

From the Sound Booth

Issue 1 | By Earl Arnold

THIS WEEK'S TOPIC: GAIN

If there is one thing that makes the biggest difference in how your church sounds on Sunday, it is gain. Gain is how much volume you add to a mic or instrument signal at the very first stage — before it goes anywhere else. Think of it as the foundation of your sound. If the foundation is off, everything built on top of it will be off too. The good news is that setting gain correctly is simple, and once you understand it, you will hear the difference every week.

FEATURED TIP THIS WEEK

Set your gain so that when someone is speaking or singing at their loudest, the channel meter peaks around -18dB to -12dB. That sweet spot gives you clean, clear sound with enough headroom so nothing distorts.

WHY IT MATTERS

Gain too low means you crank the fader up and bring unwanted noise with it. Gain too high causes harsh distortion that can damage speakers. Either way, the congregation struggles to hear — and that gets in the way of worship. Getting gain right makes everything else on your board easier to control.

HOW TO APPLY IT

During sound check, have each person speak or sing at full performance volume. Slowly turn the gain knob (top of the channel) until the meter hits -18dB to -12dB at their loudest. Leave it there. During the service, use the channel fader for adjustments — not the gain knob.

"Good sound does not happen by accident. It starts with the right foundation — and gain is that foundation."

— Earl Arnold

SUNDAY MORNING CHECKLIST

- ☐ Ask each vocalist and speaker to sound check at full performance volume
- ☐ Turn gain knob until the channel meter peaks between -18dB and -12dB
- ☐ Make sure no channel meters are hitting red (gain is too high)
- ☐ Check that main output meters are in a healthy range before service
- ☐ During the service, use only the fader — not the gain knob

DID YOU KNOW? The gain knob and the fader do two different jobs. Gain sets the strength of the incoming signal. The fader controls how much goes to the speakers. Set gain right first, and your fader works exactly as intended.

You may not have a degree in audio engineering, but you have something just as powerful — a heart to serve. Every Sunday you show up and make sure the message is heard clearly. What you do behind that board is every bit a part of the ministry as what happens on the stage. Keep learning and keep serving!

Have a question or topic you'd like covered? Send requests to sound@earlarnold.net