

Audio Theater Essentials

Great audio theater is based on using the right amount of dialogue, sound effects, music and silence to tell a story in the listener's mind. Many of the same principles of good story telling used in literature and film apply to audio theater. Audio provides a unique medium to create stories in ways that are very different than literature and film.

Plot

A clear beginning, middle, and end are required. Just the right amount of information is conveyed to the listener to keep them interested. A variety of appropriate locations are used. Transitions between scenes should be apparent to the listener. Try to never have more than a total of six characters.

Characters

Each character should have a unique tone of voice or speech mannerisms. Characters should show the proper emotion (i.e. joy, anger, fear, confusion) in their voice. Speak loud enough to be heard.

Dialogue

Use adjectives to paint a visual picture (i.e. dark grey sky). Use verbs to convey action (i.e. she smiled). Dialogue is natural, not contrived to paint a visual picture. Characters only exist to listeners if they speak or another character mentions them by name. Narration can be used when appropriate, but should not replace relevant dialogue between characters.

Sound Effects

Use sparingly when appropriate. Use to create location (i.e. city street noise). Use to create mood (i.e. somber tone for sadness). Use to simulate action (i.e. footsteps). Use to signal transition from one scene to another.

Music

Use sparingly when appropriate. Use in the background to create mood or location. Should not dominate vocals when used in the background. Use to signal transition from one scene to another.

Introduction

Use music, then a voice over announcing the title of the show. Grab the listener's attention immediately by creating curiosity about what is next. Do not waste time giving too many details. When appropriate, set up a number of sub-texts which can be developed later. Establish time and location when needed.

Conclusion

The end should be apparent to the listener. Music can be used as a cue that the show has ended. Credit is given to the writers, actors, and others involved in the production. Give a teaser for the next upcoming show.

Resources

Parts of this document are based on:

How to Write a Radio Play - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/features/howtowrite/radio.shtml>

Writing Audio Drama - <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Radio-Play>

The Nature of the Medium - <http://www.storyinsight.com/techniques/media/BBCradio.html>

