Sound Editing Basics

In Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, there is a pivotal moment when the music tells us that Jack Nicholson has lost his mind. Jack Nicholson stays stationary for the entirety of the 10-second scene while the camera zooms in on his glazed-over face. Behind this scene a continuous violin note drones on. While there isn't much to this scene visually, watching it gives the audience a clear sense of dread. This simple sound sets a tone that foreshadows the terrifying events that will inevitably come. For this scene, the sound is the most important story element. In many of your works, the same will be true.

There are four elements of sound editing to which you need to pay attention:

- **The Voice:** *First and foremost*, are the voices clear? If not, the way to fix it in post-production is to record a voice-over. A voice- over is when the character's voice is recorded *after the fact* and then edited to lip-sync with the visual scene.In these cases, it is crucial to mix the voice-over with 'ambient sound'. Ambient sound is also called room tone: it is the natural sound from that room or location in which the scene takes place. If you don't mix the voice-over with ambient sound, the recorded voice will seem detached from the scene and unnatural.

  The term voice-over also refers to any off-screen narrator, such as you often hear in documentaries.

- **Natural Sounds:** Let's say you have one scene where a young boy is running out of the house and the screen door slams behind him. You are in the edit room and you notice something is missing: it's the sound of the screen door slamming. You see it, but don't hear it. For some reason, your

mic didn't record the sound or it didn't record the emphatic SLAM sound like you needed. What do you do?You 'foley' the sound! Foley is the process for manually creating and recording sound effects after filming to emphasize the natural sounds in a scene. In this case, you record the slamming of a door and edit it into the scene.

Arguably the most enjoyable piece of sound production can be becoming a 'foley artist': a creator of sound effects. For example, to add the dramatic sound of heels walking down the hallway, you might click a block of wood against tile and record the sound to match a character's footsteps.

Or, what if the your mic didn't pick up the sound of footsteps on gravel *and* you don't have gravel lying around. What do you do? Experiment! You could place potato chips in a tray and record crunching them with your hand. Does that sound like crunching gravel? What else might replicate the sound of gravel? That's what your team needs to figure out. And once you have, you then match the recorded sound of each shoe crunch with each of your actor's footsteps.

- **Sound Effects:** While 'Natural Sounds' are needed to maintain the believability of your scene, sound effects are used to enhance the tone and ambience of the scene. Examples include bird songs, ringing bells and train whistles in the background. Or if the environment is urban, subway rumbles, car horns and sirens can be added to create an ambience of a busy, loud world.But sound effects can also be unnatural. If unnatural, they are usually used for comic effect, like a rim shot.

- **The Music:** Music in film usually speaks to the emotional tone of the scene, helping to guide your viewer or listener in how to experience your scene. Once a scene is edited, consider the tone or mood that you want the scene to convey and then choose your music to help you convey that. As an experiment, first watch an action scene from a movie. Second, turn off the sound and watch it again. Third, turn down the sound and put on an Arcade Fire tune in the background. In each of these screenings, your experience with the scene will be different.