

Paranormal Resource Alliance

Suggested Data Collection Guidelines

The quality of any paranormal investigation depends on the equipment, methods, and procedures that investigators use to collect data. Although various groups and investigators have their own protocols and procedures, most conform to certain guidelines that help to insure that the data are as clean, uncontaminated, and documented as possible.

Audio/EVP Evidence

Minimizing and referencing noise contamination. The greatest threat to the quality of audio evidence involves extraneous noises in the investigation setting. To obtain high quality audio data, investigators must (a) ensure that they make as little noise as possible and (b) verbally reference all sounds in the environment that they hear at the time. The following guidelines help to protect the quality of audio evidence.

- When collecting audio evidence, investigators should not: eat, have discussions that have nothing to do with the EVP session, or wear noisy clothing or jewelry. Wear soft soled shoes to minimize foot noise, but no flip flops. Turn off cell phones or set them to airport mode (although vibrations should be noted aloud—"My phone just went off").
- If an investigator makes a noise (body movement, stomach growling, movement of objects), he or she should identify the noise aloud (i.e., "That was John clearing his throat").
- All other noises that occur in the environment should be noted aloud (e.g., that was the furnace turning on"). When the source of the noise is unknown, it should be noted ("I heard a knocking sound") and the investigator should make an effort to determine its source.

Conducting a Productive EVP Session. Different investigators use different methods of conducting EVP sessions, and no one way is always better. Even so, the following guidelines are probably followed most commonly.

- When possible, have two or more audio recorders, located in different parts of the room, recording at the same time. Multiple recorders often allow investigators to determine the source of the EVP in the area (because it may be louder on one recorder than another) and whether an anomalous sound recorded on one recorder was produced by another investigator (often the source of an unexplained sound on one recorder is revealed on another recorder).
- Identify the location and time at the beginning of every EVP session, along with the names of the investigators who are present. Have each investigator state his or her name or say a sentence aloud so that their voices can be recorded for later reference.

- Ask simple questions that can be answered in a word or two. Yes/no questions are sometimes best. EVP are rarely more than a few words in length and thus can not answer lengthy questions.
- Primarily ask questions that are related to the reports of activity and to the specific location.
- Allow plenty of time for a response, at least 20-30 seconds.
- When you speak, talk clearly, slowly and loudly. Do not whisper.
- Agree in advance on how the EVP session will be conducted. Often, a group of investigators will ask questions in order of investigator position (first investigator on the leader's right, then the next person, and so on). In other instances, each investigator may ask a series of questions before turning the floor over to another investigator. Deciding in advance prevents investigators from talking over each other and allows time for an answer.
- Investigators should try to stay as still as possible. If you move, then say so.

Photography

Taking Pictures

- Digital cameras of at least 5 megapixels of resolution offer the best possibilities for capturing something that is not just a digital artifact.
- Film cameras provide a negative as proof of what you shoot. If you use film, use a film speed of at least 400ASA.
- Avoid taking photos when it's windy, foggy, rainy, dusty, or snowing. Always make sure that your camera lens is clean of dust and fingerprints. To avoid lens flare, which can be mistaken for something paranormal, never take a picture in the direction of the sun or direct light.
- Photographs should be taken from different angles when possible.
- Lens hoods that extend at least three inches from the lens help to reduce orbs that results from particulates in the air.

Interpreting Pictures

- Orbs are typically the result of dust, moisture, pollen, insects, rain, or lens flare, and should generally not be considered evidence of paranormal activity.
- Be aware of the visual pareidolia or matrixing effect – the phenomenon of seeing familiar shapes or forms in random combinations of shadows and light.

- Camera straps, a breath in cold air, cigarette smoke, double exposures, inadvertent streaks of light, reflections, and blocking the camera's flash can create anomalous images that are mistaken for paranormal activity.
- When reviewing infrared (IR) still photographs, be aware that other sources of IR illumination, such as from IR videocameras, may appear as lights or streaks on IR pictures.

Videography

Handheld Videocameras

- Remember you are gathering evidence and not making a documentary or music video. Treat handheld videocameras as an extension of your eye. When sweeping a room, move the camera slowly and smoothly.
- Minimize the use of zoom, which can cause a shaky image.
- If the camera also captures audio refer to the guidelines for EVP collection.
- Generally do not use the viewfinder (eye piece) as it limits your vision.
- Although using the view screen allows you to see the image you are shooting, focusing on the lighted viewscreen makes it more difficult for your eyes to adjust to the dark.

Stationary Videocameras

- Set up cameras so that they view the broadest area.
- If possible use cross surveillance but beware of IR saturation and glare.
- Keep cameras at shoulder level or higher when possible.
- Cover as many entrances and exits as possible. This helps to monitor who comes into the location.
- Limit lost space. For example, if you are covering a room and a cabinet door is supposed to open and the room has a table in the center, locate the camera so that the table doesn't hide any part of the door. Also, if possible, place the camera so that if anyone opens the door the contamination/hoax will be observed.
- Use wired cameras when possible. Use wireless primarily in situations where distance is a factor. Wireless cameras can be prone to electrical interference.
- Use tripods. Use the client's belongings (tables, chairs, mantels) only if there is no other way to support the camera (preferably with permission).

- Fasten all cords with painter's tape (or other easily removable tape) so that investigators do not trip over cords. Also, at the DVR end, try to keep the cables under control. This will ease setup and take down as well as look more professional.
- When using a central DVR, try to have an investigator view the feed at all times. This allows for faster and more accurate evidence review. The observer can notate any anomalies or interference, as well as locate the investigators.

EMF sweeps

- When using an EMF meter, sweep the area by moving the meter in a slow determined manner. Shaking or moving the meter too quickly can give false readings.
- Obtain a base reading of the area before starting an investigation, which allows for accurate documentation of anomalous changes in EMF.
- If a high EMF is present try to debunk it. Are there electric lines in that area? Are there outlets, lights, electronics, and so on?
- If there is a free standing EMF field, try to find the outline and note its shape, size, and reading.
- Use a second meter to verify readings, if available.
- When using K-2 or audio Tri-field meters to communicate with an entity, try to videotape the session to document evidence of any activity.

Temperature and Other Environmental Readings

- Use a thermometer that measures the temperature of ambient air. Many digital thermometers read surface temperatures only.
- Gather as much information as possible regarding humidity, barometric pressure, and so on.

Personal Experiences

- As a paranormal investigator, you should be prepared to experience anomalous activity, so do not overreact when something happens!
- In general, move slowly toward any sounds or images that you experience.
- If you have an experience, record it, but do not mention its details until after the investigation. However, you should ask other investigators to explore the area in which the experience occurred without giving them details beforehand.
- Do not jump to conclusions about personal experiences. Our brains and senses are complicated and easily fooled.

- If you see something, point your hand held camera toward that location and/or ask EVP questions about it.
- If the investigation team includes a sensitive or psychic, ask him or her to do a cold reading of the location before anyone starts to investigate. However, do not let the sensitive lead the investigation or tell investigators what they are sensing. They can nudge investigators to certain areas but not tell them what to expect. Sensitives should keep a journal that should not be revealed until the evidence is reviewed.
- If you feel a cold spot try to document it with an ambient thermometer. Record its temperature, size, and shape.
- If you have a personal experience, do not dwell on it too much as you may miss other occurrences.

