

## Field Audio Tips

Audio has always been the most overlooked element in a video production. That's too bad because audio quality can make or break any video project. Here are some tips to help you get the best audio you can.

### 1) Plan Ahead

When shooting on location, scout the site before the shoot. Listen for traffic noises, machinery, animals and aircraft anything that might ruin the audio during the shoot. Depending on your topic, some background noise may be acceptable or even desirable. Just make sure you can hear your subjects over the ruckus around them.

### 2) Choose the right External Microphone for your video

Unless you have a high-end professional camera, your built-in microphone is absolutely worthless for any video shoot you are doing. There are four basic types of microphones: handheld, lapel, shotgun and boundary.

- *Handheld mikes*, typically used by news reporters, add a newsy feel to your video. Directional handheld mikes minimize background noise while non-directional mikes collect the audio flavor of the scene.
- Sit-down interview participants often use lapel, or *lavalier microphones*. They are useful anytime you want to get close to the source, but minimize visual impact.
- *Shotgun microphones*, highly directional and often used on movie sets, usually suspend from a boom or "fishpole." Shotgun mikes hover just out of the video frame and point directly at the subject.
- *Boundary mikes* turn an entire table, wall or floor into a pickup surface. They clearly pick up voices from every direction but also amplify shuffling papers and air conditioner noise equally.

### 3) Position Microphones Properly

Some simple attention to microphone placement can make a dramatic improvement in sound quality. Take the shotgun mike, for example. Its extreme directional characteristics and high sensitivity make it great for picking up audio from a distance. But point a shotgun mike up at your subject from the ground (instead of overhead), and you might pick up birds singing in the trees.

Misuse of lapel microphones is just as easy. Ideally, they are worn on the outside of clothing, attached to a lapel, tie or shirt. However, hiding lapel mikes under clothes minimizes wind noise and visual distractions. This location guarantees a muffled sound and the sound of cloth rubbing on the microphone.

### 4) Monitor With Headphones

If your camera has a headphone jack, buy a pair of good headphones and keep them in your camera case. The next time you shoot, you will hear exactly what the microphone hears, making mike positioning easier. You will also catch bad connections, dead batteries and background noise before you commit it to tape. This is an absolute must and will save you much frustration and embarrassment.

### 5) Bring Spares

Spare cables, spare adapters, spare microphones and spare batteries. This tip will save your skin in an emergency. Perhaps you get to the shoot and discover your single lapel microphone won't work because there are two subjects speaking. Your spare shotgun or handheld microphone will work even better.