
Third party recordings

Sometimes, the investigator may be supplied with recordings that have been made by witnesses or other third parties.

In these cases the investigator should try to ascertain as much information about the circumstances of the recording as possible; why was it made?, what is the recording of?, etc. Where possible try to find out the type of recorder that was used and whereabouts and when the recording was made. This information will be particularly helpful later when trying to replicate or test the recording.

If the supplied recording is edited or is an extract from a longer recording asking the person to supply the full unedited original version. The original recording may contain additional information or context that can assist the investigation process.

If there is any suspicion on the part of the investigator that the recording made by a witness or third party has been altered or amended without good reason, the recording should be considered to be unreliable and its value to the investigation will be greatly diminished.

MP3 files

These are compressed audio files which are used mainly for playing music. The format is compressed and the full range of the audio may be missing.

Use a bath sponge

If you need to place your recorder down; placing it onto a bath sponge will reduce the likelihood of vibrations and sound being picked up through the body of the recorder.

Choosing the microphone

The biggest improvement to recording quality can often be gained by using the right type of microphone. The built-in microphone on many recorders is really only good enough for making quick voice notes.

Omni directional microphones are useful for recording ambient sounds from all around; directional microphones can be helpful when trying to isolate sounds from a particular direction or for removing unwanted distracting sounds.

Some microphones require additional power, either from the recorder (plug-in power and phantom power) or from an internal battery.

Make sure that the microphone has a compatible connection to the recorder; there are several differing types of connector that are used i.e. XLR, RCA, Phono.

Where possible, use a microphone stand. Hand-holding the microphone (or recorder) can introduce unwanted handling noises on the recording. Using a suspension (anti-vibration) mount can be helpful in order to further reduce any unwanted vibrations and handling sounds.



Recording Sound

Using recording equipment allows the investigator to determine if the reported sound was a real occurrence or if it may have been an auditory hallucination.

Using Equipment

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

Investigation Quick Guide



Choosing a recorder

Digital recorders provide several significant advantages; fewer moving parts and greater reliability. The recordings can be easily transferred to a computer for further examination afterwards.

The main consideration when choosing a recorder should be the intended use. Is it mainly to be used for witness interviews or recording the ambient sound within the location, or both?

Recorders which can use both batteries and external power provide the greatest degree flexibility. Being able to add additional storage (memory cards) will permit almost unlimited duration recordings to be made.

Choosing a recorder which can be connected to an external microphone offers a greatest allows the most suitable type of microphone to be used in different recording situations.

Recorders which have complicated controls, requiring time-consuming menu selections and button presses are likely to lead to mistakes setting up the device or missed recording opportunities.

Choosing a recorder that allows you to record using an uncompressed audio file format will provide the best quality. It is best to avoid recorders which only use MP3 files as these files are often highly compressed and have a reduced audio quality.

Don't overlook using your smartphone, tablet or computer; many can be used as excellent location sound recorders.

Setting up the recorder

Using the highest available recording quality is desirable. This is usually in the form of a .wav file format. Many recorders allow you to choose the frequency and bitrate of the recording. As a minimum aim for 44.1kHz / 16bit. If you are using several recorders try to ensure that each is set to use the same file format and recording quality settings.

Turn off any options that alter the nature of the recorded. These include, noise reduction, wind filters and sound effects.

If the recorder has an adjustable recording level control (input or microphone gain) don't be tempted to turn this to the maximum or to use the automatic level option. For ambient sound recording in a quiet environment setting the input level to around 80% will normally produce the best results; for speech and interviews a setting of 40-60% is normally best.

Ensure that you have sufficient memory for the intended recording session; use a freshly formatted memory card if necessary. Also, make sure that you have sufficient power for the recorder, either using batteries or an external power supply.

Once the recorder is set up, make a test recording to check that the device and microphone is working correctly and that the audio levels are properly set.

Finally, don't forget to set the time and date.

Relocating the recorder

If you need to relocate the recorder or use it for a different type of recording take a few minutes to check the settings and make a short test recording before use.

Changed Batteries?

If you need to change the batteries; be aware that some recorders will re-set the recording options and settings when their batteries are changed or the media is reformatted.



Further Information

For those seeking more comprehensive information about sound recording; the Society for Psychical 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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