

Listening Tests

It is often helpful to ask several people to listen to the recording and report what, if anything they can hear. Take care to avoid using leading statements when doing this e.g. “can you hear the man’s voice?”.

Whenever possible, each participant should listen using a pair of headphones in order to remove any extraneous sounds and other distractions.

Try to avoid group listening tests or posting onto social media and asking for suggestions. These methods carry a greater risk of participants being influenced by the opinions of others.

Participants should be asked to describe what they hear, they should not be prompted or guided about when to listen and what to listen for. If a participant fails to hear anything, this should be noted and not merely disregarded.

Participants who are not associated with the location or who have little knowledge of the case are preferred.

Keep the original recording

After making your working copy keep the original in a safe place. This may be on an external device or in the cloud. No changes should be made to this original but you may wish to use it in order to make further copies

Publicity ?

If you believe that a recording you have taken may contain something significant you should seek a further opinion from a trusted organisation such as the SPR before you approach the news or social media.

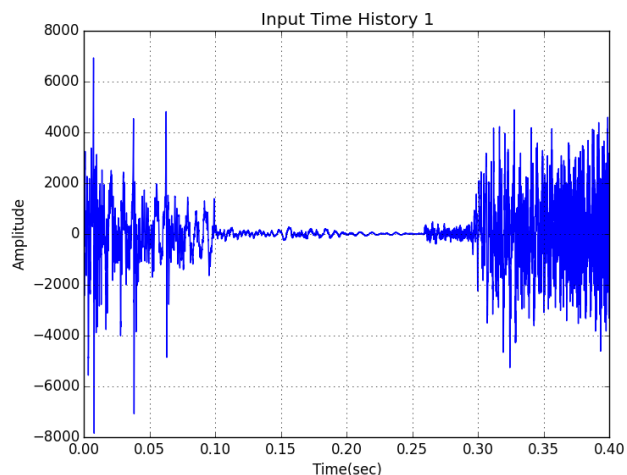
Metadata

Metadata is additional information about the sound recording which is contained in a small file attached to some recordings. This is normally in the form of an editable ‘note’ that users may optionally complete when saving the recording. Some recorders - such as smart phones, automatically include some information such as the date and time the recording was made, the recording’s bit and sample rate and sometimes a geo-tag. If this metadata is available it can be used to obtain additional information that may be helpful.

It can also be used to support the account of someone submitting a recording for examination and may indicate if the audio has been edited after it has been made.

Metadata can be used in some audio editing software in order to pre-load the required audio settings.

Unfortunately, it is possible to re-write or erase all or part of the audio metadata. It is also possible to remove some parts of the metadata such as a geo-tag which may be desirable to enhance client confidentiality.



Analysing Sounds

Examining an audio recording can provide a lot of additional information. Recordings may be taken during a site visit or may be supplied by witnesses and other third parties.

Using Equipment

Guidance Notes for Investigators
of Apparitions, Hauntings,
Poltergeists and Similar Phenomena

Investigation Quick Guide



The first steps

Always begin by making a copy of the recording. This copy will be used for all future actions. The original should be retained and carefully filed.

Avoid just loading the recording into your sound editing software and making random changes to the amplitude, filters, or some other parameter, hoping for something to reveal itself.

Using a technique similar to that employed by forensic audio analysis; create a folder for each recording or sound clip to be analysed and save an unaltered copy into this as your reference. Then create a new text file and give it the same title as the recording / clip and save this in the same folder.

Systematically work through any changes or alterations you wish to make to the recording, changing just one parameter at a time. Following every change, save a copy of the changed audio into the folder, giving it a unique and meaningful file name e.g. "*locationsound1.mp3*". Use the text file to record information about every change e.g. "*location sound1 - amplitude increased by 50%*". Repeat this step for every new change you make.

This technique will allow you to demonstrate every step you have used to draw any conclusion about the nature of the audio. It also lets you step back through your analysis allowing you and others to check your conclusions.

Third party recordings

Investigators are often sent recordings that have been taken by witnesses or other third parties. The first step should be asking the sender why they made the recording and what they believe it demonstrates. If there is any metadata this can then be compared with it, in order to confirm some of the account information.

Then check the file name, this should comply with one of the standard file indexing systems used by the equipment manufacturers. If it does not, you should immediately suspect that the recording has been edited in some way. Also look out for clips with descriptive file names e.g. "*ghostvoice.mp3*" as this is also an indication that the audio has been edited in some way.

Next, check to see if there is any metadata attached to the recording and confirm that the information it contains agrees with the information supplied by the person supplying the recording. The metadata can usually be quickly accessed from within your chosen audio editing or playback software by selecting the 'file info' option.

Sometimes you may find that only the date or time is available and that it is wrong. This is often caused by the person failing to correctly set the date and time on their device beforehand. If any other parts of the metadata appear to be incorrect or possibly changed, you may reasonably suspect that the picture has been edited or altered in some way.

If you suspect that the file has been altered then you must only proceed with great care.

Making random changes rarely provides helpful data.

Making a series of changes to a recording, changing the amplitude, frequency or even reversing the playback using sound editing software will rarely prove to be helpful.

Keep an open mind when examining a recording

Don't let your beliefs or your expectations cloud your judgement. Consider every possibility,

The image shows the front cover of a book. The title 'Using Equipment' is written in a large, white, serif font at the top. Below it, in a smaller white serif font, is the subtitle 'Guidance Notes for Investigators of Apparitions, Hauntings, Poltergeists and Similar Phenomena'. The background of the cover is a solid dark red color.

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Further Information

For those seeking more comprehensive information about analysing sound recordings; the Society for Psychological Research has published a useful book.

Using Equipment Guidance Notes for Investigators of Apparitions, Hauntings, Poltergeists and Similar Phenomena.

The book is available in soft back format directly from the SPR website: www.spr.ac.uk (books for sale) and also from Amazon in either printed or kindle formats.

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