

## Top Rookie Mistakes

With each of us audio producers, there is a learning curve. And no matter what anyone else says, you have to learn from your own mistakes. But just for the fun of it, here are some “rookie mistakes” that maybe, if you read, might save you some time and agony.

### Need I Say More? (Shhh! Listen)

When interviewing someone, you are told to establish a rapport with the guest, hoping to open the interviewee up for honest, non-scripted responses. One of the biggest issues when conducting an interview is recognizing the difference between a conversation and an interview. In the interview, one should avoid the same verbal cues that are quite appropriate in everyday conversation.



Many newbie radio producers say “uh huh” or “right” or some other word to acknowledge that they are hearing what the other person is saying. Although the microphone is pointing *away* from you, your voice is *still* being picked up. This makes editing of audio difficult as your “uh huhs” might overlap with their important answers.

The solution is to *nod and smile* :). This allows the person being interviewed to know you are listening intently.

### Take a Moment



If you pause before going to the next question, most people tend to give you even more usable information, as they often feel compelled to fill the silence and continue or elaborate on their point.

A lot of my best tape comes out of those pauses. *Who knew audio was so non-verbal?* If they don't speak, that audio helps later in the transitions from scripts voice track to

cut.

## Sound of Silence

Speaking of the sounds of silence, be sure to conduct interviews in the quietest space possible. Sound Proof Studios are the best location, but not a reality for most independent producers. Rookies don't realize how even seemingly a quiet breeze from a ceiling fan, a refrigerator compressor or even the hum of neon or fluorescent lights produce enough noise that makes audio hard to edit.

Your headphones will pick up the noise, so be sure to wear them. Turn off what you can and move when you need to. Also, be sure to record a solid minute or two of room noise to be able to use for transitions and masking edits.



## Seeing is NOT Believing!

New producers seem to have a problem with sticking out. Embrace your inner – and outer -radio geek. Yes, holding a microphone and wearing bulky headphones can make you stick out like a sore thumb. But listening to what you are recording is the only way to ensure that you have the best audio you can get. If you rely on the meter with the appropriate levels, you are not listening to the interview. I remember doing a great interview, or what I thought was a great interview, the noisy location we were in, with overhead and traffic passing by, parts of which were just unusable.

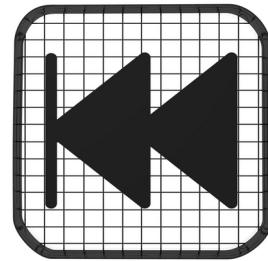


are not listening to the great interview, but because of planes flying the interview

The bulky headphones make the producer hyper aware of the surroundings being recorded. So if a loud plane is overhead or a bus or ambulance passes by, you notice and can re-ask any question to have the person answer it again. Which is easier than having the person come back out to the location. *And you can't recapture those special moments.*

## Be Kind - Rewind!

It's not only kind but it's smart. Make it part of your producer routine to listen to the audio you just captured before you leave the taping. This allows you to re-ask question while you are still there if the file was corrupted. It is a minor point, but will make life much easier than explaining to a very busy person that you need them to spend another afternoon with you, when it could have been salvaged. *I'm not naming names, but believe me when I say, print journalists are the worst, if you have to ask them to redo something.*



## Stand Back!



To tell a great story you need to watch what is happening around you. Not only is the person that everyone is looking at important, but so are the people in the crowd; their reactions to the speaker or the reasons they came could help to tell the story.

While I was at a seminar at Poynter Institute, an instructor encouraged us to “Peruse the Perimeter”. You may already know the motivations of the main character, but the audience will give you more heart and depth.

I remember being at a lobby day at the state capitol and the heartfelt stories from the crowds were so much more powerful than the savvy politicians and lobbyists on stage. *Don't get caught up in the performance, like tv is forced to do. Snap!*

## Get it Together!

You can't do anything without recording equipment, so a quick look to make sure you have the recorder, cables microphone, headphones, and spare batteries are **ALL** important.

Never assume your kit is how you left it. You may have forgotten that you needed a cable, or that you just put in the batteries, so you won't need a spare set for a while, but it is better to be cautious and check rather than have to reschedule because you forgot something basic.



## Knowledge is Power!



No matter how good the guests are, they are only as good as the questions you ask. You need to spend a generous amount of time exploring the topic and writing down questions for the guest. By the time you record an interview, you should have spoken with the guest to get an understanding of what his or her role in the segment is going to be. You should be able to feel comfortable enough with the topic so that you can actually listen to what the person is saying and translate it so the rest of us can understand it.

## Where Am I?



It is important to have sound take listeners to a certain place. Scene setting is an important skill in creating memorable radio. This *is* audio folks, so let the audience hear that you are in a crowded bar, at an outdoor concert on a submarine or at Cubs game.

Use the audio to add to the images created by your visual description in your script. While on site, write down telling characteristics of the scene. These word pictures and revealing sounds help the listener get a better understanding of the scene.