Assignment 1: Functional Sound Design

For this assignment, I chose to design five mobile phone alerts which could be applied to the context of the modern, everyday mobile phone user. Using Protools, I simulated sounds which served the functions of alarm, 'Message not sent' alert, 'Battery low' alert, 'Bluetooth connected' alert, and 'Battery charged' alert.

Most mobile phones these days come equipped with such alerts. They are functional, practical sounds that fulfil their purpose on a daily basis for most mobile phone users, making the experience of using the mobile phone much easier and more pleasant. Having owned several mobile phones in my life (starting with the trusty Nokia 3310), I recognised the value of incorporating these alerts into mobile phone design. For these reasons, I chose the above alerts to simulate for this assignment.

Mobile phone manufacturers often provide default tones for these alerts when they release a new model of mobil phone. These default tones often become recognisable as belonging to certain companies and it was these default tones that I used to guide me in the process of designing my own five alerts. I used them to gain an idea of what my alerts should sound like, yet I had to keep them separate in my head so that I wasn't just recreating existing tones.

To create each alert, I used the Pro-tools Vacuum plug-in. For my alarm tone, the sound is simple and repetitive, and reminiscent of early digital alarms, with a sample of four short blasts. To achieve this tone I mainly adjusted the Envelope and Fine and Depth nodes on the plug-in.

For the second tone, 'Message not sent', I adjusted the Cutoff, Resolution, Depth, Range, Drift and Fine, adding Dust and making a few other adjustments to get the desired sound. For the sample, I used a series of descending notes so that the mobile phone user will recognise that something has gone wrong in the message sending, as descending notes in alerts often denote problems.

In designing the 'Battery low' alert, I used the same principle as in the previous alert, i.e. descending notes indicate that something is not right. They also add to the effect that the phone is losing power, as pitch often lowers when power decreases. To create the alert, I changed the Cutoff,
Range, Fine, Drive, and Ringmodulation in the Vacuum plug-in.

To create the 'Bluetooth connected' alert, I mainly adjusted the Cutoff, Drive, and Ringmodulation. I was trying to achieve a more modern polyphonic sound, as Bluetooth is one of the more recent developments in mobile phone capabilities. In the case of this alert, I used ascending tones to create a sense that the task that the phone was carrying out had been successfully completed. For this sample, there is only one alert rather than, say, four repetitions, as I felt that only one alert was necessary for this purpose, and in the real world only one would be used.

For my final sound I used wanted to again create the sense that a task had been successfully accomplished and so for my sample, I used more ascending tones. In this case, two pairs of sounds to create the 'Battery charged' alert. To design my sound, I adjusted the Depth in Modulation and the Cutoff and Resonance of the sound. The Range was also adjusted for this alert.

Overall, I feel that I have managed to create five mobile phone sounds that fairly accurately serve the function for which they were created.