To access our full set of Into Film mini filmmaking guides visit intofilm.org

- DEVELOPMENT (3 guides)
- PRE-PRODUCTION (4 guides)
- PRODUCTION (5 guides)
  1. LIGHT A FILM SET
  2. GET SET UP
  3. MASTER THE CAMERA
  4. RECORD SOUND
  5. STAY SAFE AND OBSERVE SET ETIQUETTE
- POST-PRODUCTION (2 guides)
- EXHIBITION AND DISTRIBUTION (2 guides)
Sound is easily the most overlooked aspect of filmmaking, but is just as important as the visuals. Sound can powerfully affect an audience and has a huge impact on how they interpret what they see on screen.

The importance of sound

Film soundtracks can have four elements: music, sound effects, voice and silence, which all contribute to the meaning and storytelling. Sound, particularly music, can set the mood and inform the audience about the genre of the film: a horror film will have a very different soundtrack to a comedy.

Sound can sometimes tell the audience more about what is going on in the film than the visuals do. It can affect how an image is interpreted and also what an audience actually thinks it can see. Imagine a scene showing a flower blowing in the breeze in a field, accompanied by a calming classical music soundtrack. How would watching this make you feel? Now imagine the same visuals accompanied by the sound of an approaching lawnmower and funeral-march music. The visuals are the same but the sound dramatically changes the impression given to the audience.
Activity: What can you hear?

To reinforce the importance of sound, play a sequence from your favourite film and assess the four elements of the soundtrack. It might help to close your eyes so you can focus only on the audio.

**Music**
How would you describe the music? What mood does it convey? Is there an increase or decrease in volume or tempo and, if so, why?

**Sound effects**
What sound effects occur during the sequence? Do they simply represent an action or do they contribute to the drama of the sequence?

**Voice**
What does a character’s voice – accent, use of expression, volume – express about who they are?

**Silence**
Why do you think silence was used in the film? Is silence used to create drama, atmosphere or tension? What might be going on during this period of silence?

Consider how this scene would be different if any of the above elements were missing.
How will you include sound in your film?

As a filmmaker, you have three options when it comes to sound.

1. **Record none of your sound live and create a digital soundtrack.** This can be made up of sound effects, musical loops and a pre-recorded narration. These elements can be put together on a computer/tablet using digital audio recording and editing software/apps. Many animations are made this way. It’s easy to replicate this by recording a narration explaining what is happening on a USB microphone. You can then add relevant digital sound effects which can easily be downloaded for free from the internet. You can also create and digitally record your own sound effects to add into your software, the art of which is called **Foley**.

   Recording a modern version of silent film is another type of film where you could use this technique. You would replace the narration with intertitles with the dialogue typed onto them. Sound in your film would be a musical soundtrack and sound effects. There are a variety of silent movie apps and software available that will help you create intertitles for your film.

2. **Record all of your sound live on set.** This is a good option for live-action filmmaking, because then you’ll definitely have some sort of soundtrack for your film. If you have a lot of dialogue in your live-action film, you really need to record it live. Recording dialogue separately and syncing the recording with your actors’ lip movements is extremely tricky!
3. **Use a combination of live-recorded sound and digital sound.** This is probably your best option for live-action filmmaking, as it gives you the chance to improve or enhance your live soundtrack. The easiest way to do this is to record all of your dialogue live and add digital sound effects and music in the edit.

Some sounds like footsteps, waves or crowd noises can be recorded live (Foley) or added in as sound effects when you edit. Music will need to be sourced or composed ahead of time, ready to be added in the edit. Remember any music you use will have to be **copyright-cleared.** If you are using music in your film, it’s best to compose it yourself rather than use a pre-existing piece of music. This will mean that you will own the copyright and won’t have to get permission or pay to use somebody else’s music in your film (see **Post-production: Add Sound Effects and Music** for more information on music copyright).

If you want to use some silence in your film, plan to record this on location so that you capture the correct atmosphere.
Activity: Become a Foley artist!

Foley artists work by using a variety of surfaces - concrete, sand, wood chippings, gravel etc. They also use different props which make noises like squeaks and bangs. Foley is used to enhance a particular sound which contributes to the storytelling, so that the audience can hear it more clearly.

Why not use the props suggested below to recreate these sound effects?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prop and technique</th>
<th>Sound effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rub a pair of old jeans together, slowly or quickly</td>
<td>A person walking or running</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flapping a pair of old jeans</td>
<td>Washing on a line, sails in the wind, a flag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snap celery or carrots</td>
<td>Twigs breaking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open a small umbrella quickly</td>
<td>Flying bats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop the bubble wrap</td>
<td>A crackling fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rustle plastic bags</td>
<td>A person walking on gravel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider collecting a variety of everyday objects and experimenting with them to see what sounds you can make. What sounds of other objects or occurrences can you replicate? Can you recreate the sound of a heartbeat or a door closing?

Top Tip

If you want to record Foley sounds, they will be of a higher quality if you use an external (plug in) microphone.
Recording live sound: equipment

The way you decide to use sound in your film will be greatly influenced by the equipment you have. Using just your camera’s built-in microphone may be acceptable if you can find a really quiet space and get close to the subject. Ideally though, you need a separate microphone and headphones, and a camera with sockets you can plug these into. Tablets usually only have one audio socket but you can get an attachment that you can plug both the headphones and microphone into.

- A handheld microphone is good for interviewing or can be held just out of shot for close-ups.

- For recording drama the traditional way, you’ll need a separate microphone on a **boom pole**. One of your crew will have to hold this up in the air above the action. It’s helpful to add a furry windshield to your microphone when you are filming outdoors. Make sure the person holding your boom pole holds it above their head with their hands spread wider than shoulder width. They should take regular breaks to stop their arms getting too tired and the boom dropping into shot.

- A basic tie clip, radio mic or **lavalier microphone** is the cheapest way to get good sound for interviews and presentations to camera. They are also great for when you are shooting a wide shot where a boom-mounted microphone would have to be in shot.
Headphones are essential so you can hear what is being recorded by the microphone – recording sound without them is a bit like filming with your eyes shut. When recording live sound, you should use headphones to check the microphone is switched on. You should also check that the sound can be heard and that there are no unwanted background sounds. If there is a sound level on the camera you are using, make sure the levels never go into the red. It’s always a good idea to record a few lines and play back a test recording to check sound levels are ok.

**Recording live sound: hints and tips**

- Before you begin, ask all of the cast and crew to be silent so you can identify any low level noise that could be picked up by the microphones. Electrical equipment such as humming or buzzing fans, computers or fridges should be turned off, as should mobile phones. Some microphones will even pick up the sound of a vibrating phone on ‘silent’.

- When you scouted for outdoor locations during your pre-production stage, you should have checked for distracting background noise like a busy road or railway lines. If you have no option but to include some very loud noise such as roadworks, always try and record a shot of this activity. It helps the viewer accept the noise if, at some point, they can see it in vision.

- When shooting begins, there should be absolute silence. No talking, no whispering and no fidgeting – all of these could be picked up by your microphones.
- Make sure the actors leave pauses between their lines and don’t talk over each other.

- Ambient sound of other people in the scene will be recorded separately. Actors who are the main focus mime their words in a separate take.

- It’s a good idea to record some ‘silence’: this is background noise if you are on location, or just the silence of a room if shooting indoors. This can be really useful for patching up gaps in the sound at the editing stage. Approximately 30 to 60 seconds is sufficient.

- If there is a sound problem, a loud bang or the sound cuts out, do not be afraid to stop filming and start the scene again.

The Into Film short film How to record sound (http://bit.ly/HowToRecordSound) gives a brief overview of sound recording.