

# Field Recording Tips

by Brian Edwards-Tiekert

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### Don't trust their equipment

If you're recording an event with one podium, try to get your own microphone on it. You never know what quality sound you will get if you simply feed off the event organizers' equipment. A small folding tripod will help.

### Plug in if you have to

At some events, like City Council meetings, there are multiple people using different microphones. Look for a mult box in the back of the room that you can plug into to record the mix. If there isn't any, stick your microphone in front of a speaker.

### Use the right microphone

- An **omnidirectional** microphone is good in a reporter crush--no matter which way you wind up pointing it, your interviewee won't be off-mic. This is also a good microphone if you think you'll want to use your questions as well as the answers--you can put the microphone halfway between you and your interviewee, and it will pick up both of you equally.
- A **unidirectional** microphone will isolate the sound you're pointing it at, and make background noise drop out, but you'll have to be careful to keep it pointed the right way. Use a **cardioid** microphone if you're recording at close quarters, or a **shotgun** microphone if you're trying to pick up someone's voice from further away.

### Start recording before you reach your location.

Turn your recorder on before you get to your interview site, and leave it on until you're gone. This will help you get sound elements to set the scene: car doors clunking, office phones ringing, birds chirping, people greeting you. Remember: you can't use sound you recorded without people's knowledge, but you can ask for their permission afterwards.

### Minimize noise

Get to the quietest space you can for your interview. Smaller rooms will have less echo than larger ones--in a pinch, a car makes a great studio. Shut off devices that hum, buzz, or whir: computers, air conditioners, some fluorescent lights. If noise is coming from a particular direction--say, a streetside window--position yourself so that your body is directly between your microphone and the noise source, with your microphone pointed away. This works particularly well with a unidirectional (cardioid) microphone. To reduce the amount of noise you're picking up, lower your recording level and move your microphone closer to the mouth of your interviewee--background noise will drop out.

**Record background and ambience**

Hunt down and record one minute of any ambient or intermittent sounds that set the scene--the hubbub of a crowd, crickets chirping, keyboards tapping. At an interview site, record one minute of room tone--you can use this to make smooth transitions into your actualities.

**Don't interrupt or talk over your interviewee**

This includes saying things like "uh huh"--it will make it much more difficult to pull good sound.

**Take good notes**

When your interviewee says something noteworthy, note the time and track number on your recorder and jot down something that will remind you what it was. This will make it much easier to pull sound once you get back to the studio.