

Audacity Basics with the Keyboard

Audacity is free and very powerful audio creation and editing software. It's available on both the Mac and PC platforms and offers a lot of features to help create, edit and export audio files.

This guide will give you a basic introduction to using and control Audacity with keystrokes. It's designed for people who rely on a keyboard and may either find using a mouse difficult or impossible.

Audacity is a non-destructive audio editor - meaning that all your work happens in a project and when you edit an audio file, the original file is left intact.

You can download Audacity at this link: <http://audacityteam.org/download/> - Windows and Mac versions are available here.

NOTE: Due to the licensing of the MP3 file format, if you wish to export audio to an MP3 file, you will need to download the LAME MP3 encoder which is also available via the link above.

Audacity is multitrack meaning that you can have audio on different tracks to create a mix – you can use this to make podcasts, audio stories, documentaries, music – and many other things. Multi track just means you can have a voice over on one track, music on another track and sound effects on a third track and move these all around to make an audio piece. Another example of using multitrack is if you are composing music. Often in music production, you will have drums on one track, vocals on another and other instruments like guitars, bass and keyboards on different tracks. This gives you control over each component of the musical composition.

Below are a few of the basics to get you started in using Audacity.

This guide will cover:

- Opening, Closing and Saving Audio
- Recording, Playback and Moving Around
- Basic Editing
- Exporting Audio

Getting Audio into Audacity

When you first start Audacity, you are presented with a blank session or project. You can either begin by importing audio or recording directly into the session.

There are two main ways of getting audio into Audacity:

- Record audio live using an internal microphone or line input
- Import audio recorded outside of Audacity

To record audio directly into Audacity, you will either need to connect an audio source to your computer via a line input (usually a small 3.5mm jack) or via a microphone. There are lots of different types of microphones but most commonly for recording, you can either use a USB mic or headset or use one that is built into your computer. Built in mics can vary greatly in sound quality.

There are also audio interfaces you can get that will provide you with connections to allow you to connect mics, line inputs and other audio sources into your computer.

So ... when recording into Audacity – firstly set up whatever you are using to record by going into **Preferences** (**CTRL+P** on a PC and **COMMAND+COMMA** on a Mac).

Select **Devices** on the left hand side and **TAB** to the right and choose both **Playback** and **Recording** options. **Playback** is the device for listening to your audio, usually internal speakers or if you have an audio interface selected, you can choose that. If, for example you have a headset connected, you will see this in the **Playback** and **Recording** sections). **TAB** to the **Recording** section and choose the device you are recording from. Once you are finished here, **TAB** to **OK** and press **ENTER/RETURN**.

Recording, Playback and Moving Around Audio

To record audio, press **R**.

When you press **R** to record audio, Audacity creates a new track. If you have already recorded some audio and press **R** again, Audacity creates another new track and records from the beginning.

To stop recording, press the **SPACEBAR**.

If you wish to continue recording (append), press **SHIFT+R**. Even if you are not at the end of a track, Audacity will move you to the end of the current track and commence recording from there.

To create a new track, press **CTRL+SHIFT+N** (Windows) or **COMMAND+SHIFT+N** (Mac).

To close or delete the currently selected track, press **SHIFT+C**.

To move between tracks, press the **UP** and **DOWN ARROW** keys.

To playback press the **SPACEBAR**. This key is also used to stop playback and recording.

NOTE: When playing back, if you press the **SPACEBAR** to stop, it returns to where you commenced playback from. If you want to move the cursor to the position where you are stopping, you need to use the keystroke **SHIFT+A**.

NOTE: If you make a mistake, the **UNDO** feature is always there to help you out. On a PC, press **CTRL+Z** and on a Mac, press **COMMAND+Z**.

To move to the start of a track, press **J**.

To move to the end of a track, press **K**.

To move through a track, you can use the **LEFT** and **RIGHT ARROW** keys. You can also use **COMMA** and **FULL STOP** to move left and right through audio.

Press **SHIFT+COMMA** or **SHIFT+FULL STOP** to move in larger increments through your audio.

Workflow for Locating a Piece of Audio

- 1) Press **J** to go to the start of a track
- 2) When you hear the audio you want, press **SHIFT+A** to stop.
- 3) Use **SHIFT+COMMA** or **SHIFT+FULL STOP** to find the start of the audio
- 4) You can refine the start position by using the **LEFT** and **RIGHT ARROW** keys.

Soloing Tracks

When working in a multitrack session, if you have more than one track, when you play audio you will (by default) hear the audio of all tracks. Soloing a track means that you can just listen to (and edit) one single track.

To solo a track, press the keystroke **SHIFT+S**.

To un-solo a track, press **SHIFT+S** again.

Basic Editing

When you select audio, just like selecting text in Word, you have the power to do many things. Most commonly in audio, selecting is used to either delete, move or apply various effects. For example, you may want to remove certain words from a piece of dialogue or put a fade in or out at the start or end of some audio.

To select audio from the current cursor position to the start, press **SHIFT+J**.

To select audio from the current cursor position to the end, press **SHIFT+K**.

Use the **SHIFT+LEFT** or **RIGHT ARROW** key combinations to select audio from the current cursor position. The amount of audio that is selected will depend on how much you are zoomed in or out.

Press the **SPACEBAR** to hear what is currently selected.

To zoom in, press **CTRL+1** (PC) or **COMMAND+1** (Mac), to zoom out, press **CTRL+3** (PC) and **COMMAND+3** (Mac). To zoom to Normal press **CTRL+2** (PC) and **COMMAND+2** (Mac). This zooms the audio clip to its natural size. The amount displayed will depend on how long the piece of audio is.

NOTE: Zooming in close means that using the **LEFT** and **RIGHT ARROW** keys moves in smaller increments – therefore if you zoom out, pressing the **LEFT** and **RIGHT ARROW** keys moves you in larger increments.

Once you have selected audio, you can use keystrokes to expand or contract the selection to further refine it to exactly what you want.

SHIFT+LEFT ARROW or **SHIFT+RIGHT ARROW** will expand the audio's left or right edges respectively and **CTRL+SHIFT+LEFT ARROW** or **CTRL+SHIFT+RIGHT ARROW** (PC) **COMMAND+SHIFT+LEFT** or **RIGHT ARROW** (Mac) will contract (shrink) the selected area. Experimenting with this is always a good idea so you can learn and get a feel for how it works.

If you are about to cut or delete audio, use the **C** key to playback a preview of audio before and after what you have selected. This is especially handy when editing dialogue so you can hear what the cut will sound like prior to actually performing it.

Standard common commands like cut, copy and paste work in Audacity in the same way they work in other apps like word processors.

So with some audio selected, press (on a PC):

- **CTRL+X** to cut
- **CTRL+C** to copy
- **CTRL +V** to paste

Or (on a Mac):

- **COMMAND+X** to cut
- **COMMAND+C** to copy
- **COMAND+V** to paste

Exporting Audio

Exporting audio is achieved by choosing the Export Audio option from the File menu.

NOTE there are other options here like Export Selected which allows you to export only the audio that is highlighted.

The keystroke for exporting audio is **CTRL+SHIFT+E** (PC) or **COMMAND+SHIFT+E** (Mac). You are first presented with a dialogue box where you can choose the name of the file, its location and if you are exporting to a compressed format like MP3, this is where you can choose the **Options** button to select the quality of the file.

The next dialogue box that appears asks for metadata, sometimes called ID3 tags. This is information that is used by audio apps like iTunes and Windows Media Player. You enter Artist, Title, Album, Year and other pieces of information here.

Remember that Audacity is a multitrack non-destructive editor, so choosing **Save** or **Save As** from the **File** menu will save the project as a whole. This creates an .aup file which is an Audacity project file. If you want your audio as a .wav or mp3 file, you will need to follow the steps above to export the audio.

The Audacity Team website is www.teamaudacity.org for more information, downloads, manuals and more.

- By Glen Morrow, September 2015