VIDEO STORYTELLING PROJECTS

A DIY GUIDE TO SHOOTING, EDITING, AND PRODUCING AMAZING VIDEO STORIES ON THE GO

RAFAEL "RC" CONCEPCION

New Riders

VOICES THAT MATTER™

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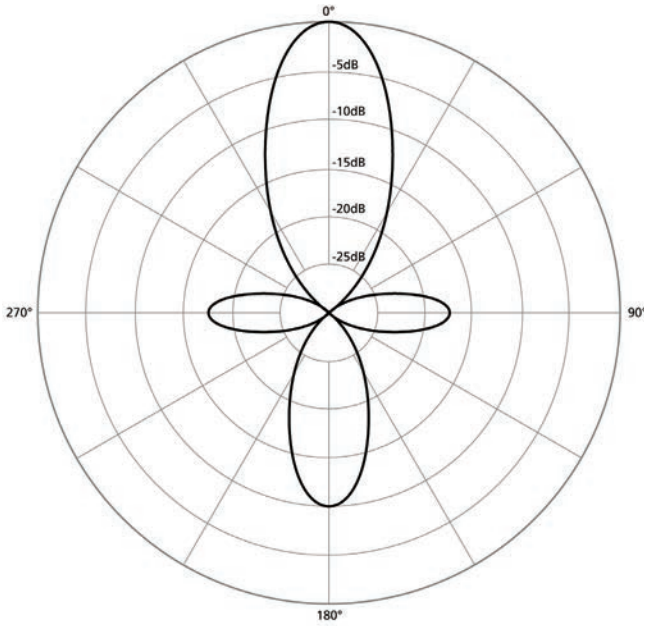

Directional: In this polar pattern, the mic picks up the sound that comes from directly in front, while rejecting a lot of the sound to the left and right. The sound directly behind the microphone is rejected quite a bit as well. Because of how narrow the pick-up pattern is, it is known as a *directional* (or *shotgun*) pattern, picking up only the sound that it is directly pointed at.

Microphones

Now that you are familiar with the patterns, you can better understand how different types of microphones are useful in different situations. As we discuss each type, I will also share with you the mics that I currently use, suggest a range of equipment for building your own collection, and offer some usage tips.

Lavalier Microphones

Lavalier microphones are small and meant to be pinned to the clothing of an interview subject. The lavalier is a sensitive, omnidirectional microphone that allows you to capture as much audio information as possible. When you use these microphones, remember that noises made by the movement of the subject's clothing also can be picked up. To minimize this, make sure that the microphone is clipped on properly or taped to the subject to minimize movement.

FIGURE 4.2 The SmallRig simorr Wave L3 Lavalier Microphone for Lightning Devices is compatible with iPhones and iPads (with Lightning ports).

GAFFER TAPE

A *gaffer* is the lead electrician of a production. To secure wires on a set, they need a type of tape that does not leave residue behind when they remove it. *Gaffer tape* is made of fabric, is heat resistant, and doesn't leave anything behind when it is pulled off. Don't be tempted to use duct tape instead: it is reflective, leaves a residue or marks when removed, and is made of a type of resin that can strip off paint from surfaces when it's removed.

Placing a lavalier microphone 6 to 8 inches under the chin of the talent should give you good sound. Shirts with buttons make this easy; the gaps between the buttons are a great place to clip a microphone. If your subject is not wearing a buttoned shirt, finding a good place to attach the mic can be problematic. One solution is to attach the microphone to the collar. While this is acceptable, the sound you capture will be different.

If I have the opportunity, I place the mic under the subject's shirt in the sternum area with a small strip of gaffer tape. If you're worried that the subject might have an allergic reaction to gaffer tape, you could place a strip of medical tape on the person, position the microphone, then attach the gaffer tape to the medical tape. Provided that you are recording a person who is not sweating during the interview, this should hold well.

While it's not unusual for a lavalier to be visible in video created for news reporting and general video content, for some types of theater productions it's preferable that the microphone be hidden. You may often see a mic taped under the bill of a hat or attached to the hair. These microphones are often more expensive than regular lavalier mics because they need to be much smaller so that they can be concealed.

When placing a mic on a subject, keep in mind that you are going to be very close to an unfamiliar person, and that closeness may be stressful to them. I let the person know of my intentions before I begin by saying simply, "I am going to need to place this mic on you to capture sound. Is this okay?" Most people will be fine with this, but it will show that you are mindful of the person's personal space.

If the mic needs to run under a shirt, I usually tell the person, "I need to have this wire go underneath your clothing to hide it. Let me hand it to you, and I am going to turn around. When you are done, just let me know and I will turn back."

A final piece of advice: Be consistent in minimizing discomfort with every person that you are working with, regardless of gender.

Handheld Microphones

Handheld microphones are usually cardioid or omnidirectional microphones. These microphones usually have a *frequency response* that's tailored to capturing good vocals. This means that the microphones are designed to be especially sensitive to the sound frequencies used by the human voice. The microphone has a metal housing and may have a foam cover that minimizes the wind noise. They are intended to be used in close proximity to the speaker.

FIGURE 4.3 A Saramonic SR_HMY handheld microphone, a favorite of journalists and musicians

When working with one of these microphones, be mindful of how you place it, known as *cueing* (or *pointing*) the mic. When you ask a question, keep the mic in front of you, under your chin, and pointing back at you. While the person you're interviewing answers the question, point the mic toward them, keeping it under their chin. This will not only make them sound their best, but it will also respect the subject's space and make sure that viewers who are deaf or hard of hearing will be able to see the lip movement.

As a general rule, cue the mic back to yourself to ask your next question or otherwise add to the conversation. If you speak while cueing an omnidirectional mic at another person, your voice will be less audible than theirs. A cardioid mic might not pick up your voice at all.

Popular handheld microphones include:

- **Shure SM-58:** This mic has been around for a long time and is widely used because it captures vocal sounds well. You'll see it used not only by singers, but by creators of other kinds of content as well. Built like a tank.
- **Røde Reporter:** Aside from the sound of the mic, my favorite feature of the mic is its length. This lets me sit a little farther away when I am pointing the mic at someone. Some have complained about the fact that you can hear your hands fumbling on the mic, but I don't find that to be a problem.
- **Sennheiser MD46:** This mic's built for taking a beating. Its cardioid polar pattern also tunes out a lot of sound that the mic is not directly pointing at, which lets you get cleaner interview audio.

FIGURE 4.4 The Zoom H4n Handy recorder, a "handy" field recording device

Field Recorders

Extremely versatile for newsgathering, *field recorders* combine a recorder with microphones that typically allow you to replicate multiple polar patterns. They can be used in omnidirectional mode for capturing natural ambient sound and can be switched into a cardioid pattern to be placed closer to a speaker for interviews. Some types of field recorders also contain inputs to which you can attach other mics, including handheld, lavalier, or shotgun mics to use alongside the onboard microphones. One thing to keep in mind when using field recorders is that they save the sound onto a removable memory card. You will need to import that sound file into your project and add it to the video you've recorded.

FIGURE 4.5 The Røde NTG4 Supercardioid Condenser Shotgun Microphone

Shotgun Microphones

Shotgun microphones are generally tube shaped and have a very directional pickup pattern. They are excellent at the direct capture of sound, such as vocals, while rejecting other ambient sounds in the environment. You can find many types of shotgun microphones—from short models that can fit on top of your phone to extremely long shotgun tubes that can be held above the subject for recording.

When choosing one, remember: The longer the tube, the more directional the sound pickup is going to be. Shotgun mics usually require power to work (a feature that is sometimes called *phantom power*), so make sure that whatever you are connecting them to has a source of power or that the mic has a place to insert a battery

A shotgun mic is a great choice for capturing spoken word, but I recommend you also use one for capturing specific environmental sounds for your story. Whirring machines, doorsteps, busy streets—these sounds are all things you can add to your story later to enhance the experience.

Wireless versus Wired

When using microphones, you have the option of working with either wireless or wired technologies to capture sound.

WIRELESS MICROPHONES

Wireless microphones offer a great amount of freedom in capturing sound, but there are some things to consider before relying on them as your sole solution.

- **Range:** Wireless microphones have built-in transmitters that relay the sounds they pick up to a remote receiver. A mic's *range* describes just how "remote" the mic can be from its receiving base unit before the signal quality degrades. More inexpensive microphones will transmit the sound they capture across a short distance, while more expensive microphones will allow you to capture sound from farther away from the receiver.
- **Frequency interference:** Wireless microphones communicate with their base units at 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz, frequencies that are common to many other household devices, including baby monitors and phones. Because of this, they can be susceptible to interference, which produces static in the audio. To guard against this, you must monitor the sound you are capturing with wireless microphones.
- **Power:** Every wireless microphone will require some form of battery power, whether from rechargeable or traditional batteries. As the batteries deplete, the microphone will suffer from a decreased transmission range and be more susceptible to interference. Worse, you could find yourself attempting to record an interview with completely dead batteries.

USING A BOOM POLE AND BOOM POLE HOLDER

When you are working with a shotgun mic, it's essential to place it as close as possible to the subject. A *boom pole* will enable you (or an assistant) do this, while at the same time keeping the mic out of the video frame. This usually requires a second person to hold the boom pole for you in a fixed place.

If you are working on your own, I highly recommend investing in a light stand, boom pole, grip head, and boom pole holder. The latter will let you articulate the boom pole in any direction you need and keep it completely steady. I usually keep this gear in a bag, so it's handy when I need it.

FIGURE 4.7 A boom mic in a typical studio setup

FIGURE 4.6 A shotgun mic mounted on a boom pole