

## American Motion Picture Society

home of the world's longest-running non-commercial film festival

[Home](#) [Cinema](#) [Student](#) [Film Talk](#) [Tech Talk](#) [Club Talk](#) [Tools/Links](#) [Festivals](#) [About Us](#)

# SOUND THINKING



Britain's [IAC website](#) has a lively, often amusing discussion forum. Getting the writers arguing about soundtracks generated some helpful notes:

- ☞ "Our ears are less tolerant to mistakes than our eyesight, so sound is critical to a good film."
- ☞ "Record the sound that you want. But ... more importantly! Don't record the sound that you don't want."
- ☞ "Most amateur camcorders have poor sound, using a very cheap mic with little bandwidth given to the track being written to the tape, so the sound is extremely inferior. An improvement is to use a more expensive mic plugged into the camera - I would suggest a \$100-150 job - anything above this will have no more improvement as the camera is already beyond its audio limit. Professional or even semi-pro cameras will be better at recording a higher quality sound, and a more expensive mic MIGHT pay off, but don't go over \$700."  
[Webmaster: Prices in English pounds were converted to approximate prices in dollar in mid December 2008.]
- ☞ "Look at the [Sennheiser](#) catalogue."
- ☞ "Treat the sound shoot as seriously as the picture shoot."
- ☞  "Monitor the location sound all the time. Use headphones. Listen for levels, quality, interference and extraneous sounds. Whenever possible have a dedicated sound person. It is not easy to shoot the picture and manage and monitor the sound at the same time. Using a boom, definitely needs a sound person."
- ☞ "We approached the singer as closely as possible. We used a monitor to check that the mic and its wind gag were not in shot. We bought a mixer for about \$150. Why? Because we wanted to have total control of our mic. before the sound was going to be recorded. Using earphones we could choose the right angle for the mic. and get the best out of the desired sound using the tone control knobs. "
- ☞ "Get the microphone as close as possible to the subject - (but not in shot). Use off-camera microphones wherever possible. Use headphones whilst filming to hear the sound recorded. Fit all microphones with a good wind gag."
- ☞ "It may take months to get the ideal quality of sound when making film of about 20 minutes. "
- ☞ "People have been surprised when I have said that I spend more time working on the sound than the pictures!"
- ☞ "Expect to spend at least as much time on the sound edit/mix as on the picture edit. Many NLEs have sound programs that will integrate with the general edit program for sound sweetening."
- ☞ "For narrations get someone who sounds good and can vary delivery and emote, expect to have several takes with different emphasis/pacing."
- ☞ "One of the most noticeable problems is that every time an edit is made the sound jumps up or down in level, drawing attention to the cut. So each picture edit should have a level adjustment made to the sound. If your software permits a crossfade may need to be applied to the edit point - in and out."
- ☞ "Keep the ambient sound, even - at an almost subliminal level - it rounds out the sound mix."
- ☞ "Choose suitable music of a high quality for use in appropriate places, and not as wallpaper. Make sure that music is carefully faded up and down when commentary or voice-over is used. Using music effectively is an art in itself. It can be very good if the music is specially written, but you need a tame composer to succeed here."
- ☞ "Sound must be balanced. Ambient sound and music must compliment the voice-over, not distract. Remember sound and vision are in partnership - they are not rivals."
- ☞ "When the edit is finished, review the sound track by closing your eyes and just listening. You will usually find some correction is needed."
- ☞ "The balance: music-narration-live sound is very important."
- ☞ " Spend a lot of time selecting music, editing programs make it possible to check the effect, get some disinterested comments."



☞ "Remember the old editor's adage - The picture delivers the information but the sound track delivers the emotion."  
and



☞ "How do you stop wind noise when filming? Stand further away from the microphone when digesting!"

