

MEDIA REVIEW LOGS

Even in the earliest days at PPI, I was heavily involved in the report-writing side of things. In fact, I created the report system PPI continues to use today. Consequently, other team members submitted to me their “evidence”— which is what we were still calling it back then. They provided me with short narratives about their data and experiences, and even if they’d summarily say, “Found nothin’,” they’d still burn their digital audio and photos onto writable CDs, which I then documented piecemeal and added to the report as fussily word-processed charts. After one investigation, it took weeks of my pestering before a team member could be cajoled to give me the results of the audio review. It was a single scrap torn from the flap of an envelope, tattooed with a squiggly, cursive meander in pencil: time codes copied right off of the read-out of the digital recorder. I asked, “What am I supposed to with this?” A hand lazily gestured to the digital recorder. “It’s all on there,” came the reply, as though whatever the device had captured were still a prisoner of it, powerless to free itself.

When the digital recorder, itself, was handed to me in lieu of a CD-ROM, it took me a while to identify the problem. Work ethic—sure, that too, but I mean the managerial problem of making people feel powerless and unappreciated when they weren’t allowed to see the bigger picture. Without being able to log the findings from their media review in a manner that mirrored my own, they felt themselves to be cogs of investigative process only, but not contributors to the determination process. If I could get everyone to use a common log protocol while reviewing their audio, photos, and video, a peer review process would finally be possible and everyone would feel a part of the post-investigation analysis phase of the case. Plus, it would streamline the report-writing process for me.

Best laid plans.... Only one diligent team member besides myself fastidiously completed every log and submitted a comprehensive portfolio of media and data at the conclusion of every investigation; Brian Miller has since become my Co-Pilot at PPI. Everyone else continued on in their haphazard, undisciplined way, sending me their source audio as if I owned some flahoopitty gizmo that dined on CD-ROMs and pooped out EVP mp3s atop neatly columnized tables of data. Sadly, with the active investigating now over, their interest in the *real* work—of compiling, analyzing, and parsing data, the way research was supposed to happen—had dropped off. It was a sign we weren’t as likeminded about being a TAPS Family team as we thought: if people weren’t even willing to fill out something as fundamental as an audio review log, what credibility did we hope to achieve as a skeptical group extolling the virtues of the scientific method?

The big diaspora came about a year later, and, under the leadership of Glenn Pitcher, “the meek and the nerdy” ended up inheriting the entire operation. It was an opportunity to transform Pacific Paranormal Investigations into the paranormal think-tank I thought it could be. We

balanced case work with writing white papers, did educational outreach and lectures at libraries, colleges, ghost meet-ups and conferences. We poured enthusiasm and energy into innovating investigative resources, experimenting with new techniques and protocols, pioneering a peer review process for our findings, all the while developing a reputation based on critical thinking and, yes, the scientific method. (Some past members caused our reputation to be a bit “floppy” for a while, but that story is for another time.)

It’s no exaggeration, then, to suggest that a system of media review logs helped launched PPI on its current trajectory. Why? Because, regardless of the media genre you’re reviewing, a systematic log for your findings is as basic to research as filing away pay stubs into a 3-drawer cabinet. It’s what mature people just do, and when you do it regularly, it’s never as complicated as you first imagine.

The logs included in this resource have also matured over the last decade, but they continue to streamline the media review process and make it a more productive, informative, and rewarding overall experience.

Because data sets for still image, video, and audio are all very similar, the logs have noticeably common denominators, like timestamps, locations, files names, and content descriptors. The following provides a summary and rationale for media log design, and includes a sample completed audio log to illustrate.

Time Cues: When you are using audio editing software that displays audio tracks as waveforms, time cues aid you in sync-ing multiple tracks and the crucial real-time timestamp. Time cues coincide with the cursor’s progress in the audio track. The starting time cue for the chronologically earliest track is 00.00.00.000 (hh.mm.ss.mss), measured in hours (hh), minutes (mm), seconds (ss), and milliseconds (mss). The starting time cue should coincide with a specified real-time starting time for the audio session, so that timestamps can be calculated accurately.

Timestamps: The merits of timestamps are discussed exhaustively in a number of other resources on this website, including “Reviewing Audio” and “File Naming Protocols.” Their importance cannot be overstressed. Without them, you and your investigative cohorts will be unable to sync your efforts, making it difficult to locate the corresponding events in other media sources. Because the peer review process depends on cross-checking and corroborating findings, real-time timestamps are a way to synchronize those efforts. If an event of interest has been captured in your audio at 9:17:34 PM, then anyone else who recorded the same session should have captured the corresponding event at about that same moment, as long as they pressed “Record” before 9:17:34 PM. That’s the beauty of real-time timestamps. While time cues differ for each audio file, and people turn their devices on and off at different moments, as long as you’re on the surface of the

same planet, real-time timestamps are fixed coordinates with a common frame of reference.

Many devices automatically timestamp the media files you create with them, but only if the devices have been set up in advance or sync themselves to an on-line chronographic source, as is usually the case with smartphones and similar portable devices. Even then, these timestamps have their limitations; some omit seconds, much less milliseconds, which can be a crucial cursor of when an event of interest occurs. For most digital audio recorders, still shot cameras, video cameras, and data logging devices, you'll probably need to input time and data manually. At least with audio devices, if you're uncomfortable setting up your device, you have a built-in work-around: just say it into the mic! In fact, using your smartphone or watch to mark the time while everyone's devices are recording is the surest way to know that everyone's audio is synced.

When it comes time to reviewing the audio and keeping a log of events of interest in it, you need only trim the starting point of the track to the start time of the session. If 22:17 PM is the start time of the recorded investigative session, then it is marked by 00.00.00.000 as its time cue. Calculating a timestamp thereafter is just a matter of noting the specific time cue where the event begins in the track and adding hh.mm.ss.mss to the official start time—22:17:00 in this case. For example, for an EVP that was captured zero hours, six minutes, and thirty-two seconds into the session, labeling it with "000632" is not helpful to another investigator looking for the same even in her audio; after all, she may have switched on her audio recorder several minutes earlier. The timestamp 22:23:32, however, is something she could calculate on her own to locate that same event quickly and reliably. **Note:** Time codes should be presented in *military time*.

Location: Where an event of interest was captured should be noted in the log, even if sometimes repetitive. For events of interest isolated in the review of still photography or video, you're encouraged to log an abbreviation that easily identifies the location of the occurrence, such as "LR" for living room, "BK PCH" for back porch, "MBWC" for master bath water closet, and so on. More suggestions for this are available in "File Naming Protocols."

Class: For audio review, a detailed explanation of the way audio events of interest are categorized by type, as well as the classifications assigned to EVP, is available in "Classifying Isolated Audio." You're urged to avoid dwelling too much on Class "C" EVP unless there's something especially noteworthy about one. Also, be fastidious not to confuse the designations "EVP" and "AVP," the latter of which does not receive a classification. (There is no such thing as a Class A AVP, for instance.) Remember, too, that AVP are alleged to have been heard in real-time with witnesses present. If an anomaly is captured without witnesses, it cannot be verified to be either an EVP or an AVP and should be noted as such.

Details: For each event of interest that is logged, there's a space where users should input important details and annotations, including the following:

1. file names

For each saved media clip representing the same event of interest, you should include its file name in the log and note what distinguishes one clip from other—especially important for audio clips to which you have made enhancements. (Again, see "File Naming Protocols" for further clarification about what to put in a file name.)

Although we encourage minor adjustments that help to showcase the potentially paranormal elements in the file, the *unmodified* version should always be included to provide context, comparison, and, in the case of EVP, a means to verify the Classification assigned to it.

Taking into account the limitations imposed by the software and equipment you use, if you plan to share your media clips, they should be saved or converted into a commonly file format.

2. transcripts

Beneath the file names, you should record a script of the event of interest—the anomaly *and* the context for it, including any dialogue or non-paranormal sounds. Because the obscured sound quality of most EVP places them in Class C and B, any transcription should be regarded as speculative *only*, and *not* verbatim quotations.

When sharing transcripts during the peer review process, withhold the specifics of the EVP, itself, including what you believe it to be saying; this "gag rule" helps you avoid biasing the listener and lets them form their own interpretation, even if that interpretation is radically different from yours.

3. notes

If you think you have an explanation for an event of interest, or you just need to express some doubts or pose some questions, this is the place to do it. You might also need to cross-reference one event of interest to another, or say more about the context of the event because it involves other data or personal experiences. The more you can round out the recorded event and its context, the better.

4. miscellaneous readings and announcements

Audio-visual recordings serve as more than data sets; they also document. Because of that, logs can be used to document everything from time calibrations and roll calls, to announcements of environmental readings and noise contamination, to real-time reports of subjective experiences and eyewitness testimony. These all have a place in your media log and can later be used to cross-check findings and build client reports.

SAMPLE AUDIO REVIEW LOG

Note: The length of this sample log is not average.

Participants BM, TM, DP, TC Family			Source Audio Files 071_130202_AUD_210400_KS 21:04 [0.00.00.000]	
Room/Area Bedroom 3 Bedroom 2 (Base of Operations)			File Abbreviations: List the names and abbreviations of rooms, software filters, or other file alterations noted in the file names. BR2, BR3	
Investigative Session Start Time 00.00.00.000 21:04:00			Notes: Client enters bedroom 3 during this session. Session is held downstairs, in the Living Room/Music Room during this time.	
base timestamp				
File Cue	Timestamp	Class/Type	DETAILS: File names Script Notes Documentation	
00.00.00.000	21:57:00		.11 - .13 mSv 72.1 F 50.3 % hum 0.00 mGs	
00.54.45.000	21:58:45		time callibration	
00.55.04.043	21:59:04		this timestamp is used in file name 071_130202_AUD_BR3_215904_KS.mp3 071_130202_CTX_BR3_215904_iR_KS.mp3 071_130202_CTX_BR3_215904_combo_ABBRV_KS.mp3 071_130202_CTX_BR3_215904_ABBRV_KS.mp3 [laptop]	
			BM: So, once again, what's your favorite color? EVP: (child's voice; 17 seconds into clip) Pink . . . (more quietly) pink.	
			Note: EXPLAINED. Cross-checking two sources of audio, this EVP appears to be caused more by a mechanical sound that one of the recording devices translated into a higher pitch.	
01.02.30.00	22:06:30		J reports a tapping sound; BM confirms that he heard the sound, possibly the bookcase creaking DP hypothesizes that the bird toy might trigger a response and tracks the fluctuations of background radiation while J plays with the toy.	
01.03.11.000	22:07:11	Class B	071_130202_EVP_BR3_220711_KS.mp3 071_130202_EVP_BR3_220711_iR_KS.mp3	
			BM: Would you like to play a little game with us? CTX: (one of the investigators whispers) There you go. EVP: (strong, acoustically unusual whisper) That'd be nice.	
			Note: This is captured immediately after J and BM report hearing the tapping noise. It could be a foot rubbing the carpet, though.	
01.24.25.000	22:28:25		time sync Session 2 ends	

To calculate a new timestamp, add a new time cue to the base timestamp

this timestamp is used in file name

