

Creating Audio Slideshows

1. Planning and execution:

Not everyone will create audio slideshows in the same manner. We are all still in the early stages of putting sound with photographs, and your choices may be different from mine. There is no stylebook. However, this is how I do it right now, and you may be able to get some tips from this process. You'll need a still camera and a digital recorder that can connect to a computer to download audio files.

PHOTOS: It's like shooting a picture page, but with more photos. In addition to the wide-angle shots, the tight concentration shots, the details, the ending photo, and so on, you need to show how the story begins, how the subject got from picture 1 to picture 2, and show in pictures what the audio is talking about.

Landrum Coach Travis Henson



If you're interviewing a woodworker and have great photos of him working on a cabinet, but all he talks about in the audio interview is tables, then you have a problem. The photos should match the sound.

You need to think about the title page, because that will become the teaser thumbnail for the story. I picked out the one above because I believe it's a quick read, and you can get the gist of the story from the one image.

I also believe you need some photos that show motion through a sequence, so the show can "move." That may be something as simple as a gesture in a two-photo sequence. Think about how you might videotape a subject moving, and then grab what

might be the first frame, the middle frame and the end frame of that movement. In most cases you don't want a single image to stay onscreen more than 10 seconds. Shooting a sequence will help you move the story along without it seeming to drag.

For an ideal three-minute slideshow, you should plan for at least 18 photos.

SOUND: Think about two types of sound: Natural sound, like the sound of a lawnmower or a short-order cook shouting out orders, and interview sound.

Natural sound: This is not always necessary if you have a good interview, but it helps tremendously when you have a slideshow showing action of any type. You only need a few seconds of any sound, and you can get it by turning on the recorder and leaving it in your back pocket, or on a counter. Just pointing the recorder in the right direction is enough.

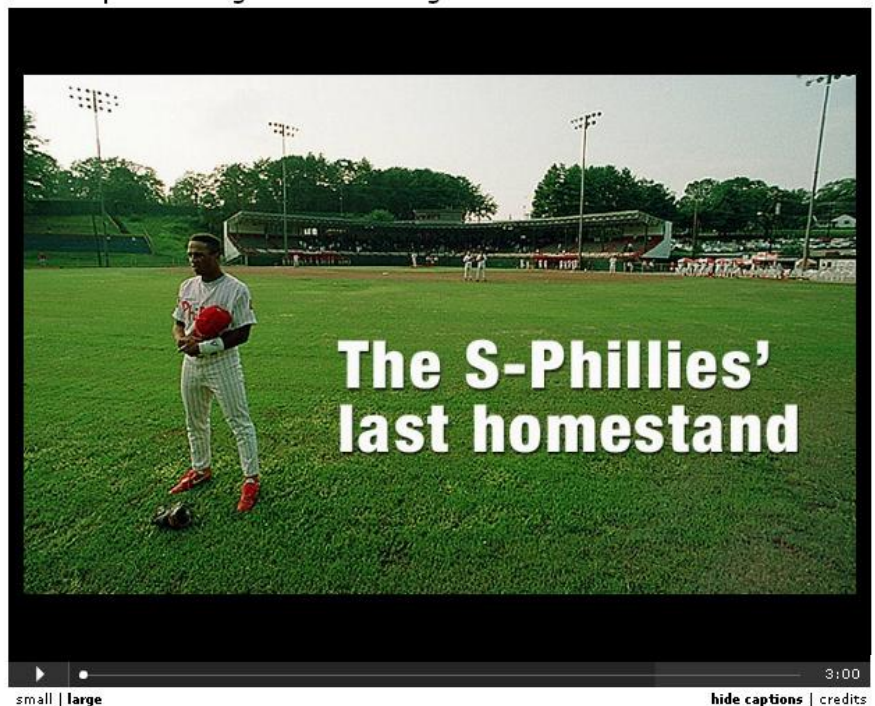
Nothing fancy required. I have kept mine sticking out of my back pocket many times during ballgames.

Interviews: You need to be much more careful recording voices than you would if you just needed to transcribe quotes from an interview. Leaving the recorder on the podium during a coach's press conference or placing it down on a desk isn't enough for good voice. You have to hold the recorder close to the subject, within a foot and a half, for sure. Avoid the temptation to talk over your interview. Avoid saying, "Um-hmm," and "Yeah."

If possible, go inside. Wind can mess up your sound. Try to find a small interview room. Turn off any background distractions – unless you want to have your subject talk while doing some action, of course.

Don't ask questions that can be answered yes or no. Ask open-ended questions, such as: "Tell me what your name is and what you do." "Tell me the story of how you got started." "Explain what you are doing now." "Talk about your best game."

The Spartanburg Phillies' last games



Equipment: We use Olympus DS-2 recorders:

http://www.olympusamerica.com/cpg_section/product.asp?product=1153

These are about \$125, but can be found for as little as \$80 online. Photojournalists at some other papers recommend more sophisticated equipment, but the DS-2 has excellent sound for the price. The DS-2 has four quality settings, and at the HQ Stereo setting at a recording level of about 20, I think you can get good sound. They come with both Macintosh and Windows-compatible software for downloading the digital files. You can record more than an hour in HQ Stereo mode.

Here is an excellent resource on sound from Nhat Meyer on Sports Shooter:

<http://www.sportsshooter.com/news/1603> also: <http://plaza.ufl.edu/mmcadams/audio.htm>

Two other recording devices come highly recommended but are more expensive.

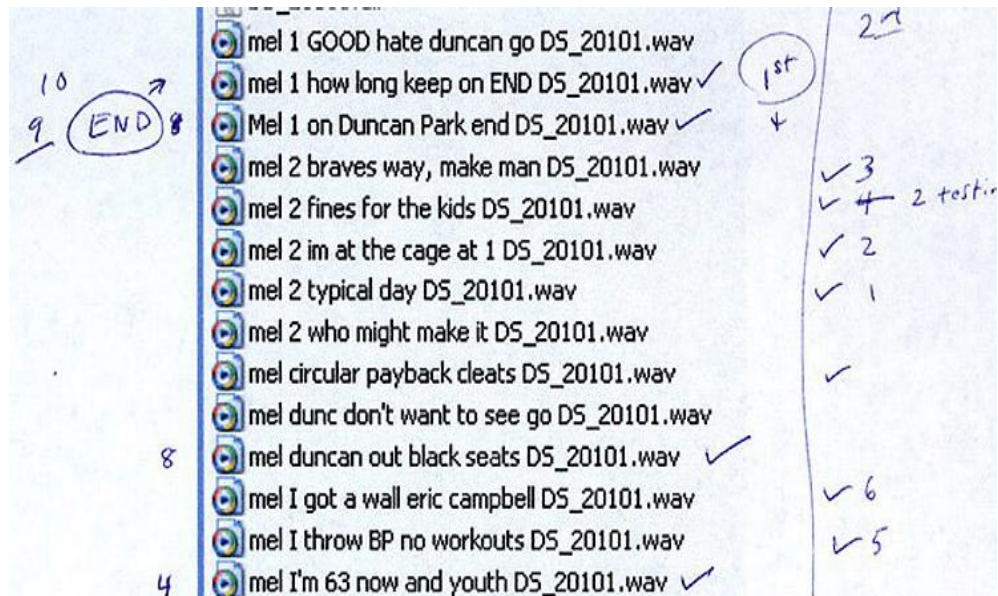
Software: We use Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>) because it's free, simple and works on Macs and Windows. We also use Soundslides from Joe Weiss (<http://www.soundslides.com>) because it's outstanding, because Joe's great to work with, because it comes in Mac and Windows, and because it's insanely easy to use. Additionally, I normally pre-edit the photos in Photo Mechanic and Photoshop.

2. Editing and creation:

1. I always look through the photos first, and then edit the audio. The photos will give you an idea of how the sound needs to flow and will give you a good idea of what to leave in and take out of the audio. If your audio is focused on something you have no photos to show, then you will have a problem.

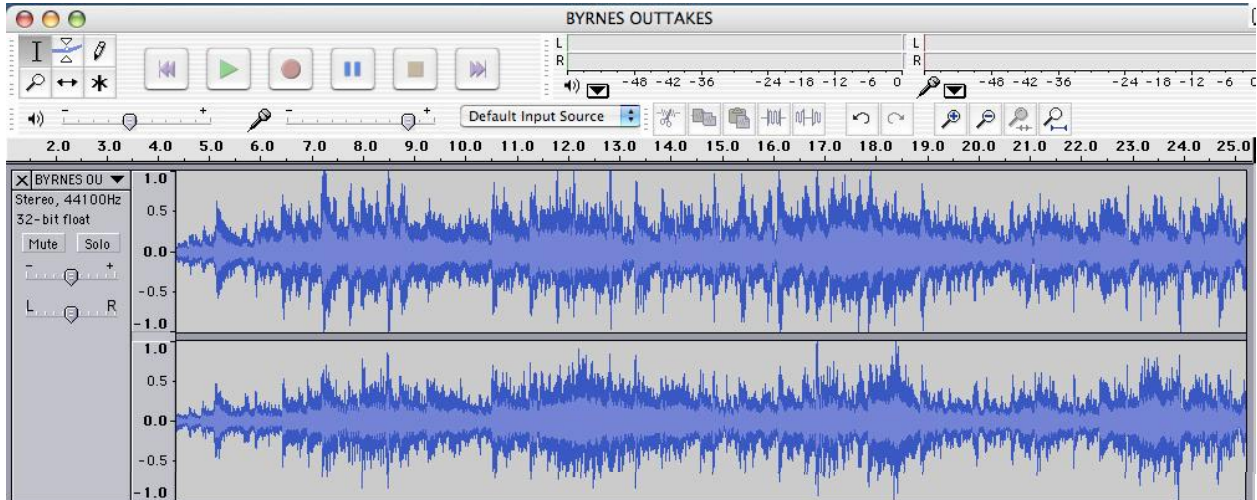
2. Once I have an idea of the available photos, I edit the audio in Audacity. If the audio is all in one file and I need to rearrange the sequence, I export short clips as WAV or AIFF files and title

them by topic so I can rearrange them later. Otherwise, I just edit the one clip by removing unnecessary portions and deleting dead space. You can see how I edited the sound for one project here, by saving small selections by topic, and



then reattaching them in a better sequence to match the photos:

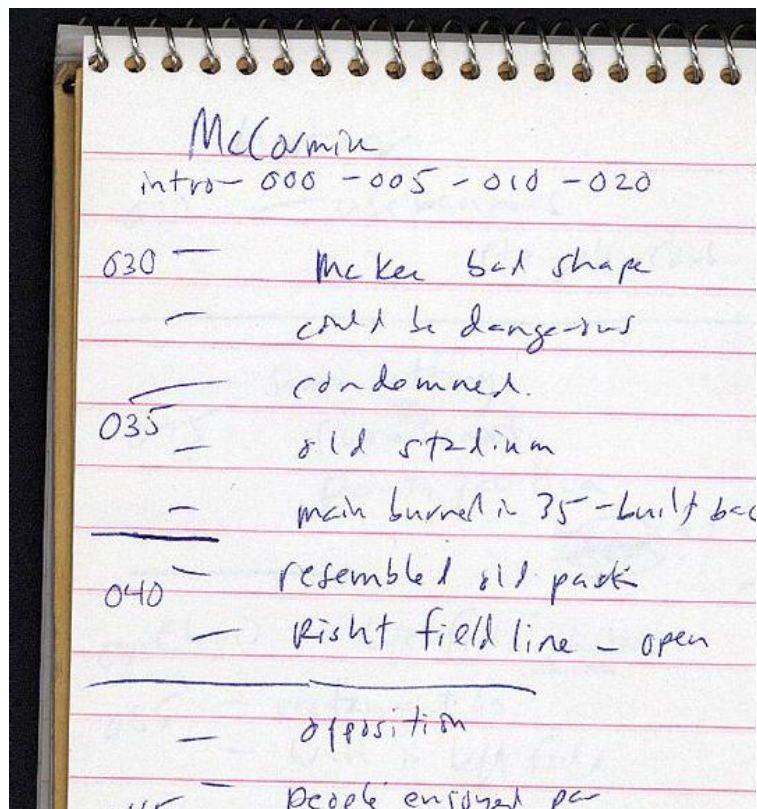
I go through the topics and put them into one audio file in the proper order, leaving out the ones I don't need.



3. Then I listen to the entire final audio file and write down what specifically is being discussed, and what photos might relate to that sequence. I then number the topical segments starting at 010 in increments of 5 or 10. The number 000 is always my title page. You don't have to renumber your photos; you can rearrange them in Soundslides. However, I find it easier to do it this way, particularly with a large number of photos. Here's a sample of my sequencing:

Soundslides will import one folder of images, and display them in filename order in the editing window.

4. When the audio clip is finished, I export it as an AIFF file. (MP3 works too, but AIFF is uncompressed and better quality. Same with WAV. Soundslides turns it into an MP3. Save the file separate from the photos.) Then I edit the photos in Photo Mechanic. I can edit the captions and throw



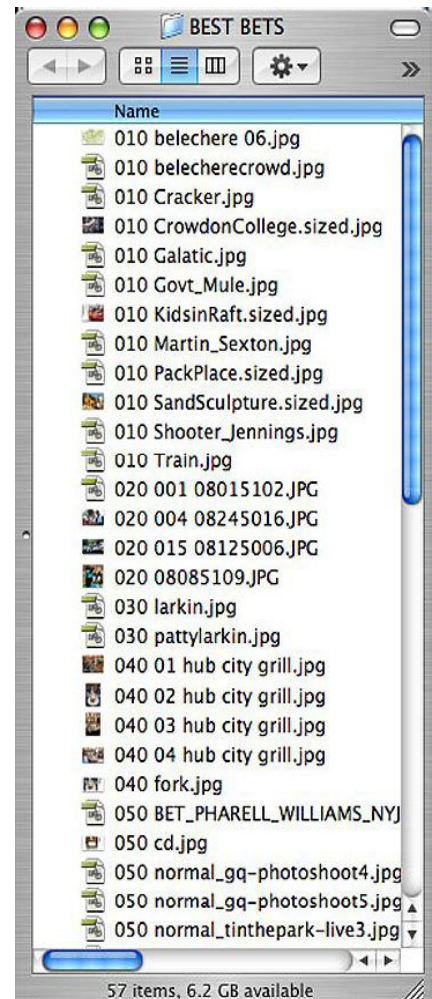
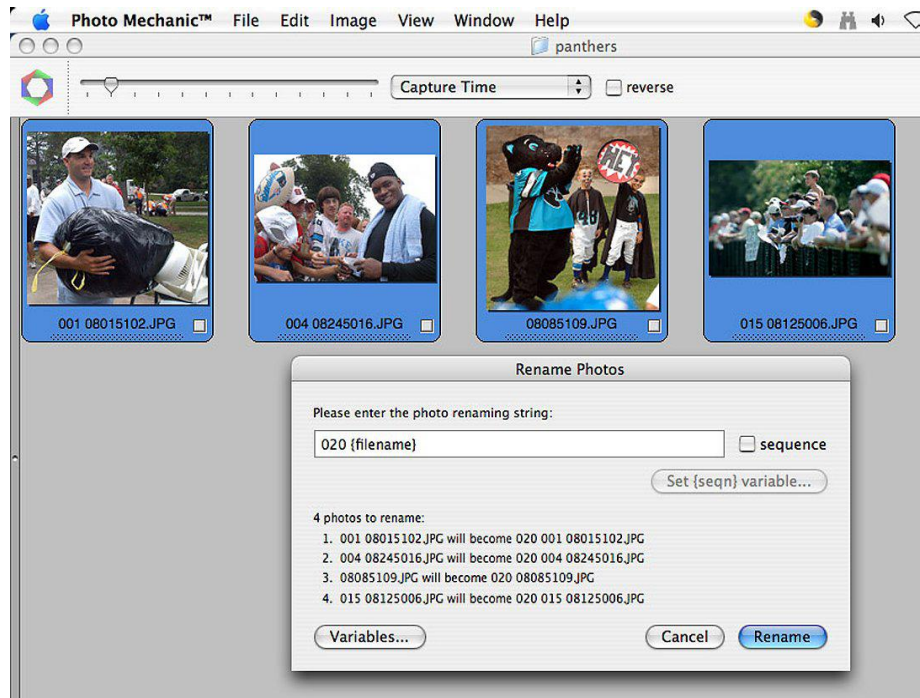
out unnecessary photos using this software. Additionally, this is where I sequence the photos to match the numbering sequence I set up to correspond to the audio. Photo Mechanic allows you to select thumbnails, then rename them as follows: (number) (filename).

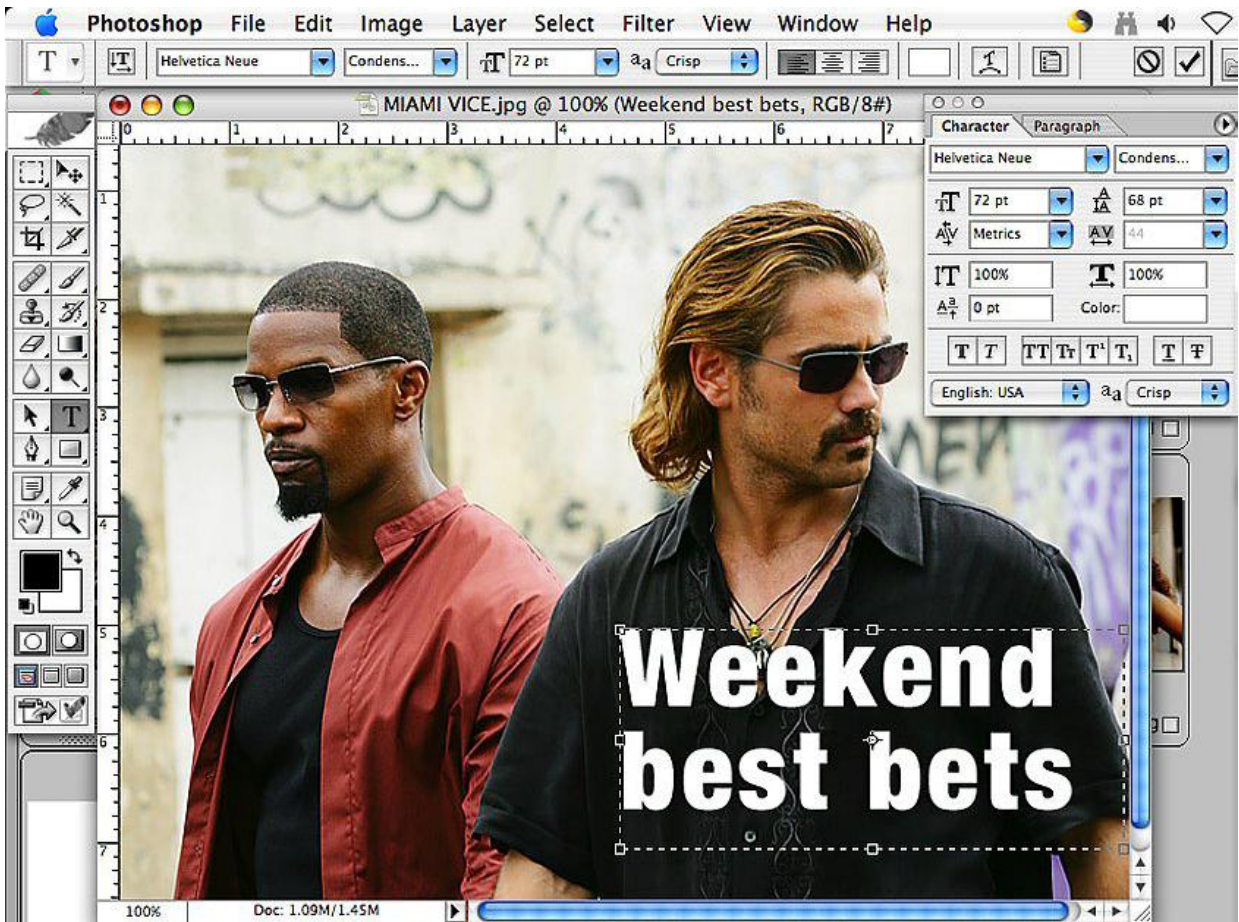
The screen shot here shows how I rename the photos. Having the photos in numerical order allows you to import them into Soundslides in the proper sequence. You can always rearrange photos within the Soundslides software, but because the images are so small, I find it much easier to have the photos flow into Soundslides already in the correct order. The numbering scheme allows for this.

5. For certain projects with distinct elements -- like a "Weekend best bets" project for entertainment -- I will put photos by topics into separate folders to help in organizing the project and then just renumber each folder one at a time according to its topic.

6. You can only import photos into Soundslides from ONE folder, so if I've used multiple folders, I pull all the photos out of these folders, put them into one big folder, and import the files from that one folder.

Before the final import, I make a copy of the folder and optimize the images for the show. Although Soundslides will downsize photos for the show, I always try to downsize and optimize them first, so the quality is the way I like it. I run a Photoshop batch action to make each photo 680 px at a 72 ppi resolution, with an Unsharp Masking of 150, 0.5 and 1.

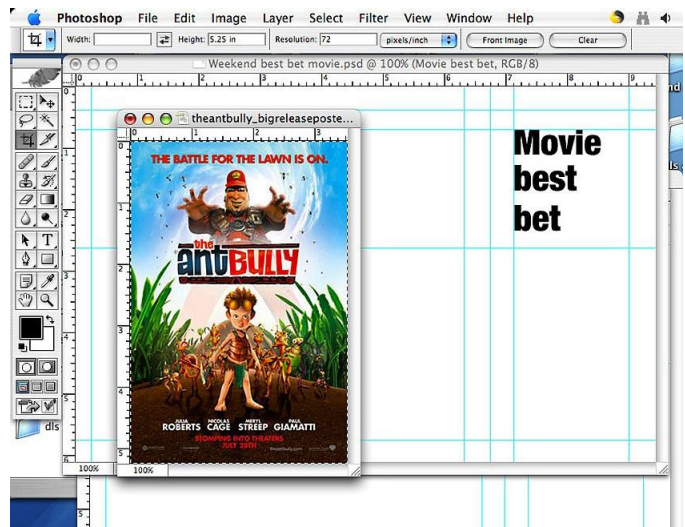




7. I also make a title page in Photoshop, again saving the file as a JPEG at 680 px and 72 ppi:

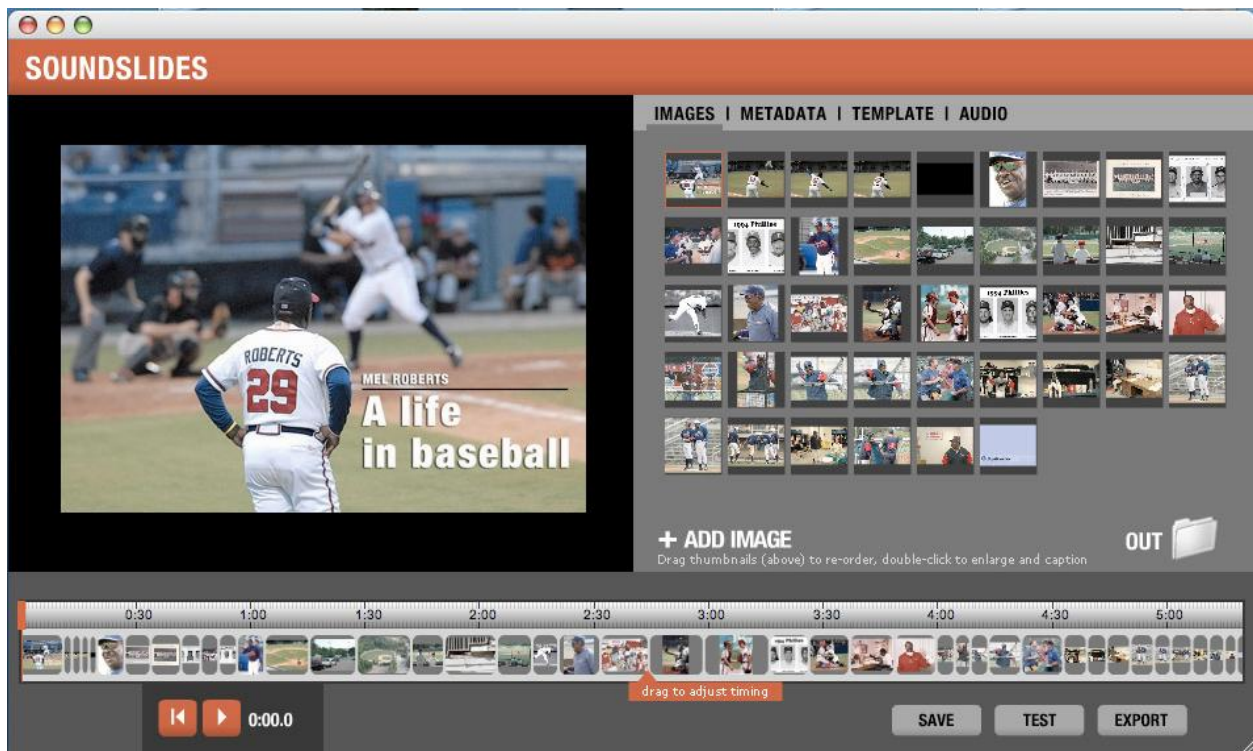
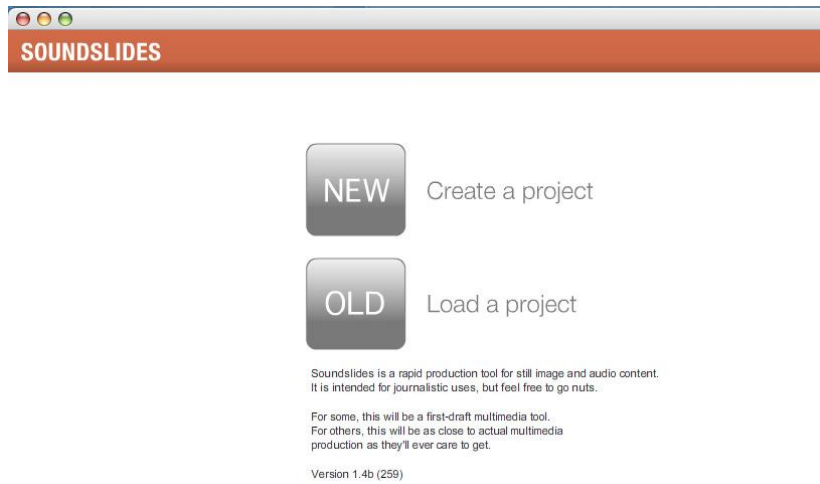
You may or may not want to do the same thing. Create a style that's unique to your site.

8. Sometimes I make section title pages in Photoshop for sections of the slideshow, if appropriate:



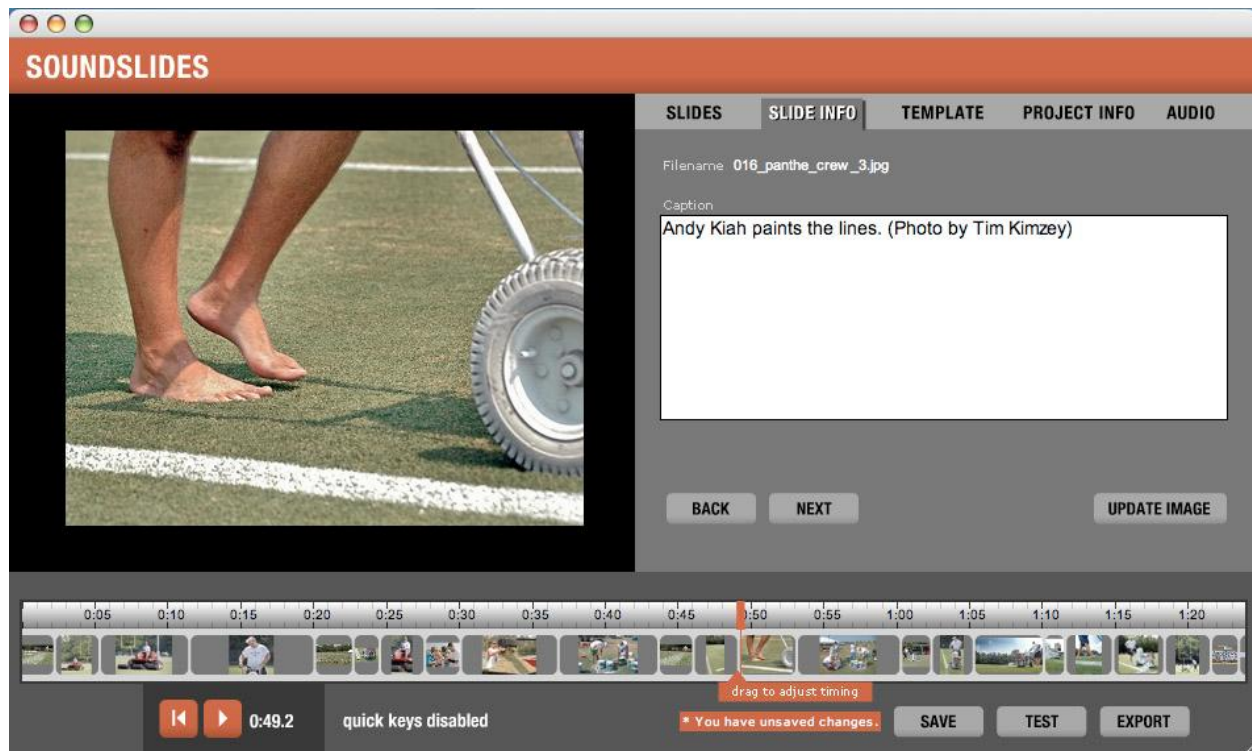
9. Then you're ready to edit in Soundslides, by importing the photos and the audio. The timing of the photos displayed can be adjusted from within Soundslides. For more help with using Soundslides, go to <http://www.soundslides.com>.

Basically, the bottom of the Soundslides window shows your timeline. You click and drag the corner of each image there to lengthen or shorten the amount of time that image appears on-screen. In the top portion of this window you can drag photos around to rearrange them in order.



The image above shows what the entire project will look like when the JPEGs and audio file are imported into Soundslides.

10. A few words about captions:



SoundSlides will import and display all the information in each JPEG's IPTC Caption field. But just because it will import all this data doesn't mean you should use it all.

When it comes to captioning a slideshow, you need to borrow Apple's slogan: "Think different." First of all, you want people to concentrate on the images and not spend all their time trying to read the captions before they disappear and the next slide is displayed.

Keep the captions short. You don't need to explain time, date, place in every caption, especially if the slideshow is about something that is clearly explained in the adjacent material on the Web. In almost every case your captions will be very different from those in print.

Second, you'll want to leave off captions entirely in some cases where the image, in the context of the entire story, is self-explanatory.

Finally, don't go overboard and leave all the captions off. Try to briefly identify anyone speaking in the audio, and anyone introduced to the show for the first time.

When you are finished using the "Slide Info" box in SoundSlides to edit your captions, run the show for yourself and see if you have time to read the entire caption before the slow progresses to the next frame. If not, go back and cut.

11. When finished with Soundslides, the files are exported into a “publish-to-web” folder, which is posted to your Web site:

In short, rename the “publish-to-web” folder, and link to the “index.html” file inside.

Here are Joe Weiss’ instructions for how to publish these files:
<http://www.soundslides.com/forum/view-topic.php?id=26>

Again, you may do things entirely differently and be quite happy with the results. If so . . . hey, let me know how you did it!

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