



OPTIMISE YOUR AUDIO RECORDING

Before you start:

- Get the equipment that is most suitable for your needs. Contact Margaret Drummond for all bookings at mdrum@waikato.ac.nz or ext: 5171.
- If it is your first time using the equipment, book it a day earlier than you need it and practise recording before your interviews.
- Always do a sound check at the venue immediately before your interview – some background noises only show up on a recording.
- Place the recorder for best sound – usually on a table part way between the interviewer and interviewee so that both parts of the conversation can be heard equally and the equipment can be checked unobtrusively. Lapel microphones frequently turn off when bumped, but also pick up unwanted noises, such as laughing and coughing, that mask other speakers' contributions.
- Check recorder settings. Turn off the voice activated (VCVA) setting. It is not designed for interviews or focus groups.
- Turn volume to highest setting when recording to give the widest possible volume range for listening to your audio files later.
- Make sure you have fresh batteries in the recorder and take spares with you.

Conditions for good recording

- Exclude as much background noise as possible, including noise from outside or in the next room. It will sound much louder on your recording. Noises to look out for include: TV, radio, kitchen/laundry appliances, traffic, air-con, heater, computers, school staff rooms, dishes banging, lawn mower, playground noise or paper rustling.
- Place the recorder on a book or notepad to absorb 'tabletop noises'.
- Record indoors if possible, if not, protect the microphone against the wind.

Recording:

- To check that the device is recording, look at the numbers on the screen. They should be 'ticking over'. Don't push the 'record' button again, as this may activate the 'pause' function on some models of audio recorders.
- To save time later and to easily keep track of your interviews, start at the very beginning of the recording with name of interviewee(s), place of interview and their role. For example, 'This is Ruth Kapoor interviewing Helena Kara at Truly Excellent School on the 3rd of December, 2009'.

- Check that your recording has been successful as soon as the interview finishes. This gives you an opportunity to make notes while the material is fresh if there has been a problem.

Recording group interviews

- Group interviews can present some extra challenges. An external microphone near the quietest person can help keep overall volume levels more even. Check its batteries and turn it on!
- Notes are very important with a group interview as people often speak over each other. You might want to ask each person to say their name the first time they speak as a reminder of who they are when you listen to the recording later.

Making the best of it

- If there are unexpected noises or if your participants are quiet speakers, you might paraphrase or repeat important comments for the recording. ('Okay, so you didn't like the way that happened?')
- If you have to raise your voices to hear each other during the interview, then you will have difficulty hearing the audio file. If you have any doubts about the sound quality make notes of main points during the interview, if appropriate, or immediately afterwards.
- If people change position or get quieter during the interview you may need to quietly change the position of the recorder or microphone.
- Save these files to your computer straight away. Back them up elsewhere (e.g. Staffhome, CDRom) depending on how long you have agreed to keep the data in your ethics agreement.

Sharing the learning and new possibilities

- If you make a great discovery about this equipment or something works particularly well for you, please tell us so we can share that with others. Don't assume we know it all - it's just not possible with this technology and a collaborative approach helps us all to learn.
- Ask us about using DSS Lite to listen to your audio files, even if you do not have the full DSS licensed software.
- Ask us about recording digital audio files on your iPod, iTouch or iPhone.

All enquiries to Margaret Drummond at mdrum@waikato.ac.nz or ext: 5171.