

A PAPER ON “STUDIO SIGNS AND THEIR MEANINGS” PRESENTED BY FONGU DIANE TEBO

It is proper for us to begin our discussion by looking at the key words in our topic “studio” and “sign”. The word “studio” has several meanings, but we will look at the definition which suits our context.

A studio is a room from which radio or television programmers are regularly broadcast or in which they are recorded.

The word “Sign” refers to a gesture or movement made with the hand or head-used for example, to give information or a command-for example “sign language” which is a system of communication for deaf people using gestures instead of words.

Studio signs or hand signals are therefore signs that are made usually in the studio, to ease the recording or broadcast of a television or radio programme. Radio and television sometimes use studio signs or hand signals for communication between members of a working team. Hand signals were developed in the early days of radio because; sound-proof glass partitions separated directors and engineers from performers. Let’s talk a little bit about how you should conduct yourself while in the studio.

In most radio stations, a RED LIGHT IN THE studio will indicate that the microphone is open and from that moment, absolutely no unnecessary sound can be tolerated. So you’ve got to wait patiently and be alert for a signal-the signal will probably be given by a floor director (T.V) or by an engineer over an intercom (for radio). In any arrangement, you must depend on a visual signal-so keep watching the engineer. On receiving the signal, move into the exact position and posture you will use during your reading, broadcast, or performance. And as you read or speak, remain alert for any hand signal given by the floor director or engineer, and act accordingly. This is because during the presentation of a radio or television programme, it is difficult to instruct the average speaker or performer verbally.

Yet it is very often necessary to communicate certain information to the speaker, while the broadcast or recording is in progress.

The speaker might talk too fast or too slow; he might be too far from or too close to the mike, or an accurate time cue can be important to the performer etc. all of such information must be conveyed to the broadcaster or producer, without disrupting the flow of the programme. And to achieve this, one of the oldest means of communication is used; The SIGN LANGUAGE. Broadcasters over the years have established and agreed upon certain specific signs for each purpose. In the following pages, the most common signs are illustrated and their meaning is given.

It is however important to note that, over the years many aspects of broadcasting have changed. The television came along and much of radio turned to recorded music-with most announcers doing their own engineering. Today, not all radio stations have a control room adjacent to (an announcer booth or) the studio.

In spite of this, some hand signals are still used in both radio and television-some hand signals are used in radio only, some in television only.

- (A) **ATTENTION:** This signal, a simple waving of the hand, usually precedes the stand-by signal. In radio, it is given by an engineer-in television by the floor director.
- (B) **STAND – BY:** The stand by signal is made by holding the hand slightly above the head, palm toward the announcer. The stand – by signal is given at any time when the announcers cannot judge the precise moment at which to pick up a cue- such as at the beginning of a radio or television programme. (A different stand-by signal is used in television when cuing the anchor from on camera to another).
- (C) **CUE:** The cue signal is made by rapidly lowering the hand from the stand-by position, with the index finger extended and pointing directly at the person being cued. It is simply saying that you are on. In nearly every instance, the cue signal follows the stand-by signal; neither signal is normally given alone. In some radio operations, the cue signal is given as often by the announcer, as by the engineer.

Music and fast-paced news programming require timing to the split second, and cues are given by the person who is in the best position to coordinate the elements of production. It could be the announcer or engineer/floor director.

- (D) **MIKE OPEN?** This is a question often from the announcer, asking the engineer or floor director whether the microphone is open or not. The signal for this question is simply done by the announcer pointing at the mike in front-with the index finger, and at the same time giving the engineer a questionable look.
- (E) **CUT:** The cut signal is made by drawing the index finger across the throat. This is an emergency sign; on receiving it, stop speaking at once. After stopping your performance, wait for oral or visual signals before beginning again.
- (F) **SLOW DOWN OR STRETCH:**

This signal is made by a television floor director or an audio engineer or director. It is made by pulling the hands apart, as though pulling something that is elastic (Taffy). Because to slow down and to stretch mean two different things, you must rely on the context in which the signal is given, to know how to interpret the sign.

When reading from a script, the signal means to slow down, reduce your speed or pace; when ad-libbing, the signal means to stretch- in order words, to keep talking until a further signal is given. On receiving this signal, you should slow down the pace of your delivery.

(G) **SPEED UP:** The speed-up signal is given by holding the hand before the body, index finger extended and then rotating the hand. On receiving this signal, you should increase the pace of your delivery. The signal is usually not very precise, because it does not tell you how much you should speed up, or for how long the delivery should last. Later directions such as on the nose or slow down, will give you this information. The speed-up signal must not be used for, nor confused with the wrap-up sign.

(H) **WRAP IT UP:** This signal is made by holding both hands in front of the torso, and then rotating them about 8 inches apart. The hands are rotated so that one hand, first the left and then the right, is above the other. On receiving this signal, bring the programme or the segment to a close as soon as possible, in a smooth and natural way.

11 – TIME SIGNALS: As a programme nears its conclusion, or as a segment of a programme nears a station break, it is important for an announcer to know the exact number of remaining minutes or seconds. These signals are given in the same manner for both radio and television, though television uses them often and radio uses them only occasionally.

Here are the time signals:

Three minutes: Three fingers held up and waved slowly

Two minutes: Two fingers held up and waved slowly

One minute: The index finger held up and waved slowly.

Thirty seconds: The index finger of one hand crossing the index finger of the other (in television the right and left arms are crossed).

Fifteen Seconds: A clenched fist held up right and near the head.

Ten to Zero seconds: In circumstances wherein extremely close timing is required (as in going from a live Segment on Television to a commercial, the floor director will pass on signals from the control room, by first holding up all ten fingers on both hands, and then lowering one finger for each count, until all fingers have been lowered. This will be your cue to end your comments.

RADIO

The following hand signals are used exclusively for radio, though some may be seen occasionally in an audio recording studio.

12. TAKE A LEVEL: This signal is made by holding the hand-palm down and then moving it back and forth- as though smoothing a pile of sand. In some operations, the signal is given by holding a hand at face level, with the tip of the

thumb touching the fingers; the hand is then opened and closed rapidly, as though to say “go on and gab”—this usage should be discouraged for two reasons: First, the engineer will find gabbing-ya-tah-tah-all but useless in setting a level; second, the gab signal can be confused with the signal for an up coming tape cart.

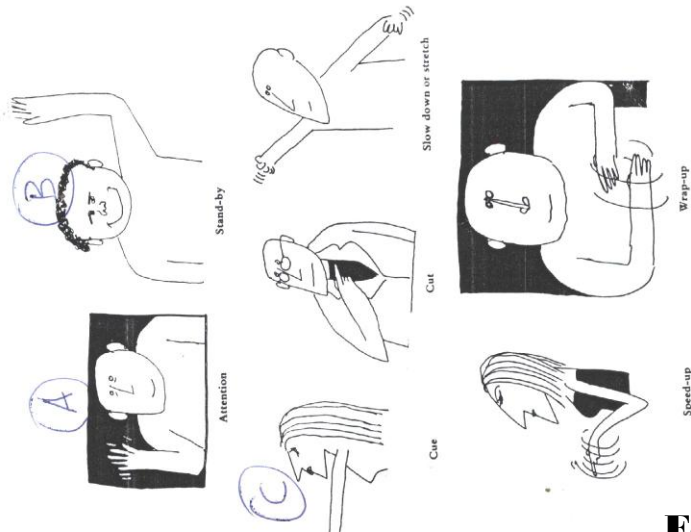
The signal to take a level is not often used because, most audio engineers prefer an oral cue. There are however times when the sign for taking a level together with four other hand signals, can be used for efficiently directing an announcer or performer, to make the best use of the microphone. These signals are louder, softer, move closer to the mike, and move back from the mike.

13. **LOUDER**: The signal to increase volume is made by holding the hand before the body, palm up, and then raising the hand.
14. **SOFTERL**: The signal to increase volume is made by holding the hand before the body, palm down, and then lowering the hand.
15. **MOVE CLOSER TO THE MIKE**, The signal is made by holding the hands apart, palms towards each other, and then moving the hands so as to bring them together. This sign is sometimes used in television, to tell a performer to move closer to another person on the set.
16. **MOVE BACK FROM THE MIKE**: The hands are held in front of the body, close to one another, with the backs of the hands facing one another. The hands are then moved away from each other.
17. **COMMERCIAL**: The Commercial signal is made by touching the index finger of one hand, to the palm of the other. It may be given by an engineer or announcer, to indicate that a recorded commercial will follow.
18. **CART**: Cart is an abbreviation for Cartridge. The signal is made by holding up one hand in the shape of a U or C, as though the hand were holding a tape cartridge. In news operations, the cart signal indicate that the news item coming up includes a Carted segment, usually a recorded report from a reporter in the field.
19. **HEADLINES**: The headlines signal is made either by drawing the index finger across the forehead, or by tapping the top of the head. The signal is given by a news anchor, to tell the engineer that news headlines will follow the item being read then. The engineer, has to play the headlines sounder or Jingle.

20. **SOUNDER** The sounder signal is made by holding the hand flat, palm down, and moving it from right to left- while simultaneously making the hand flutter. Sounders – also called logos or IDs, include jingles for sports reports, consumer action reports, business news, and similar regular features. The signal is given by a news anchor to tell the engineer that the next scheduled feature is coming up, and that the appropriate sounder is to be played on cue.

TELEVISION

21. **STANDBY TO SWITCH CAMERAS**: This signal, most often used in newscast, tells the anchor to prepare to be waved from one Camera to another. It is made by holding both hands next to the lens of the taking camera.
22. **SWITCH CAMERAS**: On this signal, your glance should move immediately to the Camera to which you have been waved. The floor director will have moved from the stand- by signal to the switch Camera signal, by moving one or both hands from the first to the second Camera.
23. **BREAK**, This signal, used chiefly on interview and talk programmes, tells you that you should wrap up the present segment for a commercial break. The signal is made by holding the hands as though they were grasping a brick or a piece of wood, and then making a breaking motion.
24. **INTRODUCE / DROP REPORT**: A thumbs-up signal is given to a news anchor, to indicate that a planned report from the field is ready to go on the air.
A thumbs-down signal means that the report is not to be introduced. Reports may be dropped because of technical difficulties or because of time pressures.



Move closer to mic



Move back from mic



Commercial



Cart



Headlines



Sounder



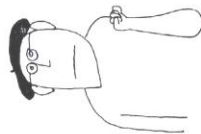
Break



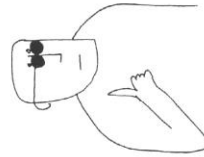
Drop report



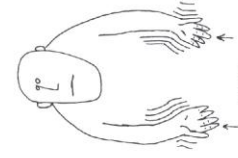
Softer



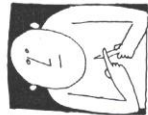
15 seconds



Introduce report



Louder



30 seconds



Take a level