

Recording directly to computer¹

Another possibility is to make recordings directly onto your laptop computer. You can plug an external microphone into the computer and record directly to the sound card. Your recordings are saved digitally. To do this you need a sound card and the software to make the recordings. You should also have a lot of spare room on your hard disk drive and a CD (or ideally a DVD) burner to make backup copies.

This is another type of recording setup that is probably all right in an emergency or as a backup but is not workable for everyday recording without huge expense. There are problems with the quality of the recordings made; good sound cards are very expensive and with the cheaper models there are issues with noise from the processor, the hard drive turning, and distortion from the sound card itself. It's intensive on the battery. Good software for audio recording and editing is also expensive. Windows is not designed for this sort of thing and you need to shut down a lot of processes to maximise the amount of memory dedicated to the recording. It takes huge amounts of processing power to do properly and requires vast amounts of spare disk space if you are going to make this your regular recorder. Also, of course, all the problems that were mentioned above in relation to laptops also apply here; screens can be hard to read in bright sunlight, they are fragile, you can't sit in the dirt with them.

Having said all this, there are professional musicians who have laptops with dedicated recording setups. There are also pre-digitisers (or external sound cards) which can be used to modify an existing computer system.

¹ Ladefoged (2003) has some information about how to set this up.