

The use of Sound Clips

Sound clips make news or a report livelier, more interesting and more authentic. But not all sound clips are good and make sense. Before you use a sound clip, you should consider whether it will truly provide listeners with new insights. Ask yourself these core questions:

- **Can I, as a journalist, say what the sound clip contains better, simpler or clearer?**

YES => do not use sound clip

NO => use sound clip

- **Does the sound clip contain something that I, as a neutral reporter, may not express (e.g. opinion, emotions)?**

YES => use sound clip

NO => do not use sound clip

In practice, some “golden rules” for using sound clips have evolved:

1. Sound clips should be unique.

Sound clips make sense if they contain the following:

- Strong feelings
- Expressions of opinion
- Humour/wit
- Something about the personality of the interviewee
- Eye witness reports
- Historical sound documents

2. Sound clips are not for conveying facts and background information. These essentials should be part of your text, not part of the sound clip.

3. Caution with expert language or jargon in sound clips.

Journalists often use sound clips when they have to report about complex subject matters, e.g. complicated scientific or business topics. Frequently, the journalists themselves have not fully understood all details and aspects of these issues. But they fear that they might be unable to translate the specialists’ “jargon” into generally understandable language.

Such sound clips containing expert lingo are usually incomprehensible for the listener. It is better to leave them out. If the journalist cannot understand what is being said, then chances are that most listeners will not either.

If you are doing interviews and the interviewees talk to you in a language only experts will understand, immediately ask them to rephrase their thoughts using simple words.

4. Do not include the contents of the sound clip in the introduction.

When leading into a sound clip, journalists frequently make the mistake of saying exactly the same things that the listener will hear again from the interviewee. This is a waste of time and it is boring for the listener.

Instead, guide the listener towards the statement of the sound clip, explain who is speaking and what they are speaking about, but do not summarise what the statement is about in advance.

Example:

Not good:	Better:
Journalist: “Minister X believes the construction of the new factory will create jobs and provide economic impetus for the city.”	Journalist: “Although the construction of the new factory is contentious, Minister X believes the positive aspects outweigh the negative.”
Minister X: “As the minister in charge, I believe that the construction of the new factory will create a large number of jobs for our city. This will provide economic impetus for our city.”	Minister X: “As the minister in charge, I believe that the construction of the new factory will create a large number of jobs for our city. This will provide economic impetus for our city.”

5. Sound clips should be neither too short nor too long.

The listener needs time to adapt to the new voice. However, the sound clip should not be so long that it dominates the news bulletin or the report.

In the case of news with clips, the sound clips should not be longer than 20 seconds. For longer journalistic reports of between 2½ and 4 minutes, each sound clip should be between 15 and 30 seconds long. For longer reports – e.g. in the case of a 30-minute feature – the sound clips could also be longer.

6. The voice should go down at the end of the sound clip.

The listener should hear that the interviewee has come to the end of their sentence and/or thought. If you cut a sound clip at a point where the interviewee’s voice is up, the listener will suspect that the interviewee may have further expanded on his or her thought. So a statement cut in mid-sentence may sound like you are trying to keep something from the listener – manipulating what was actually said.