonya Patel said, "The six skips limit was really frustrating. I stopped using Spotify as much because of that [limitation]." IA junior Advika Chandras added, "It's less distracting now because I don't have to skip songs constantly or open a different playlist to get the song I want." For free users, if your desired song doesn't show up within 6 skips, you're stuck listening to whatever is on. The 6-skips per hour and shuffle mode were too much of an obstacle to an enjoyable listening experience, leading several users to abandon the platform in favor of YouTube and Apple Music. After receiving countless complaints from the millions of global Spotify users, the company has decided to prioritize users "get[ting] the most out of [their] music" by granting the "freedom to play, search, and share" music (previously exclusive premium features).

For students, the update is more than just convenience – it changes how they actually use Spotify day to day. Several students use instrumental or lo-fi playlists to study, upbeat songs for working out, and calming music when winding down. IA sophomore Jyothsna Gundala said, "I think [the new updates are] good because free users should be allowed to choose their own songs. Overall, the improvements help navigate the app easier." Chandras also noted that her own "listening habits show that [she has] started listening to music more on Spotify. [She] believe[s] it has helped more people focus because [users are] given more of a choice to listen to the music they want, which helps them maintain better focus as they're not worrying about when the song they want will play, and now they can use it in the background while studying." Now, instead of being pulled out of focus by an unwanted track, students can rely on their playlists to consistently deliver what they need.

Spotify's update didn't occur in a vacuum. Alternative streaming platforms (e.g., YouTube Music and Apple Music) have long allowed free users to select songs, thus exerting pressure on Spotify to respond to its user base. By allowing free users more control, the company keeps its service competitive with other online music services. Not only is Spotify responding to user frustration but also setting the stage for a more enjoyable and consistent listening experience for students and casual listeners alike.

Ultimately, Spotify's update gives free users a sense of control that was missing for over a decade. For students, this means study playlists remain steady, workout tracks match the intended vibe, and favorite songs are just a tap away. By responding to complaints and simplifying navigation, Spotify has ensured that free users can enjoy music on their own terms — proving that sometimes, a little choice goes a long way.