AUDACITY
AUDIO RECORDING SOFTWARE

Audacity is a clear example of the open source movement with many online technologies. This free program allows for the recording, editing, and mixing of audio files that, with practice, can sound professionally produced.

Files in Audacity can be recorded and then manipulated by editing and then exporting them from the program in a variety of formats such as .wav or .mp3 files. Users can also take pre-existing audio and load them into the program to edit them together such as combining music and voice to create a song.

In this week's Teacher's Corner, we look at how to use Audacity and ways it can be used to produce classroom materials. Audacity does have a brief set-up phase that must be completed before being able to create .mp3 files. However once this is completed, producing files in .mp3 format is quick and easy. This week's Teacher's Corner begins with a set-up guide and orientation to the program, and concludes with some ways to use Audacity to create audio for the classroom.
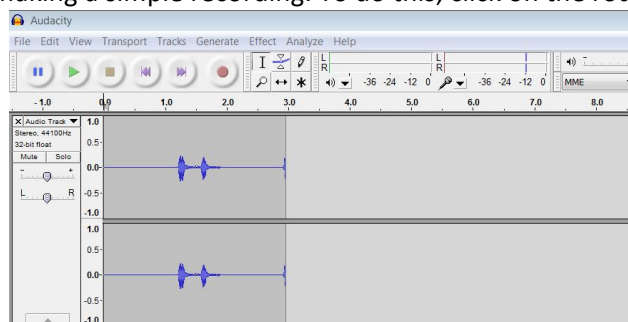
Remember, using any technology is equivalent to learning a new skill. As with any skill, practice makes perfect, so be sure to go slow, acknowledge that mistakes will be made, and use this guide alongside the software itself. Any short-term fear of learning new technology can be conquered, and in return you'll find a fantastic new program that can breathe new life into speaking and listening activities!
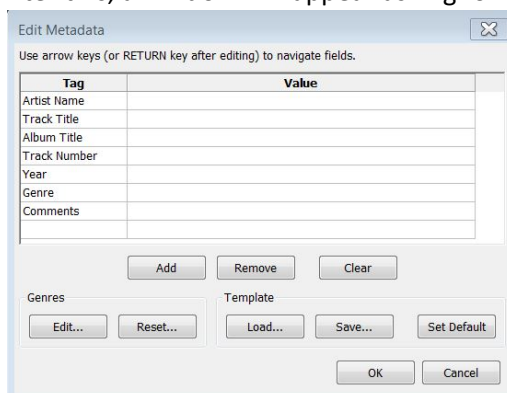
AUDACITY: SETTING UP

Audacity is a software program that needs to be installed on a computer to function. The following steps can be used to get Audacity successfully running on a computer.
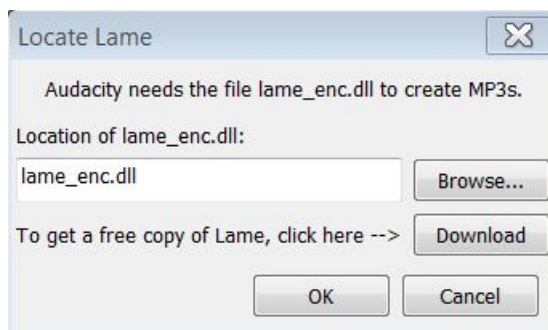
1. Begin by visiting the Audacity website and downloading the software here. Once the software has been downloaded, double-click on the Audacity icon and follow the instructions.
    a. Audacity is available in a number of languages. As the software starts the installation process the first option is to select a language.
2. Follow the onscreen instructions. Once complete, Audacity will be installed on the computer.
3. To begin creating .mp3 files, one small addition is needed to the program. The easiest way to install this addition is by trying to create an .mp3 file. It may seem confusing at first, but it is straightforward in practice.
    a. Start by making a simple recording. To do this, click on the round, red record button.

b. Once the software is recording, speak a phrase or sing a song – any audio will do.
c. Next click on File -> Export
d. A window will pop up asking for the file to be named and to select a location where it will be saved. After this, a window will appear asking for file metadata.

e. Meta is information that can be added to the file such as the artist, year, and name. While this can help keep files organized, it is not needed. Fields can be left blank while selecting OK to move forward.
f. After this window appears, Audacity will prompt a screen notifying Lame is needed. Don't panic!

g. To get the needed files, download them here. Follow the instructions and download and install the Lame files in a location where they will not be deleted. Installing them inside the Audacity program file is recommended.
h. Once the Lame files have been installed, click Browse and navigate to the location where the Lame files were saved.
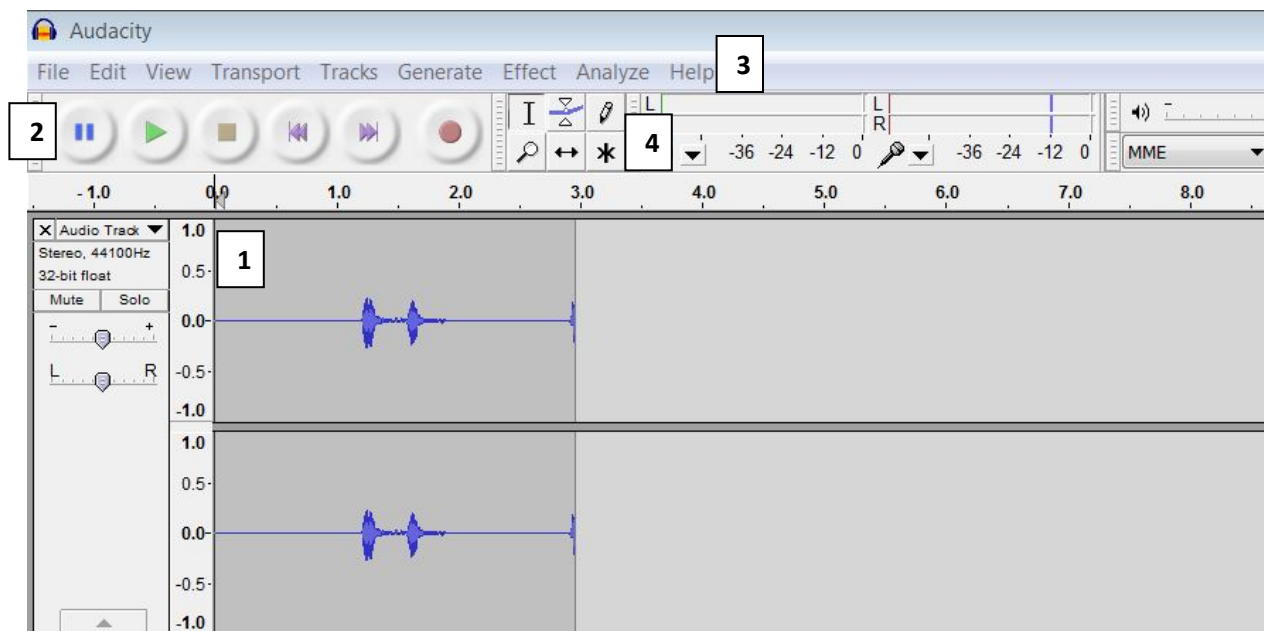i. Click on the file **lame_enc.dll**

j. This will allow Audacity to create .mp3 files!
    i. It may seem to be a hassle just to create .mp3 files, but they are the most commonly used file format for audio and will allow for recordings that can be played on every device that a school or student may have.

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ii. Audacity is unable to natively create .mp3 files. This means that the capacity to record in .mp3 has to be added to the software and cannot be included.

iii. Don't worry, this step of the process never has to be repeated!

RECORDING IN AUDACITY

With Audacity now at full capacity it is possible to begin making recordings for the classroom. First, it is important to have a basic overview of the features of Audacity.
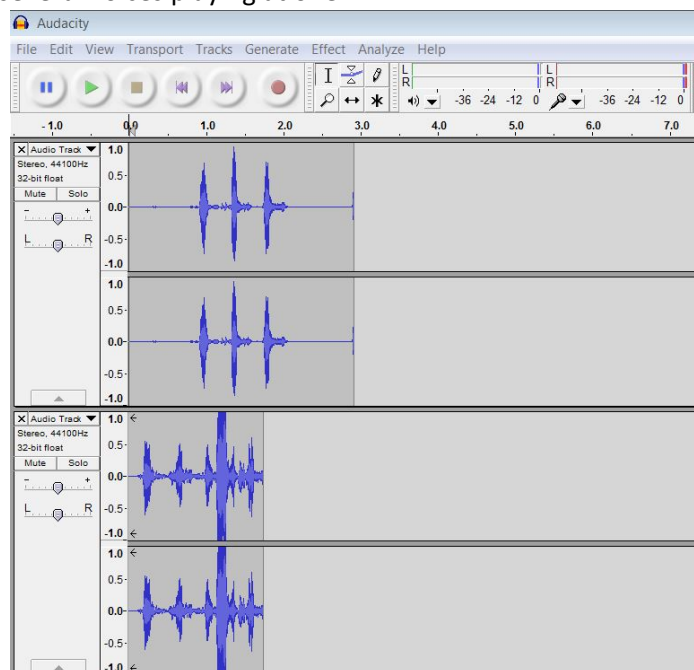

1. **Recordings** – This is where the recordings appear. The blue lines are the audio waves of the recording. If during the recording process these blue lines remain flat, check the microphone.
2. **Recording Interface** – These buttons are the basic recording menu. These are *pause*, *play*, *stop*, *backward*, *forward*, and *record*.
   a. If the buttons are greyed-out (in other words, if the colors are faded) or do not respond to button presses, check that the audio recording is not paused. If a recording is paused, rather than stopped, more recording is not possible.
3. **Menu Bar** – This bar features the common menu commands of the program. To make basic recordings, only the File and Edit commands are needed.
   a. For more advanced recordings, Generate and Effect allow for the adding of effects to the recording such as changing the pitch and tone, as well as adding or removing silence.
4. **Tools** – These tools, shown to the left of the number four in the image above, are used to alter the recording tracks. The tracks can be magnified, scrolled, and selected. The selection tool, which looks similar to the capital letter **i (I)**, is the default tool in the tool menu.

Recording
1. When recording in Audacity, each time the recording button is pressed a new track is created. When each new recording is made the previous tracks will play. Initially, this can be confusing,

but with more experience in Audacity this turns into an interesting feature that enables voices over music or several voices playing at one.

2. Try experimenting with the recording features and the multiple track functionality.
3. Record two tracks in Audacity, similar to the image above, then try cutting and pasting the second track into the first track.
   a. To select a track use the selection tool in the toolbar and left click and hold on the bottom audio track. Then drag the mouse to the right to highlight the track. Finally, cut and paste the track into the first track.
   b. This highlight, cut, and paste functionality is the same as in many software programs such as Microsoft Word. Remember: if mistakes are made, there is an undo button!
4. These steps may seem basic but they are all that are needed to create audio tracks. To explore more of the features, the Audacity website has a wide variety of helpful tutorials.

AUDACITY: CLASSROOM USE

With the basic functionality of Audacity, interesting classroom activities can be designed. Here are a few that can be used for speaking activities.

Audio Journals
1. Have students record weekly journals that can then be submitted as homework assignments.
   a. These journals can be on a specific topic or more free form for students to talk about what is important to them.
2. When grading or listening to these audio journals, if students have made mistakes in pronunciation or vocabulary, the editing features of Audacity can be used to insert feedback directly into the journal entry. This can give the students better insight into the mistakes they have made in their speaking.

Podcasts

Similar to audio journals, students can be assigned to complete podcasts. Podcasts are the Internet version of radio station programs. Some podcast ideas are: lectures on a specific topic, movie reviews, interviews with unique individuals, and conversations between friends. When creating a podcast, it is important for the students to embrace the role of host. As host they should offer introductions to the topics, keep the podcast focused on the topic, and generally work to make it as entertaining as possible. Using podcasts can be a great way to get students to use their language in a more free-form conversational style. Great examples of podcasts can be found here, here, and here.

Accent Activity
In this activity students seek to mimic an accent. It is recommended to do this activity over the entire length of the course with students submitting an audio journal each week. Although this is designed for more advanced students, a modified version of this activity could be a fun assignment for lower-level students as well.
1. Begin by having the students go online and find a short video of 30-45 seconds. This video should feature an extended speech from a single individual such as a celebrity interview, a speech by a famous politician, or a dialogue from a movie where a character talks at length.
2. Week 1 –Students watch their video and transcribe the words spoken by their target speaker. Repeated viewings will most likely be needed to transcribe the video.
   a. For homework this week, students submit a document with the transcribed dialogue.
3. Week 2 - Students record their own version of the dialogue reading from the transcription they made.
   a. For homework this week, students submit their dialogue recording.
4. Week 3 –Students listen to both the movie clip and their own recording. Have them take notes on where their speaking differs from the movie clip. These differences could be in pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, or suprasegmentals (patterns that occur over a larger series of words such as stress and pitch). It is not critical that students document all the differences but that they begin to notice the differences.
   a. For homework this week, students submit their notes where they documented the differences in speaking. For lower-level students have them focus on only one or two differences.
5. Week 4 –Students continue to listen to the clip and make recordings. Each week their goal should be to get their accent closer and closer to the movie clip and sound just like the speaker in the clip when saying the same dialogue.
   a. Each week for homework, students submit their recording along with an added reflection where they discuss the challenges in mimicking the movie clip. This reflection is the critical aspect of the homework, so encourage the students to be as detailed as possible noting both successes and frustrations. Again, for lower level students, this reflection could focus on one or two items.
6. Final Week – After enough weeks of practice, students come to class with their movie clip. Each student should come to the front of the class and present their movie clip. Next, the student gives a live presentation of the dialogue (which has now been memorized).
   a. Encourage the students to act out the dialogue as well as they can! As a fun class activity, the class can vote on all the performances and give unique awards such as 'best pronunciation', 'best intonation', 'best acting', or 'most dramatic classroom performance'.