

dl-sounds.com

Pocket Audio Glossary

50 Essential Filmmaking Terms

"Your quick reference for video production terminology"



dl-sounds.com/film-audio-glossary

Audio Basics

Fundamental concepts every creator should know

Amplitude

Height of a sound wave; determines loudness/softness

Frequency *(Hz, Pitch)*

Number of sound wave cycles per second; determines pitch

Decibel (dB)

Unit measuring sound intensity/volume

Sample Rate *(kHz)*

Audio samples captured per second. CD: 44.1kHz; Pro: 48kHz

Bit Depth

Information per sample. CD: 16-bit; Professional: 24-bit

Dynamic Range

Difference between quietest and loudest parts of audio

Clipping *(Peaking, Distortion)*

Distortion when signal exceeds maximum level (red lines!)

Headroom

Space between normal level and clipping. Leave 6-12dB when recording

Mono *(Monaural)*

Single channel audio; same signal to L and R

Stereo

Two-channel audio with separate left and right signals

Recording & Capture

Shotgun Microphone *(Boom mic)*

Highly directional mic for capturing sound from front

Lavalier Microphone *(Lapel mic, Lav)*

Small clip-on mic for close-up voice recording

XLR

Professional 3-pin balanced audio connector; industry standard

Phantom Power (48V)

Power supplied through XLR cable for condenser mics

Polar Pattern (*Pickup pattern*)

Directional sensitivity of a microphone

Cardioid

Heart-shaped pattern; picks up primarily from front

Gain (*Input level*)

Input amplification. Adjust BEFORE recording, not after!

Audio Interface

Hardware connecting microphones to computer

Quick Reference: Recording Levels

Dialogue target:	-12dB to -6dB
Headroom:	6-12dB
Never exceed:	-3dB (risk clipping)
Sample rate:	48kHz (video standard)

Music & Editing

Terms for working with music and DAWs

Music & Composition

Tempo

Speed of music measured in beats per minute

BPM

Beats Per Minute; 120 BPM = 2 beats/second

Key *(Tonality)*

Group of pitches forming basis of musical piece

Major Key

Generally bright, happy, uplifting sound

Minor Key

Generally dark, sad, or serious sound

Chord Progression *(Changes)*

Series of chords played in sequence

Royalty-Free Music *(RF Music)*

Licensed for one-time fee without ongoing royalties

Soundtrack *(Score, OST)*

Music composed to accompany film, game, or show

Editing & DAW

DAW

Digital Audio Workstation; software for recording/editing

Timeline *(Sequence)*

Visual workspace showing clips chronologically

Crossfade *(Fade)*

Gradual transition between two audio clips

Normalize

Adjusting audio to optimal level without clipping

EQ (Equalizer) (*Equalization*)

Tool for adjusting volume of specific frequencies

High-Pass Filter (*Low-cut*)

Removes low frequencies below set point

Reverb (*Reverberation*)

Effect simulating sound reflection in a space

Delay (*Echo*)

Effect that repeats audio after set time

Easily Confused Terms**Gain vs. Volume**

Gain = input (before recording); Volume = output (after recording)

EQ vs. Filter

EQ shapes tone (boost/cut); Filter removes entire frequency ranges

Reverb vs. Delay

Reverb = room reflections; Delay = distinct echo repeats

Mixing & Delivery

Professional standards for final output

Mixing & Mastering

Mixing

Balancing and blending multiple audio tracks

Pan *(Panning)*

Positioning sound in stereo field (left to right)

Compressor *(Comp)*

Reduces dynamic range by lowering loud parts

Limiter *(Brickwall)*

Extreme compressor preventing audio from exceeding ceiling

LUFS

Loudness Unit Full Scale; measures perceived loudness over time

Peak Level

Highest point of audio signal (single moment)

Sidechain *(Ducking)*

Using one signal to control effect on another

Bus *(Group, Submix)*

Channel combining multiple tracks for group processing

Automation

Recording parameter changes (volume, pan) over time

Stem

Submix of related tracks exported separately

Delivery & Formats

WAV

Uncompressed audio format; highest quality, large files

MP3

Compressed format; smaller files, some quality loss

AAC (.m4a)

Efficient compressed format; better than MP3 at same size

Codec

Software/hardware for compressing/decompressing audio/video

Bit Rate (kbps)

Data processed per unit of time. 320 kbps = high quality

Lossless

Compression without quality loss (FLAC, ALAC, WAV)

Lossy

Compression with some quality loss (MP3, AAC)

Platform Loudness Standards (LUFS)

YouTube:	-14 LUFS
Spotify:	-14 LUFS
Apple Music:	-16 LUFS
Broadcast (EU):	-23 LUFS

Tip: Always deliver in WAV for archiving. Use AAC or high-bitrate MP3 for web delivery.

Sound Design & Video

Creative audio and production terms

Sound Design & Effects

Sound Design (*Audio design*)

Creating and manipulating audio elements for media

Foley

Recreation of everyday sound effects added in post

SFX (*Sound Effects*)

Audio elements other than dialogue/music

Ambience (*Room tone, Atmosphere*)

Background environmental sound establishing location

Room Tone (*Presence*)

Background sound of location with no apparent source

ADR (*Automated Dialogue Replacement, Looping*)

Re-recording dialogue in studio to fix unclear audio

Voice Over (*VO, Narration*)

Spoken narration recorded separately from picture

Envelope (*ADSR*)

Shape of sound over time: Attack, Decay, Sustain, Release

Video-Specific Audio

Sync (*Synchronization*)

Matching audio to corresponding video

Slate (*Clapper, Clapboard*)

Board used to mark takes and aid sync

Wild Track

Audio recorded without corresponding picture

Production Audio (*Location sound*)

Audio recorded during filming

Post Audio (*Post sound*)

All audio work done after filming

M&E (*Music & Effects*)

Track without dialogue; for dubbing into other languages

More Confused Terms

Compressor vs. Limiter

Compressor = manages dynamic range; Limiter = strict ceiling against clipping

LUFS vs. Peak Level

Peak = loudest moment; LUFS = perceived loudness over time

Sample Rate vs. Bit Depth

Sample rate = how often measured (frequency); Bit depth = how accurately (dynamics)

dl-sounds.com — Filmmaker's Audio Glossary

Read the full article with 112 terms at dl-sounds.com/film-audio-glossary

Free royalty-free music for creators