

Hot or Boring Tape? A Sound Difference

First course, Second grading period, Week 2

Hot tape is tape that grabs you, makes you want to listen, states an idea well in an interesting way. It can come from anywhere. A policy maker at a press conference, a personal story, ambience where something happens so compelling and illustrative of what you are reporting that to leave it out would seem unthinkable.

Not every piece of tape can be hot tape. Learning to recognize hot tape and how to get it is crucial to putting together listenable and memorable radio.



Enduring Understanding

Radio is sound and relies on sound alone to convey information, ideas and attitudes. Understanding how to recognize hot tape, solid tape and boring tape is crucial to putting together listenable and well prepared newscasts, promos, commercials, pieces and documentaries on radio.



Essential Questions

What is hot tape? When is “boring” tape useful in copy? When do you use substantive somewhat boring tape as a tape cut?



Objectives and Outcome

The student will learn how to hear and recognize the hot tape, substantive tape and boring tape and know what to do with it.



Suggested Time

Two to three days



Resources and Materials

- Pre-selected tapes in the categories under discussion (10-16 examples of hot and boring tape cuts)
- Radio transcripts of pieces
- A pre-selected press conference or interview of 20 minutes that includes both hot and boring tape
- Taped nightly news show and All Things Considered



Procedure

1. Define hot tape and play several examples (at least five) for the class. Hot tape is tape that grabs you, makes you want to listen, states an idea well in an interesting way. (Note: It does NOT matter if the audio is from TV or radio.) Discuss each one.
2. Play six examples of hot and boring tape in random order.

Have the students write down “hot” or “boring” and key phrases they hear in each one. Have students share their evaluations and why specific tapes are “hot.” Explain why the other examples are classified “boring.”

3. Play six additional hot and boring tape cuts in random order. By now the class should be making the distinction very easily.
4. Now listen to 10 minutes of a pre-selected press conference or interview consisting of a mix of hot and boring tape. Play it from the workstation off a monitor so students can see the time counting up. Have them log the tape starring (*) the hot tape and underlining important statements that may sound boring but are important to content.
5. Isolate the hot tape and necessary tape on the workstation on the monitor and save the cuts. Explain why you are making the edits at particular points as you go along.
6. Students make a piece out of the press conference/interview tape they heard and analyzed previously. Have them write into three hot tape cuts and one substantive one that is more ho hum, using the illustration tape as a guide to get information for their own copy. If there is time have them read the copy and play the cuts for the class.
7. Record All Things Considered and nightly news shows for use with students in class. This will be used for assessment of their ability to identify hot tape.
8. If there is time, students fan out around the school to record hot ambience. Something specific MUST happen on the tape. You want locker slams, animated chatter, telephones being answered; in other words, the active sounds of the school make hot tape.



Homework

Students listen to one of two programs — the nightly news for a half hour or 15 minutes of All Things Considered on radio. Students list all the hot tape they hear in the broadcast.

Have students interview a family member. They should ask questions about someone, a grandmother, a favorite uncle, the time the family member fought in Vietnam, etc. Get the person really revved up and talking in an animated way and listen for the hot tape flow. Students make a specific list of the phrases that jump out at them as the conversation continues and not what the conversation was all about. Note, the more engaged the student is in the story and involved, the more animated the interviewee will be, and the better the conversation will be.

If they are not animated, get people to restate answers. They may be more interested and engaged as you revisit or clarify the subject. Use this technique when interviewees sound flat. Do remember not everyone always needs to or should sound upbeat and animated. Use your best judgment. Don't overdo it. But remember, the way you engage people in conversation and the way you sound will affect how they sound in their answers.



Assessment

Define hot tape and find five examples on an evening's newscast or All Things Considered. Be very specific in terms of the actualities you describe in your answers.

Students may be given a take-home quiz to find 10 examples of hot tape from various radio broadcasts on the Web and record them. In addition to the recording, they are to tell why they selected these as examples of hot tape.



Academic Content Standards

National Standard

Know and apply appropriate criteria to arts and communication products. (McREL, Arts & Communication Career, Standard 2)



Industry Standards and Expectations

Understand content, technical concepts and vocabulary to analyze information and follow directions. (F02.1.2, Comprehend and use reading strategies to learn meaning, technical concepts and vocabulary, Career Cluster Project: Communications Skills)

Apply knowledge of equipment and skills related to audio production. (Pathway KS Statement: Audio and Video Technology and Film, States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Identify the basic functions and resources for editing. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Exhibit knowledge of editing audio and video productions, States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Sound of MOS

First course, Second grading period, Week 2

Known as Kid in the Hall features in the student newspaper, Man on the Street (MOS) interviews select individuals at random to get their opinions. This vox pop (Voice of the People) assignment combines ambience collection, question formulation, and recording the human voice.



Enduring Understanding

Radio is sound and relies on sound alone to convey information, ideas and attitudes. Understanding how to use sound and its potential to communicate is essential to radio.



Essential Question

What are the sound requirements and technical skills needed to record a MOS?



Objectives and Outcome

- Students will practice writing questions to elicit responses.
- Students will record in the field, practicing their interview and microphone placement techniques.
- Students will evaluate taped interviews to determine the best responses.



Suggested Time

Two to three days



Resources and Materials

- Minidiscs, headphones, microphones
- Audio workstation

“Vox Pop,” Radio Production, page 102-108, 316, CD-ROM example (edited and unedited, Harry Potter film)



Procedure

1. Discuss the etymology of vox pop. Why would radio be an appropriate medium for the voice of the people? Man on the Street interviews work well when different areas of the school and of the town are utilized for a more random selection. (For example, what type of answers might you receive if all MOS were done on Rodeo Drive or Wall Street? In the locker room or with the girls chorus?) How does the random selection of the MOS give the public a voice on radio?

2. Play an example of MOS. Discuss its content and how it illustrates the sound requirements, including the use of clear, interesting answers and ambience to smooth out transitions as these answers are combined. The tape should be discussed from its technical aspects, not news content (this will be taught later in a more advanced lesson on the vox pop).
3. Give students their MOS assignment. Use a class- or a teacher-generated question series.
4. After listening as a class to the collected tape, decide on an interesting order of the best answers. Include one or two of the questions. Put the MOS recordings together into a single audio workstation. Teachers could demonstrate mixing ambience techniques and workstation features by doing the edit and mix with the class.

If students are advanced enough on the workstation, teams could work on the same recordings. At the end, the teams could compare their end products.



Homework

During the class period or as homework, ask students to record MOS in the school. Each student is to record two students' responses on a pre-assigned topic.

An example of a question series that students might ask: What are you eating? Please describe it for our listeners. How did you like it? Have students properly use the microphone to record the questions as well as the answers. Make it fun and remember to tell students to record everything including laughter.

Remind students not to stop recording too early. More is better. The more candid and appealing response may come in banter that follows the "official" exchange.



Assessment

Review the questioning techniques used during the MOS.
Review the quality of sound that is recorded. Can voices be heard? How has ambient sound been handled?
Review the editing of the clips. Find the areas that were done well and those that need improvement.

This activity might be best given a participation grade to learn skills, unless there is one particular skill that you want students to hone.



Academic Content Standards

Participate actively in self-directed work teams for a particular purpose, including posing relevant questions; extracting essential information from others' input, building on the ideas of others, and contributing relevant information or ideas in group discussions; and summarizing orally, in a coherent and organized way, information and ideas learned (DCPS English Language Arts, 10.L.1)

National

Understand the principles, processes, and products associated with arts and communication media (McREL, Standard 1, Arts & Communication Career)

National Benchmark

Know skills used in electronic communications (e.g., producing audio recordings and broadcasts, producing video recordings and motion pictures). (McREL, Arts & Communication Career, Grades 9-12)

Revise writing to improve the topic/idea development, organization, language/style, word choice, and the tone in light of the audience, purpose and formality of the context (DCPS English Language Arts, 9.W.5)



Industry Standards and Expectations

Comprehend the types of microphones, pick-up patterns, and techniques required for a variety of audio presentations. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Apply Knowledge of equipment and skills related to audio production, States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Apply knowledge of audio equipment for productions, including basic recording equipment, equalizers, mixing consoles, and quality-monitoring equipment. (Performance Element, Pathway KS Statement: Apply Knowledge of equipment and skills related to audio production, States' Career Clusters, National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium)

Knowledge: Journalism teachers understand: 7. The writing process as it relates to journalism (brainstorming, questioning, reporting, gathering and synthesizing information, writing, editing, and evaluating the final media product). (Standard #1A — Knowledge of Curriculum and Content/Classroom, Standards for Journalism Educators, Journalism Education Association and the Scholastic Journalism Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication)