



# The Voice Actor's Performance Guidebook

Including practice steps,  
practice scripts,  
and post-training help.

*Prepare. Practice. Perform.  
In Practical Steps.*

David Goldberg  
CEO, Edge Studio





**Edge Studio is America's leading educational resource  
for aspiring and working voice actors.**

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# **CHAPTER 1: THE VOICE ACTOR'S PROFILE**

**Not everyone has the aptitude and skill set to be a successful voice actor.  
This chapter will help you determine whether or not you do.**

## ***In this chapter:***

1. Do you need a certain profile?
2. Do you need certain skills?
3. What are some of the obstacles to becoming a voice actor? What are the remedies?

## ***Frequently asked questions:***

### ***1. Do you need a certain profile?***

#### **a. Can anyone be a successful voice actor?**

**No.** Even though performing voice-over requires two abilities that you most likely already do very well (read and speak), not everyone can make money by talking into a microphone. There's more to it.

Some people don't realize how much more, and end up spinning their wheels, even wasting their time. But many people – many more than you might expect – do have the “raw materials” that success requires. The best way to find out which group you're in is to consult a VO coach who is industry-savvy, honest and candid. But here's a start ...

#### **b. Do you need to be an actor?**

**No.** Even though it's called “voice acting,” many voice-over genres require little of what most people think of as “acting.” For example, genres that involve minimal acting skill include: documentary narration, non-fiction audiobook, telephony, and some eLearning situations. Some other genres obviously do involve acting ability, such as animation, certain types of commercials (dialogs and characters), fiction audiobook, and some promos.

Why do we say “minimal” skill rather than “no” skill? It’s because voice-over performance in itself is a form of acting.

“Acting” can be defined as the realistic expression of emotion. In that sense, it’s a part of virtually any voice-over, because all VO involves the expression and change of emotion at some level. For example, even a recorded phone prompt calls for a subtle expression of emotional sensitivity in your voice. (Empathetic yet positive: “We’re sorry, all our representatives are busy.” Upbeat and encouraging: “While you’re waiting, have you thought about the ways we can grow your business? ...”)

So, if you’re not trained as an actor, don’t think of that as a limitation on your ability to pursue a voice-over career. Think of a voice-over career as a way to develop acting sensibilities you already have!

### **c. Do you need an especially attractive voice?**

**No.** For the past decade or two, everyday-sounding voices have been highly marketable. In fact, often the more mainstream the voice is, the more work there is for it (and more types of work). Clients are constantly looking for fresh examples of everyday voices.

If your voice is especially beautiful, sexy, powerful, resonant, deep, childlike or has some other extraordinary quality, you can use that to advantage. Special voices have their own sort of marketability. But they’re hardly the only ones in demand.

### **d. Do you need unique vocal capabilities?**

**No.** Those who can do unique things with their voices (speak very articulately, read extra quickly, etc.) would be advised to go after certain types of clients in certain genres. But they have no more chance of obtaining work than someone who doesn’t have such capability. They just go after different sorts of work. This is because there’s work for most every voice type.

**e. Do you need to do accents, character voices, imitations, etc.?**

**No.** There's certainly work for people who can portray characters, and characters sometimes have an accent. But there is seldom need for only an accent or dialect. (And when an accent is needed, a client has Internet access to trained talent who may have been born with it.) There are even fewer work opportunities for those who solely offer impressions. (When was the last time you heard an impression used in a voice-over?)

Again, most work uses voice actors who speak in a more everyday voice. Those voices have the potential to work every day.

## **2. Do you need certain skills?**

**Yes. To succeed in voice-over, the following skills are necessary:**

*A marketable voice:* As mentioned above, you need a marketable voice. Fortunately, most voices are marketable.

*A directable delivery:* The key to pleasing casting teams and clients is to demonstrate proficiency with vocal techniques and vocal control. You will work with a director or will direct yourself. Either way, you must be able to adapt to the needs of the script and the client, and adjust your performance as requested (or as you anticipate). Looking ahead, this is why your VO demo must reflect your true capabilities. If you don't sound as good as your demo, you'll soon be found out, and your career may come to a sudden halt.

### ***Trained ears***

When you can hear your performance from the point of view of clients and casting teams, you communicate more easily with everyone. Clients often ask the voice actor for input. Your ability to "hear" a performance will give them confidence and make satisfying them

easier for you. It will also facilitate working from your home studio, where you are often Producer, Director and Actor rolled into one. To boot, this added value can also mean you'll make more money.

### ***Creativity***

Creativity helps a production come to life. It impresses producers and casting agents. Being creative, and understanding how to voice things creatively, is one of the marks of a pro.

### ***A lack of inhibition***

This goes with creativity. It helps your voice to be relaxed and “vocally free,” it opens the way to fresh approaches, and it contributes to the credibility of your characters.

### ***An ability to remain calm***

Studio time is precious, as are producers' and clients' schedules, so during recording sessions, things can get hectic. Even when numerous confused co-producers give contradictory commands, it is essential to maintain composure so you can get the job done right.

### ***An ability to appear professional and experienced***

Would the production team want to hire anyone who doesn't come across as professional?

### ***Patience and dedication in your career growth***

This is a must. Experience does not come overnight, and building a large client base takes time. Even with success, you have to be okay with some rejection. It's part of the audition process.

### ***A non-attitude performance***

It's not all about you. It's about making the script – and the recording project – work. You are usually part of a bigger picture, and you need the ability to work with the team. A production is successful when the voice actor, copywriter, engineer, video editor, director and others work smoothly together.

### *Professional business practices*

An understanding of the industry is key to finding clients. And the key to maintaining them is being prompt, courteous, organized, accurate and timely with your billing, etc.

## **3. What are some of the obstacles to becoming a voice actor?**

**Several factors can make it difficult to sound natural. For example:**

### *Affected delivery*

VO beginners gravitate towards using an affected delivery, because to the ordinary ear, that's what VO seems to be. Unnatural, affected deliveries stand out, so most people notice them. Conversely, natural deliveries blend in, so we're not aware of them.

To fix this misapprehension, listen for natural voice-overs and take note of them. You'll hear natural delivery in most national commercials, documentaries, telephone systems, training videos, and recordings of that sort.

### *Choppiness*

In normal conversation, we usually express ourselves in complete thoughts, not word-by-word. ("Word-by-word" is the way as you might haltingly speak a foreign language that you are not fluent in.) In normal conversation, our words flow naturally, until another thought comes to mind, or the other person speaks.

However, when reading aloud, many people – including VO novices – read words one at a time. That sounds stilted, choppy, and unnatural. To fix this, "look ahead" when reading – in other words, use your peripheral vision to grasp the full thought, and know what's coming up.

### ***Too much drama!***

When we're in the spotlight (in front of the microphone), it is instinctive to be over dramatic, theatrical, overly articulate. This is simple to remedy: pretend you are talking to one person, at a normal conversational distance. Sometimes as if even closer.

### ***Addressing the multitude***

Since the voice actor knows that millions of people may hear the recording, there is a tendency to project. To sound natural, talk as if you are talking to one person. This is not just a mental technique ... it reflects the real world, because listening to voice-over is generally a solitary activity. That is, people listen to radio commercials, documentaries, audiobooks, etc. by themselves.

### ***Not knowing the technology***

The fear of the microphone not "picking up" our voice makes us speak louder. Modern microphones work incredibly well, so let the electronics do their job and use your natural speaking volume.

### ***The glory of headphones***

Wearing headphones in a soundproof room tends to focus your attention on your voice. How glorious it can sound! But that leads to inadvertently projecting. Don't do that. Practice talking into your microphone at a natural volume/level.

### ***Scripts are not written in conversational language***

Even when a script is written in "conversational" language and style, it's usually different from anything in your everyday conversation. It represents someone else's words, or a character's words. It's often written in the "third person" (about "he, she, they and them"). In most everyday conversations, we speak mostly in the first and second person (about "I, me and you"). Voice-over training helps deal with this difference, so that you can read virtually any script in a seemingly natural manner.

## *Stage fright*

A recording session can create nervousness, which creates an unnatural sound. Even top stage actors experience nerves before going on, and although you're not on "stage," it's still an important performance. Practice and confidence will take care of this.

## **CHAPTER 2: PERFORMANCE STYLES**

**Most people think voice-over is delivered a certain way, but they are often wrong. This chapter explains what types of delivery most of your clients will really request from you.**

## ***In this chapter:***

1. The two styles of performance
2. Which performance style is most popular today?
3. Why is the natural style most popular?
4. Does the public notice natural delivery?
5. Why does the public think that voice-over is mostly the affected style?
6. Why does the public think that voice-over is mostly commercial work?
7. Why is the affected style still used sometimes?

## ***1. The two styles of performance***

**As we mentioned in Chapter 1, voice-over performances can be split into two types:**

### ***Unaffected***

Unaffected vocal performances (also known as natural delivery) are those in which a voice actor uses their natural voice and natural delivery. It is generally used in most genres of voice-over. There are three main exceptions, as listed below.

*TIP: “Natural” is often mistakenly interpreted as “nonchalant,” but this is incorrect. Natural simply means unaffected, which means ANY voice-type used in real life, such as nonchalant, energetic, or funny.*

## *Affected*

Affected vocal performances are those in which voice actors use unnatural voices and/or unnatural deliveries. This is most common in these three genres:

- a. Promos and trailers
- b. Hard-sell and announcer reads
- c. Character and animation voices

## **2. Which performance style is most popular today?**

**Today's most popular style is the natural, unaffected style.**

Casting teams generally hire voice actors who speak in their natural voice and use an unaffected and tension-free vocal delivery. In fact, Edge Studio estimates that this natural delivery is used in 95% of recordings.

Therefore when a director directs you to be “natural” and “conversational,” they want you to sound like you, rather than try to sound like someone else.

But each of us has many natural deliveries. Think of them as varying based on your emotion. We can be nonchalant, energetic, funny, sad, compassionate, happy, sarcastic, and so on. So when asked to sound “natural,” that’s just the start. Then decide which natural “you” is most appropriate.

NOTE: Over the course of a script, emotions often change. See more on this in Chapter 5, Section 7: “Emotion, Character, Tone.”

## **3. Why is the natural style most popular?**

**IMPORTANT:** The public generally responds more favorably to authentic/natural sounding voice actors, rather than affected ones.

This is why we estimate that 95% of voice-overs use a natural delivery. Just a few decades ago, this was not the case. The once-ubiquitous announcer style, which saw its demise in the late 1980s, was an affected, pushed, and projected type of delivery.

#### ***4. Does the public notice natural delivery?***

Even though a natural delivery is used an estimated 95% of the time, the public rarely notices it.

This is because when voice-over is delivered naturally, it ‘blends’ in, and goes by unnoticed. For example, most people don’t notice the voice-over on a documentary (even though they hear the words). Nor do most people notice the voice on national television commercials, training films at work, educational videos at school, and so forth.

#### ***5. Why does the public think that voice-over is mostly the affected style?***

As we observed in Chapter 1, most people notice only voice-overs that are affected, because they “stand out.” Therefore when people think of voice-over, they recall only the affected style and they assume that is what voice-over is.

#### ***6. Why does the public think that voice-over is mostly commercial?***

Much of the affected voice-over work occurs in the commercial sector (promos & trailers, hard-sell/announcer commercials, some character work). And since people generally notice only affected-style voice-overs, commercials are what they think of when they think of voice-over.

Interestingly, even in the commercial genre, only an estimated 5% of the work involves affected delivery. But commercials are so frequent, it’s frequently noticed. The other 95% is delivered so naturally, they style of delivery goes by unnoticed.

## ***7. Why is the affected style still used sometimes?***

The affected-style delivery is still heard for a number of reasons:

This style works well for promos, hard-sell commercials, and character/animation work.

Sometimes affected voices are heard because untrained voice talent are used – such as the owner of a company narrating their own commercial, an employee narrating a company's telephone system, a local actor narrating a friend's documentary, and so on. This doesn't make them necessarily good, but it may at least make the company owner credible.

## **CHAPTER 3: ADVICE ON TRAINING**

**We have seen thousands of people train to become voice actors. Many were successful. Many were not. Over time, common denominators have become clear. Some follow in this chapter.**

## ***In this chapter:***

1. Capitalize on you
2. Follow these three steps to learn how to perform
3. Don't rush your training!

### ***1. Capitalize on you***

**To be most successful, you should:**

#### ***Sound like you***

Accept, trust, and use your voice. Don't try to sound like someone else. Clients usually hire voice actors who naturally have the voice and delivery type they want. Any vocal affectation\* to sound like someone else will sound inauthentic. So do what you do well, capitalize on your natural strengths, and trust your voice. Sound like you!

A few exceptions. Affected voices are commonly used for:

- Promos and trailers
- Hard-sell and announcer reads
- Character and animation voices

***Specialize in voice-over genres and niches that match your personality, experiences, subject matter, interests, and goals.***

By narrating material that matches your interests and/or natural skill-sets, you will:

- Market yourself more comfortably
- Get hired more often because prospective clients will feel comfortable with you
- Have more fun when working, because you'll be interested in what you narrate
- And you'll sound better!

## ***2. Follow these three steps to learn how to perform***

### ***1. Get a candid evaluation and assessment.***

To be most successful, you must determine (a) if you are marketable and (b) if so, in which genres could you be most marketable.

So begin with an evaluation. An honest, candid one. Not everyone can be successful in voice-over. Find out if you can, before you invest time and money.

But very few coaches can accurately evaluate you. That's because very few coaches truly have all the knowledge that is needed.

### ***2. You need a coach who thoroughly understands all the genres in the voice-over industry.***

If the coach is only familiar with some genres, they won't know whether or not you could be marketable in other genres. For example, a coach who specializes in commercials and promos could overlook your potential in narrating self-guided museum exhibit tours and documentaries. They may not even know the market exists.

## **Your coach should:**

- Be very familiar with subject-matter niches, so they can help you identify sectors of the industry where your particular expertise can open doors for you. (Remember, a niche is not the same thing as a genre. For example, a client in the Corporate Narration genre might need someone with aviation expertise.)
- Work closely with casting teams, so they know what casting teams specifically listen for when hiring voice actors.
- Work closely with clients, marketing departments, and advertising agencies, so they understand why they select the voice actors they do.
- Be familiar with industry trends, what used to be in, what's in today, and where the market is headed.
- Know the voice-over industry from a marketing perspective, and can guide you on marketing yourself successfully.
- Be familiar with all types of clients, understands the various personality types and client needs, and so can assess where you'd "fit in."
- Be absolutely candid with you.
- Put together the big picture, point you in the right direction, and help you create a practical and realistic game plan.

### ***3. If your evaluation indicates that you could be marketable, then:***

- Participate in professional classes and workshops. To become competitive with other working professionals, it's practically impossible to train yourself. You need perspective, you need a trained, unbiased ear, you need to see how peers approach scripts differently and how they remain successful. You need to train with professionals who have a history of helping aspiring voice actors become successful.
- Take private coaching sessions. Train with coaches who "live and breathe" the genres of voice-over in which you want to work.

*TIP: Be sure some (or all) of your private coaching sessions are remote sessions. (By “remote” we mean when, from your home, you connect with your coach via Skype or telephone.) This is important because you will record most jobs from your home studio, often with your client remotely participating via Skype and/or telephone. By working remotely with your coach, you learn this skill before a remote-recording session with your client!*

### **3. Don't rush your training!**

A voice-over career doesn't happen overnight. If it were that easy, everyone would do it. Instead, one must practice, market, and be patient. The professionals who make it sound simple, do these three things. Follow their example.

#### **Numerous variables dictate the amount of time required to reach your goals:**

- *Experience:* Previous “unnatural” voice experience (such as radio broadcasting, stage acting, and some public speaking), may require additional training time. This is because some skills and habits will need to be unlearned before learning voice-over skills. Conversely, natural voice experience (such as reading for the blind, reading for children, counseling, singing, and on-camera acting) may make it easier for you to begin working as a voice actor.
- *Inhibition:* One needs to be loose and carefree in front of the microphone. Inhibitions can be detrimental, as they produce a stiff and unnatural sound.
- *Natural aptitude:* Some people are naturals. Some are not and require more time to train.
- *Diligence in practicing:* Practicing is key to breaking into the business. The more you practice, and the better your practice sessions are planned, the sooner you can enter the field.

- *Goals:* Choosing to specialize in multiple genres of the voice-over industry usually requires more training, because there are more styles and skills to learn. For this reason, many new voice actors begin their careers by offering clients just a few genres. Over time, they expand the services they offer clients by training in additional genres.

It will take some time before your training “clicks in” and you sound marketable. So do not become discouraged when, after your first few weeks, you don’t sound as good as full-time professionals. In time, you will.

How long will it take to “click in”? That depends on these factors:

- Your past experience
- How quickly you pick things up
- How many genres/niches/styles you want to offer clients
- And most importantly, whether or not you focus on the genres and/or niches which are most marketable for you

To do this right and give yourself a competitive head-start, assume a minimum time-investment of four months. At the end of this time, you should be able to begin marketing yourself.

When do you stop training and begin recording demos? The answer is different for every person. Basically it comes down to one thing: *Record your demos when both you and your coach feel that you are ready.* This means that, after appropriate coaching and consultation with your coach, you two can find the balance between taking that leap of faith (because otherwise you could train forever), but also not recording too soon. For example, ensure that you can read a script proficiently on your own, without your coach needing to direct you. Because then the demo is your work (not your coach’s work reminding you how to read a script). And ensure that you’ve worked on the business, marketing, and home studio parts of your new business, so that when you are ready to record your demo, your demo plan is already in place.

How many demos should you record? This also is different for every person. You need to assess your resources (how much time and money do you have to invest into your new

voice-over business) and how much opportunity you want to have when you enter the industry. For example, it takes less training (which means less time and less money) to learn one style of voice-over. Yet, entering the industry with three of four demos gives you significantly more opportunity from the onset.

Deciding how much to invest into your new voice-over business is a personal decision. But as new businesses go, you're in great shape; launching a voice-over business is a tiny investment compared to just about everything else out there. Even launching your voice-over career with four demos costs much less than opening up a new restaurant, creating a new retail store, or getting a college degree. Remember however, that this is an investment and you need to take it seriously to be successful.

*TIP: Any recording studio with a microphone might offer to teach voice-over and produce voice-over demos. But unless they have a team who truly understands the voice-over industry, it's unlikely that they can train you to work alongside professional voice actors, let alone produce a demo that sounds professional and does not sound like everyone else's.*

After recording your demos, you really ought to continue training. In fact, Edge Studio regularly trains and mentors full-time professionals. As a result, they become more and more successful. Sometimes their goal with further training is to obtain more or better work within the genres that they already pursue successfully. In other cases, their goal is to add additional genres to their repertoire, so they can market to yet more clients.

Furthermore, markets within the industry change over time, genres expand and contract in popularity, and trends develop. Focusing daily on a particular genre, even the most successful working pro can miss seeing the full extent and nature of some of these changes.

What if you don't continue training? Sadly, many busy professional voice actors become complacent. Eventually they begin losing work to new voice actors. Don't let this happen to you!

## **CHAPTER 4: THE PERFORMANCE MINDSET**

**The right mindset can make all the difference.**

## ***In this chapter:***

1. Vocal composure
2. Vocal freedom / tension-free
3. Be yourself / affectation-free

Three principles apply to virtually all voice-over deliveries. Whether you want to specialize in animation, commercial, documentary, corporate presentations, podcasting, or any other voice-over genre, understanding and incorporating the following framework will be vital to your success.

### **1. Composure**

Vocal and physical composure come from a mindset that allows you to sound and work like a professional.

Having composure means that you are:

- *Confident*: When at the microphone, be confident. Assume you can do it, and “go for it.” Do not be hesitant or reserved. If you make a mistake, correct it and continue. No need to say, “I’m sorry.” (Producers tend to grimace when a voice actor repeatedly says “I’m sorry.”)
- *Competent*: Be sure to know your stuff. Remember your training.
- *Comfortable*: Even if you have to fake it (with or without a client), be comfortable when at the microphone. Even if it’s your first job, pretend you’ve done this a million times before. Take a breath before beginning. Take your time. Enjoy the process. Remember these things, and you’ll sound SO much better!

## **2. Vocal freedom / tension-free read**

Vocal freedom is a vocal quality that makes you sound professional.

A tension-free delivery sounds natural and authentic, and listeners are more apt to remain engaged and trust what you say in your recording. (When tension is apparent in your vocal delivery, listeners are more likely to hear your recording as a “fake” and tune it out.)

Reading without tension means that you are:

- *Vocally loose*: Achieve this by letting your mouth, throat, and voice box be loose. Keep your hands open (not clenched). Drop your shoulders. Ensure your veins are not popping out of your forehead. Simply let your body be free, loose, without constriction. This works well even when performing high-energy scripts. Let it be easy.
- *Physical (using body language)*: Body language helps you sound natural, because we use body language and hand gestures when speaking in real life. Incorporating body language into your vocal delivery helps 99% of voice actors’ sound significantly more authentic. It also helps relieve tension.
- *Uninhibited*: Think you sing better in the shower? That’s because you’re uninhibited when no one can hear you. So do the same when recording ... even if other people are hearing you. Let it go. You’ll sound better!
- *Carefree*: Have fun, let go, enjoy the process, and do not try too hard.

## **3. Be yourself / affectation-free**

As previously noted, casting professionals usually seek an affectation-free delivery ... meaning that “you should generally sound like you.” (Of course, remember that we have many natural deliveries – so “sounding like you” means using whichever of your natural deliveries is appropriate for the given script.)

So, be yourself. And remember that we have many natural “voices.” Your job is to use the most appropriate of your natural voices when recording.

## **CHAPTER 5: FOUNDATION TRAINING**

**So much for overall mindset and planning. Now let's get down to work. To build a successful voice-over career, you need to build a solid foundation.**

### ***In this chapter:***

1. The four vocal components
2. Inflection and pitch
3. Flowing naturally
4. Variety
5. Diction
6. Numbers, web addresses, and more
7. Emotion, character, tone
8. Microphone essentials

This chapter establishes proficiency in vocal technique and aural awareness, allowing you to begin working in the industry. You will 1) gain technique to ensure control of your voice, allowing the producer's direction to be followed precisely, (2) learn how to employ technique reflexively, allowing your delivery to sound natural and confident, and simultaneously be executed quickly, and (3) be able to incorporate emotion, variety, creativity, and character into the technically perfect delivery.

***Please review each section of this chapter in order, and do not skip any parts.***

Once you understand a section, move on to the next section while incorporating what you have previously learned.

**IMPORTANT:** All techniques presented are guidelines, not rules set in stone. As with any voice-over script, there are always exceptions.

## 1. *The four vocal components*

The speaking voice has four components: tone, volume, pitch, and tempo. In real life (natural conversation), we subconsciously use the appropriate amount of each, given the circumstance and intent of our conversation. This changes for each conversation, and throughout the conversation. When reading a voice-over script, it is necessary to do the same.

At recording sessions, members of the production team (the engineer, producer, script-writer, client, etc.) will generally tell you how they prefer the script read. They may suggest the tone of speech, volume, pitch range, tempo and so on. They will work with you to help you find, and use, the correct combination of the four vocal components.

Occasionally the production team will not tell you what vocal style they prefer, because they believe it is self-explanatory ... even though sometimes it is not. In that case, think about the purpose of the script: who the listener is, the intent, and so forth, to determine possible ways that the script could be narrated. Then ask the production team if they have any direction for you. Remember, no matter how talented you are, it is impossible to guess what the producer has in mind ... so always ask. After all, even the best house painter can't guess what colors you prefer.

**IMPORTANT:** Treat the four components independently from one another. In other words, when told to adjust one component, do not let the others change.

### **Here are the four vocal components:**

**Tone:** Tone is the emotion in your voice. It is also known as the character, feeling, and the acting portion of your delivery. For example, everyone has a sad tone, a happy tone, a sarcastic tone, an angry tone, an enthusiastic tone, and so on. In fact, we have a different tone for every adjective in the dictionary. Unless your script requires tonal changes, your tone should remain consistent throughout the recording. In other words, if reading a happy script, remain happy throughout the entire script. This is like natural conversation, where we usually remain in the same tone until a new circumstance occurs.

Examples:

*strong (ESPN promo):*

It's Major League Baseball like you've never seen before!

*nonchalant (commercial):*

I'm here to tell you about an HMO program from HealthNet.

*soft (relaxation guide):*

Breathe in. Breathe out. And again. Now relax your body ...

*friendly (college interactive tour):*

Welcome to UCONN. In the next 15 minutes, you will ...

**IMPORTANT:** Be sure to not let tonal changes affect your pitch, tempo, and volume. For example, when told to increase enthusiasm, aspiring voice talent often get louder and faster. This is not good. In this situation, the producer may say, "Try the read again, this time with the additional enthusiasm, but use the volume and speed that you had for the first read." Try to avoid creating the need for such an extra take, which should not be necessary if you remember this lesson. There are often more productive ways to use that recording time.

**Tempo:** Tempo is the speed of your vocal delivery. Sometimes a faster tempo is necessary, sometimes a slower one. And just as in most everyday conversations, often a fluctuating tempo is most natural.

Examples:

*fast (promotional video):*

Stains and discoloration just disappear! As you see, this product ...

*mid (documentary):*

Here you see the speckled white owl. Notice how the wing span ...

*slow (television commercial):*

Luxurious. (Visual: Plush interior of the car.) Inviting. (Visual: People on the street gazing at the car as it slowly passes by.) Exhilarating. (Visual: The driver smiling while rounding a curve on a beautiful road.) The all new M6 from BMW.

**IMPORTANT:** As with the other vocal components (see “Important” above and below), don’t let tempo changes affect your pitch, tone, and volume. For example, when told to slow down, aspiring voice talent often, unconsciously, decrease their energy level.

**Volume:** Volume is the loudness of your voice. Since most people listen to voice-overs by themselves (for example, you probably listen to radio commercials, audiobooks, documentaries, telephone systems, etc., by yourself), producers generally want you to use the same volume as you do when speaking to someone in real life. However there are times when louder and softer volumes are appropriate.

Whatever volume you start at, it is important to maintain that volume consistently throughout the recording. If your volume changes, it may be difficult for the recording engineer to record you properly. Like a photographer trying to focus on you as you move toward and away from the camera, the engineer will be confronted with an unpredictably changing volume setting. The exception is if a volume change is specified in the script or by the director. In that case, you should warn the engineer where it will occur and you both should do a rehearsal.

Examples:

*loud (car dealer commercial):*

But hurry, these prices are in effect for a limited time only.

*mid (computer training tutorial):*

Next, hit the “forward” button to return to the main menu.

*low (commercial):*

Sensual colors for sensual lips. Revlon introduces ...

**IMPORTANT:** As with the other vocal components (see above), don’t let volume changes affect your pitch, tone, and tempo. For example, when told to lower volume, aspiring voice talent tend to let their energy level decrease and their tempo slow down.

**Pitch:** Pitch is the musical note of your speaking voice. It is also referred to as the tune, and octave of your voice. The music scale, “do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti, do” covers a full range (octave) of pitch, beginning in a low pitch and ending in a high pitch.

The bottom pitch (the first “do” in the musical scale) is known as your base pitch. (In this case, “do” is not necessarily a “C” on the scale. Unless you are emphasizing a word, this “do” is the note around which you naturally hover, generally. Find your base pitch by either going to sing the musical scale ... but stopping before the second note, or by sticking out your tongue and saying, “Ahhh” (as if you were at the doctor), or by holding out your hands in a classic meditation pose and saying, “Ohhhm.”

The range between your lowest pitch and highest pitch is called your “pitch range” (or “range of pitch”). For example, if you speak in a monotone, you speak with a limited pitch range. If your voice is bouncy, or sing-songy, or up-and-down like a roller-coaster, then you speak with a wide (or large) pitch range.

Determining the appropriate pitch range is essential, and is up to you and the production team.

Examples:

*large pitch range (children’s story):*

This is the amazing tale of Hubert and Frog!

*mid (telephone system):*

Press 9 to hear these options again.

*small (commercial):*

We care about you and your loved ones. We’re Aetna.

**IMPORTANT:** As with the other vocal components (see above), don’t let pitch changes affect your tempo, tone, and volume. For example, when told to increase highs and lows, aspiring voice talent often become louder, stronger, and faster, as well. This is not good. The producer may say, “Your range is great, but everything needs to be brought down.”

**NOTE:** A higher pitch range also suggests distance. This is because loud voices are naturally higher in pitch. Therefore the higher the pitch used while reading, the farther away you will appear. This is an important technique, as if a producer needs you to sound loud,

you can simply raise your pitch (instead of raising your volume, which will hurt your throat and could be difficult to record from the engineer's perspective).

To demonstrate, read the following example in a normal low pitch, and then again in a high pitch. Notice that in the higher pitch, it appears farther away.

Example:

Attention shoppers. I'm on top of this building with an important message!

**IN SUMMARY:** Your job is generally to sound natural. That means duplicating a natural way of speaking. Therefore once the producer helps you establish the appropriate voice (the appropriate amount of each component), your volume and tone should stay consistent ... only your pitch and tempo should change. This duplicates how we speak in real life.

## **2. Inflection & Pitch**

Inflection is the upward and downward pitch movement throughout a word or phrase. In natural conversation, we continually, and unconsciously, change pitch to modify emphasis. If we didn't, we would sound monotonous (as in "monotone").

Like every natural conversation, each voice-over script requires a specific amount of pitch range. If the vocal delivery should be enthusiastic, engaging, excited, and so forth, a wide pitch range is appropriate (from low notes to high notes). If the vocal delivery should be soothing, sensual, compassionate, and so forth, a limited pitch range is appropriate (from low notes to slightly higher notes).

Emphasis and de-emphasis (simply the lack of emphasis) are both used in everyday, natural speech. They should therefore be used in voice-over. It is essential that voice talent understand them, learning when and how to use them on command, for two reasons. First, using an appropriate inflection pattern is critical for allowing scripts to sound natural. Second, it is typical for a producer to point out words in a script that need certain types of inflection.

**IMPORTANT:** Remember that voice-over delivery should generally sound like natural conversation. Therefore, like natural conversation, when changing your pitch during your

vocal delivery, your volume (loudness) and tone (emotion) should not change. In other words, “stay in character.”

*Emphasis:* Emphasizing a word (raising pitch on a word) does three things:

- makes the word stand out
- makes the word declarative
- signals the end of a thought

Most commonly, producers ask you to emphasize a word to make it stand out. In fact, this is one of the most common directions given.

**IMPORTANT:** *Producers and directors rarely use the word “emphasis.” They use synonyms. They may ask you to hit the word, or punch the word, or stress, color, goose, milk, or accent the word, etc.*

They all mean the same thing. Producers may even say things like, “This is the money word ... be sure to nail it.” This guidebook will use “hitting” and “hit” to designate emphasis.

To properly hit a word, simply raise your pitch on the accent syllable of the word. Sound confusing? If you do not think about it, you will most likely hit the word correctly, since you hit words correctly in natural conversation all the time without thinking about it. And note that as in natural conversation, your volume and tone should not increase when hitting words.

Newcomers to voice-over often:

- forget to hit words that should be hit
- incorrectly hit words (they raise volume and/or strengthen tone instead of raising pitch)

Practice hitting the following words. Remember that the pitch should be raised on the accented syllable, not on the entire word. Also remember that the volume and tone should remain consistent.

*the first syllable should be raised in pitch*  
elephant

*the second syllable should be raised in pitch*  
rhinoceros

Note that when hitting a word with one syllable, the beginning of it is generally hit.

*the “c” should be raised in pitch*  
car

Following is list of instances where hitting is appropriate. These rules generally follow a natural vocal pattern:

*a. Hit words that the scriptwriter highlights, italicizes, or underlines.*

*radio commercial*

At Hampton Toyota, we always have the lowest prices.

*education video*

In this tutorial, you will learn five ways to increase your real-estate assets.

If the scriptwriter does not highlight words in some way, the voice-over artist has liberty to decide which words to hit.

*TIP: Do not argue with the producer about the words they request that you hit ... even if you are sure that a different word should be hit instead. Your skill includes being able to do whatever the director asks.*

- b. *One of the first words of every phrase and sentence should be hit – this grabs the attention of the listener.*

Try reading this: “Welcome to our company video.”

First, read it without any emphasis – you’ll find that your delivery is monotonous and boring. Then re-read the sentence many times, each time hitting a different word – now you’ll find that your delivery is interesting.

*If the script is*

Benefit from our experience ... the James Company.

*try*

Benefit from our experience ... the James Company.

or

Benefit from our experience ... the James Company.

or

Benefit from our experience ... the James Company.

or

Benefit from our experience ... the James Company.

etc.

**IMPORTANT:** In these examples, the key words are emphasized by their formatting, for illustrative purposes. (In this case, they’re underlined.) In an actual script, they might not be. If no emphasis is indicated, the choices of what to hit are up to you and the director. If key words are indicated, you surely will want to hit them, at least.

- c. *Descriptive words should be hit. These include adjectives, modifiers, and any word that clarifies the point.*

*television commercial*

The Subaru Outback, the fastest 4-wheel drive car available.

*telephony system*

Thanks for holding. While on hold, we'd like to tell you about exciting offers ...

- d. Action verbs should be hit. These are words that direct the listener, define the subject, and help the listener know what to do.*

*radio commercial*

Now you can prevent your clogs from clogging with new Liquid Plumber Drain Cleaner.

*training tutorial*

Next, choose a topic, wait for the picture, and then press the “go” button.

**NOTES:** In the first example, many aspiring voice artists would emphasize “clogs,” since that is what the commercial is about. However the commercial is about preventing clogs. In fact, emphasizing “clogs” showcases the negative ... the thing the listener wants to get rid of. Hitting “prevent” suggests a positive solution. Also, if you’re like most people, you paused between “clogging” and “with” in the first example. This pause is not necessary and creates a choppy sound. Try again without the hesitation – your read will likely sound smoother.

But this particular case raises another issue. Without the pause, it might sound like your sink is “clogging with Liquid Plumber.” That’s certainly not what the advertiser wants people to hear! What to do? Remember that there are other ways to separate phrases besides pausing. For example, you might use tempo. Slow just a bit as you say “clogging” (but not so much as to call attention to the word), and speed up a bit as you say “with Liquid Plumber Drain Cleaner.” And don’t get so absorbed in the speed-up that you forget to hit “Liquid Plumber,” the product name. Speaking of which ...

- e. Hit key words, such as client names, products, subjects.*

Key words must be hit so that the listener knows which words are important. This is akin to product names (Pepsi, Microsoft, Lexus, etc.) being in bigger letters on packaging, billboards, and magazine advertisements.

IMPORTANT: Newcomers often forget that key words, even when articulated clearly, most likely will not stand out unless they are hit. This is because those words will not be unique. Plus they may be covered by background music and sound effects.

*radio commercial*

The NRX from Acura, now with a leather interior standard.

*instructional video*

Thanks for purchasing the Soft-Strider treadmill from Icon Health.  
In this video, you will ...

It is not necessary to hit a key word every time it appears in a script, as that would be redundant. After hitting the key word once, different words may be hit.

*radio commercial*

It's Macy's 50% storewide sale! So at Macy's, save half on every purchase.

*documentary*

The Mayan were a civilized culture. In fact, all Mayan children remained in school until 14 years of age, when they ...

Some key words are made up of two words combined. In this case, treat the key phrase as one word, and hit the word you would in natural conversation. In this example, hit the first word in each key phrase – without hitting the second word in each key phrase.

*instructional manual*

This audio manual discusses the sound system and air conditioning of your new car.

*f. Hit the ends of phrases.*

Hitting the end of a phrase signals the end of a thought. Since we do this in natural conversation, it is necessary to do when reading voice-over scripts, as the goal is to sound natural. Unfortunately, newcomers often drop the pitch at the ends of phrases. “Dropping the ends,” as it is known, sounds unnatural and is the surest indicator that you are reading. (Just listen to an untrained telemarketer.)

Practice hitting the ends of these phrases:

*radio commercial*

It’s the sale of a lifetime ... plus we’re open Monday through Friday.

*museum self-guided tour*

You have now entered the gallery. First notice the statue on your left. It is of ...

When the word at the end of a phrase has previously been emphasized, it does not need to be hit again.

In the following example, since “money” is hit at the end of the first phrase, it doesn’t need to be hit at the end of the second phrase.

*television commercial*

Filene’s has always saved you money, and now they can save you more money.

*g. Multiple key words in a row.*

When multiple key words are in a row, each should be hit. But simply stressing each contiguous word tends to emphasize none of them, and can sound annoying or artificial.

There’s a classic joke, where the director repeatedly asks for an additional take of a commercial, each take to hit yet one more word. By the end of the session, the talent is shouting the entire commercial!

As we’ve noted, for technical reasons increasing your volume is not a good way to hit something. It just makes for a good joke.

But how do you effectively hit multiple words in a row? You use a “pivot.”

A “pivot” is our name for a technique in which the voice actor connects the accented syllables of two words via a smooth low pitch.

It’s like imitating a siren -- wherein your pitch begins high, then glides down low, then glides back up high again. Only in this instance, your voice goes high on the accented syllable of the first word you want to emphasize, goes down low at the end of the word, and fades back up on the accented syllable of the second word you want to emphasize.

The most famous example of a pivot is, “Heeeeeeeeeere’sJohhhhhhhny!” Notice that there is no space between these two words. Like a siren, it’s one, fluid movement. The voice begins high on “Heeeeeee”, then glides down low on “eere’s,” then glides back up to a high on “Johhhhh,” and then glides down low on “ny!.

Generally when two words in a row need to be hit, use a pivot. Practice with these examples. Make sure that both key words are hit – and make sure to use a low pitch between the hit words.

*telephony system*

Thank you for choosing AT&T.

*television commercial*

The Honda Accord, now driving in a town near you.

*corporate video*

Welcome to Advantage Technologies, and to the beginning of a wonderful, new career.

## ***h. Inverting (the opposite of emphasizing a word)***

Inverting a word does two things:

- makes a word a question
- signals that there is more to follow

Industry terms for inverting are “up-talk,” “swooping upwards,” “questioning,” even “high-rising terminal inflective.” This guidebook will use “inverting” to designate this.

We invert words in natural conversation to signal a question or that there is more to follow. We do this by raising the pitch at the end of the word (said otherwise, the word’s accented syllable is lower in pitch). Note that hitting and inverting are opposites.

Practice inverting the following word.

united

Not sure if you did it correctly? By adding a question mark to the end, you will probably invert it correctly.

united?

### *Instances where words are naturally inverted:*

- a. When making a question, the last word of the phrase should generally be inverted. In the following examples, notice how the last word is inverted.

*television commercial*

Did you hear about the One-Day Super Sale?

*children’s education game*

You’re right ... do you know what button to press next?

- b. Series of items are generally inverted in natural conversation, as they signal that there are more items to follow. Note, however, that unless the phrase ends with a question mark, the last item is generally hit – this is because it signals the end of the list.

Read the following sentence out loud. Notice that each item is inverted (signaling more to follow), except for the last item, which is hit (signaling the end).

*radio commercial*

Hurry in, because we're giving away free sunroofs, satellite radios,  
and tire upgrades to the first 100 people!

*EMT training film*

Your training kit includes bandages, gauze, and braces.

c. Exceptions. There are instances when a word should be hit, even though it would be natural to invert it.

*When speaking a key phrase in natural conversation, we naturally tend to invert (uptalk) the first word and hit the second word. However in voice-over delivery, the first word of a key phrase should often be hit (not inverted).*

For example, read the following example naturally. You'll probably invert "united" (as it signals that the word "bank" is to follow) and hit "bank" (as it signals the end). The problem with this is that now, only the word "bank" is emphasized. However since both words are key words, both should be hit. In other words, make sure "united" AND "bank" are hit. The easiest way to hit both words is to use a "pivot" (as was discussed previously).

United Bank

To better illustrate the last example, think about this. If "United Bank" were advertising in a magazine, both words would be emphasized in big letters. However, if United Bank's advertisement was written the way we naturally speak, only the word "bank" would be emphasized – and the magazine reader would only see "bank." Therefore, it is necessary to hit both words ... even though it feels unnatural.

*When reading a list of items in a formal or educational script, each item should generally be hit, even though it is natural to invert it.*

For example, in the following example, three amenities are listed. If spoken naturally, "Bluetooth" and "leather" would be inverted (signaling that there is more to follow), and "sun-

roof” would be hit (signaling the end). However if the producer desires a sophisticated delivery, and/or will have a separate visual for each amenity, then each word should be hit.

*television commercial*

This Lexus comes standard with Bluetooth, leather, and sunroof.

*welcome package*

As a new Citibank member, you will enjoy 24-hour customer service, grace period payoffs, and bonus points.

*TIP: When attempting to hit numerous words in a row, it may be difficult to hit each one (as we are used to inverting each word). A simple technique is to pretend that there is a period after each item. For example:*

*television commercial*

*This Lexus comes standard with Bluetooth. Leather. And sunroof.*

*welcome package*

*As a new Citibank member, you will enjoy 24-hour customer service. Grace period payoffs. And bonus points.*

Remember that that when reading a script that requires an informal delivery, each item should generally be inverted. This is because the sentence is supposed to sound 100% natural.

In the following example, invert each item (uptalk):

*television commercial*

My wife nearly killed me for buying a Lexus, but after I told her it had Bluetooth, leather, and a sunroof, she nearly fainted.

### 3. *Flowing naturally*

In natural conversation, we speak spontaneously. We continuously adjust our pitch, timing, volume, and tone to reveal our thoughts. We say “umm.” We use contractions. We use colloquialisms. All of these unconscious spoken characteristics allow our words to flow and incorporate a natural variety, which in turn makes us sound natural.

Sounding natural helps you to appear credible to the listener. If a voice-over artist sounds unnatural, as if she is reading, he or she will not appear credible. Subsequently, the listener may not listen, or may not believe.

Unfortunately, untrained people tend not to flow the words when reading aloud. There are various reasons. First, most written English (including many scripts) are different from spoken English. The words are not necessarily the vocabulary people use when speaking informally. Second, the written text doesn't include clues as to voice characteristics – pitch, volume, etc., – let alone “non-verbal” utterances such as “umm” and “uh.” And third, untrained voice-over artists habitually read in a “choppy,” disconnected way. This may be because in grade school they learned to read one word at a time, and to pronounce some words in a formal way (e.g., “the” pronounced as “thee”), and their reading-aloud technique never progressed further.

Following are techniques that help flow the script naturally. Remember, since these techniques are generally followed in natural conversation, speaking to the microphone as if it were a friend is a great trick for ensuring a natural flow.

***Connect sounds together.*** Though we connect words in natural conversation that end and begin with the same sound, we often hesitate between these words when reading voice-over. This causes a choppy and disconnected sound.

In the following example, pronounce the “st” once between the words “best” and “stuff”:

*If the script is:*

Snapple ... made from the best stuff on earth.

*it should be read as:*

Snapple ... made from the beststuff on earth.

***Connect words beginning with vowels, instead of pausing before them.*** In natural conversation, we generally connect our words, even when they begin with a vowel. However, when reading, we are inclined to pause before words that begin with vowels. This is known as a “glottal stop.” Technically, it is a momentary closing of the airway by the glottis (at the back of the mouth).

A glottal stop is caused by having too much vocal tension when reading a word beginning with a vowel (as untrained voice-over artists tend to do). Therefore, try to use as little tension as possible when reading (unless the script requires tension).

Glottal stops are more prevalent with words that begin with “a” and “e,” and they make a delivery sound choppy and unnatural.

Note: an exception to the glottal stop is a dramatic pause, which will be discussed later.

Practice reading the following sentence without pausing before words that begin with vowels. In other words, blend all the words together as if they were one long word. For practice, try emphasizing words that begin with vowels without pausing before them, and instead, raising the pitch on them.

*radio commercial*

JCPenney always has every item on sale.

*business documentary*

Since 1992, the American Airlines name has been in nearly every airport around the world.

***Use contractions when the script is informal, as they will make your delivery sound more natural.*** For example, turn “do not” into “don’t.”

One difficult thing about making a script flow naturally is that some scriptwriters do not think to use contractions. But since producers often prefer a natural delivery, they sometimes expect the voice-over artist to turn contractible words into contractions. If you are unsure what the producer may want, ask.

Following is an informal script, where contractions would be desired:

*If the script is:*

At Toyota, you will love what we are all about.

*... it probably should be read as:*

At Toyota, you'll love what we're all about.

When reading a formal script, keeping words un-contracted may be desired.

Mercedes Benz ... we are the best.

Mercedes Benz ... we're the best.

*TIP: The safest bet is to read as written. But if you're unsure it's correct, there's no harm in asking. A producer or director would much rather you ask than have you get it wrong.*

***Use body language (body and facial gestures).*** You may think the listener won't hear the difference, but they will. In real life, we rely on body language and facial gestures to help us communicate our thoughts more concretely. If we spoke without body language and facial gestures, we would sound stiff and contrived. Therefore, these should be used during recording.

Ironically, inexperienced voice-over artists often do not use body language and facial gestures when recording, as they feel that they will look unprofessional moving all about in front of the microphone. The irony is that not using these movements is what makes them appear inexperienced.

*TIP: When you are conscious of using body language, it will feel odd. Practice will remedy this.*

**Read “laterally.”** It is common for a voice-over artist to receive the script just moments before recording it (having no time to rehearse), so you should know how to read laterally. This technique allows you to read a script that you have not rehearsed, and maybe haven’t even had a chance to read. (That’s called “cold copy,” or a “cold read.”). It helps you read stumble-free and sound more natural.

To read laterally, focus two or three words ahead of the word that you are saying. Thus you always see what is coming up next and can be prepared for it. For example,

*If the script is:*  
That is a car?

*And you were not reading laterally, you may have read it like this:*  
That is a car.

After reading the word “car” would you have then realized it should have been read with the inflection of a question. But by then, it is too late.

Learning how to read cold copy is essential. Recall from Chapter 1 that most voice-over work is narration (e.g., a 12-hour audiobook, a one-hour documentary). It is virtually impossible to review and memorize this amount of text prior to recording.

With a short script, hopefully you’ll have an opportunity to analyze it, and make mental or written notes. (See our thoughts about “marking up” copy, later in this chapter.) But only when a script is very short (e.g., a tag) will you likely be able to memorize it prior to recording.

It takes a while to learn the lateral technique. But once it’s mastered, even the most difficult cold copy can be read smoothly, continuously, and flawlessly. It also makes perfect sense. After all, people think in phrases. People speak in phrases. When reading silently, most people read in phrases. The VO pro knows how to read aloud in phrases.

Similarly we:

- Think laterally: We map out thoughts and ideas in our heads often before saying them out loud. For example, imagine you are about to say something, and then someone

abruptly tells you to be quiet. Even though you have not spoken a single word yet, you know what you were about to say. This is because you thought laterally. By thinking laterally, we speak smoothly. Likewise in voice-over, when reading laterally, we read smoothly.

- Walk laterally: If we were to look straight down at our feet, we would bump into things. We would also walk “choppily,” appearing to stagger as we make constant corrections. But because we look ahead, we walk smoothly. We are prepared for the next thing.
- Drive cars laterally: Our eyes are generally looking several seconds ahead. This way, we are prepared for the next obstacle, such as a stop sign, a pothole or a change in traffic pattern. If we didn’t look ahead when driving, we would be on obstacles before having time to prepare for them. At best, we would drive choppily, not smoothly.

To be a good reader, you must be able to read even the most “wordy” scripts smoothly, naturally, and with few stumbles.

Practice with these sentences. (If you read ahead, you’ll read them correctly the first time.)

To demonstrate the power of Tide, we’ll challenge the other leading brand.

To demonstrate, the power of Tide will challenge the other leading brand.

To demonstrate the power, Tide will challenge the other leading brand.

To demonstrate, the powder of Tide will challenge the other leading brand.

#### **4. Variety**

If you can bore someone in a 30-second commercial, think what would happen if they fell asleep listening to an audiobook while driving their car ... Crash!

In spontaneous conversation, we do not simply “say” words. To keep our conversation interesting and entertaining, we add variety to our words. Learning how to add vocal variety to scripts - even boring ones - is an art that voice talent must master.

Another reason it is necessary to learn how to add variety to your delivery is because producers often ask for multiple “takes” of the script – meaning they want you to narrate multiple versions of the same script. Assuming each of your deliveries is different, the

producer has different options to choose from, and can then pick their favorite version. This decision is often made after the recording session is over, well after you're gone.

Often, after listening to all your takes, the producer may ask for a combination of some. For example, "Please read again – I like the speed of take two but the energy level of take four."

By memorizing the following types of variety, you'll be able to impress your clients.

Here are the five ways to add variety:

**1. Use pitch variation to hit different words with different pitches and/or to change pitch from phase to phrase.**

By hitting different words, a great amount of variety can be introduced into your delivery. In the first example below, hit the words "shopping" and "could."

Then re-read the example, this time hitting the words "direct" and "more." Try every combination. Then do the same for the second example.

Remember: Unless the scriptwriter highlights words for you, you have liberty to choose which words to hit. And often, the producer may want to hear different permutations, in order to decide which they prefer.

*television commercial*

By shopping direct, you could save more money!

*information on-hold message*

Did you know you can request certificate rewards? Just ask when we return.

**2. Use dramatic pauses to add variety to your read. A short dramatic pause is also called a "beat."** For example, a producer will say, "Give me a beat before that word."

Dramatic pauses also help emphasize the following word. In other words, instead of hitting a word to emphasize it, insert a pause (space) before it.

Whether you use a dramatic pause to add variety or to emphasize the following word, be sure that the pause is not too long, or it will sound *too* dramatic ... and thus artificial.

In the following example, add a dramatic pause after “not.” Then try a dramatic pause after “unless.” Try a dramatic pause everywhere, one at a time. To be very creative, imagine that there are four burger restaurants in town (Burger Palace, Burger Works, Burger Central, and Burger King), and therefore to distinguish which restaurant you are speaking about, insert a dramatic pause before “King.” Experiment with the second example as well.

*television commercial*

A burger is not a burger, unless it’s from Burger King.

*self-help audiobook*

Great - now that you’ve mastered chords, your next guitar lesson is scales.

**IMPORTANT:** Too many dramatic pauses, or too long a pause, can contribute to choppi-ness. So use dramatic pauses with care, and sparingly. See the discussion of choppiness in Chapter 6.

### 3. *Elongate words to add variety to your delivery.*

Another way to add variety and emphasis is to elongate some words. This technique is especially useful on key words and descriptive words. Sometimes, elongating a word is called “opening up the word” or “lengthening” or “stretching” the word.

Elongating a word is simple. Simply stretch the vowel on the accented syllable of the word. Make sure the word is not overly elongated, or it will sound theatrical.

In both of the following examples, just about every word can be elongated – experiment stretching each one. Just be sure not to elongate more than one or two words within the same sentence, as that generally sounds theatrical and redundant.

*television commercial*

The 200 horsepower, very stylish Camry, with an interior like you've never seen before. Only from Toyota.

*yoga breathing course*

Breathe in. Breathe out. Now relax your shoulders, letting go of all tension from within your body.

Elongation is extra useful on short key words. By slightly elongating the word, this technique gives the listener more time to hear it. For example, read the following sentence twice. Do not elongate the “oo” in “Coors” the first time, and slightly elongate it the second time – you’ll hear how much more clear the word is the second time.

*television commercial*

Up here in the mountains ... we love Coors Beer.

**4. *Vary the tempo of your words, as this adds variety.***

In natural conversation, we continually vary our tempo – even within a single sentence. Doing the same for script reading will make your delivery sound more natural while adding variety.

In these examples, read the first half of the sentence slowly and the second half quickly. Then reverse it.

*public service announcement*

For just dollars a day, you'll help feed hungry children.

*tutorial*

Be aware of the role played by pitch, and keep the copy interesting.

## 5. *Change emotion/character from phrase to phrase.*

In natural conversation, we continually change our emotion, to match our intent. Doing the same when script reading will make your delivery sound more natural while adding variety.

### *radio commercial*

People can give you their word in many ways. But when it comes to something as important as selling your home, you want a commitment in writing.  
That's why at Century 21, we give you our Seller's Service Pledge!

### *Avoid repetitiveness.*

A repetitive vocal pattern is a word or group of words that follow the same intonation (pitch). If used, your delivery will sound boring. Here are two situations where patterns should be avoided.

a. *Avoid phrase patterns.* Notice that the end of this sentence consists of two similar phrases: "know their stuff" and "buy their stuff." Instead of having both "their stuff"s read with the same intonation, add variety so that they sound different from each other. Do the same for the second example.

### *commercial*

The Home Depot ... where people who know their stuff, buy their stuff.

### *corporate training*

In this tutorial, you will learn how to answer customer's questions,  
save your answers, and log them into the database.

b. *Avoid repetitive hitting.* When a key word appears more than once, it may not be necessary to hit each time. In the first example below, "Macy's" appears numerous times. If it is read the same way every time, it will be redundant – therefore, read it differently each time. For example, hit it the first time, invert it the second time, etc. Do the same for the second example.

*commercial*

At Macy's, we strive to save you money. So now at Macy's, get up to 50% off.  
Plus receive a free Macy's scratch-off card for more savings!

*dentist video*

... and that is why flossing is so important. So remember, floss first thing every morning, floss after each meal, and floss before going to bed.

**Lists.** As noted earlier, a list is a group of words or items in series with each other. Each item on a list should generally be read differently, otherwise the list will sound repetitive.

One way to add variety to a list is called the ladder technique – this is where each item goes one step higher in pitch. Another way to add variety is to vary inflection by alternating hitting and inverting words. A third way is to completely vary your pitch; in other words, hit each item at a different pitch.

*commercial*

At the JCPenney one-day, super-day-sale, save 30% on men's clothing, 40% on women's clothing, and up to an amazing 50% on kid's clothing!

*parenting video*

So remember these five steps to good communication:  
listen, understand, believe, console, and suggest.

**IMPORTANT:** When reading a list that is accompanied by a visual (like the examples below), a dramatic pause (beat) is often necessary between each item. This allows time for the visual to change for each item, and therefore gives the viewer time to see each item before the next item appears.

*television commercial*

This Lexus comes standard with Bluetooth, large screen GPS,  
and full-length moon roof.

## *documentary*

In this region, several animals live freely, including the White Spotted Tiger, the Rheingold Kangaroo, the Gray Falcon, and the Desert Toad.

### **5. Diction**

Every natural conversation requires a different level of articulation. It depends upon our listener, our environment, and our intent.

Sometimes we speak formally (enunciate words clearly) – other times we speak informally (colloquially).

The voice talent's job is to determine how formally or informally the script should be presented, and then deliver the read accordingly. For example, the script might require that you sound like a formal, highly educated person. Modify your everyday conversational approach to reflect such a character.

*TIP: Work from an “informal” base – since that’s the way you speak most naturally. In other words, pronounce words as they are spoken in genuine conversation, and then tailor your manner as necessary to match the formality level that the script or situation requires.*

Or an example of a situational need would be if the recording will be heard by an international population (e.g., language tutorials, museum guided tours, international airline videos, etc.). Such reads should generally be especially clear, as many of these listeners may not speak your language as their mother tongue.

Yet, a local bank commercial in a small suburban location, that is advertising to the local population, may be more colloquial.

This is more difficult than it appears. Following are some reasons why:

- Most voice talent tend to over-enunciate, with the intent of sounding extra clear. This often sounds unnatural and, in many situations, is not preferred by producers.
- Scriptwriters often write scripts formally – without using contractions, colloquialisms,

etc. – and yet expect the voice talent to read the script with contractions and colloquialisms. How is the talent to know this intent?

- A producer may ask the voice talent to get rid of all colloquialisms ... yet sound natural.
- Scripts are often written in the third person, yet we naturally speak in the first and second person.

*Exercises:* The following scripts should be read formally, as they need to be clear and/or may be heard by foreigners.

*television commercial*

Compassion and trust ... qualities you can expect from Aetna Insurance.

*airline safety video*

Your seat may be used as a flotation device  
in the unlikely event of an in-flight emergency.

These following scripts should be read informally, sounding natural and conversational.

*radio commercial*

At B.K.'s, we're all about great taste!

*on-hold message*

Thanks for calling Milford Bank, your hometown bank.  
We're glad you're calling and will pick up shortly.

Regardless of the amount of formality required in your delivery, there are a few general "diction guidelines" that apply for most every script.

*a.* Pronounce "the" with a soft "e," and pronounce the word "a" with a soft "a." This is how we generally say these words in natural conversation. Unfortunately, when reading

aloud, people often use hard (long) vowels, for a variety of reasons. Ironically, this is the one of the biggest indicators that we are reading.

Practice reading the following examples incorrectly (with hard vowels), and then correctly (with soft vowels). Notice how much more natural they sound with soft vowels.

*commercial*

The deal of a lifetime!

*documentary*

The gorilla is a mammal that lives in the forest.

Exception: When the word following “the” begins with a vowel, “the” should be pronounced with a long “e.”

*commercial*

The experts at Miller Ford offer the experience you need!

*documentary*

The iguana is found over a large geographic area, from Mexico to southern Brazil, to the islands of the Caribbean.

*b. Articulate long or complex words clearly enough for the listener to understand them.* Remember that it is often difficult for you to notice a slurred word, because you have the script to lean on. You already know what the word is. Your listener doesn’t have that luxury, and has only one chance to catch what you said.

Also remember that the listener often hears background music behind your voice-over, and noise in their environment, making it more difficult to distinguish slurred words. So think about the listener. Ensure that your delivery is clear enough for them.

To pronounce a challenging word, break it up into separate syllables, concentrating on each syllable and pronouncing it individually. For example, if “particularly” is particularly

difficult to pronounce, say it with a space between each syllable, like this:

par ... tic ... u ... lar ... ly

Then, connect the syllables, while still concentrating on each one individually:

particularly

Here are some common words that are often mispronounced:

probably, regularly, particularly, digital, citizen, costs, desktop, general, temperature, government, environment, perspective, hospital, nuclear, Internet, espresso

c. *Articulate alliterative and other awkward phrases (tongue twisters) clearly, as this allows the listener to understand the phrase.*

Tongue twisters are those in which similar words and sounds are connected. They often occur because the scriptwriter focused more on the content than on the need for voice talents to delivery it clearly.

Ironically, each word of an awkward phrase can be articulated clearly and easily on its own. The challenge is connecting the words clearly.

To read such a phrase clearly, first break it up into separate words, and concentrate on each word and pronounce it individually. For example, if the following sentence is difficult to read, pronounce each word with a space between it, like this:

It's ... the ... One ... Day ... Super ... Sale ... at ... Sears, ...  
starting ... this ... Saturday ... at ... 7am!

Then, connect the words while still concentrating on each word individually:

It's the One-Day Super Sale at Sears, starting this Saturday at 7am!

Tongue twisters are great to use for practice. Here are some useful ones:

Which wristwatches are Swiss wristwatches?

Sally sells seashells by the seashore.

*d. Do not over-articulate, or your delivery will sound contrived and unnatural.* While it may seem obviously a good idea to pronounce every sound very clearly, it is more important that the delivery sounds natural.

Following are words that are often over-articulated:

effective (The first “e” should be soft, not hard.)

often (The “t” should not be pronounced.)

vegetable (The “et” should not be pronounced.)

*e. Determine how formal / informal the pronunciation should be, and adjust accordingly. Use your discretion.*

For example, sometimes the letter “t” should be pronounced, and sometimes it should not.

INFORMAL: In the commercial below: do not pronounce the “t” in “mountain.” In the promotional video below, do not pronounce the “t” in “out” and the second “t” in “Internet.”

*commercial*

Up here in the mountains, we love Coors Beer.

*promotional video*

So check us out – we offer the fastest way to the Internet!

FORMAL: In the commercial below, pronounce the “t” in “commitment” and “Vincent.”  
In the documentary below, pronounce the “t” in “mountain.”

*commercial*

Service and commitment ... what you expect from St. Vincent Hospital.

*documentary*

The Atlas Mountains stand over 13,000 feet high.

*f.* *Words with multiple pronunciations often occur in scripts.* When deciding which pronunciation to use, the rule of thumb is to use the dictionary’s first phonetic pronunciation, as that is the officially preferred pronunciation. However, sometimes in VO, you might chose the approved alternative, which might actually be equally or more popular. Here are examples:

interesting: pronounce “in-trest-ing”, not “in-ter-est-ing”

comfortable: pronounce “comfter-ble”, not “com-fort-able”

February: pronounce “feb-u-ary”, not “feb-ru-ary”

But if you do choose to say “in-trest-ing,” do not let it degenerate to “inch-rest-ing.”

*TIP: Sometimes different pronunciations of a word are equally acceptable. In these cases, the producer has final say of which version will be used. Sometimes, the producer may ask to hear both versions to help them choose. Once decided, it is necessary to remain consistent throughout the entire script (in other words, pronounce the word the same way each time). Following are examples.*

*finances: fuh-naan’-sehs, phi-naan’-sehs, or phi’-naan-sehs*

*details: dih-tayls’, or dee’-tayls*

*data: day’-teh, or dah’-teh*

*envelope: ehn’-veh-lohp, or ahn’-veh-lohp*

- g. *The use of contractions is generally preferred in informal scripts.*

*For example:*

You know when it is hot ... I grab a cold 7UP.

*... should be read like this:*

Ya' know when it's hot, I grab a cold 7UP.

- h. *Lazy mouth occurs when undesired sounds are made before pronouncing "hard" consonants.* For example, people often make an "mmm" before saying the word "bye." (If you haven't noticed people saying "mmm-bye," listen for it ... you'll be sure to hear it.)

Unfortunately, while lazy mouth is very common, it is usually not preferred by producers. It's therefore smart to learn how to rid yourself of it.

There are 3 common lazy mouth situations. They are:

- "m" sounds before words beginning with "b":

*say:*

Brought to you by Aetna.

*instead of:*

mmm-Brought to you by Aetna.

- "n" sounds before words beginning with "j"

*say:*

JCPenney introduces their one-day sale.

*instead of:*

nnn-JCPenney introduces their one-day sale.

- “n” sounds before words beginning with “d”

*say:*

Duracell batteries are the most trusted battery.

*instead of:*

nnn-Duracell batteries are the most trusted battery.

To rid lazy mouth from your vocal delivery, read one of the above exercises while exaggerating lazy mouth. (In other words, read the example very incorrectly.) While articulating the lazy mouth sound, notice the position of your tongue and mouth. Then read the same example again with a smaller amount of lazy mouth. Then read again, with no lazy mouth. Now you should have the ability to notice when lazy mouth appears in your delivery, as well as the ability to correct it.

## **6. Numbers, web addresses, and more**

Numbers are a big part of voice-over delivery, as many scripts contain them. Knowing what to do with them is crucial. The following examples will prepare you for most scripts.

*Many numbers can be read in different ways.* When numbers are present in your script, do not stop and ask the producer how they prefer them delivered. Instead go with your gut instinct. This way, you have a good chance of reading them the way the producer prefers it. (And you’ll also eliminate an edit for the engineer!) This is because the producer typically wants voice talent to read numbers the way you would speak them naturally.

Remember, the rule of thumb is to go with your gut instinct instead of stopping the recording and asking the producer how they prefer it.

The following numbers can be read multiple ways:

- Call us at 203-334-3343

Call 2 zero 3 or Call 2 “oh” 3.

- You can win \$100!  
win a hundred bucks! or win one hundred dollars!
- This Ford pick-up comes with a 350-horsepower engine.  
a 300 and 50 hp engine or a 3-50 hp engine or a 300-50 hp engine

*Telephone numbers, e-mail addresses, website addresses, etc., should be delivered clearly.* However since voice actors often memorize this information during the recording session, they tend to read it too fast for the listener to catch and retain. (Think of how annoying it is when someone leaves their telephone number too quickly on your voice mail.) Read clearly – remembering that the listener does not know the information. For a phone number, the proper technique is to pause after the area code and prefix. These pauses are usually very short. For example:

*Read:*

Call us at 1-800-123-4567.

*Like this:*

Call us at 1800 ... 123 ... 4567.

Notice that it is not necessary to pause after the first digit, “1.”

However telephone numbers often need to be read quickly (to fit time). In this case, instead of pausing between the three sections, begin each section of the telephone number at a different pitch, as this helps differentiate the various sections.

*When telephone numbers spell words, the voice talent should generally say the word, as opposed to spelling it out.* This is because a word is normally easier to remember than the individual letters.

In the rare instance the producer wants the word spelled out, she will generally use dashes between each letter.

In the following example, say the word “shoe-town” the first time, and spell it out the second time:

Call us 1-800-shoe-town. That’s 1-800-s-h-o-e-t-o-w-n.

*Most menu-prompt (voice-menu) systems require that numbers be read very clearly. This means your delivery should be highly articulate.*

Also since menu-prompt systems are concatenated (combined from separate component words or phrases), producers typically ask you to record each number with three different inflections, so that the automated system can sequence them into a more natural-sounding delivery. That is, by alternating the inflections upon playback, the sound is less repetitive and is instead more humanlike.

For example, if the computer needs to announce: The number is 123-456-7890.

The “1” will have upwards inflection, the “2” straight inflection, the “3” downwards inflection, etc.

A typical menu-prompt script looks like this:

*Read the following, each with upwards, straight, and downwards inflections:*

digits 0 though 9

10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90

hundred

thousand

*Read the following with downwards inflection only:*

and

the number is

I'm sorry, I did not understand.

Please enter the number again.

You pressed

Press 1 if correct

Press 2 if incorrect

## **7. Emotion, character, tone**

In real life, we consciously, and subconsciously, display different emotions by changing the way we deliver our words. In fact, it is normal to exhibit hundreds of different emotions each day. Emotions range from happy to sad, strong to timid, energetic to tired, melodramatic to nonchalant, sarcastic to humble, etc.

In the voice-over industry, emotion is often referred to as “tone of voice.” Sometimes, it is called the “delivery,” or “character.” A producer may request a happy tone, a sincere tone, and so forth.

*TIP: Since every script requires a different tone, the more versatile your delivery is, the more voice-over work you can obtain.*

This would seem easy, considering that most emotions are used in daily life, and we all encounter a wide range of characters. But for some people, getting “into character” is a challenge.

**IMPORTANT:** An error commonly made by voice talent is: not “thinking before reading.” In other words, they haven’t thought through the script well enough to use the appropriate character, or they take too long to find the right character, or they lose the character while reading, either because they’ve stopped thinking like the character, or they didn’t think the character through well enough before starting.

The best way to establish the character is to lose all inhibitions. In other words, let yourself go, and enjoy reading the script. If there remains any tension, nervousness, hesitation, or stiffness in the body while reading, the character will not sound real and convincing.

Have fun with this - this is the most fun part of voice-over!

*The technique to help “get into character” is to imagine the script’s situation in your head ... and then mimic it.* For example, read the following examples, and think about how each would sound in real life ... then do the same aloud.

Three IMPORTANT points should be made clear.

1. In natural conversation, we use the appropriate delivery immediately – we do not need to “warm up” in real life.
2. In real life we switch immediately from one appropriate delivery to another. Therefore, if a producer gives you two scripts that each require a different tone, you should be able to go from one delivery to another without needing “warm-up” time.
3. Anyone who listens to you can determine what tone you are using ... therefore you need to use the appropriate tone, or your delivery will not sound natural.

Try reading these scripts – be sure to use the appropriate tone.

*funeral home commercial*

At Beyond-Life, we care about you, and your family.

*lottery commercial*

I won! Wow! The Tri-State Lottery ... someone’s gotta win!

*perfume commercial*

Drive ’em wild, with “Seduction,” from Revlon!

*cartoon promo*

Hey kids, its Mopey, your favorite donkey, Sunday at 9 am!

*Unfortunately, many voice-over artists do not get into character quickly enough and instead slowly “fade into character.” This will not please the producer.*

Therefore, BEFORE READING A SINGLE WORD OUT LOUD, use the “4 Voice Fundamentals” (below) to establish the character. These voice attributes are the major ingredients of every character. Different permutations will generate different characters.

As discussed earlier:

1. ***Pitch range:*** Range of pitch helps indicate the amount of energy and excitement in a character.

Typically, an emphatic, excited, or upbeat character will require a large pitch range, while a soft, serious, compassionate, or sad character will require a smaller pitch range (almost a monotone).

*large pitch range:*

Welcome to the most amazing show in history!

*small pitch range:*

As I watched her die, I too felt like dying.

2. ***Tempo:*** This also dictates the amount of enthusiasm in a script. Tempo should match the “feel” of the copy. If the copy is upbeat, excited, or vigorous, use a faster tempo. If the copy is sad, emphatic, serious, or sentimental, use a slower tempo.

*fast tempo:*

But hurry, these prices are in effect for a limited time only.

*slow tempo:*

It took years, but finally, I found a broker willing to listen to me.

3. **Tone:** Tone portrays the emotion. A strong tone is jarring, powerful, announcing, and robust. A soft tone portrays an intimate, sad, warm, and seductive character.

*strong tone:*

As we head into 2019, we will remain #1!

*soft tone:*

What my family needs is an insurance agent we can count on.

4. **Volume (dynamic range):** This attribute shows emotion. A loud volume suggests anger, excitement, and irritation. Soft volume suggests intimacy, warmth, and affection.

*loud volume:*

Hey that's my kid who just scored ... that Power-Bar really paid off!

*quiet volume:*

Show your love with a bouquet from FTD.

EMOTIONS OFTEN CHANGE: Emotion happens in the moment, so from moment to moment a person's emotion can change. In an actual conversation, someone doesn't know what they're going to say next – it depends on whatever thought came just before. (No matter if it was theirs or the other person's.) In other words, each phrase or sentence is a new thought, modifying, or adding to, or building on what came previously. This means each thought carries its own "emotion." It's usually an almost subconscious transition, but it's there.

Similarly, in many scripts, especially those that tell stories (audiobooks, some commercials, cartoons, and so on), each sentence carries a different thought. In these scripts, your emotions should also progress, however subtle the changes. The flow of emotions – an "emotional progression" – is key to making a script interesting, and keeping your chosen

tone relevant to the listener and what you're saying.

But be careful. The difference from sentence to sentence is often a subtle distinction. So think of it more as a mind-set, and don't overdo this technique. Adding too much emotion will sound theatrical, even silly ... and wrong!

## **8. Microphone essentials**

It is the microphone that captures your voice. Therefore understanding it and knowing how to use it to your advantage can greatly enhance your voice-over delivery. It can also enhance your image as a professional in the booth. Not knowing these essentials can quickly mark you as a beginner.

Professional voice talent refer to microphone technique as "working the mic." Following are techniques that should be employed during every recording session.

**Placement:** The placement of the microphone is directly related to sound quality. Engineers therefore precisely place the microphone in a location, relative to your mouth, based upon your voice and the desired sound for the narration.

The microphone generally faces your nose, neck, mouth, or cheeks. Occasionally it is above you, sometimes to the side, and sometimes even placed below your mouth.

Do not assume that the engineer is incompetent if the microphone is not where you expect it should be. Nor should you try to move to where the microphone is. Instead, remain centered with the music stand, and leave the rest up to the engineer.

**Lateral movements:** It is crucial that you remain "on-axis" (in front of the microphone) to ensure a consistent tone. Moving to either side of the microphone will create drastic tonal changes – making your voice sound muffled, as without treble (clarity). This is known as being "off-axis" from the microphone.

One exception is if a producer desires a muffled sound, as if you're speaking through a door. Then speaking off-axis is perfect.

***Proximate movements:*** Moving closer to and farther away from the microphone will create drastic volume (amplitude) changes. It is essential that you remain the same distance from the microphone to ensure a consistent volume.

***Proximity effect:*** As you move closer to a directional microphone, the type most engineers use, the fuller, richer, and more bassy (less treble) your voice will be. This is known as “proximity effect.”

When a full-bodied, sexy, or deep tone is required, use proximity effect to your advantage – stand about 3 to 4 inches from the mic to achieve this full sound. When a thinner sound is desired, try standing 6 to 8 inches away.

***NOTE:*** When standing close to the microphone, you are more prone to “pop.” Popping is when a powerful burst of air from your mouth overloads and distorts the microphone. This mostly occurs on “plosives” (words that begin with “p,” “b,” and “t.”) For these words, either move a few inches further away from the microphone, or lessen the volume of air leaving your mouth.

Microphone etiquette is an attribute engineers welcome. Therefore voice talents who are considerate and respectful of engineer’s microphones have a greater chance of being hired again.

Always remember the following:

***Never touch the microphone or the microphone stand.*** The positioning of the microphone is critical — slight movements can drastically affect the sound quality. So after the engineer places the microphone, do not change it.

If the position of the microphone causes a shadow on your script, or is too high or low for your comfort, simply ask the engineer to adjust it.

Also, touching the microphone can create a very loud sound in the control room (the engineer’s room) if the speakers are turned up. This can damage the speakers and the engineer’s ears.

***Never blow into or tap on the microphone (as characters in movies do during sound checks).***

First of all, microphones are very fragile - a slight touch may damage them.

Secondly, microphones are very sensitive. They're intended to pick up and amplify sounds coming from a few inches away – and they do this very well. So when the sound is created at the microphone, it will be overly amplified – possibly causing damage to the recording room's speakers and in your headphones (damaging your ears). It is, again, best to not touch the microphone.

***Never hang the headphones on the microphone stand.*** First, this can cause feedback. Feedback is an audio loop that produces a high-pitched squealing sound. It occurs when a headphone is too close to a microphone. It is caused by the headphones' sound being picked up by the microphone, amplified, sent back to the headphones, then back to the microphone — creating a never-ending and quickly loudening loop. This loop will eventually destroy the speakers – and your hearing.

Second, when you hang headphones on a microphone stand, they could fall off and break.

## **CHAPTER 6: ADVANCED TRAINING**

**Maybe we should call this “Advanced Fundamentals” – because much of this chapter is aimed at the advanced beginner. It will build your performance capabilities, expanding your range and marketability. But this chapter is also valuable to the working pro – in case you missed any of these techniques in your training, or through the distractions of work have forgotten to stay on your toes.**

### ***In this chapter:***

1. Mental and physical preparation
2. Copy analysis ... on your own
3. Copy analysis ... with the creative team
4. Delivery / character development
5. Valuing words
6. Mouth noises and breathing techniques
7. Diction
8. Flow / smoothness
9. Timing
10. Hitting
11. Smile
12. Variety
13. Consistency / valuing words
14. Punctuation
15. Key words
16. Multi-person scripts
17. Auditions

## 1. *Mental and physical preparation*

“Talking on egg shells.”

Being calm and relaxed during a recording session can greatly aid voice talent in sounding natural.

- Nervousness is an obstacle that affects newcomers as well as professionals. Its symptoms are severe, and can cause any or all of the following:
- Breathing problems: Unless breathing is even and relaxed, the outflow of air will not be consistent. This causes the voice talent to run out of air in the middle of sentences, introducing gasps of air into the recording which are annoying for engineers to remove.
- An unstable vocal quality: Nervousness will cause the throat to tighten, resulting in a higher pitched voice, which is unnatural, and leading to a choppy and stumble-prone delivery.
- Hesitance in the delivery: A lack of confidence is audible to anyone, whether consciously or unconsciously. Hesitance causes stutters, stumbles, and an unnatural flow.
- A tendency to lose concentration: Once concentration is lost, it is very difficult to regain it. Without concentrating, there is a strong chance of not following the producer’s directions.

These symptoms are exacerbated the more nervous the voice talent is. In fact, the worse the symptoms, the more difficult it is to overcome them.

Hence, the best solution is not to be nervous in the first place.

By employing the following series of breathing and relaxation exercises, voice talent can control “butterflies” from the start and remain composed throughout the recording.

- En route to the recording session, take slow, deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth. Sense the body’s reaction.
- At the recording studio, but prior to recording, breathe lightly in through the nose and out through the mouth. If possible, leave the studio and take some deeper breaths, again in through the nose and out through the mouth, this time vocalizing exhalations (mixing air and sound - as in “aahhhh”). Sense the body’s reaction.

- In front of the microphone (both before the red recording light goes on and in between takes), breathe lightly in and out through the mouth. Close the eyes, sip a drink, and sense the relaxation of the voice. It is essential to be relaxed when reading in front of a group of people - especially when all focus and eyes are on you. In fact, part of a professional athlete's training includes learning how to disregard cheering (or booing) fans.

The way to remain calm is to incorporate the previous relaxation techniques with the following exercises:

***At home, with your eyes closed, envision yourself reading in front of a large group of people, and notice how easy it is to remain calm.*** Practice this exercise every day, but each time in a different setting.

For example, imagine standing in front of the microphone and reading a national television commercial with five people watching you and the producer saying, "You must get it right this time!"

Then, the next time you practice, imagine sitting down, reading a documentary for 10 people, in a low-pressure recording session.

Next time you practice, imagine having 5 different producers all shouting contradictory comments at you.

If you practice with enough different scenarios, you should have experience for each job that you obtain. In other words, whatever situation you find yourself in, you will have already "been there, done that."

***Watch public speakers presenting speeches (for example, the President delivering an Address to the Nation), and notice how relaxed and in control they are.*** Tell yourself that you will be that calm. Continue to remind yourself, if necessary.

***Practice reading in front of large groups of people.*** For example:

- Read for children at school
- Read for children or senior citizens at libraries
- Read for the blind at libraries or at the headquarters of organizations for the blind. (This is a good way to learn how to deal with reading in front of people, since the blind are not staring at you, as producers will.)

## 2. Copy analysis ... on your own

Generally, the voice talent receives the script and is given a few minutes to review it. Take advantage of that time by analyzing the copy.

By following the copy analysis steps below, voice talent can be better prepared for the actual recording.

*To begin, read the script to yourself as if you were reading for pleasure.* In other words, try not to think about the delivery the producer will request.

*TIP: If the copy is long, glance at the beginning, middle, and end of it to get a sense of the entire piece.*

**Read the script a second time.** This time, think about the following 4 aspects:

1. *Creative analysis:* Determine what the overall creative concept is.
  - What is the overall “feel” of the copy (e.g., formal, informal, etc.)?
  - Which words are key words?
  - Will there be accompanying audio? If so, what will it sound like?
  - Will there be accompanying visual? If so, what will it look like?
2. *Marketing analysis:* Determine what the overall marketing concept is.
  - What is the intent of the copy (e.g., to sell a product, give information)?
  - Who will the audience be (e.g., children, adults, etc.)?
  - Where will it be heard (e.g., radio, TV, video, telephone, etc.)?

3. *Tone/character analysis:* Determine what tone delivery will be required.
  - Is the copy in the first person or third person?
  - What emotion type is necessary (e.g., funny, sad, caring, etc.)?
  
4. *Alternative analysis:* Be prepared to deliver different styles.
  - Your analysis may be very different from that of the creative team, and therefore being prepared with an alternative version may be beneficial.
  - Even if the creative team liked the results of your analysis, they may request an alternative take so that they have more to choose from.

**IMPORTANT:** ALWAYS MARK UP YOUR COPY! A pencil is among the most useful tools in your voice-over kit. You can't focus on thoughts if you are simultaneously trying to remember every nuance you had planned for expressing them. So every experienced voice talent has his or her own sort of short-hand for making notes on scripts. This notation process is called "marking up" the copy.

Among things your copy mark-up should indicate are:

- where you plan to take each breath
- other pauses
- places NOT to pause
- changes in inflection
- changes in tempo
- anything else that will help you get through the script without distraction or error

There are certain mark-up conventions (marks) typically used, but what you choose to use doesn't matter. The symbols and scratches are meant only for you, so you can use any marks or system you want. It's more important that your mark-up system be consistent from script to script. Before long, you'll no longer have to think about what each of your marks means – you'll see them, but following them will become automatic. So you can focus on your thoughts.

### 3. Copy analysis ... with the creative team.

After reviewing the script, the creative team will describe the style of delivery required. It is their job to ensure that you sound great. It is your job to follow their directions precisely.

The creative team will review the creative, marketing, and character concepts with you.

Listen carefully. You may find that your interpretation was right on the money, or maybe it was far off. If you were off, be adaptable.

Sometimes, it may be difficult to grasp the concepts the creative team furnishes. In fact, you may feel confident that the way you're being instructed will sound absurd.

However, keep in mind that once your voice recording is mixed with other voice-over artists, music, sound effects, visuals, etc., the read should work. Regardless, it is not your place to comment unless you are prompted for input.

Then it is time to interrogate the production team. This is the time to ask any questions in reference to the script and its delivery. Asking now is better than asking in midst of the actual recording.

Here are typical questions that may be asked:

- How is this word pronounced?
- Should I read this part?
- So you want me to sound sincere, yet still use a strong tone of voice?
- How long should this be?
- Can you tell me what kind of music will be playing in the background?

*TIP: The team may cause you to change your initial analysis, and you'll need to change your mark-up. Sometimes, you, yourself will decide to change something. Or you'll want to take an entirely different copy approach. Now you know why to use a pencil during the session, not a pen. And why to bring the eraser.*

### **3. Delivery/character development**

After the copy has been analyzed, it is time to establish the delivery/character.

Part of a voice talent's job is to establish an appropriate delivery. Once mastered, you appear professional, experienced, and polished. This section will discuss how to develop and maintain an appropriate delivery.

To begin, here are errors voice talent often make during their recording sessions:

- taking too long to develop the appropriate delivery
- not using the appropriate delivery from the beginning of the script
- not maintaining the delivery

After showing up at the recording studio, members of the creative team (producer, copywriter, engineer, and client) work with you to develop the intended delivery. This is based upon factors such as who will listen to the completed product, what its purpose is, where it will be played. While you'll have as much time as necessary to develop the correct delivery, it is always best to do it as quickly as possible.

The production team will give you directions like "You need to be softer and more emotional," or "Give us a bit more smile," or "Try lowering your pitch."

The production team may even attempt to demonstrate the required delivery to you, also called a "line read." If this happens, listen carefully to their voices. Try to pick up the subtle nuances they demonstrate.

Remember that their voices may not be trained, so use their example only as the framework for your character. Don't simply mimic them.

Sometimes, you'll be requested to use a certain delivery sound that you had included on your demo.

By taking the following steps, an experienced voice-over artist can just about "nail" the delivery on the first take.

*Conjure up a mental image of the finished recording as if a professional had recorded it.*

Then mimic it. By creating and mimicking this mental image, development of the delivery should be easier.

To conjure up the mental image, concentrate on two items:

- Audio: Imagine you were the audience, and were listening to a voice-over artist reading the script. What would the voice-over artist sound like? What type of delivery would be used? Would there be music playing in the background? If so, what kind?
- Visual: Compose a visual scene that helps you establish the mood of the copy. What type of characters would you see? What would the visuals look like?

*Think about the application of the voice-over.* For example:

- If the voice-over is for a visual (such as a documentary, children's picture-book, etc.), then the delivery should be on the slower side. This is so the viewer has time to take in the visual as well as the audio.  
But if there is no visual (as with a radio commercial, voice-mail, etc.), the delivery should be faster. This way it will not drag for the listener. To observe this, watch a television documentary with your eyes closed. The voice-over will appear too slow. However, with your eyes opened, the speed will seem appropriate.
- A radio commercial will generally require more variety and energy than a television commercial. This is because the only thing on the radio commercial is the voice, as opposed to a television commercial, which has a visual to help hold the attention of the audience.

*Recall a situation in which you naturally used the required delivery.* For example, if you need to record a funny commercial, think of a funny joke. This mind-set makes it significantly easier to develop a fine-tuned character sound.

*Create the delivery by using the 4 components of our voice: pitch, tempo, tone, and volume.*

*Manipulate the delivery so that it is neither overdone nor underdone.* But beware: there is a very fine line between the two.

Generally, voice-over artists feel that they are employing more character than they actually are. In fact, the producer typically needs to direct the voice-over artist to give more character, so that the desired character level is achieved.

However, then the common tendency of the voice-over artist is to over-compensate and give too much.

If you're unsure of how much character to give, begin with too much, as that will most likely be appropriate. And on the rare occasion when it is too much, you will impress the producer by demonstrating an ability to cover a large range - and that could lead to additional work.

*Develop a "lead-in" (also known as "pre-sentencing").* A lead-in is a word or phrase that you think (without actually saying it) prior to reading the script. This acts as a warm-up, and makes it easier to establish the character on the first word.

This is a common technique in the industry, because establishing the appropriate delivery on the first word is difficult. Without employing a lead-in, it is common for the first word to be in the wrong delivery. Producers will not accept this.

Very often, a lead-in may be as short as, "Ya'-know," or "Listen," or "Okay."

Practice reading the following sentences. Notice that in the first example, the first word will not be as full of character as it will be on the second example.

script:

I was walking into my bank, and the teller said something about free ...

now add a lead-in:

It was amazing, I was walking into my bank, and the teller ...

## **5. Valuing words**

The practice of giving every word its due is known as valuing words. In other words, not a single word of the script should be "thrown away" or "swallowed." Read the following examples, and make sure that every word is valued.

Throughout the world, our company has thrived.

## **6. Mouth noises and breathing techniques**

In actual conversation, mouths produce extraneous noises. While these noises go unnoticed in real life, recording equipment often amplifies them to a volume that can be detrimental to a recording. (See “compressor” in the section “Recording Studios” for an explanation of this.)

By avoiding these extraneous noises, you will give the engineer less to edit out of the recording, therefore creating a greater chance of repeat business.

The following section will illustrate how to keep extraneous noises under control.

***Lip smacks occur every time we open and close our mouths.*** This is a (generally) faint “smack” noise. This sound is only noticeable when it occurs in unnatural places. And there are three instances when we unnaturally close and open our mouths:

- Prior to recording, there will be a tendency to quickly close and open your mouth before beginning. To prevent this smack noise at the beginning of the recording, keep your mouth open for at least 2 seconds before recording.
- Some people have a habit of closing their mouths between sentences. This causes a smack noise between every sentence. Keep your mouth open between sentences, as you do in natural conversation.
- It is intuitive to close the mouth at the completion of a very important phrase or sentence. The intent of closing of the mouth is to create a more dramatic effect, which will signify how important the sentence was. Do not do this. Instead of creating a dramatic effect, the “smack” comes across sounding odd to the listener, and adds noise that the engineer has to edit out.

***Many people have wet mouth, a recording problem in which wet, “clammy” mouths produce “click” noises.*** (See “wet mouth” under “Recording Sessions” for remedies.)

***Dry mouth is another recording obstacle many people have.*** Dry mouth also produces “click” noises. (See “dry mouth” under “Recording Sessions” for remedies).

*During normal conversation, we take breathing for granted.* Since breathing is necessary, making it work to your advantage is key. Most importantly, try not to think about it, as this will most likely allow you to read without a breathing problem. Once you are conscious of breathing, breathing problems become more pronounced.

In the field of voice-over, there are three times when breathing can be detrimental to a recording:

1. Right before recording, there is an inclination to take a deep breath, in order to have enough air for the entire sentence. However, this is not necessary in natural conversation, nor should it be necessary in voice-over.  
To prevent this unnatural breath noise, take a natural-sized breath, but take it two seconds before recording. This ensures that there will not be a breath noise so close to the first word of the script that the engineer cannot edit it out.
2. When reading, we often lose sense of the best places to breathe, and we wind up with breaths in unnatural places. These breaths sound unnatural and make the recording sound choppy and stilted.

Reading laterally (see “natural flow” under “Foundation Training” in Chapter 5) will help tremendously. Unnatural breaths do not occur in natural conversation, because we speak extemporaneously - that is, we assemble complete thoughts in our heads, including the appropriate pauses for breathing, before saying them out loud. This allows us to take breaths in natural places.

If you run out of air when recording, there is not much to do. Even if you try to make it to the last word, the words will not sound natural. Plus, the longer you hold in your breath, the quicker you will run out of air again in the next sentence.

3. When reading scripts written without enough punctuation marks, you’ll notice a tendency to run out of air. Therefore, adding punctuation marks is often necessary (see “punctuation” below).

There are two exercises that can teach the body to have greater control of the intake and release of air, allowing longer periods of reading without running out of air. By employing them, recording sessions will go smoother, and the engineer will have fewer edits.

- any cardiovascular exercise
- air-controlling exercise: Inhale deeply, hold the air in for five seconds, and then let it out slowly while saying the alphabet. By doing this regularly, you will increase how many letters of the alphabet you can say on a single breath.

**Note:** Please consult a physician before employing these breathing exercises.

## **7. Diction**

Certain sounds are challenging to articulate clearly. But since one of the voice-over artist's jobs is to articulate clearly, it is essential to learn how to pronounce these tricky words.

To gain the skill of clear enunciation:

- Be aware of the challenging sound – physically listen to it as it leaves your mouth.
- Next, feel your mouth form the sound. Make sure that you do not over-articulate.
- Finally, repeat the word at a regular tempo, and simultaneously concentrate on hearing it and feeling it. Now you should be able to say the word easily and flawlessly.

Following are challenging sounds:

- Final consonants (the underlined letters in the examples) are often difficult:

“L”: You’ll love the deall at Shelll.

“R”: The dinosaurr was a spectacularr creaturer.

“T”: With Fidelity Investments, your accountt will grow.

- The “th” sound is often slurred, mispronounced as a “d”, or not pronounced at all.  
Throughout the world, our company has thrived.
- Regionalisms, such as the following, are typically hindrances for recording voice-over work, especially national and international work. However, a regionalism may be great if the recording is going to be listened to in the geographical region in which it originated:
  - The “r” sound for natives of New York and Boston
  - The “drawl” from the American south

## 8. **Flow / smoothness**

Smooth jazz. Smooth skin. Smooth vodka. Everyone likes smooth.

This goes for voice-over as well – both producers and listeners prefer smooth deliveries over choppy ones. However many talent read choppily ... especially less experienced talent.

Following are the most common types and causes of choppiness:

***Dramatic pauses:*** Due to being dramatic and theatrical.

In Chapter 5, we talked about dramatic pauses being one way to add variety to your read. But remember that we advised using them judiciously and sparingly. Insert too many pauses, and you begin to sound artificial. The read will also become choppy and tiresome.

Inappropriate or excessive dramatic pauses occur much more often among less experienced talent. Novice voice actors feel that dramatic pauses make their delivery sound better, more interesting, and more intriguing. However no matter how good these pauses sound to them, the read will generally sound significantly better (smoother) to others without the pauses.

For example, in the sentence below, many people will pause after the word “Security,”

believing that this will add drama. Actually, most producers do not want drama, instead preferring a smoother, more natural delivery without the pause. Try reading it both ways.

Aetna Insurance. Security for a lifetime.

***Clarifying (and often subconscious) pauses:*** Due to trying too hard to make the delivery ultra-clear for the listener. Also due to lack of confidence.

Less experienced talent try really hard to make their delivery clear for the listener. In doing so, they often separate phrases of the script into little choppy bits. This usually occurs unknowingly. Once pointed out, they often recognize how choppy they were and how much better their reads sound when reading smoothly.

For example, most talent will pause in the following sentences (where the slash is). However these sentences will usually sound significantly better (smoother) if read without the pause. Try reading these examples with the pauses. Then try reading the sentence without the pauses. Notice how much better (smoother) they sound the second time. Most producers will prefer it without the pauses:

Save on men's, women's, and children's fashions / at the one-day super sale!

Call 1-800-123-4567 / for more information.

Please contact customer service / on the number on the card.

Abraham Lincoln was born February 12, 1809 / in Hardin County, Kentucky.

What we at Travelers Insurance / have been dedicated to providing for 130 years.

The easy-to-follow lessons / and innovative accompanying CD included in your packet ...

***Unintentional pauses before words that begin with vowels:*** Due to “working the words” too hard (forcing words).

This epitome of choppiness happens with aspiring talent, professional talent, and singers. The linguistic term for this occurrence is a “glottal stop.” Getting rid of these nasty little pauses makes a voice-over delivery go from unprofessional sounding to professional.

For example, read the following sentence. There is a good chance that you will unintentionally pause before the words “always” and “every.” Now try reading it again, this time without the pauses. Notice how much better (smoother) it sounds:

JCPenney always has every item on sale!

***Robotic delivery:*** Due to articulating too carefully, being hesitant, and/or over-thinking when reading.

If you’re like most aspiring voice talent, the more you try, the choppier your delivery will be. To repair this, just relax. One of best techniques you can employ to sound smooth is to be relaxed, comfortable, and experienced.

***Grammatical pauses:*** Due to inexperience.

Some punctuation marks are necessary for print but should NOT be used in a voice-over script. For example, if a comma is not necessary to the sense of the text, the comma might just be grammatical, be there for readability, or be there out of convention. Dates, locations, and lists are examples.

To illustrate, read the following sentence twice – the first time observing all punctuation marks (which aid reading), and the second time without pausing at them. Notice how the second version sounds better (smoother) without the pauses:

Dr. Joe Gerard, Jr., created the first blue, dynamic pithi-scope  
on September 14th, 1953, in Dallas, Texas.

You likely paused after “blue” when reading the sentence the first time. That pause is unnecessary, and your delivery will sound better (smoother) without it. Likewise, if you told someone, “I have a red, antique pickup truck.” you wouldn’t pause after “red.” The phrase “antique pickup truck” is a single thing, and it is red. You no more need to pause there than if you said “a red apple.”

*It’s someone else’s fault that I paused:* Due to copywriter’s and/or client’s inexperience.

Inexperienced copywriters and clients often do not read the script out loud before giving it to the voice talent, and therefore often give the voice talent a script full of too many punctuation marks.

Also, clients sometimes take copy directly from print sources and assume it will work well for voice-over, when actually it will not.

In either case, the voice talent is often presented with scripts that contain unnecessary punctuation marks. In these instances, ask the producer if they will prefer alternate reads – one where each mark is respected, and one where some are disregarded.

For example, read the following script the way it is written – notice how choppy it is. Then read it again, this time eliminating the majority of pauses. You will hear how much better (smoother) it sounds:

When reading scripts, written by inexperienced scriptwriters, who sometimes use “too many punctuation marks,” like this sentence ... the voice talent will sound very, VERY choppy, if they read every single punctuation mark.

Here are a few final thoughts.

- A good rule of thumb is: “pause between phrases, not within them.” This will create a delivery that sounds natural, as most words in genuine conversation connect to each other.
- There is a time and place for everything. For example, certain scripts may sound terrific with many pauses. Sometimes a client may request a delivery style that appears choppy, yet when mixed with the visual seems appropriate.

- The majority of unnecessary and excessive pauses sound better when eliminated, and instead a smooth delivery is used.
- No matter how good dramatic pauses sound, quite often the delivery will sound better without them.

## 9. Timing

When handing you the script, the producer will tell you how long the finished recording should be. It is your job to turn on your internal tempo-clock and ensure that the finished recording is the specified length (or at least close).

The producer will time your reads and let you know if you need to speed up or slow down, and by how much. Learning how to control your speed, therefore, is essential.

Note: Current recording software gives the engineer the ability to adjust the recording length by as much as 10%. This software is called time-expansion software (used to make a recording longer) and time-compression software (used to make a recording shorter). However, the engineer would prefer to not rely on digitally adjusting the timing.

Calibrating your internal clock is a matter of practice. Here are some ways to develop this sense. You should practice them with a clock or watch, preferably one having a sweep second hand, or (better yet) a stopwatch.

*TIP: Can't find an inexpensive stopwatch or timer that doesn't beep? If you have a smartphone, there's an app for that.*

Here are ways to alter your timing:

*Speed up or slow down the speed of the words, by elongating or shortening them.*

Practice reading the following example at different speeds. Your reading can range between 1.25 seconds long and twice that fast, or 2.5 seconds long.

It's the largest selection anywhere.

*Lengthen or shorten the pauses between sentences and paragraphs.* Note that when you're forced to read copy so quickly that it sounds rushed, a tiny pause between phrases will help make the read appear significantly less rushed.

Practice reading the following example with different spacing between the listed items. It can range between 3.5 seconds and almost double that, 5.5 seconds long.

Johnson Lighting Company has bulbs, fixtures, lamps, shades, candles, and chandeliers.

*Add or delete dramatic pauses.* Practice reading the following example with different degrees of dramatic pause. Your reading can range between 2.5 and 5 seconds long.

The Johnson Lighting Company, we're light-years beyond our competition.

Here are examples to prepare you for real recording sessions:

*Split-second timing in commercial recording is a must.* Advertisers purchase specific-length "blocks" of air-time from television and radio stations, so voice-over producers need to ensure that the spot is exactly the right duration.

Most radio commercials require the voice-over artist to read for the entire spot. On the other hand, most TV commercials contain only a few lines of copy - the rest of the spot is filled with background music, sound effects, other voices, etc.

The producer will tell you how long the script should be - sometimes down to the tenth of a second.

Try reading this commercial in 12 seconds, 14 seconds, and 16 seconds.

Got a problem with a home appliance? One phone call to Sears Home Central fixes your Kenmore, GE, Whirlpool — any major appliance brand. Call Sears Home Central at 1-800-4-REPAIR. Sears Home Central. The service side of Sears.

*A tag is the closing line of a commercial.* Tags are usually just a few seconds in length. The producer will tell you exactly how long the tag needs to be.

Try reading this tag in 3 seconds, 3.5 seconds, and 4 seconds.

Stove-Top Stuffing. Anything less is just stuff.

*A donut is a section of a commercial that is sandwiched between two other sections.* For example, if a 30-second commercial has 10 seconds of music at the beginning and 10 seconds of music at the end, the producer will say, “Your script is a 10-second donut” - meaning that your voice will be in the middle 10-second portion of the commercial.

Your job is to read the copy at just the right tempo, so that you completely fill the space but don't cover up anything else.

Try this 2.5-second donut inside a 30-second television car commercial. (During the donut, the on-camera actor points to a sunroof and leather interior, and then to the car.)

0.00 - 14.5 = jingle

14.5 - 17.0 = VO: It's things like this, that make you want one of these.

18.0 - 28.6 = jingle

Timing is not generally as much of a concern in narration recording, because many do not have a predetermined length.

For those scripts that do, such as an hour-long documentary, there is still not much to be concerned about. This is because there is normally more video footage than there is audio recording, so the engineer can space out the script recording throughout the video footage.

## 10. Hitting

“If you can’t hit the word, you’ll be asked to hit the road.”

In the earlier “Foundation Technique” section, basic words that should be hit were taught. In this “Advanced Technique” section, you’ll learn to hit words that can turn an otherwise plain read into an exciting and/or more appropriate one.

*Hitting pronouns often clarifies the meaning of the sentence:*

Fortune Magazine is the source individuals turn to,  
for information that is critical to their success.

We’re sorry, that is an invalid entry.

Hoffman Furniture is throwing its doors wide open,  
for the wildest bargain frenzy you’ve ever seen.

*Hitting reference words can help enforce a point.* “Reference” words are words that may appear insignificant, yet refer to something that is very significant. By identifying and valuing these words, your reads will sound better – resulting in happier clients.

For example:

In the following commercial text, the word “this” refers to the car, and therefore requires emphasis. Furthermore, if this is a television commercial, it is likely that the car is shown while that word is said, in which case, valuing “this” will help your read “match” the visual.

The Corvette Stingray. This is the sports car that captivates enthusiasts and casual drivers alike, and renders your expectations obsolete with precision performance and incredible technology!

Value the word “they” in this commercial, because “they” refers to the subject of the sentence:

Take a Sentimental Journey with the “Band of Renown”  
as they play the “Music of your life.”

Value “your” in this promotional video, because this word represents the person who will benefit from the product:

Join the thousands of men who have boosted their sexual performance with Potennix.  
Put the fire back into your lovemaking with Potennix.

Value the word “it” and “our” in this corporate industrial, because “it” refers to the cinema and “our” refers to the company:

“The cinema has no boundary; it is a ribbon of dream,” Orson Welles said.  
This motto has kept our company the number one mortgage holder in America  
for seven years.

Value the word “we’ve” and “It’s” in this commercial, because “we’ve” refers to Amtrak and “It’s” refers to the country:

So much beauty in one place! America is a great country, and we’ve got the best way  
to see it. Amtrak “Explore America” Fares. Round trips from one hundred  
and seventy nine dollars all across America. It’s a great country at a great price.  
Call 1-800-USA-RAIL now about Amtrak “Explore America” fares.

Value the word “this” in this commercial, because it refers to what the company does for the customer:

From onsite rental cars, to guaranteed repairs. All with every car policy at Progressive. Because this is how we keep you moving. Check out Progressive.com for details beauty in one place!

*Hitting adverbs and adjectives can also strengthen a point.*

With new Suave shampoo, you’ll add shine and bounce the healthy way.

Step 1 – carefully insert piece A into slot B. Step 2 – ...

Breyers delicious premium ice cream has an irresistible taste.

*Hitting conjunctions can bring extra enthusiasm to the copy.*

With air-conditioning and power windows ... you can’t go wrong.

The company is best known for creating tools that utilize step-and-scan technology.

Get a 10% cash rebate or \$500 cash back!

*Hitting the first word of phrases can “open up” the delivery.* Note: a common error that voice-over artists make is rushing the first word of a phrase, instead of valuing it.

Just waiting to engage your driving passion for performance.

In this video presentation, you’ll learn how clear plastic is recycled.

## **11. Smile**

Half of voice-over work requires a smile. Therefore being able to add a smile to your delivery can double the amount of work you obtain. However the smile must be convincing, because a contrived smile sounds fake and is a huge turn-off to producers and listeners.

Many telemarketers use the “mirror trick” when selling. That is, they hold a mirror up to their faces, and see themselves smile when speaking to potential customers. This strange behavior is so silly, it tends to produce more, natural smile – and this helps them close sales as they sound friendlier, more personable, and more convincing.

NOTE: A big mirror might reflect your voice into the microphone. So use this trick only for practice or preparation.

## **12. Variety**

While producers dictate the style of delivery, they leave it up to the voice-over artist to make it interesting. Often, the producer will ask for multiple takes, so that they can hear different versions of the same script (all of which are interesting).

When you give multiple takes, it is necessary that each version be quite different from another, and that each version is delivered without time spent thinking about what to do next.

In other words, the producer wants drastically different-sounding takes conjured up quickly.

NOTE: Due to the length of most narrations, a narration producer will generally not require multiple takes.

Give five takes of the following scripts:

Audio Associates ... there's no mistaking our sound.

Egypt has always been a land of mystery and magic.

Call 1-800-4-travel for details on this exciting offer!

With no money down, this deal cannot be beat.

Samsung recently announced plans to sell off its international division.

### **13. Consistency**

One of the key skills a professional voice-over artist has is an ability to maintain a consistent vocal delivery. This is more difficult than it sounds, and can take years to master.

There are several situations where consistency is crucial:

*When recording, it is common for the producer to request that you re-record a sentence with a modification.* It is imperative that when you re-record, ONLY the one modification is changed ... and everything else is not. The producers will not be content if other modifications are changed.

For example, if the producer says, “Please re-record that last sentence and add more smile,” make sure the smile is added but that the speed is not faster or the volume louder.

Many voice-over artists tend to increase their volume when asked for more smile. Similarly, they tend to slow down their tempo when requested to decrease their projection. Watch out for these and other mishaps.

Read this sentence multiple times, each time only changing one thing:

Born with absolute pitch, infallible rhythm, and natural comprehension of harmony,  
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had come into this world with a complete gift.

*Often, the voice-over artist is requested to read the script multiple times so that the producer has the ability to edit together sections from each recording to create the ultimate version.*

However, many voice-over artists tend to lose their spontaneity and enthusiasm when reading the same script repeatedly. If your sound has varied between takes, the recordings will not edit together smoothly.

With ample practice and good concentration, most voice-over artists learn to be cognizant of this obstacle and combat it to keep the spontaneity and enthusiasm consistent.

To practice, you will need two audio recorders. Record yourself on audio recorder #1 reading the following script 10 times. Then, while listening back to your recording on audio recorder #1, record each sentence of the script from a particular recording onto audio recorder #2. When completed, listen back to audio recorder #2 – all of the sentences should blend smoothly into each other.

The Zambezi river is 1,700 miles long from its source to its mouth on the shores of the Indian Ocean. It was formed during the volcanic upheavals of the Jurassic period about 150 million years ago, when an old river was split into two. The Zambezi is the fourth-largest river in Africa. It rises in northern Zambia, and flows southwest into Angola before turning back into Zambia and heading south.

*If asked to re-record a part of the script over, it is essential that your vocal delivery remains consistent with the previously recorded recording.* This is because when the engineer edits the new and old recordings together, they need to flow smoothly into one another.

Record the following commercial once all the way through. Then record yourself re-recording a small section of it. Finally, play back both recordings. They should contain exactly the same speed, volume, tone, and pitch. If not, keep practicing.

In *Premiere Magazine*, you'll read about the making of movies, shot by shot. Catch the rising stars. See what hot new movies are in the works. Plus much more.

*Some recordings are long enough that they are recorded on multiple days, such as audiobooks.* In these instances, it is essential that your vocal delivery remains consistent from day to day, so that when the recording is edited together, it flows smoothly. If your vocal delivery has changed the recordings will not edit together smoothly.

To practice, read one sentence (of the following example) each day, until the entire paragraph is completed. Then play back the entire recording. It should flow smoothly. If it does not, you are not consistent enough.

NOTE: It is common for professionals to ask the engineer to play back the last 15 seconds of the previous day's recording prior to recording, so that they can match the delivery style.

In our next segment we visit individual stadiums, explore tales of the classic teams, legendary stars, and the devotion of the American baseball fan. First stop: Yankee Stadium, home of the team America loves to hate and breeding ground for a host of superstars and legends. Back at the Hall of Fame in the World Series room, we explore the lives of ordinary men with extraordinary skills. And look at how and why Americans have elevated such men to mythic places in our folklore.

Chicago, Illinois. In America's foremost sports city, our first location is Comiskey Park, the oldest standing major league ballpark in America.

## **14. Punctuation**

Punctuation marks are very important in scripts. First, punctuation marks help the voice-over artist read the script with the timing that scriptwriter intended. Second, punctuation marks break up long passages into small phrases, as opposed to long run-on sentences. This allows the voice-over artist to stumble less often, while also making the script easier for the listener to understand.

A good scriptwriter will use many punctuation marks in the script, separating it into discrete thoughts, indicating places to breathe, and allowing moments for the listener to grasp and absorb what they're just heard.

Earlier in this chapter, we discussed Grammatical Pauses, and how some punctuation marks (especially commas) are there just for readability, not necessarily requiring a pause.

However, sometimes you will come across a script with too few punctuation marks. This is because many scriptwriters are grounded in printed text (such as a brochure, magazine advertisement or website), and aren't thinking about the requirements of reading aloud.

As a rule of thumb, add punctuation marks between phrases when reading voice-over scripts. However, make sure your pauses are not unnaturally long – instead they should sound natural.

Read the following examples WITHOUT punctuation marks.

Breakthroughs in technology have made it possible for automotive designers to create for the driver one of the safest environments ever. The new Volvo.

Since the beginning of time man has been compelled by the wonders of the universe to comprehend the existence of God.

Now insert punctuation marks and read them again. Notice how much better they sound this time.

Breakthroughs in technology have made it possible, for automotive designers, to create for the driver, one of the safest environments ever. The new Volvo.

Since the beginning of time, man has been compelled – by the wonders of the universe – to comprehend the existence ... of God.

Make sure to use a very small pause (called a “beat”) before and after a quoted phrase – without the beat, the quoted phrase will not be separated for the listener.

Car and Driver Magazine called the all new Lexus the “best sedan” in its class.

## 15. **Keywords**

The advanced technique for allowing key words to be heard clearly is to elongate the accented syllable of the word.

Remember: One of the goals of the voice-over artist is to read the key words in such a way that everyone notices them - whether they are paying close attention or not. And most people do not pay close attention to commercials. They are busy driving a car during a radio commercial, or grabbing a bite to eat during a TV spot.

In fact, although you are speaking as if to one individual, that individual might be anyone among the masses. Therefore you must make sure that even the less educated, or non-fluent, or distracted people in the audience can understand the content.

If the following company name were read at normal tempo, it would be difficult for the listener to discern it. If the “ea” in “Bear” is elongated (just a little), the word is very discernible. Be careful not to over-elongate the “ea,” as that will sound unnatural.

The Bear Furniture Company

## 16. **Multi-person scripts**

A multi-person script (also known as “two-person,” or “dialogue,” or “double,” etc.) is one that has dialogue between two or more voice-over artists. Many commercials and audio-books are multi-person. Sometimes all the characters are recorded “live” (meaning simultaneously) at a commercial studio or via Internet connection from each of their own home studios. Other times each voice actor records their own part at their home studio without ever hearing the other voice actors’ parts.

*TIP: Recording live gives the voice-over artists the ability to feed off of each other’s lines, and energy, and therefore results in a more energetic and natural delivery.*

Here are steps necessary to read multi-person scripts:

1. Read laterally (see “Natural Flow” in Chapter 5). This is absolutely essential here. Seeing what is coming up allows for a natural delivery.
2. Begin reading your line right before the previous reader’s line is completed. In other words, cut off their last word. This is the way we converse in real life. It will also compensate for the normal delay in your reaction time.
3. Do not look at the other voice-over artist, as you will lose your place in the script if you do. While this seems simple, it is not.

Use a partner and practice with these multi-person scripts.

AMOCO CERTICARE “SERVICE WHILE YOU SLEEP” (radio commercial)

Person #1: So, I understand you’re pretty busy.

#2: Really busy. Will this take long?

#1: No. It’s just a thirty-second commercial.

#2: Good. Because, I’m —

#1: Busy. I know. Well, is there any time when you’re not busy?

#2: Well, there’s always while I sleep.

#1: Well, Certicare just introduced a program called “Service While You Sleep.”

#2: Why do they call it that?

#1: Because they service your car while you sleep.

#2: Catchy name.

#1: Glad you like it. Just call 4-REPAIR. Certicare does the rest.

#2: 4-REPAIR. Got it. Will the call take long?

#1: No. Why?

#2: Because I’m —

#1: Really busy.

#2: Got it.

J. GOLD ATTORNEYS (television commercial)

Wife: I'll take the microwave.

Husband: I'll take the television.

Wife: I'll take the kids!

Husband: The kids? What do you mean you'll take the kids?

Wife: And the dog.

Husband: I'll take the dog.

Wife: And I'll take the house.

Husband: The silver.

Wife: The gold.

Husband: The money.

Wife: The money?

Annrc: Do yourself a big favor ... see a good attorney and eliminate the hassles of major trauma in your life. J. Gold Attorneys. Call today to set up a free private consultation. J. Gold Attorneys. Let us help you.

## **17. Auditions**

At an audition, the producer typically gives you at least 10 minutes to review the script prior to reading. Then, with varying amounts of direction from the producer, you'll be asked to read.

Often, the chance of winning an audition relies on the first read, so make sure that it follows the producer's directions explicitly. Next, the producer will often ask the voice-over artist to re-read the copy in their own style. This is the time to show creativity and variety.

Try reading the following scripts using different styles.

### DOVE PROMISES (television commercial)

Introducing Dove Promises ... the temptation of a deep and lingering chocolate, wrapped in an involving message ... a chocolate and a message too rich to be rushed. Some moments are so delicious, why rush them? ... Dove.

### TOYOTA CAMRY (television commercial)

The sophisticated material used to make the cockpit canopy of the F-16 Fighter shatter-resistant is the same material we use to make the headlamp covers on the Camry. So, you can imagine how advanced the rest of the car is. Camry by Toyota. Hey, it's your money.

### SIR ISAAC NEWTON (film for children)

English mathematician and scientist Isaac Newton was one of the greatest thinkers of all time. He worked out the laws of gravity, invented calculus, and devised the reflecting, or Newtonian, telescope. He studied the movement of planets, and published the corpuscular theory of light. It occurred to Newton that the force that attracts bodies towards the Earth (gravity) might also be important in the motion of the Moon around the Earth, and the planets around the Sun.

### PHYSICIAN NETWORK (corporate sales presentation)

Physician Network is a leader in developing and marketing highly functional practice-management software products for physician practices. The company's objective is to establish a large installed base of physician-practice customers who use its products. Since 1993, Physician Network has completed seven acquisitions of software information businesses, lifting its share of the office-based physician market to approximately 25% of the market.

## **CHAPTER 7: PRACTICE**

**When are you done training?  
NEVER! Even pros work with coaches to remain relevant,  
offer new delivery styles to clients, and “up” their game.**

## ***In this chapter:***

1. Practice steps
2. Practice scripts

Like any skill, the more you continue practicing, the better you'll become.

However, practicing incorrectly can do more harm than good, as you will likely reinforce bad habits.

We suggest incorporating the following practice methods and scripts into your routine.

### ***TIPS:***

*When focusing on your core skill-set, use practice scripts that are appropriate for your voice. When working on expanding your range, work on other types of scripts.*

*Do not practice with the same scripts repeatedly, because doing so allows you to read from memory. It's best to prepare for real work, which often means reading cold copy.*

*Take note how long it takes you to sound good. If it takes more than three reads, then it's taking you too long. Clients expect you to work quickly.*

## 1. ***Practice steps***

***First, practice reading aloud.*** Not to yourself. Not in a whisper. Rather in your everyday, conversational volume. The more you do this, the better you will become!

HOW? Read from as many different sources of writing and writers as possible. For example, read aloud from a newspaper, a travel brochure, a paperback book, a magazine article, a magazine advertisement, an educational textbook, read junk-mail, read Wikipedia, even read an old phonebook. Doing so will prepare you to adapt to any of the various types of scripts, copywriter formats, and copywriter writing-styles that you'll receive when working professionally.

Do this until you can read just about anything for at least one minute without stumbling.

***Then practice reading aloud, this time focusing on using your natural voice and natural vocal delivery.***

HOW? Record yourself speaking in your everyday, conversational voice (for example, record yourself speaking to someone on the telephone). Then write down your lines (what you said on the phone). Then re-record your lines. Lastly listen back and compare both recordings.

Do this until both recordings sound the same.

***Then practice using the scripts that appear later in this chapter.*** A good plan of attack is to:

a. *Practice each technique one at a time, until it becomes reflexive.*

HOW? Record everything you practice, but only up to 30-seconds of any technique at a time, and then review the recording before moving on. (If you record more than 30-seconds and upon review, discover that you were reading incorrectly, you will have then reinforced bad habits.)

b. *Once you are able to apply each technique reflexively, combine them – practice a few techniques simultaneously until your delivery sounds natural.*

HOW? Again, record everything you practice, but this time up to one-minute. If you stumble, just backtrack to the beginning of the previous phrase/sentence, and begin there – that’s what professionals do.

c. *Eventually build up your stamina by incorporating multiple techniques and reading 10-minute long passages.* Again, if you stumble, just backtrack to the beginning of the previous phrase/sentence, and begin there. (Please take note that very, VERY few professionals can read for 10 minutes without stumbling ... in fact many professionals can only get through two or three-minutes before stumbling. So don’t be concerned if you stumble along the way, and remember that the goal of this exercise is to increase your stamina.)

### ***When you’re comfortable with this:***

a. *Mimic professionals who have a similar vocal delivery (not voice) as you.* This will increase your ability to mimic the styles that your clients request.

HOW? Record one-minute of a professional voice-over (commercial on TV, audiobook passage ...). Then transcribe your lines. Then re-record your lines. Lastly listen back and compare both recordings. Try to use the same tone, timing, tempo ... this will teach you to take your client’s direction well.

b. *Join a practice group.*

c. *Use the Free Feedback Forum at [www.edgestudio.com/feedback-forum](http://www.edgestudio.com/feedback-forum)*

d. *Participate in Edge’s Free Script Recording Contests at [www.edgestudio.com/script-contests](http://www.edgestudio.com/script-contests)*

Use the Free Practice Script Library at [www.edgestudio.com/script-library](http://www.edgestudio.com/script-library)

e. *Donate your time to a “reading to the blind” organization, or a school, a senior living facility.* There are probably some within a few miles of wherever you reside. But please note that reading to a group of people usually requires that you project your voice ... and voice projection is usually not desired in the voice-over industry. So please understand that your goals with this practice technique are to gain comfort reading in front of clients, confidence with your reading ability, and better cold-reading technique. ... Your goal is not to learn how to speak loudly.

## **2. Practice scripts**

Following are practice scripts for practice ... not your demo. (We don't want everyone's demo to sound the same. In fact, we never use these “practice” scripts on demos. Edge Studio works with students to find and tailor scripts to fit your strengths, clients, interests, and goals.)

### 43 Practice Scripts

Scripts 1-34 = Non-character scripts

Scripts 35-37 = Kids scripts

Scripts 38-43 = Character scripts

#### 1. THE TRAVELERS INSURANCE COMPANY (television commercial)

We all share the same goals in business and in life. Security ... protection ... trust. What every man, woman, and child seeks from birth. What we at The Travelers have been dedicated to providing for 130 years. A difference backed by over \$100 billion in assets, and the knowledge that every customer under America's umbrella is our most important one. The Travelers Insurance Company.

## 2. REVLON COLOR STAY (makeup application video)

At Revlon, we believe that looking good means feeling good about yourself. And for most women, looking good begins with clear, smooth, glowing skin. How do you get it? That's what this Color-Stay Makeup Video is all about. This video teaches you about your skin, and how by performing some basic techniques, you can get and maintain a beautiful and younger complexion. Simply follow the basic steps in this video.

## 3. BOSTON UNIVERSITY (interactive college guided tour)

Wondering what it's like to be a student at Boston University? Take one of our virtual tours to learn about the lives of some of our students and their varying backgrounds, interests and majors.

Freshmen can learn more about what to expect during their first year at BU including time management, how college differs from high school, and what living in a residence hall is really like.

Interested in the person you could become with a degree from Boston University? Check out the Senior Experience tour to learn from students who "know the ropes". Find out about the challenges and rigors of various majors, the benefits of internships, and preparing for the world after graduation.

## 4. WASHINGTON MUTUAL (radio commercial)

Tired of getting played every time you get cash out of an ATM? Then start using a Washington Mutual ATM. Unlike some other banks who force you to pay an arbitrary surcharge when you get your money out of our ATMs, we don't – even if you're not a Washington Mutual customer. Surcharge-free ATMs from Washington Mutual, just the way nature intended them to be.

## 5. THE NEW YORK TIMES (television commercial)

The New York Times offers you world-class coverage of events. Overthrown governments. Acts of diplomacy. Plummeting stocks. Rising stocks. Mudslinging. Filibustering and other timely issues. THE NEW YORK TIMES. Pick up a copy at a newsstand today. Or, to inquire about home delivery, call 1-800-NY-TIMES.

## 6. IRA TUTORIAL (home learning guide)

In the next 15 minutes, you will learn the four steps towards a better retirement. An IRA will be a key player in almost any retirement plan. Here are some steps you can take now to make your IRA work harder for you and help secure a more comfortable retirement. The earlier you start contributing to a tax-deferred IRA Annuity, the larger your nest egg can grow. Over time, the combination of tax-deferral and compound interest can be dramatic. Although you can open an IRA Annuity with as little as \$50, making the maximum contribution ...

## 7. AMERICAN EXPRESS (menu-prompt telephony)

Welcome to American Express, please have your card available.

For balance, recent charges and credits posted to the account, future spending or membership rewards, press 1.

To enroll or make a payment by phone, or for other payment information, press 2.

If your card has been lost, stolen, is damaged, to check on the status of a renewal card or a replacement card request, or to change your name on the card, press 3.

To apply for an American Express card, or to cancel a card, press 4.

For questions regarding travel-related charges billed to your account, including airline, cruise line, tour operators, travel agents or hotels, press 5.

For all other inquiries, press zero.

#### 8. DODGE CHARGER (radio commercial)

Now it's even easier to take off in a Dodge Charger. After \$1,500 cash back, Charger's just 27 grand for starters, or 33 grand nicely equipped with lots of neat stuff like A/C, blue-tooth, and power everything. Plus get low 1.9% APR financing for up to 60 months. But you better move quick. They're going pretty fast these days.

#### 9. JIF PEANUT BUTTER (television commercial)

My kids. All they care about is peanut butter. So I make sure they get the best. Ya' know, I wasn't sure there was a best, until I opened the three leading brands, and found Jif smells more like fresh peanuts. That's how I know JIF is better. As long as my kids care about peanut butter, I want to know they're getting the best. Jif Peanut Butter ... for Moms who care.

#### 10. EARTHQUAKE (nature documentary)

Pulled and pushed by forces deep within the planet, the Pacific plate is sliding northwest past North America at an average of about 2 inches a year - roughly the same rate as fingernails grow.

But movement along the fault usually occurs in bursts. Along most of the fault, the colder, more rigid rocks near the earth's surface resist the plate motions. Eventually, enough strain develops along a segment of the fault to overcome the resistance. Then, in geologic terms, that stretch of the fault "breaks," "fails," or "ruptures" and a segment of the crust riding the Pacific plate surges north, creating an earthquake.

In the magnitude 7.7 San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which killed more than 3000 people ...

### 11. RUNNING SHOES (in-store promotional video)

There is no perfect running shoe, partly because no two feet are alike, even on the same person. Still, top brands can be comfortable, safe, and effective running mates — if you know what to look for. This video gives you practical guidelines to help you find shoes that will serve you well in the long run. First: if in doubt, don't buy. Shoes should feel just right in the store. Don't count on improvements after they're broken in. Second ...

### 12. AMERICAN AIRLINES (in-flight video)

Welcome aboard American Airlines coast-to-coast service. We'll be happy to do everything possible to make your flight with us a most pleasurable experience. We'll provide you with all the information you need to know about your flight, your destination, and the equipment on which you are currently flying.

In addition, we are proud to present our American Airlines feature film presentation, for our transcontinental passengers. We'd like you now to remove the plastic insert found directly in front of you in the seat back pocket. Please review the safety information during the flight for your own protection, in the unlikely event of an in-flight emergency.

### 13. FOX 54 (television promo)

Buckle your couch belts. This weekend FOX 54 takes you for a ride! Saturday night at 8, get on a Harley or get out of the way when Mel Gibson takes to the open highway in MAD MAX. A biker gang terrorizes innocent pedestrians. MAD MAX is gonna put the pedal to the metal and blow the bikers right off the asphalt! Then at 10, Charles Bronson is back ... cracking down on crack in DEATH WISH 4: THE CRACKDOWN. Mr. Vigilante goes after the dopes who deal drugs. The deal is ... he does it his way. Bronson takes the war against drugs personally. All right here on FOX 54.

#### 14. MAYBELLINE TRUE ILLUSIONS MAKEUP (television commercial)

Introducing new True Illusions Makeup. It's a whole new reason to wear makeup. A look that's flawless yet makeup-free. A Maybelline beauty breakthrough makes it happen. You'll know True Illusions is different as soon as it floats across your face. It releases color weightlessly, evenly, subtly concealing flaws. To create a new kind of natural that's perfectly you.

#### 15. CREST EXTENDER (television commercial)

Introducing the Crest Extender. Gentle Extender fibers clean deep between teeth. Now you can floss daily ... and extend between. Crest Extender. Fits between to get teeth clean.

#### 16. DINERS CLUB (radio commercial)

After 30 days, most charge card companies give you a warning. But at Diner's Club, we give you another 30 days. We understand that sometimes a three-day business trip turns into three weeks, and by necessity, you could use some extra time to pay your bill. That's why we always give you the convenience of an extra billing period to pay when you need it, interest-free. Call us at 1-800-2-DINERS. We'll answer all of your questions, no extra charge. Diners Club. Breaking the plastic mold.

#### 17. THE CONNECTICUT LOTTERY (radio commercial)

I couldn't stop laughing. I mean me ... win the lottery? I couldn't believe it! I mean, at first, I figured it was just my husband ... or even a couple friends playing a joke on me. But when they gave me the money ... well then I knew it was for real. I've been playing those same numbers for about 2 years ... and wow ... it really can pay off. The Connecticut lottery ... somebody's gotta win.

## 18. BEST BUY (television commercial)

You gotta see it, to believe it. For a limited time, the whole store is on sale. That's right, every item is reduced significantly — up to 75% off in some cases. With over 50 brand names to choose from, our camera department is stocked and ready to deal. And get this, we've got over one hundred different computer systems and tablets ready for immediate blow-out. It's Best Buy's biggest sale ever! Sale ends Sunday June 18th.

## 19. BLUE ANGELS (sales video)

Strap yourself in for a high-altitude, history-making adventure — you're about to experience the thrill, precision, and aerial artistry of the Navy's Blue Angels. This video opens the cockpit on this legendary squadron as they take off on their first European tour in 20 years. You'll soar above Russia, where MIG fighters intercept and escort the BLUE ANGELS — the first U.S. military flight demo team ever to appear in the former enemy's skies. You'll discover the team's illustrious story through archival footage and interviews with pilots and crews. Plus ...

## 20. BILL GATES (biography)

Born in Seattle, Washington, on October 28, 1955, William Henry Gates III is the only son of the three children of Mary and William Henry Gates, Jr. A bright and active child, Bill began cutting classes to hang out at all hours at his private school's computer center. When he was only 16, he and friend Paul Allen sold their computer-run system to monitor highway traffic and reportedly earned \$20,000 — but business fell off when customers found out that the entrepreneurs were still in high school.

## 21. BUICK LACROSSE (television commercial)

Analog instrumentation ... a leather-wrapped steering wheel ... contoured sport bucket seats. It's all there in the new Buick Lacrosse, just waiting to engage your driving passion for performance. And there's a lot here to engage. The Lacrosse. Its performance, excitement, and commitment to quality make this the Sport Sedan of a lifetime. Experience the new Buick!

## 22. WINTERGREEN RESORT (television commercial)

If you're in the dark about where to ski, let us shed some light on the subject. High in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains, discover what's been called the Mid-Atlantic's finest overall ski experience. Wintergreen offers 10 slopes, five lifts, and an extensive snow-making system. Not to mention luxurious accommodations, an indoor spa, and a nationally recognized children's program. For more information, call 1-800-ski-green. That's 1-800-ski-green. Wintergreen and Virginia ... the perfect combination!

## 23. THE CENTURY OF CHANGE (audiobook)

The Century of Change is the story of Americans who combined their native skills with the growing torrent of new knowledge to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children. Like the sewing machine, countless other inventions and techniques appeared to help this determination become a reality. The story is not a routine report of smooth progress toward the perfection of life. There have been hardships, yes – even injustice among Americans. The balance between laws and social progress is the critical element in George Washington's Great Experiment. It is the people – each new generation of Americans – who must improve and maintain this balance within their Constitution.

#### 24. THE LAND OF EGYPT (travelogue)

Egypt has always been a land of mystery and magic. A land different from all others, difficult to understand, apart and alien, yet strangely fascinating. It was the most self-contained of all the countries of the ancient world; it lived its own life, practiced its own religion, and made up its own government with hardly any outside interference either from or upon other civilizations. The Egyptians were ...

#### 25. CITIZENS' COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN (PSA radio commercial)

As a parent, I know what city kids face in the streets today is bad enough. And now, the city wants to slash school building improvements and after-school youth programs ... all of which are essential to keeping youngsters off the streets. Don't let this happen to our children's futures. Call the Mayor and your council representative. Tell them you want to put kids first, not last, when they plan the city budget. A message from CITIZENS' COMMITTEE FOR CHILDREN.

#### 26. LOCKHEED SPACE STATION (space documentary)

For more than three decades, mankind has explored the mysteries of the universe from a vantage point in space. Now we're turning space into a practical place to work. By the year 2020, NASA's space station is scheduled to give science a permanent platform in orbit. A place where researchers can examine our world from a unique perspective, and experiment under conditions of extreme temperature and weightlessness. In zero gravity, compounds can react in ways not possible here on Earth. Scientists can create better medicines, more durable plastics, and stronger alloys made of metals that resist mixing under gravity's pull. The Space Station will ...

### 27. DELTA AIRLINES INTERACTIVE (interactive website)

It's always the right time to fly Delta. And to assure a perfect trip, Delta has prepared this program to offer you important facts and helpful information, along with tips for travelers. Just click start for practical information. 50 years have passed since Delta established itself as a national carrier, and Delta has come a long way since then. It has matured into an international airline, serving thousands of destinations. Since its inception, Delta has served as a steadfast air bridge between Asia and the world.

### 28. MACY'S (television commercial)

It's Macy's Thanksgiving sale. Storewide savings for the whole family. All women's coats and jackets ... 30-50 percent off. All men's outerwear ... 25-50 percent off. And all kids' jackets, hats, and gloves ... up to 60 percent off. Macy's Thanksgiving Sale. All you need for the holidays.

### 29. HAMPTON TOYOTA (radio commercial)

At HAMPTON TOYOTA, we're having a sale that'll blow you away! It's our annual July 4th birthday extravaganza. Hundreds of cars, trucks, and vans ... at unbelievable rock bottom prices. Shop around. Then come to HAMPTON because we guarantee the lowest prices. The right car, the right price, the right dealer. HAMPTON TOYOTA ... right where it counts.

### 30. BOSE 3-2-1 GS SYSTEM (tutorial)

Congratulations on your discerning purchase of the new Bose 3-2-1 GS System. We've made this award-winning 3-2-1 DVD home entertainment system even smaller and better, with an enhanced surround sound experience from just two incredibly small speakers. With Bose patented speaker technology and our latest signal processing, your new speakers will deliver the benefits of a surround sound without running wires to the back of your room.

### 31. VIRTUOSO TRAVEL SPECIALIST (television commercial)

Flock to Florida, hang ten in Hawaii, cruise in California ... whichever sun-sational trip you take, you'll get discounts of up to 25% off Alamo's great rates, so you can have a cool time in a hot place. See ya in the sun! Call your local Virtuoso travel specialist for reservations or information.

### 32. GREAT CANADIAN ADVENTURES (television commercial)

Thousands of miles of unspoiled wilderness. Boy oh boy are you gonna need a good guide. Canada is big, rugged, 100% pure, and definitely the place to go for authentic outdoor adventure. That's why we've put together an amazing 44-page guide, jam-packed with unique adventures, astounding photographs, regional highlights, and information on the valuable exchange rate and how to get here. And best of all, it's free. Get closer to polar bears, moose, and whales; mush your own team of sled dogs across northern lands; or play all day, then retreat to the comforts of a resort lodge nestled amid majestic mountains. For your FREE copy of "Great Canadian Adventures" call 1-877-8-CANADA. The World Needs More CANADA.

### 33. SENSITIVE SKIN DOVE (television commercial)

There are products made for sensitive skin. But there's nothing quite like Sensitive Skin Dove – it's the mildest perfume-free sensitive skin bar ever made. No wonder Dove's the one that dermatologists recommend most to keep your skin looking healthy and feeling soft. Dove. For the beauty that's already there.

34. HD AVIATOR SUNGLASSES (television commercial)

(Voice actor:) Other Sunglasses sell for one hundred, two hundred, even three hundred dollars, and they don't have HD Vision lenses that cut through glare and give you high definition color and clarity. Call and you can get our brand new HD Aviators for just ten dollars! ... But Wait ... Call right now and you'll get a second pair for free! Just pay shipping and handling. HD Aviators! Don't wait! Call NOW!

(Announcer:) To order your HD Aviators for ten dollars and \$6.99 shipping and handling have your credit card ready and call 1-800-788-1292. That's 1-800-788-1292 or you can go to [GetHDAviators.com](http://GetHDAviators.com). Don't delay. Call 1-800-788-1292 or order on-line today.

Scripts 35-37 = Kids Scripts

35. SESAME STREET PLAYHOUSE (television commercial)

It's Sesame Street in the backyard. All the fun and imagination of Sesame Street is here. A playhouse with things to slide on, and wriggle through, and pretend to talk on, and play with. The outdoors is even more fun when Sesame Street is part of it. Now, there's a lot of Sesame Street for everyone's backyard. It's fun. Each sold separately ... from Mattel.

### 36. PIXELS (interactive computer game)

1. Which of these things starts with the letter “B”? A pencil ... a car ... a ball ... or an apple? Touch your answer on the screen, and hit “enter.”

- Hey, you got it! You could hear the “buh” sound in the word “ball.”

- I’m sorry, that is not correct. Try again.

2. Hey, somebody ripped up this picture. Can you figure out what it was? Was it a horse, a cat, a pig, or a dog?

- Good going! It was a dog. You have sharp eyes.

- Oops, that is not right. Try again.

3. All of these things are neat to eat, but three of them aren’t a treat for your teeth. Which thing is good for you and your teeth?

- That’s right! The carrot is very good for you.

- That is not the right answer. Try again.

### 37. SPACE CAMP MISSION (museum exhibit)

Welcome to Space Camp! Join us on the “Blast off to Camp Sweepstakes”, where we join the US Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama. We’ll train like real astronauts do, perform scientific experiments and participate in a simulated space mission!

## Scripts 38-43 = Character Scripts

animated productions, cartoons, video games, talking toys ...

### 38. MOPEY THE DONKEY (children's interactive game wizard)

Hi kids, I'm Mopey the donkey, and I'm here to help guide you through this program. Any time that you have a question, just place your cursor on the "help me" button, and click the mouse. If you want me to repeat something, click the "go back" button. Now, to begin, click "start," and me and my pals will show you around!

### 39. LENDER'S BAGELS (radio commercial)

As a New Yorker, I know a good bagel when I see one. And let me tell ya, Lender's makes one that can't be beat! Available in all your favorite flavors. Hey, you can trust a New Yorker. Lender's ... just like New York!

### 40. LIQUID PLUMBER (television commercial)

Every time you use your kitchen or bathroom sink, gunky stuff like soap, hair and grease can clog your drains. And as a plumber, I've seen first-hand how gross clogged-up drains can be. Now you can prevent this clogging with new Liquid Plumber drain cleaner. Let Liquid Plumber Build-up Remover Drain Cleaner clear your drains, so you don't have to be grossed out.

### 41. CELENTANO FROZEN FOODS (radio commercial)

You know, when mama cooked, nobody could beat the fresh aroma that came from her kitchen. Somehow, the sauce was always just right ... the pasta so fresh, the taste so delicious. Now, there's only one name to think of for food like Mama's. Celentano's Italian Frozen Entrees, with the freshness of a home-cooked meal ... Lasagna, ravioli, manicotti, stuffed shells ... just like Mama used to make ... only with fewer calories. CELENTANO ... do it for yourself ... do it for Mama.

42. THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD (children's cartoon)

Chug, chug, chug, puff, puff, puff, ding dong, ding dong. The little train rumbled over the tracks. She was a happy little train, for she had such a jolly load to carry. Her cars were filled full of good little things for boys and girls. There were toy animals — giraffes with long necks, teddy bears with almost no necks at all, and even a baby elephant. Then there was the funniest little clown you ever saw.

43. DR. SEUSS (children's picture book)

Dear Whelden will show you great sights as you go: Right now you are riding down Stethoscope Row. And I know that, like all our top patients, you're hoping to get yourself stethed with some fine first-class scoping. So I'm sure you'll be simply delighted to hear that in the Internal Organs Olympics last year Doctor Schmidt, Smoot, Sinatra, Sylvester, and Fonz won fifteen gold medals, nine silver, six bronze! For the moment, however, we'll by-pass this bunch. There is plenty of time to see them after lunch.

## **CHAPTER 8: POST TRAINING**

**You've developed your performance skills.  
Now it's time to formulate your success plan!**

## ***In this chapter:***

1. Evaluate your potential
2. Determine your next step

In your voice-over career, learning should never end. And there is quite a bit more to a successful voice-over business than just knowing how to perform.

You should also know:

- Basic technical knowledge – obviously necessary to operate a home studio.
- Business practices – general practices of running a small business, and the standard practices of our industry.
- Marketing practices and strategies – including an awareness of industry trends, and resources for self-promotion.
- Your business plan – every business should have one, to keep track of all the above, measure growth, spot potential, deal with risks, and pull everything together.

Edge Studio prides itself in encompassing all these areas in its curriculum, which is designed to guide both new talent and highly experienced working pros.

We offer group classes, remote classes (by phone or Skype), seminars online and in person, and private coaching by specialists in virtually any VO field. We also have close relationships with related experts, such coaches in acting, voice training, singing and other disciplines.

If you're just starting out and you've read this far, obviously you have the interest. It's time to learn if you have the potential to make it as a voice-over performer. If you haven't yet been evaluated by us, that's the way to start.

If you have been evaluated by us, and received a green light, what are you waiting for? Call us at 888-321-EDGE, or write [training@edgestudio.com](mailto:training@edgestudio.com), and let's talk about a training program geared to your interests and capabilities.

And if you're a working pro, we can enhance your capabilities, too. Talk with us about ongoing professional development.

We encourage all our students and readers to continually watch for voice-over marketing trends and opportunities. Read the trade magazines in print and online, and keep abreast through social media. Participate in our seminars and webinars, and avail yourself of the many free resources at [EdgeStudio.com](http://EdgeStudio.com). Keep in touch with your peers – people in the voice-over community are remarkably supportive of each other.

You might also exercise your imagination with improv classes; there are improv groups all over, and it's a great way to lose your inhibitions and open doors into many genres.

In fact, we'll close this guidebook with a basic tenant of improv training:

- When offered an opportunity, never say “No.”
- Always say “Yes,” and add what you can of your own.

# **ABOUT DAVID GOLDBERG**

A leading authority on voice-over and Chief Edge Officer of Edge Studio, David Goldberg has cast and directed thousands of voice-over productions. He has also coached innumerable voice actors, from beginners to top working pros and celebrities.

David says, “Although I don’t have a golden voice, I guess my ears work pretty well.”

Indeed. David’s ears are considered the best in the industry.

He’s known for an uncanny ability to provide super-quick yet precise direction. Because he sees things from all industry perspectives, many veteran voice actors rely on him as their mentor. David is also one of the most active directors and speakers, frequently illustrating his practical answers with fun anecdotes from his many years of experience.



Soon after founding Edge Studio as a music-recording facility in 1988, David added spoken voice recording to its repertoire. In response to many clients asking him for voice over guidance, David wrote the first edition of the “Voice Over Performance Guidebook” in 1992.

Since 2000, Edge Studio has focused exclusively on spoken voice, and is now one of the world’s premiere voice over production, casting, and training facilities.

Clients and agents rely on David’s ability to pinpoint the right voice actor for their production. Voice actors rely on his ability to help them find their full potential, benefiting from his perception, straight-forwardness, production savvy, and those acute ears.