ProTools 3: Basic Editing

Here are the editing "modes" and tools we'll use to edit audio:

"shuffle/slip/spot/grid" are editing "modes" that determine how the soundfiles are placed and moved in the edit window.

"Shuffle" (keyboard shortcut: "F1") will automatically rearrange audio regions, closing up the gaps when a section is deleted or moved. This is a very helpful mode for many editing tasks, when one wishes to delete sections from a continuous audio stream, or rearrange blocks of adjacent sound.   Regions cannot overlap one another, and will stay immediately next to one another.

"Slip" (keyboard shortcut: "F2") allows the user to place an audio region at any location along the timeline. There can be silent spaces between audio regions. This is the mode you will want to use to place sounds at particular locations, most useful in assembly of a production.

"Spot" (keyboard shortcut: "F3") is for placing audio at very specific time values. In spot mode any time you attempt to move a region, a dialog box will open asking to define the region's start, end or duration, or relationship to a sync point. This mode is excellent for placing static elements of a production that should begin or end at specific times, such as credits, audio logos, etc.

"Grid" is used for constraining region boundaries to regular rhythmic patterns, which is used mostly in music editing.

 On the left in the tools is the "zoomer" (keyboard shortcut: "command-1") a magnifying glass that you can use to define the level of zoom of the edit display. Simply choose the zoomer, then click and drag over the area you would like to zoom to. You can zoom-in by predetermined steps by simply clicking in a track with the zoomer, or zoom out by …clicking. The zoom amount is set in preferences>>…zoom level. The keyboard shortcuts "command-[" will zoom out and "command-]" will zoom-in. Newer versions of ProTools have a Single Zoom mode, which will allow one zoom and then return to the previous tool.

Toolbar continued…

The "trimmer" (keyboard shortcut: "command-2") trims the heads or tails of a region, quickly eliminating silence or unwanted sound from the boundaries of an audio region. Watch the direction of the "prongs" to determine which edge will be adjusted. In "Shuffle" mode the trimmer will trim the edges and slide the adjacent region at the same time. Newer versions of ProTools can put the trimmer in "TCE" mode (time compression-expansion) which will stretch or squeeze the soundfile to whatever length you determine. This changes the nature of the sound, so be sure this is what you want before using this mode. The trimmer can also be used to adjust the length of a fade. If a track is set to volume mode, the trimmer can raise or lower a range of volume breakpoints.

The "Region" tool (keyboard shortcut: "command-3") lets you define sections of the soundfile to act upon. Click and drag across a portion of your soundfile and it will be highlighted. At this point you can choose to make the highlighted section a new region (command-E) or delete it (delete key) or perform an Audiosuite process on it, or many other choices. The tool selects a section of the soundfile to be acted on. Double-click on a region and the entire region will be selected. If a track is set to display automation points, the region tool can select a range of points to be deleted or adjusted. Triple-click with this tool and the entire track will be selected. Click once, and the playhead will move to that location.

The "Grabber" (keyboard shortcut: "command-4") lets you move the region around by clicking and dragging. The movement is constrained by the slip/shuffle/spot mode, but this is the tool to use to move a region within a track, or between tracks. Double-clicking with the grabber opens a "name the region" dialog which can be very useful to keep track of sections of a longer recording. If a track is set to volume or other automation views, the grabber is used to make and move breakpoints on the automation line.

The "Scrubber" (keyboard shortcut: "command-5") emulates "rocking the reels" on a tape machine, allowing slow manual control of forward or reverse play of the sound, helpful for finding small clicks or other audio events. Holding the "option" key allows fast playback in either direction.

The "Pencil Tool" (keyboard shortcut: "command-6") is a utility from the old Sound Designer program that allows graphical repair of waveform irregularities. Zoom in very close on a waveform with a click or a clipped peak, and re-drawing a "more correct" waveform can often repair clicks or pops. The pencil tool can also draw automation data when that mode is displayed in the edit window.

Zoom to the start of the track, and in the top left corner of the edit window, choose "slip" mode, then to the right, choose the "Trimmer" tool. You can do this very quickly by hitting the F2 key to get in Slip mode, then "command-2" to select the trim tool.

Or you can use the smart tool, which automatically toggles between trim, region and grabber, depending on where the tool is in relation to a region. At the head or tail it switches to trimmer, in the middle of the region it switches to region tool, or if you move the tool to the bottom of the waveform display, it switches to the grabber.

Play the sound file by hitting the spacebar, and notice where the sound actually starts. You can probably do this by eye, there will be an obvious change in the waveform as the audio starts. But be sure to listen carefully too, it is easy to clip off a low-level but crucial beginning of a sound, especially "f" sounds.

If you are having a hard time seeing the waveform, zoom in, or change the waveform display with the display tool, clicking the upper part to make the waveforms larger, or the bottom to make them smaller. Adjust the waveform until the peaks fill the panel, but the display still shows the wave contour. Command-bracket will zoom in and out, Command-option-bracket will zoom the waveform display vertically. You can also use the "zoomer," the magnifying glass in the toolbar. Clicking with the mouse while that tool is selected will zoom you in, clicking and dragging will zoom to the range you dragged, option clicking will zoom out.

With the trimmer, grab the left edge of the soundfile, and drag it toward the beginning of the sound you want to keep. Or you can simply click on the waveform at the point you want to trim to, and the sound will clip back to that point. Or drag with the region tool over the audio you wish to remove, then hit "delete."

Do the same to the end, trimming back to the end of the sound you wish to keep.