Sound Recording Notes

Recording for sound effects and non-synch sound

If you are using a audio tape recorder kit or DAT kit:

• Sound recordist should state the audio tape between each take, and turn the volume down between takes to ease searching later. Take notes and log your recordings as you go! Note conditions, location, etc - be specific ie: "30 seconds of traffic on Mission Street, 5:00 PM"

• Set up a recording level by watching the VU meter - occasional peaks into the red are OK, but avoid 'pinning' the needle. Voice recording should be in a range between -7 to -1 db. Don't record ANYTHING at a low level - it may be worthless to you later. The key to level is often proximity, so...

• GET THE MICROPHONE CLOSE TO THE SOURCE OF THE SOUND.
  Even the shotgun mic will record better sound at 12 inches, instead of 12 feet. (or even three feet). Move the mic around, and listen to how sound changes with angle of approach - RECORD several takes of each sound effect. Every inch closer to the source will improve the quality of the recorded sound.

• Use headphones while recording, but set a playback level and leave it there - don't fine tune the setting during recording - you need a constant volume to measure against. But there is an exception:

• When recording a sound that you will use as background - keep the record level high, but turn down the headphone level, so you hear it at a low level. - this will give you a sense of what "reads" at a low background level.

• Dolby noise reduction is designed to reduce 'tape hiss'. Make sure you match the setting in playback that you used in recording. ie. On/OFF or Dolby B or C (audio cassette only)

• For voice recording, hold the microphone close to the subject's mouth, and below or above (let them speak over the mic) - there is no substitute for proximity in sound recording. Get the mic as close as possible without interfering with the framing of the camera. Above is usually less obtrusive, and if using the shot gun, provides a "dead" background. Use a "fish pole" to hold the mic.

• The shotgun mic is a super-cardoid, electric condenser microphone. It doesn't amplify sound, but it is highly directional - you still need to be close to the source of the sound, and be aware of other sounds beyond (behind) your subject that might be picked up as well. This is why it is good to mic from above the subject, thereby making a background of floor or ground (usually a "dead' element). The shotgun has a switch that enables it to "roll off" lower frequencies - try listening with this switch on and then off. (typically used to "roll off" wind noise).

• When shooting observational documentary - take some time to just record sound (on tape). For example - give yourself some long takes of background sound, ambiance, or diegetic music. These can be captured as audio only clips and used to "sweeten" your sound track. Remember, in Final Cut Pro you can work with up to 8 sound tracks. Think about and look (listen) for other non-sync sounds that would be useful details to use in editing.

Notes: