



Creating a Radio Drama

Making a radio drama is a lot like making a movie except for one major difference ...it's all sound! Your tools are limited to dialogue, music, sound effects and ambient sound -- think rain outside or a car driving by. While these tools appear to be limiting, when combined effectively, they can paint vivid pictures in the mind of the listener.

Sound stimulates our visual imagination and helps to create visual images in our mind. And that is your goal: to transport the listener's visual imagination into the story that you are telling.

The tools you have to do this are just sounds: verbal and non-verbal sounds.

Below are a few tips to consider when creating your radio drama.

TIP 1: CREATING CHARACTER THROUGH VOICE

- Your listeners should be able to picture the character in their heads based on a) the sound of their voice and b) the words spoken.
 - When creating characters using the voice only, experiment with exaggerating those voices. Exaggeration can often lead to succinct and engaging characterizations for the listener.
 - Ask a friend to close their eyes, listen to the proposed character voice and then tell you the kind of person they pictured in their minds. Do this experiment with several friends.

TIP 2: AMBIENT SOUND CREATES PLACE

- You communicate place or setting through sound. If you don't locate the story in the reader's imagination, then the story can lose its structure. Sound creates place.
 - For example...is your story set outside? Where? Do we hear crickets in a country or cars in New York City? If you are near water, do we hear lapping waves? Train coming? We need to hear that engine slowly approaching, getting louder and louder. Sound sets the story.

TIP 3: THE USE OF REAL SOUND EFFECTS

- If your story has a scuffle in it, then it needs to sound like a scuffle. If your story has a woman walking over cobblestones with high heels, then your story needs to sound like high heels tripping over cobblestones. These are real sound effects and most of them you can record yourself, laying them down on their own sound effects track.
 - If people are eating, record the sounds of forks on plates; glasses being put on the table and water pouring into a glass. Anything that you can record yourself, you should try. The sound will be more authentic...and the production process will be more fun. (In professional movie making, the people who create the natural or real sound effects (like people walking, running, breathing hard, hands rubbing together, etc.) are called Foley Artists.)
- If you can't record the sound yourself – say you need a railroad horn, for example, and don't have one around -- then find one on the Internet.
 - Check the royalty free links.
 - iMovie and Windows Movie Maker both have a ton of sound effects you can use as well.
- Some Advice: Sound effects should be used sparingly and selectively. Too many effects will distract the listener and will slow the pace of the action.

TIP 4: SOUNDTRACK WONDERS

- Adding background music to your radio is another way to set the tone of your radio play. The music is used often to set an emotional tone. It can also foreshadow or punctuate a scene, as in a short musical 'sting' that ends a scene on an upbeat or downbeat note.

- Adding artificial sound effects – such as pops and whistles and bells – to emphasize comic moments, can also be an effective and creative use of sound.
- Like the use of sound effects, be sure that the music is there to service the story; to help shape the story in the listener's mind and not to draw attention to itself.