

# Automatic Dialogue Replacement

ADR is the process of re-recording an actor's dialogue in a recording studio. The goal of good ADR is to make the newly replaced dialogue fit both the original performance and the original acoustics.

Step 1 in ADR is to avoid it at all costs. While there are a few actors who like perform ADR, most hate the process, and rightfully so. It's a long, tedious, draining, but occasionally necessary step in film production. And even then, even with professional actors and technicians, it can stand out like a sore thumb and scream "THIS LINE WAS NOT RECORDED ON THE SET." Do whatever you have to do to get the line recorded on the set. It's not that difficult to get good audio, you just have to actually care about the audio and take the time (and bring the knowledge) to get it right the first time.

The most difficult part of ADR is making it sound natural. That means both the performance and the environment must sound like they match the original recording. If you're using ADR to replace just a single line of dialogue, then it must match the audio around it (the location audio). If you're replacing the audio for an entire scene, then your job is a bit easier, but it still must sound natural. And above all, the performance must seem like it works with the picture on the screen. The final thing to be concerned with is lip-sync. While lip-sync is important, it's usually the first concern of people learning to do ADR, when the other two factors are SO much more important. If the audience believes the performance, they won't be looking at the actor's lips to see if they're in sync!

But if you have to record ADR, then here's what you do:

## To Prepare for an ADR session

First, schedule the recording booth, a boom mic (if you originally recorded with a boom, otherwise whatever mic you originally recorded with), the talent, the director, and the ADR recordist/engineer (you) for the session. If all of these people and things aren't available, you can't record ADR. You might be tempted to record without the director, but DON'T DO IT. Judging ADR for performance is 1) very hard to do, and 2) near-impossible to do while running the equipment and 3) very subjective. The director will never like your work as much as they would if they were there while you did it.

In planning for ADR, experienced professionals plan to record 10 lines per hour, so I'd double that time to be certain that you can get everything finished.

By the way, ADR logs, and all the audio and video files you need to complete ADR are on the "Courses > Audio Production > ADR" folder. Whenever you see a file and you don't know what it is, go look on the server.

## Before the ADR Session:

- Figure out all the audio clips that need to be replaced from FCP
  - Fill out an ADR log for each character with Time Code and any notes
  - And assign a Cue Number for each line of dialogue
    - You'll record each line one-at-a-time
    - Cue numbers are usually labeled "ADR01," "ADR02," etc
- Create a folder for all your ADR files (there will be a lot of them!)
- Create an FCP sequence for each ADR clip (so if you have 24 lines to replace, you'll have 24 sequences)
  - Label each sequence with the cue name and number ("ADR 01")
  - In the sequence, put the video and audio of the line you want replaced, along with a little bit of the video and audio that proceeds it.
  - Put a "Three Beep" sound effect that ends just as the ADR line begins.
  - Duplicate that video clip and the three beeps later in the timeline, so you now have the same clips twice in the sequence
  - Delete the original audio in the second clip, so that you only have the three beeps left as audio for the second clip.
  - Repeat with every sequence until all your sequences are ready for the ADR session.

## Setting up the Recording Booth

Get there well before the talent and director so you can set up before they arrive. And always test everything. There's nothing more frustrating for talent than showing up, ready to work, and finding technical difficulties. And there's nothing worse for the engineer (or more embarrassing) than having to fix a problem while the talent and director stand around watching you.

Bring a few copies of the script with you. You'll want yours, of course. and (invariably) someone else will need a copy. And bring all your STP projects on your Firewire Drive. And don't forget the ADR logs (and detail logs)!

Set up the studio headphones so the actor can hear the computer and the recording room mic (so you can talk to them). They may also want to hear themselves in the headphones. The headphones will play back any track that you turn up with the Aux 1 & 2 dials near the top of the mixer. But I'm sure you already knew that...

And set up the video to play on the 2<sup>nd</sup> monitor, and turn on the TV in the studio so that the talent can see the video play back.

Prepare microphones that resemble the set-up on set so that the dialogue will match. If you recorded the actors on Lav mics, record them again on Lavs. If they were on a Boom, record them on a boom. Make certain the mic is in a similar position to how it was on set. NEVER have them just talk straight into a mic – nothing sounds more fake than ADR that is recorded too "clean" because the actor simply talked into the mic like they were recording a voice-over. Do whatever you can to recreate the placement that they had on set. We'll cover how to add the right room tone later on, but for now, mic placement is key.

Do a few test recordings before the talent gets there, just to be sure that everything will work. A couple of things to remember in FCP – you'll be using the Voice Over Tool (in "Tools > Voice Over"), which will record on the first empty track, and will drop the new audio file into wherever you have the "Capture Scratch" set. Make sure all that is set to go to your hard drive,

into a “Recordings” folder for this ADR project. Also check that the recording is coming from the PreSonus box (in the VO tool, under “Source” – if the PreSonus box isn’t an option, check that it’s plugged into the firewire box, and you may have to re-boot the system). You’ll also need to tell it to input from channel 3 on the PreSonus box – that’s the channel coming from the mixer.

When the talent arrives, talk with them about the best way to proceed. They may have a method they prefer, so go with that. But if not (most of the time, they won’t), you’ll simply play the piece for them – the first time, they get to hear it, the second time they try and dub it. If it works, great, if not, try it again.

The recording method should become a rhythm: you hit record for the VO tool, which sets off the 5 seconds cue (which is annoying, honestly), then they hear 3 beeps, followed by the original audio, then 3 beeps, and they record. On that recording pass,

### **To log the ADR as you record**

Generally, on an ADR log, you circle the best takes so you know what takes to use in editing. And write down any notes that may be helpful to the editor (who may or may not be you). You should always keep notes as if you won’t be editing it, and someone else needs to understand it. First of all, do that just in case that happens, but also do it because you won’t remember anything from this session months later when you need to dig back through and find that one detail that you need to fix.

You might decide to use parts of two different takes and combine them. That’s fine, circle them both and make a note about it on the log. But check out that they can sound natural when combined. Quickly put them together on the timeline to make sure that they work.

You may even have to nudge the words around a bit to get them to sync up better. Again, test this to make sure it sounds natural.

And save all the takes, just in case you get into the edit bay and decide you want to go back and use a different take. You never know...

Finally, I’ll repeat before we continue, that lip sync is NOT the key issue in recording ADR. Naturally, the actor has to be in the ballpark, but the main thing to worry about is “does it sound natural?” If you believe the performance, and the mic placement works, then you’re probably doing good and ready to move on to the next cue.

Load up the next ADR cue and record that one the same way. And the next one, and the next one...

### **Wrapping up**

Making the ADR and Location sound match is a pretty tough game. You can spend a lot of time re-recording dialogue and it may never sound exactly the way you want it. It bears repeating and highlighting in bold type:

**the best solution is to get good audio on the set!**

But once you’ve made the decision to ADR, remember that you’ll always be more aware of it than the audience. Do everything you can to get it to sound right, but also realize that there’s a point where you may not be able to do any more. Keep someone with ‘fresh ears’ around and ask them what they think of the scene. Don’t tell them that you’re working on ADR, just have them watch the scene. If they don’t notice it, then you’re all good. If they do, you may want to try another trick or two...

