

My audio design project leads the listener through a day behind the preparation and execution of a discussion course for molecular genetics, a core biology class. Rather than create a discussion about place or memory, I have used my audio project to preserve a memory. As this is my final time teaching genetics, and likely the last structured teaching opportunity I will have for a while, I wanted to capture a day in my life so that others would be able to relive my experience.

I do not have a very specific target audience, as I believe this audio could be beneficial listening for people in any discipline, as the concept of teaching is universal. However, teachers and students working with such a problem based learning set up would definitely receive the most value from listening to this piece.

Though I purposefully did not go into any actual teaching materials, I understand that the concepts of molecular genetics do not appeal to many people. As such, I aimed to create a piece that was light hearted and humorous. In the beginning, I chose a low key electronic piece to act as the background music for my vocal track. I wanted the music to sound like the beginning of a documentary—to sound informative and inviting. The first cut to the sound of the lecture (which itself is boring and difficult to follow) is purposefully lacking in background music so that it sounds even more bland. Thus, my interruption has a more humorous contrast. However, the lack of background music for the audio portion where I talk to another teaching assistant is a practical choice, given how much chatter there was overlaying more sounds would have made it too chaotic. Following this interaction, I am using music that I would consider to be “elevator music” to drive home to more office feel. At the office noises, I gradually staggered in three separate sounds—the copier, then the printer, then the stapler. Placing all three sounds at once would be too heavy and this transition makes the final build up louder in comparison (giving the sense of a busy office). When I go back to lecturing, I transition to a “beach side” track which I found worked well with the rest of the audio I wanted to work with. To create a jarring contrast, I left out music and fading effects for both the quiz and the criticism audio. Thus, the deafening silence and harsh judgement comes suddenly and sticks out. Similar to the office sounds, I staggered in the grading (pen and paper) and grade entry (keyboard typing) sounds. This time I did not overlap them as I wanted them to flow into each other but not be considered occurring at the same time.

On a more general scale, I had to do a lot of tinkering with the entirety of the audio in order to have a cleaner and more cohesive sounding element. A big problem I had was volumes and I had to tinker with the volume sliders on individual channels. Most often, I had to turn up the sound of my voice while lowering the sound of recordings and background music. Furthermore, I used fade in/out quite liberally, fading the ends between separate sound clips e.g. from narration to recording. In areas where I wanted audio to cut out suddenly, I used a selection tool to mute specific parts of the other audio. For instance, during the quiz silence section, I selected and muted the background music. Additionally, I used the selection tool to cut and rearrange audio so that the entire piece would run 5 minutes in length and fit under the background track I used.

As problem based learning is become more popular in the STEM field—especially as lecture teaching is emphasized less and less—I believe my audio piece would be a good way to see the potential strengths and weaknesses behind such a class. Therefore, this audio could be played for new or less experienced teaching assistants, so that they can have a better idea of how to handle a class. On the other hand, students would greatly benefit from seeing what goes into a course. As they are only experiencing an hour, they often fail to appreciate the effort I put into getting ready. Additionally, they would be able to see how we improve the lessons with each iteration—they would know that we take the material and any criticisms seriously. Thus, I believe this would be a great piece to put on Blackboard so that any student taking genetics or another problem based learning class can take a listen to see what they’re signing up for.