

# Pack 108, Item 13

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**BH2 – Audio editing**

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***What is audio editing?***

Audio editing is the process of electronically shortening, deleting, rearranging, or cutting audio into segments.

***How can it help me serve my listeners better?***

* My listeners will hear only what is important and necessary to the story.
* My listeners won’t get bored by statements or explanations that go on too long.
* My listeners won’t get distracted by verbal expressions such as “ums” and “ahs.”

***How can it help me produce better programs?***

* Editing my audio helps me produce programs that begin and end within the time period allotted for the program.
* By cutting out audio that isn’t important, effective, or entertaining, I can use more audio that is important, effective, or entertaining.
* I can make my program more interesting by arranging segments (clips) in a logical way that tells a story or proves a point.

***How do I get started?*** (Learn more about these and other points in the *Details* section below.)

🡺 The ethics of editing: Be accurate, be honest, be fair,

🡺 Learn your editing software.

🡺 Plan ahead

🡺 Record your audio and upload it to your computer.

🡺 Listen to your audio file and make notes. Decide on your focus.

🡺 Choose a production format.

🡺 Delete the longer segments of audio you don’t want.

🡺 Arrange the audio to suit how you want to tell the story.

🡺 Do the fine editing.

🡺 Listen and then mix down the final product.

***Details***

**The ethics of editing: Be accurate, be honest, be fair**

This is an important place to start as it will help you make the right decisions when you start editing.

When we edit, we present an audio representation that’s slightly different than what actually happened. This is not a bad thing. Our job as broadcasters is to present a fair and accurate account of events and issues. That job includes choosing what to include and exclude based on the focus of the story and the information needs of our audience. We rarely have enough time to present everything, and so we delete segments of the recording that are off-topic, confusing, distracting, or boring for the audience.

Here’s an example. Let’s say you are doing a story about problems farmers are having with the quality of seed they buy.

*Edited clip:*The cassava seeds I bought did not germinate.

*Original recording:* **Only a few of** the cassava seeds I bought, **as my husband also told you,** did not germinate.

There is a huge difference between the two versions. By deleting the first phrase “**Only a few**” you change the meaning of the original statement. By deleting “**as my husband also told you”** you don’t change the meaning. Rather, you simplify the statement by removing an unnecessary fact.

Editing is a powerful tool for broadcasters. It is important to consider how what you remove can change the meaning of a statement.

Remember to use qualifiers. It is not fair to imply that something was stated as an absolute if the person qualified their answer, as in the example about seed germination above.

For example, a full original recording could be, “Pesticides are effective. A great many farmers rely on them. But they have serious environmental, health, and even agricultural downsides.” But to edit this to say, “Pesticides are effective. A great many farmers rely on them” is not an accurate and fair representation of the original quote.

For more on the importance of fairness, accuracy, integrity, and respect in radio broadcasting, see FRI’s Broadcaster how-to guide: [F.A.I.R. journalism standards for farmer programs](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/104-post-harvest-cow-pea/f-r-journalism-standards-farmer-programs/).

**Learn your editing software.**

There are many editing programs available. Some are sophisticated, allowing you to add special effects. Some are basic, and some have graphics that make them easier to navigate. Whichever one you use, it is worthwhile practicing on it before you start to make radio programs with it. As broadcasters, we have to deal with deadlines. Not knowing your program well will slow you down. And being familiar with the program will help you make cleaner edits faster.

**Plan ahead**

It’s important to plan what type of material you need for your program, and how much time you have to present it. Just because you are able to edit your audio files doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t you spend carefully planning and organizing your interview. With deadlines and a limited amount of time available during the program, you should make sure from the beginning that your recording is as focused as possible. It is much easier to clean up a 15-minute interview to 10 minutes than it is to edit a 35-minute interview to 10 minutes. When you have too much audio material, it is more difficult to choose what to edit, and there is a much higher risk of misrepresenting the meaning of the original recording.

**Record your audio and upload it to your computer.**

It is easier to edit a good quality recording. If there is background noise such as a vehicle running, children playing, or a radio playing, editing will be more difficult. The background sound will be uneven and distracting to the listener. If you have no choice but to record in a noisy place, record a few minutes of just the background sound. Then you can mix it under the voice to make your edits less obvious.

Once you have your recordings, upload them to your computer. To make your job easier, label each audio file with a descriptive name—such as the name of the guest and topic. An example might be *Elizabeth cassava seeds*. For more on archiving audio files, see FRI’s Broadcaster how-to guide on [saving, organizing and archiving radio programs](http://scripts.farmradio.fm/radio-resource-packs/108-farm-radio-resource-pack/bh2-saving-organizing-archiving-audio-files/).

**Listen to your audio file and make notes. Decide on your focus.**

Many broadcasters transcribe their recordings word for word. This is helpful because reading the transcript is faster than listening to the recording again. You can base your editing decisions on the written copy. You can rearrange clips by cutting and pasting text on your computer or laptop.

But there are two drawbacks to transcribing recordings word for word. The first is that transcribing is very time-consuming. The second is that an edit that looks good on paper may sound terrible to the ear. A speaker may end a sentence with a laugh in their voice, or their voice may rise in pitch. The sentence you transcribed on paper and want to edit won’t capture that laugh or the rising pitch, and an edit based on the transcript may sound bad in an audio version, or be distracting to the listener. If you do choose to transcribe, you also need to listen carefully to the audio version of any edits you make on the written copy, and make sure it flows properly.

Another approach is to simply make brief, descriptive notes as you are listening. You can use time codes to mark important segments, for example when Elizabeth says that only a few of her seeds didn’t germinate. Your notes might look like this:

(Time of clip) (Description)

12:53 – 13:00 E – only few seeds didn’t germinate

13:44 – 16:22 E – worried about drought – crop withering in field

17:15 - 18:30 E – mentions help from son and daughter

21:02 – 25:00 E – story of visit from extension worker – asks for help; he

promises to help but E thinks it will be too late

Whether you transcribe every word or make brief notes, it is important to be familiar with your audio recording before you start editing. Once you know what you have, then you can decide on the focus of your piece.

The focus is best described by a single sentence that states: someone is doing something for a reason. The focus of the story of Elizabeth might be: Elizabeth **(someone)** asks for help from the extension worker **(is doing something)** because **(for a reason**) her crops are withering in the field. This focus will guide you on what to keep and what to delete. In this case, you don’t need to use the clip of Elizabeth saying she had good germination. You will use the clips (or part of them) about the drought, the story of the extension worker, and (possibly) her children helping her, but only if they fit with the focus of the program.

**Choose a production format.**

You can present your recorded audio in a number of ways. For example, it could be a series of short clips linked together by a script. It could be a straight interview. It might also be a single voice narrative. The physical editing process is the same for each. But how you approach each format is different. If you choose short clips linked by a script, you are looking for clear, concise statements or moments of emotion.

It’s probably better for the presenter to explain complex or fact-heavy concepts because the presenter can take the time to write them out and refine them. But a presenter can’t provide the emotion. That’s your guest’s job. Your guest is also better at describing why they have done something, or why they haven’t done it. When you make descriptive editing notes, it is also useful to note if a clip has good emotional content.

If you choose an interview format, you will be editing out pauses, mistakes (both theirs and your own), and perhaps rearranging the order of the questions and answers to give the interview a more logical flow. You will also be trying to shorten answers. It is easier for the audience to listen to something that is tight and focused.

A single voice narrative is most often an interview without the questions. Editing a single voice narrative involves deleting your questions and arranging the remaining audio in a way that sounds like your guest is simply telling a story. For this format, it is important to have your guest answer your questions with complete sentences. If they don’t, it will be very difficult to edit.

Here is an example:

*Version 1*

Interviewer: What is the first thing you do when you are getting ready to plant?

Farmer: Walk the fields. I’m looking at moisture content.

Interviewer: And then what?

Farmer: The bank. I may need a loan. Last year’s crop wasn’t very good. So I might also choose to plant a different variety. There are new varieties that may work better if it is going to be a dry growing season.

*Edited version 1*

Farmer: Walk the fields. I’m looking at moisture content. The bank. I may need a loan. Last year’s crop wasn’t very good. So I might also choose to plant a different variety. There are new varieties that may work better if it is going to be a dry growing season.

*Well, that didn’t work very well. Remember to ask your guest to answer in complete sentences.*

*Version 2 (after you’ve coached your guest to answer in complete sentences)*

Interviewer: What is the first thing you do when you are getting ready to plant?

Farmer: The first thing I do when I am getting ready to plant is to walk the fields. I’m looking at moisture content.

Interviewer: And then what?

Farmer: Then I will go and visit the bank. I may need a loan. Last year’s crop wasn’t very good. So I might also choose to plant a different variety. There are new varieties that may work better if it is going to be a dry growing season.

*Edited version*

Farmer: The first thing I do when I am getting ready to plant is to walk the fields. I’m looking at moisture content. Last year’s crop wasn’t very good. There are new varieties that may work better if it is going to be a dry growing season. So I might also choose to plant a different variety. Then I will go and visit the bank. I may need a loan.

You might want to coach your interviewees, for example on how the microphone works, to speak in complete sentences, to answer only the question that was asked, or not to speak for too long. This will make your editing work much easier.

**Delete the longer segments of audio you don’t want.**

It is easiest to start editing by getting rid of long segments of recorded audio you don’t want. You’ll know what you want to keep from either making notes or transcribing, then deciding on your focus. Eliminate what doesn’t fit with your focus. Make sure your software allows you to do *non-destructive editing*\*. It is best not to edit too close to the beginning of the audio file you want to keep, nor too close to the end. Leave a word or two or three; leave a breath or a pause. You will take care of those when you do the fine editing.

**Arrange the audio to suit how you want to tell the story.**

As with the example above, we sometimes have to rearrange audio to ensure that the story make logical sense. Our guests, as smart as they are, may remember something later in an interview that should be moved up to the beginning. Or you may ask a question at the beginning that properly belongs near the end. As long as rearranging the order doesn’t alter the meaning, it is fair to do it. We recreate reality to present a truthful story.

**Do the fine editing.**

This is where it gets tricky. And fun. Essentially, what you are trying to do with fine editing is make sure the final product reflects the way your guest actually speaks—that is to say, it has the same pacing.

*The breath*

When we talk, we breathe. But people don’t generally breathe before they say something. They breathe after they say it. So listeners normally expect to hear the breath that follows what someone says, not the breath that comes before their next speech. Whatever the breath pacing is, when you remove sentences, you should be aware of the breath.

Sometimes, someone finishes a sentence and you want to make the edit after their last word. If they take a breath after their last word, leave it in the recording. Delete the audio you don’t want and begin the next sentence at the end of the breath.

For example, if you wanted to edit out sentences 2-6, it would look like this:

Sentence 1 (& breath) *edited to* (no breath) sentence 7.

Pacing is mostly about the spaces between words and breaths. Keeping the slight pause *before the breath and the breath itself* at the end of Sentence 1 maintains the guest’s natural pacing.

If you are doing a lot of editing, using this technique may mean you record a breath at the beginning of each sentence. Listen to the original recording to determine how often the speaker draws a breath. Then edit accordingly.

You may find that, after editing a particular segment, there is no pause for a breath. If so, you can copy a breath from another part of the audio and insert it to maintain the natural flow.

This is about ease of listening for the audience. If they are distracted by a guest who takes too many breaths, or not enough, they will be distracted from the content. When editors don’t pay attention to the breath, the final edited product can sound very “choppy.” Trying to get rid of every silence in a recording can make a person’s speech sound very unnatural.

*Stumbles*

When a guest misspeaks or stumbles on a word, they may repeat the word. They usually say it with greater force. If you edit out the mistake and go directly to the correct word, it will sound odd. If possible, it is best to combine the mistake and the correct word.

Here’s an example:

Farmer: I planted my cassabah … sorry, I mean *cassava*, in very good soil.

To edit out the mistake, take the ***cass*** from the mistake and finish it off with the rest of the word from the retake.

Farmer:I planted my ***cass* ava** in very good soil.

This will sound much more natural.

Editing after a hard consonant like a “c” or “t” is easier and sounds better. These sounds have a distinct beginning and end. Softer sounds such as “s” and “m” can be stretched out and sometimes blend into the next word, making it a little more difficult for an editor to make a clean cut. However, an “s” at the end of a phrase or sentence is a good place to cut. An “s” has what is called a natural decay—it fades out by itself.

*The pause*

Pauses maintain proper pacing, add emphasis to a comment, or mark a change in the direction of content. They are part of natural speech.

Listeners react to silence by re-engaging. They hear a change—suddenly nothing is coming out of their radio and it alerts them.

To insert a pause, listen to the recording and find one of the guest’s natural pauses. Copy and insert it where you need it. It will have the right background sound.

How long should a pause be? There is no correct answer or magic formula. But generally, a pause should be about as long as it takes to breathe in and breathe out. That gives the listener a chance to take a breath. Longer pauses have more dramatic tension, but they can be misused.

*The fade and the crossfade*

Most editing programs allow you to fade into and out of audio. This means that in less than a second, the audio increases or decreases in volume. Fading smooths the transition from one piece of audio to another. Fades are very helpful when there is any kind of background audio.

A crossfade is when one piece of sound gradually fades out while another is simultaneously fading in. Crossfades are useful when there are slight differences in background sound. Like fades, they make the transition from one sound to another smoother.

**Listen and then mix down the final product.**

Once you make all your edits, it’s important to listen to what you have done. You are listening to make sure that it makes sense. You are listening for rough edits that need to be smoother. You are listening for pacing.

Once you are satisfied, you can mix down your work. That means having the software commit all your changes to a permanent new audio file. With most editing programs, if necessary, you can still go back to the audio file before it is mixed down and make other edits, and then mix it down again. Always be sure your edits are non-destructive\*.

***Conclusion***

Editing takes practice, but it’s worth the effort! Understanding the software you work with, planning ahead, having a clear focus, and understanding the fundamentals of editing audio will help you maintain the integrity of what was said and ensure that the pacing sounds natural. This will significantly increase your listeners’ satisfaction. It will bring you closer to capturing listeners’ attention and providing listeners with the information they need—when they need it.

***Definitions***

*Crossfade:* A crossfade is when one piece of sound gradually fades out while another is simultaneously fading in.

*Fade:* When the volume of a sound gradually decreases.

*Non-destructive editing*: Non-destructive editing is a form of audio, video, or image editing in which the original content is not modified in the course of editing. Instead, specialized software specifies and modifies the edits.

*Pacing*: Pacing is the timing of what we hear in an audio production. It is best thought of as how pauses are used. The less space between words, or between clips, the faster the pace. More pauses slow it down. A well-paced audio production will use a full range of pauses, from non-existent to long. Proper pacing can add tension and emotion to a production.

## Acknowledgements

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