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I have looked at the mp3 header and have the WIKI page but still can't see any direct/indirect method for calculating duration. I do see problems if it takes a un-encoding process to find the length. Counting the blocks is not too much of a problem, as long as I can spot them.

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You can estimate duration knowing the bitrate and file size. But this is just an estimate. To calculate the exact length, you'll have to scan the file and count the frames. Do a search on the internet - there are dozens of articles about this, many with sample code.

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