Audio Recording and Editing

When you record audio in the field, you are searching for two types of sound: actualities and natural sound.

Actuality Words spoken in an interview or in conversation, also known as a sound bite or a quote. These quotes should be short (no more than one or two sentences) and relate directly to the story you are trying to tell.

Natural Sound Sound recorded from the environment where you are reporting. All audio stories should include natural sound.

The process of editing is finding the best actualities and natural sound to tell your story. You do this by using an audio editing program to sift through and arrange your raw audio from the field.

Raw audio Sound gathered with an audio recorder before the editing process. These files are often in .mp3 or .wma format.

Converting audio for editing

You should always edit sound files in an uncompressed (big) format. This will allow you to make edits without losing sound quality.

WAV The most common uncompressed (bigger) audio format. This is the file format you should be editing in.

Mp3 A compressed file format that makes audio files smaller for sharing on the Internet or saving on a computer.

WMA A compressed file format similar to mp3's. It only works on computers running Windows.

In order to convert audio to WAV format, use the included WinFF software. Open the software and press the "Add" button. Select all the audio files you wish to convert.

Change the "Convert to" dialog box to "Audio." Then, change the "Device Preset" dialog box to "Wav for CD." Finally, select the folder where you wish to save the .wav audio files. Hit "Convert."

The One Folder Rule

With both audio and video projects, it is always best to have your raw material, project files and edited material in one "project folder" on your computer. This will allow you to always find your material and allow you to move the one folder to another computer and begin editing there.

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Editing audio with Audacity

First, a few definitions:

Waveform The visual illustration of a sound file. Used to edit audio.

Timeline The workspace where you move and manipulate waveforms to create a finished audio product.

Play head This bar indicates where the clip will start playing if the space bar is pressed. This is also used to target an area where you want to insert a clip with the Paste command.

Key frame A point used to start or stop an adjustment with the envelope tool. Key frames always come in pairs.

dB Or decibels. The unit used to measure the volume of sound. An audio file will clip (become too loud) at 0 dB. Most audio stories should show up at around 10 dB on the audio monitoring bars.

Stereo Audio recorded to two tracks, left and right

Mono Audio recorded to one track, a mix of left and right or one track in the middle

Panning The pan of an audio segment determines whether it is heard through the left speaker or the right speaker (If you're wearing headphones, the left ear or the right ear.) Sometimes, it is appropriate to put different voices in the story on different sides of the sound file.

Clipping When a track is too loud, it will clip. You can tell a track is clipping, because it will produce a red line on the audio monitor bars.

A Tour of the Audacity Interface

Buttons as on a normal tape deck. Use these to controls to play through your project or to record dialog for your project.

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Cursor controls These controls change your cursor to allow you to perform different actions on the timeline.

From top left:

Cursor tool The most common tool. It allows you to move the play head along the timeline to select when to start playing. It also allows you to select different audio tracks. You can click and drag to select a portion of an audio clip.

Envelope tool This tool allows you to control the volume of your clips. You can create envelope points or fade points to gradually increase or decrease the volume of your clip by creating more than one envelope point in a row.

Draw tool Less commonly used. This tool allows you to make fine adjustments to your audio levels. It can only be used when zoomed in very close.

Zoom tool This tool allows you to zoom in and out on your timeline. It is faster to do this using "Ctrl + 1" to zoom in, "Ctrl + 3" to zoom out, and "Ctrl + 2" to zoom to the size of your clip.

Move tool This tool allows you to move a sound clip back and forth on the timeline within a track.

Tip: To move a clip to a new audio track, you must copy and paste it.

Multi tool This tool allows you to use all of the tools of above depending on where your cursor is located on the clip. It can be used with some practice.

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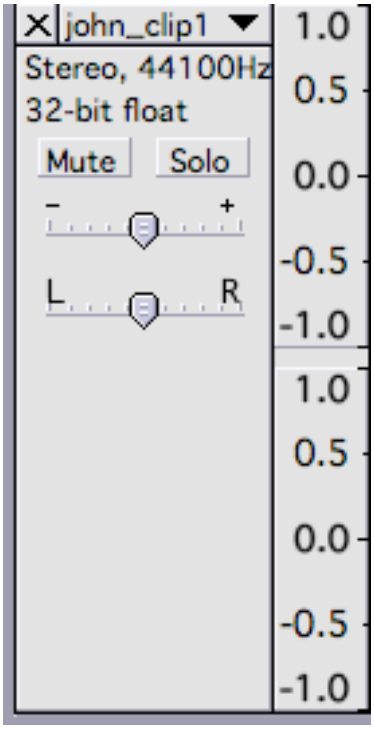
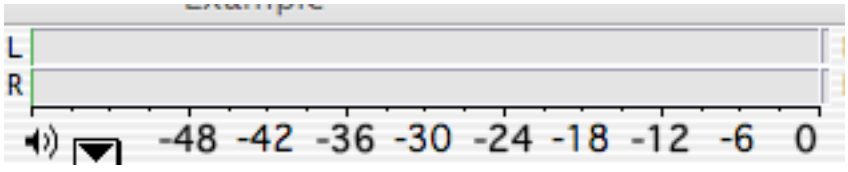


The Track View

The graphic above shows the options for individual tracks on the timeline. The **Mute** button turns off the track and allows you to listen to other clips on the timeline. The **Solo** button turns off all tracks except the highlighted track.

The first slide bar allows you to adjust the volume of an *entire track*. The second slide bar controls the panning of the track, you can slide it from the left ear to the right ear.



The audio monitor bars display the volume of your clip as it plays. If they reach the far right (zero), the audio track is clipping.

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Editing toolbar

These buttons allow you to modify the clips on the timeline.

From left:

Cut Removes the selected portion and sends it to the clipboard. Use “Ctrl + X”

Copy Creates a copy of the selected portion and sends it to clipboard. Use. “Ctrl + C”

Paste Inserts the clipboard contents onto the timeline at the point of the play head, pushing aside whatever is there. Use “Ctrl + V”

Trim Removes everything outside the selected area. Use “Ctrl + T”

Silence selection Leaves selection time length in place but deletes sound.

Steps to Create an Audio and Start Editing Project

1. Create New Project

2. Import raw files as .wav’s using “Project > Import Audio” or “Ctrl + I”

3. Hit the Play button or Space bar to start playing.

4. Trim down actualities to what you want to include in the final product.

5. Find natural sound and trim to what you want to include in the final product.

6. Copy and paste all actualities to one track. Copy and paste all natural sound to one track. Order and space them using the move tool.

7. Equalize all audio, both actualities and natural sound, so they match volume across the final product.

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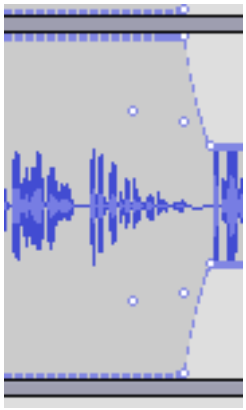
8. Create fades with the envelope tool.



Tip: To use the envelope tool, click to place a new key frame. Click to place a second key frame. Hover the Envelope tool over the key frame, click and drag up and down to adjust volume.

9. Listen again to make sure everything is the way you want it.

Exporting Your Finished Product

Once you have completed your edit, you will need to export the project as a .wav or .mp3 file. For SoundSlides audio slideshows, you want to export an .mp3. If you want to export a sound file to use with a video editing program, you should export as a .wav file.

To export, go to the “File” menu. Choose “Export As WAV” or “Export as MP3”

Choose your destination folder.

Click save.