

Sound

Sound is very important.

Sound is more important than picture (really).

- it can make you angry: you can watch a fuzzy TV, but listening to really quiet/feedbacky sound will annoy or turn off the audience

- it's a lot harder to fix in post

- you can get away with using just the audio, if it all goes wrong or if you find it works better. Can't often do that the other way round...

Audio's also good for storytelling

- where are these people? What time of day, etc?

Walter Murch's books on editing and sound are awesome if you care about this stuff. Sound design can happily absorb your life.

What kind of mic (or: why your band's mic probably won't do)

Dynamic mics are those used by bands, for roving mics at events (good sound, no power demands, but bad at range)

Condenser mics are those mostly used in video – they have an amplifier inside, so they pick up sound at long range, but need power to run. Very sensitive – you can't hold them or it'll hear your hand rustle. They break easily, too.

Where are these mics picking up from?

Pickup pattern affects how you use the mics.

'Shotgun' mics – cardioid, so called for its 'heart-shaped' pickup pattern. You may recognize the furry covers they live in (to reduce wind noise)

Can use these, in order of niceness of sound:

- on a boom pole. Best, but usually impractical
- on a mic stand (careful with cables)
- on the camera (have to aim)

Monitor the sound! You'll pick up a lot in between you and the subject, and behind the subject. Recognise the power of your Batman hearing (if someone's in front of a fridge, etc).

Omnidirectional: most lapel mics.

Good, can flip upside down to get rid of plosive sounds (Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers) and can cope with the mic moving a bit. Decent warm, close-up sound from a lapel mic: but they pick up clothes rustle, cut out, get interference (if they're on a legal channel at all).

The best is to have multiple sources: shotgun plus a lapel, maybe – and mix them.

Monitor the sound! Did we say that already?

(Some other kinds of mic to mention: boundary: in a room, not often used; there's also the in-camera mic: not as bad as you'd imagine from a technical standpoint, but you'll just listen to yourself clicking buttons on the camera so you should mostly discount this source of sound).

Pay attention to where you're recording sound: this you can do for free. And you should.

Separate sound?

Good quality but a pain to sync (you can do this electronically, used to be by a clapper board)

Keep the batteries in there even if you're running an external recorder off mains: if the power goes you lose the file.

Only sound?

Why record video?

Audio is intimate. You can listen to audio when you're jogging and when you're falling asleep.

Audio is much easier: you're doing one difficult thing rather than three or four at once.

Audio is not limiting. Listen to radiolab podcasts to explore the range of stuff you can do with sound.