

SO YOU WANT TO BE A VOICE ACTOR:
EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW TO START YOUR OWN BUSINESS ONLINE

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INTRODUCTION

So you want to be a voice over artist, eh? Bravo to you! I'm proud of you for researching and finding your way to this all-inclusive, yet not entirely exhaustive "How To" guide. Oftentimes, when people ask me "I'd like to do voice over work. Sounds like fun! How do I get into it?" I get frustrated. The question makes the job seem so easy. While the work itself is not particularly difficult like let's say, coal mining, or brain surgery, it does take a bit of talent and know-how to start making a noticeable income. Besides, if you already have the equipment, studio setup and skills to record and edit audio, you should be researching online, you know, where the jobs are, not asking someone who is just trying to work the field.

Let me introduce myself and why I am authorized to write this book. I'm Maggi Mayfield. I'm a long time radio personality turned full time voice actor. I got my first voice over job AT my first full time radio job. A mall in Las Vegas hired me to read a :60 second commercial and then paid me \$100. I read for them every month for a couple of years. This was my first client! And I can tell you, this was long before Facebook or LinkedIn so I had no idea how to find more clients to pay me like that. Plus, working in radio turned out to be a pretty meager salary so the extra (and oh-so-easy) income was helpful.

Now I work out of my own home studio in Los Angeles (in my closet) and regularly work with over 20 clients! (You only really need about 8 or so to make the leap into full time). I teach the art of interpreting scripts and copy, how to take care of your voice with vocal warm ups and editing tricks (since this will be a minor portion of working for yourself....don't be scared!) at a broadcasting school in Huntington Beach, CA. I also help actors produce voice over demos (which you need) and thus far, 90% of my clients have either gotten an agent or gotten work because of our work together.

I am a big believer in "There is room for everyone that works hard." Many voice over artists will become possessive over their "secrets" and clientele. This is because it does take time, persistence and hard work to earn and keep these clients. Don't fear, though, because no two voices are alike and no two brains will interpret a script the same. So there is, in fact, room for everyone.

If you are a person who has been told, "You have a great voice, you should do voice overs," I'm going to warn you right now, that's not even half of the battle. Cool, you've got a great voice, but I'm going to ask you, "Can you read?" READING is so much more important than just *sounding good*. So practice reading. Outloud. I tell my students this

everyday. Read out loud for AT LEAST 5 minutes everyday. And vary it. Your Twitter feed, Variety Magazine, LA Times, a chapter of a fiction book, a kids book, an advertisement; I don't care what it is, just read it out loud. With a bit of practice, you will start to sound like you are just talking, and not just reading to your audience. We'll circle back around to this idea, but you take nothing else away from this book, remember, be a good reader. In fact, read the next paragraph out loud. Start practicing *now!*

Much of what I learned in this business has been trial and error, attending seminars, hiring coaches and a ton of Googling. I mean a ton! At least once a month I sit down with trusty Google and start asking "Where to find voice over jobs" or "best voice over microphones for traveling" or "Voice over agents." The research never ends. I can't tell you how many times I've been asked "How did you get into that?" only to respond with "I Googled it," because it's the truth. So consider this book my gift to you. A compilation of everything I've Googled and learned by just doing.

Here's what you can expect if you read all the way through this guide: I'll take you through the ins and outs of some of the vocabulary used in the business, the different types of voice overs you can do, the difference between being a union talent versus non union talent, buying equipment and setting up a studio, how to protect your instrument (voice), reading/interpreting scripts, the secrets of putting together a demo, and maximizing your internet presence to get work!

There is a lot more to it than just reading a few scripts. To start making real money takes time and a lot of effort. In fact, about 80% of what you will actually be doing as a voice over artist, is marketing yourself! But we'll get to that later. First, you should know a few things before you get started.

A FEW WORDS YOU NEED TO KNOW

There are a few buzz words and phrases used when working as a voice over talent that may help you understand what a client needs or wants.

Script/Copy-These are used interchangeably. Although, I would argue that a script is used for projects that have character dialogue or audiobooks. A piece of copy is generally shorter projects like a radio or TV commercial.

Deliverables- This means 'How will you deliver the product?' Clients will ask this question because oftentimes they aren't quite sure how they need it. They are a middleman; they find the voice they like and send it to their in house producer to finalize the project.

Edit- This means, on your end, to delete mistakes and unwanted sounds out of your reading.

Milestone- This is a break in a job. So if you are working on an audiobook, you may want to set up two or three stopping points or milestones, to make sure the client likes the work you are creating and that you are giving them exactly what they want. This is also a great way to ensure your client is serious about paying you.

Revisions/Recut-When a client sends the project back to you with notes on your product. They will have either an updated or revised script/copy (because when they heard the words out loud, it didn't flow easily) or they will want you to redo or *recut* a particular line/lines.

Take-When a client asks for several takes of a project, they want a few options. Don't read them the same way each time, vary up the energy, cadence and delivery of your read.

WHAT KIND OF VOICE OVERS CAN I DO?

Many people think that voice overs is all about cartoons. While that is one of the more fun and exciting aspects of voice overs, it is only a small percentage of the kind of work you can do as a voice over talent. Everything you hear in the world, someone had to record it. On hold messages for businesses, employee training videos, safety videos, product presentations, radio and television commercials, audiobooks, and even the voice you hear on a bus letting you know the next stop or on a plane giving you the safety rules and guidelines. Voice overs are everywhere! So again, there is room for everyone in this business. Getting to know your own voice, the types of voice overs you are best at and/or get the most work for will be beneficial in creating a demo to help you land those types of jobs.

TO GET AN AGENT, OR NOT TO GET AN AGENT

Ah, that is the question, isn't it?! You probably think, "yes, Maggi, get an agent! For they can help you get all the jobs you could possibly imagine!" I'd say, yes, that's the ideal way it should happen. However, you may be shocked to learn, I've been doing this all on my own without an agent as a Non-Union talent. Let me explain what that is just a bit.

UNION VS. NON-UNION

Many online resources will tell you that in order to be a professional voice over artist, you will need to be a member of the "union." The union they are referring to is SAG-AFTRA. This is an all encompassing talent union to protect creative people such as actors, directors, broadcasters, journalists, puppeteers, stunt performers, singers, recording artists, dancers and voice over artists. The union does a really great job of helping these performers earn fair wages, health insurance and even 401k. You must be aware that it is very expensive to join the union and that doing so as an inexperienced voice over talent may actually not be that beneficial to you.

As a union talent, you may get higher wages, but the jobs are more difficult to find, let alone get. The competition is fierce and without much experience, landing your first few gigs will be much more difficult. Once you go union, you can never go back either. You can't take non-union jobs at lower rates. You will get fined if you get caught and eventually, you will get caught.

Working as a non-union talent opens you up to the rest of the world of voice overs, audiobooks, on hold messages, product presentations and so many radio and television commercials. The difficult part about working as a non-union talent is the effort on your part to find work. Also, if a client doesn't pay, (which has never happened to me) then you don't have the help of SAG-AFTRA to fight to get your money. You have to fight for yourself to get the money you were promised. You know, a big part of the reason we started doing this in the first place. Again, this has never happened to me. ALL of my clients are so delighted with the product I give that they always pay well before the deadline. I also use several websites and production companies that probably all deal with those kinds of problems for me. I'll discuss these websites and production companies in great detail later.

While we are discussing pay, another major difference between union and non-union talent is HOW they get paid. A union talent will get paid half of the job up front and the rest upon completion while a non-union talent will have to wait until the end to collect their fees. Don't let this stress you out. Think of it like eating at a fancy restaurant. You sit down, order, eat delicious food (hopefully) and pay upon completion of the service. Getting paid at the end of a job is the same thing. You could ask a client to split up the fees for much bigger jobs to know they are serious. Oftentimes for jobs that big, the client will set up several milestones within the job. This way it breaks down the workload for you into more manageable pieces and then you can expect a more steady flow of income until the job is completed.

LET'S SET UP YOUR STUDIO

Getting set up can be one of the more exciting, albeit challenging parts of starting your own voice over business. Remember, this is a business and there will be a bit of over-head before you get your first gig. This does NOT mean you need to go crazy and spend thousands of dollars to get started. In fact, for probably less than \$700 you could be up and running, depending on the equipment you already have!

First, you will need a computer that you don't use for much else other than editing. The last thing you want is a computer running slowly because of a virus you picked up on Facebook. It doesn't have to be fancy. I started with a simple Toshiba laptop and an external hard drive to save all of my audio. (Which you will want to do! Save everything because this will help you create and update your demo, which I will cover later).

Next, you will need software to help you record and edit. There is not much editing that needs to be done so don't stress if you have little to no experience. When you send a client your audio, it does need to be finished; as in edit out all of your mistakes, breaths, popping sounds etc. The mic is very sensitive and records everything. You want to send your client the very best! This is what gets clients coming back and helps you decide what to charge, which I will cover in more detail later.

There is a lot of free software for audio editing online. Audacity is the number one rated software. It is really user friendly. Record, highlight and delete. That's all you *really* need to use. If you like to get fancy and have some time to peruse other software, I'd recommend Adobe Audition. There are so many cool tricks in manipulating audio from filters to mixing, it really is my favorite piece of software. Other software you might encounter are Protools, LogicPro and GarageBand. Here, I say go with what makes you

comfortable. Most clients ask for a mp3 or wav file. If you can get your voice to one of those formats, it really doesn't matter how you get there, at least at first, anyway.

The next piece of hardware you will need is a microphone! This is where things really start getting fun. You can buy a really nice microphone. A high end [Audiotechnica AT2020USB](#) Cardioid Condenser USB recording microphone is a mic that just about any computer will recognize once you plug it into the USB port. It can run anywhere from \$100-\$140 depending on when Amazon is running sales. I highly recommend this microphone and I'm not even being paid to say that. This is the exact mic that got me started without the use of a professional grade studio and has helped me build my portfolio and maintain relationships with my clients. Now that I currently work in a professional grade studio, I use this mic and my laptop to accommodate a client during off hours or when I want to get away for the weekend and there might be a "just in case" moment when a client needs a revision, edit or something cut immediately. (You will also find that there is a high need for American voices in other countries. Currently, my biggest and most demanding clients are in Japan, South Korea and India. Needless to say, their work weeks begin during my Sunday afternoon).

You don't need to get the biggest and baddest equipment however, may I remind you that this is the way you want to make a living, at least part time. You want to sound the best you possibly can. Invest a little in yourself and it will pay you back!

There are a lot of microphones you could purchase. You don't have to get a microphone with a USB plug, but it will be the easiest, one stop purchase, at least to get you started. There are lots of better microphones that need to be plugged into a sound mixing board or processor before your computer will recognize it. At that point, you've got quite a bit of equipment and may need something more stable than just a laptop. Again, you absolutely could get one of those, along with a condenser, but these are pricier purchases and not really necessary to get you *started*. Which is what this book is all about. Keep it simple, and once you start building clients, (which takes a lot more time than you think) reinvest in yourself with your earnings and upgrade to all the fancy stuff!

Make sure when you are doing your research on the best microphone for you, that you find a mic good for voice recording. Some will be meant more for music, or percussion, but you'd be better off with a mic that is designed to pick up voices and minimize room noise. Trust me, no matter how quiet a room or how much sound proofing, it will never be quiet enough.

A few websites to find equipment: (Get to know them and love them!)

[Sweetwater](#)

[Guitar Center](#) (They have an entire new podcast section, they could be really helpful in a pinch!)

[Amazon](#) (compare prices!)

[Adorama](#) (If you have an aversion to any of the above, these guys have what you need, too)

Let's make sure we cover properly soundproofing your space.

Wherever you decide to record, make sure it is a place that you will be uninterrupted. There is nothing worse than hitting the record button and you are about half way through a piece of copy only to be barged in on by the kids, or the dog starts barking, or a car drives by. These quiet, uninhabited spaces are difficult to come by. Your first thought may be the bathroom. *Who would bother me there?* Well, hopefully no one. But bathrooms and any large rooms, really are terrible for recording because they tend to allow sound to bounce around. This causes an unnatural echo in your recordings which clients tend to dislike in the product they pay for. May I recommend a closet or laundry room? These are perfect because they are small areas where sound will not be able to bounce around. The clothing in these rooms are great for absorbing extra noise, too, so you won't get a bunch of echo in your voice.

If this isn't possible, don't worry! There are alternatives, you just need to get a little creative. I've seen professionals like Mike Rowe from "Dirty Jobs" record voice overs on the road in bed with a mountain of blankets on top of him. I've seen other professionals stand in a corner with blankets hung up on the wall. A more permanent moveable device might look like this: take a plastic tub that you would get at Wal-mart to store Christmas decorations in and line the inside with a mattress topper. I use this sound box when I leave for the weekend but still want to be on standby for a client. It's easy to carry and I can put my equipment inside and keep track of everything in one place. My sound box is double lined with the mattress topper. All it took was a little glue on the inside of the box. After the first layer was set, I had extra topper left over so I just double lined the inside, for good measure.

When I use it, I just prop the box up on a flat surface that is either standing height (like on the hood of my SUV...which I've done in the middle of a rest stop or the woods!) or sitting height (like on a desk). I prop the microphone up on it's stand, connected to the laptop, which is usually on top of the sound box and then I read the copy from my phone.

In this case, you may still need to let others around you know that you are about to record and to leave you be or talk a ways away from you, but the sound box will always give you that echo-free, pure sound of your voice.

Another little quick tip, if you are struggling to find out why your voice isn't sounding as crisp or clear on the recording as you'd like, you can also try to put a sock over the mic. Professionals will use a "mic sock" which is designed to put over the head of the microphone to reduce the sound of wind and external noise. Find a thick sock at home, it'll work. Just make sure it's clean!

If this all seems daunting and you don't want to record or edit your own stuff, there are professional recording studios everywhere that will record and edit your audio. It does come at a price, however, so do your due diligence and research to see if paying someone else a portion of your earnings would even be worth the time and money. In the beginning, jobs won't be big or high paying. Approach it with a "take what you can get" attitude.

I've taken the liberty to compile a list of quick videos to acquaint you with how to navigate each of the aforementioned editing software. But may I remind you, a more in depth look is only a Google search away!

[AUDACITY](#)

[ADOBE AUDITION](#)

[LOGIC PRO](#)

[PRO TOOLS](#)

[GARAGE BAND](#)

PROTECT YOUR INSTRUMENT

Your voice is a powerful instrument composed of many muscles including your tongue, teeth, lips, esophagus, lungs, larynx, trachea and even your nose. They are all connected and every one of them is used for speaking.

Just as most athletes would never start a game or race without warming up their muscles, a voice actor would never get on the mic without some sort of warm up. After all, the voice, the tongue, the lips, the lungs, the throat and the face all have muscles and need attending to before you hit the record button. If you'd like your money maker

to survive day in and day out of recording, you'll want to keep your instrument in tip top shape! Some days, I can be reading for up to four hours at a time!

Here is a series of warm up exercises you can do that take less than 5 minutes and will certainly warm up your vocal chords.

1. Stand up. You need the best posture possible to allow all of the air to escape your lips and sound like the best version of you! Plus, when the air can easily escape, you tend to have more of it accessible; plus you will be able to breathe deeper. Bonus: you'll have more energy for longer recording sessions. (If you are in a space that does not work for standing and you must sit, finish warming up while in a standing position, but during recording, sit towards the front of the chair, with good posture. Imagine you are a sitting marionette and there is a string pulling the crown of the neck towards the sky).
2. You definitely don't have to do this, but I start with a few jumping jacks. Not only does it get your blood flowing and your lungs really working, but it allows me to relax! Just 8-10 or so will do the trick. It can feel silly standing in front of a microphone reading words from a page that are not your own, sometimes in a different voice. This is totally bizarre! A few jumping jacks are a playful way to get you to loosen up and get out of your comfort zone.
3. Your lungs have air, your brain is letting go of what feels silly in the body, now it's time to relax. Give yourself a little massage. Take your time with this part. Start with each of your hands on your shoulders. Rub those puppies. You hold a lot of stress there! Make your way up your neck and behind the ears. You may start to feel warm in the face. Good! Tug your ears and move your fingers to rub where your jaw meets your ears. I call it the chewing bone. Keep rubbing your beautiful face up your temples and across your forehead. Come down each side of the nose and pull your sinuses apart. Take the deepest breath you've taken all day while your sinuses are open like that and as you exhale, all the stress you've just rubbed out should come out with that breath. I like to end with a quick tapping of the cheeks. It feels good to be alive!
4. Begin humming. Anything. Warm up the vocal chords and let sound resonate in your nasal cavity. The "ABC's" are nice and quick. I generally choose whatever song is stuck in my head at the moment. (Thank you Adele.) If you feel like it, sing a little bit of it. Get the jaw moving.
5. Move the face! Try going from a really surprised open-eyed face to a really scrunched up pouty face. Probably didn't know you had all of those muscles in your forehead, did you?

6. Move the lips. I like the “ooooohhhhhh-eeeeeee-ooohhhhhh-eeeeee” movement. Open your mouth as wide as you can in the “ahh” position and transition to move your lips back to “eee.” Repeat “ooohhh” to “eee” as many times as you can in one breath and keep repeating until you feel satisfied. This sounds weird, but your face will thank you after hours of recordings!
7. Move the tongue. Take your tongue outside of your mouth and move it in a plus sign motion. Top to bottom, left to right. Reverse! Right to left, bottom to top! Stop when you feel satisfied or can no longer take the almost drool on your chin. Next try to write the alphabet, with your tongue. In cursive. Outside of your mouth. Then grab the drool rag!
8. Try a few tongue twisters. This is the part of the warm up where you get to use everything in conjunction. The tip of the tongue, the teeth, the lips (and all of the other body parts we massaged!)
- 9.

Here are a few tongue twisters I really like:

KINKY COOKIE, KINKY COOKIE, KINKY COOKIE (3 times in one breath)

TIP IT, PIPET; TIP IT, PIPET; TIP IT, PIPET. (3 times in one breath)

NO MING NO MONG, NO MING NO MONG, NO MING NO MONG. (3 times in one breath)

LIBID IBID, LIBID IBID, LIBID IBID. (3 times in one breath)

FLORA'S FAN FLUTTERED FEEBLY AND HER FINE FINGERS FIDGETED

WHICH WRIST WATCHES ARE SWISS WRISTWATCHES

THE WIRE ROUND AROUND A REEL.

FREE FLEA SPRAY (5 times in one breath)

DID YOU, WOULD YOU, COULD YOU WILLIAM. (3 times in one breath)

YOU KNOW YOU NEED UNIQUE NEW YORK

SIX LONG SLIM SLICK SLENDER SAPLINGS

STRANGE STRATEGIC STATISTICS

THE MINX MIXED A MEDICINAL MIXTURE

WOULD YOU PAWN PRAWNS AT PAWN SHOP OR PRAWN SHOP

THE BOTTOM OF THE BUTTER BUCKET IS THE BUTTERED BUCKET BOTTOM

The point of tongue twisters is that it should be *fun* (you know, like get you out of your head) and reveal to you what sounds in the English language you have trouble opening

your mouth to pronounce. There are so many available to practice with. Try this [familiar guide](#), or maybe something a little bit more [difficult like this](#).

These exercises seem silly, but they really do help keep your vocal muscles safe from injury. There is nothing worse than working on a project with a client for a few days and your voice is tired and scratching after day one of work. You want your amazing voice to sound the same every time, so warm up!

While we are talking about your voice, let me also briefly introduce you to the Voice Doctor. Dr. Gupta will come up at ANY conference or seminar having to do with voice over actors. Her philosophy is that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. NEVER push it. This is not a replaceable machine. Get all the facts about this amazing tool you carry inside your throat and see what happens when you either don't warm up or don't take care of your voice.

It's also important to note that before and during a recording session, you should refrain from smoking and cold beverages. Smoking strains the chords and cold liquids tend to close up your throat. I'd also recommend steering clear from caffeine and extremely hot beverages. Luke warm water or herbal tea (not too hot) will keep your voice nice and lubed for long recording sessions. When and if you do start to feel tired, then STOP. Take a break. Foods that help sooth your voice include avocado, thick soup like tomato or pea, melons like cantaloupe, oatmeal and tea. [Throat coat tea](#) does wonders when you can feel a cold starting to come on or you've just come from a particularly long or exhausting session. You can pick it up at any grocery store or Amazon has it in stock as well.

SECRETS TO READING AND INTERPRETING SCRIPTS

You are all set up! You have a mic and you are sitting in your homemade booth. You are warmed up and ready to record. Stop. Step away from the mic. We have a bit more to do before hitting the record button.

If you've ever taken an acting class, this portion of the book is going to feel a lot like that class. After all, you are a voice *actor* now! Even if the script or copy you are holding in front of you is a commercial or an eLearning course, you are still acting like you know the material. For example, when I read eLearning courses for medical students, I don't really understand what the material is about per se, but I can figure out with context clues which words are nouns or adjectives. I can also gather that my audience consists

of medical students and that this is a serious subject. Or if I were reading a commercial for a clothing store, with a few context clues, I can figure out that this commercial is about getting teenagers to come in and sell their new or gently used clothing...and then of course to shop! This isn't quite as serious as a medical narration so my approach will be very different.

When you have a script in front of you, this is called a piece of "copy." If your client is nice to you, they will send you copy or a script in all capital letters and double spaced. These format settings make your job easier because the words will be easy to see and the lines will be easy to distinguish.

Don't count on your client being so kind! In fact, oftentimes a client will send you a piece of copy they are very proud of that has little to no punctuation and clearly has not been proofread for spelling or grammatical errors. This is ok!

PRO-TIP: Read the copy exactly as it was written. Unless there was an obvious spelling/grammatical error such as "how" when they clearly meant "who." When you fix mistakes like that, you are setting yourself up for a few things. A) The client will continue to rely on you to proofread their work before you record; and B) you cheat yourself out of extra money. Every time you have to record an edit or revision because of their mistake, you should be paid. Now, if the mistake was on your part, clear it up. Re-record and move on. I'll discuss later on how to charge and invoice a client including mistakes.

You want to read through your copy to get a general sense and understanding of what it is all about. After all, you are an actor; an actor that is not seen, just heard. You only have the power of your voice to convey your message, whether it be for a commercial, a character in a cartoon, an audiobook, etc.

Everytime I get a new piece of copy or a script I ask myself several questions:

- a) What is this about? (*i.e. describing medical procedure or introducing a trendy clothing store*)
- b) Who am I? (*i.e. the expert on this medical procedure or a teen who likes to shop*)
- c) Who am I talking to? (*i.e. medical students or my best friend who needs to check out this shop*)

Very rarely is that last question "Who am I talking to?" going to be more than one person. Yet, this can be the most difficult one to answer. Advertising is very personal. In fact, there are startup companies being developed to even further target individuals. Do

you like to surf? Well, here is a commercial (just for you in your Instagram feed) about drinking Coca Cola on the beach! Are you really into sewing? Well, it just so happens that every sewing circle drinks Coca Cola too! *Imagine that!* So remember, “Who am I talking to?” is usually a best friend or some one JUST LIKE YOU or someone who wants to BE just like you. Unless this is a two person script where it is obvious who you are talking to, assume that your audience is very similar to who you are, the speaker, in the commercial or copy. (This is a thing they need! They must have it! And you, the actor, are just the person to deliver it to them.)

Actors (*that’s you now!*) have several tricks they use to interpret their copy. Some may read through the copy once to get a general sense of how the audience will likely receive the commercial. You only get a first impression once, so just read the copy all the way through once. Don’t interpret or analyze, just read it and get a sense of what it is about.

The next time you read it through, take a pen/pencil/highlighter/utensil of choice, and mark it up. Here are two important things to look for that will make you sound like a pro when it is time to actually record your commercial. First, underline or highlight every time the client’s name appears in the copy. (Obviously, you wouldn’t need to for an audiobook or educational presentation). This is the person that has paid for you to read their commercial, they are the ones you need to sell to your audience. The visual reminder as you read during recording, tends to make you focus and slow down when saying the client’s name.

Second, take notice of the punctuation. Not all pieces of copy are going to grace you with great punctuation. Commas, semi colons, periods, question marks and exclamation points all mean different things and therefore should change the way you interpret the copy. A comma is good for a slight pause or quick breath, semi colons are more dramatic pauses while periods mean stop. The sentence should be definitive; it should be very clear that the thought has finished. A question mark should also indicate that the thought is complete but, instead, have a different inflection at the end, as if the thought is complete but you want the listener to contribute to the thought. An exclamation point also completes a thought but is done so with excitement!

Many actors and voice actors will accentuate these punctuation marks with a slash ‘/’ to note a pause or a double slash ‘//’ to note a longer pause. Underline important words or phrases. As you read through to make notes, say the words out loud because you will also catch words that are difficult to say or phrases that feel weird. Then you will already have an idea of the portions of the copy that are more troublesome than others.

Here is an example of a script that I have manipulated and marked to help during recording.

For example, here is a commercial for Westhills Village.

“A FRIENDLY WORK ENVIRONMENT, /FOCUSED ON EMPLOYEE WELLNESS,/ HAPPINESS AND GROWTH? SOUND TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE?! NOT AT WESTHILLS VILLAGE IN RAPID CITY! WESTHILLS VILLAGE FEATURES COMPETITIVE WAGES,/ TUITION REIMBURSEMENT TO ADVANCE YOUR EDUCATION,/ EXCELLENT BENEFITS AND PAID TRAINING. EMPLOYEES HAVE ACCESS TO ALL THE WESTHILLS VILLAGE AMENITIES. WESTHILLS VILLAGE IS CURRENTLY SEEKING A VARIETY OF POSITIONS INCLUDING C.N.A.’s,/ RN’s,/ LONG TERM NURSING AND MORE.// THIS IS YOUR OPPORTUNITY/...RIGHT HERE, /RIGHT NOW...AT WESTHILLS VILLAGE, APPLY ONLINE NOW AT WESTHILLS VILLAGE DOT COM.”

As you can see, I have highlighted every time the client name appears in the copy. This is important because Westhills Village is the one paying me to make them sound amazing and hopefully get some great candidates to apply! I want Westhills Village to stand out and be memorable.

Even though this technically is a commercial, advertising has moved from actors who can “SELL” to actors who can sound “natural.” By this I mean, no longer are commercials sounding like an actor trying to sell you something, advertising (even television) focuses on gaining the consumers trust. To do this, they have their ‘friend’ tell them about these products. So when you are reading, you should sound like you are just talking to your friend. THIS IS REALLY DIFFICULT TO DO! It takes practice and time. It is called “reading naturally.”

There is a way you can practice getting better at reading naturally. Read everything out loud! Remember? 5 minutes every day. Read the back of your shampoo bottle aloud, the toothpaste instructions, billboards on the way to work, your work emails. Read your Facebook feed or your kid’s Cosmo magazine. Even start repeating phrases you hear on the radio. The more comfortable you become with reading, the better and more conversational you will sound when you read on the mic. Because you may not be a medical expert or a teenager who shops, but you can certainly sound like one. Read outloud. Make me believe you are just talking.

THE PERFECT DEMO

Okay, you get it! You've marked up your copy and interpreted your scripts. You are ready to act! Or read! But you must convince others you are ready too. You can't do that without a demo.

A demo is a compilation of how you sound. It's proof that you can go from medical expert to teenager with ease! Agencies, managers, and producers are going to want to hear how you sound. They *want* to hear your demo! Your demo is just an example of all of your best work. Don't worry, you don't need to have been paid for the scripts you read in your demo. But, there is a definite method to the madness in arranging your various samples that will help you get noticed faster and ultimately, book you more work. Which is the goal, right?

Your demo is supposed to represent your skills and showcase your talent. The tricky part is that anyone listening to your demo isn't going to listen for long. You have to snag them within the first 10-15 seconds. That's not a lot of time! But there are secrets to keeping a listener longer.

Generally, your demo should not be longer than :60 seconds in total. It should contain at least three to five different scripts or pieces of copy. The first thing you want on your demo is the biggest or most famous client you have. In this case, since you haven't even begun to get paid for work, just pick a radio or TV commercial ad on television, and copy down the words. Transcribe it. Pick an ad with a voice that sounds similar to your own. So if you are reading a script for Toyota, it would sound plausible that your voice would be or could be used for that commercial. Just be smart. For example, a young sounding female voice might not fit for a Home Depot read, because a) the audience for that commercial are homeowners. Hearing about products for the home won't sound as convincing coming from a youthful female as it would from a strong male or older female voice; and b) Home Depot already has a pretty famous voice reading their commercials. "You can do it, we can help." You know exactly how that voice sounds, so trying to pass it off as your own body of work will make you appear deceptive and possibly even difficult to work with.

The next piece in your demo should be the best thing you've done. The piece you are most proud of! So you hook them in with the biggest most conceivably recognizable name, then keep them tuned into the best thing you've ever done. Whatever that may be; commercial, audio book, training manual, tag line, just put the thing you think sounds the best.

After you have the hook and line, the next few things should round off your capabilities. Do you do an accent? A character? A special kind of reading, like children's story books, medical jargon, or online classes? This is where you put the next few pieces of audio. This way, the potential client recognizes your voice, hears your best stuff, and then even if they don't think you are the perfect fit for this particular project, they get an idea of your range. This is important because people producing projects needing voice overs, generally have several projects rolling at once. So where you may not be the perfect fit for the job you are auditioning for, you may just be what they need on another project!

There are many companies in every corner of the world that can help you produce your demo. This can cost you anywhere from \$500-\$1500. Research your potential producer. This is a lot of money to shell out. Ask them for samples from previous clients. Ask them if they coach or direct you. Ask about helping find copy suitable for your voice type. Ask about how long a session lasts. Anything you can think of, ask. This is quite a bit of time and money and energy on both of your parts to come up short with anything less than stellar.

NOW HOW DO I FIND WORK?

You have the perfect set up and the best demo ready to go! Now what? Find work. The frustrating part is that a good voice and a good demo doesn't mean jobs will be lining up in your email inbox. You have to go look for them. I mean, really look. Luckily, the Internet is a vast place where millions of people are connected and needing things like "American Voice Over Actor-Male (or Female)" aren't difficult to find.

Unfortunately, for this type of work however, a quick Google search isn't going to instantly connect your work to the people that need your type of work. So you might think you need an agent. Or do you?

Agents or managers can be wonderful human beings that can put your talent in the front row of all the best producers and project managers in Hollywood. Which is GREAT!

These might even be some of the biggest paying jobs you could get access to. The catch is that agents and managers are incredibly difficult to come by, let alone one that you can trust to do the job you want and need. If you can land a talent manager or agent to help you, then great; I'm still trying to figure out how to accomplish this. Agents that specialize in voice overs typically want actors that do other stuff too (like act in front of a camera, or perform stand up)

If you are struggling, like me, don't fret! I make a great income without the help of anyone else. The income doesn't come without a lot of hard work including hours spent online marketing myself, updating my website and demos, writing potential talent agencies and networking like a bat out of hell.

If you typed in "Voice Over Jobs" in Google right now, you'd probably get a laundry list of services like [Voice123](#), [Voices.com](#), or [EdgeStudio](#) that you could pay a monthly or yearly fee, to get access to auditions for jobs. There are a lot of actors that use these services and even more clients looking for freelance voice talent there. I have several colleagues that use these services and have done very well using them. I had a lot of success using Voices.com. I found a promo code (quick Google Search) and signed up for \$100 off. The first year was great! I more than tripled my money back and my confidence started soaring because I was getting booked, regularly! The second year, I continued to audition, although not as aggressively because I started accumulating more and more clients outside of the site. After a second year of auditioning, I didn't book one single job! I haven't been back since.

I call these, pay-to-play websites. They are easy to spot because they will ask you for a membership fee to gain access to the auditions. The problem I have with these services is that in order to gain any reputation, you have to be sitting at your computer ready to pounce on open auditions. This can be okay to do while you are recording for another project, reading industry news, or submitting your demo to talent agents/managers. In other words, these pay-to-play websites can be great if you are online and working on other projects simultaneously. This is how I was so successful with voices.com the first year and had just the opposite experience the next. As you gain experience and confidence, these Pay to Play sites can be quite the time suck.

You absolutely don't have to Pay to Play. I understand that it is a gamble. But, there is certainly value in paying for that much information and networking ability at your fingertips.

As a side note, other voice actors (those who make big bucks in video games and animation) will tell you that these Pay to Play sites are killing the industry. The rates (which I will go into detail soon!) are so low and really devalue the art of what you are doing. Reading like you are talking. (Keep practicing!). These sites also make it really difficult to transition from a first time client to a regular working partnership.

Most likely, when you start in your voice over career, you won't be working at it full time. You won't quit your day job. This will be some fun "play" money to cover a concert, movie night or small bills. Manage your time wisely. It is precious. Let the Internet do the work for you. If you still want to sign up for these pay-to-play websites, do so! But be prepared to sit on them for a while (hopefully while you multitask) waiting for an audition, or several, to pop up. It may take days, or weeks to land your first audition, but generally, that is all it really takes. One or two paid gigs and your profile on those pay-to-play websites will start coming up at the top of the feed when a client searches for particular voices. Before you know it, you will begin getting "booked" for jobs. This is when a client selects you, out of all the possible voices in the world, to read and interpret their copy. What an honor!

There are other ways to find and land work, without using these pay-to-play websites. In fact, a little known secret is that there are MANY radio stations across the United States that don't have enough people working in their buildings to cover the volume of commercials they are creating for their local businesses and clients. Generally, the handful of on air talent (radio dj's) are working their shift, then having to cut many commercials. Females are outnumbered in the radio industry and therefore overused in their commercial rotation. Commercials sound less credible when the same voices are used over and over again to sell the Chevy dealership downtown, and then the same voice for the Ford Dealership just outside of town, and then the John Deere Tractor Dealer and so on.

So what happens is these small radio stations pay a service like an outside production company to create these commercials. They will pay an agreed upon fee, let's say \$250 per month to record and produce an agreed upon amount of commercials, let's say 10 per month. That production company will hire freelance voice over talent to keep in their roster and rotate through all of them equally. There are MANY of these production companies. I'm listed on 4 different rosters and they pay anywhere from \$4 per commercial up to \$25 per commercial. The frequency with which they come also varies. I get far more requests for work from the \$4 per spot company than the \$25 per spot company. If you want to find these radio companies, your best bet is on the website,

allaccess.com. This is a radio industry site where you can stay up to date with the who's who in the biz, but also, scan for jobs. Lots of voice over work pops up here, specifically for those production companies.

There are also several websites you can use that don't require you to pay to gain access to audition information. One of my favorites is voicebunny.com. They will make you audition, but this process should be pretty painless. They will send you a sample script, then you have an allotted amount of time to return the sample script. They are looking for quality of equipment and turn around time. Generally, the faster you can return a project to a client in the best quality possible, the more competitive you become. Someone may have an excellent voice, but if it takes them two days to return a :60 second commercial, that is a problem.

Another website I use often, that has been wonderful in gaining exposure to different types of projects; upwork.com. This is just meant for freelance work in general, but the amount of voice over work that comes through there is insane! Clients from all over the world are looking for American accents. They are in high demand right now as many clients are looking to build and develop video games or e-learning programs for kids to learn to speak English.

I can't stress this enough. Do your research! Keep Googling "Where to find voice over jobs" or "voice work" or "voice overs." Any variation will lead to results, or at least a few more answered questions.

THE BUSINESS STUFF

Getting work is only half the battle. Keeping it and charging a fair wage is another. Clients sometimes have a difficult time understanding the value of what they are paying for so I like to lay it all out for them. Let's say the project is for a product video for Herbalife. They have a 20 minute presentation video they need recorded. I tell them my fee for 20 minutes of finished and mastered recorded audio, exactly how long it will take for them to receive the finished product and how many edits/revisions they get.

The general rule of thumb to calculate time is like this: for every 1 minute of FINISHED audio (meaning it's been edited), this will take you about 3 minutes of actual work. This means reading it, recording it, editing it and sending it. So if you work on a 10 minute product video, this should take you about 30 minutes from start to finish to complete. Many clients like to charge based on the final product, but they forget that there is more

work that goes into it than that. “You only did 10 minutes of work!” Well, no, actually I did 30 minutes of work for *your project*, and spent many hours training to do this work so quickly and professionally for you!”

Remember, this is work. You reading this book is work! You are investing in yourself. You could be spending this time doing 100 other things (I know the endless possibilities of Netflix) but you chose to invest in yourself. This time counts as working.

Another factor of time I want you to consider is word count. Hang with me. It is very common for a client to ask you how much you’d charge based on a script or copy with X amount of words. “How do you calculate something like that?” Simple. The average reader can read about 110 words per minute. SO, if a client says to you “Hey, I like your voice! I have a 5,000 word eLearning course I’d like you voice, how much would you charge?” Start here:

5,000 words divided by 110 words per minute =(45.4545455)

This means that when the project is all finished there will be about 45 minutes of completed audio. Finished, mastered and ready to go audio. But you, oh wise one, now know that this will take you probably closer to 2 hours and 15 minutes to complete! (Remember, it takes three times as long to complete that work than the actual finished product. So 45 mins project x 3 = 2 ½ hours). How much is your time worth?

Figuring out just how much you should be charging is such a daunting task. When you start using the Pay To Play sites, you will be vastly undercharging. There is an amazing guide written by people who have been in this business a lot longer than me and want to protect the integrity of what we do. The [Global Voice Acting Academy](#) has broken down pretty much every type of job you can think of and what you should be charging your client.

When I first started, I was completely undervaluing myself. I’d pretty much start at a base of \$7/finished minute. I had to work a lot to book those concert tickets I wanted or weekend getaway. I really had to learn to be comfortable saying “I spent a lot of time learning this craft and deserve to be paid what I’m asking.” Some actors will go lower, and some will go higher depending on their current demand.

NEVER change the wording in a piece of copy or script, unless a client asks you for help in this department. You are not a proofreader. You are a voice talent and are only

hurting yourself when you do this. Besides, you never know if they actually WANT it read this way. So fight your brain's urge to make everything grammatically correct. Don't be afraid to kick back a piece of copy to a client that has a ton of 'local' words, words that you wouldn't know because they are the names of streets or people you wouldn't be familiar with because you don't live there. (Thank goodness you read through the copy first before you started recording, right?)

Usually, I include up to 5 edits/revisions within the base fee. This lets the client know that you are a professional and that your time is valuable. It can be a nightmare when a client refuses to proofread their copy before sending it to you to ensure they get exactly what they want. I put that cap in there because things do come up and sometimes having a few different varied reads can be helpful.

If you include up to five edits and they come back with several edits because of grammatical errors on their part, you are cheating yourself out of money. After those 5 edits, I do charge, per mastered minute of edited and mastered audio revisions. Although at a discounted rate. It's frustrating for a client to have to resend their copy and it is distracting to you, especially when they are not the only client you are servicing.

Be realistic in turn around time for a project. No matter the size of the project, I can generally complete it within 24 hours. Unless there is a lot of production necessary, which means adding sound effects or different voices, it shouldn't take more than a day to complete these projects. In fact, the quicker you return them back to a client, the better you make them look and the more likely they are to continue to use your voice. Just stay in touch and let them know what is going on. Make them feel like the most important client on your agenda. And always double check your work. Did you edit out all of the mistakes on your end? Did you read all the words correctly? If you don't know how to pronounce something...look it up! Youtube is excellent for this.

MARKETING YOURSELF

Staying competitive also means marketing yourself properly. You probably wanted to get into this business to have crazy voices or maybe read some fun scripts and the idea of marketing yourself, or putting yourself out there, probably never crossed your mind. Working as a non-union voice talent without an agent means that initially, you are unknown. No managers or agents are rallying for you to get work to earn that 10% commission. No one is putting your demo on the line to be judged by project managers and producers. This is the majority of the work you will have to do for yourself.

Luckily, in the era of the Internet, lots of marketing you do can be free! Uploading your demo and any other samples to a service like soundcloud.com is beneficial because all of your audio will be in one central location. Then you can send the profile link to project managers and producers in need of freelance voice over talent. Soundcloud.com is a free service, up to a certain amount of GB, but your samples shouldn't be entire projects (most clients won't allow that anyway), rather snippets, or your demo, of the work you've done. This way a future client has an idea of your range.

You can create your own website if you have the chops to do so. Wix.com is a free source you can use. If you care to, you can pay extra for a personal domain name (i.e. your name is Jane Doe, then you can find a dot com that would work for your name like janedoe.com) Your own personal website adds to the illusion of professionalism, which you are, but again, is not necessary if you are just beginning. Use soundcloud.com. It's user friendly and awesome to get the ball rolling.

Then, type in any number of combinations in the LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Craigslist search boxes: Voice Over Talent, Voice Over Work, Voice Over Artist, Voice Over Jobs etc to bring up jobs or other people in the field. There should be directions in the job posting regarding how to apply or submit your demo.

Reach out to others in the business. Listen to their demos. Privately critique it; what did you like, what didn't you like? Does yours sound similar? What kinds of jobs are they getting booked for? How does this professional describe their own voice? Make sure to drop a line and say hi and tell them what you liked about their audio. You can also like or follow them to stay up to date on what they are doing. You just never know who you are talking to and how you might be able to help one another in the future. I have needed and used people in the business I have never met face to face for voice over work! So put yourself out there. The worst that could happen is they say "no," and then you move on to the next one.

Keep telling people what you do. Post your demos as you make or update them on Facebook. Tell Twitter! Tell your coworkers. Join Facebook groups. If you've found this guide to getting started helpful and less daunting, then start researching classes and coaches in your area. Practice, practice and then practice some more! (How much of this book did you read aloud?) Go to seminars. Get obsessed. Get in the way.

The last thing I can think of to make sure you are successful is to start a daily journal of what you've done. Write down everyday what work you did. This habit became extremely useful when I finally had to switch over and report all of my new side-hustle

income. You can see a log of what projects you worked on, who paid and when, and the time you've spent investing in yourself. Did you buy a microphone? Save the receipt. Read this book? Log the hours. I like to write out in a spreadsheet, right at the top: **Date|Client|Project|\$\$ Agreed|Paid Date**. Then I fill in today's date and either the client (or sometimes me), what project I worked on (or what I was practicing or researching), how much my client and I agreed I'd be paid (or just the amount of time I spent) and then the date I was paid. This helps me keep track of everything I've been up to and although at first this may seem tedious, as you gain more clients, and you will, you are already in the habit and will never lose track of your money owed or time again.

WRAP IT UP

I hope you've enjoyed this guide to getting started as a voice actor. There should be a better understanding of a few key words that clients might throw at you as well as some questions they may ask. You should also have a bigger idea of the kinds of work you can get and hopefully be less intimidated about setting up a studio and working without a manager or agent. Remember, warm up that amazing voice of yours, slow down and interpret your script. AND when in doubt, Google it. The answer is there and there are so many forums and groups to help you. This is such a fun line of work and there is room for everyone if you are willing to work hard. Keep practicing and read more things out loud. Put yourself out there and I just know, you'll be raking in the dough before you know it and bragging that you are a professional voice over talent!

Thank you for following me on this journey. Here are a few online communities that I follow to keep up with everything that's happening in the industry:

[Gravy For The Brain](#)

[The Voice Over Network](#)

[The Buzz Magazine](#)

[The Voice Over Collective](#)

[Lisa Biggs \(She holds lots of free classes\)](#)

[Gabrielle Nistico](#) (She talks a lot about the business side of Voice Over)