

Creating Your Own Pre-Recorded Puppet Tracks & Other Media, Part 2

There's some basic equipment necessary for creating your own puppet tracks or curriculum media. These basics include a microphone, something to capture your audio and some way to play it back.

Computer Basic

Okay, here's the most basic way to create a track with your computer and a microphone. Now, you can use the microphone on your computer, one of those nifty little desk mics, or a headset microphone commonly used for voice recognition (*I prefer this type*). Plug the end of this microphone directly into your computer via the microphone input slot. (*If you don't know where this is, check your computer manual. One many new computers, this is colored coded pink*).

Now if you are using a Windows based system (what other choice is there really?) then open up your sound recorder. [On Windows XP, go to START, then to ACCESSORIES and finally, ENTERTAINMENT and click on SOUND RECORDER.] Next, click record and start reading your script. When you are finished, hit the stop button. The awesome part of using a computer is that you can instantly go back and see how it sounds. If you don't like it, just re-record it. Next, save your file. Be sure you use a name that goes with your project so you can recognize it later and also, be sure to save it where you can find it again. Usually, I create a project folder in MY DOCUMENTS and then add folders with project names inside the PROJECT Folder. This is where I save everything, so I can find it when I need it.



Once you have recorded your script you can play with it a little in the SOUND RECORDER program. It will let you add echo, speed it up or slow it down. These options are all under the EFFECTS menu. Just play with them and see what you like. Remember, save your file again if you add an effect. I'll also recommend that you not save over your original file, just in case you later don't like the way the effect sounds-so give your file a new name or add a "2" after the name.

Now you're ready to use your script. Of course, with the SOUND RECORDER, you can't add background sounds; music and all your actors have to record their part together. We'll talk later of some of more options. Now if you are going to be using a CD Player for your presentation, and you have a CD Burner on your computer, just burn the file to onto a blank CD. If you are going to be using a computer to present your script, you can leave it in the computer format. Simply load it into your favorite media player and push play

Computer and Audio Editing Software

This method is really much the same as that above, except now you are using an audio editor to do your recording and editing. If you use a multi-track editor, you can record each character in your skit individually and then go back and put it together. Or you can have your voice actors record together (which is what I do mostly) and then add in your background music, sound effects and such and you're basically done. You still have the option of cutting out or trimming unwanted audio that was recorded. Again, be sure to save your work and then export to a CD or an audio file usable on your computer.

I use editing software called Multiquence for my audio projects. There are others out there. Some are simpler, some are much more complex. Some cost hundreds of dollars and some are free. I believe Multiquence is running around \$52.00 now. I know there are some good, free editors out there – just do a search for “free audio editor” and see what you find.

Computer, Editing Software, Mixing board & a Recording Microphone

Okay, this is me at my most complicated. I now use the computer and editing software along with a special recording microphone called a condensor microphone. Now, I'm no expert but this microphone picks up everything and it sounds great. I run the microphone through my sound mixer – the mic needs phantom power (just means it needs an outside power source) – and I output my mixer from one of my Audio Send channels into the Microphone Input on my computer. I fire up my editing software and when I'm ready, I hit record and signal my voice actors to begin. Now, I can edit the recording, add background music and sound effects. Finally, I drop the recording on to CDs for my puppeteers to practice with and add the computer audio file to my Power Point presentation which runs all my multi-media.

Some Last Tips

Please remember, I'm no expert (I don't even play one on TV). All I do comes from hours of playing. Now some things I have learned.

- Don't record your voice actors and have your speakers on playback at the same time. Your mics will pick up the voices coming over the speakers.
- Be sure your recording is loud enough. Most recorders have a meter. You want your loudest parts to just peak into the red.
- Don't let your voice actors stand too close to the microphone or you'll get pops and possible static. Use a shield – one of those round circles with what looks like panty hose stretched across - that mounts on your mic stand and helps prevent the pops from your “P's”
- Always use a microphone stand. This will cut down on movement noises from holding the microphone.
- Have voice actors turn their cell phones off or on to silent. There's nothing worse than getting a great take and have a phone ring or beep at the very end.
- Be sure you play back your recording all the way through, before you send everyone home and/or take apart your equipment.