

Analyzing Sound in Film and TV

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

music: soundtrack or musical score that accompanies a film; helps set mood and create atmosphere

sound effects: sounds—such as rain, thunder, screeching tires, dogs barking, and footsteps—added to films or TV shows during the editing process to help make scenes seem more realistic and exciting or to create mood, atmosphere, and drama

voice-over: unseen commentator or narrator of a film or TV show; provides important background information and conveys narrator’s thoughts, feelings, and interpretations of events and other characters

dialogue: conversations between two or more characters; reveals characters’ emotions and personalities and shows how characters interact

When you are watching a movie or a TV show, you don’t always notice the sound techniques that are used to make what you are viewing more compelling. Analyzing the sound techniques filmmakers and TV directors use to enhance their stories will help you appreciate what you are watching.

HERE’S HOW

Strategy 1: Listen for music and sound effects. The most effective way to analyze a film’s music and sound effects is to do so with your eyes closed.

- Notice what kind of music accompanies the scene. Is it soft and romantic? Loud and intense? Think about what mood the music helps create.
- Identify sound effects, such as screeching tires, roaring thunder, or chirping birds. Consider why the filmmaker may have included them.

Strategy 2: Listen to dialogue and voice-overs. Sound also includes the words the characters speak, either in dialogue or in voice-overs.

- Pay attention to the dialogue between characters. What are the characters’ thoughts, motivations, and opinions? How do they treat others?
- Notice whether the film has a narrator who speaks in voice-overs. Is the narrator a character in the story or an omniscient—or all-knowing—voice? Consider what you learn about characters and events from this narrator.
- Listen for a character’s tone and volume. A character’s tone may reveal the character’s personality and how he or she feels about other characters or the situation.

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Directions: Imagine that you are a sound director for a movie studio. Your job is to select appropriate music and sound effects for the movies that your studio will be releasing this year. Below are the names of the movies that are about to be released. For each movie, you must choose the music and sound effects to accompany the key scene that is described. (For the music, you may choose a particular song or a general type.) Also think about dialogue and voice-overs that can accompany the scenes. When possible, include the types of dialogue or voice-overs you might hear. For each category, explain your choices.

Movie Title	Key Scene	Sound
<i>Goodbye for Now</i>	Sylvia and Frank have been dating for one year, but Frank is leaving for college. Sylvia still has one more year until she graduates from high school. In this scene, the two say a tearful goodbye to each other at the airport.	
<i>The Kidnapping</i>	A married couple hires a new nanny to take care of their 5-year-old daughter during the day. In this scene, the couple arrives home to find their house ransacked and their daughter missing. At the end of the scene, they find a ransom note from the nanny and her accomplice.	
<i>One Dark Night</i>	Sophia and her friends go to a town carnival. Before long, Sophia gets separated from her friends. She decides to go to the fun house and soon gets lost inside it. She keeps seeing warped reflections of herself in the mirrors. In this scene, Sophia realizes that this is no ordinary carnival.	

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Directions: Choose a TV show, and watch the first ten minutes. While watching it, pay attention to the sounds and how those sounds affect the show. Answer the questions as you watch the show or after you have watched it. If possible, you may want to record the show so you can watch it more than once.

1. What mood does the theme song create? How does it help you relate to the show? _____

2. What sound effects are used? How do the sound effects help you connect to the characters and the action? _____

3. What does the dialogue reveal about the characters? How does it help you connect to the characters? _____

4. Does the show use a voice-over? If so, what does the voice-over tell you about the character or the show? _____
