3 Audacity Tips To Enhance Your Recorded Interviews

Ryan Dube May 6, 2010 5 minutes

As a blogger and a researcher, I have to conduct a lot of interviews. Some months I've conducted two or three interviews a week, and many of those are recorded interviews. One of the nice things about recorded interviews is that they work well as an audio podcast either available for download from your own blog, or distributed as a podcast at any podcast directory.

Regardless what you intend to do with the interview, one thing that's for certain is that you want to develop a reputation as a professional interviewer that produces high-quality, interesting conversations with fascinating people.

Only part of the recipe for this is developing interesting and thoughtful questions for your interviewee to answer, but the other significant part of the equation is how well you've edited the audio interview into a high-quality, professional show. Many avid audio enthusiasts may find some of the edits below somewhat simple, but for the blogger or podcaster with little audio editing experience, these tips are critical to know.

Why Audacity?

I use the Audacity audio recording software to record and edit all of my interviews. My recording setup is about as simple as it gets – an Olympic earpiece that doubles as both a microphone and an earphone so that I can hear the person on the phone while the microphone feeds the conversation into the laptop and Audacity. This works well and produces high-quality conversations, but like anything, there are flaws in the setup that produce less than optimum conditions.

The beauty of Audacity is that you have the capability to "fix" those flaws. The three most common problems that I'm going to touch on in this post are removing background noise, amplifying voices, and integrating quality introduction with music.
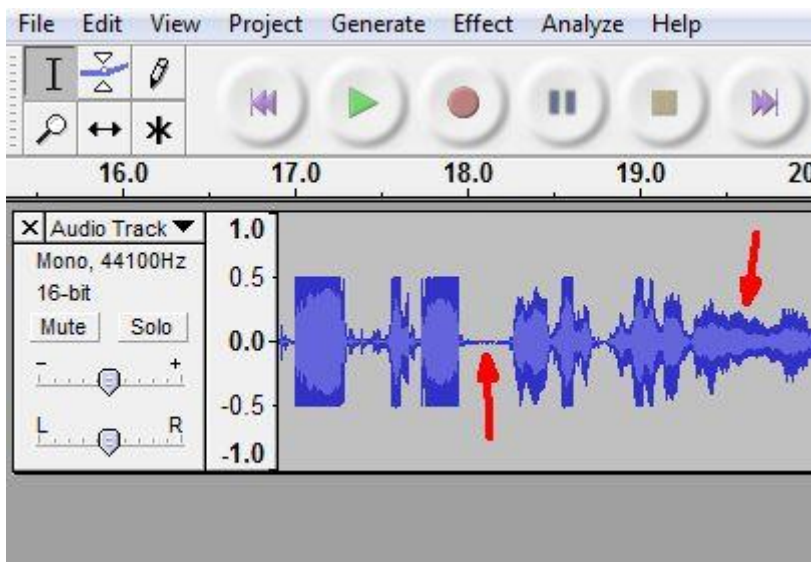

Before we start doctoring the audio file with the Audacity audio recording software, let me first introduce the patient. Above is a snippet of an hour-long audio interview that I conducted last month.

The two most common flaws are background noise, shown in the center of this clip, and low voice volume (my voice) as shown on the right. You can see that the amplitude when I was talking is about half of that of the voice on the phone – which is to be expected when recording with such an earpiece.
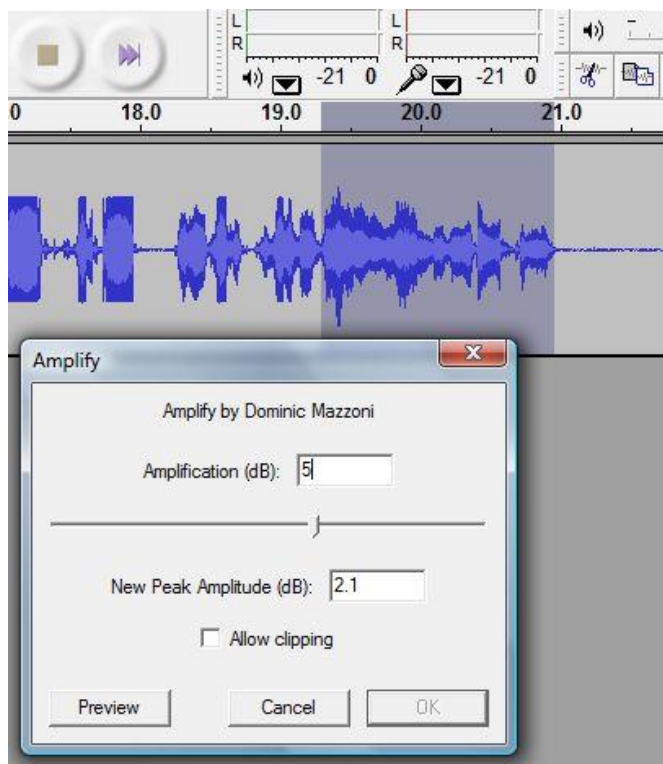
How To Fix Quiet Voices

The first tweak for the common interview issue of quiet voices is also the easiest. The volume of the voice is equivalent to "amplitude," so all you have to do is use Audacity's **Amplify** tool to increase the quiet voice just a little bit.

To perform this task, just highlight the section of audio track with the quiet voice, and then select **Amplify** from the **Effect** menu option.
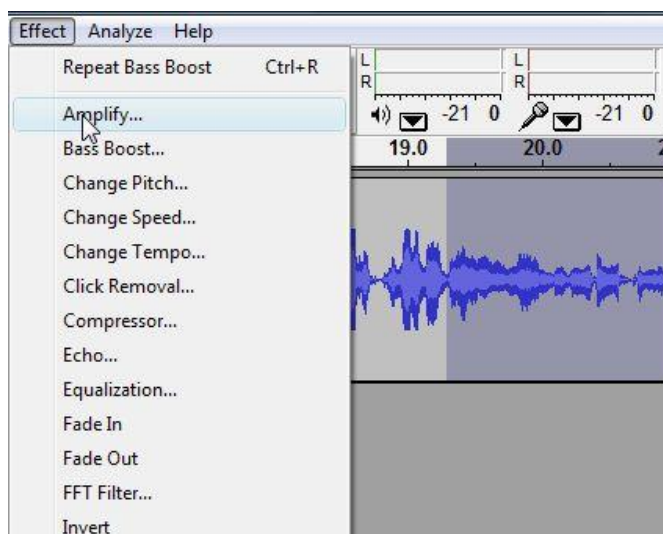
In the amplify tool, you'll need to select an amplification that is just enough to increase the voice volume to a level that's equivalent to the other person speaking. It may take some trial and error the first time, so just undo the change and try a new value until you get it right.


In my case, I found that an increase of 5 dB did the trick. Once you know the right value, the only tedious part of this fix is that you'll need to find every place in the track where the quiet voice shows up, and do the highlight/amplify routine to fix it.

How To Remove Background Noise With Audacity

The second most common flaw in an interview audio file is background noise. Maybe you left a fan on in the other room, or there are cars going by just outside the open window, and you realize once you listen to the audio that the sound is terribly annoying and distracting.

The first step in this technique is to identify an area in your file that features nothing but the background noise alone. When you find such an area, highlight that section of the audio track, and then go into the **Noise Removal** tool in the **Effects** menu option.
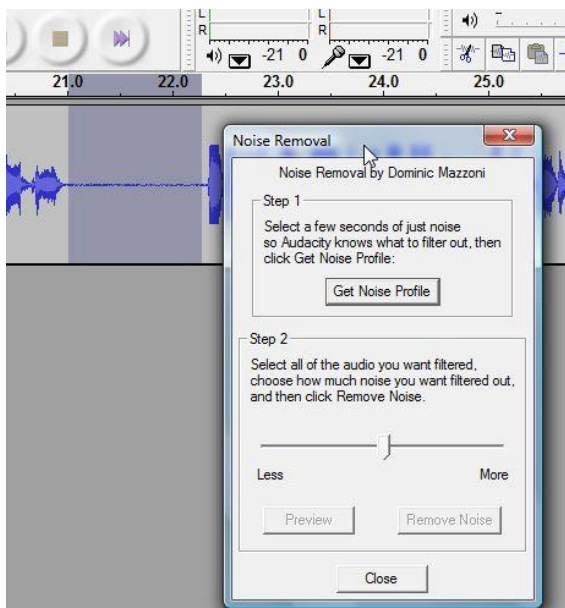

Once you're there, click on **Get Noise Profile**. Doing this captures a snapshot of the background noise itself. The software uses this to "erase" that sound profile from a section (or all) of the audio file. The next step is just to highlight the area where you want to remove the noise (most of the time you'll just select the entire track), and then go back into this window and select **Remove Noise**.
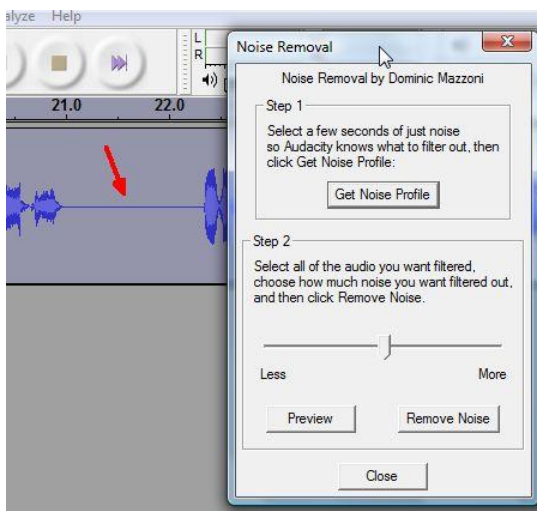
As you can see, Audacity does an amazing job at cleaning up the noise. There is one caveat, and it is this – carefully gauge the amount of noise that you want to remove. Removing too little won't do much good, and removing too much will make the audio sound over-digitized or artificially quiet. One thing I noticed is that the middle to lower-middle setting is usually ideal.

Integrating A Musical Or Voice Introduction

Have you ever heard those cool podcasts with a great musical introduction? Well, believe it or not, you can do the same exact thing in Audacity in just a few simple steps. The first step, obviously, is importing the music file that you would like to use (make sure you don't infringe on any licensing issues).
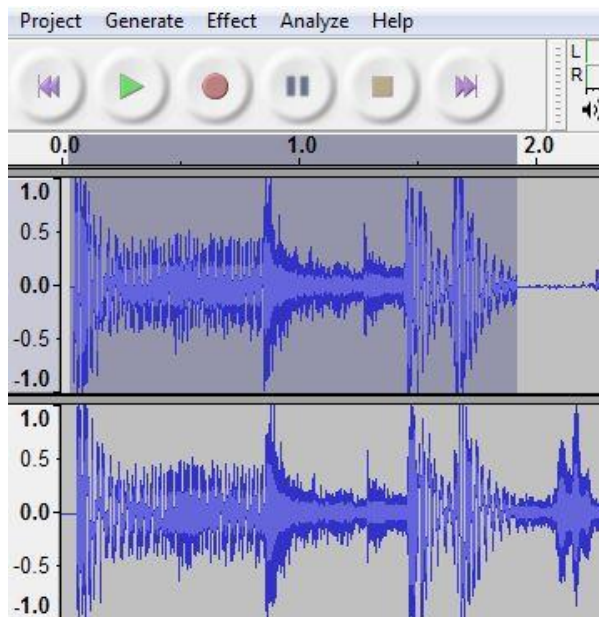
The next step is to highlight the block of music you'd like to use as your introduction (select the correct number of seconds) and then do a simple **Copy**. Then place the cursor at the start of your audio file, and select **Paste**. The copied music clip will get inserted into your track, pushing the entire interview to the right.

While this is cool, it'll sound weird because, at the end of the clip, your music will just end abruptly. Instead, you want to taper off the music as you enter into the interview itself. You can do this by highlighting the very last part of your music clip and selecting **Effect > Fade Out** from the **Effect Menu**.
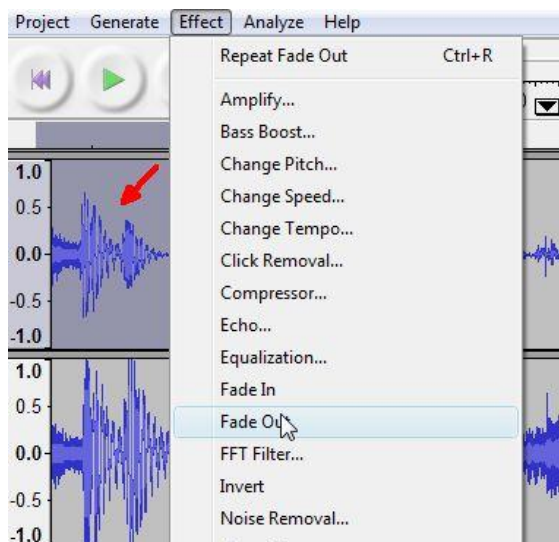
You'll see the amplitude of the music clip taper off as it approaches the end of the clip, and in effect producing a very nice fade into the interview itself.

Þessi pistill er frá Makeuseof.com