Transcript: Audio Recording and Editing with Audacity

[00:00:00] Audio Recording and Editing with Audacity. A Digital Writing Tutorial from Bedford/St. Martin's.

[00:00:06] You might think that being able to record and edit an audio track is a skill needed only by professional musicians and audio engineers, or that it requires a lot of expensive equipment. But there are simple ways to make your own recordings and lots of reasons why you might need to do so.

[00:00:21] For example, you might want to share a presentation with remote audiences or make it available for your audience to refer back to. You can record the audio portion to embed in your slides. In more creative projects, you can use audio along with text and images to engage your audience in different ways. Or you can reach a broader audience by recording a podcast to distribute through a campus channel or a site such as SoundCloud or Podbean.

[00:00:48] Think carefully about your purpose and the needs of your audience when deciding whether to use audio in your projects.
- What do you want your audience to do with the information you're providing?
- Where will they be using the information?
- Can your message be better conveyed with text or images?

Depending on your audience and purpose, you might decide to combine audio with other media.

[00:01:09] For example, think of the way museums often provide audio guides for visitors, in addition to text on the wall that gives basic information about the objects on display. The text provides a visual reference, but the audio guide provides more extensive commentary that visitors can easily access as they move throughout the gallery.

[00:01:28] If you need to create audio for any type of project, you might want to try Audacity. Audacity is a free, open-source program for recording and editing audio files. It works on Windows, Mac, and Linux operating systems. Choose the latest version for your system at audacity. sourceforge.net and install it on your computer.

[00:01:50] You'll need a few other things before you get started.
- First, a microphone connected to your computer. I'm using this headset, which connects to my computer with a USB port.
- Next, a quiet environment in which to work. You want to avoid picking up any background noise in your recording.
- And finally, your script. Be sure that you've revised your script with your audience and purpose in mind and have rehearsed with it several times in advance.

[00:02:19] When you open Audacity, test your input levels by clicking the input level meter in the upper right corner and speaking into your microphone. If the red bar reaches all the way to the right, use the slider to lower your input volume. If the red bar stays under the center line, raise your input volume. You want the red bar to reach close to the right, but not all the way. It looks like my input volume is OK.

[00:02:46] Now you're ready to record. Click the red Record button, and speak clearly into your microphone. I'm going to record the intro for my weekly podcast. "Hi! Thanks for tuning in to Monkeys,

Monkeys, Monkeys, the weekly podcast that's all about monkeys!...This week's topic: Monkeys in Literature. We all know that monkeys like Curious George are favorite characters in children's books, but did you also know that monkeys have played an important role in some classic novels for adults?"

[00:03:15] When you're finished recording, click Stop. It's unlikely that you'll make it all the way through your script perfectly on the first try. If you want to start over, select Undo Record on the Edit menu.

[00:03:28] But what if most of your recording was great and you just have a few problem areas? What if I was almost at the end of the best podcast ever recorded about monkeys, and then this happened? "Well, that's it for this week. Tune in next week when we'll discuss monkeys in *[sound of phone ringing]*…oh no! my cell phone!... Tune in next week when we'll discuss monkeys in popular music!"

[00:03:51] In situations like this, you can simply edit out the problem spots. But before you start editing, be sure to save your file. Choose File > Save Project As.... and follow the same steps you would when saving any file.

[00:04:04] Now you can start editing. Audacity has many editing features, but we'll look at just one that's especially useful: You can delete your mistakes! When you play back the track, watch the graph to see where the mistakes are happening. To fix this kind of problem, click the Select tool, then click and drag over the part of the track you want to remove. Then hit Delete on your keyboard. The section you highlighted will disappear. Like that! Let's see how it sounds with the edits.

"Well, that's it for this week. Tune in next week when we'll discuss monkeys in popular music!"

[00:04:41] That's much better! One way to avoid having to start over or delete mistakes is to record your audio in small chunks. Then you can edit the files together to create one complete file.

[00:04:52] Let's say I wanted to combine the first part of my podcast with the last part. With both files open, go to the second file and click in the area above the Mute/Solo button to select the whole track. Go to Edit > Find Zero Crossings. Then go back to Edit and select Remove Audio > and Cut. Now go to the first file. Move the cursor to the end of the track by selecting Edit > Move Cursor > To Track End. Then go back to Edit and click Paste. Both sections of the podcast are now in a single file.

[00:05:27] When you're happy with the final results, save your changes. To be able to use your file in other programs such as iTunes, you'll need to Export it. To do so, choose File > Export. Then select a file type. Mp3 is the best choice if you plan to distribute your recording on the Web. When you hit Save, you'll see a dialog box that allows you to create tags. Tags can help you easily find and organize your audio files. The default tags are set up for music files, but you can add your own tags with the Add button.

[00:06:00] Now you know the basics of audio recording and editing with Audacity. To get more help, check out the manuals, tutorials, and tips at audacity.sourceforge.net. And have fun recording!