

AudiAnnotate User Testing Workshop Report

About the Workshop

This workshop was initiated out of the AudiAnnotate team's progress testing Sonic Visualiser and Audacity, in order to gain feedback and outside evaluation for our annotation workflow. This workshop took place on November 22, 2019 from 11:30-1:00 at the Harry Ransom Center. Those with and without audio editing experience were invited to attend the workshop and assist in evaluation of the two audio annotating tools and workflows.

During the Workshop

We began the workshop with an introduction to the AudiAnnotate project, discussing the goals of the project as it might pertain to annotating and interacting with archival audio collections at the Ransom Center. Users were also given a brief introduction to Sonic Visualiser and Audacity, as well as the Anne Sexton audio recordings that they had access to for working in the applications. The audio files available to users were two recordings from the Anne Sexton audio collection at the Ransom Center. The first recording was Anne Sexton reading her poems to music and the second recording was Anne Sexton leading a poetry talk with students at Sweet Briar College in 1966. After the introduction, users were first instructed to open Audacity and Sonic Visualiser and spend about 30 minutes attempting to annotate files in each application. We also gave participants access to two basic "Getting Started" workflows, one for Audacity and one for Sonic Visualiser (below). Participants were encouraged to attempt annotations first without consulting the workflow, as a way to gauge intuitiveness of one application versus the other.

Workshop Discussion

After participants had time to work through and attempt annotation of audio files in both applications, we moved forward into a time of discussion. Overall, participants agreed that out of the two apps, Audacity was most intuitive, and all participants said they had some trouble with Sonic Visualiser. Some users noted that while Sonic Visualiser had more of a learning curve and was confusing, the interface was more visually fluid and worked well for finding place within an audio file along the wave forms, while some suggested the opposite. Users suggested that the stacking of multiple layers in Sonic Visualiser was difficult, compared to adding multiple label tracks in Audacity. Users also noted that icon size in Audacity is quite small and could potentially be difficult for users.

Much of the discussion that ensued revolved around how this sort of editing would be possible at the Ransom Center itself. Because of the iterative nature of audio editing, saving annotations onto a file involves saving the audio file itself. Digital audio files at an archive are not intended to leave the building, so the question becomes, what would this sort of annotating look like? How would the work station itself be configured? One attendee suggested that being able to clip and manipulate the audio file, making it different than the archival audio itself, might be a way to come away from the reading room with a file that includes audio alongside annotations. This is also complicated by copyright, which is often difficult to obtain for audio files, especially when multiple people are involved. One attendee imagined a space where the computer is not locked down in any way, and entirely open to the internet, with liability on the archive's patrons to not share the file upon saving it. This attendee brought up a recently published article that suggests less policing of file sharing in archival settings.

Attendees also discussed the "Getting Started" workflows that were provided. It was determined that these were particularly helpful for orienting users to a researcher's perspective, versus just editing audio. These workflows, in the format of one-page instructions for annotations, were helpful for allowing users to focus on and have options for annotating audio in each application. Participants noted that it would also be helpful to have information on how to download and export the annotations in these basic workflows. Attendees noted that this process would depend on the archive's download restrictions.

Post-Workshop Survey Responses

Users were asked to fill out a post-workshop survey. While only three users participated in the survey, some helpful information was shared. All three users had used Audacity before. Two users surveyed had used additional audio editing tools, including Protools, Cubase, Wavelab, and Izotope. Two of the three users agreed that Audacity worked best over Sonic Visualiser, while one user was unsure.

When asked what was difficult in Sonic Visualiser, one user said understanding what to do with the exported data set, another said figuring out how to export, and the other said the tools, waveform navigation, and playback from particular points. When asked what worked best in Sonic Visualiser, users said adding annotations in the interface and creating a spectrogram.

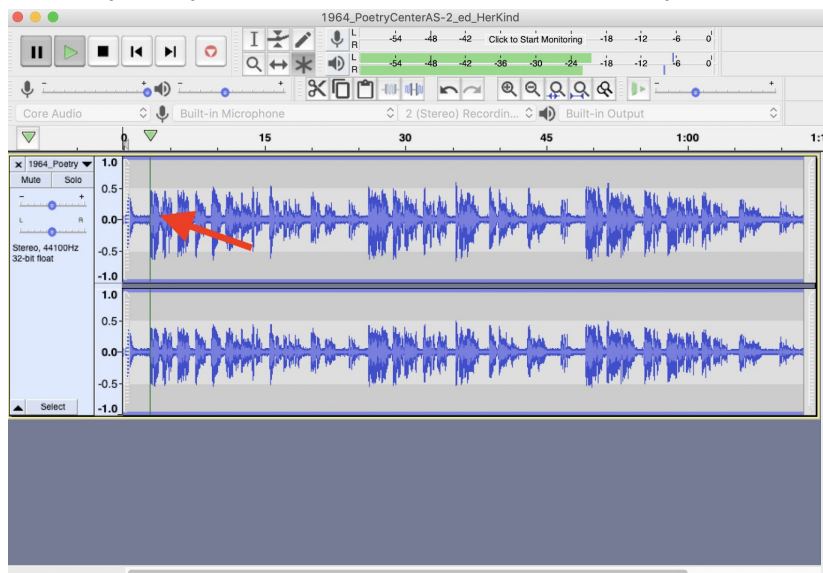
When asked what was difficult in Audacity, users said that adding annotations without losing their place along the waveform was challenging. One user also mentioned that the timing exported in seconds, as opposed to minutes and seconds was confusing. Another user mentioned that adding annotations was difficult, and questioned the benefit of adding annotations to an audio file rather than just writing them in a text file. Users suggested that navigating the waveform itself and exporting notes were the most intuitive aspects of Audacity.

Users were also asked if they think Ransom Center patrons would be able to participate fairly seamlessly in annotating audio recordings in the reading room, and two out of three of those surveyed did not think so. One user also wondered if there are best practices or recommendations for the ideal workspace in the archival setting that could be specified.

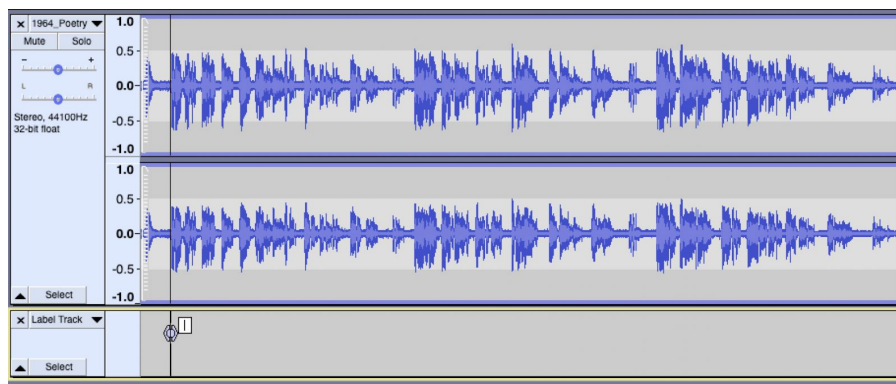
Basic Workflow for Audacity

Getting Started in Audacity:

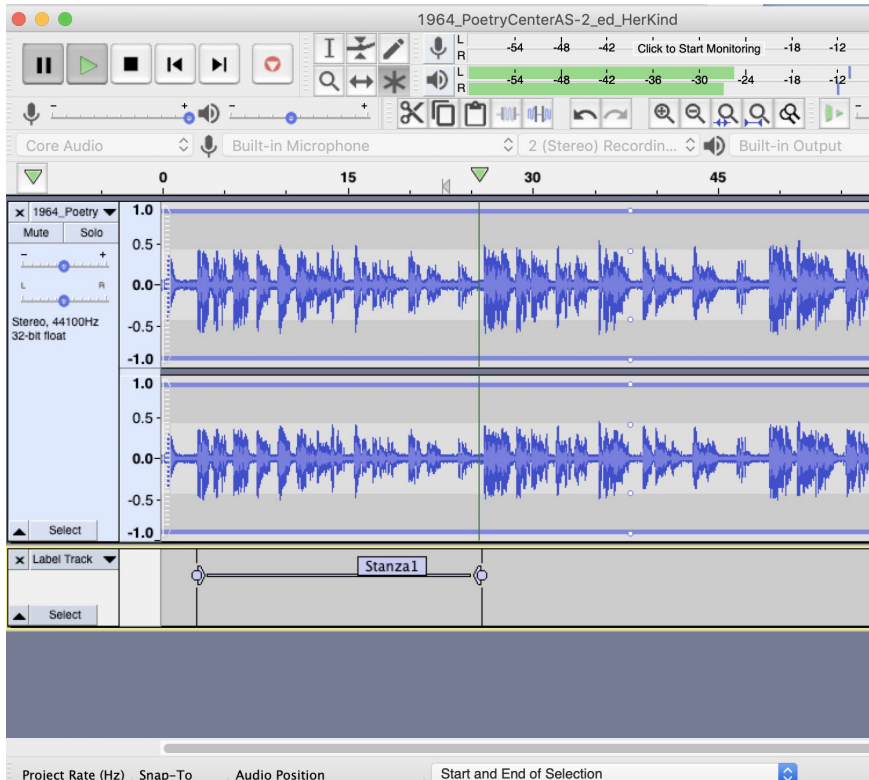
1. Open Audacity, and in the top left, navigate to file → Open → [file name]
2. On the warning screen, make sure the make a copy choice is selected, then click ok.
3. There are multiple ways to annotate a stanza. First, we'll try ranges. To insert a range, you'll pause the poem by clicking the "p" key when you hear the first line of the stanza begin.
4. Click the time marker line to mark the place in time where you want to add the label. This typically will correspond to the place where you paused the audio (see image below)



5. Then, you'll click command + b to add a label. A field will pop up and you can type something like, "Stanza1" to mark the stanza



6. To create the range, you'll click and drag the right edge of the point to the end of the stanza. You'll have to play the recording to know where to end the stanza. A completed range will look like this:



7. Those are the basics. Feel free to annotate as you wish, thinking about the issues you run into and what works or doesn't work for you.

Another way to add labels in Audacity:

1. When you open the app and add audio, go to Edit → Labels, then click “Type to create a label”
2. Now as you're listening, when you type any key, a label will begin
3. Using this method, to pause the audio, you need to use the pause button on the upper left of the interface

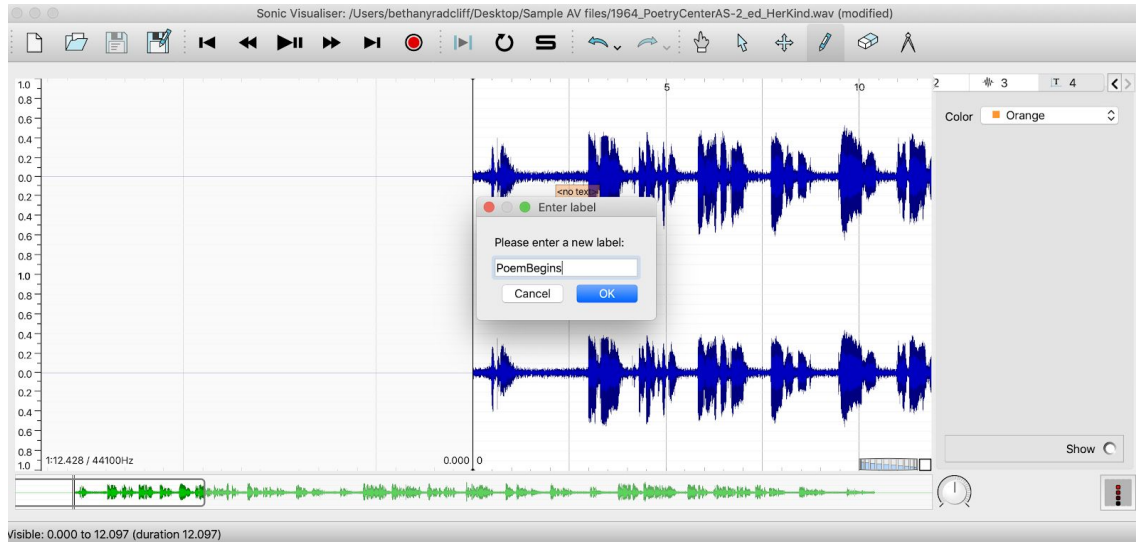
Basic Workflow for Sonic Visualiser

Getting Started in Sonic Visualiser:

1. Open Sonic Visualiser.
2. On the top bar, click file → open and select an audio file.
3. Click ok. You should see two waveforms on the interface.
4. Now let's try adding annotations to a file. We'll start with some structural elements. To begin adding annotations, go to layer → add new text layer
5. To add an annotation, you can click anywhere on the screen. The best way to be precise with annotations is to listen to the audio, then pause (by clicking the space bar) when

you want to add an annotation, then click where you'd like the annotation to be added along the waveform.

6. Once you click, you'll see the screen below. After you type your annotation into the box, click okay or hit the enter key.



7. That's one basic way of adding annotations. Feel free to explore the application and play with other features.