

Using “Audacity” free audio recording/playback software to help learn your part

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Background

How can a PC help the learning process? There are a couple of things to mention at least for me. First, when I'm practicing, I always think I sound better than I *actually* sound. This applies to being on top of the notes, to keeping phrases strong to the end, all the things we work on as singers. Hearing myself when I play it back, I can focus on listening to my sound (as opposed to producing it) and pick the places that need the most work. Surprise - I always find some!

Second, singing in tempo with the learning CD adds a pressure similar to singing in a contest - you have to be ready for that next phrase or syncopation, and you don't get a second chance. Mostly I know exactly where I have screwed up, and when I play it back, sure enough there it is. It's like a final exam, but you get to take it as many times as you want, until you get 100.

The only better “final exam” for me at least is to sing with three other guys, but I can take the Audacity test any evening I have a few minutes free and fix a few errors at a time, until it's as flawless as I can get it. For me, this is just a tool that I find helpful.

Introduction

I've used the free software package called Audacity quite extensively in the past when preparing learning tracks for my chorus, and it has also come in handy when preparing for Brigades. In addition to a PC or laptop with a sound card, you will need a headset with an attached microphone. Any PC telephony or gaming headset from Best Buy etc. will probably work fine.

Obtaining Audacity software

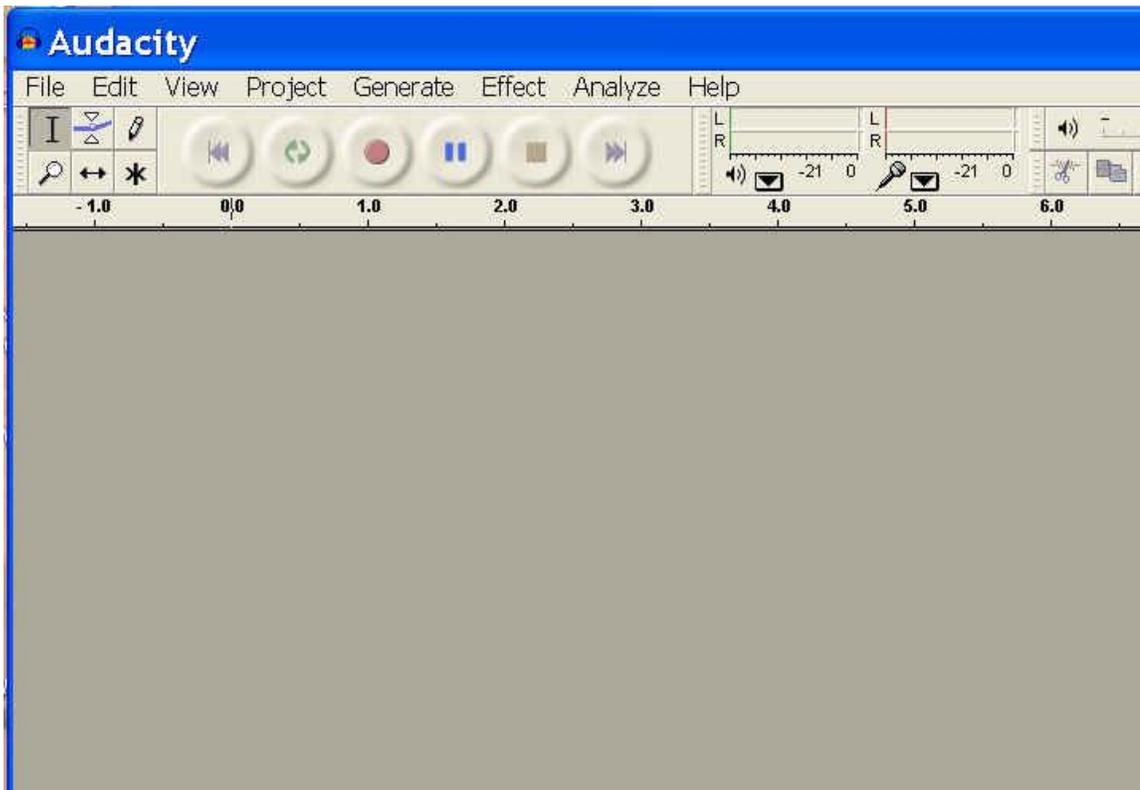
Audacity can be downloaded from <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download/> as a free package. Download also the free package ‘lame mp3 encoder’ since you will need it to create mp3 files.

Copy the part predominant files for your part onto your PC

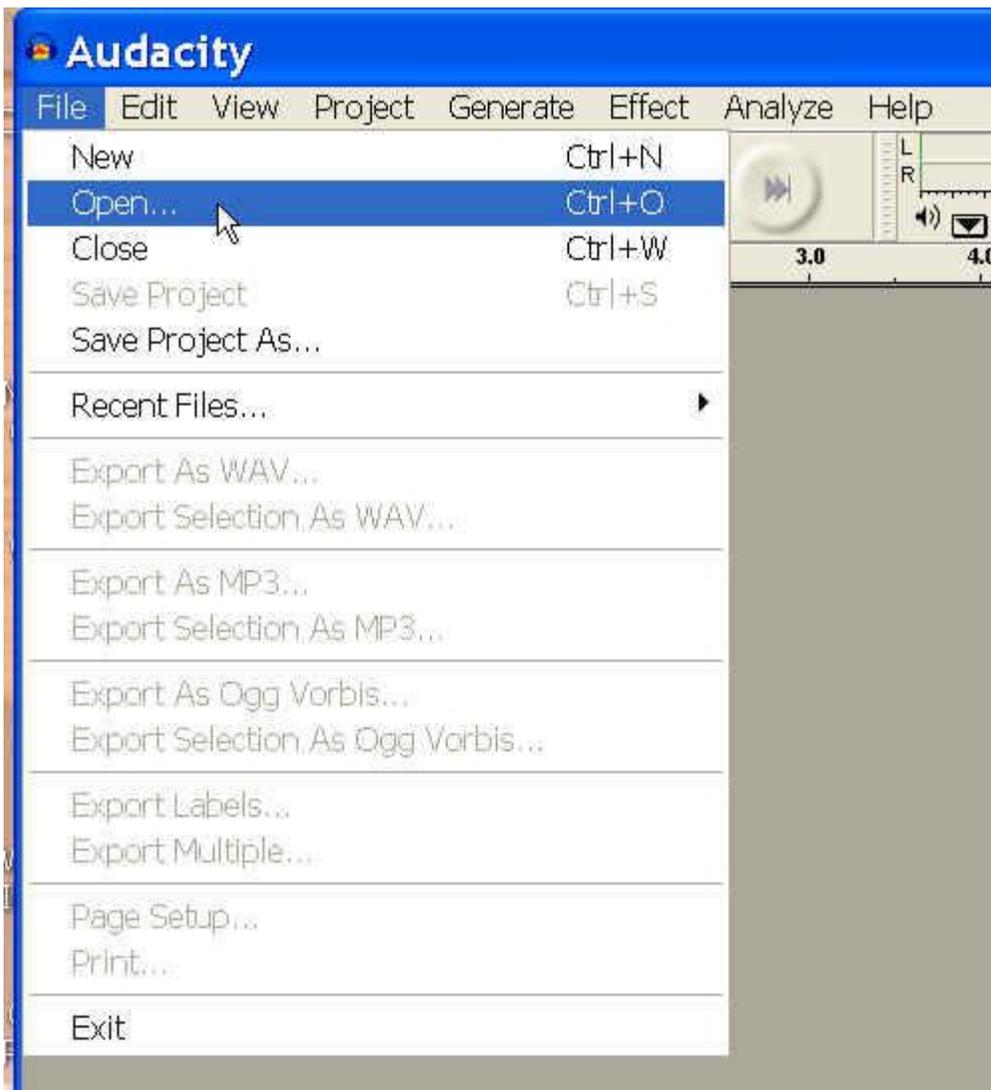
First you should copy (“rip”) the part-predominant tracks from your learning CD onto your PC hard drive, either as .wav or .mp3 files. **Audiograbber** is a great, free program for doing this. If you use Audiograbber, you can rip them directly as .mp3 files to save space on your hard drive. (The other option, ripping as .wav files, takes much more space.)

Load a file into the first track in Audacity

When you start Audacity, you will see the following screen:



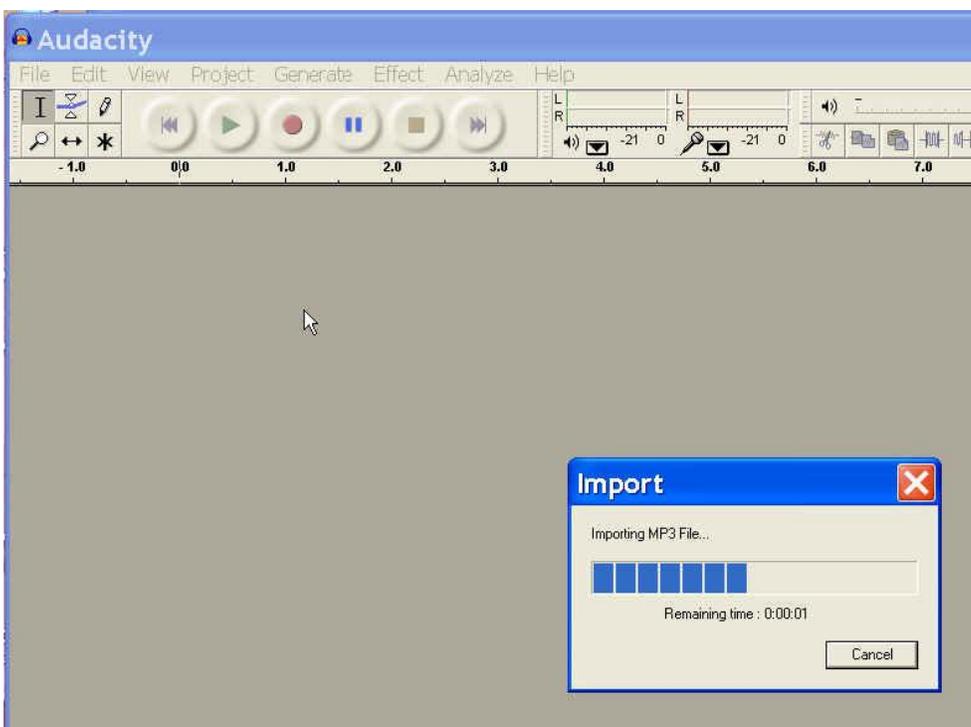
Click on File – Open:



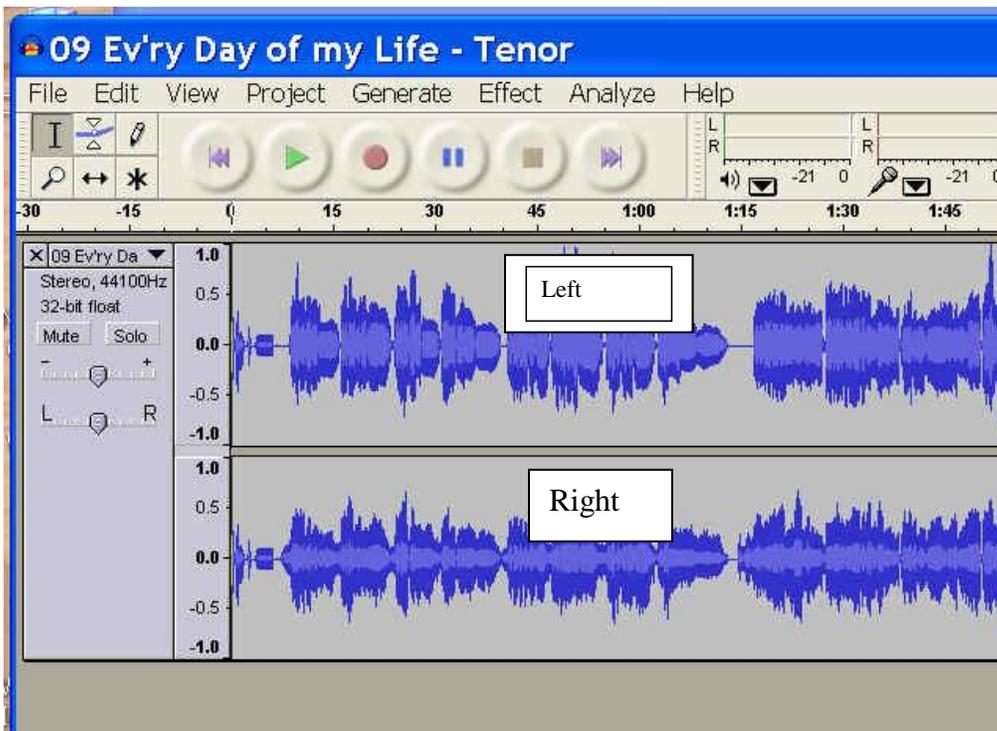
Now select a part-predominant .WAV or .MP3 file. Here we will choose the Tenor part to “Every Day of my Life”.



Upon opening the file, Audacity will build a waveform picture and load it into track 1.



Then you will see something like this. Notice how the L and R parts have been split into the L and R stereo channels of the first track.



Now pan the L/R slider all the way to the right, so you will only hear the other 3 parts:

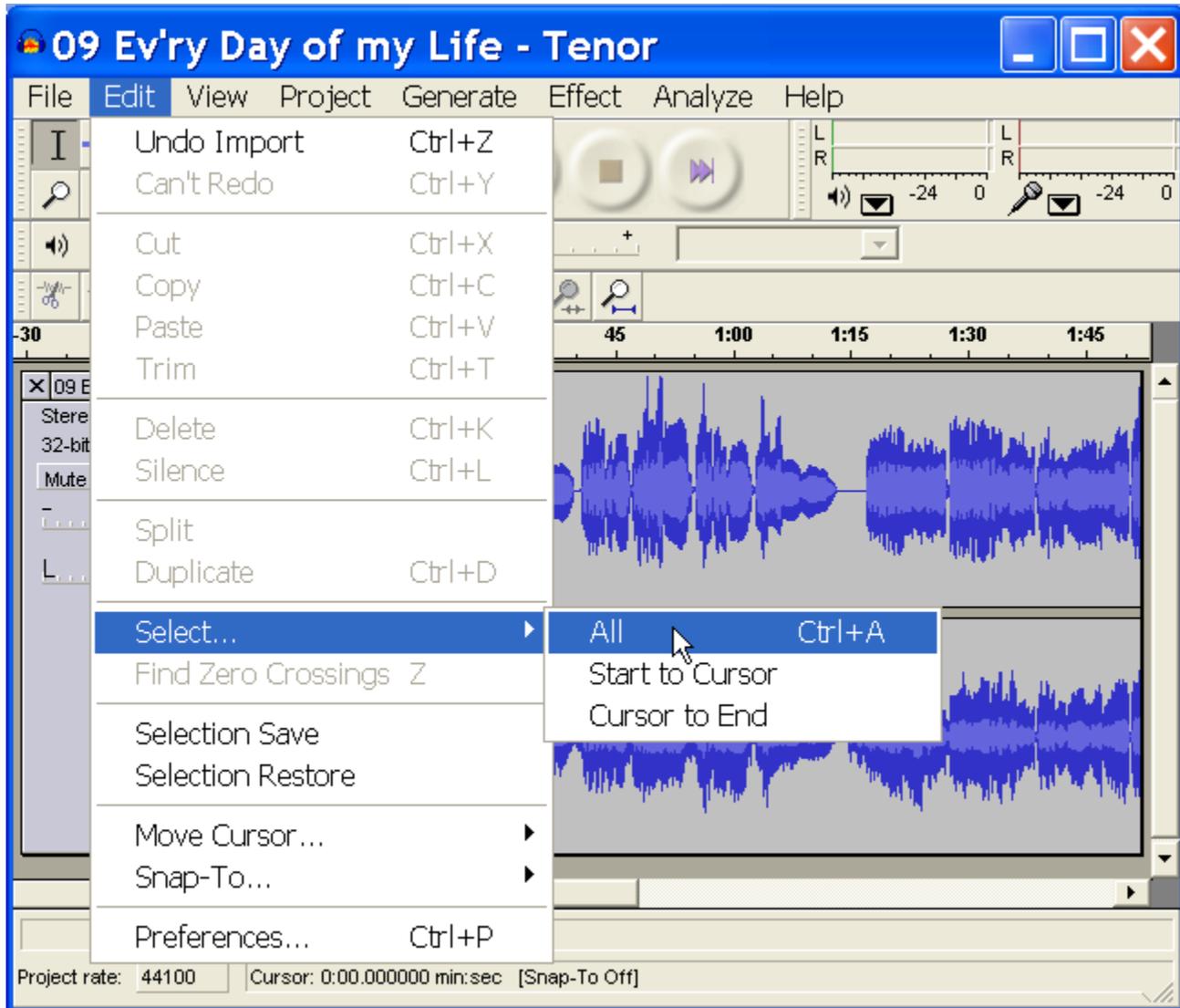


Changing the Speed of Playback Without Changing the Pitch

Open Audacity

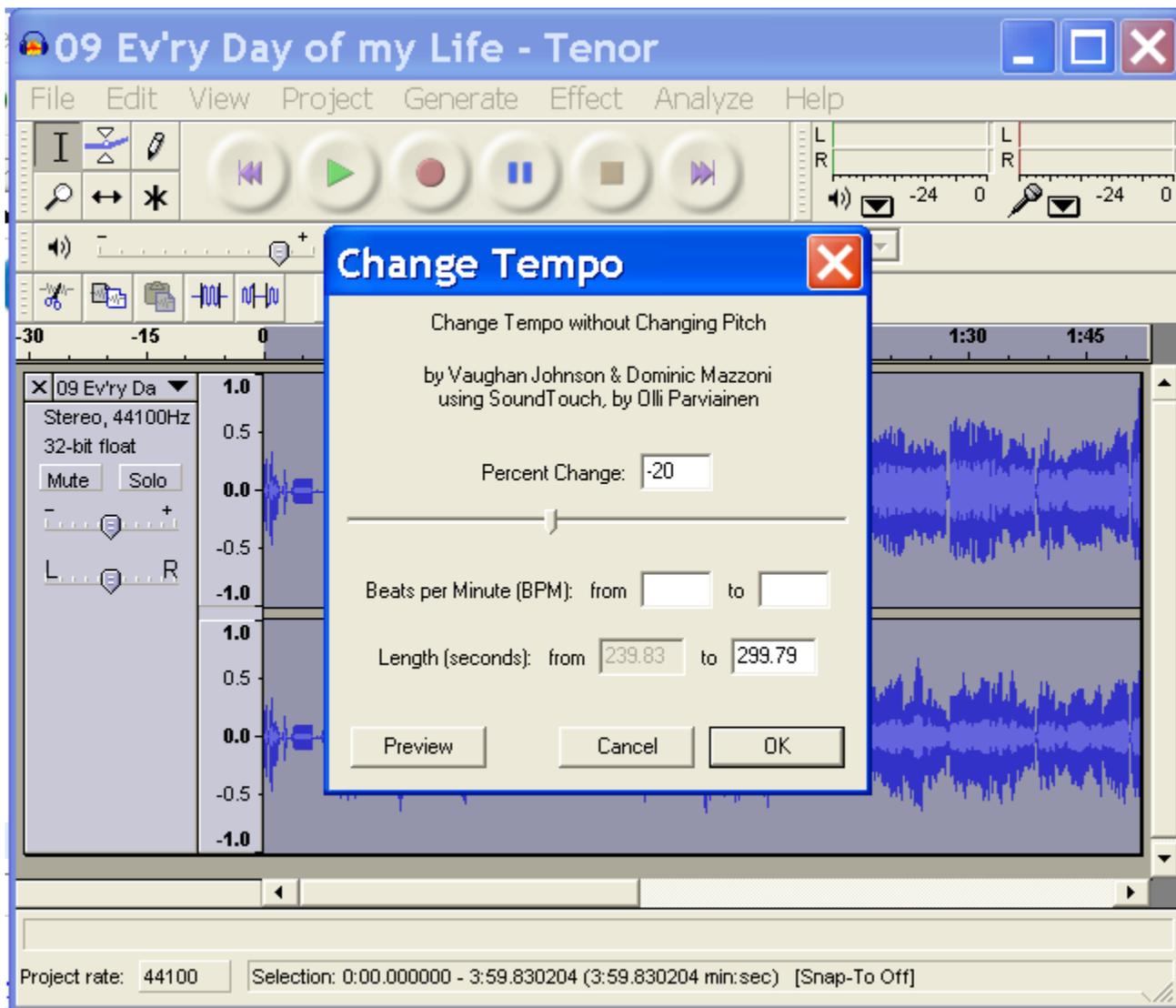
Select File, Open, and navigate to the song on your computer

Once the file is open, Select Edit>Select>All



Select Effect>Change Tempo

Put -20 in the Percent Change Box and hit OK



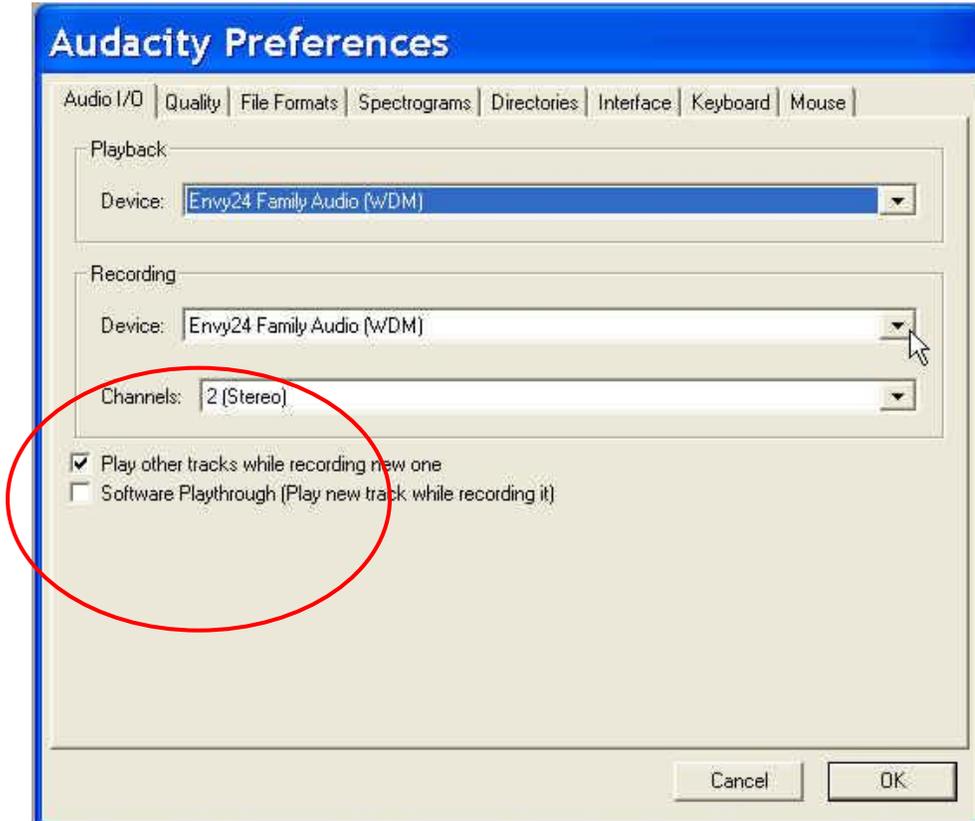
Hit the play button

The 'slow' version can be saved under a new name.

Set up Audacity to record from your sound card

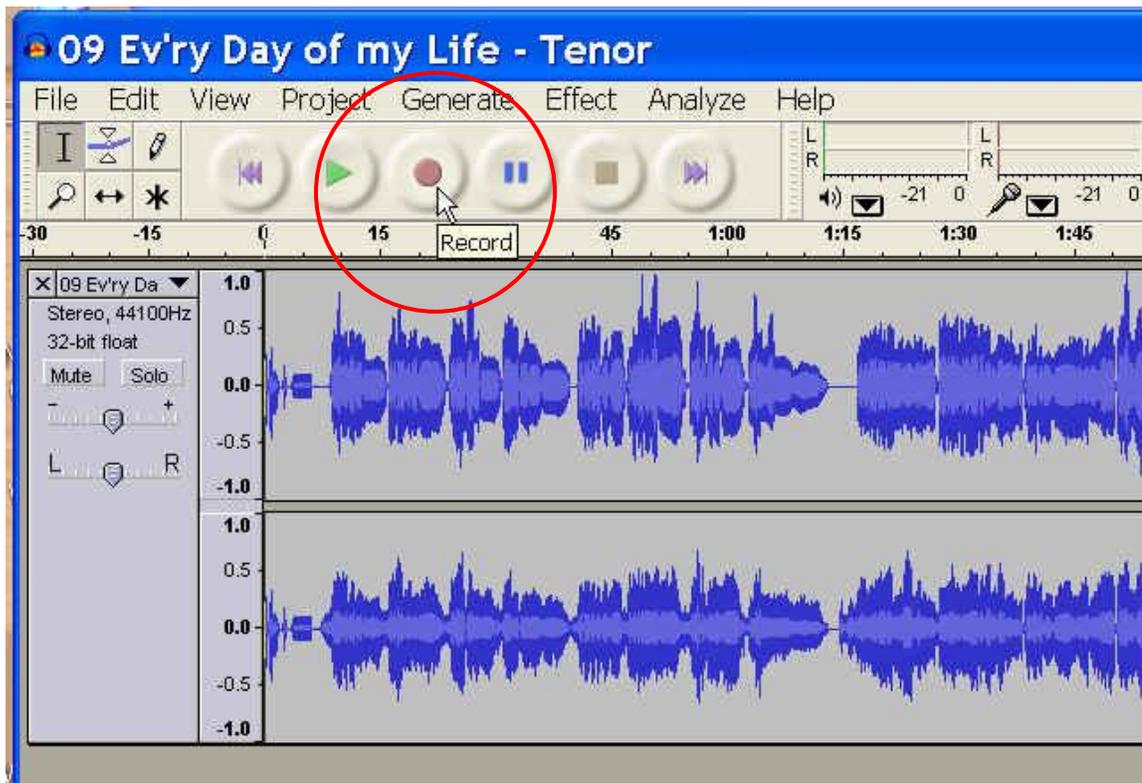
Go to Edit – Preferences and set up the recording preferences to the correct sound card if you have more than one.

Important: insure that the box labelled “Play other tracks while recording new one” is CHECKED, and insure the Software Playthrough box is NOT CHECKED:

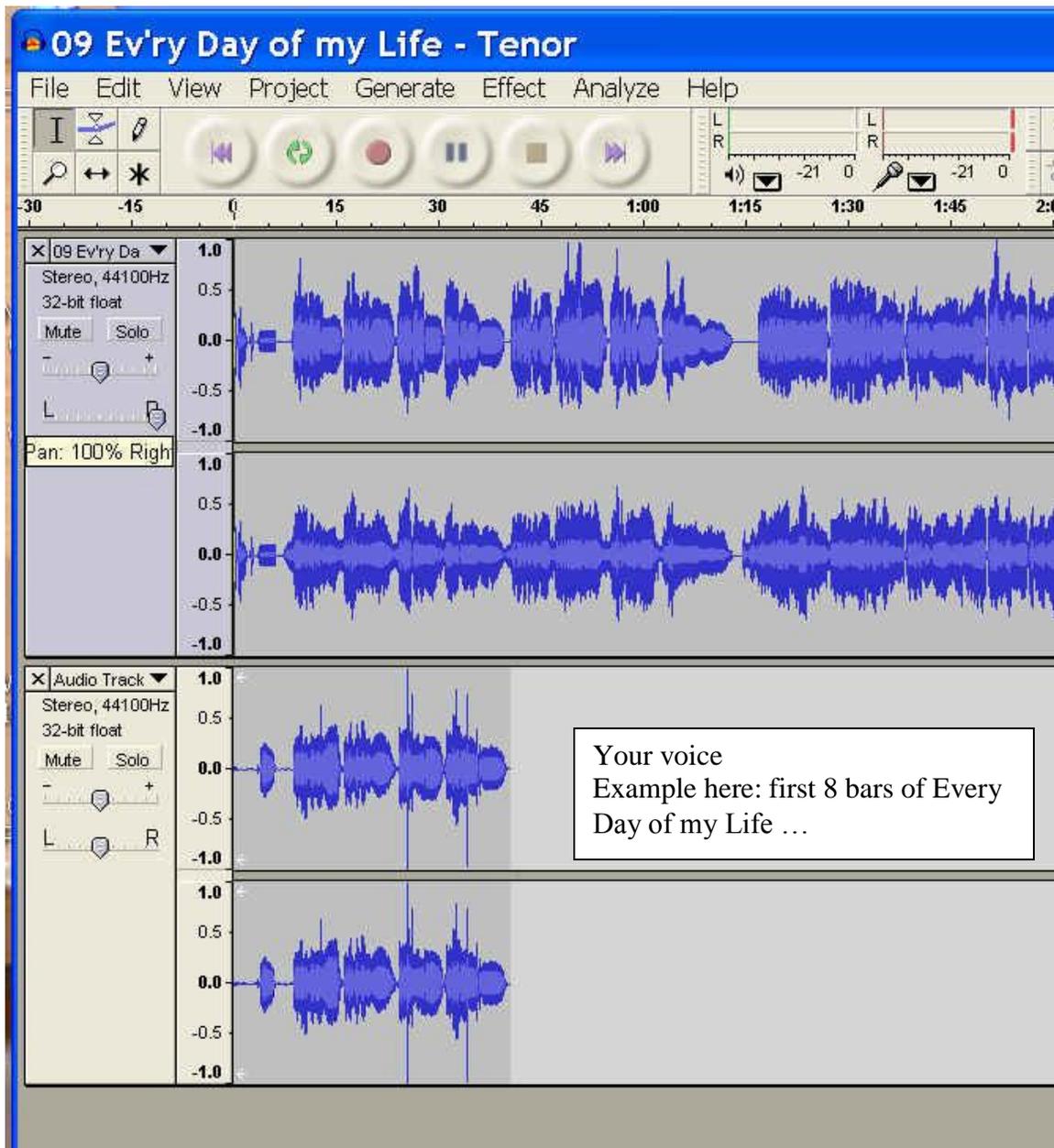


Record your part while listening to the other three parts

Now click the red circle “Record” button:

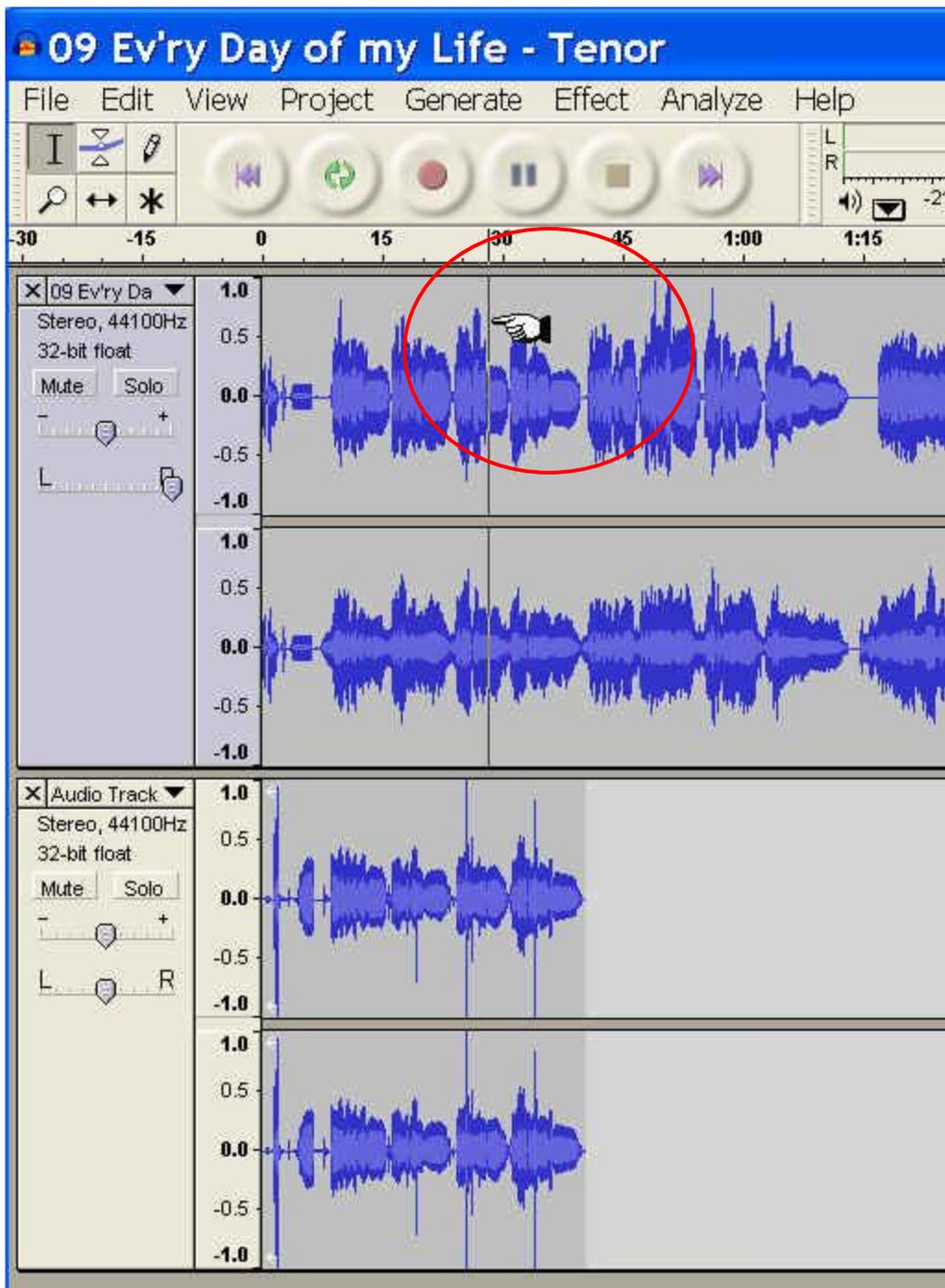


A new track will appear, and you can start singing your part. You should also hear the other 3 tracks in your headphones. Note: use your headphones rather than speakers, otherwise your microphone will pick up the other 3 parts from the speakers on top of your voice when you sing.

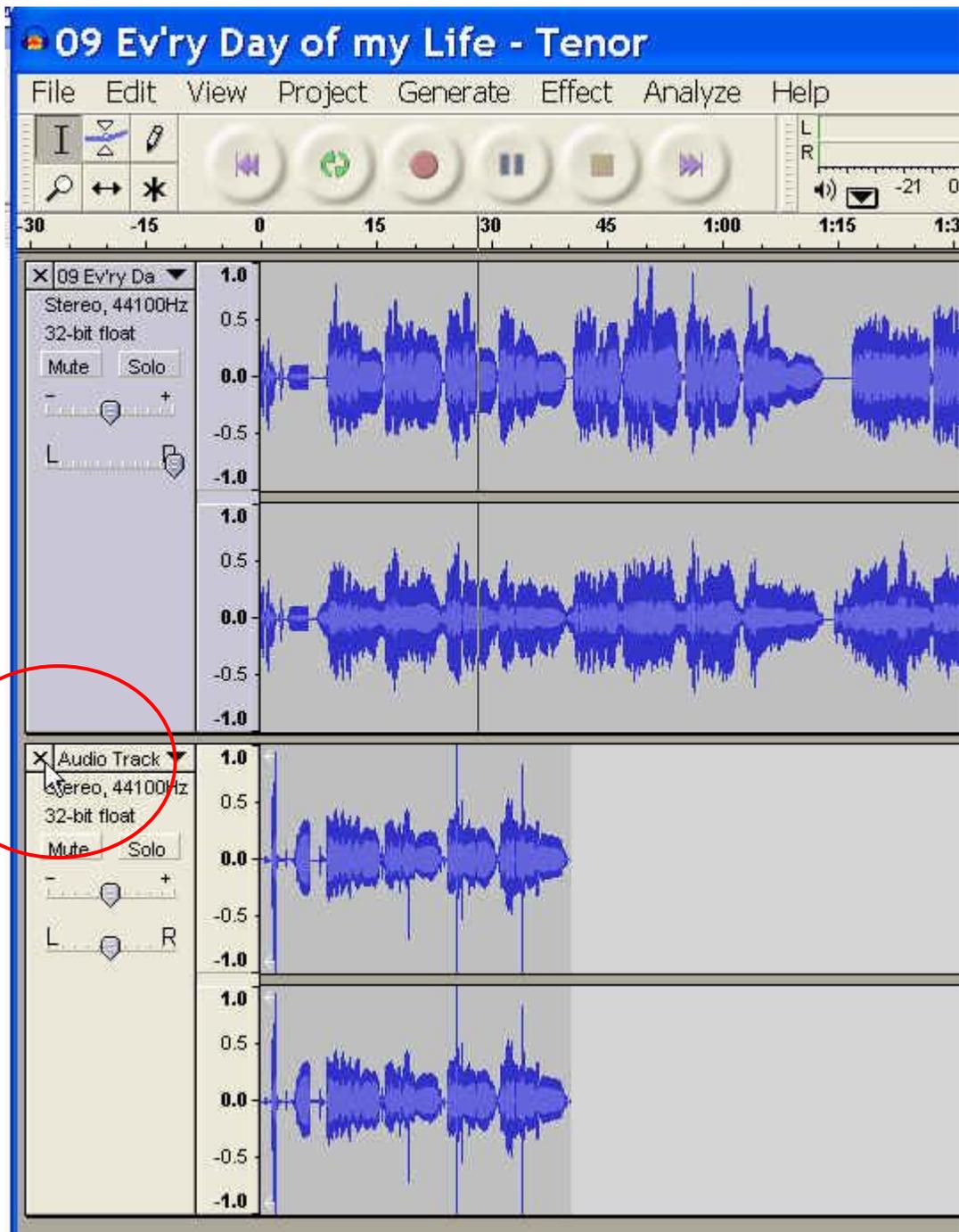


Press the Spacebar to stop recording, or click on the square Stop button with your mouse.

Now you can play the entire song by clicking the Spacebar to start/stop, or you can select a starting point somewhere in the song by clicking inside a wav file. Then pressing the Spacebar will start at that new spot each time.



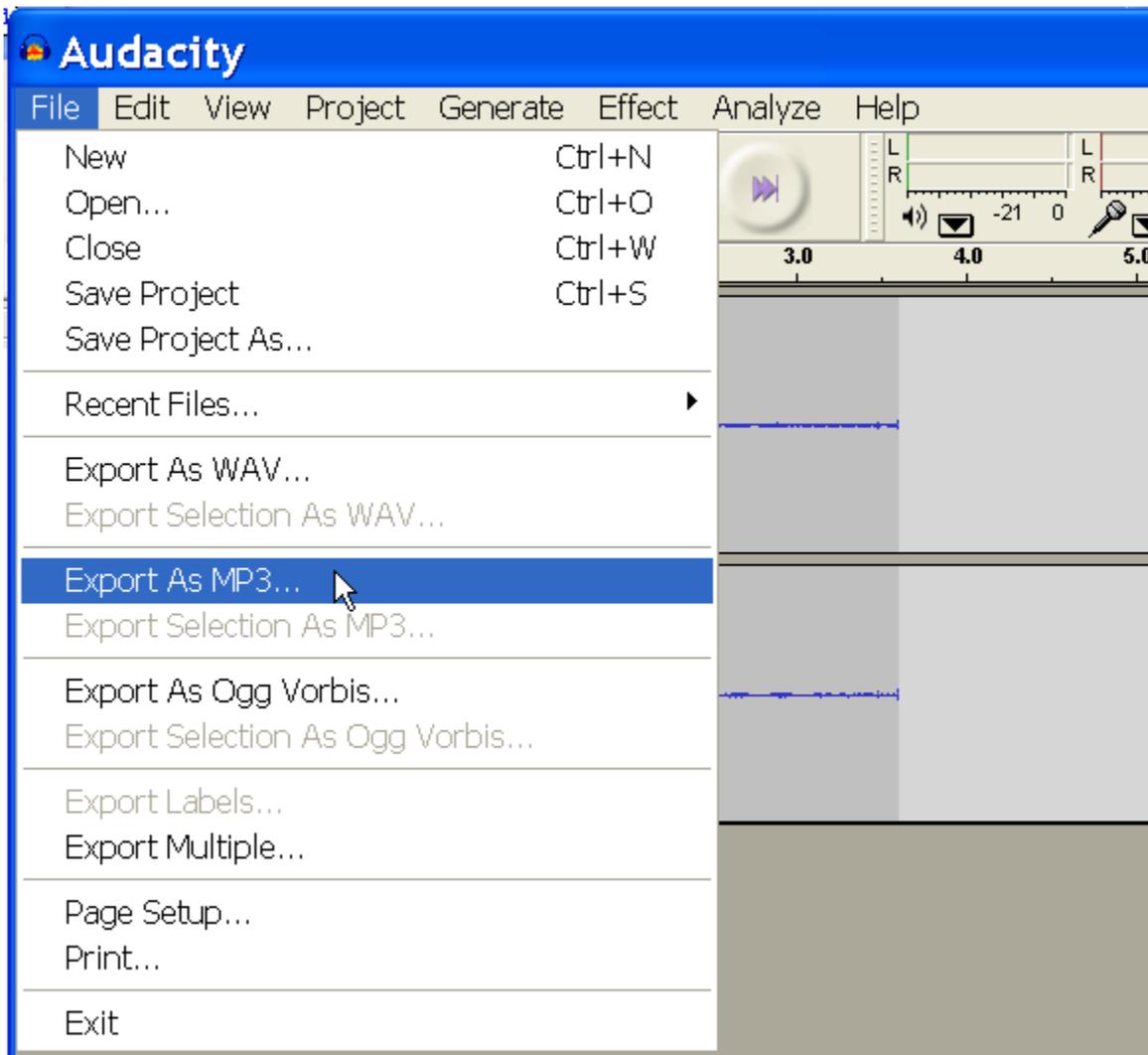
You can delete your “take” and start over any time by clicking the X in the upper left corner.



That's it – record and re-record as many times as you like.

When you are ready to create an mp3 file, just click on File -> Export as MP3

It would probably be a good idea to create a folder on your hard drive called “My Recordings” and create a folder in this folder for each song you work on. Then you can keep your recordings, and when you try to send the email to your section leader with the attachment, you will know where the files are!



The first time you try this, you may be asked to tell Audacity where to find the “lame mp3 encoder dll file”. This you can obtain from the Audacity download site. Just remember where you download it and point Audacity to this file. You will only have to do this once.

I hope this helps you with your learning. Please provide feedback on this document to Ted Blank (tedblank@gmail.com) . Input is always welcome.

In Harmony,
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