

# RECORDING AND USING SOUND TO TELL STORIES

## WHAT KINDS OF SOUNDS ARE YOU USING?

- » **Voice:** narration, conversation, interview, etc.
- » **Music:** instruments, arrangements, vocals
- » **Sound effects:** ambient sounds
- » **Silence:** the absence of sound (room tone is the sound of a room)

## HOW ARE YOU USING SOUNDS?

### The meaning of a sound:

Ask yourself why you are using this sound and what thoughts or emotions it triggers. For example, someone crying or a violin playing are often used to communicate sadness or loss. The meaning of sounds varies depending on location and context. Honks may indicate traffic, frustration, and overcrowding in one context, and in another they may indicate a busy and thriving location.

**Duration:** How long will the sound last? Will it be sudden or continuous?

**Repetition:** Is the use of repetition stressful or soothing?

**Intensity:** Should the sound be far away and faint? Or close and loud?

## WHAT ARE YOU RECORDING WITH?

**Selecting a recording device:** There are many good digital recorders, but make sure you check that your recording device has a microphone and headphone input.

**Selecting a microphone:** A *lavalier* (tie clip) is a good microphone to use for interviews because it is close to the person speaking and helps isolate his or her voice from other sounds. A directional microphone is also useful for interviews, while an omni microphone records environmental sounds well.

**Microphone handling:** If you are using a directional microphone, hold it carefully and use your headphones to listen for your own handling sounds. If you attach a lavalier microphone to your subject, make sure they don't hit the microphone by mistake with animated hand gestures. It is a good idea to get some practice recording and listening to your recordings to find out how much handling sound you make. Some unwanted noises can be edited out later, but the fewer you start with, the better.

**Wearing headphones:** You always need to wear headphones when recording sound to monitor what you are recording. With headphones, you will know if your battery runs out or if the microphone is not working properly.

**Unwanted Noises:** One of the best places to record narration is in a sound studio or closet. These locations are insulated from outside sounds. If you are in a noisy environment, try moving away from the noise source and placing the microphone as close as possible to your subject. It is hard to record when there are heavy winds, so the best option is to go inside or find a way to cover the microphone.

**Levels:** Make sure you are recording at consistent audio levels. If the sound levels are either too high or too low it can sound distorted.

### FIND YOUR KEY CHAIN EXERCISE:

Collect the keychains of everyone in the group. Have participants close their eyes. Shake each key set and ask participants to raise their hand if they identify their key set. Discuss the relationship between sound and memory.

### LISTENING EXERCISES:

Write down all the sounds you hear in the room. As a group discuss what you heard. Next to each sound, be sure to note:

- » The actual sounds – honking, chirping, coughing, sniffing, shuffling papers
- » The sources of sounds – radio, television, street
- » The qualities of sounds – muffled, loud, sudden, continuous

### SOUND EDITING TIPS:

- » Use music sparingly since it can be distracting
- » Make sure the levels are mixed so that the volumes of the voice, sound effects and music permit you to hear everything clearly. Use audio fades for smooth transitions.

### SOFTWARE TO EDIT SOUNDS

Audacity: [www.audacity.sourceforge.net](http://www.audacity.sourceforge.net)

### RECORDING EXERCISE

- » Select a theme for a recording exercise, such as 'my favourite singer' or 'my first pet.'
- » Write a short narration of at least five lines, and record this narration in three different locations, such as a closet, a kitchen, a back porch, or a coffee shop.
- » Make sure to keep the microphone at the same distance while recording.
- » Now listen to the recordings in a different environment like a bedroom or office. Compare the three recordings.
- » Take notes of any sound effects or music you might want to include if you were to add to the narration.

### WHERE YOU CAN FIND SOUND EFFECTS OR MUSIC:

#### Music Sites

[www.publicdomain2ten.com](http://www.publicdomain2ten.com)  
[www.musopen.com](http://www.musopen.com)

#### Sound effects

[www.freesound.org](http://www.freesound.org)  
[www.ccmixer.org](http://www.ccmixer.org)  
[www.partnersinrhyme.com](http://www.partnersinrhyme.com)  
[www.audiomicro.com/free-sound-effects](http://www.audiomicro.com/free-sound-effects)  
[www.soundjay.com](http://www.soundjay.com)