

FIELD GUIDE TO AUDIO GATHERING

why and how photojournalists should gather audio ←

WHY SHOULD PHOTOJOURNALISTS GATHER AUDIO?

Without question, gathering audio interviews and natural sound from an event will make you a much better journalist. You will learn more about your subject. You will gather detailed information for your story and your captions, and you will have a product that is more marketable across many more outlets.

Sound adds realism, texture and depth to your stories and it lets the people in your pictures speak for themselves.

Think about how your sound and pictures are going to work together. You want your sound to compliment and carry your pictures, and you want your pictures to do the same for your sound.

WHICH SHOULD I WORK ON: PICTURES OR SOUND?

That depends. If there's sound that I think might be gone in a few minutes, I'll probably break out my recorder and start recording. If the light is perfect but fading, I'll most likely make pictures first.

There's no right way to do it, and there's always a trade-off. You have to accept the fact that when you are recording, you'll miss some great images and when you are shooting you'll miss some wonderful sound. I've tried doing both at once, it doesn't work. Getting good sound takes just as much skill, energy and focus as getting good pictures; it's tough to do both things at the same time.

WHAT IS "NATURAL SOUND" AND WHAT CAN IT DO FOR ME?

Natural sound is any sound other than a formal interview. Stop and listen to what you hear right now. What you hear is natural sound. It might be a computer hum, a radio or television, people talking in the other room, the wind blowing, your fingers on the keyboard, or pure silence. Natural sound provides the details that give an interview a sense a place and helps to paint the picture.

→ Natural sound can be incorporated in a variety of ways in audio storytelling, so gather all you can when you're in the field. If, just for a moment, the user felt like they were on that farm where you did that story, you have succeeded. What put them there? The interview with the farmer or the natural sounds of chickens, cows and the tractor sprinkled throughout the story?

Wherever you record sound, especially if it's an interview, be sure and get 30 seconds or more of pure background sound ("room tone"). Every place has its own "silence", and they all sound different. You may need some of that silence to cover some of your edits later in the editing process.

AUDIO QUICK TIPS

- ◆ Stop! Listen!
- ◆ What are the natural sounds around you? Do they distract or add to the story (like backgrounds in your images.)
- ◆ What do you have images of that could be enhanced by the sounds of the environment?
- ◆ Think of natural sound as the texture of your piece. As light adds texture and mood to a photograph, natural sound adds texture, mood and context.
- ◆ Nat sound is useful for transitions. How do you get from one element of the storyline to the next? Sound can help you do this.
- ◆ Audio can lead you to pictures and pictures can lead you to audio.
- ◆ Recording audio can lead you to the FOCUS of your story.
- ◆ Record Levels should stay between -12db and -6 db.
- ◆ Be sure you have extra batteries and your mic works. Double check your system before each assignment.
- ◆ Get close! If your sound isn't good enough, your microphone isn't close enough.
- ◆ ALWAYS wear headphones!

The Ten Commandments of Recording

(plus a few more)

- Always get a minute of ambiance/room tone (01)
- Keep the same mic placement when recording room tone (02)
- Do not walk on the ends of sound bites (03)
- Always wear your headphones and keep them holy (04)
- Shun the evil hums: fluorescents, computers, and refrigerators (05)
- Never interview people with music playing in the background (06)
- Always have the person say their name for proper pronunciation (07)
(and have them spell it on tape too)
- Always check your recording before departure from the scene (08)
- Mic closely (09)
- Always capture story-telling natural sounds (10)
(especially to support an interview)
- Remember to record audio details and establishing moments (11)
(the same as “close ups” in photography)
- Get another minute of ambiance/room tone, just in case (12)

Start thinking now: Opening? Closing? Conflict? Tension?