

Chapter 11: Audio Engineering and Soundwriting in an Interdisciplinary Course

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3. Sample Audio Reflection by Benjamin Dufresne

Transcript

Ben Dufresne: The narration for this audio reflection was recorded entirely through my cellphone mic. Our podcast was recorded in a variety of different places with a variety of different equipment. This had a pretty significant impact on the way that our podcast ended up sounding. We used this difference very intentionally to make it clear when we were moving between locations as well as when we were moving between interview dialogue and narration. For the interview, we used the built-in mic on my phone. I set it down on Mr. Brown's desk, and we just went from there. That mic was picking up my voice as well as Shannon's and Mr. Brown's. We were all sitting at least 4 or 5 feet away, so the recording ended up including a lot of the acoustic reflections in the room in addition to the direct sound of our voices. The room itself was pretty much bare with low pile carpet on the floor, which means the reflections make a pretty noticeable difference even though they have a short decay since the room was small. That recording also included the sound of air conditioning blowing from the vents.

[Cut to scene from podcast]

Mr. Brown: The house, the mansion was built in 1853 to be the summer home of Joseph and Adelia Acklen. Adelia grew up here in Nashville, in downtown Nashville, was educated in downtown Nashville. Married first a gentleman by the name of Isaac Franklin. They were married for seven years. Then, upon his death left her an enormous estate.

[Cut back to Critical Reflection]

Dufresne: For the podcast narration, we used an AKG-P220 large diaphragm condenser mic. We put a pop filter over it to reduce plosives and had Shannon speak within a foot of the microphone. We recorded the narration in an acoustically treated practice room on the first floor of the Hitch building. Because of this, our narration is very dry sounding. The acoustic reflections are very minimal, and the speech is clearer.

Another reason why the narration is clearer than the interview audio is the file type. My phone saves the audio it records as .m4a, a file that uses lossy compression. While the sound quality of .m4a files is higher than .mp3, it still uses perceptual encoding to get rid of any sound information that it assumes the human ear won't perceive, especially high frequencies. This leads to the voices sounding slightly muffled. We recorded the narration into Pro Tools then exported the takes as .wav files for Jackson to edit in Logic. Wav is an uncompressed file type, so the audio would not have the high end cut and the voice is more intelligible.

In addition to piecing together and cleaning up both sources as dialogue as well as putting it together with sound effects and the intro clip, Jackson also made some edits to the sound of the project as a whole. He put compresses on every track as well as one master compressor that affects all the tracks. He also used EQ to shape the sound of the narration. He made a pretty deep cut in the frequencies below 100 Hz to get rid of any hum from the background. He also made a slight boost for the frequencies between 100 and 500 Hz and a very slight attenuation for the frequencies between 500 Hz and 10,000 Hz. Here's a clip of the original narration.

[Cut to scene from podcast with flat narration and no sound effects]

Shannon Harper: Killed in plane and automobile crashes and burned to death in a house fire.

[Cut back to Critical Reflection]

Dufresne: And here's the same section in the final podcast audio.

[Cut to scene from podcast with dynamic narration and sound effects]

Harper: Killed in plane and automobile crashes and burned to death in a house fire.