

# Boom Operating

The Art and Passion



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Production Sound Mixer

*South Seas Graduate 2005*

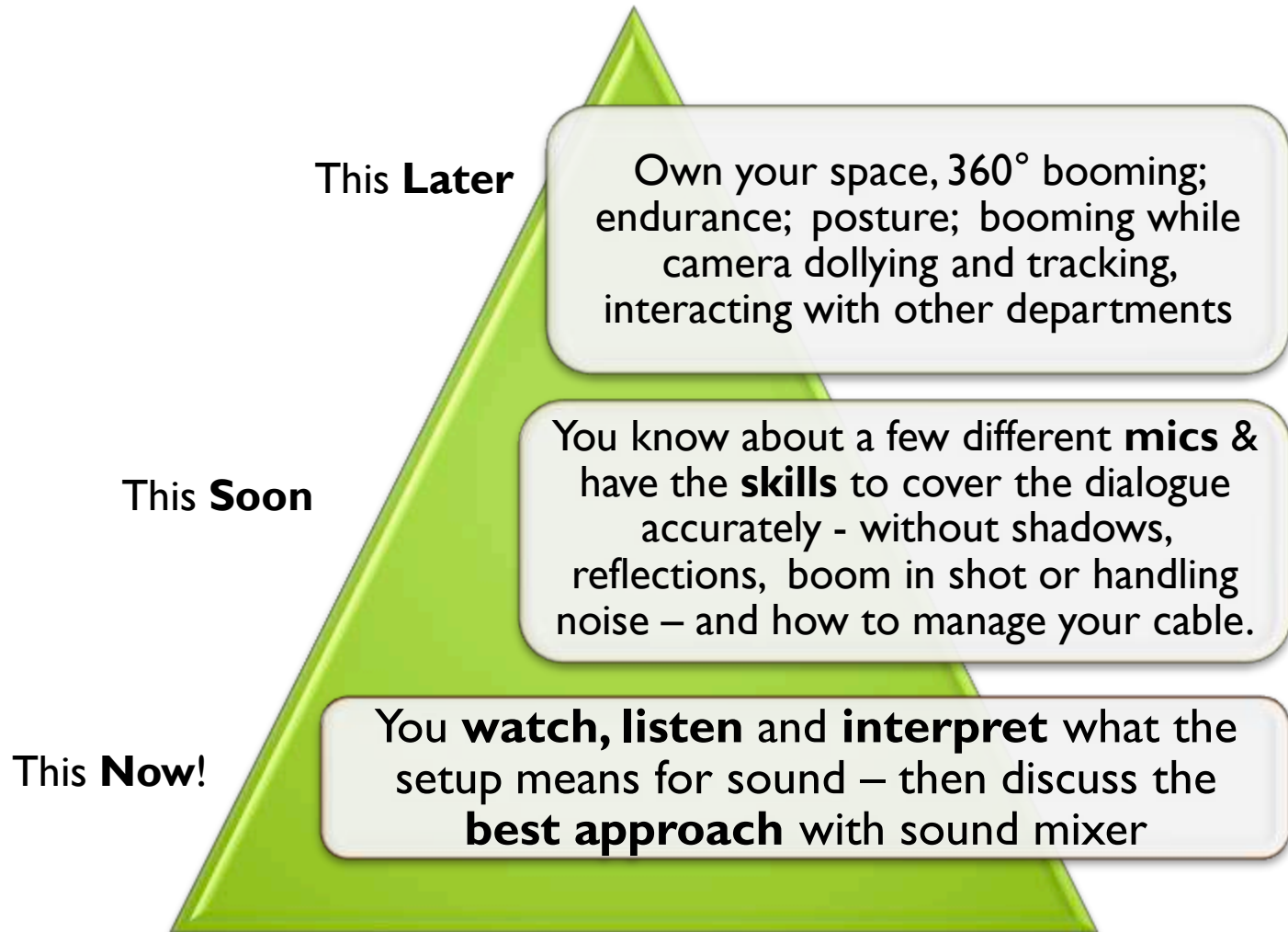
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# PART ONE

The Art: *Skills You Need*



# What Matters Most



# Booming Equipment



The Pole



The windshield

The comb

The hand mount

Spare mic clips

The windjammer (hairy dog)

# Loving your Boom Equipment



- **Microphone:** Keep dry & secure.
- **Boom Pole:** If going '*long*', plug in and start extending top section first. Pull out each section to its limit then bring back a few inches before locking off
- **Windshield:** Comb out any knots, take off and dry after use if damp - will rust mic if left
- **Cables:** Wash thoroughly if dirty. Dirt will dry and sharp ends may pierce rubber. Loop cables 'over-under' carefully to avoid leaving '*memory*'.

# Two Great Microphones



## Sanken CS-1

*Short Shotgun ~ great for **interiors**  
and as camera microphone*



**Very short:** 180mm long  
– easy to hide from  
camera.

**Very Light** - just 100g -  
Ideal weight for boom ops

Sharp directivity

**No distortion** even in  
close setting to sound  
source

**Price:** approx. \$1100+gst



## Sanken CS-3

*Directional Shotgun ~ great for **exteriors**  
and extreme side/rare rejection of sound*



**Maintains diversity** over  
extremely wide frequency  
range

**Extreme rejection** from the  
sides and rear, even with low  
frequencies.

**Low proximity effect**  
which produces little change in  
sound character regardless of  
close-up and wide angle.

Supercardioid

**Price:** approx. \$1600+gst

# Blockings, Rehearsals, Takes



- **The Block:** Put down the boom. Watch as *director and actors* figure out best movement in the given space. *Director and DP* will discuss **shot sequence** (*if they don't you must ask*)
- **The Rehearsal:** Boom up in position. When lights are up test shadows and camera frames - mark off against something on horizon. Mark your spot exactly on ground and **clear a path** for yourself if you need to move during the take. (*NB: sometimes director shoots the rehearsal so be ready*).
- **The First Take:** **Watch carefully how dialogue is delivered.** This can often be different from rehearsal. If dialogue is delivered down to chest or away from camera try to change that (*talk to director - or actor if on good terms*)

# Tricky Situations



- **Reflections or shadows from mirrors/shiny surfaces/lights** – you can't always see it's a problem so ask someone to check frame for you while swinging – deliberately break frame to give cam op. idea of your presence. Check with **Art dep.** if OK to remove mirrors or replace with hanging pictures & ask **Gaffer** if OK to turn off house lights which produce 360° shadows!
- **Dollies/cranes/cramped spaces/wide angles**

***Remember:** With lots of low budget shoots around often useable sound is required for every scene (i.e. no ADR budget) so that's when other departments may be required to move/adjust around you*

## EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Scene 16B Ext. Britomart





# When to Boom

- If **camera angles** are tight enough
- If **clothing noise** makes radio mics sound terrible (when actors are in bed / hugging / fighting)

## EXAMPLE SCENARIO

Scene 76

Int. Langham Hotel



# Managing a Script



- **If you're both booming and mixing** (as we all must do immediately after film school), **know the last words of each actor** so you can change boom position in time. When booming actors some distance apart, **turn mic first then gently move boom** otherwise you'll hear whoooooosh!
- **If you have a boom op:** prop up script and highlight dialogue (on the 'sides') and **mark during the take any words you didn't capture properly** (due to poor boom position or ext. noises like planes/rogue cell phones).

# Booming Posture



**Hold pole very lightly**

Little finger free at end of pole

**Cable levered around fingers**

**Loosen shoulders**   **Horse stance**   **Don't lock hips**



# The Location Scout

- ✓ **Read script three times** (feel>technical>FX)
- ✓ Imagine you're shooting the scene
- ✓ Keep an ear out for creaky floors/air conditioning/traffic problems
- ✓ Discuss generator placement with gaffer
- ✓ Present list of sound issues at meeting  
(*even if little questions like background music*)
- ✓ Buy rugs to help interior acoustics (Savemart)

## **END OF PART ONE ~**

### *The Art: Skills You Need*



# questions

Do not be afraid to ask questions – don't be in the dark about anything – that can cost a shot. Best waste someone's times.

Know what other departments are doing / create positive relationships with people from other dep.

# PART TWO

The Passion: *attitudes you need*





# Attitude One

- **Find the work. Don't wait.**

**Stop complaining about having no work.** Stop thinking the industry will love you and give you work. Get off your arse and go to the work especially if for experienced mixer.

**Send out newsletters** that inform people (start with everyone at South Seas) what you're up to and include a few interesting facts that relates sound to their industry and thus gives them something.

**Listen for Opportunities.** I was contacted by a producer in Italy last week to record sound on a documentary. I have no idea how he got my details but this sort of thing is happening more and more because I am not waiting for work to come to me. It has taken me too long to reach this attitude.

If you want to get good fast be very **hungry for work.**



# Attitude Two

- **Research everyday. Test cameras**

**Stop thinking you'll know it all after film school.** This attitude is detested by experienced crew and attributed to why people think film school is a joke.

**Subscribe to R.A.M.P.S.** There is one main production sound forum. There are over 15 thousand posts on every location sound topic imaginable. Don't forget this site: <http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.movies.production.sound/>

*NB: Start with my website – it has grouped many posts into topics: [www.fieldsounds.co.nz](http://www.fieldsounds.co.nz)*

**Make up your own contact list. Make it your bible.** Keep it up to date. Build rapport with as many directors from South Seas as you can and mix sound for them - whenever they ask.

**Stop thinking you'll get by on the day.** You won't. You will stuff up the audio and never work for that director again. Each camera has its little traps. Find out beforehand what they are. In your time. Makes notes.

**Go to Darryn and make time to test sound gear with each camera –** also Panavision for the high spec HD cameras (e.g Sony HDW-F900R) Test cable feed, wireless feed, timecode, playback, monitor return. Make notes. You don't want to discover a problem on the shoot day. **Avoid this at all costs.**

**You need to get good before you get the money.  
SO GET GOOD!**



# Attitude Three

- **Find a mentor. You know nothing.**

Essential. Mike Westgate was mine. He was the only sound mixer I'd met who was at ease with sharing his knowledge. The others regarded me with some reservation.

When I first met him on Shortcuts I glued myself to him for the entire 3 days. I would ask him question after question and always he'd give what he knew. I then boomed for him for many months after film school. Invested the money straight into sound gear.

**Be humble and learn from the pros.** One day you may be lucky enough to mentor an eager trainee.



# Attitude Four

- **Make sound allies. Share equipment, techniques.**  
Yes, you are after the same jobs but let 's face it – that isn't going to change in a hurry. We're all here to stay!  
Make equipment deals with other soundies if budget or time-constraints mean you can't hire from rentals shops.

**Respect other soundies.** Maybe they get a job too many one day and mention your name.



# Attitude Five

- **Repay your debts.**

Give gifts to all those key individuals who've helped you on your way and given you opportunities to further your sound career: tutors, mentor sound mixers, producers, directors, DP etc. If you don't repay your debt to them you'll never climb up to their level.

**When you repay a debt** you get rid of the guilt you feel from using people to get to where you are now.



# Attitude Six

- **Market yourself consistently.**

**Have neatly designed business cards** - hand them out as fast as you can (order at least 500) before they become irrelevant because you've changed address. Ideally you will also have a website with the same design as your business cards. *I got 1500 cards for about \$50 from [vistaprint.co.nz](http://vistaprint.co.nz)*

**Keep in touch with the producers**, production managers and directors from this year - they will be your closest allies in getting you work before you start to attract attention commercially.

**Get a haircut, an alarm clock, and some business cards** – lazy teenagers don't work in the film industry.



# Attitude Seven

- **Find your passion within sound.**

I enjoy the physicality of boom swinging - the flexibility and accuracy demanded of me. No need for gym after a day of swinging!

I enjoy it when the director sparks me / the crew up and motivates us to get the best results. It has to be the director and that's why I enjoy getting to know independent directors – as well as those from production companies - because I like doing a job for someone who means something to me personally. I think we all do.

A few weeks ago I recorded and boomed for an independent director who shot a one-scene film in front of the mirrors in a dance studio. He wanted both me and the camera guy in shot the whole time – as part of the scene! That stuff is just fun – I walked out of there with a big grin on my face.

You must do some of that to keep alive the passion of why you do sound in the first place. To keep your edge...to keep you eager to learn and experiment.

**Ask yourself 'why sound'?** What is your long term goal? Be sure you have something strong enough to last you through many discouragements and mistakes.

**END OF PART TWO~**

The Passion: *Attitudes You Need*

questions



# In Closing

## Boom Operating :The Art and Passion

Lift up your performance at South Seas. Don't be 'peer pressured' into laziness. *Spend every free moment researching, testing, refining your technique.* **Become the best.** Then you will not be forgotten when you go looking for work. And you will rise quickly and get on with the things in life that are important to you.



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# www.fieldsounds.co.nz

The production sound website  
*where answers are questioned...*

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