

# Listening Assignment

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*Fundamentals of Sound Engineering, Spring 2009*

## Deadlines:

Song selection: April 15, 2009 by 5 PM

Presentations: In class, May 11 and 13, 2009

Paper: By 5 PM on the day of your presentation

Deadlines are firm. No late work will be accepted unless prior approval has been given. Students **are required to submit an electronic copy** of their work to [earsnw@gmail.com](mailto:earsnw@gmail.com) as a .doc, .docx, .rtf, or .pdf file. Please do not turn in paper copies unless you are having extreme technical difficulties.

We are aware of the programs that corrupt email attachments to make it appear like a technical error caused the file not to transmit. Students are responsible for checking the validity of the file transmission. Corrupted email attachments or server errors will not be taken as an excuse for turning in an assignment past its due date.

Confirmation of receipt and attachment viability will be given as soon as possible, but may not come in time if the assignment is submitted within 2 hours of the due date.

## Purpose:

This assignment is designed to give each student the opportunity to listen critically to a recording that they like or find interesting, and analyze the song, not only in terms of the objective content, but in how that content comes together as a work of art, and is transmitted to the listener. This assignment will help students to develop better listening skills, and will enhance their appreciation for the subtleties in music that, though often overlooked, are an integral part of live and studio mixing. Furthermore, students will gain experience in communicating these sometimes nebulous topics, as they share their findings in an interactive presentation to the class.

## Song Selection (10% of overall grade):

Students are required to submit at least 2 song choices, indicating preference rank. Multiple choices are required because no two students will be allowed to use the same recording for their assignment. There are a lot of songs out there; think carefully about what song will mean the most to *you*. Pick something that you find enjoyable, that contains a full spectrum of sound (unlike, say, a simple guitar/vocal track), and exhibits interesting sounds, arrangements, or dynamic changes.

## Report (40% of overall grade):

Listen to your song on at least 2 different sound systems and answer the following questions:

-How does the song start? Does it build slowly or jump right in?

-What instruments are present in the mix? What are their respective levels? How does this change throughout the song?

-What is the frequency spectrum of the song? Is it bass-heavy? Treble-heavy? Well-balanced? Does this change depending on the system you are listening to?

-How are the instruments panned in the mix? Does this change throughout the recording? If so, why do you think the producers decided to do this?

-Listen for any effects (i.e. reverb, delay, tremolo) applied to the tracks of the song. Can you tell if there are any? Can you tell if they are natural (like room reverb) or post-production (like a plug-in effect)? Do the effects change throughout the song? What do you think this adds (or subtracts) to the song?

-What do you like and/or dislike about this recording? What sticks out to you? What would you change about it, given the opportunity?

-Research your recording, and comment on how it was made. Often you can find information in the liner notes of the album. Otherwise, Google can usually turn up some good tidbits. If you cannot find any information on your specific recording, look up the band, producer, or engineer of your song, and find out what studio techniques they were known to employ.

-What systems did you listen to your song on? Did it sound different on each of them? What differences did you notice?

### **Presentation (50% of overall grade):**

Create a PowerPoint to present to the class, with clips from your song, and key points you would like to discuss about each of them. We would like each student to have 4-5 clips of roughly 30 seconds from the song, and be able to talk about each one in depth. The PowerPoint should also contain the information you found about your recording or band, and if possible, any photos or diagrams of the studio that it was recorded in or the techniques used. If you do not have a software program for cutting tracks into segments, there are some good free programs available online, listed at the bottom of this assignment.

### **Free audio editing programs:**

-Soundhack: <http://soundhack.com/freeware.php>

-Audacity: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>