

SOUND MIXING

After dialogue is recorded, sound effects added and music composed, the various tracks are combined, or mixed, into one complete stereophonic soundtrack by the rerecording mixer. Rerecording mixers set sound levels so that dialogue and key sound effects stand out against the background. Contrasting sound levels also make the story more dramatic.

A loud explosion, for example, will be especially shocking if it takes place when everything else is silent.

Just as a camera can move from one character to another, sound can shift the audience's attention between characters or parts of a scene. By fading noisy background chatter in a crowded room, the filmmaker can direct the audience to an intimate conversation between two people. Heartbeats or heavy breathing can alert us to a character's fear. When the soundtrack plays only the sounds heard by one specific character, the technique is called "point of audition."

Silence is another useful tool for the sound mixer. In the final shootout in *Road to Perdition*, there are no gunshots on the soundtrack until the main character kills the older man who has been his mentor. The sudden shocking sound of gunfire lets the audience know how difficult it is for the character to murder his old friend.

Most of the sound heard on a movie soundtrack comes from the people or objects onscreen. This is called "source" sound. Musical scores and voiceovers are the most common types of non-source sound, but offscreen sounds can also build suspense, provide hints of upcoming action and connect unrelated settings, places or times.

Identify the characters, objects and actions in the following scene.

A boy and girl walk down a quiet road. Turning a corner, they see a menacing bulldog behind a sagging chain link fence. The angry dog lunges against its restraints, banging into the fence. The children give the dog a wide berth, but the boy slips in a puddle of water. The girl pulls him up by his hands, and they run quickly to safety.

What sounds would be involved here? Use the back of this sheet if you need more space.

Characters: _____



Academy Governor Kevin O'Connell mixes dialogue on the Harrison Motion Picture Console in the Cary Grant Theater at Sony Studios.

Objects: _____

Actions: _____

What is the mood of this scene? Which sounds let you know this?

What offscreen sounds might be heard? _____

SOUND MIXING TERMS:

MIXING: The process of setting levels of dialogue, music and sound effects and combining them into one continuous whole.

OFFSCREEN: Anything that takes place where the audience cannot see it, for example, the sound of traffic outside the room where the actors are talking. The musical score is another example of an offscreen sound.

POINT OF AUDITION: Sound as it might be heard by a character within the film. Similar to visual point of view.

SOURCE SOUND: Sound that appears to come from an object seen onscreen, such as a radio or television, animals or actors.