GUIDELINES FOR WRITING FOR MUSIC LIBRARIES

Here are some requested guidelines for creating cues that get placements and make money:

- **Hard ending on all cues, no fade outs**. Tail outs should not be overly long.

- **No key changes**

- **No tempo changes**

- **One mood throughout:** A cue should not start light and happy and end up sad or dramatic. Editors choose cues according to mood and tempo, so cues like this usually get thrown out. I think a good cue changes textures, but not mood throughout.

  The **Videohelper guide** (see below) has a different take on it, but I don't agree – I think if the moods changes then the cue no longer works for the reason it was chosen by the editor…….

- **Edit Dead Space At The Top & Tail End:** Always make sure to edit out any extraneous silence from the top and end of your tracks. Keep any dead space to no more than .25 seconds at the top and end.

- **Good edit points in the cue** (see Videohelper diagram below). Editors love when they can just edit out sections in the middle of a cue and go straight to the end, and it works without a lot of fiddling around.

- **Master your tracks but don't overly compress/ limit them.** Unlike with records, you don't need to take part in the loudness wars and make your tracks ridiculously loud.

  So use compression and limiting judiciously; it's easy to overdo it in trying to make your tracks as loud as possible.

  Finally, mix your tracks with a maximum level of 0.5 dB. Leaving some headroom gives a little room to account for different audio systems and DAW playback idiosyncracies.

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Videohelper is a very popular music library. Below I have included a scan from one of their demo CDs that talks about how they put together tracks. If you want to incorporate some of Videohelper's guidelines please do so. But this is not a requirement. But the way they structure cues and build in edit points is great info.

When we create music, **we approach things differently than most libraries.** Our goal is not to reproduce a genre or style of music, but to help you tell a story, hold the audience[1] and provide you with a musical toolbox that will make your life in the edit room easier. That's why many producers and editors think of us as the biggest tools in the industry.[2]

Let's examine a typical VideoHelper cut, represented below as a computer waveform, with the higher peaks representing louder moments.
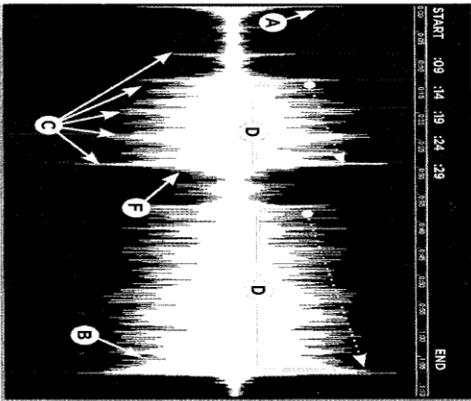
A typical VideoHelper cut.

(fig. 1)

START :00 :09 :14 :19 :24 :29 END

A. **CATCH THEIR ATTENTION[3]** - In most cases, every cut starts with an event - a big hit, crash, sound effect or something to catch people's attention. It also gives the editor a great transition if this cut will be edited into another piece of music.

B. **BIG FINISH!** - Most cuts end with a hit or event that can easily be edited anywhere else into the piece to provide an ending where needed. We know long fade outs are useless.[4]

C. **HIT POINTS** - Other libraries provide :30/:20/:15/:10 cutdowns - but, as producers, we never used them.[5] They never quite fit our copy - and we found ourselves taking the full-length versions and editing them to fit our spots. So, we created a means of putting "hit points" in almost each and every one of our cuts at :05 intervals, starting @:09. This provides you with climactic or transitional events happening @:09, :14, :19, :24 and :29. So you can use one piece of music for cutdowns of the same spot without having to re-edit or replace the music.

D. **BUILDS TO KEY POINTS** - The first :30 of every cut builds in intensity towards a climax @:29, then usually settles down, only to build to another over-the-top climax towards the final hit.[6] Too many pieces of production music tend to be repetitive and sedate - our music is designed to move and tell a story.

E. **MOOD CHANGES** - Within each of our cuts, the mood changes at least once.[7] For example, the cut pictured goes from completely serene to tumultuous and then back again. This provides producers with multiple approaches to the same theme - for moments when you've got copy that reads "These poor, cuddly, orphaned kittens were left in a forest to die - only to become KILLER KITTIES!"[8]

F. **REMIXES** - After the hit @:29, our cuts usually restate or rephrase the musical

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1. Sometimes we all need to be held. Admit it.
2. This sounded SO much better in our heads.

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3. Useful when you don't have a title graphic that says "College Girls Gone Wild!"
4. Unless you're Kajagoogoo, the UK band whose only hit "Too Shy" can't fade from our memory quickly enough.
5. But according to random drug testing, we used everything else.
6. This, if taken out of context, sounds kinky. Just commenting.
7. Unless it's Traci Gordon[a], my ex-girlfriend. Then expect its mood to change each second.
   [a] "That bitch"
8. "Kitties" does not include Dukakis, Carlyle, or a very young Cat Stevens.

idea started in the first half – but remixed (for example, adding drum loops or losing the lead instrument). Other libraries do separate tracks of alternate mixes – but we place them in the context of the same song. Why? So you can note where the change happens and "slide" it around to fit your copy – again, all using same piece of music.

G. **PULSE** – Almost every cut has a steady rhythmic element – some kind of beat you can cut to – because after all, it's been proven that cutting to music enhances the perceived professionalism of a spot.[9] The only exceptions to this rule are the cuts on our "half" discs (e.g. Atmospheres, Disc 20.5) and the ScoreHelper and MODULES Library CDs.

H. **BREAKS** – More often than not, we let the beat completely stop – or interrupt it with a completely outrageous rhythmic break. Again, this is a tool to prevent your viewers from falling into a dreamlike lull – and it can be inserted anywhere within a piece to accent graphic transitions or on-air talent falling down flights of stairs.

I. **MODULARITY** – When we write a cut, we pay close attention that certain elements are loopable – that they can be edited easily and laid end-to-end to provide longer, if not more redundant, passages.

THINGS YOU WON'T FIND: We don't change key or tempo within 99% of our cuts, because that would prevent you from being able to cut-and-paste elements interchangeably within a track.[10] And in the rare occasion that a cut might retard/accelerate towards a climax[11], we make sure that this happens in the second half of the piece. Also, we usually precede this final section with a percussive element, allowing it to be edited out or easily pasted elsewhere into the cut.

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9. As cited in the groundbreaking study "Statistics We Just Made Up", Todd/Seit, Adelphi University, 1992.
10. Other things that would prevent edits: Death, paralysis, being transported to the Phantom Zone like General Zod in Superman II.
11. Geez, I'm sorry. This never happened to me before. I swear.