



## STORIES FROM MAIN STREET STORYTELLING GUIDE



developed by  
Museum on Main Street  
and MuseWeb Foundation



This Field Guide is adapted from the Museum on Main Street Storytelling Toolkit available for download at [museumonmainstreet.org/content/resources](https://museumonmainstreet.org/content/resources).

#### Museum on Main Street

Museum on Main Street (MoMS) is a partnership between the Smithsonian Institution and state humanities councils nationwide that serves small-town museums and their patrons. This innovative project provides one-of-a-kind access to Smithsonian exhibitions and educational humanities programs. Most importantly, MoMS provides community museums and libraries an opportunity to showcase their strengths and reinforce their meaningful contributions to small-town life.

#### MuseWeb Foundation

The MuseWeb Foundation is a new nonprofit offshoot of the international Museums and the Web Conference (MW), which began in 1997 and has since showcased and documented leading work in the cultural field. The MuseWeb Foundation was conceived as an accelerator of cultural innovation to help develop and fund some of the most promising projects and initiatives from the conference and the cultural heritage field at large. Learn more at [www.museweb.us](https://www.museweb.us).

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“ Since we began to gather ourselves together into towns and cities, our stories have helped us organize ourselves. The narratives we exchange give the members of our community a shared sense not only of place but also of purpose. We live in an historical moment when telling our stories is crucial, because they become our truth—a truth that circulates and gives ourselves a vision of our life chances. ”

—Seph Rodney

## Did you know that about *half* of museums and other cultural organizations in the U.S. are located in small and rural communities?

America's small museums and libraries are the caretakers of a staggering number of objects, photos, and documents that preserve local history. These organizations are centers for the study of American history and culture just like our major museums. Their stories are our stories. And Stories from Main Street, a project created by the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street (MoMS) program, seeks to collect those stories that represent the rich history of our small towns and exemplify the excitement, diversity and creativity of their citizens.



**Your story matters to the Smithsonian.** Imagine hundreds of stories, photos, and videos provided by people from all over the nation. The items stored by the Stories from Main Street program and its companion website will give people who call rural America home a place to show everyone what makes each community unique and quintessentially American.



# STORYTELLING





“ We are all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn’t a stronger connection between people than storytelling.”

–Jimmy Neil Smith,  
Director of the International  
Storytelling Center



# NONFICTION NARRATIVE

**Nonfiction narrative goes under many names, including creative nonfiction, literary journalism, and fact-based storytelling.**



Nonfiction narratives use details to create setting, character and theme. Although they are telling true stories, narratives aim to bring the events to life for readers, making it three-dimensional as opposed to simply stating the facts. Other types of nonfiction might focus solely on teaching the audience facts about a topic in a straightforward manner.

For example, a purely informational nonfiction account of a historical event like a war, might tell you dates, give data about how many people died in a war, and relate the facts about the key events of the battles. A narrative nonfiction account would paint the picture of the war, talking about sights, sounds, smells, the soldiers' lives and thoughts (all gathered from careful research), and the commanders' personalities, interests, and world views – things that would give the audience a fuller understanding of them as people.

Narrative nonfiction is not made up. It is fact-based. The details added to bring the story to life are pulled from research – first-person interviews or documents like letters. Any descriptions of the setting or events are created using first-person accounts and an understanding of the time period based on research. The characters are real people and their personalities are simply brought to life by what we know about their hopes, dreams, demeanors, etc.

# STORYTELLING STRUCTURE

**Storytelling rules are helpful guidelines to follow, not true rules.**


Here's a video series from Bloop Animation with examples from Pixar movies to bring the elements of storytelling to life: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLY6PCL9yInRSaO6o8Loocvzxusr\\_35XfC](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLY6PCL9yInRSaO6o8Loocvzxusr_35XfC).





**A story has three structural elements: A beginning, a middle, and an end.**






Learn more about story structure and “The Three C’s” in UNESCO’s How to Write a Documentary Script: [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/programme\\_doc\\_documentary\\_script.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/programme_doc_documentary_script.pdf).

9  
TYPES  
OF

LOCAL STORIES  
THAT CAUSE  
ENGAGEMENT



<p>1 PLACE EXPLAINERS</p> 	<p>2 CROWD PLEASERS</p> 	<p>3 CURIOSITY STIMULATORS</p> 	<p>4 NEWS EXPLAINERS</p> 
<p>Every city has traits, quirks, mysteries and habits begging to be dissected. <i>Place Explainers</i> shed light on these questions.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Why Does Seattle Have So Few Kids and So Many Dogs?</i></p>	<p>Locals love to brag about their area. <i>Crowd Pleasers</i> zero in on that feeling of pride by highlighting positive news and local successes.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Seattle Ranked 2nd-best City in the Country.</i></p>	<p>A <i>Curiosity Stimulator</i> is something geeky, unusual, remarkable, unbelievable or clever that's tied to your local area.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>A Rideable 4,000-pound Spider-Robot Being Built In Somerville.</i></p>	<p><i>News Explainers</i> take local stories and make sense of them for people. They illustrate why or how something happened.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Everything You Need to Know About California's Ballot Measures.</i></p>

<p>5 MAJOR BREAKING NEWS</p> 	<p>6 FEEL-GOOD SMILERS</p> 	<p>7 TOPICAL BUZZERS</p> 	<p>8 PROVOCATIVE CONTROVERSIES</p> 	<p>9 AWE-INSPIRING VISUALS</p> 
<p>Local areas are saturated with news. But <i>Major Breaking News</i> stories are the BIG stories that affect the lives of a local area as a whole.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Hurricane Sandy Makes Landfall.</i></p>	<p>Think “awww,” think “awesome,” think “hilarious.” Most of all, think positive: <i>Feel-Good Smilers</i> are made up of happy or funny stories.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Newborn Orca Calf Reported in Puget Sound.</i></p>	<p>A <i>Topical Buzzer</i> is the local story everyone's talking about right now. The key is timing: You must create it as people are buzzing.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Space Shuttle Endeavor Arrives in California.</i></p>	<p>When people encounter a <i>Provocative Controversy</i>, two things happen: they get ticked off and highly opinionated.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Backlash After State Kills Entire Pack of Wolves.</i></p>	<p>People love beautiful images of their town, city or state. <i>Awe-Inspiring Visuals</i> capture that wonderment through photos and videos.</p> <p><b>Ex:</b> <i>Video: A Stirring Time-lapse of Pacific Northwest Scenes.</i></p>

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RUSS GOSSETT. © 2012 NPR DIGITAL SERVICES

## THE BEGINNING

The beginning sets the tone and mood for the story and hints at the surprises that lie ahead by raising the right questions in the minds of the audience.

A good beginning does these things:

- Sets up the flavor of things to come, both in story and mood.
- Establishes the message you want to communicate to the audience.
- Creates curiosity among the audience of the things to come.
- Shows change or the promise of change.
- Creates the element of consequence – an event that causes change.

The inciting incident is often a common feature used in the beginning to start a story. It is an incident that radically upsets the balance of forces within the story. It is a dynamic and fully developed event, not something vague. The inciting incident is any event that swings reality in either a negative or positive way, creating imbalance relative to the previous way.



## THE MIDDLE

Many a time, a story starts off, but the middle becomes boring. A story must move progressively forward to a final action. The events must become bigger and better and their excitement and involvement must gradually increase as the story moves forward. This is called progression. The movement forward needs to be sharp and planned.

The key to a good middle is structure. The storyteller must ensure that the middle of the story presents a chain of logic designed to prove its core assertion. Each event and action must be pertinent and in keeping with the subject and tone of the story.

## THE END

The end is usually a reiteration of the core assertion of the story. In many stories, this is done by hammering home the assertion with a ‘key feature’, which could be anything from a phrase to a visual, or many visuals, to one last event that sets the impression. All or many issues are hopefully, or at least temporarily, resolved in the end of a story.

### Two types of endings:

**Closed End.** One where all the questions raised in the story are answered and all emotions evoked are satisfied.

**Open End.** One that leaves some or many questions unanswered and some emotions unfulfilled. The questions left are answerable and the emotions resolvable and all that has gone before has led to clear and limited alternatives that make a certain degree of closure possible for the audience.

In non-fiction, the mood of the story must be determined by the events of real life and cannot be controlled by the storyteller. The storyteller must judge the mood of the ending after studying the conclusions the story has come to based on the turn of real-life events.



## CHARACTER

Characters give a human face to any story. They experience the story for the audience. The more the audience knows about a person in the story, the closer they feel to that person. This empathy is important because, through it, the audience can get emotionally involved and be that much more affected by it.

**Two types of characters:**

**Active Characters.** Those that initiate the events that take place around them. They take action and make things happen. For example, someone who starts a campaign to change the law is an active character.

**Passive Characters.** Those that react to situations thrust upon them without their choosing. Their actions are brought upon by things happening to them. For example, a farmer whose village has seen drought for two years and struggles to make ends meet is a passive character.

**CONFLICT**

Without conflict, there is no reason for the story to move forward. Characters try and attain their goals in the face of opposition and obstacles. These opposing forces could be big or small, one or many, brief or protracted and in any shape or form. Opposition could come from other characters, organized entities or the situation and environment surrounding the characters.

In non-fiction work, you have to study the various conflicts facing the story's real-life characters and portray them in the story. You must then follow the characters as they try and overcome their 'opponents' in the story. Characters might not overcome all or any of the conflict. Real life isn't always made up of heroes and villains, and the character may fail to achieve what he set out to do.

**Two types of conflict:**

**Outer Conflict.** An antagonism from the world around them. This could be from other people, objects, organizations or the environment.

**Inner Conflict.** Conflict inside themselves. This may include their psychology, weaknesses, fears, dark sides, etc. Many stories have a combination of both

# WRITING A NONFICTION SCRIPT

**Like in a movie, a nonfiction script outlines every aural, visual, behavioral, and lingual element required to tell a story.**

It contains the words that will be spoken in the finished piece, as well as instructions for the elements of audio and video that should be captured as the piece is recorded. It is a production document. There are three main steps to creating a script.

## THE BRIEF

Creating a brief allows you to document the answers to really important project questions. Explain your goals, target audience, topic, and intended takeaways when developing your brief. This is the document you will use to ensure all your future decisions match your intended goals.

## THE OUTLINE

An outline should be the second step to creating your script. You need to know your story's beginning, middle, and end before you get started. Once you have the basic skeleton of your project written out, you can make sure the story makes sense and fill in the details of the assets you need to gather (images, audio, video).





## THE SCRIPT

This doesn't have to be fancy. It's purpose is strictly functional. It's a set of directions for you to follow when creating the final product. Like a blueprint. As you map out what you want your final product to sound and/or look like, write in instructions on how many camera angles you need on different shots, and what kind of audio and/or video you need to record at each location.

**Write in plain, conversational English.** When writing the narrative elements of your script, you want to write how the narrator/voice over should speak, not how you would write a formal paper. Practice speaking it out loud to see if it sounds too formal.

**Make it thorough.** A script doesn't just include dialogue or voice over scripting. If your finished product will require multiple shots, people, or scenes, include these details. For video, be sure to include any necessary information about the location, actions that should be taken on camera, and visual elements – including clothing choices.

**Format for easy reading.** Format the elements like b-roll, sound effects, text overlays, voiceover, background sounds, and other audio recordings by using different colors, fonts or callouts to visually differentiate the elements of your script.

**Script every word.** For any voice over or narration, script every word. Ad-libbing never works. You will have to do multiple takes and you want each take to be as similar to the last one as possible. You also want to ensure the timing is exactly right. Scripting will save you a lot of time and frustration.

**Make it short.** For both audio and video, shorter is better than long. Cut out any unnecessary aspects of your script. Attention spans are short. Make sure you get to your point before you lose your audience's interest. For a tour, remember that people will be standing while listening to your tour. Be respectful of their feet and make it short. Entertaining, but brief.



## AUDIO ELEMENTS

There are eight elements to audio. Your job is to decide which elements will appear at which points in the final piece, whether in combination or solo.

Learn more about the elements of audio recording from B-side Radio: <http://bsideradio.org/learn/recording-audio-in-the-public-radio-style>.

### ACTUALITIES

These are audio recordings gathered during interviews. In video recordings, this element is often called “talking heads.”

### VOICE OVER

These are the recordings created by you or someone you recruit that links all the elements together and tells the story. It can feature one or more people.

### AMBIENCE

These are natural sound effects from the world that help set a scene. If you were at a dairy, this would be the sound of a cow mooing. At a construction site, it would be the sound of a saw or a hammer. Get your microphone right up next to the source of the sound you’re trying to capture. Try to record a minute of this, though often only 5-10 seconds of it will be used.

### BACKGROUND SOUND

This is the sound of a place (often also called ambience). Not a singular easily discernible sound but rather the full spectrum of sounds. For this, you don’t want to point your microphone at anything in particular, just stand in a location and record. You should record at least a minute of this in every place.



## **ROOM TONE**

This is the sound of a room - the lights, the hum of the air conditioner, cars outside, etc. When you record an interview in a room, the sound of the room is always there behind the voice of your interviewee. This sound will differ as you edit in interviews from different rooms, places, and your own narration. Moving between the different audio clips can sometimes be jarring depending on how present the room tone is. You can smooth this transition by mixing in room tone behind your voice. You need to gather at least 45 seconds to a minute of room tone in each room where you do an interview, more if there are distinct sounds happening, like cars going by.

## **SOUND EFFECTS**

This is any sound that is artificially injected into the soundtrack to enhance it. This could be a natural sound like the ambience you recorded to a digitally created sound.



## **SILENCE**

This is the lack of any sound over a particular moment in a finished piece. In audio-only pieces, silence should almost never be used unless you need it to make a dramatic point.

## **MUSIC**

Background music appeals on an emotional level with the audience. It can be used to establish a particular time period, geographical location, or identify a particular community. See the Production section to learn more about music rights and permissions.

**Writing for audio is different than most types of writing.** Unlike the reader, the listener often has no opportunity to reread what has been said if they miss something or need clarification. As such, preparing material that will be read aloud requires a slightly different approach than preparing written material.

**Below are ten tips on how to write for the ear:**

**1** Embrace a conversational tone. Remember that storytelling is a dialogue, not a monologue, and that you want to be engaging and natural in your speech.

**2** Keep your sentences short and simple. Avoid compound or complex sentences, and abide by the basic subject-verb-object structure.

**3** Use a simple vocabulary. Big words sound impressive, but they can cause your listener to get lost. Remember that you are speaking to a general audience, and write your story accordingly. If you need to use complicated words or concepts, consider defining the terms as you read.

**4** Avoid passive voice. Use active verbs and be direct. This will give your statements more impact. Ex. passive: “she was walking toward the house” vs. active: “she walked toward the house.”

**5** Use contractions. Remember that you want the conversation to flow naturally. For a more seamless delivery use “can’t” instead of “cannot.”

**6** Punctuate for rhythm. Consider the way your story will sound when spoken out loud and use punctuation to mark pauses and place emphasis. Remember to pace yourself and allow time for your audience to absorb what has been said.

**7** Round your numbers. Unless there is a reason for you to use the exact number, simplify your story by rounding figures to the nearest whole.

**8** Use a straightforward, linear narrative. With audio recordings, there is virtue in clarity. Remember that a listener cannot always rewind if they get lost, so make sure that the structure of your story follows a chronological order with a beginning, middle and end.

**9** Read it out loud. When you have finished drafting your story, read it aloud. What sounds good in your head might not sound natural when read out loud. Reading your story aloud will help you identify problems with rhythm and sentence structure.

**10** Use dialogue (if possible). For a listener, it is easier and more interesting to jump into the story when they can be the third (or more) member of a conversation, rather than being talked to.

# VIDEO ELEMENTS

There are five main elements to video. Your job is to decide which elements (and their sub-elements) will appear at which points in the video, whether in combination or solo. Learn more from UNESCO's How to Write a Documentary Script: [http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/programme\\_doc\\_documentary\\_script.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/programme_doc_documentary_script.pdf).

## VISUAL IMAGES

**Single Shot.** A single “take” on an action. Something needs to be happening in a shot for the audience to see. The images, the action, the events should not be random but meaningful.

**Sequence.** A sequence is a collection of shots put together that tell a story continuously – like a series of close-up and wide-angle views of someone driving to work. Putting several action shots like this together creates events.



**Montage.** A montage is a sequence of sorts. It's a process of combining a number of small shots and weaving them together to communicate a large amount of information in a short time - like time passing in a person's life.

**Talking heads.** This includes interviews of people on camera or people talking directly to the audience on camera or both.

**Colors, textures and Lines.** Elements of line, texture and color all carry their own weights in a film. Color and its presence or absence from a film can make a significant difference to the film's message and mood.

## PRINT AND OTHER GRAPHICS

This can be identification of the talking heads, orienting text like dates and places over a location, or newspaper clippings and headings to emphasize a point being made by the narration. Video is about showing, not telling, so use print and graphics sparingly and purposefully.

## SPEECH

Narrative commentary / Voice over. Narration is the commentary that sometimes accompanies a visual image in a documentary. It's also often called a 'voice-over' and it can be spoken by one or more off-screen commentators. Talking heads or interviews. An effective way to communicate information.

## MUSIC

Background music appeals on an emotional level with the audience. Music is also used to establish a particular geographical location or identify a particular community. See the Project and Editing Guide to learn more about music rights and permissions.

## NOISE

**Ambient Sound.** The sound that is naturally present and is recorded simultaneously with it is essential to the creation of a location atmosphere.

**Sound effects.** Any sound that is artificially injected into the soundtrack to enhance it – natural or digitally created.

**Silence.** The lack of any sound over a particular moment in a film forces the audience to focus on the visual. Silence should be used sparingly.







**Writing for video is different than writing for audio. Though audio is an important factor in video, most of the story should be brought to life through visual elements.**

**Show, don't tell.** Video is a visual medium. Unlike a novel, a video script is never 'read' literally by the audience and therefore you should try and incorporate most of the information you have to give into a visual format. For example, rather than telling the audience that a man is a farmer, you should show the man working in his fields. It always helps to show character and event action rather than talk about it or include it in narration because the audience is then able to experience it themselves, making it more real for them.

**Show through action and movement.** There is a reason we call them "moving images" and you should keep that in mind. The visual must be kept moving; the characters must be 'doing' something. The audience will react to movement on screen with interest and to static images with boredom.

**Visual pertinence.** Simply put, visual pertinence is keeping the visuals relevant to the subject and sustaining the flow of action. Don't show a farmer working behind a desk in a bank unless he works there part-time. It is important for you to structure sequences according to the point in time they appear in the video. If a character has just suffered a major loss, then don't show a sequence where they go to a party unless that's what they would do naturally in that situation.



**Emotional pertinence.** Emotional pertinence is controlling the emotional reaction of the audience and making it relevant to the story at that point in the video. This can be done by emphasizing emotional details or triggers which will provide the desired emotional response from the audience.

**Moods and Metaphors.** You have many visual tools at your disposal including the control of visual mood and visual metaphors to represent an idea that would be otherwise difficult to portray visually. For example, a sequence which features a man working late into the night in his office could be full of shadows to add to the perception of time.

**Special effects.** Sometimes, special effects like slow motion, where a visual is slowed down in time, help create and regulate tempo and rhythm in a video as well as enhance emotional value at certain points. Dissolving from one shot to another helps create smoother visual flow. Special effects may or may not be incorporated into the script in great detail. It is not advisable to use too many special effects in a non-fiction video because they alter the nature of reality.





# RESEARCH



“ Stories create community, enable us to see through the eyes of other people, and open us to the claims of others. ”

– Peter Forbes,  
photographer and author

# BASIC STEPS OF RESEARCH

The backbone of any good story is research. If you don't understand a topic, the narrative of your story will suffer. Below are the basic steps of research.

**1 Determine what topics you need to research.** What information do you need to understand the story of your topic. What time period is your topic based in? What national history do you need to know to understand how your community's story fits into the larger story? Do you understand the intricacies of your topic? If your topic is a specific baseball team, do you understand the rules of the sport? Have those rules changed over the years?

**2 Determine the types of information you'll need.** Do you need to interview locals who have lived through an event or people who are experts on the topic? Do you need newspapers from the time period? Nonfiction books and essays on the time period and topic? Statistics from time period – on population numbers and demographics, sports scores, other numbers? What about letters and first-person accounts from the deceased?

**3 Do preliminary research.** First you need to understand basic facts about the time period and topic. Read Wikipedia entries and other overviews of the topic. These are called secondary sources, meaning existing research was collected by someone for an article, book or other publication. The sources listed in these overview books and articles are great ones to consult for more in-depth research.



**4 Narrow your research focus.** Now that you have an understanding of the time period and larger themes related to your topic, it's time to focus. Find and read information on the narrow topic you've chosen. This is also when you start finding and using primary sources – newspapers from the time period, first-hand accounts of the topic, interviews with those still living who remember the events.

**5 Access academic sources.** If you have a university nearby, visit their library to use their resources and books. If your community has an archive or museum, ask to access any primary resources they have on your topic. The internet can also be useful for research, but it is often difficult to evaluate the validity of sources you find online. A general rule is anything from a web address ending in .edu and .gov is valid. Remember to record where you found your research, so you can properly cite your sources.



**6 Evaluate your sources.** Pay attention to who is making the claims in your sources and where they get their information. Are the authors stating facts or offering opinions? Are the facts supported by citations of other sources? If you can, consult as many of the original sources cited in the books you are reading. After referencing the original materials, you may have different conclusions than the author you are reading.

**7 Organize your information.** If you feel that you’ve done enough research to craft an informative and engaging narrative, organize the information you’ve gathered in an outline. This will give your project a form, and give you a good way to see if you have any gaps in knowledge that you need to research further.

**8 Cite your sources.** You need to keep track of which resources your research is coming from – titles, authors, page numbers, etc. – so you can cite your sources. Once you’ve finished with your project, you’ll need to cite the sources you used to craft your narrative. This way you show that you are not intending to plagiarize someone else’s ideas, and your audience can consult those sources to learn more about the topic.





# CITING SOURCES

Citations identify a published work (e.g. book, article, chapter, web site). Citing a source means that you show, within your project, written, audio, or video, that you took words, ideas, figures, images, etc. from someone else.

## CITE SOURCES TO:

- Show you've done proper research by listing sources you used
- Be a responsible scholar by giving credit to other researchers
- Avoid plagiarism by quoting words and ideas used by other authors
- Allow your reader to track down the sources you used

## CITATIONS CONTAIN:

- Author name(s)
- Titles of books, articles, and journals
- Date of publication
- Page numbers
- Volume and issue numbers (for articles)

## YOU MUST CITE:

- Facts, figures, ideas, or information that is not common knowledge
- Ideas, words, theories, or exact language another person published
- Another person's exact words should be quoted and cited

**When in doubt, be safe and cite your source!**

## HOW TO CITE IN A VIDEO PROJECT

- Put citations on an endscreen of the video
- And/or put citations in the text description of the video
- When conducting interviews, always use lower third captions to identify the person being interviewed.

## HOW TO CITE IN AN AUDIO PROJECT

- Put citations in the text description
- If you quote someone in the story, be sure to identify who originally said that quotation
- If you use interview audio make sure they are identified either by the person introducing themselves or in the voiceover

## CITATION FORMATS

The two citation formats often used by humanities and history projects are MLA and Chicago Style. Visit their websites to learn how to cite sources in these styles.

- MLA: <https://style.mla.org>
- Chicago Style: <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>

There are many online resources that can help to make keeping track of citations easy and generate them quickly. Check with a local library to find out about getting access to citation trackers like RefWorks.

Websites like [www.citationmachine.net](http://www.citationmachine.net) are also useful for putting references into the correct citation format.

# ARCHIVES

Archives exist both to preserve historic materials and to make them available for use.

Learn more from Using Archives: A Guide to Effective Research:

<http://www2.archivists.org/book/export/html/14460>.

## TYPES OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

Archives can hold both published and unpublished materials, and those materials can be in any format. Some examples are manuscripts, letters, photographs, moving image and sound materials, artwork, books, diaries, artifacts, and the digital equivalents of all of these things. Materials in an archive are often unique, specialized, or rare objects, meaning very few of them exist in the world, or they are the only ones of their kind.

## FINDING ARCHIVES:

- Use Google to see if there are archives specific to your topic.
- Consult bibliographies and works cited sections in books on your topic.
- Contact experts in the field. Where did they go for their research?
- Look for websites dedicated to your topic. Do they list any archives?
- Talk to a reference librarian at your local library about accessing the WorldCat database, which includes listings for archival materials.
- Search ArchiveGrid at <http://beta.worldcat.org/archivegrid>. This database contains nearly a million collection descriptions.
- Search the National Archives and Records Administration at <http://www.archives.gov>.



- Search the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov>.
- Search the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) at <http://www.loc.gov/coll/nucmc>.

## REQUESTING MATERIAL:

Access policies vary among archives, but ask yourself or the archive's staff these questions to see if you can access to materials without visiting in person:

- Has the material been digitized and is it available online?
- Are the materials you want to see available through interlibrary loan?
- Are the materials you want available through libraries other than the repository at which you found them? Check WorldCat database.
- Will the archives provide scans or photocopies of the materials you wish to consult? There may be fees associated.
- Do you have a simple question that can be answered by having the archival staff view the materials on your behalf?

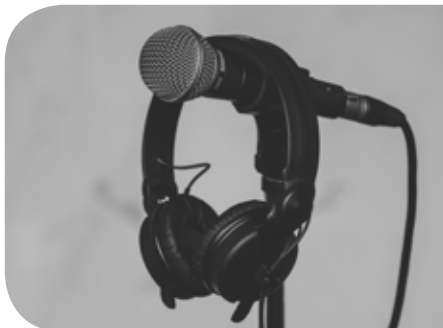
## VISITING:

If you need to visit the archives in person, you should plan ahead for your visit: Inform the archival staff of the date(s) that you intend to visit and the materials you would like to see.

- Check to see whether there are any limits on the amount of materials you may request or specific request times.
- Review guidelines for using materials at the archives. Look for these to be posted on the repository website, or ask a staff member.
- Examine the reproduction policies of the archives. Regulations and fees for requesting photocopies, scans, etc. vary among archives.
- Ask whether the archives offers Internet access and accommodates personal laptop computers.
- Schedule additional time for the unexpected. Discoveries may lead you down different avenues than you had originally anticipated.



# INTERVIEWING



“ Long before I wrote stories, I listened for stories. Listening for them is something more acute than listening to them. I suppose it’s an early form of participation in what goes on. Listening children know stories are there. When their elders sit and begin, children are just waiting and hoping for one to come out, like a mouse from its hole. ”

–Eudora Welty,  
short story writer



# INTRODUCTION TO INTERVIEWING

**Conducting an interview, or recording an oral history, is a form of primary research told by someone with expertise or experience of an event firsthand.**

The first step in interviewing someone occurs before any conversation happens—conducting research on the person being interviewed helps you to craft questions that will lead to compelling content. Background information can help to formulate thoughtful responses that go beyond simply asking the next question. It can also make you feel more confident during an interview in case you have to prompt your interviewee in order to dig deeper or discuss uncomfortable topics.

Laws pertaining to the recording of sound differ from state to state. Best practice for recording conversations, and for the purpose of this project, is to get the consent of all parties beforehand. For more information on your state’s laws on recording conversations, you can reference the Reporting Committee’s Reporter’s Recording Guide: <http://www.rcfp.org/reporters-recording-guide>.

Have anyone that you interview, audio or video, fill out a form that gives you permission to record them and share the interview with others.



**Hearing from experts on a topic or people who have lived through a particular moment can help unearth new facts and aspects of your story. The following tips will help you conduct successful interviews.**

**Plan.** Know what you're asking for. What is the topic you plan to cover? Who are the best people to cover that topic? Research on the internet or reach out to local contacts to find the best person/people to interview.

**Contact potential interviewees.** If you have email information, write a short, clear email that tells them who you are and why you are contacting them and what format the interview will be in and what it will be used for. If you have a phone number, compose a short script with the same information before calling them.

**Write well-researched questions.** Research your topic so you can create educated questions that cover the things most relevant to the topic you've chosen. Do not ask for basic definitions and statistics you could have found somewhere else. Take the time to fully understand the person you are interviewing. Search for interviews they've done in the past to get a feel for their style and to more fully understand their work.

**Group questions into topics of discussion.** Arrange questions in a way that allows experts to build on their answers to your previous questions. And mentally learn to treat an interview like a discussion on a topic instead of a Q&A period.

**Conduct the interview.** Introduce yourself, explain the project, give a general overview of the topic you have chosen, and request permission to record the conversation before starting your recorder or camera. Most important – relax! This isn't scary. You are prepared and your interviewee is interested in participating in your project. They want to help you by answering your questions.

**Listen.** Focus on what's being said by the speaker rather than on your list of questions. When you provide a strict set of questions, you can miss out on huge opportunities to build rapport and investigate responses. When you interview, consider their responses. Don't mindlessly ask your list of questions. Participate in the conversation.

**Become comfortable with silence.** After you ask your question, your interviewee may need time to think about their answer. Let them think. It's tough, but don't rush them.

**Ask permission to follow up.** You may find when reviewing the interview that you didn't cover everything. Get their permission to contact them for further clarification and perhaps a follow-up interview.



## ORAL HISTORIES

Interviewing a person about their experiences during a time period or about a part of their life is called an oral history. The following tips will help you create effective oral history interview questions. You can learn more from UCLA's Interviewing Guidelines: <http://oralhistory.library.ucla.edu/interviewGuidelines.html>.

**Ask large questions first.** Questions that begin “Tell me about . . .” or “Can you describe . . .” are good ways of stimulating the interviewee’s memory and describe his or her experiences at length.

**Focus on the interviewee’s experience, not just facts or opinions.** Always ask the interviewee to speak in terms of their concrete experiences and not simply about what they think people in general felt or did.



**Do not interrupt.** Interruptions disrupt the flow of narrative, break the speaker’s concentration, and they may never return to what they were about to say. Wait until the interviewee completes a story or train of thought to ask a follow-up question or introduce a new topic. If they are long-winded or rambling, you may need to jump in very quickly when a story is completed.

**Be ready with follow-up questions.** Much of your role is to be alert to what the interviewee does not say and to help him or her expand the story so that it is more meaningful for others – ask them for greater detail, context, clarification, and evaluation.

**Questions should be concise and focused.** Try to be as precise as possible, and ask only one question at a time.

**Avoid having the questions feel choppy and disconnected.** Clearly indicate shifts in direction or how one question relates to another. For example, use the following transitions: “We’ve talked about X, but now I’d like to move on to . . .” or “I’d like to follow up on something you said previously . . .”

**Yes-or-no and leading questions should be avoided.** Only use yes-or-no questions when clarifying specific details of a story. And leading questions – those that begin “Don’t you think that . . .” may prevent an interviewee from sharing their own thoughts on an issue.

**Don’t begin with highly personal or sensitive questions.** As the interviewee becomes more relaxed with the interview situation, they will invariably open up and often be willing to discuss issues they would not have been willing to discuss at the beginning of the interview.

**Challenge the interviewee when necessary.** If you feel there is more to a story than the interviewee is telling or that the interviewee is glossing over negative aspects, politely but firmly challenge the interviewee. This can generally be done by simply asking for explanations of facts that do not fit with your understanding or by calling attention to other ways of perceiving the situation. Such challenges often appear less confrontational if you refer to other sources that disagree with the interviewee or, in a more general way, to “criticisms at the time” or to “arguments I have heard.”

# AUDIO RECORDING

There are many elements to sound that we don't notice until we are trying to record a specific event. Below are tips to help you record your interview and voice over narration audio. Learn more about audio recording from B-side Radio: <http://bsideradio.org/learn/recording-audio-in-the-public-radio-style/>.

**Choose an appropriate recording location.** Interviewees often want to meet at a local coffee shop, but the only time you want to record there is if you're doing a story about coffee. It is best to talk to people in their natural environments or a location relevant to the story, so the sound under the interview advances the story (or at least doesn't distract from it). Except, of course, when that environment is really noisy – interview them in a quiet spot then go to the noisy place for ambiance and to get them to show you around.

**Position the mic.** Hold or place the mic or other recording device fairly close to the person's mouth. The best place to hold the mic is 3-5 inches away from their mouth. If you have a high-quality standing mic and you're in a quiet environment, you can place it 6-8 inches away. Explain to the interviewee that it helps you get the best possible sound. Often when people say words that start with the letter P, the burst of air makes a popping sound in the mic. This is what we call "P-popping" or plosives. To avoid it, hold your mic slightly off to the side – out of their airstream.



**Position yourself.** If you are holding the mic, rest your arm on a table or against your torso. You don't want to be holding your arm out in front of you unless you have to because it will start to hurt very quickly. Hold your hand steady. The mic will pick up everything: your fingers rubbing against the mic, tapping, rustling papers, cameras clicking, or phone notifications.



**Record a test.** Test your equipment before your interviewee gets there or while you are introducing yourself and your project, to make sure it all sounds right. Listen to the audio playback with headphones. Headphones help isolate the audio and you'll be able to hear any problems better than if you listen with speakers.

**Set your levels.** For the best quality, set the levels on your recorder manually and as high as you can without having the sound distort because it's too loud. This is something that you constantly have to think about. Some people speak more loudly than others. Some people are really soft and then get animated. Ask the interviewee to give their name and title in the beginning to set the initial levels, and pay attention to their volume throughout the interview.

**Be silent.** When you're having a conversation, it's natural to respond with an occasional "yes" or "uh huh." But when you're recording an interview, that's a big no no. No one wants to hear you saying "uh huh" in the middle of a sound bite. Resist your inclination to vocalize and instead tell the interviewee you're listening with facial expressions. Smile, nod, scrunch your nose, just don't vocalize.

**Dampen the sound.** When recording voice over narration, avoid the audio bouncing around the room by finding some way to focus the audio on the mic, rather than the walls of your room. Some people use foam boxes around the back of their mic. Others use pillows or record under a blanket.



# VOICEOVER NARRATION

Reading a script for voice over narration is not as easy as you may think. Here are a few simple tips to help you create professional voiceover recordings.

Learn more from “Can You Hear Me Now?”: <http://lpd.nau.edu/can-you-hear-me-now-tips-for-recording-your-best-audio/>

**Make sure your script is easy to read.** Don’t try to fit your entire script onto one page in tiny font. Make the font large and double or triple space it. Record in a well-lit room that will make the script easy to read.

**Face the microphone.** This can be hard when you need to read a piece of paper on the table or held in your hands. And holding a script in your hands can cause unwanted noise in your recording. Tape your script or place it upright somewhere so you are facing the microphone.

**Avoid excess noise.** Your microphone picks up on everything. If you swivel in your chair, tap your ring on the table, someone walks in and shuts the door (even in the next room!), redo that audio.

**Stand up while recording.** You’ll feel more energized and be able to breathe better. If you do sit, don’t slouch. Sit up straight and keep your chin out. Don’t let it drop to your chest.

**Don’t ad-lib.** Odds are that you’ll have to do multiple takes. Sticking with the script lets you find a common edit point on re-takes.

**Practice.** It can make perfect sense on paper, but when you speak it, it doesn’t work. Read it, make edits, read it again, and again, and again. Knowing what you are reading will make a real difference when you record.

**Create a conversational**

**tone.** Pretend like you're talking to someone rather than just reading a script. If you mess up, leave a noticeable pause and keep on going. You can cut the error out of the audio in editing.

**Stress vocal emphasis.** Pay attention to the most important piece of information within the sentence. Read a sentence aloud, then go back and read that sentence with different emphasis on different parts of the sentence. Did you notice how the focus and meaning of the sentence changed?



**Pay attention to inflection.** Much like vocal emphasis, inflection – the change in volume and tone of your voice – can change the way your information comes across. Inflection is also important in avoiding being monotone. Sound excited and interested. This will translate to your audience and help keep them excited, interested and engaged.

**Record silence.** By recording up to a minute of silence, you have a way to sample the ambient noise to filter it out later, or use it to smoothly transition into audio with different room and ambient noise.

**Mark your retakes.** If you do multiple takes, create a marker. Leave about 5 seconds of silence and then indicate what it is, like “section one, take two...”

# AUDIO EQUIPMENT

If you can't access the equipment below, you can record all audio on a smartphone and create your own dampeners and screens if you need them.

**Here is a list of basic audio recording equipment you may want to consider:**

**Recorder.** The industry standard is a flash type recorder. You want to be able to adjust your record levels. You want to be able to plug in a microphone. And ideally, the recorder would also have a great built-in mic because sometimes plugging in an external mic isn't practical.

**Omni-directional microphone.** This type of microphone tends to record sound with a very warm quality, picking up not just what you're pointing at, but some of the other sound around it. This is good for recording interviews in quiet places and for gathering the general ambient sound of a place.

**Unidirectional microphone (shotgun mic).** These microphones tend to be long and thin. They are very sensitive and pick up mostly the sound of what you're pointing at. They're great for recording interviews in noisy places and for gathering sound of quiet or distant things.

**Laveleer microphone.** Lav mics are extremely small, and are designed to easily clip onto the shirt or jacket collar of the speaker. This gives very close proximity to their mouth. It will take some time to attach the lav to your subject and run cables back to your digital recording device or setup a wireless system, so keep set-up time in mind if using this mic

**Handheld microphone.** Handheld mics are large, designed to be seen but take no time to set up. This makes them perfect for a quick audio recording, where you may need to approach the subject and begin recording immediately in a busy environment. They are best used when placed very close to the chosen sound source, so microphone technique is important.

**Headphones.** The bigger, the better. Wear headphones at all times while recording so you know what you're getting on tape. It's best to use headphones that fully cover your ears.

**Sound dampener.** Sound from your voice reaches the microphone directly and then indirectly after bouncing off walls, floors and ceiling. That distance is enough for the sound to become out of sync and record a bit of an echo. Most people use foam tiles on their walls or place their microphone in a sound dampening box.



**Pop Filter/Microphone Screen.** A pop filter or pop shield is noise protection filter for microphones. It serves to reduce or eliminate 'popping' sounds caused by fast moving air on the microphone during recorded speech. It also keeps moisture off the microphone which can cause mold growth.

**Wind screen.** Wind on a microphone makes a rumbly distorting sound. Foam windshields work indoors to reduce noise, but are not good for outdoor recording unless there is very little wind around. For outdoor recording in the wind, get an outdoor windscreen known as a deadcat.

# VIDEO RECORDING

There are a lot of things to keep in mind when recording video footage. Below are a few tips to help you record your video project.

Learn more about recording video from UC Berkeley: [https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/shooting\\_tips/](https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/shooting_tips/)



**Don't talk while the camera is rolling.** When the camera is rolling it picks up all ambient sound, not just what you're focusing on. And you won't be able to separate the unwanted audio out in the editing process.

**Hold your shots.** Hold shots for at least 15 seconds before you pan, zoom or go onto another shot. That way you'll be sure you have enough video of a scene to work with later when you do your editing.

**Don't excessively pan and zoom.** Don't constantly pan from side to side or zoom in and out with the camera. Instead start with a static, wide angle shot, and hold it for 15 seconds. Then make your move to zoom in or pan, and hold the next static shot for an additional 15 seconds.

**Get all the shots you need.** Make sure you get a variety of shots, even if you don't think you'll use them. They may come in handy. A-roll is the main subject of your shot, usually with audio like an interview. B-roll is the background video, often just video over which you'll lay an audio track.

**Be aware of depth of field.** Be aware of ways to increase the sense of depth within your shot, since video images are inherently flat. If you're shooting someone, try to include other objects in the background or foreground that give the viewer a sense of depth.

**Change angles and perspectives.** Look for interesting perspectives. Don't shoot everything from eye level – it's boring. For example, if you're shooting a scene like people walking on a sidewalk, hold the camera low to show their feet moving, rather than just shots of their faces. Or if you're shooting someone working at a computer terminal, take one shot from over their shoulder, then another that is a close-up of their hands and fingers using the keyboard and mouse, then a shot of their face looking at the screen. A good ratio is 50 percent closeups and extreme closeups, 25 percent medium shots, and 25 percent wide shots.

**Have people in your scenes.** Try to get people in your shots, which almost always makes the video more interesting. Don't do a static shot of a building – include people walking in and out to animate the scene.

**Use tripods for steady shots.** Use a tripod to get a steady shot, especially if you're shooting something that is not moving or an interview. If you don't have a tripod or you're doing a shot where you'll have to move quickly, use something to steady your camera, like leaning against a tree.





# INTERVIEW FOOTAGE

Interview footage is often the main element of a nonfiction video project. It's important to get it right. Below are tips to help you record your interview.

Learn more about recording interviews from UC Berkeley: [https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/shooting\\_tips/](https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/shooting_tips/)

**Scout the location.** Physically go to the location ahead of the shoot. What type of lighting is there? Is there electrical power? Is there ambient noise? What other problems can you anticipate?

**Pack extra batteries and memory cards.** You don't want the limitations of your batteries or memory to cut a shoot short, so bring plenty of both.

**Communicate with your interviewees.** You don't want to find that your talent has worn a shirt that doesn't work on camera. Send them an email with what to expect, clothing considerations, and contact information.

**Define a creative style for your production.** How will the interviews be lit? Will the interviewer be on camera as well? Will the subject look at the interviewer or the camera? Make sure the look is clearly defined and used across all interviews.

**Repeat the question in the answer.** Try to have your interviewee repeat the question in their response. For example if you ask, "What is your favorite color?" and their response is "Green", it doesn't give the editor much to go on. Instead a better response would be "My favorite color is green".

**Watch out for distracting noises.** Don't use a chair with wheels or that squeaks. Beware of nervous activity – like tapping fingers or jangling change. Stop your shoot, point it out, and then start shooting



again.

**Get multiple angles.** Having at least two cameras will make editing much easier and more dynamic. For example, if your subject had to pause to sneeze you can cut it out by switching to the other angle in editing.

**Shoot b-roll of the interviewee.** Capture this footage at the start or end of the interview. Typical shots include asking the interviewee to nod on camera, or getting shots of them at their job or other relevant activity.

**Don't use the zoom function.** Instead use care when framing and composing your shots and do any additional cropping and zoom work in the video editor.

**Frame and compose your shots.** Pay attention to your surroundings and don't be shy about rearranging furniture, moving things on a desk, pushing plants out of view, or asking the interviewee to change positions so you properly frame the shot. If you're having technical problems, stop the interview until you have fixed them.



**Leave noseroom and headroom.** Don't leave excessive empty space above a person's head – that's dead space. Put a little room above a person's head in a shot, but have more room below the person's face – space you can use to add text in editing. If you're shooting a person standing, get their entire body in the shot. And if the person is looking to the side, add space in the direction in which the person is looking.

# VIDEO EQUIPMENT

If you aren't able to access the equipment below, you can record video on a smartphone. *If you are recording video on your phone, you will need an external microphone for audio recording the scenes you are shooting.* Here is a list of basic video recording equipment you may want to consider.

**Video Camera.** What camera you choose depends on your budget, the type of shooting you're doing (static, stealth, etc.) and where you plan to showcase your film (web-only, theater, broadcast). You can shoot on anything from your smartphone to a DSLR to a top-of-line camera such as the Red Epic.

**Tripod.** A necessary piece of equipment to keep your footage looking steady and professional. Get a tripod with a fluid head for smoother looking pans.

**Camera Light.** Sometimes a nice pop of light from the camera can help fill in shadows. This is a nice accessory especially in a shoot where you might not have time for a full 3-point lighting set-up.

**Three-Point Lighting Kit.** You only need this if you're planning a lot of shooting inside. Creating a well-lit scene usually involves a 3-way lighting set-up.

**Microphone.** You cannot depend on the camera's microphone. They aren't strong enough. See the list of audio recording equipment for other options.

**Boom Pole.** A boom mic set-up comes in handy to capture audio from a group interview, crowd scenes or any situation where you need to gather professional audio quickly.

**Audio (XLR) Cables.** If you plan to use a professional audio set-up with your camera, you'll need XLR cables to go from your camera to the mic.

**Light Reflector.** A reflector is a tool that reflects existing light. Their

primary purpose is to fix shadows. If you are shooting outdoors during the day, a reflector can be used to fix odd shadows on the face, or prevent a backlit subject from becoming a silhouette.

**Lenses.** There are many options. The standard lens is among the easiest to use, as it provides a similar viewing angle to the human eye. A wide-angle lens capture more of the scene than the human eye can focus on. Telephoto lenses are designed to zoom in on very far-away subjects. Macro lenses are specialized lenses that excel at close-up scenes. A prime lens is the opposite of a zoom lens: it has a single focal length, so they can't zoom, but because they have fewer moving parts, they often produce higher-quality images.

**Extra Batteries.** Don't get caught without enough batteries out on a shoot.

**Memory Cards.** You'll need somewhere to record the footage you'll be shooting. One memory card will not be enough. They can fill up quickly.

**External Hard Drive.** A portable hard drive comes in handy if you plan to do a lot of shooting in the field and need to offload your footage from your camera's memory cards.



**Camera Bag.** You need something sturdy and weatherproof to put all your gear in.



# PRODUCTION



“ The story-making process enables us to simplify complex information into the core essence of understanding. ”

–Y. Gabriel,  
Storytelling in Organizations

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# EDITING OVERVIEW

Ever made a collage with paper? Editing audio is a lot of cutting, pasting, and moving parts to form a whole. You first have to find the best audio for each moment, clean it, and then arrange and layer the different audio elements to create a pleasing soundtrack that tells the story.

## SOFTWARE

There are several powerful, free editing tools available for both Windows and Macs that should cover all your audio and video editing needs. If you decide to spend money on editing software, do your research to find the best software for the price.

### AUDIO

**Audacity.** Audacity is a powerful multi-track recording app, and it's easy to use. Audacity allows you to record live audio, record from your desktop, convert old tapes/records, edit various formats, cut/copy/splice/mix audio, add effects, change speed/pitch, and much more. Despite all the professional-level set of features that Audacity has, the simplicity of its user interface is one of its most impressive features.

**Levelator.** Levelator is software that adjusts the audio levels within your audio file for variations from one speaker to the next. It is a compressor, normalizer and limiter in one package. The user interface is as easy as it gets: drag-and-drop any WAV or AIFF file onto Levelator's application window, and a few moments later you'll get a version with improved sound.



## VIDEO

**Lightworks.** Lightworks is considered one of the best free editing programs out there. It features a beautiful user interface, a timeline, multi-camera support, and real-time video effects and easy-to-use trimming tools. Some features are easy, but it is a complex system and the support documents aren't very comprehensive.

**Blender.** Blender is more than an editor, it's an opensource, 3D animation suite, which allows for modeling, rendering, motion tracking, and more. On the video editing side, there are a ton of features, which means you can produce complex video projects. For the amateur video editor, all the functionality that's available can be a bit overwhelming.

**WeVideo.** WeVideo is one of the most widely used cloud-based video editing applications. This means you can produce and edit videos from an online interface. Most of the editing features are based on a drag-and-drop design and are very simple. Basic editing is free, but if you want access to more sophisticated editing features you will have to upgrade to their paid plans.

**VSDC Free Video Editor.** In addition to supporting nearly every major video format, the program offers advanced video effects, including object transformation and color correction, as well as advanced audio effects like volume correction. If you want technical support, you need to pay.

**Avidemux.** Avidemux is primarily Windows-based, and gives you options for basic editing. This includes easy clip splicing, as well as a host of filters. The editing tools are robust enough to ensure that your videos look professional. The application features an extensive online Wiki for an added layer of support as you learn to edit with the software.

# EDITING AUDIO

The tips below should help you as you edit your project.

**Mix the audio.** Most audio projects use two or more tracks. Mixing is the blending of those tracks together. Remember to balance your levels. For example, your project might include a vocal track and music. You want to lower the volume of the music when the vocal is playing.

**Always dissolve or fade new tracks.** A new sound appearing out of nowhere is very jarring for the listener. Even a short fade-in can make the sound enter more naturally. Use dissolves when one sound is leaving at the same time another is entering.

**Don't forget room tone and background noise.** If you are creating an audio track for a scene, it won't sound natural unless you include a recording from the space that the scene is taking place. It may seem silly to add what seems like silence in an empty space, but it is absolutely essential for setting a scene.



**Edit dialogue.** Dialog editing often involves creative decision-making. You may need to edit out “uhs”, stutters, distracting pauses, vocal stumbles, and sometimes words or phrases that you deem unnecessary, or unsuitable. Done well, these kinds of edits can make a tentative, halting speaker sound smooth and focused, but done poorly, it could potentially sound unnatural, so take care in your choices.

**Minimize differences in audio clips in the same scene.**

Sometimes you'll find that the audio in different shots from the same

scene have differences in the background ambience. For example, if you shoot a conversation in a city park, and the shoot lasts all day, you may notice that some shots have more traffic noise in the background because of rush hour. You'll need to edit more "rush hour" background noise into the quieter clips, so that all the clips sound the same. Usually, the shot with the highest ambient background noise level dictates the noise level for other clips.

**Make sure your audio edit points aren't noticeable.** Editing audio clips in a sequence mainly involves finding good edit points that sound natural. Audio edit points are often more effective when they are offset from the corresponding video edits. Although you may set your initial audio and video edit points in the same place to create a quick rough cut, editing your audio more finely may involve moving your audio edit points to overlap the end of the video cuts. Those overlapping frames will turn an otherwise obvious cut into a much smoother transition.

**Crop out or trim the silence.** At the beginning and end of clips and sometimes at points in the middle, you'll have periods of near silence when no one is speaking. To make your recording as 'neat' and professional sounding as possible, you'll want to remove these "silent" sections.

**Normalize the audio.** In general, you'll want the audio of all your scenes to be the same volume – making quiet speakers louder and louder voice more quiet. This requires normalizing the audio on all your clips so they match.

The first audio edit should be one for the ear. Make sure it sounds good. The first time you edit a story will be the only time for you to hear it the way a user would. It should be well-paced, with strong transitions and have a strong storyline – with a surprise or "aha" moment. More information can be found in Editorial Training by NPR: <http://training.npr.org/audio/the-ear-training-guide-for-audio-producers/>

### What to listen for during an edit for the ear:

- When did I tune out or get bored?
- When was I confused?
- When was the audio hard to hear or distracting?
- Is any audio misleading?
- When did the story make clear, powerful points?
- Is a key point missing?
- Does the structure of the story make sense?
- Does the tension build through their piece?
- When did something feel off about the audio levels or the story?
- Were there moments that were harsh to the ear or contradictory?
- When did I smile, laugh or feel happy?



### How to use the script during an edit for the ear (see Storytelling):

- Make quick, simple marks along the margins: for example, mark an “?” near a section that confused you, then quickly look up again
- Add a checkmark beside a moment you liked
- If you tuned out or got bored, note roughly when that happened.
- If one section raises a clear question, note it – “Why”?

### Four things not to do when editing for the ear:

**1** Don't line edit. Don't worry yet about grammar, word choice or line-byline writing. Save that for later edits.

**2** Don't get distracted by one glaring flaw. If you focus too much on one thing you hear, you'll miss other parts of the piece. Just note it, and then return to it.

**3** Don't explain away problems you hear. For example, let's say some audio is hard to hear, and your first instinct is, "I couldn't hear that." But what if, almost instantaneously, your next thought is, "Well, maybe it's clear enough. . ."? After all, we're all busy, and we can only solve so many problems at a time. Trust your first instinct! Listeners only have one chance to hear a story, and it's likely they have distractions while listening. If you, while listening closely, couldn't hear something well, there's no way a listener — going about her life, driving a car, walking down the street — will hear it.

**4** Don't read the script during the first edit. Reading along becomes a crutch. You think you're reading and listening at the same time, but you're crippling your ability to experience the story as a listener would. The temptation to stop listening is too great.

## EDITING VIDEO

Editing video is a mixture of visual and audio editing. Be sure to read the audio editing tips to get a fuller picture of what is required for audio and learn more about video editing with the tips below.



**Start with a rough cut.** Put the footage you want to use in chronological order in the time line, without much editing. Once you have the general timeline created, then you trim each clip, cut out all the unusable shots, and add alternate footage.

**Avoid jump cuts.** You should cut out moments when interviewees say “um” and “uh” and stumble over their words. When you cut those moments out, you should layer b-roll over these edited moments. If you do this carefully, it will look like the speaker said things perfectly without a hitch.

**Vary your shots.** Don’t use the same shot for the entire video, vary it with other angles. This can be as simple as recording your interview with two cameras and switching between them.

**Time your cuts well.** Your shots should last longer than 1 second. Static shots can last between 2 and 10 seconds. If there is a lot going on in the shot or somebody is talking, it can be longer. Switch between shot lengths, some longer shots and then some shorter ones.

**Cut on motion.** Motion distracts the eye from noticing editing cuts. When cutting, try to do it when the subject is in motion. For example, cutting from a turning head to an opening door is smoother than cutting from a still head to a opening door.

**Add music and sound effects.** Footage can bring a completely different message across if it is accompanied with appropriate music. Test different kinds of music tracks for your video and “feel” the difference.

**Add lower third titles to your interviewees.** These titles are shown at the bottom part of the screen when someone is talking to introduce that person and give more information about them. Be sure to use legible fonts in easily read sizes for the titles.

**Think about why you are using the shots.** Each shot you put on your timeline should have a purpose. If what is being heard doesn't match what is being seen, fix it. Only use the best shots.

**Use transitions with a purpose.** Different transitions should be used for different purposes. Don't always fade in and fade out of everything. Don't use crazy transitions. Subtlety is the key.

**Correct the color.** Color correction is usually the last step before a video is completed. You can use color correction to make the colors in your video appear more accurate, or you can use it to alter the mood of the film with color filters. Similar to a good soundtrack, well-colored video can complement and help set the mood of the story that you are trying to tell.

**Be invisible.** If your viewer is thinking about the editing, it means something was jarring. The goal is to make your editing invisible.



# INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

It is important to understand the laws governing the use of images, music and audio created by others. It's simplest to use images that clearly state that they are public domain (see below) or that they can be used under a Creative Commons license, meaning that the creator has given permission for others to use their work under certain circumstances. Wikipedia and federal resources like Library of Congress are very helpful. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>.

Music and sound re-use are very restricted, so be sure to use care when choosing assets to use in your stories. Here is an overview of music copyright issues: <https://ucomm.wsu.edu/music-copyright/>.



## YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE

You are the sole owner of your content. As such, you are responsible for being in compliance with Intellectual Property (IP) law. Ask yourself: Am I hindering the artist's ability to monetize this material by using it? If the answer is "yes," you are likely violating copyright.

## PUBLIC DOMAIN

The only time you do not need to secure special permission is if an asset is your original material or when it's in the public domain. Any song or musical work published in 1922 or earlier is in the Public Domain in the U.S. No sound effects recordings are in the Public Domain in the U.S., no matter how old those recordings are. Luckily there are many people who let others use their recordings for free. Several are listed on the next page. If audio you are using is not in the Public Domain, you need to obtain a license to use it.

## ROYALTY FREE

Permission must still be granted for Royalty Free recordings and “Royalty Free” does not necessarily mean FREE – often you must pay a license fee.

## FAIR USE

Fair use is a set of exceptions that limit the power of copyright laws and the use of images or audio is deemed “fair.” To determine “fair use,” several factors are taken into account.

- The purpose and character of its use – whether it is being used in a for-profit product or for nonprofit educational purposes
- The nature of the copyrighted work – facts and ideas are not protected by copyright—only the way they are expressed
- The amount and substance of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole – in general, the less used in relation to the whole, the more likely the use will be considered “fair”
- The effect of the use upon the profitability of the copyrighted work – do not infringe on the original creator’s ability to sell their work
- Acknowledgement of copyrighted source – it is best practice to acknowledge the source of the audio content

This Fair Use Checklist can help you decide if your use of the music, audio, or other content is considered “fair use”: <https://copyright.columbia.edu/basics/fair-use/fair-use-checklist.html>.

All of these sites have different requirements for using their music and sound effects. Be sure to pay attention to what those requirements are.

**The Free Sound Project.** A collaborative database of Creative Commons Licensed sounds. You can also upload your own creations to the database. <http://www.freesound.org>

**Bargus Sound Library.** A small sound library of high-quality royalty free sounds. <http://www.bargus.org/soundlibrary.html>

**The Recordist Sound Library.** A collection of free sound effects in MP3 format for nonprofit use. <http://creativesounddesign.com/the-recordist-free-sound-effects>

**SoundGator.** Free high-quality mp3 sound effects in various categories. The database has more than 400 wav sounds to download. <http://www.soundgator.com>

**Sound Effects+.** Free high-quality sound effects recorded and designed by a team of audio professionals. <http://www.soundeffectsplus.com>

**SoundJay.** Professional, high quality sound effects. <http://www.soundjay.com>

**MuseOpen.** Provides access to recordings, sheet music, and textbooks to the public for free. The music collection is classical. <https://musopen.org>

**Incompetech.** The site was created by composer Kevin MacLeod and has music categorized by genre and feel. <http://incompetech.com/music>

**MobyGratis.** Moby has made over 150 tracks from his catalog of music available to license for free, via a simple online application system. <http://www.mobygratis.com>

**BeatPick.** A great selection of licensed music and if you are using it in a non-commercial or nonprofit production it's free. <http://www.beatpick.com>

**PublicDomain4U.** Old music that is now in the public domain, but also more modern music that is free with artist permission. <http://publicdomain4u.com>

**CCmixer.** Ccmixer offers mashups of public domain songs under a Creative Commons license. <http://dig.ccmixer.org>

# PUBLISHING YOUR PROJECT

On completion of your project, it can be uploaded or linked directly to the Stories from Main Street online collection: <https://museumonmainstreet.org/stories>. But it should be shared across multiple platforms in order to reach the widest audience possible. Below are the steps for some of the most popular websites but you can find more recommendations here: <http://www.museweb.us/finding-a-home-for-your-story/>.

## YOUTUBE

If your project is a video, you can upload it to YouTube. YouTube is the largest and most popular online, free video sharing platform in the world. Once your video project is created, you can upload it to the site. To upload a video to YouTube, you need the following elements:

**Video File.** This is the finished video project you intend to upload.

**Video Title.** Titles contain valuable information to help viewers find your videos in search results. Include keywords your audience is likely to use when looking for videos like yours. Well-written titles can be the difference between someone watching and sharing your video, or scrolling right past it – so try to create titles that appeal to your viewers' interests and sensibilities, but keep it short. If your title is really long, it can get cut off.

**Tags.** A tag is a keyword – words that people would use to search for your video or the content in your video. Tags will not only help YouTube categorize and learn more about your video; they will also increase the chance of your video appearing in the right sidebar of other videos with related content. Be succinct with your video's tags. You don't need to describe every possible topic, word, or idea; instead, if you only had a few words to tell a friend about your video, what would you say?



**Description.** The description field is incredibly useful for helping viewers find, learn about, and decide if they’d like to watch your videos. You can think about the description as two parts – what viewers see before they click “Show more” and what they see after. Consider prioritizing the first few lines of your description to describe your video because it’s what viewers will see first.

**Creating a User Account.** In order to upload a video, you must first sign up for a free YouTube account using your name and email address.

### Basic Steps of Uploading a Video

- Sign into your YouTube account
- Click on “Upload” at the top of the page
- Before you start, you can choose the video privacy settings
- Select the video you’d like to upload from your computer
- As the video is uploading, you can edit the basic title, description, and advanced settings of the video
- Click Publish to finish uploading a public video to YouTube. If you set the video privacy setting to Private or Unlisted, just click “Done” to finish the upload or click Share to privately share your video
- Learn more: <https://creatoracademy.youtube.com>

## SOUNDCLOUD

If your project is an audio project, you can upload it to SoundCloud.

SoundCloud is the world’s leading social sound platform where anyone can create sounds and share them everywhere. Once your audio project is created, you can upload it to the site. To upload an audio file to Soundcloud, you need the following elements:



**Image.** Any images up to 2mb in size. For the best results, use a .jpg or .png of at least 800 pixels x 800 pixels. Square images look best for track artwork.

**Track Title.** Clear track titles help your fans know exactly what they're listening to. Track titles must be between 1 and 100 characters.

**Tags.** Tags help identify what kind of sound your track is (whether it is spoken voice, hip-hop, etc.). This makes it easier for your listeners to find it in search results on SoundCloud.

**Description.** Write a description for your track, and let your fans learn more about what they are listening to. You can include a transcript and link to your collaborators.

**Privacy Settings.** You have two options for how you want to share it with other users: public and private. Public means that anyone can listen to your track, and it will show up on your SoundCloud profile page and your followers' Streams. Private is exclusive, giving you control over who has access to your tracks.

**Sharing.** If you have your Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr accounts connected to SoundCloud, you can choose to share your upload to them automatically by checking the boxes next to their icons.

## Creating a User Account

You can use your email address, Google+ or Facebook to create an account. Signing up is free, and provides you with unlimited listening, as well as great creator features, such as the ability to upload 180 minutes of your own content.

## Basic Steps of Uploading an Audio File

- Sign into your SoundCloud account
- Click on "Upload" at the top of the page
- On the Upload page, you can either click 'Choose file to upload' or drag and drop the file into the screen
- Once you have selected your audio file, it will immediately start uploading and SoundCloud will transcode it to be streamable
- While your track is uploading, you can add any additional track information, privacy settings, and sharing settings.
- Learn more: <http://help.soundcloud.com>

“ The purpose of a storyteller is not to tell you how to think, but to give you questions to think upon.”

–Brandon Sanderson





