

If levels rarely go past 1/3 then (#1) move closer to subject or (#2) turn up mic sensitivity. Remember it is better to be closer and keep your sensitivity low than to be far away with high sensitivity.

Good mic levels stay around 1/2 and move to full during peak audio levels. This is your ideal situation. Peaks during peaks, lows during lows.

Constantly maxed-out levels mean your mic sensitivity is too high. Turn down to low, or move away.



Use shotgun mic to isolate audio. This mic also amplifies the signal so you usually only need to keep mic sensitivity on low or med. Tip: Just because you can pick up audio farther away doesn't mean you can be lazy. "Closer the better" rule still applies with this mic. In fact it even makes it better.



Omni-directional stereo mic (or built-in mic) is good for ambient audio or closed quarters (small room) where more than one person is talking. Keep mic sensitivity on medium or high. If you are close to subject (<1 ft.) then keep sensitivity on low. You can't isolate audio as good as the shotgun, but you can control how loud something sounds by how close you are. If you want to hear the background sounds then this is the perfect mic! Remember: Built-in mic will pick up handling noise. Hold still.

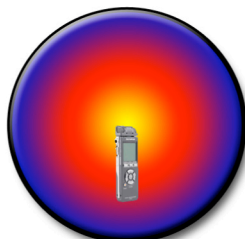


Lapel (or tie clip, or lav) mic is useful for moving subject (eg. During a tour). Remember it is omni-directional and will pick up everything around you. Keep mic sensitivity on low or medium if subject is soft spoken. Tip: Make sure the mic isn't rubbing against something as the person moves or else you will hear it.

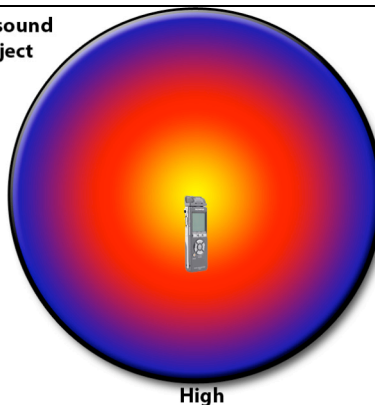
**Mic sensitivity:** Think of a bubble around your mic. Control your sound by either increasing/decreasing your bubble or moving your subject inside the bubble.



Low



Medium



High

All recorders have automatic recording levels. This is different than mic sensitivity. Auto level tries to make everything as loud as possible usually making the first word of each sentence louder as the recorder is trying to figure out where to set the levels. More professional recorders have manual level control.

## **Microphone tips:**

"Closer the better" rule. You always want to be as close as you can without being too close. Avoid the subject breathing on the mic and being uncomfortably close.

If you are too far away you will have to raise the mic sensitivity. This results in unwanted noise (from boosting the signal) and the mic will also pick up everything in the room as your bubble is bigger.

You could almost say "The closer the cleaner."

Use headphones to monitor your audio. It is amazing what your brain filters out. Headphones ensure you hear what your mic is hearing. You will notice things like background noise or low audio levels and save yourself grief later.

Beware of handling noise. Hold the mic firmly and don't shuffle it around or else you will hear it in your audio.

Turn off your cell phone to avoid RF interference. Putting it on silent won't help. It needs to be fully turned off or else you will get that weird buzzing and clicking sound if you receive a text message or call.

Sound comes from the chest. Don't hold the mic directly in front of your subject's mouth. It is awkward as well you are more likely to have wind noise and "pop your P's". Bass comes from the chest. Hold the mic below the person's chin to get the best sound.

Use a wind sock (a.k.a. dead cat) to reduce wind noise outside. An actual sock will work.

## **Recording scenarios:**

Sit down interview



Shotgun mic on table.  
2-3 ft. away.  
Sensitivity on low.  
Prop mic up on books or bag.

Moving subject interview



Lapel mic on subject.  
Sensitivity on low or medium  
(if quiet or soft-spoken person).

Multi-person interview



Omni-directional mic if quiet  
background OR if you don't know  
who will talk next.  
Mic sensitivity on medium.

Busy street interview



Shotgun mic on low sensitivity.  
Keep close. 1-2 ft.  
"Closer the better" is very  
important here.

Far away interview (or ambient)



Shotgun on medium or high  
sensitivity. OR move closer if you  
can.

Ambient Sounds

All above rules still apply.  
Remember audio is audio.

---

## **Recording Tips:**

-Always monitor your audio. Use earbuds or headphones to listen to your mic levels. You will be amazed by how much background noise your brain filters out and your microphone picks up! Use headphones that completely cover your ears or earbuds with soft rubber that act as ear plugs. You only want to hear what your mic is hearing.

-Be aware of your surroundings. Simply moving into the next room can make all the difference in the world. A living room will have a much warmer sound with carpet and couches than a kitchen with hard surfaces and floor.

-STOP and listen for a moment.... Notice any unwanted sounds? Turn off the radio, TV, AC. Turn down the fridge so that the motor stops (remember to put it back after!).

-When you hit record, say what you are recording first. Eg. "sound of chickens", "interview with Joe" This will save you time later when you are renaming and organizing files.

-If you don't risk missing something, hit stop and then record again after each good quote. When you get back to the office, just skip to the end of each audio file for the good quotes.

-Jot down notes as you go of file names and time codes.  
Eg. DSC00399 @ 2:45 – great quote about working in Mexico.

-When you get back to the office at the end of the day, organize your files to help yourself later.  
Eg. Rename DSC00399.wma → 0399\_interview\_with\_joe\_1.wma  
Try to keep file # (0399) to match jot notes.

-Remember that an interview where you can't hear or understand the person can still be salvaged later using sub-titles in the video, or a translator speaking over.

-Your recorder can hold HOURS and HOURS of audio. DON'T delete anything in the field. Wait until you hear it in the "studio" later during post-production. You have virtually unlimited space so use it.

-Don't forget to record some ambient "scene setter" sounds. Ambient audio can really strengthen your story. Make the listener feel like they are actually there. Ambient can either run below an interview track or in between quotes to give the listener a break.

-Know the difference between sound events and sound effects. Don't record fake sounds later. Think journalistically and ethically. Get the ambient sounds the first time.

-Record a few seconds of "room noise" where no one is talking. This can come in very handy for inserting in between quotes or covering up unwanted sounds in your interview.

-It is okay to remove "Ummms and Uhhhs" from your interview as long as it doesn't change what the subject says or change their character.  
Eg. If a person is on a respirator, and has to pause to breathe every few words, it would be unethical to remove those pauses and the sound of the respirator as that is a part of their character.

## **Interview Tips:**

-Be prepared. Research your subject and the story ahead of time so that you can be more confident in your questions.

-Prepare your questions in advance and write them down so you can stay focused on **listening** during the interview rather than thinking of what to ask.

-Ask the person to please spell their name and give their title. Written notes can easily get lost. Also, while they spell their name you can set your levels and test your audio.

-Try to interview more than one person. A second perspective can strengthen your narrative. Maybe the next person you interview can explain the story twice as good in half the time. Look for the loud mouthed kid or the organizer who knows everything. There may be a public relations person on site who can bang out a quick sound bite for you. Balance the PR lady interview with someone else.

-If the person is nervous being interviewed, try to calm them down. Simply asking "Could you show me what you do and describe it to me?" can help take their mind off the interview and focus on the interesting thing that they do.

-Ask: Who, What, Why, When, Where, How  
Why?

What happened?

Then what happened?

Then what happened? (II)

What did you see?

What went through your mind?

What would you say to someone who...?

What did that tell you?

Why did you care about that?

How did/would you respond (to something)?

What makes you care about that?

Why was that important?

What picture remains most vivid?

Imagine you're back at (the scene), how did you feel?

What did you see?

Describe the scene.

What did it smell like?

What stands out the most?

What are the consequences of...?

What's the (best, worst) possible scenario?

What do you fear?

How did/does that affect you?

How did you deal with that?

How do you know?

How does that make you feel?

What went through your mind?

What did he/she/they say?

What were the options?

How would you describe that?

-Sometimes people can't describe what they do very well because it is so normal or mundane to them. A trick is to ask them hypothetical questions to put their mind in someone else's shoes.

Eg. "If this was the first time you ever saw this... what would be going through your head?"

-Often if you ask someone to repeat something they will think that they have done something wrong and will break their thought process trying to rephrase it.... This rarely results in as good a response. Instead try to act deaf and dumb. Simply saying "Oh sorry. I missed that" will not only get them to repeat it, they often will do it better because they think something is wrong with you instead of worrying about what they say.

-Don't say Uh Huh...Uh Huh...Uh Huh... instead use positive gestures. Smile, nod, give thumbs-up to give the subject positive reinforcement. If they know they are doing a good job they will keep talking well.

-Silence is a powerful tool. Don't rush to jump in the second your subject stops talking. Silence is awkward and simply pausing for a few seconds may cause them to continue talking and elaborate further. It is amazing how much extra information you can get out of someone by saying nothing!

-Never ask "yes/no" questions. You always want the subject to give context to what they are saying. Instead of asking "How long have you been a bus driver?" which will probably result in "12 years"..... ask in a way that will cause the person to repeat the question to give context.

Eg. "How long have you been a bus driver AND what is your favorite thing about the job?"

Now the person will probably qualify the first question by saying something like "Well I've been a bus driver for 12 years and my favorite thing about it is..."

-Some people are just plain difficult and will only give short answers. Depending on the situation and the subject, sometimes it is okay to ask the person to repeat the question before they answer.

Eg. "What's my favorite thing about being a bus driver? Well I'd have to say..."

-Keep rolling. Digital recording is free. Often the instant you turn your recorder off, the subject will give a golden quote and you will have missed it. When you are "done" your interview, hit stop and then record again. Don't be sneaky and pretend like it isn't running anymore. Just set the recorder down and talk casually as you pack up your stuff. The subject may remember one last thing to say.

-#1 best advice ever. If your subject is long-winded in their answers don't be afraid to ask them "Could you please just say that again but summed up?" If you explain to them what you are doing and the importance of condensing time, they may be very co-operative... and save you a LOT of time later chopping down their interview.

Eg. "Could you please re-phrase that in a shorter way so that our listeners can understand?"

## **Soundslide photo tips:**

-Details details details. You are used to only shooting what would run in the paper however now you need detail "B-roll" images to mix in with your main pictures. You can never have too many detail shots.

-Don't just focus on the subject. Show what they are doing, or what is happening around them too. Don't just take pictures of a chef cooking, take pictures of the fresh vegetables, the cooking utensils, pots and pans, etc.

-Pay attention to key-words for B-roll images. If the Chef mentions how he hates doing the dishes, get a picture of the dishes in the sink. If he says his feet hurt from standing, get a shot of his feet. If he says it is too hot in the kitchen, find a thermometer or thermostat. You need pictures to back up the audio. Think: Say it then show it.

-Scene setters. Show the outside of the building or a wide-angle shot of the room to give the viewer a sense of the subject's surroundings and location. If you are in Mexico, show the street scenes, flags, Spanish signs. If you are in Wainwright Alberta show the "Welcome to Wainwright" sign, oil derricks and pick-up trucks. You can always get three shots out of every scene. Wide, medium, tight. Wide, medium, tight. Wide, medium, tight.

-Time-lapse or video. Show a progression of images, or a time lapse or a moving scene. You're 8 frames-per-second motor drive can come in quite handy.

-DON'T delete anything in the field. An image that may seem too soft to publish in the newspaper may be tack sharp when re-sized down to 600px and sharpened for web.

-Play the Soundslide in your head. Always ask yourself what you are missing or what audio/pictures may help reinforce the story. Don't leave until you can build a rough soundslide in your head with what you know you have.

-Remember you never know how *bad* something is until post-production BUT you WILL know how *good* something is while you're recording it, as long as you follow these simple tips.

### **Websites you should check out:**

[www.ryanjackson.ca](http://www.ryanjackson.ca) - Tons of links to training resources and hours of training videos from classes and conferences where I have taught multimedia.

<http://www.visualedge.org/lessons/SoundStory.pdf> - A great guide full of tips on audio storytelling. Many interview tips in this guide are from here.

<http://jtoolkit.com/index.html> - Mindy's jtoolkit. Audio, Video, Tools, Web, etc.

<http://www.bbctraining.com/onlineCourse.asp?tID=2555&cat=3> - BBC Training and Development - Interviewing for Radio

<http://www.multimedias shooter.com/wp/category/tutorials/> - MultimediaShooter Tutorials archive (including Soundslides)

[http://www.kenstone.net/fcp\\_homepage/location\\_sound.html](http://www.kenstone.net/fcp_homepage/location_sound.html) - Location Sound: The Basics and Beyond

### **"The best way to learn to write is to read and the best way to learn audio is to listen."**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3qmtwa1yZRM> - NPR's *This American Life*'s Ira Glass on storytelling. Very inspiring and educational.

[http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/ghetto\\_life\\_101/](http://www.soundportraits.org/on-air/ghetto_life_101/) - A classic audio story where a tape recorder was given to two kids in Chicago's South Side. One of the most acclaimed programs in public radio history.

[http://www.thislife.org/radio\\_Favorites.aspx](http://www.thislife.org/radio_Favorites.aspx) Classic audio stories from NPR's *This American Life*.

<http://www.mediastorm.org/> THE best multimedia projects on the internet.

<http://www.spokesmanreview.com/blogs/video/> Pioneer in daily Soundslides and video from medium sized paper. Blog archive goes back to May 2005. Plenty of inspiration here.