Good sound recording isn't about expensive microphones and other equipment. Many of us have the tools we need, such as

- A voice recorder or Dictaphone
- Smartphone
- Laptop

To get the best sound you need to
- Reduce wind or breath noise
- Avoid echoey spaces
- Avoid interference
- Be the right distance from a microphone
- Reduce background noise
- Avoid anything too loud

Let's look at those one at a time:

Wind - this is the great enemy of sound recording. Out of doors, you need to keep sheltered, eg by a building, or if in the open use your coat or whatever is to hand. You can make a fluffy mic cover - try a sock, or sew one if you have some furry fabric.

Breath - don't be so close to the microphone that your breathing dominates it. 15-30 cm is about right, though it depends on what your using - try it out and listen back. As with wind, some kind of cover or shield will help.

Echoes - if you are recording at home, take a little time to reduce hard surfaces, for example by closing curtains, or sitting on a sofa. If you want to sound more studio-like, put a cardboard box or duvet over yourself and your microphone.

Interference - If you are using your phone, put it onto flight mode while you record. Reduce nearby electronics as much as possible whatever you are using.

Distance - this depends on other factors. Too close is too breathy - but it can be good to be really close if you are somewhere very noisy, as then you will come into focus. If it's too far away, your voice won't be heard so well.

Background noise - sometimes it's great! If you are in an interesting place let's hear it. Listen to your environment before you record. Temporarily turn off the fridge, or a computer you're not using. Also hold equipment still, maybe by using a handle or tripod to reduce handling noise and vibrations.

Loudness - microphones are sensitive and loud sounds will distort. Quiet sounds can be turned up on software. So it's better to record too quiet than too loud.

Recording in Audacity

You can use Audacity - the free editing software we recommend - to edit recordings from your phone or other device, or you can record directly into it. Your computer will usually do this using its built in mic, or you can plug in a simple USB mic. You may need to adjust your microphone settings if it doesn't work straight away.

Open a new project, which will look like this:
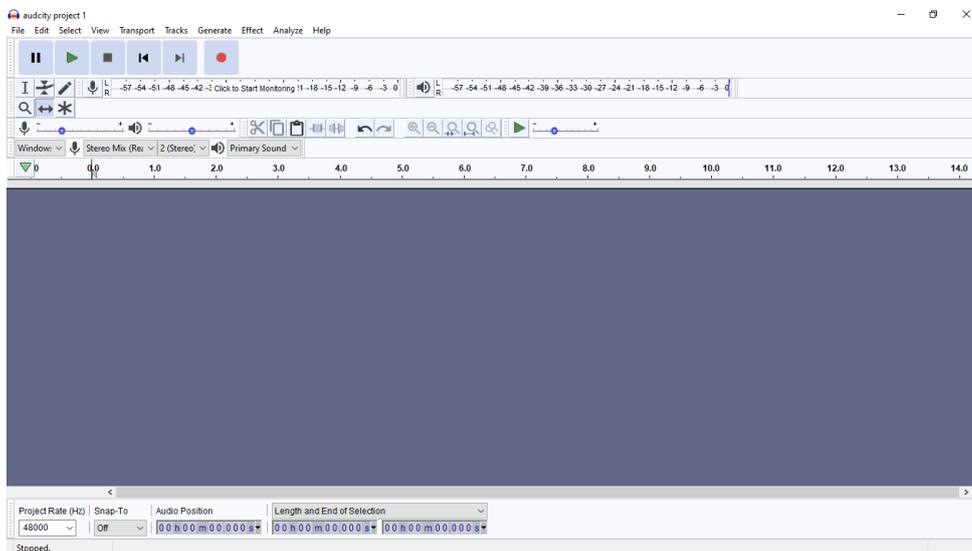
Press the red record button
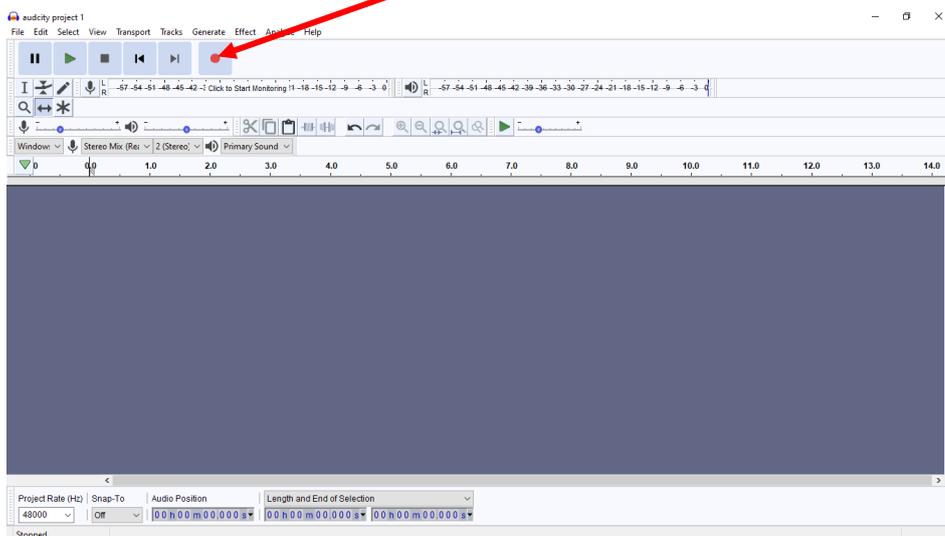
It will immediately start recording
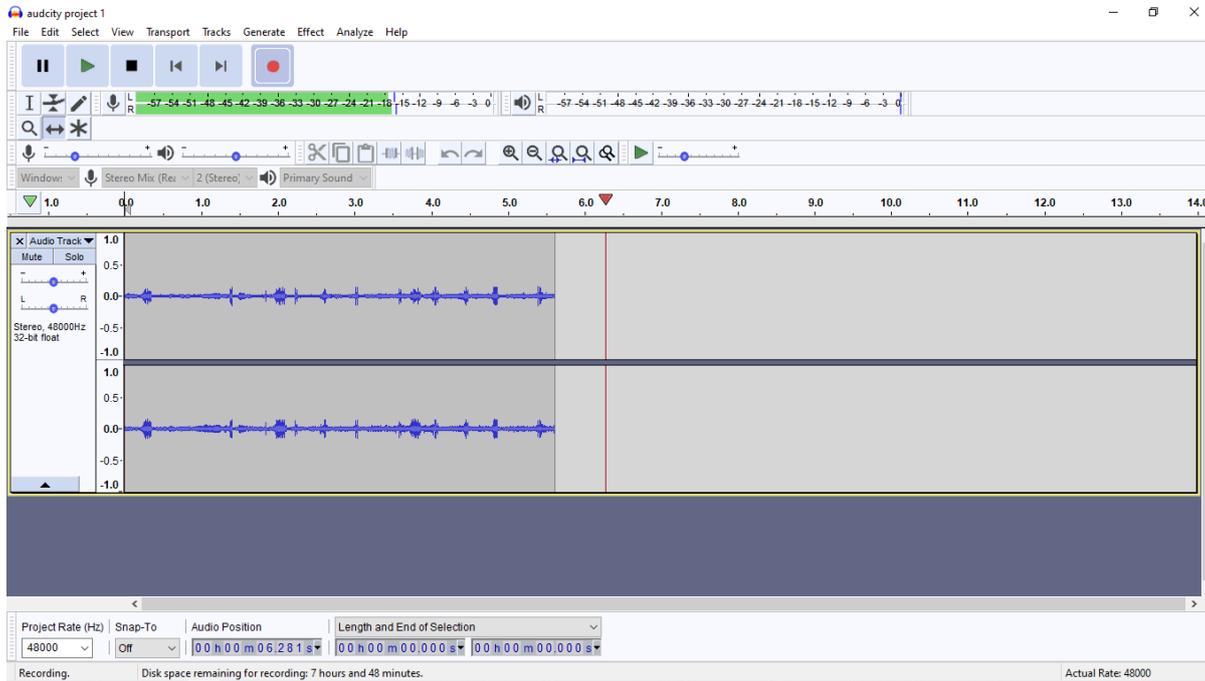
Press stop when you have finished
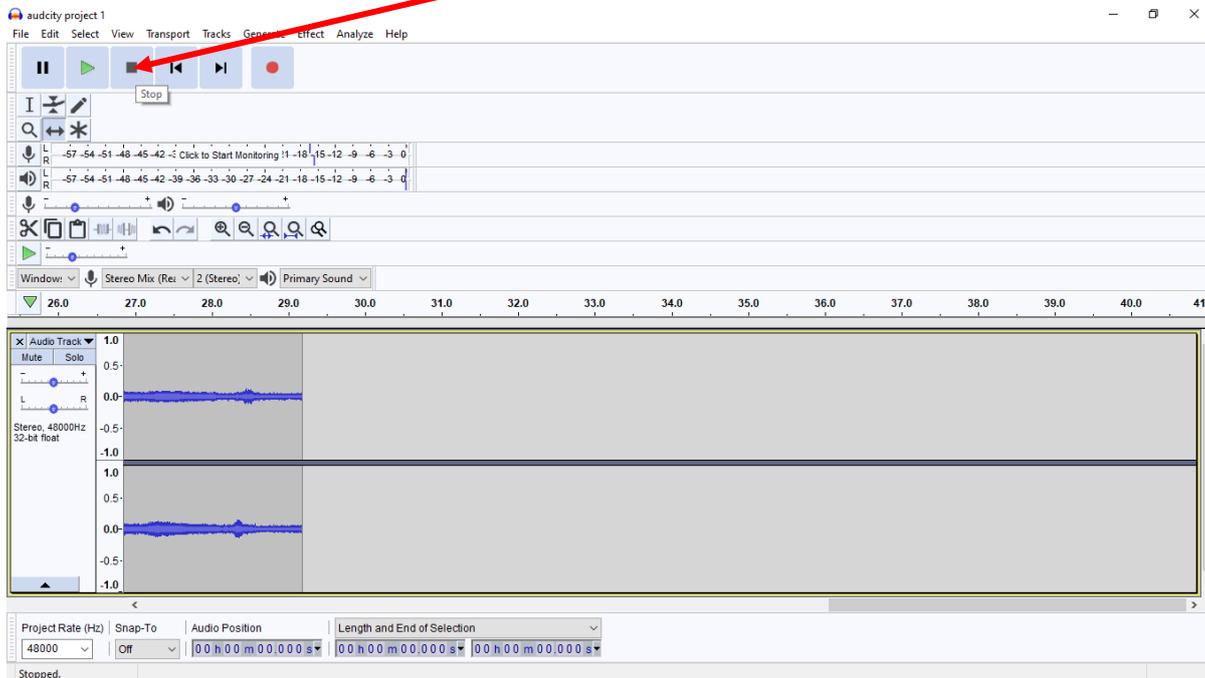
Using headphones

Headphones are helpful when you are recording as they will give a clear picture of the quality. For example, they will reveal interference you won't know about otherwise. You don't always need to use them, but they are particularly useful when you are getting used to a new set up or place.

As with anything else, you don't need expensive studio gear. Buy something cheap, simple and reliable and learn to use it well.

Recording other sound

Most of the above relates to recording your voice. At other times you might want to record sounds of nature and other interesting noises

Soundscape recording

The soundscape is all the sounds around you. Find a place to be, out of the wind. Stand or sit still and quiet, turn your microphone on and listen. The longer you listen for, the more interesting it will get.

Quiet sounds

Textures of paper, a sleeping cat, water dripping into a bowl. Place a microphone very close by to capture quiet sounds. Keep still and quiet yourself, and allow it to go on for as long as you can.

Walking

Walking through an environment whilst recording it happening around you is rewarding and fascinating.