Brought to you by www.VoiceOverClub.com
Training and Resources for Voice Over Artists

The Purpose of This eBook

There has <u>never</u> been a better time for you to get started doing voice overs than right now! The power of the Internet, coupled with advancements in technology, computing and recording software, help make the possibility of becoming a voice over talent a reality.

Now, you can create, edit and produce commercial-grade voice overs in your own home and post them online for all to hear. This book is designed to be a quick-start guide to help you get on the fast track and make your own voice recordings!

How Technology Changed the Game

Technology is a game changer, breaking down barriers, removing obstacles and creating opportunities where none existed before. It makes possible what was once impossible and its effect on the voice over industry is astounding. Becoming a professional voice over talent is now easier than ever!

Achieving success as a voice over talent used to require moving to a major market like New York, Los Angeles or Chicago, getting signed by an agent, joining a union, and physically traveling to various studios to record voice overs.

Advances in technology and the Internet, now make it possible for professional voice talent to live wherever they please. They allow voice talent to decide whether or not to secure an agent, to join a union, be financial core or non-union. Further, they create an expectation that voice over talents record professional voice overs from their own home studios.

Certainly live auditions are still used for certain projects and an agent may have voice talents come to a studio for a live audition. More common are subscription-based online casting services that email audition opportunities to voice over talents. These auditions may be recorded from a home studio or temporary studio setup.

The Misconceptions and Misinformation about Home Studios

Setting up a home studio and learning how to record your voice is not difficult - but the misconceptions and misinformation about home studio setups can be intimidating and create unnecessary doubts when you are starting out as a voice over talent. Beware of these myths when entering into the realm of voice overs…

- You need a $10,000 home studio setup to do professional voice overs

- Expensive mics will make anyone sound good

- You must purchase all the best gear to sound professional

Making good decisions requires accurate information which will help you avoid unnecessary and costly mistakes. First, you do not need a $10,000 studio setup to record professional voice overs. If that were true, voice over talents would not be able to travel because they would need their $10,000 studios with them to record. Instead you can use a simple portable-studio-setup (laptop, USB Condensor mic, and headphones) when travelling.

All you need to get started is some very basic equipment, software, and a relatively quiet place to record. Home studio setups range from basic to elaborate. Just understand that having an elaborate setup will not automatically make you into professional voice over talent. Mastering the basics first and upgrading your studio as your voice over business grows, and your needs change, makes the best sense.

Additionally, expensive mics are nice but don't mistake the quality of a microphone for good voice over technique, as they are two very different elements. You will eventually need to have a quality microphone to record auditions and voice overs and a quality low-noise USB Condenser mic is perfect for beginning voice talent as they are affordable, easy to use and very portable.

As you develop your voice over technique you will also want to get some professional training with a good "Voice Over Coach". It's true with professional athletes and orchestral musicians and it's true for voice over talent too – having a good coach will help you stay on track and improve the fastest. The coaching/training should include professionally-produced demos, where your coach helps to direct your recording session.

Finally, "Gear envy" is a fantastic way to go broke fast. Yes, you will need quality equipment as you progress, but you do <u>not</u> need to have the best of the best! You only need to have what makes sense for you at your skill level. Unfortunately, some new voice talents confuse "being professional" with having all the best gear and a fancy studio. They set out to create elaborate setups that are beyond their skill level and financial budget, before taking the time to master the basics first.

We recommend that you start out <u>simply</u> with a basic studio setup, learn to record and edit your own voice, and get some professional training (upgrading your equipment only as needed). Taking a more conservative approach like this will help you to get on the right path to a successful career in this industry.

Recording – What's Needed to Get Started?

For purposes of simply learning how to record your voice on a very basic level, **not much** is required to get started. All you will need is a computer, some free software, a simple headset or microphone that can be plugged in to your microphone jack on your computer, and a fairly quiet place to record. *As you practice you will gain experience and confidence*.

Free downloadable software such as Audacity and Garage Band (included on newer Macs) allow you to practice recording your voice and provide basic editing features.

At the most basic level, you can also use the built-in recorder in your Windows-based computer called **Windows Sound Recorder**. Although these free tools aren't quite robust enough for professional- grade recordings, they are an <u>excellent</u> way to get started and hone your skills!

Sound Recorder in Windows XP

Windows Sound Recorder

This built in recorder can be found in your programs folder under "Accessories". This may vary on different systems but do a search for "sound recorder" and it should be easy to find.
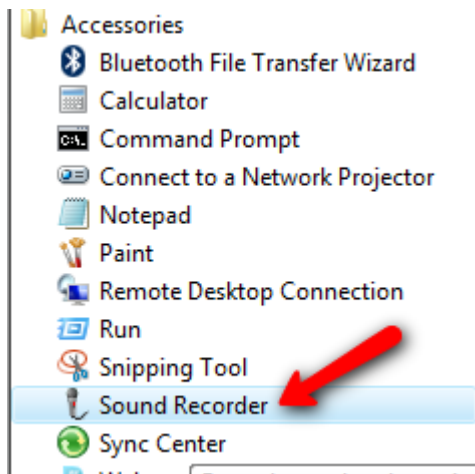
(Windows Vista)

To record your voice with Sound Recorder, simply press the "Start Recording" button.
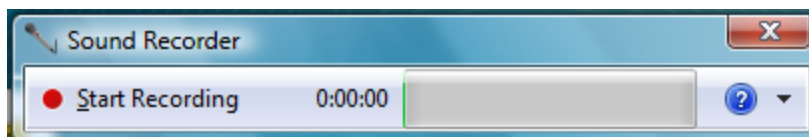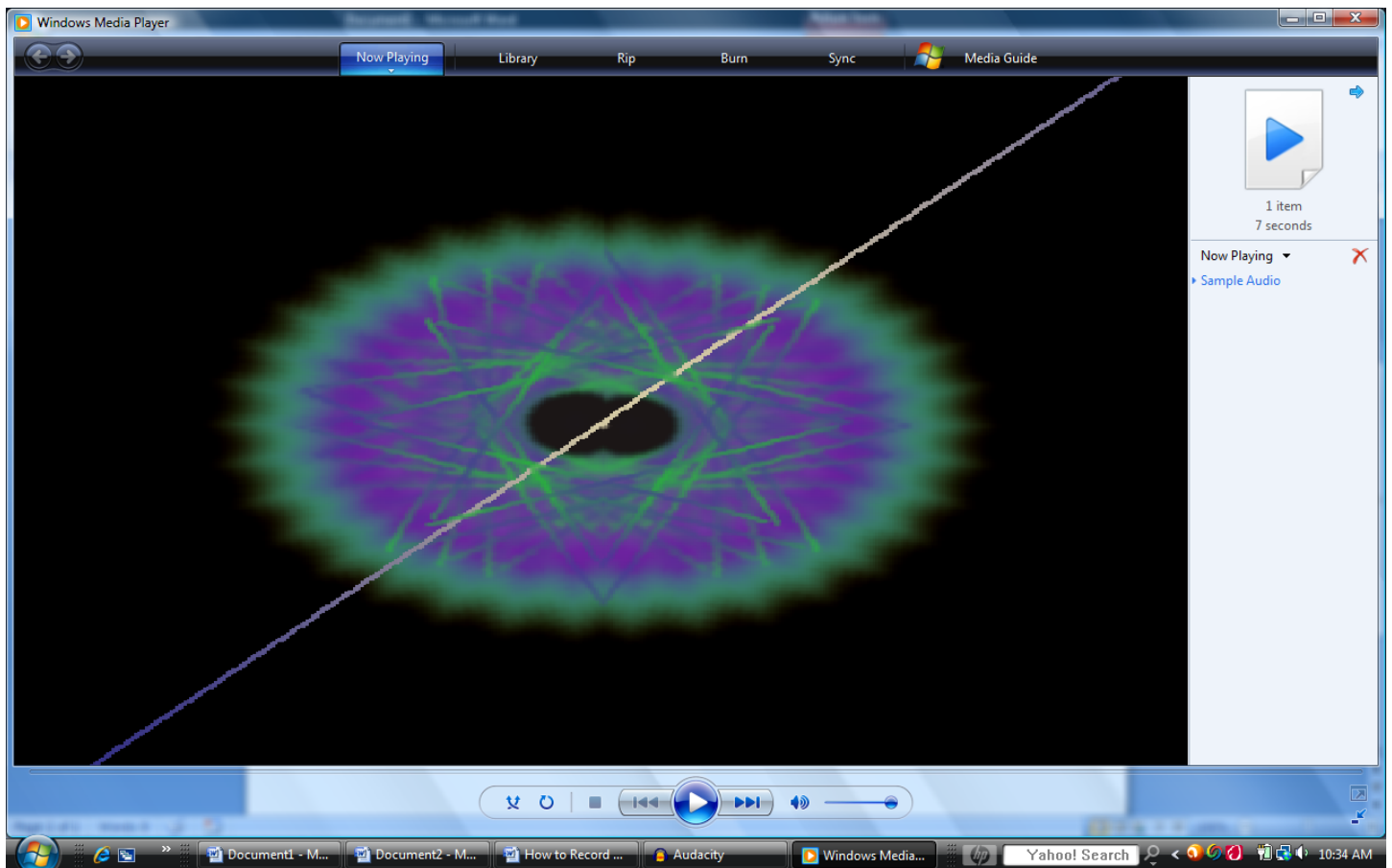

When you are finished recording, press the "Stop Recording" button.
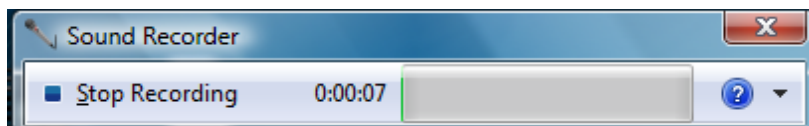
Then save your file into a folder called "**My Voice Overs**" – titling each recording with a name that you will remember it by, i.e. "my-voiceover-01".
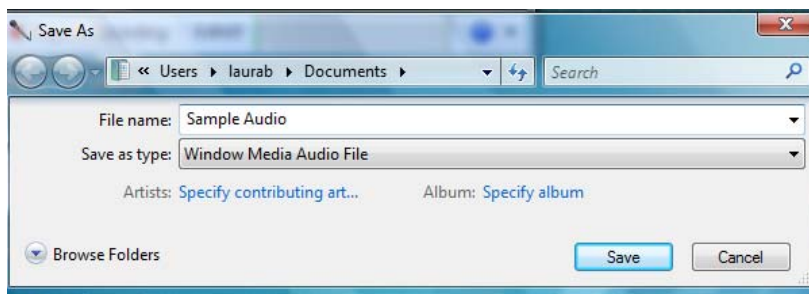
TIP: Use this recorder along with the free voice-over scripts on www.VoiceOverClub.com to practice recording yourself. ;-)

Now, click on it and it will play back with Windows Media Player. Pretty simple huh?!

Again, Windows Sound Recorder is very basic and is a GREAT way to practice recording your voice and getting used to recording yourself.

The next level of recording at home is to use more sophisticated recording software that you can download and use for FREE.

- Audacity

Audacity is available for **both** Windows-PC **and** Mac users! It's a multi-feature, multi-track recording and editing software. It's very easy to use, and this guide will help you to become familiar with various editing features.

http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/
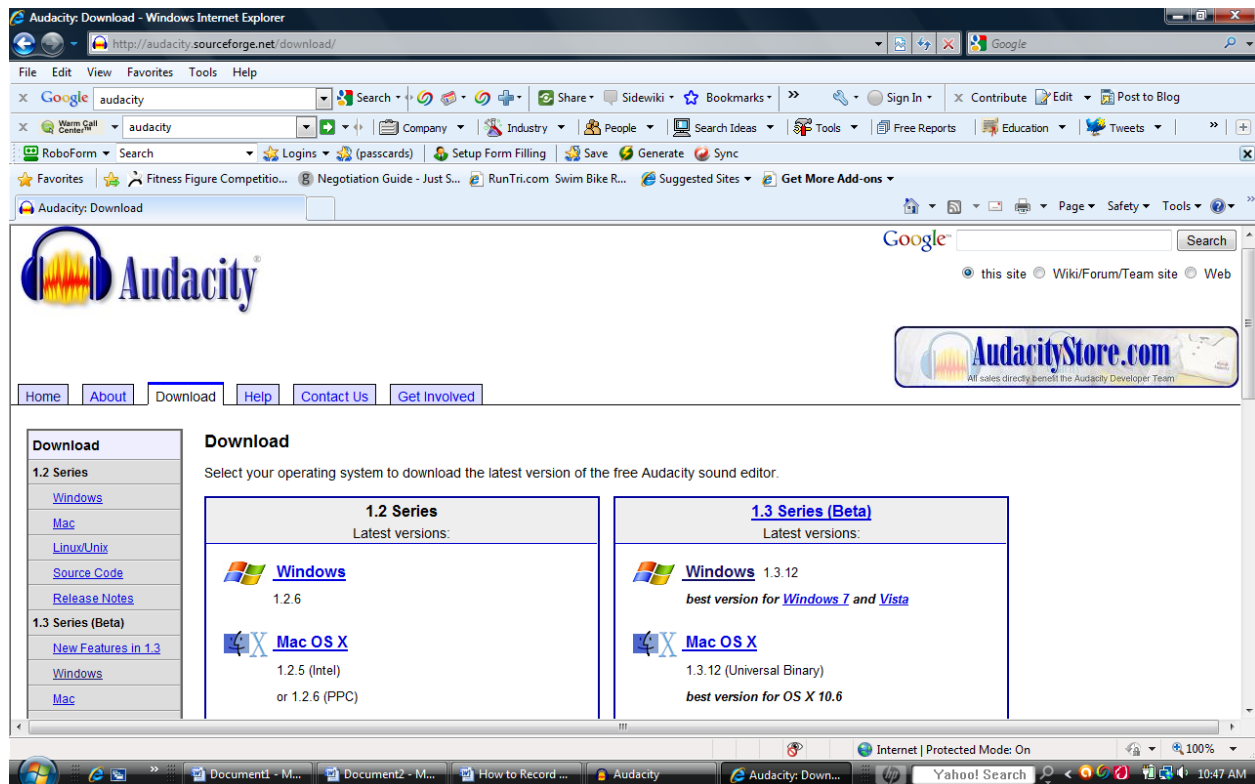
To down load Audacity, copy and paste this address http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/ in your web browser. Select your operating system and follow the prompts.

Audacity also has a great online user's manual (Wiki) that will really help you to get up to speed with more of the advanced features.

Save this link and come back to it for future reference:

http://wiki.audacityteam.org/wiki/Audacity_Wiki_Home_Page

Once you have installed Audacity, you can open the application as you would any Word Doc – and start your first recording by first selecting **File>New** then clicking **File>Save Project As.** This will create a **PROJECT** file and a folder, one will be the name of the Audacity file itself (where your recording data and edits are stored), and the folder will be where your recordings (i.e. audio files) will be saved.

RECORDING:

Audacity is different from *Sound Recorder* because Audacity allows you to record numerous tracks and play them back all simultaneously (this is called "Multi Track Recording").

The six buttons on the top left of your screen in Audacity will allow you to **pause**, **play**, **stop**, **rewind**, **fast forward**, and **record** audio files.

To record with Audacity, press the record button and begin speaking. When you are done press the **stop** button. As with Windows Sound Recorder, simply try recording your voice reading a sample voice over script. Press the **ROUND "RECORD"** button and speak into your microphone, and press the **SQUARE "STOP"** button when you are finished.
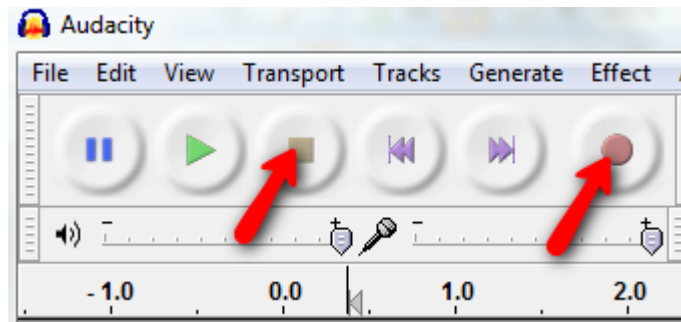
TIP: You won't "break" this software, and using it will not hurt your computer, so don't be afraid to play around with it (it's how you will learn) and with a little practice you will get the hang of this in no time!

After recording you will see a series of sound waves. The **larger** waves indicate **louder** levels and the *smaller* waves show *softer* levels.
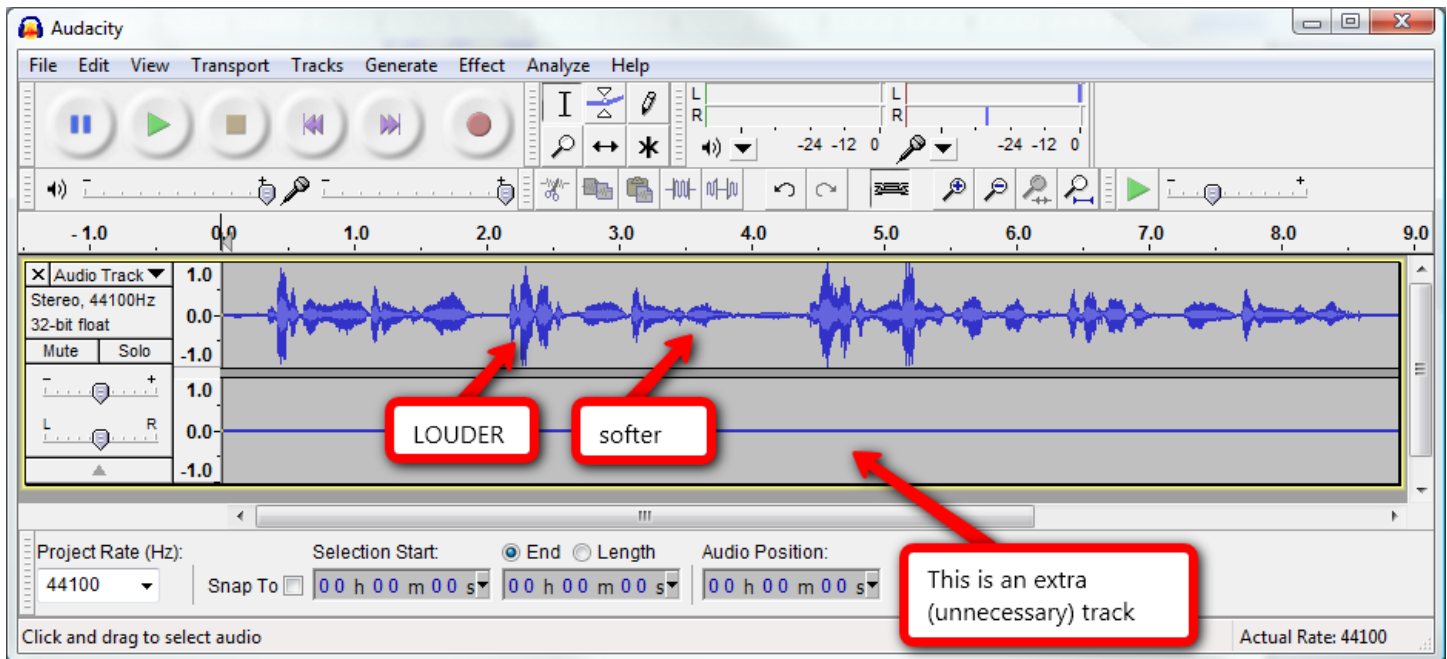
Voice Overs are typically recorded in "**Mono**" - meaning only <u>ONE</u> track of audio, but Audacity automatically starts your recording with a Stereo track – creating an extra (and unnecessary track).

Switch the track to a single **Mono** track by simplying click on the down arrow in the **Audio Track box** and select Split Stereo track.
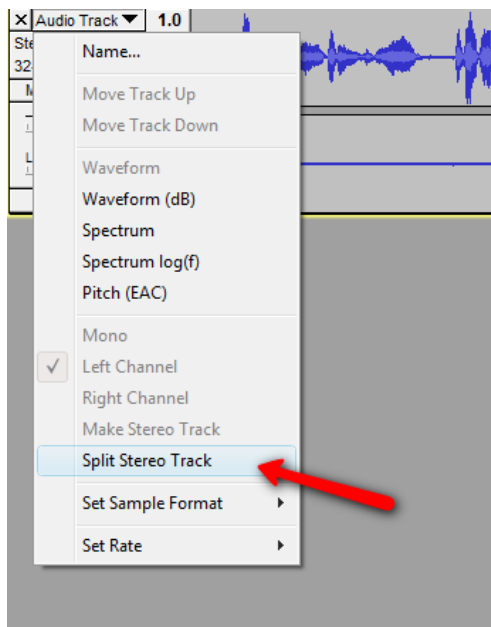
This will split the 2 tracks creating a "Left" and a "Right" track.Next, change your track to "Mono" by selecting from the same dropdown again – and choose "Mono".
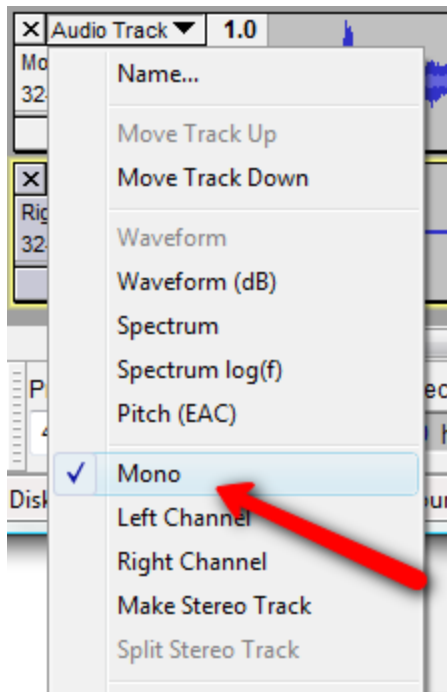
You may then delete the extra track by simply clicking the X.

Click here to delete the remaining track
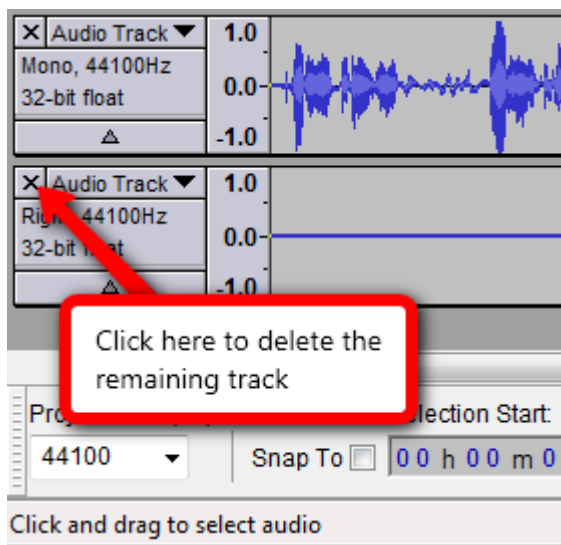
If you want to DELETE the track you recorded on, you can simply return the "Play Head" to the beginning of the track, and simply record over it. Another option is to select the entire track (Ctrl + A) or highlight the part of the track you want to delete and press "Delete" on your keyboard.

This is the PLAYHEAD

SAMPLE RATES:

"Sample Rate" is the number of audio samples captured per second. The higher the number, the higher the sound quality. The most common sample rate in voice over is 44100 Hz, which is the same as 44.1K. This is the same sample rate used to record Compact Disks.

Audacity automatically records at 44.1K.
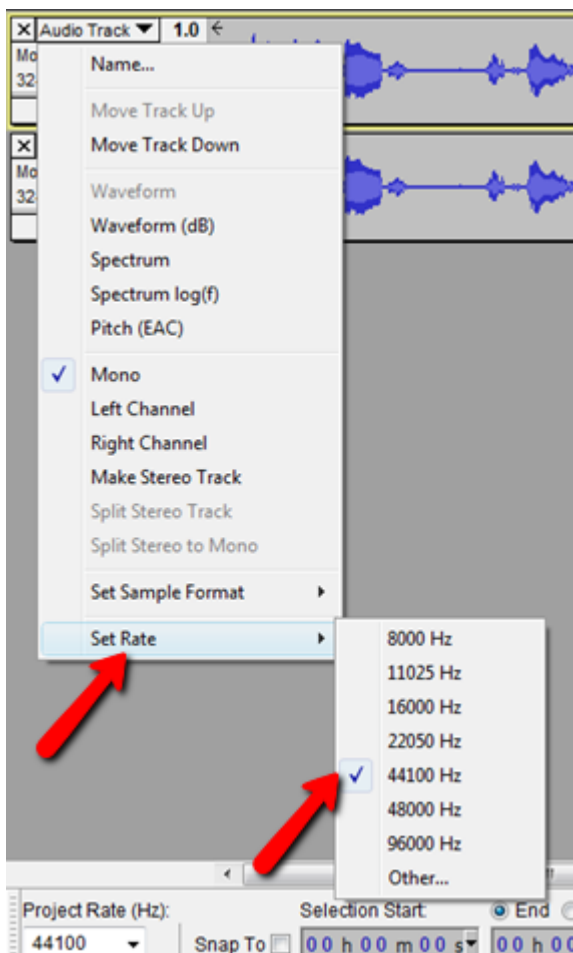
PLAYBACK: Checking for Distortion

Next, play your recording and check your recording for distortion.
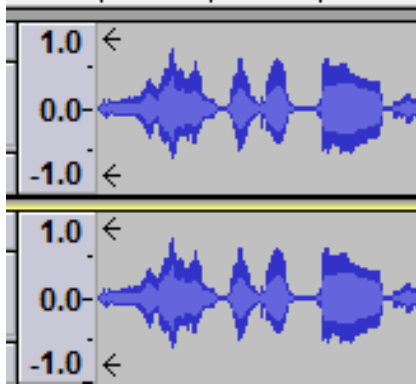
The image above looks good.

To recognize distortion, you will need to understand the maximum dynamic range, which represents the quietest to the loudest sound levels that will be captured. The maximum dynamic range shown above is 0 to +100 units (or 0 to +1.0). When the sound signal is stronger and goes above this range, that signal is "clipped" and it will sound distorted.

The example below (left of this screen) shows sound levels that are too high, also called clipping. Clipping occurs when the volume is too loud for your microphone to capture and record, falling outside of the maximum dynamic range. Fixing this is often as easy as taking a small step back from the microphone or adjusting the microphone just off to the side a bit. Also, be sure to speak in a normal volume and let the microphone do the amplifying.
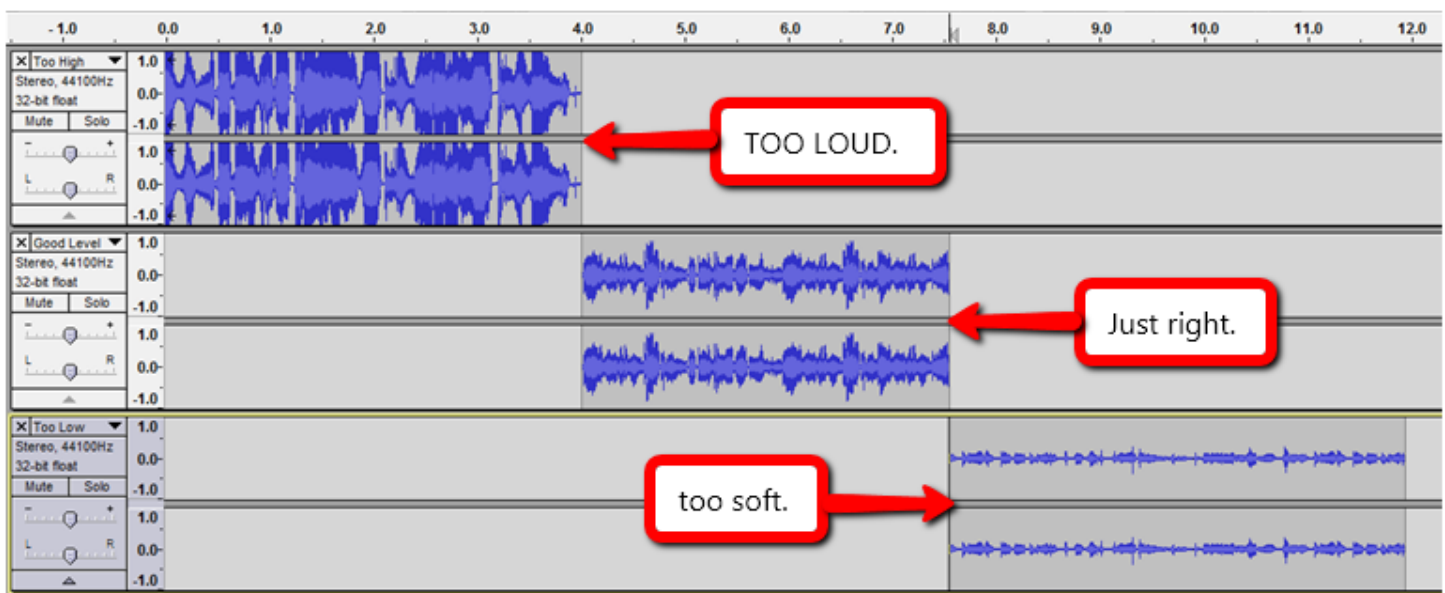
The middle example shows a **good sound level**. This is your goal. This is a sign of proper microphone placement and proper speaking volume. You want to avoid the extremes as shown in the top left and bottom right examples.

The bottom right example shows sound levels that are too low. Fixing this is often a matter of moving a bit closer to the microphone and speaking more directly into it. Also, check your posture and breathing. Slouching or speaking with your head down will cause your volume level to decrease. Try bringing the script up to eye level and make sure it does not block the path from your voice to the microphone.

EDITING:

You may also want to edit your audio. You can perform a number of editing functions with Audacity to clean up your audio track, delete mistakes, and remove unwanted noises or silences.

Let's say you want to copy and paste a section of audio, so that a phrase you recorded later - happens earlier in the playback.

To do this simply move your cursor to the beginning of the selection of audio you wish to edit, click and hold your mouse, drag it over the section you want to edit, then release. The section will be highlighted as shown in the example below.
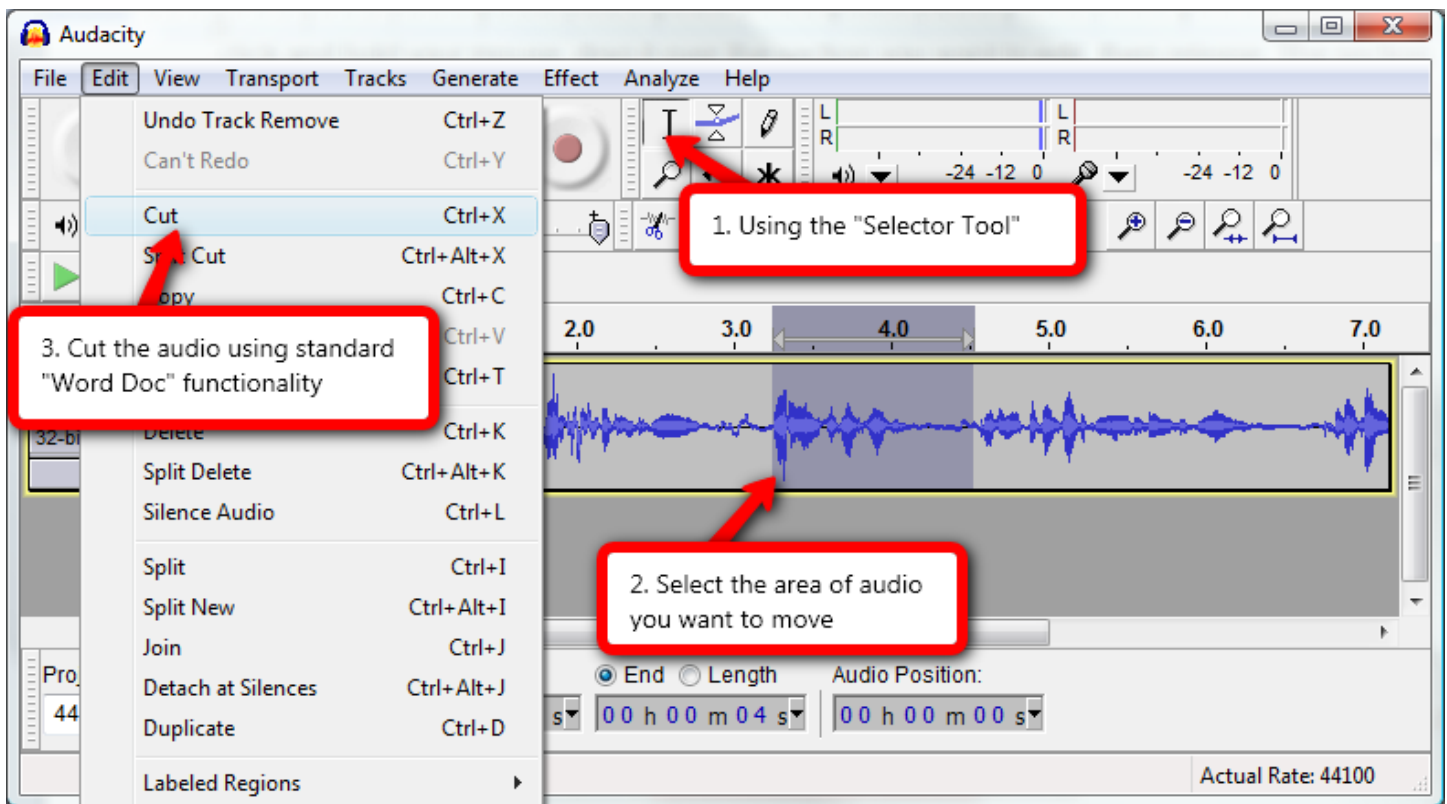
Now the audio sound bite is on your computer's clipboard – the next step is to PASTE it where you want it to go, just as you would with text in a standard Word-document.

Point the cursor to the area on the timeline you want to hear it playback and simply select "Paste" or (Ctrl + V) to move it where you want it to go.
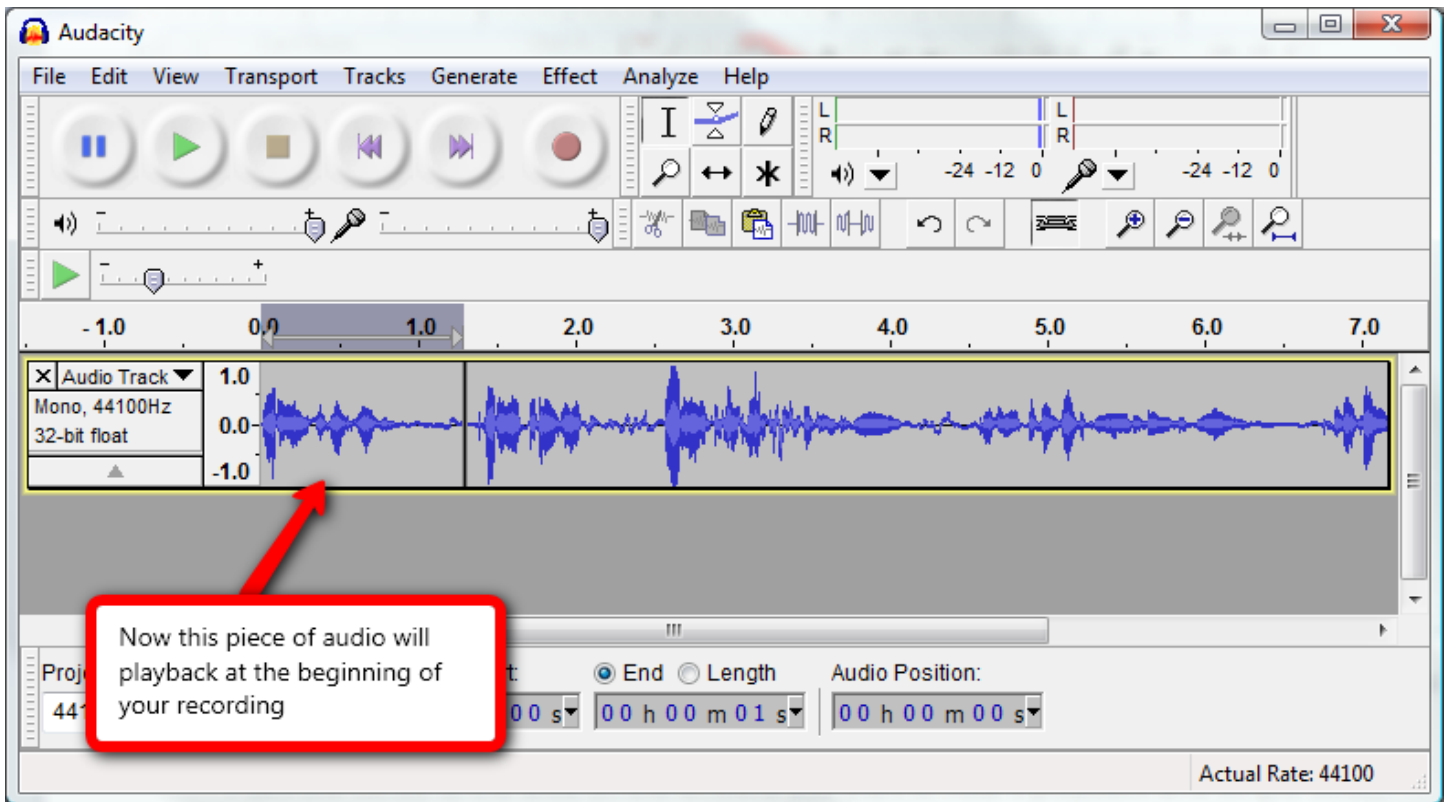
SAVE your project after each edit so you don't lose your changes. Once again, this is just like a standard Word document (Ctrl + S).

USING EFFECTS:

Once you get your audio edited the way you would like it to be, you can use some simple effects to enhance the sound quality during playback.

Audacity has a TON of built in audio effects for you to use. These effects should be used sparingly and should not be obvious to the end listener. Keep in mind that you can simply "**Undo**" (Ctrl + Z) your effect if you don't like it.

One of the most common post-production features used is **Equalization with High Pass Filter**. To apply this feature, simply highlight the audio file, as shown below either by clicking and dragging or "**Apply All**" (Ctrl + A).
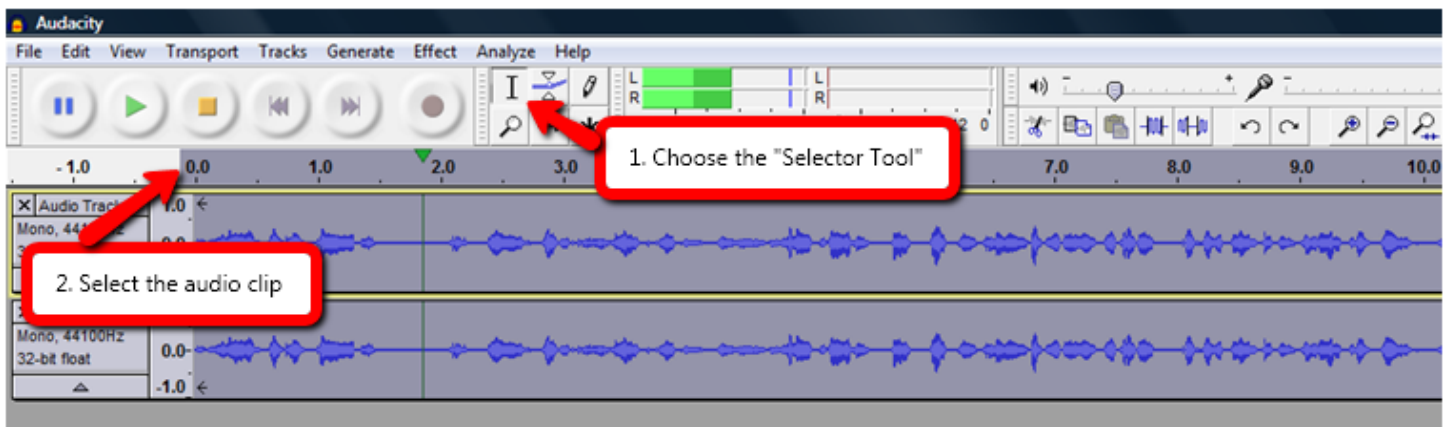
Next choose the effect you wish to apply to your audio.
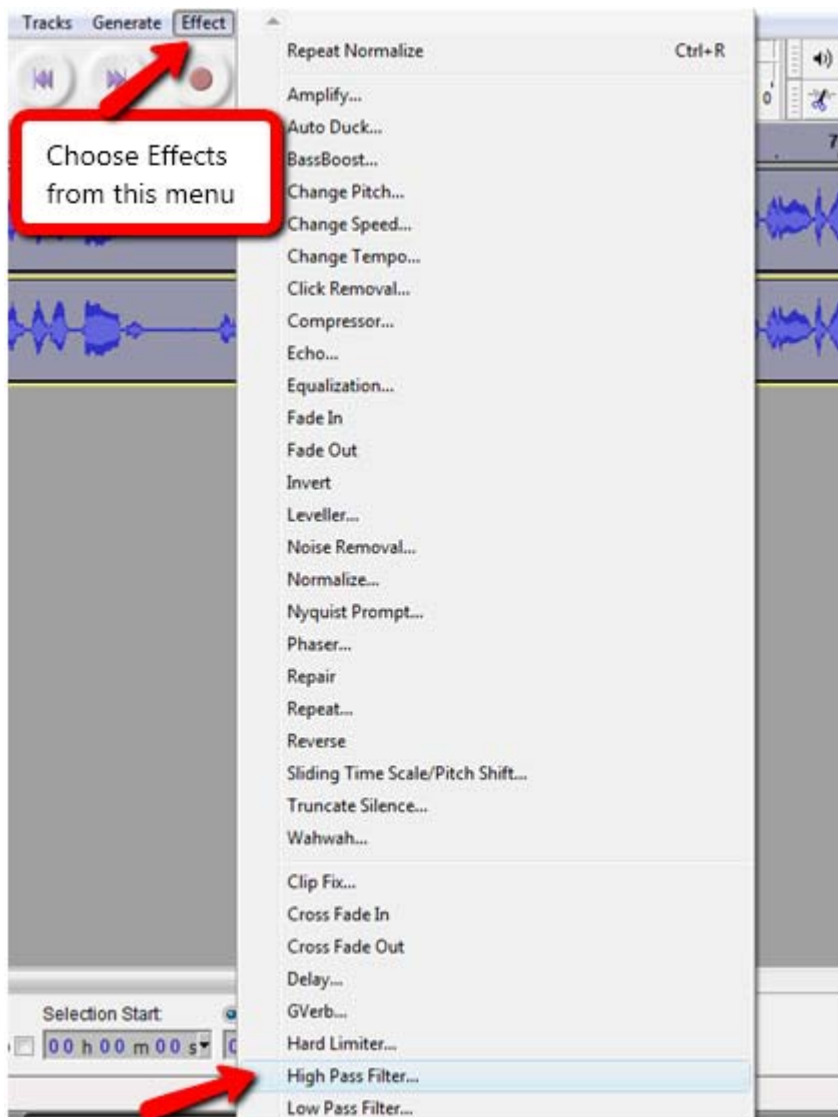
The **High Pass Filter** lets frequencies above a selected frequency to pass into the audio and eliminates frequencies below it. This feature is used to cut out excessive bass in your recording.
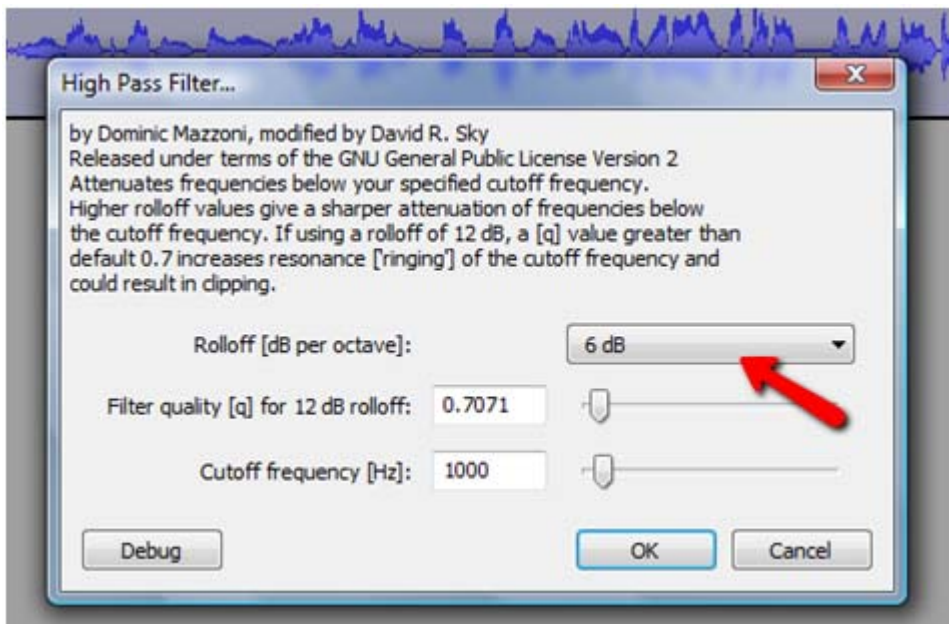
When choosing to use High Pass Filtering, make your adjustments as mild as possible. Try setting it to 60Hz (6 dB) for starters – and don't be afraid to experiment with the settings. Remember you can (and should) **UNDO** effects if they don't sound good.
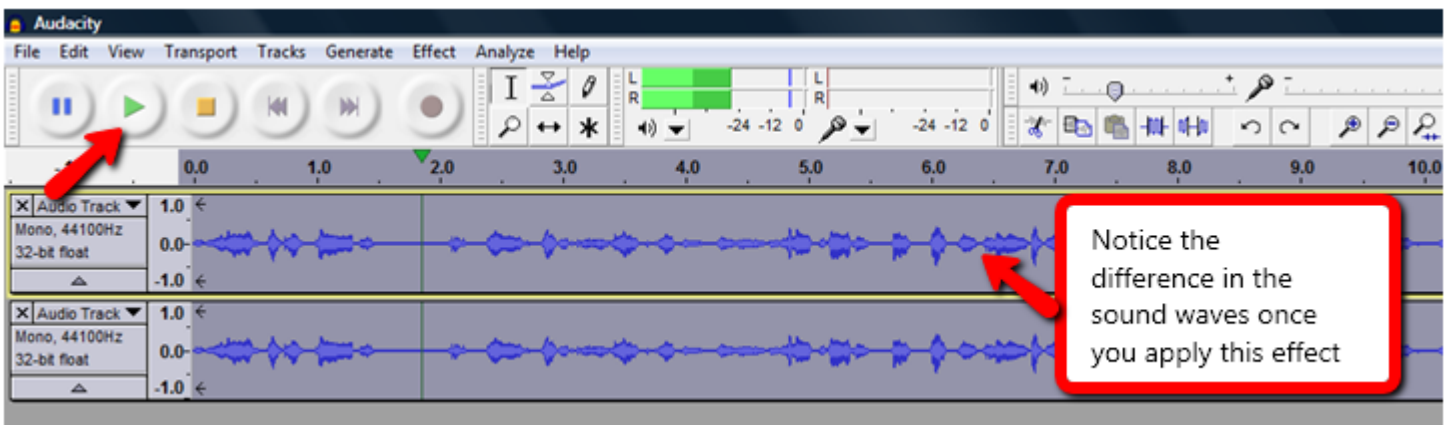
Play your recording and listen to the difference.

After you are satisfied with your equalization levels, you may want try **normalizing** your audio file. The **Normalize** function brings your sound levels up to full scale and increases the amplitude of the sound wave. The result is a louder, brighter, fuller sound.

To apply this feature, simply highlight the audio file, as shown previously. Then click on the **Effects tab** and choose **Normalize**.
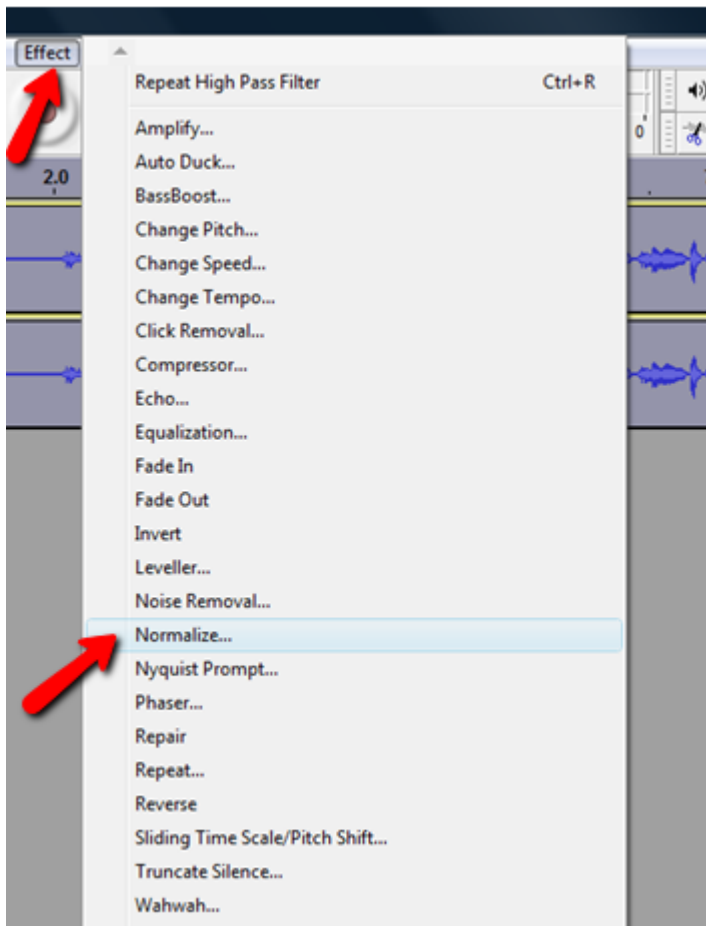
A box will pop up and ask to what level you want to normalize. Leave both boxes checked and change the level from -0.0 dB to -0.3 dB as this will allow some room for further compression and other post-production effects your audio will go through in the final production stages.
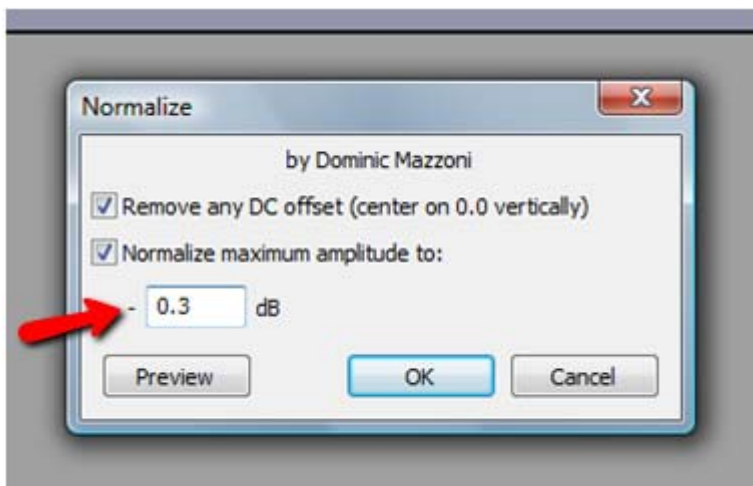
You will see a marked difference in the audio waves. Listen to your recording again and you will hear a much brighter, well-rounded sound.

Notice how the sound waves change after you apply this effect
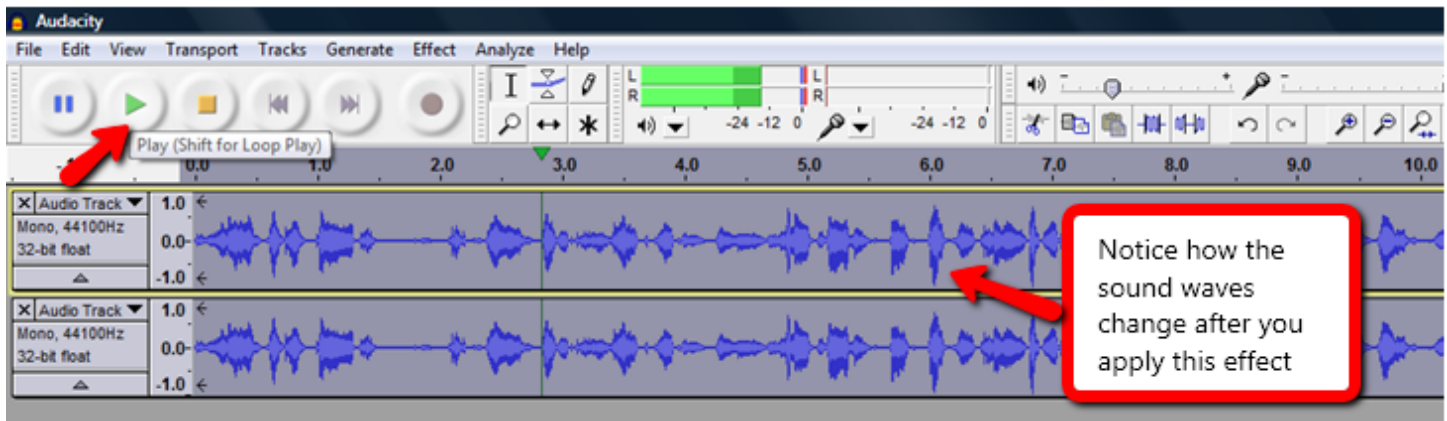
Another popular post-production effect is gating. **Gating** is a feature that acts like a gate to control low-level room noise from sneaking into your audio file when your sound level goes below your gate threshold. When you speak, the gate opens and the room noise is mostly masked by your voice. When your sound level goes below your gate threshold, it blocks the noise from getting into your recording. *In Audacity, the gating function is located in the Effects menu under* **Noise Removal***.*
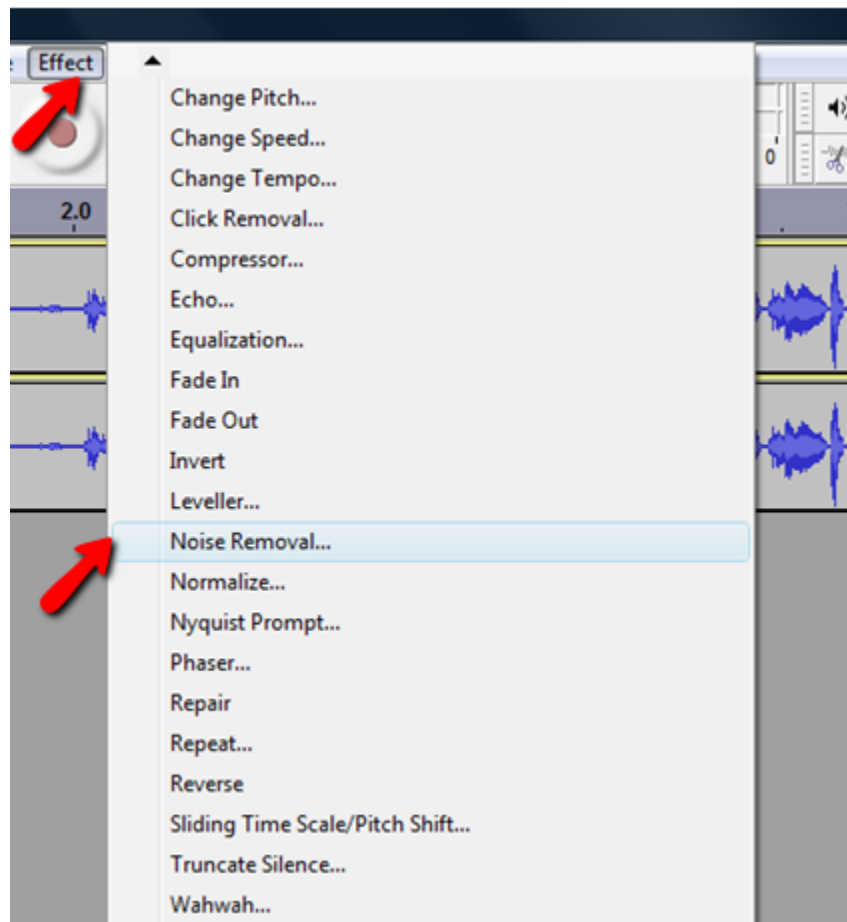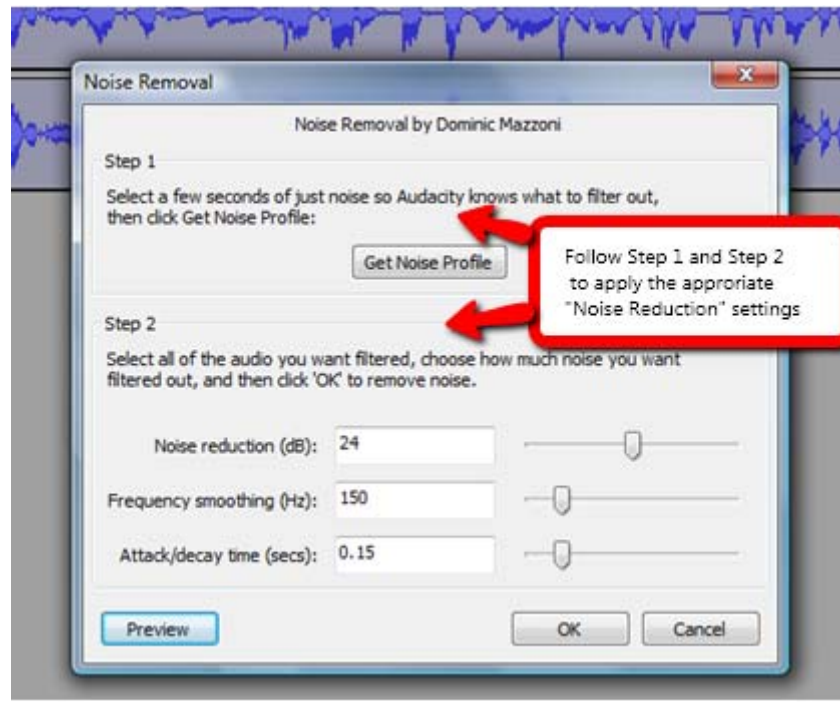
Gating is very delicate and should be used sparingly, just enough to keep out room noise. If gating is applied too heavily you will lose the beginnings of your words in the audio.

These post-production effects can enhance your audio when used appropriately.

Keeping your post-production applications *to a minimum* is important because you do not know exactly what the client will be doing with your audio clip, such as adding sound effects and other audio or post-production applications to create the final product.

Save the changes to your audio (Ctrl + S).

The next step is to convert your audio to the proper format. To do this, click on **File** and then **Export**.
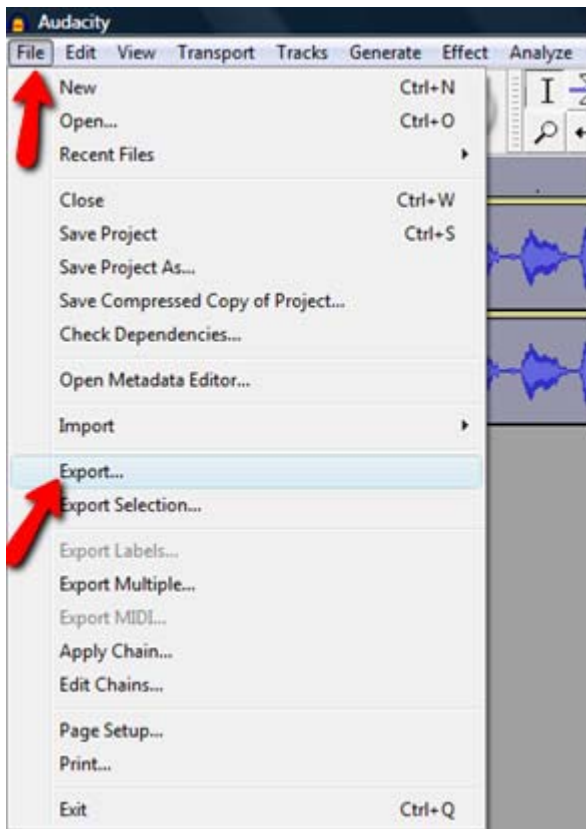
This will provide a menu of formatting options. Name your file and choose the appropriate audio file format for your project.

TIP: Paying voice over clients will specify which type of file they want and how they want the file named. Pay very close attention to this and be sure to send clients the type of file they want and name the file exactly as specified.
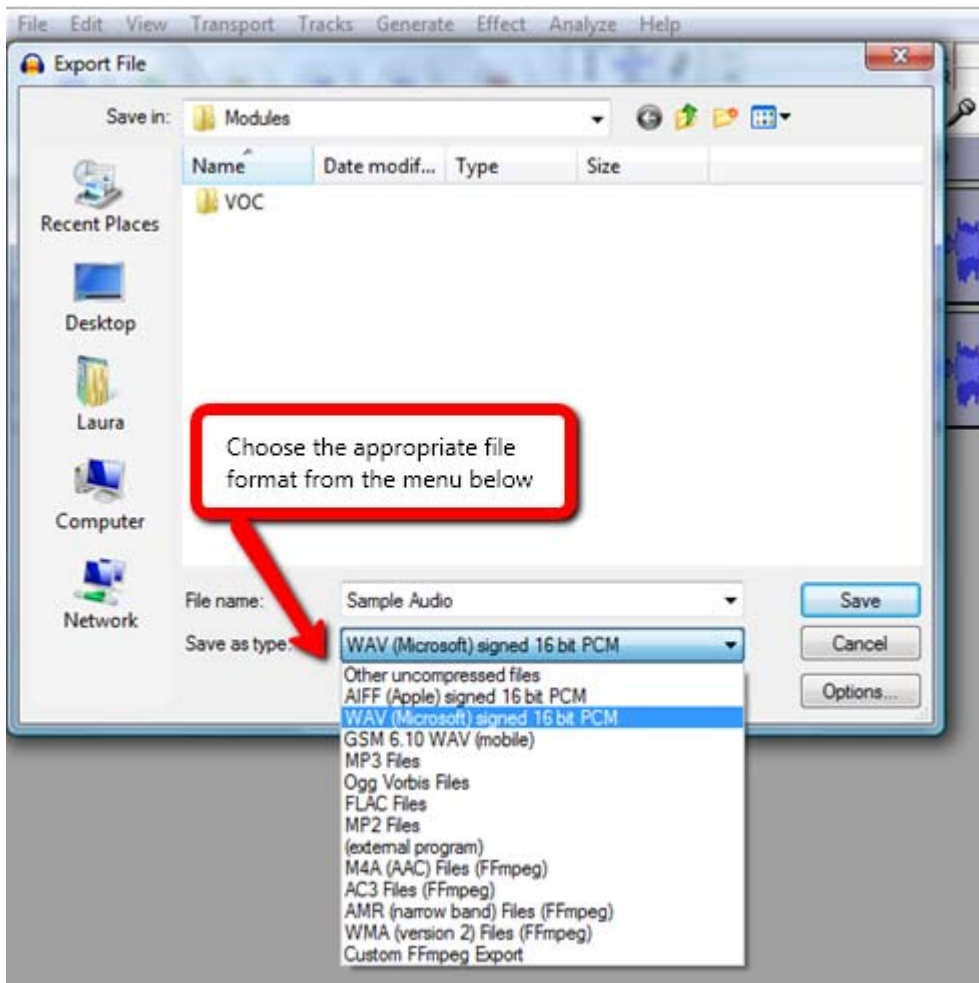
The most common formats are **WAV** or **AIFF** files. **AIFF** files are specific to Macs. Choose a folder for your recording project that is specific to the project name. If you are doing practice recordings, simply call it, "practice recordings". Likewise, consider having a different project folder for each name.

WAV FILES. WAV files are known as a "lossless format" that digitally captures sound and maintains the integrity of the audio. Although WAV files produce the ultimate quality, the files are very large and are not the most practical format for all audio projects and for transferring audio files to a client.

AIFF FILES. AIFF (Audio Interchange File Format) files are specific to Macs and share common elements with RIFF (Resource Interchange File Format) from which WAV files are based. These formats share some common elements which allow them to play on any computer system.

MP3 FILES. MP3s are a compressed (or smaller) format that reduces the dynamic range of the recording slightly, but makes the audio file easier to manage (i.e. send over the Internet, or playback in a portable "MP3 Recorder"). This is a well known and popular format these days,

but you cannot record directly to MP3, instead MP3 files are created from these 2 existing formats AFTER they are recorded.

EXPORTING MP3 FILES:

Formatting your audio file to an MP3 file in Audacity requires a FREE download called LAME MP3 Encoder. Copy and paste this link in your web browser http://lame.buanzo.com.ar/. Then locate your operating system to choose the appropriate download.
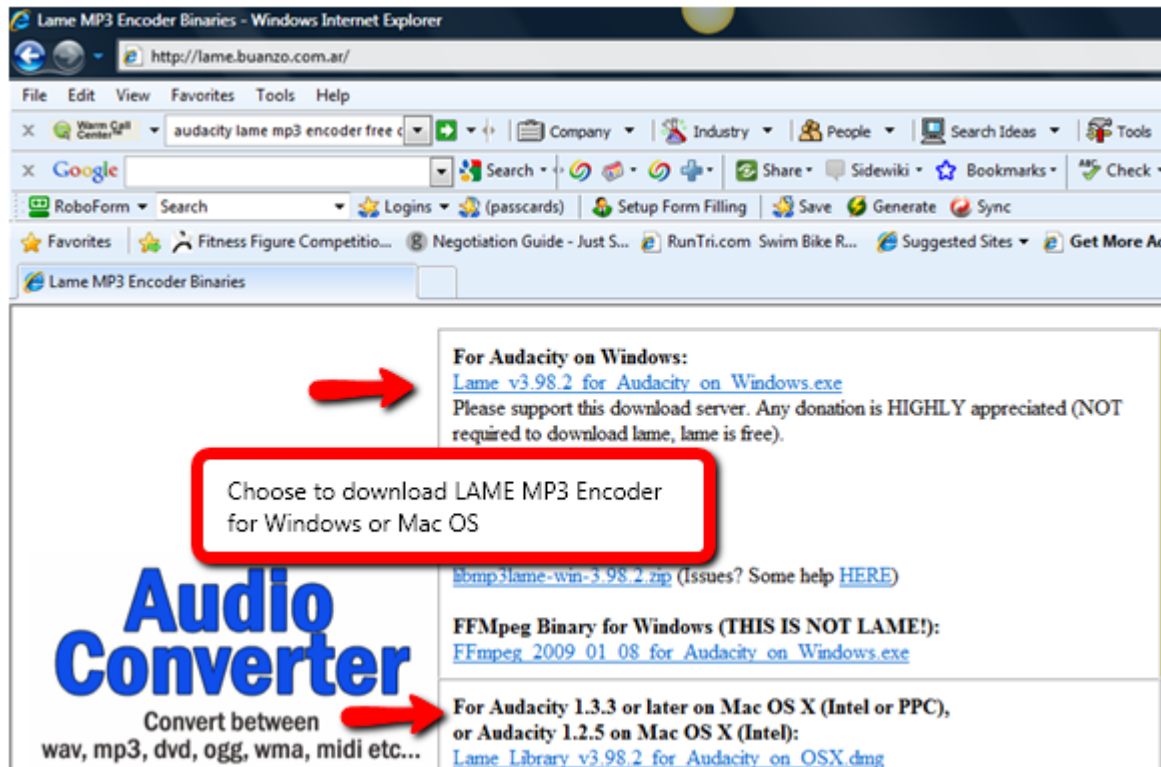
Click on the appropriate link to begin the download. When asked if you want to run or save this file, click "Save".
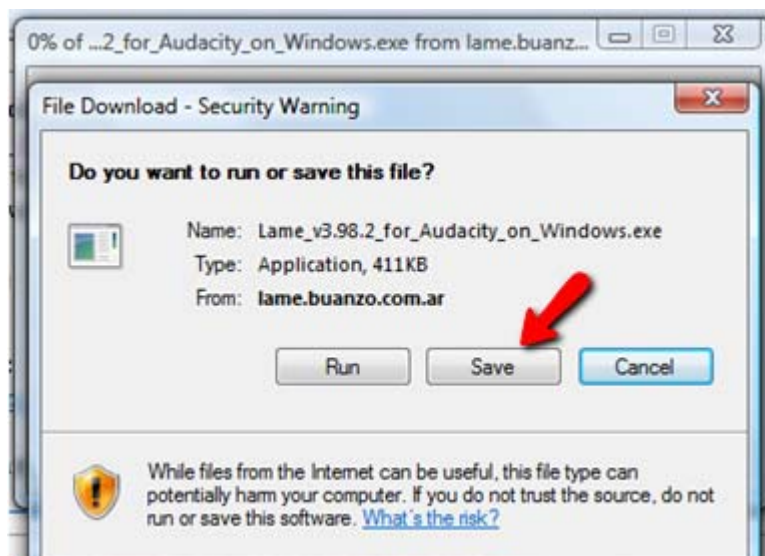
Choose the location in which you want LAME MP3 Encoder to be saved.
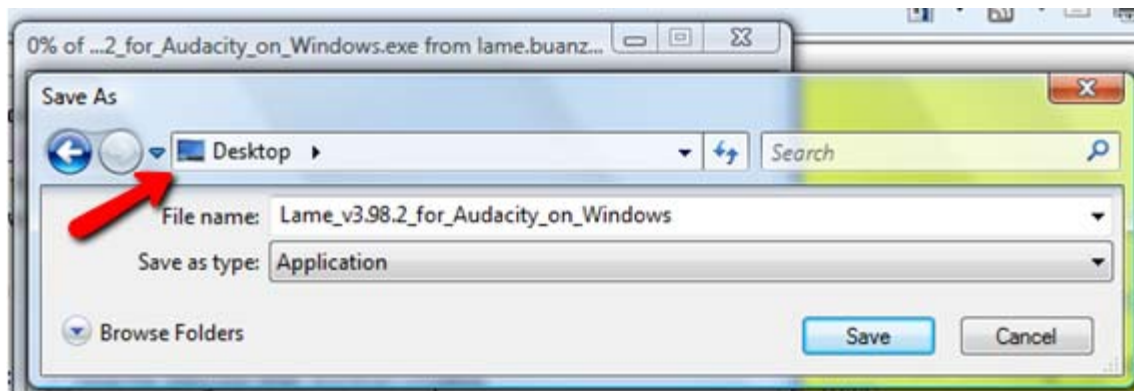
After the file has successfully downloaded, click "Close".
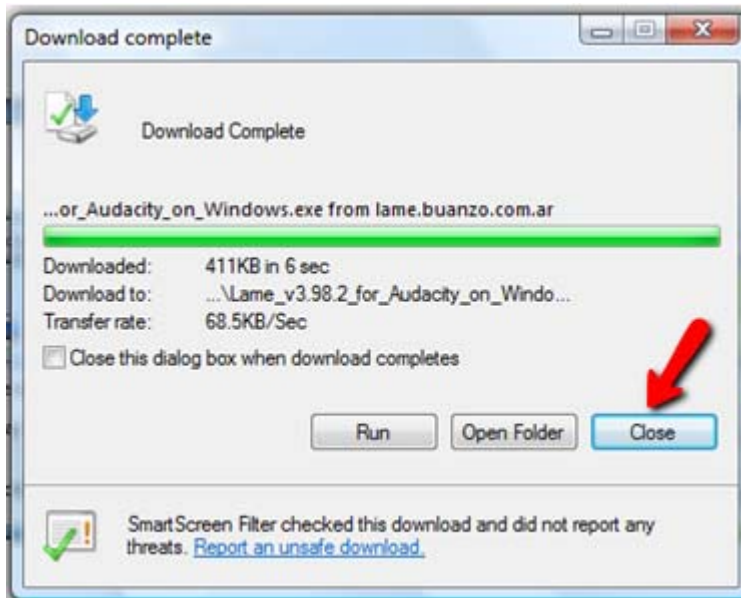
LAME MP3 Encoder should be in the location you selected. In this case, it was saved to the Desktop.

The first time you click on the LAME MP3 icon, LAME for Audacity Setup Wizard will run. You will only have to go through Setup Wizard once. Simply follow the prompts. Click "Next".

Select "I accept the agreement" and click "Next".

The Setup Wizard will then create a folder for LAME MP3 Encoder. Click "Next".
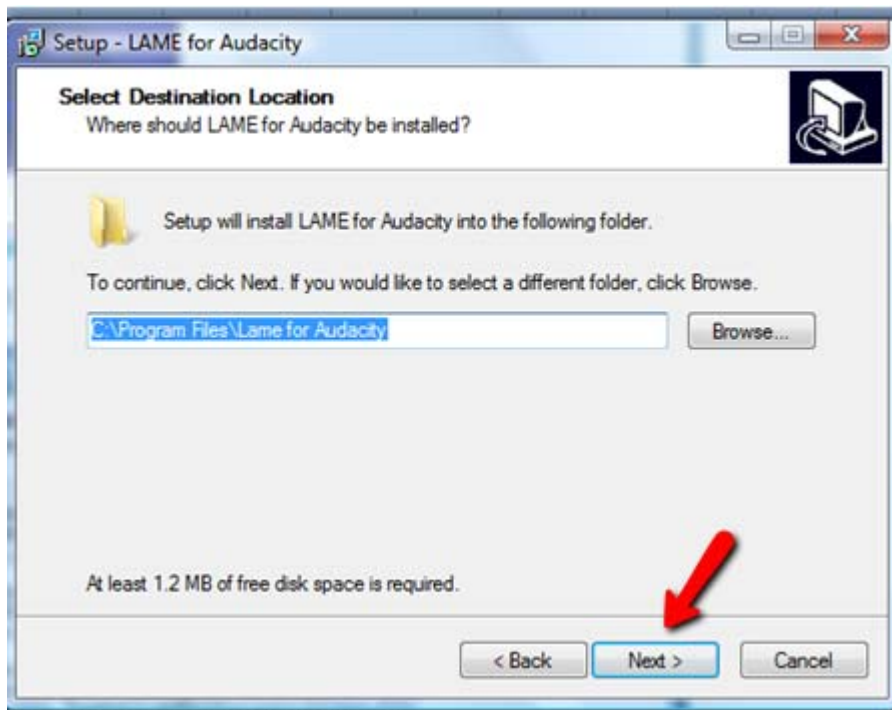
Click "Install" and LAME MP3 will begin installing.
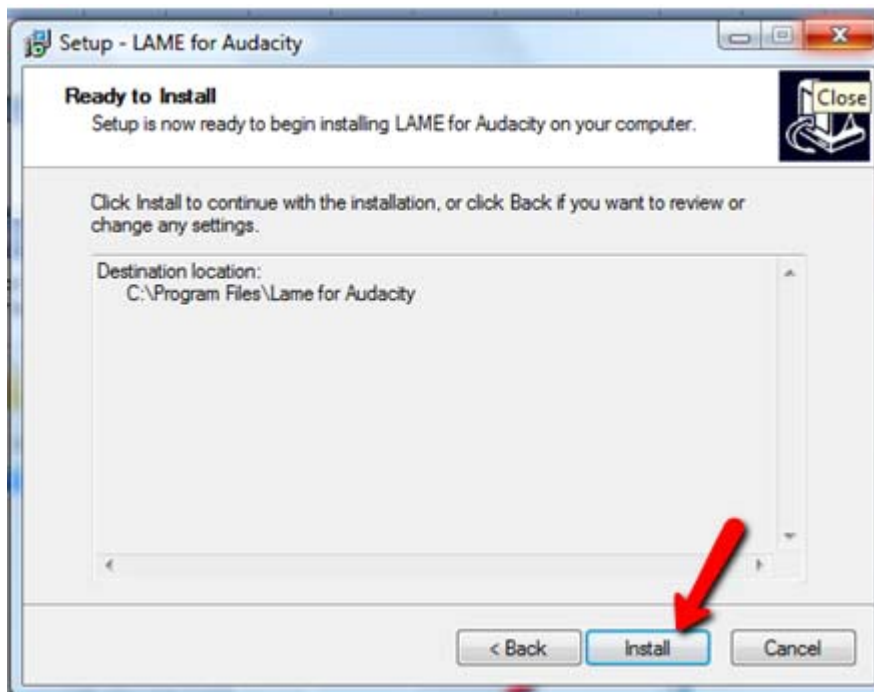
Click "Finish" after the installation is complete to exit the Setup Wizard.

Once LAME MP3 Encoder is installed, you can launch Audacity and export MP3 files.
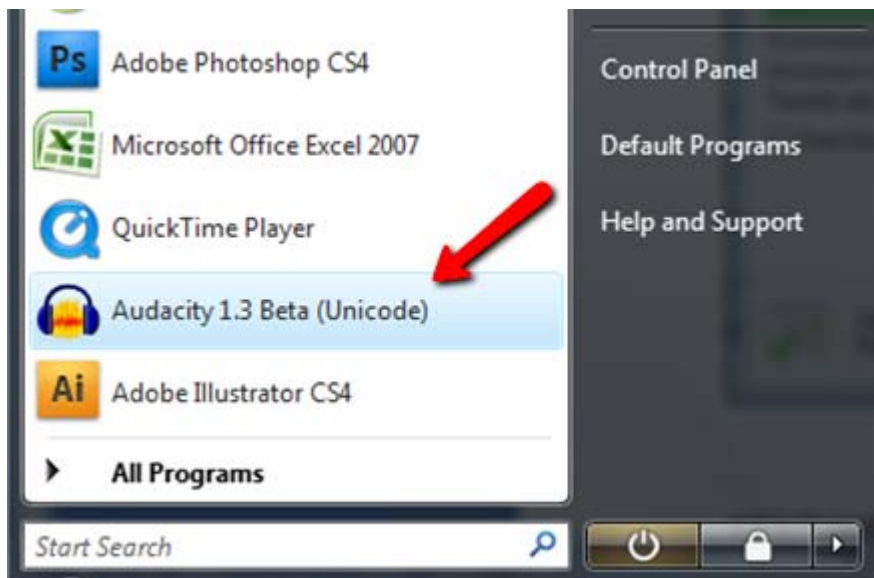
Open Audacity and record an audio clip or open an audio file you previously recorded. Then go to the "File" menu and select "Export".
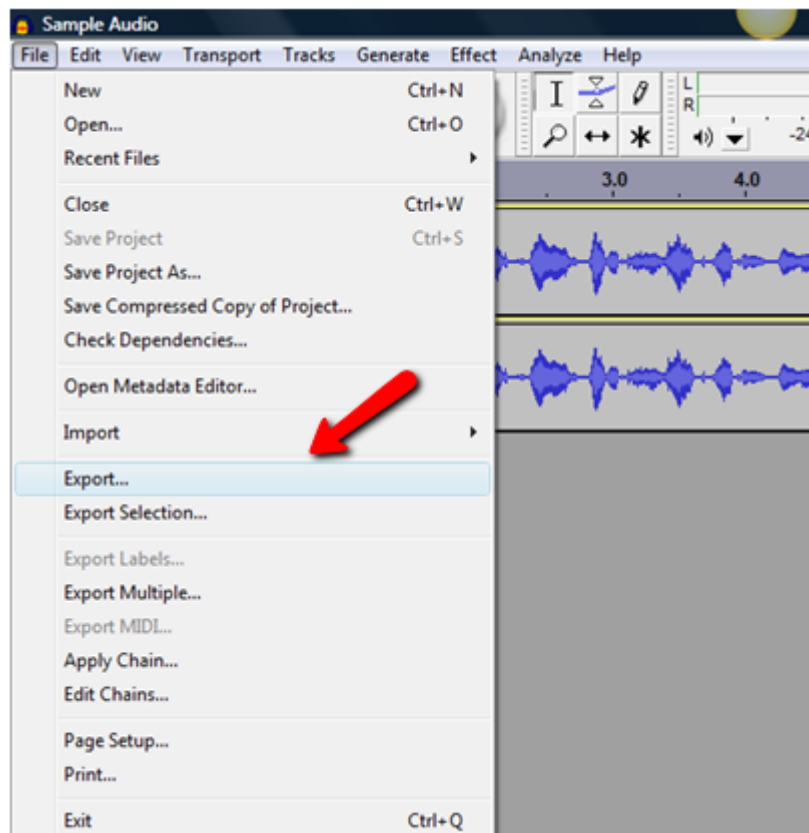
Choose "MP3 Files" and click "Save".
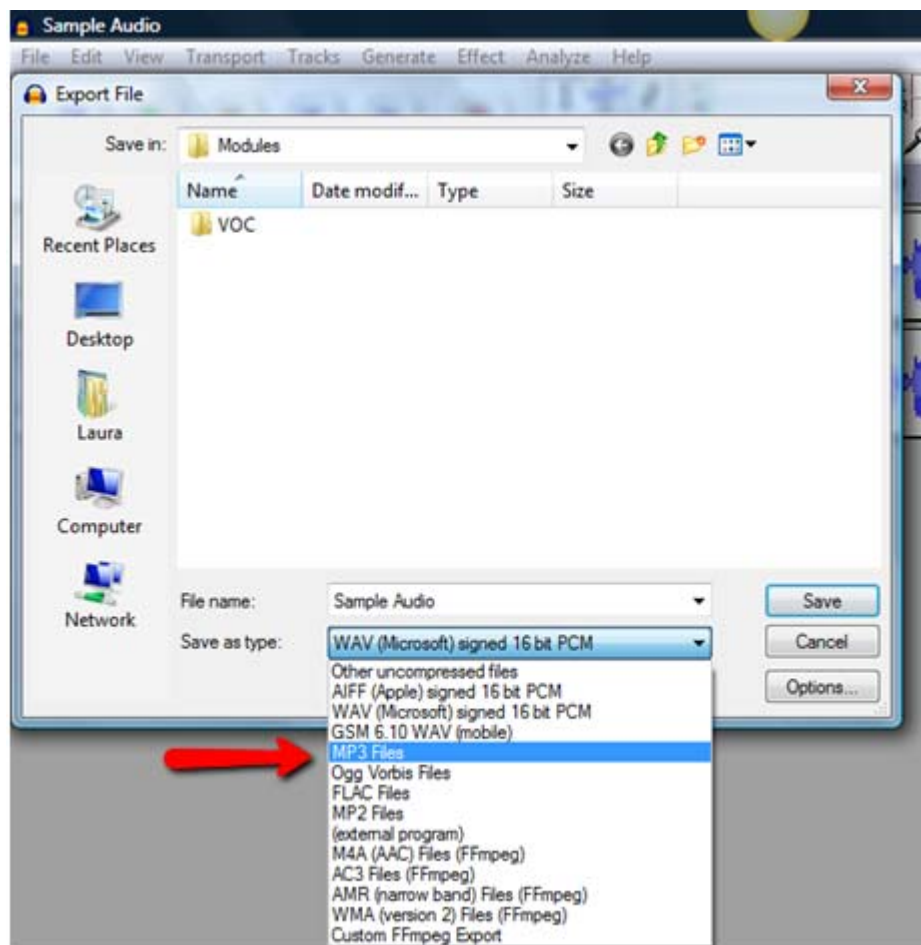
Select the location you want to save your MP3 file to, name the audio file and click "Save".
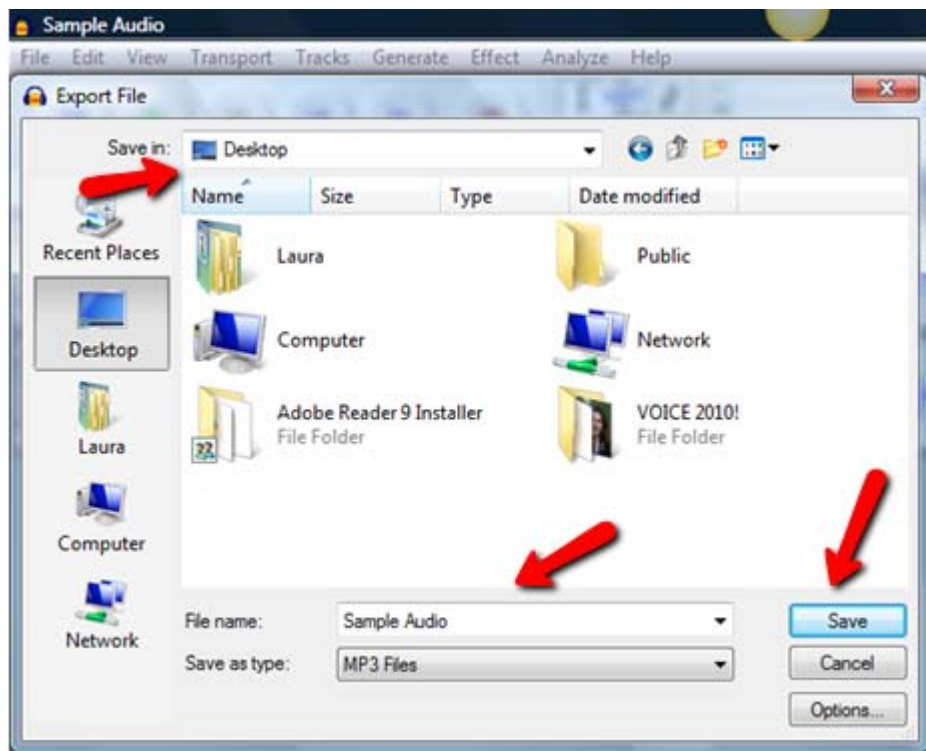
The following table will appear and you can fill in any information that is relevant. Then click "OK".
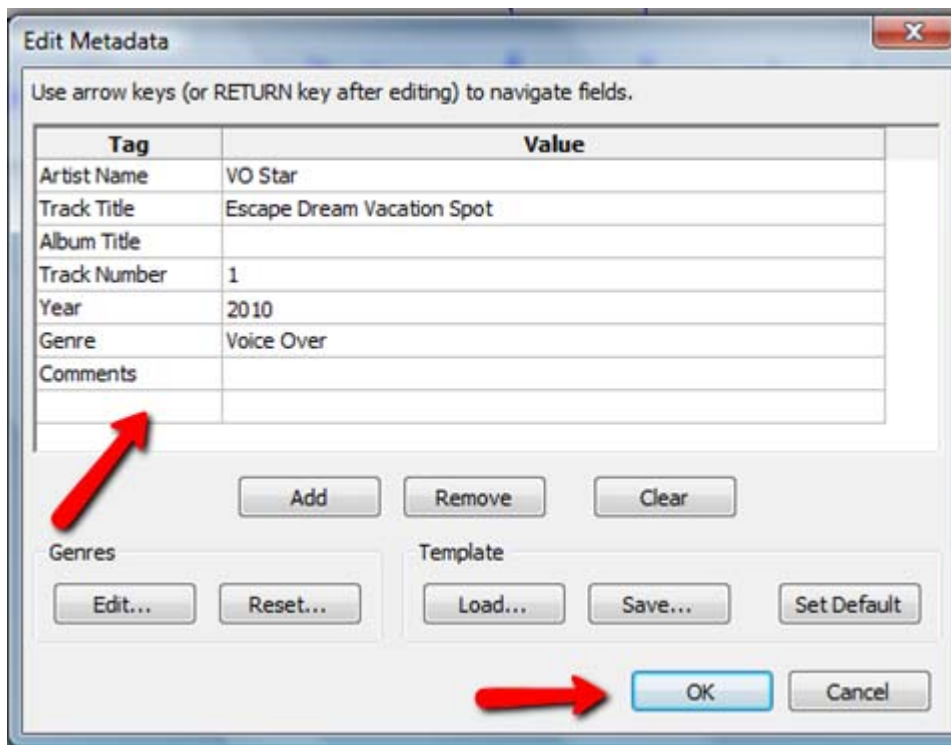
Your audio file will be exported as an MP3 file.

Now you know how to create MP3 files from WAV and AIFF files!

SENDING AUDIO FILES:

Regardless of the file format, audio files tend to be large and can be a challenge to send as an email attachment to your client, even with a high-speed connection. The solution is to use a service such as **YouSendIt.com**.

https://www.yousendit.com/

YouSendIt is a service that allows you to upload your audio file to YouSendIt, where it is secured, and email your client a link to your file where they can download it. This service is easy to use and it's FREE for files up to 100MB.

Copy and paste this link in your web browser https://www.yousendit.com/ and click on "Sign Up".

To get started, choose the "Lite" Plan. It's free and, as your needs change, you may want to upgrade to a paid plan with advanced features and options. Be sure to take advantage of the "Free Trial" for any plan options too. This will allow you to use the program and learn the new features before you invest any money.

Simply fill in your email address, your full name, create a password, confirm it and hit the "Submit" button. It's that easy!

Sending a file is easy too. First, type in your email address and the recipient's email address. Next, click on "Select File".

Find the file you want to send and click "Open"..
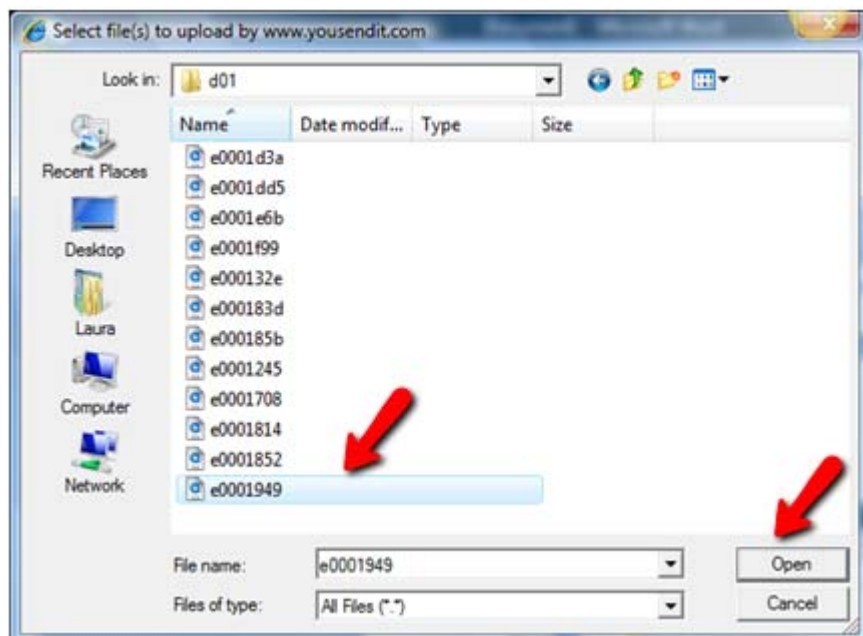
Now your file is attached.

Next, add a Subject for your email and a short Message for your client by clicking on the arrow buttons next to "Subject" and "Message" as shown in the illustration below. Then click on "Send It".

Once your file has been sent you will receive an instant confirmation as shown below. You will also receive an email confirmation with an exact copy of what you sent your client, including the link.
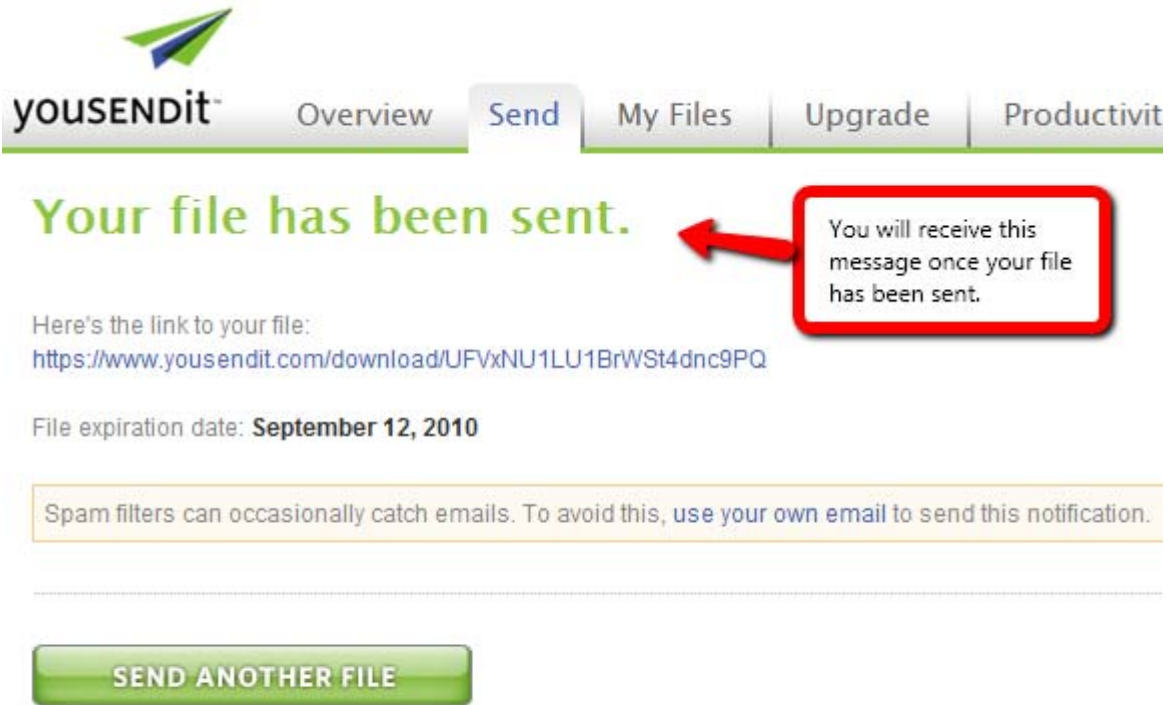
It's that simple!

Congratulations! You now know how to record your voice with your home computer. You can edit your audio tracks and know how to apply some production effects. You can format your audio files and send them to your friends or clients. Keep practicing and you will become more confident. Once you have decided to take your recording to a serious level, you will need to add some gear and set up a simple home studio.

Backing It All Up

You have done it! You have recorded your voice and are ready to record more audio files. Here's a word to the wise – back up your audio files to an external hard drive and possibly another back up source such as an online backup service like Carbonite. You will want to keep your audio files safe because both you and your clients will be counting on them.

Setting Up Your Home Studio

Your home studio will need the following basic features: a computer, an Internet connection, a microphone, recording and editing software, headphones or monitors, any necessary cables,

cords, adapters or accessories, sound treatment material and a place to record. The goal is to use these elements to create an audio chain that effectively produces a professional, clean, high-quality sound which clients will ultimately pay you to produce.

- A Windows or Mac-based computer equipped with a decent sound card and processor will serve as your Digital Audio Workstation (DAW).

  A sound card is a hardware component that allows your computer to send and receive audio signals. Most computers come with a sound card built in and expansion ports which allow you to plug in a microphone and a headset or speakers.

  A processor is the powerhouse, the brain that tells the computer what to do and how to do it most efficiently. The speed of the processor is how fast the computer can carry out these instructions. Processor speed is usually measured in Megahertz (MHz) or Gigahertz (GHz). A single Megahertz equals 1,000,000 cycles per second or instructions per second that the computer can carry out and 1000 MHz equals 1 GHz or 1,000,000,000 cycles per second. Simply put, the bigger the number, the faster the processor.

  Whether you choose a PC or a Mac is a matter of personal preference. Thinking in terms of desktop or laptop you should consider your studio location. A desktop is perfect for a dedicated studio space. If portability is a priority consider a laptop.

- You will need a reliable, high-speed Internet connection, preferably broadband to send your audio files for auditions and to clients.

- Recording auditions and professional voice overs will require a quality, low-noise Condenser microphone. USB Condenser microphones are perfect for beginning voice over talent as they are easy to use and can be purchased for as little as $100. Some of the quality brands to watch for include: **Rode**, **Shure**, **Blue**, **Audio-Technica**, **MXL**, and **AKG**.

MXLUSB-009

Shure PG27USB

- You will need appropriate professional recording and editing software for recording auditions and professional quality voice overs. **Sony Sound Forge** (Windows only), **Adobe Soundbooth**, **Adobe Audition**, and **Twisted Wave** (Mac only) are all professional-grade software with *free download trials* to help you choose the right program for you. Definitely take advantage of the free trials, learn the various features and get comfortable with the software before you decide to buy.

Adobe Audition

Twisted Wave

- You want your sound to be as clean as possible. Closed-back headphones will allow you to accurately hear your recording, including any mouth noise or outside noises that may have crept in to your recording preventing a professional, clean, high-quality sound. **Sony**, **Shure**, **Sennheiser**, and **Audio-Technica** are all excellent brands to consider. Another option is to invest in quality monitors, although this option costs more.

- As you set up your home studio and prepare to record, you may find that you will need longer cables or cords and maybe some adapters to accommodate your equipment. Consider how you will mount your microphone and if you need a pop filter to help control plosives. Plosives are those harsh sounds from consonants such as B, P, and T. You may also want a music stand to hold your scripts while you record.

- You will need a quiet place to put all of this. Some voice over talents convert a spare or walk-in closet to a studio space. Others use a corner of a room or an entire room for their home studio set up. Once you decide on your studio space you will need to prepare it with some sound treatment solutions.

- Simple solutions to help block outside noise include: adding weather stripping to drafty windows and doors, placing a foam beam, foam blocks or piece of wood wrapped with a towel along the bottom of doors, and creating covers for higher- traffic windows out of plywood or particle board to cover windows while you record. Fasten window covers with hanger bolts and wing nuts for easy removal. You should add weather stripping to the window side to protect the window frame and trim and may want to consider adding some Auralex acoustical foam to the studio side for added sound absorption. Heavier drapes are fine for lower-traffic windows. Thick, plush or shag carpet on the floor will also help absorb sound and prevent unwanted noise. Air conditioners and furnaces are additional noise culprits that you may need to turn off while recording.

  Your computer will make noise but remember that it needs room for air circulation to stay cool too. If you have a desktop unit, placing it underneath the desk will significantly reduce fan noise in your recording. If you have a laptop, creating a barrier between the laptop and the microphone is easy with simple room dividers and thick quilts or foam core panels with Auralex foam. Again, just make sure to leave enough room for air circulation so your laptop doesn't get too hot. Finally, take off any jewelry that may add unwanted noise during recording sessions. You can always put it back on later.
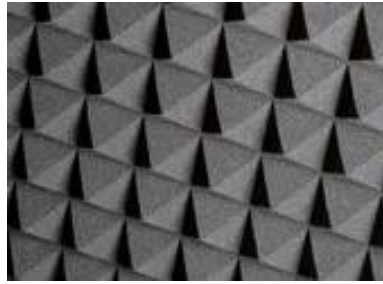
Putting It to the Test

Now that you have your studio set up and your sound treatment in place, it's time to put it to the test. Record silence for 20 to 30 seconds and then record a short spot using the free voice-over scripts on www.VoiceOverClub.com. Listen to your recording with your headphones to detect any unwanted noise. Keep in mind that most recording and editing software will have a gate setting to help control and minimize room noise but it's important to address unwanted, controllable noises. Also, play around with your mic positioning to find your sweet spot, reduce plosives, and achieve the right sound level.

Kicking It Up a Notch

Your home studio is a work in progress. As you gain more experience, you may want to offer some production services to your voice over clients such as adding background music and sound effects. As your recording needs change, you may want to consider adding to your studio and upgrading your gear. This may include upgrading your microphone, adding a preamp and mixer, upgrading your studio space and sound treatment, or perhaps adding ISDN or Source Connect. The sky's the limit!

It's Your Voice, It's Your Future!

You now know how to record your own voice and set up your home studio. It's time to get on the fast track and make your own voice recordings. Keep practicing. Get some professional voice over training. You've got what it takes and you know what to do. What you choose to do with it is ultimately up to you.

Happy recording!