



HUNT THE SOUND

FREE GUIDE

5 audio mistakes that make your podcast sound **amateur.**

And how to fix every one of them for free. Most fixes take under 15 minutes, and none of them require expensive software or plugins.

By Colton Hunt · Hunt The Sound · Jackson, TN

huntthesound.com

BEFORE WE START

The same five problems, over and over.

I'm Colton Hunt, audio engineer and musician, and the person behind Hunt The Sound in Jackson, Tennessee. I hold a Master of Music in Music Technology, and I've spent over a decade behind the board. These days my whole focus is remote mixing and audio post for artists, podcasters, and creators.

When podcasters send me their raw recordings, I hear the same five problems again and again. The good news? Every single one of them is fixable, most in under 15 minutes, and none of them require expensive software or plugins.

This guide walks you through each mistake, explains why it matters to your listeners, and gives you a concrete fix you can apply today. No jargon, no upselling. Just the practical stuff that makes an immediate difference.

Let's fix your audio.

01 Recording in an untreated room

02 Microphone too far from your mouth

03 Inconsistent levels between speakers

04 Not using noise reduction

05 Exporting at the wrong settings

MISTAKE 01

Recording in an untreated room.

When you record in a bare room with hardwood floors, drywall, and no soft surfaces, sound bounces off every surface before reaching your microphone. Your listeners hear this as echo, reverb, or a hollow "bathroom" quality that screams amateur. Even a great microphone can't fix a bad room, because it captures everything: your voice plus every reflection.

This is the single most common problem I hear in raw podcast recordings. And it's almost impossible to fix in post-production. Once room reverb is baked into the recording, it's there for good.

THE FIX: TAME YOUR ROOM

Option A, the closet method. Record in a small, clothes-filled closet. Hanging clothes are excellent sound absorbers. This is one of the best free acoustic treatments available. It sounds silly, but professional voiceover artists use this trick constantly.

Option B, the blanket fort. Hang heavy blankets or comforters on mic stands, chairs, or a clothing rack around your recording position. You don't need to cover the whole room. Just create a soft barrier between you and the nearest hard surfaces.

Option C, mic positioning. Face a soft surface (couch, bed, bookshelf) and put your back to the room. Position the mic between you and the soft surface. This alone significantly reduces the room reflections reaching the mic.

QUICK TEST: Clap your hands in your recording space. If you hear a noticeable ring or echo, you need more soft surfaces. Keep adding blankets or move to a smaller space until the clap sounds dead and flat.

MISTAKE 02

Microphone too far from your mouth.

When your mic is more than 6 to 8 inches from your mouth, two things happen: your voice sounds thin and distant, and the microphone picks up more room noise relative to your voice. The technical term is a poor "signal-to-noise ratio." Your voice (the signal) gets quieter while background noise stays the same.

Listeners experience this as a recording that sounds far away, echoey, or like you're talking in a tunnel. They'll turn up the volume to hear you, which also turns up the HVAC noise, the computer fan, and every other ambient sound in the room.

THE FIX: MIC DISTANCE AND ANGLE

The 4-inch rule. Position your mouth approximately 4 inches (a fist-width) from the microphone. This is the sweet spot for most USB and XLR podcast mics: close enough for a warm, present sound without triggering excessive plosives.

Angle it slightly. Don't speak directly into the front of the mic. Angle it about 15 to 20 degrees off-axis. This reduces plosive pops (the "P" and "B" sounds that cause thumps) while keeping your voice full and clear.

Use a pop filter. If you don't have one, stretch a thin sock or pantyhose over a wire hanger bent into a circle. Place it 2 to 3 inches in front of the mic. This catches plosive air blasts before they hit the diaphragm.

Stay consistent. The biggest amateur tell is distance variation: leaning in and out during recording. Find a comfortable position and stay there. If you gesture a lot while talking, remember that head movement changes the mic distance and volume constantly.

MISTAKE 03

Inconsistent levels between speakers.

One host is loud and clear. The guest sounds like they're whispering from another room. Or worse: one person's audio peaks and distorts while the other is barely audible. This forces listeners to constantly adjust their volume, which is the fastest way to make someone hit "skip" on your episode.

This happens because different people have different vocal volumes, microphones, mic distances, and recording environments. If you don't address it before and after recording, your podcast sounds uneven and unprofessional.

THE FIX: GAIN STAGING + POST LEVELING

Before recording, set your gain properly. Have each speaker talk at their normal volume while you adjust the input gain. Watch the level meter in your recording software. You want peaks hitting around -12 to -6 dB. If the meter is barely moving, turn the gain up. If it's hitting the red, turn it down.

After recording, level in Audacity (free). Open your recording in Audacity. Select all of one speaker's audio (or their entire track if recorded separately), then go to Effect > Normalize and set it to -3.0 dB. Do the same for the other speaker. This brings both voices to the same peak level automatically.

For remote guests. Always have each person record their own audio locally, not through Zoom's compressed feed. Use a platform like Riverside, SquadCast, or Zencastr that records locally on each end. If you must use Zoom, have each person also record a local backup in Audacity or QuickTime.

THE COMPRESSION TRICK: After normalizing, select the quieter speaker's track, go to Effect > Compressor, and use Threshold -18 dB, Ratio 3:1, Attack 0.01s, Release 0.1s. This evens out their volume without making it sound processed.

MISTAKE 04

Not using noise reduction.

Every recording environment has background noise: air conditioning, computer fans, refrigerator hum, street traffic, keyboard clicks during notes. You might not notice it while recording because your brain filters it out, but your microphone captures everything. And your listeners, especially those wearing headphones, hear all of it.

Constant low-level noise makes your podcast sound like it was recorded in a kitchen or office rather than a professional space. It's fatiguing to listen to over a 30 to 60 minute episode, even when listeners can't specifically identify what's bothering them.

THE FIX: AUDACITY NOISE REDUCTION

Step 1: capture a noise profile. At the start of every recording, sit in silence for 5 to 10 seconds. Don't talk, don't move. Just let the mic record the room's ambient noise. This "room tone" sample is what trains the noise reduction tool.

Step 2: select the silent section. In Audacity, highlight just those few seconds of silence at the beginning.

Step 3: get the noise profile. Go to Effect > Noise Reduction, then click "Get Noise Profile." The window closes; that's normal. Audacity just learned what your background noise sounds like.

Step 4: apply to the full recording. Select your entire recording (Ctrl+A / Cmd+A), go back to Effect > Noise Reduction, and use these conservative settings: Noise Reduction 6 to 12 dB, Sensitivity 6, Frequency Smoothing 3. Click OK.

WARNING: Don't go above 12 dB of noise reduction. It starts making your voice sound robotic and artifacted. A little background noise is better than a voice that sounds underwater. Start at 6 dB and increase gradually.

MISTAKE 05

Exporting at the wrong settings.

You've done everything right: good room, good mic technique, clean audio. Then you export the file wrong and either upload a massive WAV that takes forever to process, an MP3 so compressed it sounds like AM radio, or a file with no metadata that shows up as "Unknown" in podcast apps.

Export settings are the last step, and they're easy to get right once you know the standard. Every major podcast hosting platform (Buzzsprout, Libsyn, Anchor, Podbean) expects the same thing.

THE FIX: CORRECT EXPORT SETTINGS

Format: MP3. Not WAV, not FLAC, not AAC. MP3 is the universal podcast standard.

Bitrate. 128 kbps for mono (single speaker or combined stereo-to-mono), 192 kbps if you're exporting in stereo. Mono at 128 kbps is the industry standard for speech podcasts: small enough to download quickly, high enough quality that no one can tell the difference.

Sample rate: 44,100 Hz (44.1 kHz). CD quality, and the standard for podcast audio.

Channels: mono for most podcasts. Unless you have a specific creative reason for stereo (sound design, music-heavy shows), mono cuts your file size in half and sounds identical on earbuds.

In Audacity. File > Export > Export as MP3. Set Bit Rate Mode to "Constant," Quality to 128 kbps, and Channel Mode to "Joint Stereo" (or Force Mono). Fill in the metadata tags: Title, Artist, Album, Year, Genre.

LOUDNESS: Before exporting, aim for -16 LUFS (stereo) or -19 LUFS (mono), the targets recommended by Apple Podcasts and Spotify. In Audacity, approximate this by normalizing peaks to -1.0 dB after compression.



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These fixes get you 80% of the way there.

If you want the last 20%, or you'd rather hand off post entirely so you can focus on your content, that's what I do: remote podcast post for shows that want to sound like they have an engineer on staff. Because they do.

Podcast post, per episode

\$110

Leveling, noise reduction, edits. Broadcast-quality audio for every episode.

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FADERS UP. LET'S FINISH THIS.