

Introduction to Recording & Editing Audio with Audacity

Taught by: Kasya O'Connor Grant & Claire Lavarreda
CRIM2300 - Punishment in the Age of Mass Incarceration
Prof. Megan Denver
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Objectives

- Understand podcast anatomy
- Learn best practices for audio recording
- Learn about and explore Audacity as a podcast editing tool
- Learn how to:
 - Record audio
 - Clip audio
 - Add/move/delete tracks
 - Add sound effects and/or background music
 - Save and export projects

Slides and handouts available at: <https://bit.ly/fa23-denver>



Schedule

- **Monday: Introduction to Audacity**
 - Start thinking about your topics + music
 - Have some ideas/music picked by Wednesday
- **Wednesday: Hands-on portion**
 - We will be workshopping over Zoom and demo-ing some practices
- **Thursday:**
 - Drop-in help via Zoom
 - If you'd like some hands-on help, we will be hosting a Zoom session during usual class time (10:30-11:30AM) where you can come ask questions



Podcasting + Incarceration

- Podcasting can allow the incarcerated + their families to create a community of support.
- Zak and Jules, hosts of the life-after-prison podcast *The Sit Down*, are quoted in an article by the Guardian:

“I felt like I was living in a world that I didn’t understand and which didn’t understand me... talking to people with stories and information, it’s a blessing. Everyone is doing it for the same reasons, bridging the alone feeling, slowly starting to feel you’re not the only one with these feelings.” ([Podcasts for Ex-Offenders](#))



Podcast Anatomy



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Podcasts

Podcasts typically begin with an **opening segment** of 10–30 seconds of music and audio wherein the creator identifies the **podcast title, host, and episode topic**—this creates a trademark/signature and indicates to the listener that the podcast is about to begin. **Be as creative as you want!**

For your specific incarceration-related assignment, spend time thinking about the tone you want to set. (Calm? Informative? Hopeful?)



Podcast Anatomy: Intro/Opening Segment

Intros/Opening segments are listeners' **first impressions** of a podcast. From the opening segment alone, listeners make assumptions about the podcast's **Audience, Genre, Style**, and overall **Structure**.

This means that within a short span of time, the podcast's opening segment must accomplish several goals like:

- Grabbing attention: several successful podcasts set the tone using **Media** (e.g., theme song music, sound effects, archival audio clips)
- Identifying an audience: Acknowledging/naming people who might be interested
- Establishing listener expectations: Explaining the goal and theme of the podcast



Opening Segment Example

Listen to the opening segment to the episode, “[Northampton County Judge Craig Dally](#)” by the Prison Project Podcast (Up to 1:00) and take notes.

Questions to keep in mind:

- How do they introduce their topic? What audio techniques do they use to **engage their audience?**
- What kinds of media are included?
- How does an opening segment **encourage reflection, action, and/or emotion?**



Podcast Anatomy: The Body

Your podcast should have an **argument** or **perspective**, not just a recitation of facts. Try to keep your tone **persuasive** and **conversational**. Like any good piece of reporting, your podcast should be **organized** and rehearsed ahead of time.

Do your research and have your script written **before** you start recording; know how your show is laid out and how much time you have.

- Write out large numbers and/or complicated words/names out phonetically (twenty-two thousand and thirty-four vs. 22,034)
- Mark out spaces in the script for pauses, sound clips/effects, transitions between topics, etc.



Podcast Anatomy: The Outro

Podcasts typically end with a **closing segment** of 10–30 seconds of music and audio acknowledging the creator names the **creator(s)**, **institutional affiliation**, and **audio/production credits**, and **acknowledgments** including people whose work or advice has significantly influenced or contributed to the episode.

An outro script for your class might sound something like “This podcast was made by [student name]...opening music created by [artist name], sound effects taken from [repository name]... with special thanks to [name] for their contribution.” It may also include outro music.

As in your opening segment, you can use music and sound effects to make your closing segment dynamic and interesting.



Outro Example

Now listen to the concluding segment to the episode “[Prison Librarians](#),” by *Beyond Prisons*. (01:08:30 onward). Compare the techniques used in the outro to the techniques used in the intro segment from earlier.

- How did this conclusion convey a sense of **cohesion**?
- What decisions were made to keep the audience engaged?
- Even though this outro doesn’t have music, how do the hosts wrap things up?



Best Practices for Podcasting



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General Best Practices

- **Test your mic** and technology before you start.
 - Record some test audio and play it back before you begin.
- **Have a plan** for the conversation and transitions.
 - Give yourself a script. As you record, mark out spaces for transitions in the recording (topic-to-topic, parts of the episode).
- **Don't panic** over filler words (e.g., um, uh, yeah, like). Edit these out later.
- **Prepare phonetic pronunciations** for names, long numbers, and complicated terminology. **This is *particularly* important for recording in a language that you may be less familiar with.**
- Include **transcripts for accessibility** (use software like Otter AI).
- Use **open access media/music** ([Free Music Archive](#), [YouTube](#))



Getting Started: Tips for Recording Audio

- Record test audio and adjust mic volume if necessary.
- Record a few seconds of silence at the start and end of each track
- Begin way in advance, and do several takes.
 - Editing often takes much longer than the recording itself!
- Speak slowly, clearly, and conversationally.
 - If you use too many “filler words” (um, like, so) you can always edit them out later. Stop recording and start again at the top of the sentence to avoid jarring sound cuts in post-production.



Environmental Considerations

- Ideally, find a room with good sound absorption to prevent the “echo effect.”
 - **Yes:** carpet, cushions, bookshelves, clothes (bedrooms, closets).
 - **No:** larger spaces with hard, smooth surfaces (kitchens, bathrooms).
- Put some **distance** between yourself and the microphone (depending on your equipment).
 - Being too close can make the audio too loud or garbled sounding as you speak. If you are positioned too far away, the audio will be too quiet or too muffled to salvage.
 - Know where your microphone is located and keep it clear of papers/other objects.



Environmental Considerations cont'd.

- Use headphones when recording and editing.
 - After you finish editing, listen to the file without headphones to see where the audio is too loud/quiet when played in a space.
- Take ambient noise into consideration.
 - A/C units, refrigerators, traffic, pets, roommates, loud clothing, etc.
- Stay hydrated!
 - Keep a drink nearby (water, juice, etc.) to soothe your throat and keep it relaxed.



Special Considerations

- Depending on your location + schedule, there are several on-campus resources for recording podcasts, including:

(1). Snell Library Recording Studios + Support

- Depending on availability, you are able to rent out equipment and a studio to record your project. Book online + talk to staff [here](#).

(2). CAMD Podcast Studio

- CAMD has a podcast room you can book, which comes with equipment. For more info, [click here](#).

Recording Considerations for Interviews

- **Remote recording** (via Skype, Zoom).
 - If you record via Zoom, **save your recording to your computer**, not the cloud.
- **Ease into the interview** with low-stakes conversation
 - Interviews are like playing catch. Start with questions that allow everyone to get comfortable. Be yourself!
- **Don't rush**, and know you can start over
 - You don't need to get everything in a single take, and you won't use all the audio that you record. So don't be afraid to pause frequently and remember you can start over (or cut something altogether!)



Recording Considerations for Interviews

- **Emotional considerations**
 - Whether it's a recording of yourself or an exchange with another person, make sure you have clear boundaries set in place
 - You can always edit out things later—respect your own and others' boundaries and if someone decides to withdraw consent to use all or part of an interview, make sure to respect that! Remember, this is about healing.
- **Talking about personal trauma, life experiences, and medical information**
 - Build in breaks for you/your interviewee, be considerate, respect the need for starts/stoppages
- **Ensure you have proper consent and permissions for sensitive information**
 - Does your project need forms or verbal confirmation?



Making Podcasts: Audacity

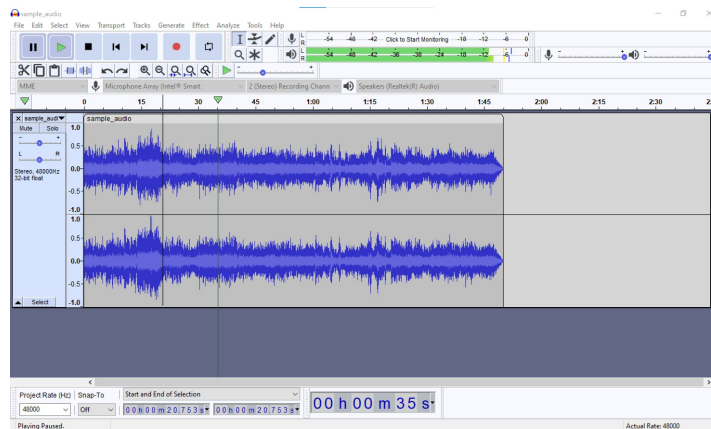


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What is Audacity?

Audacity is a free, easy-to-use, **multi-track** audio editor and one of the more popular free audio editors used for creating podcasts.



(**Multi-track**: the ability to have different layers of audio in one clip.)



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Downloading Audacity

<https://www.audacityteam.org/> --- Audacity is platform-agnostic!

Choose if you want it for Windows, Mac, or Linux.

Audacity is free software and developed by volunteers.

 **Audacity for Windows**

Windows 10/8/7/Vista (XP support has officially been dropped)

 **Audacity for Mac OS X / macOS**

Mac OS X/macOS 10.7 and later.

 **Audacity for GNU/Linux**

Source code

For PC users: download **Windows Installer**

For Mac users: download **MacOS.dmg**



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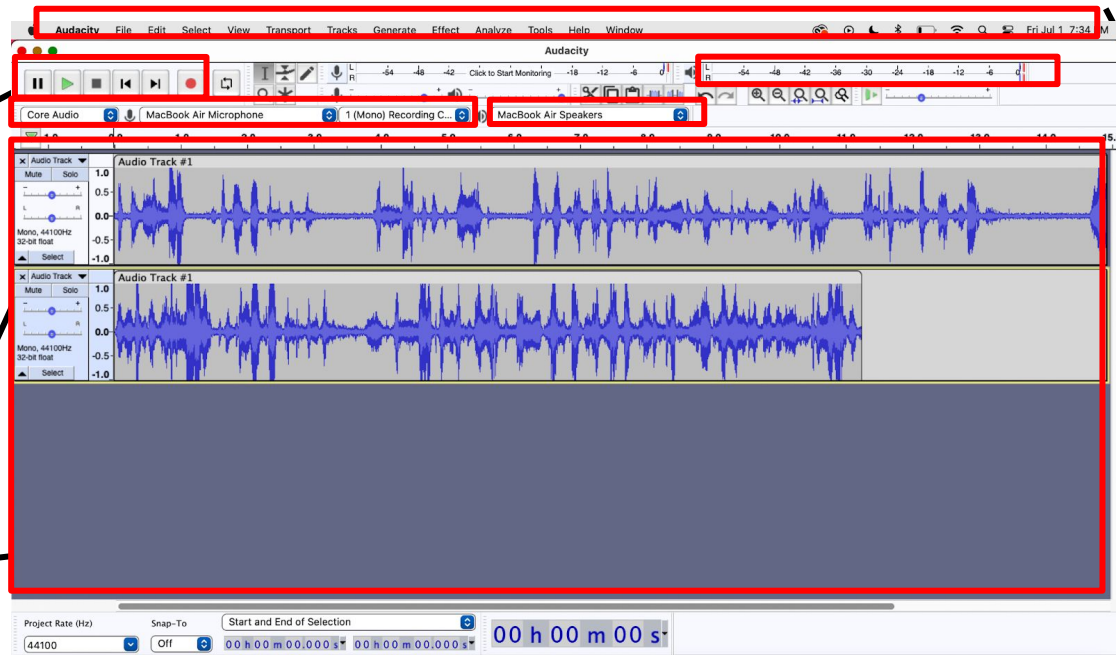
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Anatomy of Audacity

Main buttons (L-R):
pause, play, stop,
fast-forward/
backward, record

Microphone,
volume, input, and
output

Recordings (audio
tracks) will display
in this window
here.



Editing, saving,
effects,
transporting or
exporting the
recording.

Output Volume
Level Monitor:
shows the
loudness of
each track in
real-time
*Tip: try for -12
to -6db*

Other Audacity
tools

Key Terms

- **Track:** a single audio channel or stream.
 - **Multi-track:** an audio recording or channel with more than one track or recording of sound.
- **Clipping:** splitting audio into separate sections—that is, making “clips”
- **Waveform:** the curve within a track showing the duration and volume of individual sounds
- **Mixing:** the process of audio production, or mixing tracks of recordings, music, and other desired media.
- **MP3 File:** the most generally used audio file format. Others include .wav and .mp4.



Basics: Audacity & Recording Audio



Getting Started: Tips for Recording Audio

- Know where your microphone is located and keep it clear of papers/other objects
- Use headphones when recording and editing
 - After you finish editing, listen to the file without headphones to see where the audio is too loud/quiet when played in a space.
- Take ambient noise into consideration
 - A/C units, refrigerators, traffic, pets, roommates, loud clothing, etc.
- **Save frequently.** Audacity does not autosave.



Recording Audio cont'd.

- Record test audio and adjust mic volume if necessary
- Record a few seconds of silence at the start and end of each track
- Begin way in advance, and do several takes
 - Editing often takes much longer than the recording itself!
- Speak slowly, clearly, and conversationally
 - If you use too many “filler words” (um, like, so) you can always edit them out later. Stop recording and start again at the top of the sentence to avoid jarring sound cuts in post-production
 - Clarity is very important if learning a new language!



Recording

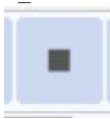
Make sure your **microphone** is working by checking to see that it's selected in the microphone section of the screen. Each computer will have different microphones, so check your sound settings for your model.



To **record**, click the button with the **red circle**.



Hit the **pause** button to pause a recording.



Hit the **stop** button to stop recording.

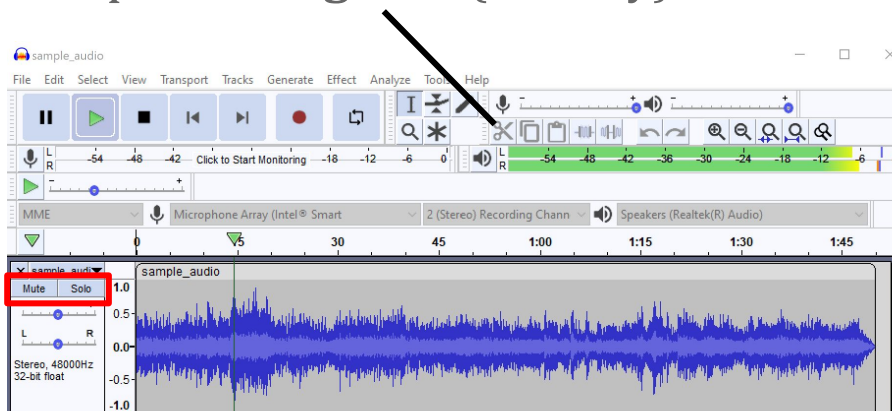


Use **Re-play** to verify that the recording is the quality/ volume that you want.



Checking volume

Keep an eye on the **monitor** when recording and playing back your audio—try to keep it in the **green** (literally).



If your volume is too loud, the monitor levels will turn yellow and red. Tracks that are too loud will have a blown-out effect when played back.

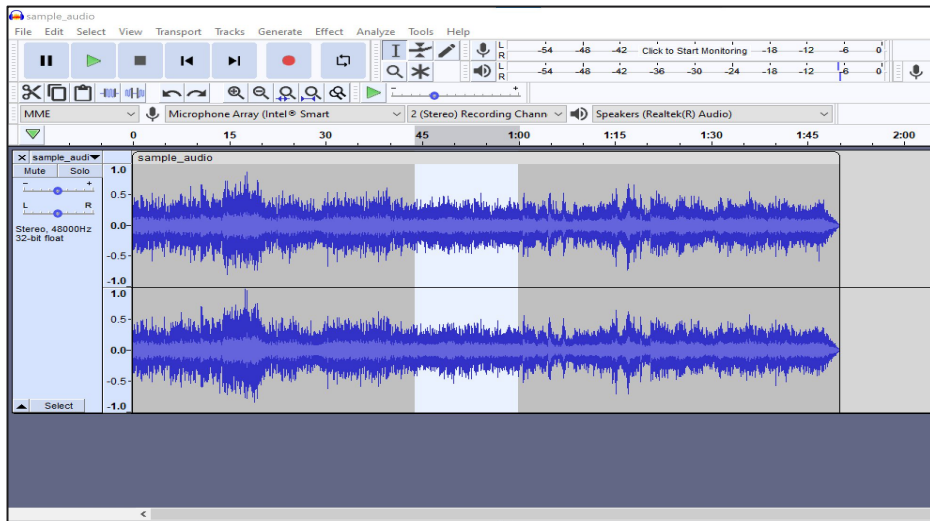
If one of your tracks is louder or softer than the others, you can adjust the volume on each track.

Tip: to hear one track without the others, you can **mute** the other tracks or click “**solo**”



Moving Tracks

To move entire tracks or audio around in Audacity, you can click and drag them by hovering your mouse over the top of the clip.



Once you have selected the clip, click whatever clip or track you want to move and drag it into position.



Next Steps:

- For Wednesday, **pick music** to use for our demo. You can find royalty free music here: freemusicarchive.org OR studio.youtube.com and click on the 'Audio Library' tab
(you have to be signed into Google for this one)
- **Start thinking about incarceration topics**, issues, and discussions you may want to podcast about.
- **Download Audacity** if you didn't download it in class today



Final Questions

- Now that you've gotten a brief intro to podcasting, how do you see incarceration narratives + podcasting working (or not) together?
 - How does Audacity lend itself to effective discussions related to incarceration?



Reminder

- Wednesday we are on Zoom!

- Same time
- Link here:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88552737284?pwd=urhlacY6IFu6sukwBqntjc4jassEwx.1>



Thank you!

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