

## CREATING AN AUDIO SLIDESHOW

“Don’t tell me. Show me.”

### Introduction

If you are a good writer, you already have what it takes to tell stories in other media: a sense for news and story; a sharp mind; a compassionate heart; persistence and passion; keen observational and analytical skills; and a sense of drama and “the moment.”

“Still images elicit a visceral response. They can be enhanced by text captions that are great for the basic *who*, *what* and *where* of an image. The addition of audio, then, takes the picture and text caption to another level, where image, text and audio work together to create an experience that neither could produce on its own.”

– *Brian Storm, MediaStorm*

### Audio

- Audio is intimate. It conveys what text and images can’t: emotion, humor. Sound can transport you.
- Audio gives your subject a voice.
- Paint a picture with sounds as well as words.
- “Create a virtual reality for your listener. Make them feel like they’re wherever you are, not reading the postcard you sent.” – *J. Carl Gantner*

### Gathering Audio

- Equipment
  - The recorder
  - Headphones
  - Batteries
  - Get your gear in order, know how to operate it. You only get one shot at getting audio.
  - DTC checkout policies
- General Tips
  - Your brain is an amazing noise filter. Your recorder isn’t. Close your eyes and listen. Watch out for camera clicks.
  - Cover your bases. Record a *lot* of ambient/natural sound. Do multiple takes. Record 20 times more than the length of your show.
  - Make sure your gear is in order. Extra batteries.

- Natural and Ambient Sound
  - Background noise (ambient sound) and sound effects (natural sound)
  - Use to show action.
  - You'll only need a few seconds of natural sound, but record at least 15 seconds of it.
  - Record at least a minute, preferably more, of ambient sound in each location, including where you interview.
  - Get close to it with recorder. But also record medium distance and far.
  - Gather 5 seconds of "junk" audio before and after each recording. These buffers are called "handles" and will come in handy when you're editing.
  - Your sound must be authentic. Ethics.
  
- Interview Sound
  - Different from just recording for transcription.
  - Before you start taping, write down basic facts: name, spelling, pronunciation, location, date.
  - On tape, start by having subject state name, title what they do.
  - Get close with recorder, 4" or so.
  - Shut up. Don't trample over the audio with your own voice. Make eye contact and nod instead.
  - Don't let the subject hold the mic.
  - Watch out for "handling" noise.
  - Find a quiet, "soft" room.
  - Listen more, talk less. Don't fear silence.
  - Be confident with gear. If you are constantly checking equipment, your source's confidence will erode.
  - Wear headphones!
  - Ask subject to repeat what s/he said if a noisy disturbance.
  - Reassure subject that s/he can start over if s/he gets tongue-tied.
  - Avoid yes or no questions. Ask open-ended questions.
    - Tell me the story of ...
    - Explain what you are doing now.
    - Talk about your best/worst/..."
    - Describe for me...
    - Give me a sense of...
    - Could you tell me why?
    - Why?
    - What happened?
    - Then what happened?
    - Then what happened?
    - What did you see?

- What went through your mind?
- What would you say to someone who...
- What did that tell you?
- Why did you care about that?
- How did/would you respond (to something)?
- What makes you care about that?
- Why was that important?
- What picture remains most vivid?
- Imagine you're back at scene; how did you feel?
- What did you see?
- Describe the scene.
- What stands out the most?
- What did it smell like?
- What are the consequences?
- What's the best/worst possible scenario?
- What do you fear?
- How did/does that affect you?
- How did you deal with that?
- How do you know?
- What went thru your mind?
- What did he/she/they say?
- What were the options?
- How would you describe that?

### Editing Audio

- \_ Make copies of your audio files. Never edit original files.
- \_ Keep your audio files organized. Find a consistent naming/filing system.
- \_ Place all sound files for one project in one folder, slugged with the interviewee's name and the date of interview.
- \_ Audio formats. Ours will come in as .WMA (Windows Media). Newer Macs will convert them automatically to an editable AIFF file. We'll edit in GarageBand.
- \_ Bring all your audio clips into GarageBand and listen to all of it. Write down specifically what's being discussed and note the time stamps of important material. Jot down what photos might relate to that sequence.
- \_ When you're done editing, export the finished file as an MP3.

## **Photography**

### Gathering Photos

- \_ Shooting for a slideshow is like shooting a photo essay for print, but with more pictures.

- Is the story linear (chronological)? Then think sequence: beginning, middle, end. If not, how will you organize your photos in a logical way?
- Photos must be high quality: sharp, well-focused, well-composed. Get variety, in angle, lighting, distance from subject, horizontal/vertical.
- For a 2-3 minute slideshow, you'll need 20 to 35 great photos.
- Get a mix of wide-angle shots, medium shots, close-ups and tight detail shots.
- Shots for beginning of show: set the scene, introduce topic and main character
- Shots for middle of show: develop the topic and character with details.
- Shots for end of show: Wrap up the story, what does it all mean, what's next, what does this story point to.
- Think about the "cover" or "title" shot. This will be the teaser thumbnail.

### Editing Photos

- Make copies! Never overwrite your original image.
- In PhotoShop, crop, adjust red-eye, adjust brightness.
- Decide on sequence of photos. Rename photos in numerical order (*01farm, 02sunrise, 03barn, 04fence, 05cow...*). No spaces, no punctuation.
- Decide if you want to make a title page or section title pages, with text on photo.
- Prep image for Soundslides:
  - Set resolution to 72 dpi. Image Size > Resolution > 72 dpi
  - Resample Image > Bicubic Sharper
  - Constrain Proportions
  - Width > 680 px
  - File > File Info. Soundslides pulls caption info from here (you can edit later in Soundslides). Include author (photographer), copyrighted work/notice ("2009 by Jill Van Wyke")
  - Save As > .jpg, quality setting "High." (Soundslides will compress.)
  - Do not "Save for Web"
- Save all your images for one slideshow in one folder. Don't put any other images in that folder. Soundslides imports folders, not individual images.
- Remember where you put it. Make a parent folder with two folders in it, one for your edited images, one your edited audio.

## **Soundslides**

### Producing in Soundslides

- Optimum length of a slideshow is 2-3 minutes.
- Five to six seconds per photo. 20-35 photos total.
- The quality of your photos and your audio determine length.

- Look through your pictures first, then edit your audio. Your photos will give you an idea of how the sound needs to flow. What audio do you need to leave in or take out, based on your photos?
- Your audio must support your photos must support your audio. The audio commentary should match the picture being shown. It's confusing for viewer if it doesn't. Match sound to pictures.
- Avoid redundancy. Vary images by close-ups, medium, detail, wide shots, different angles.
- Use a quick series of stills to indicate motion/action.
- If you have someone speaking for 15 seconds, try to use three appropriate photos for that 15 seconds.

### Captions

- Viewers should concentrate on images, not captions.
- Keep them short. You don't need time, date, place in every caption (very different from print captions).
- You can omit captions entirely where the image, in the context of the story is self-explanatory.
- But don't omit all captions. Briefly identify anyone speaking in audio, and anyone introduced in show for the first time.
- Test it: Do you have time to read the entire caption before the show advances to the next frame?
- Why bother with captions at all? They are key in an all-digital, metadata-driven search universe. You can't search pixels. You search text.

### Final Thoughts

- Try. Fail. Try again. Fail harder.
- The best way to learn to write is to read. The best way to learn audio is to listen.
- Practice is the path to perfection.