

Peter Baker's **Voiceover Masterclass**

www.Voiceovermasterclass.com

Hello and welcome to Voiceover Masterclass. This is the document that accompanies the series of videos available at

www.Voiceovermasterclass.com

I also give you here a chapter from one of my earlier books that still maybe useful to you. So I'd suggest you work your way through the videos first and use this document as an "aide memoire" of the facts and tips I give you. The videos can be watched in any order, but feel free to dip in and out as you wish:

- Making money as a voiceover
- How to set up your voiceover studio
- Getting into the head of the listener - analysing scripts
- Anchoring voice styles and accents
- Sight reading
- The Announcer Voice
- Hard Sell reads
- Keyboard shortcuts
- Editing exercise
- Reading Waveforms
- Dealing with multiple files
- Auditioning online
- Creating demo showreels
- Marketing your voiceover services - 1
- Marketing your voiceover services - 2
- Arm movements when recording
- Paying tax as a voiceover
- So, why be a voiceover?
- Top Tips for Voiceovers

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ABOUT PETER BAKER

In case you don't know anything at all about me, here's a short introduction. I'm Peter Baker, a UK based voiceover who's been in the game for almost 40 years.

My very first job was as an on air announcer and DJ on Piccadilly Radio in the city of Manchester back in the 1970's and as well as broadcasting live virtually every day, I also worked in Commercial Production, writing ads and promos, working with all the top voiceover talent who gave me many of the tips and techniques you're going to learn about in this Masterclass. As well as continuing to be a freelance voice talent, I worked as an in vision BBC TV Newsreader in Bristol for many years and also was a Granada ITV Producer and Director and ran a motoring TV channel for some years. Today voiceover work provides my main income and gives me so much variety; I love it!



Now a question I'm often asked is how much can a voiceover earn? Well, when you have got yourself established, this is the kind of income streams you should have coming in.



First on this diagram, you'll see "Direct Clients" these are people who have either found your website or you have emailed them and they like your voice and your reliability, so they have become regular clients. Maybe they have an elearning module a month they want you to record, or 3 or 4 ads per week for their radio station, or a regular podcast.

Then there are production companies and ad agencies, who produce media for their own clients, and your VO is needed as part of the project; usually they are videos of some kind. These jobs often pay more than direct clients, but you may need to work harder as you'll often retake scripts as you are hearing feedback 2nd hand from the agency, and you won't be allowed to talk to the end user themselves. Anyway, after a year or two you will have a "critical mass" of direct clients, production companies and agencies...maybe 200, or 300, where you'll rarely have a day without any jobs at all, as statistically one of your regular clients will always want something. And of course every client wants their voiceover as soon as possible!

Then you have the voiceover websites - here you're a member of that site and it holds cash from clients once you are booked, you communicate with clients usually via the site, upload your voiceover files there, and you get paid from the website once the client is happy. I'll give a full list of the best ones later.

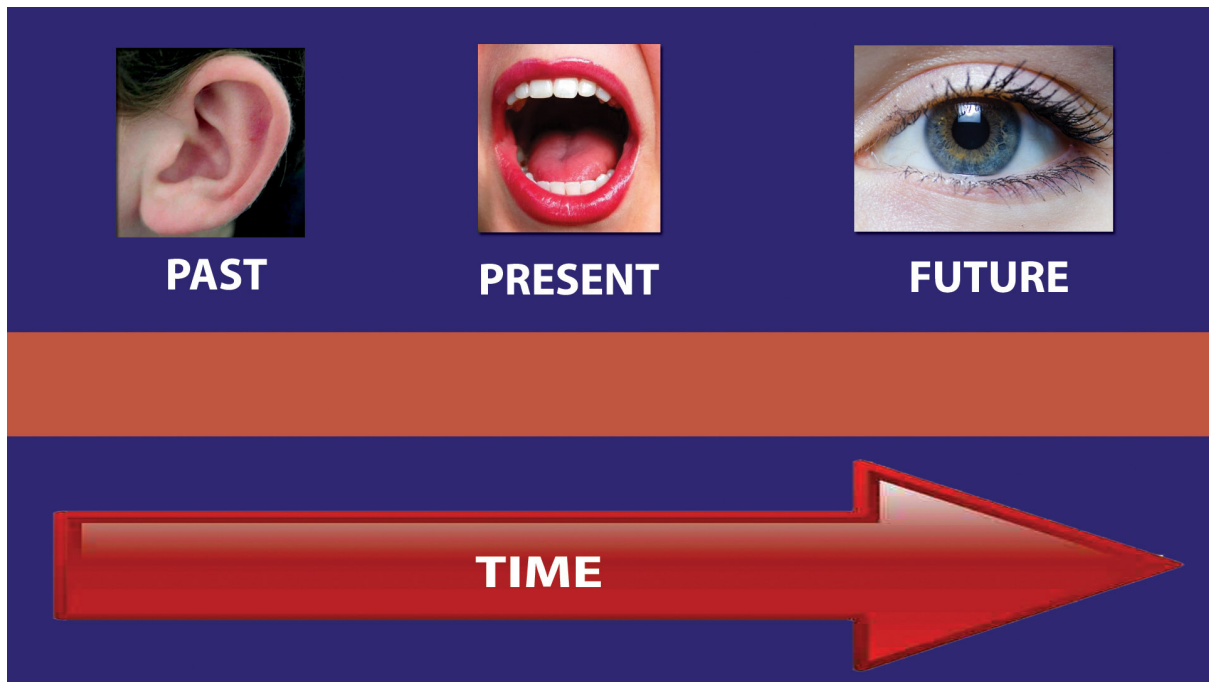
The fourth income stream is for major projects, such as audio books, and TV radio or cinema campaigns where you get an often obscene amount of money for recording often very little. Maybe you get one of these big projects a month, and the other projects you are asked to do you may either need to politely say no to, or persuade the client to receive the files later than they were expecting.

So you have four main income streams, and you have to keep all camps happy...so you're regularly checking your email for direct quick jobs and potential big jobs as well as checking your notifications from the sites you are registered on. So how much can you make? Now I don't know what part of the planet you are from, so excuse me if I only mention US dollars throughout this Masterclass, but you should be aiming at in your first years comfortably earning \$200 per day, and that's 7 days a week. So assuming you have a 2 week holiday in a year, (and on holiday you will still want to nip into a local studio to record a lucrative job) you should bring in $350 \times 200 = \$70,000$ per year. When you are more established you could earn way over \$100,000, and of course the amount is limited to the hours in the day you can record, and that's why you need to be very, very time efficient as I'll go on about throughout this Masterclass. Of course the amount of cash is before tax, and I talk about this in a video module, but it's good money for very flexible working usually at home, and often it's fascinating work. You get to learn all sorts of things from reading scripts, and getting your head round the information so that it sounds like to the listener that you are a true expert and you have a full understanding of the subject!

So what skills do you need to be a successful voiceover?

Here's my list of what I strongly believe you need, and I expand on this list on the video accompanying this chapter.

- You must have no inhibitions; you shouldn't feel embarrassed or self conscious about "putting on" a voice instantly. It's all part of the fun!
- You need to have a sense of timing. So if someone hands you a script that is for a 30 second ad, say, you'll know how to pace it without looking at a clock to hit that "30" pretty accurately first time.
- You need to be able to concentrate. I mean here, you have to switch off everything else in your brain as you read...you should be totally and utterly focused on what you are saying and the meaning behind what you are saying.
- You need the ability to anchor voice styles. So if you're asked to record a 5 minute script in an "Old and Wise" style, or imitating Gandalf or whatever, you stay in that voice and style right through to the end.
- You need to have an "ear" for other voices, particularly accents and characters, and try and add new voices to your arsenal you can offer clients.
- You will need to quickly develop the skill to "understand" a script after glancing at it. After a while it should become second nature to look at a script for the first time and think "Yes, it's one of "those""
- You need to be very, very, very reliable. Most media projects are "urgent", usually because you will be recording for a production company or ad agency who want to look efficient to their own clients. If you deliver fast and accurately, they will love you and keep coming back for more.
- You need to generally be available every day at often unusual hours, what I mean by this is that if you are a UK artist, your North American clients will want you available in the evenings.



Here's an illustration of the "multiskilled" brain you have to hone as a voiceover talent. It's explained in the videos.

So how do you get started?

Offering voiceover services is a fun and flexible way to earn extra income or to be your full time job. You could be reading documentary narrations, radio and TV commercials, web promos, corporate films, transport station announcements, telephone prompts, self-help books or read entire novels where you have to do the character voices as well!

Have you heard my voice? Visit my site www.PeterBakerVoiceover.com and click to hear some of my samples. Now, you don't need to have a deep, resonant "traditional" voice like mine with an "R.P." (Received Pronunciation or "BBC") accent to be in demand. These days, character voices and regional accents of all types are fine; in fact many clients actively look for that "different" voice for their project.

You need to have no absolutely inhibitions, have some sort of drama training or inclination, have good microphone technique and a GREAT sense of timing. The gaps between words and sentences have to be "just right"...a split second too short or too long will naturally sound "wrong" to you – don't worry, you'll soon pick this up!

HOW THE INTERNET HAS COMPLETELY REVOLUTIONISED THE VOICEOVER INDUSTRY

In the old days, you'd have to physically travel to studios and radio and TV stations to read scripts in their "in trays". You'd often sleep in your car if that town's radio station or recording studios had nothing for you that day – yes, it often was that bad! Today, your clients can be around the globe, so your potential clients is everyone on the planet, and professional equipment is extremely cheap compared to the past. The internet can help you create demos and real paying jobs quickly and easily. I will tell you what basic skills you need, equipment and where to get started with specific sites to get signed up to. Some voiceover sites you need to subscribe to. That's OK because you can claim back subscriptions against tax. Your equipment costs can also be claimed back against tax – keep all your receipts! Let's get started.

EQUIPMENT

You may not need to splash out on equipment at first; you could have a friend's gear you can borrow, or with permission, use a student or local radio studio. If you are buying, this is what you'll need.

MICROPHONE:

The best voiceover microphones are condenser ones and the very best condenser ones in my opinion that will make your voice sound amazing, capturing every nuance, are by the German organisation Neumann. If you find a used, looked-after legendary Neumann U87, buy it! (Try ebay!)

If you have to buy new, get the cut-down version of the U87, the TLM103 which has the same "sound", but is transformerless (TLM=TransformerLess Microphone) but the solo polarity field is fine for VO work :

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Sennheiser-8430-Neumann-TLM103-Microphone/dp/B00066WDSK/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1367556618&s_r=8-2&keywords=TLM103

Please note the Neumann studio microphones are EXTREMELY sensitive and fragile. They are NOT for taking out for street vox-pops etc! When I do have to do emergency voiceovers in the back of a car parked in a quiet lane, or sat on the bed in a hotel somewhere, using the WiFi from my phone to download a script and upload the file(s) - I use another normal stick microphone in these situations – a good quality one such as a Shure SM58 will be OK for this with a huge pop filter on so you use it like a “lip microphone” used at football matches, so this way you exclude external noise well. If you can afford it though, go for Neumann’s “stick” microphone for vocal work, the KMS 104 or KMS104 PLUS if you’re a girl, as this gives better low resonance response.



MICROPHONE STAND:

The “arm” type is far better than the table top stand as you don’t lose desk space, and it doesn’t transmit vibrations. I use one of these:

http://www.amazon.co.uk/PODCASTER-TABLE-STAND-AND-ARM/dp/B001D7UYBO/ref=sr_1_cc_1?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1367557313&sr=1-1-catcorr&keywords=rode+microphone+stand

POP FILTER:

You’ll need a good pop filter as well. You speak normally 2 inches in front of the pop filter, which is 3 inches in front of the microphone. Clean it using soap and water every week or so for hygiene.

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Studio-Microphone-Screen-Flexible-Gooseneck/dp/B008AOH1O6/ref=sr_1_7?s=musical-instruments&ie=UTF8&qid=1367557435&sr=1-7&keywords=pop+filter

RECORDING EQUIPMENT:

This is a very personal choice. Some people like to record straight into their computer using the editing program, such as Adobe Audition to record.

Please don't do this. Most input circuits of even expensive computers are poor as few people record, they mostly play back. If they are using the inputs, it is for Skype etc. Plus you need to minimize the wires from your mouth to the end file! Why put your microphone through a mixer that may add hiss and distortion? You may be tempted to add EQ (bass and treble) as your record, so the recording studio you are sending the file to won't have the raw "flat" sound they need to work with.

My Neumann U87 has a very expensive, screened 3metre wire directly into a Marantz PMD 661 recorder and I monitor using headphones from the Marantz:

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Marantz-PMD-Mkii-Canford-79-718/dp/B00AAW1A6G/ref=sr_1_3?s=musical-instruments&ie=UTF8&qid=1367557570&sr=1-3&keywords=MARANTZ

This also give me the flexibility to pop the card out after a recording session and edit on my laptop on the train, or whatever. I also like the security of recording on a separate device so once it's transferred by USB for editing on the computer, you still have the original recording on the SD card.



LOCATION:



If you're setting up at home, find a nice acoustically "dead" environment. If you can't find one, you'll need to create a "den" with heavy blankets and duvets – don't forget the ventilation, and make sure any lights don't cause a fire hazard!

When you can afford it, buy your own voice booth like this:

<http://www.vocalbooth.com/products/vocal-booths/>

You may be tempted to buy one of these things:

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Portable-Vocal-Booth-Home-Edition/dp/B003DUQD78/ref=sr_1_1?s=musical-instruments&ie=UTF8&qid=1367557974&sr=1-1&keywords=voice+booth

But in reality, this gadget is really for singers in the studio and makes little difference to the sound in cutting out extraneous noises. Plus you can't see your script easily!

It is far better in my opinion to buy:



KAOTICA EYEBALL:

The pop filter goes in front of the essential Kaotica Eyeball and inside this special foam ball is your microphone!

This means you don't need an acoustically "dead" room to record in and you can look round it at your script! I've recorded in many a quiet hotel room and experts have thought I had recorded in a pro voice booth. It's the best \$200 worth of foam you'll ever buy!



<http://kaoticaeyeball.com/> Look at this comparison test:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HclyK_RvoTk or this one outdoors!
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SM6l7QFVlke>

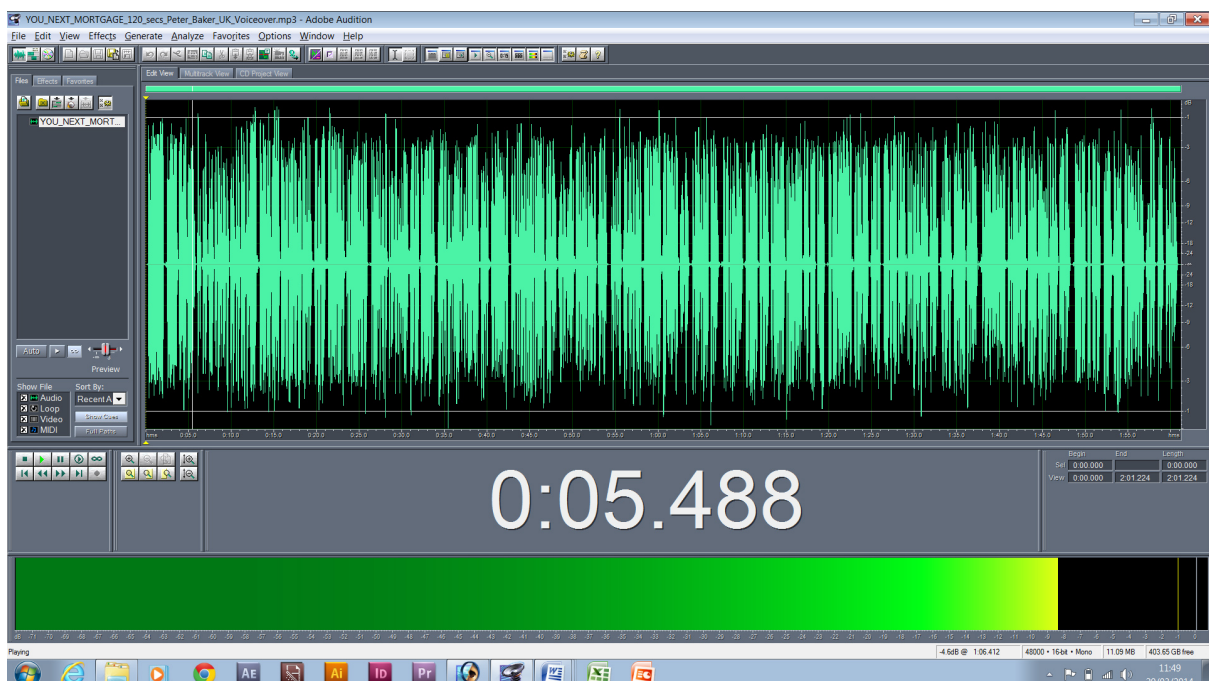
COMPUTER

Any reasonably fast computer, Windows or Mac will be fine, BUT it must have a quiet fan. If you have a tower, place it under the desk or better still, as I have done, in a well ventilated soundproofed cupboard with extension cables and USB amplified cables.

You don't read off nasty paper scripts that rustle...you'd read off the computer screen and scroll with your mouse.

You'll need to learn a professional audio editing software program; the industry standard for our kind of work is Adobe Audition.

http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Dmi&field-keywords=adaobe%20audition



Using Audition or your own choice of audio editing programs, you need to train yourself to save time when using it. Create and learn keyboard

short cuts! In Adobe Audition, click ALT + K. Get rid of the nonsense pre-set shortcuts that you'll never need (as you're not mixing music), and create functions for the things you'll need as a voiceover.

I suggest you make key "1" EFFECTS – AMPLITUDE – NORMALIZE

Then make the key "2" for EFFECTS – AMPLITUDE - DYNAMICS PROCESSING (I usually use (because it suits my voice) the -9dB limit hard, to give me waveform a "haircut". This gets rid of nasty spikes for my own voice but doesn't actually compress it so the dynamics are lost. Your style may be different, so please experiment)

"3" EFFECTS – TIME / PITCH – STRETCH This I set for me to 102/3 for Pitch lowering, when a character voice needs to be very low or for a deep movie trailer voice. If I play 2 characters, setting this to 95/96 gives me a higher pitched voice than my own normal one. Don't go higher than 103 or lower than 95 or your voice will sound very artificial! Don't forget you can use varying proximity effects to get different voices as well...the closer you go, the deeper it will be.

"4" EFFECTS – AMPLITUDE – HARD LIMITING Experiment for the best settings to give you a punchy "hard sell" voice. First, record in Audition, or open a file from your external recorder.

So with the shortcuts under your belt....here's a typical workflow, which you should be able to do in 10 seconds or less!

Control + A to select the whole waveform.

Tap "1" then ENTER This normalizes.

Tap "2" then ENTER This gives the waveform "haircut"

Tap "1" then ENTER This normalizes again.

That's it. You have a punchy but not crazy compressed voiceover you can now start editing. As well as cutting mistakes out, you'll need to cut

out breaths as well. You'll know in editing whether a breath needs to be DELETED, or simply made SILENT. If the gap still needs to be there, use the latter.

I set up a Adobe Audition short cut to create silence on whatever area of the waveform I have selected. So I select a breath, click "X" and it's silent. A great time saver. As before, you go to ALT + K to set up shortcuts and make X to do "EFFECTS – APPLY SILENCE". Any nasty spikes or pops in there? Try highlighting the area and then use EFFECTS – NOISE REDUCTION – Auto Pop / Click Eliminator

Note that many studios insist that you provide non-processed files, as they like to do all this stuff at their end. Your output file would be a wav, aiff, or mp3 at a decent data rate, such as 320Kb/sec. Then you'd send your file(s) to the client using the free service www.WeTransfer.com or whatever. I personally use www.TransferBigFiles.com which you pay for, (if you want a personalised page which looks very professional) but gives you more flexibility and a "library" you can access on the road when the client has lost their download and wants it again!

FIND VOICEOVER WORK

You need to create your own voiceover site and put carefully crafted samples on it as well as testimonials when you get them.

Look at my site : www.PeterBakerVoiceover.com

I created this myself using simple Serif software:

http://www.amazon.co.uk/Serif-WPX6USDPR-T-WebPlus-X6-PC/dp/B0089TS05G/ref=sr_1_cc_2?s=aps&ie=UTF8&qid=1367559401&sr=1-2-catcorr&keywords=serif+webplus

Having your own site make you look professional and gives you your own domain for good looking email addresses. See if your name is available, buy the domain and get hosting. I personally use this place in Leeds which gives a good service: www.eukhost.com

Then when you have the website propagated, you create your website. If you're using Serif WebPlus, you export into a "Disk Folder" then upload into your "www" folder by using an ftp uploader like FileZilla which is free: <https://filezilla-project.org/download.php?type=client>

YOUR "SHOWREELS"

These are short 1-2 minute files showing your voice off to the best. You need to work out what you can offer. Maybe you're great at character voices but can't really tackle serious documentaries. That's fine, just do what you're best at and create different files with short excerpts hacked together, they don't have to smoothly fade in and out.

PROMOTE YOURSELF

You'll find hundreds of production companies round the world on www.Mandy.com. This is a great resource for freelance TV & film people, and also for voiceovers. Remember that English is a standard language and if – say – a Thai factory has made a corporate video in the native tongue, they almost always need an English version of it as well. To contact UK production companies, Googling will find a rich seam.

Many people ask me if you need an "agent". Not when starting out. An agent won't touch you unless you have a good track record. Agents are useful for getting you into the "big time", and you may have to physically travel to London auditions a lot! You don't need to be in any union these days.

FIND WORK ON THESE SITES:

FIVERR

www.fiverr.com

Surely not! Record a professional voiceover for only Five dollars? No, it's only \$4 you get to keep, actually. But it's worth it! Small things add up. I have been on Fiverr for a few years and do about an hour a day, where I record and send about 10-15 jobs. \$40 isn't bad, but where you really make the money is offering "extras" on top. For one "gig" of \$5 you record a minute, say...it's up to you. For fast turnaround or video

sync work, people are prepared to pay an EXTRA \$20 or \$40, so be clever with your marketing. Note that Fiverr do not allow you to give any direct contact details and will throw you off if you do. However, many former Fiverr clients have "found me" via Google anyway and now pay full price for a full service. At the time of writing I have made over \$45,000 since 2011, so it really is worth investigating. I consider the Fiverr site an invaluable MARKETING tool, not a desperate "anything for a few dollars" site. You must have a very strong work ethic to be successful at first in particular – you need to record and send out files promptly and be very understanding of clients who may not have English as their first language.

FIVE SQUIDS

www.fivesquids.co.uk

This is the UK "version" of Fiverr, it's not the same company. The advantage here is that £5 is worth more than \$5! The disadvantage is that it's an appallingly designed site, it's as Fiver was 5 years ago..for multiple orders, clients have to order separate orders...sigh.

ELANCE

<http://elance.com>

Here you complete a "profile" then you buy "Connects" which you use when you bid for jobs.

PEOPLE PER HOUR

www.peopleperhour.com

A UK based site, with quite a few decent voiceover jobs.

BODALGO

www.bodalgo.com

A German site with loads of good pro voiceover jobs. It's expensive to subscribe, but remember you can claim expenses back at Tax-year end.

VOICES.COM

www.voices.com

A US site with loads of good pro voiceover jobs for "British" accents. Yearly subscription.

VOICE123.COM

www.voice123.com

A US site with loads of good pro voiceover jobs for "British" accents. Again a yearly subscription.

VOICESPRO.COM

www.voicepro.com

A UK site with jobs that often need to be in actual physical sessions in London.

PIEHOLE.CO.UK

www.piehole.co.uk

They need to accept you as a pro VO then you pay them to be on the site.

Here are some other sites you may find VO opportunities:

VOICE BUNNY

<http://voicebunny.com/>

GURU

www.guru.com

FREELANCER

www.freelancer.co.uk

POWTOON

www.powtoon.com

AUDIO CATCH

www.audiocatch.com

ODESK

www.odesk.com

FREELANCED.COM

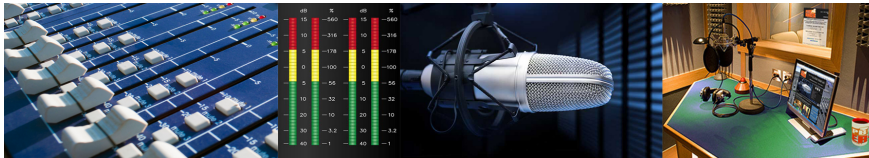
www.freelanced.com

VOXXPRESS

<https://www.voxypress.com>

VOICEOVER GARDEN

<http://www.voiceovergarden.com>



Good luck!

PETER BAKER

Here is a chapter from a book I had out some years ago that I hope is also useful for you:

THE VOICE

Like it or not, something about your voice may be consciously or subconsciously getting on people's nerves. A well-rounded, resonant, friendly, clear voice is more in demand than an angular, harsh, garbled voice.

If you're a radio presenter, you'll know that by turning up the bass control on the microphone channel, and by switching in a compressor circuit, your voice can sound 'butch' and 'punchy'.

This can also unfortunately make you sound muffled and flat if you're not careful. It is far better to train the voice equipment in your own body to create the desired effect.

A resonant voice in broadcasting is extremely attractive in both men and women, and portrays assured authority and well-being.

However, nothing is worse than a 'put on' resonant voice which can make newsreaders sound although they are reading a request, and make presenters sound incredibly insincere.

Here's how to develop your NATURAL resonance.

VOICE EXERCISE # 1 : RESONANCE

In the morning, when your voice muscles are more relaxed, find a quiet room and sit comfortably. Softly hum the first note that comes into your head. Shape the sound like **"OM"**, tailing out the **"M"** until you run out of breath. Don't worry if you're not musical, hum the **"OM"** sound as best you can, and try and feel which parts of you are vibrating.

Now make the **"OM"** progressively lower. if you are a musician, make the notes go down in semitones. Go down the scale until you reach the lowest note you can chant without straining. Don't force it; the note should still be recognisable. If you have a musical instrument

handy, jot down which note you've reached.

The idea is that the "**OM**" chant should resonate in your chest area rather than your throat. The latter will produce strained vocal cords and simply not sound as good. The volume at this stage is not important; the key thing to aim for is CHEST RESONANCE at your lower note, and to sustain it for the whole breath. You may find it easier to stand rather than sit down for this exercise.

I know this is deadly boring, but try to do this for ten minutes a day; you should notice a real improvement in a few weeks. Many Buddhists do this type of chanting for hours at a time, while staring at a mantra pattern. I'm not sure whether it has helped *Radio Bangkok* presenters to develop their voices, but I know it's an effective and easy way to give your voice depth and authority without sounding phoney.

Soon your lowest note will go even lower, and your voice will have the ability to sound richer and more resonant.

How to switch it on? Simple. RELAX. when you're stressed up, listen to the timbre of your voice...strained, high-pitched and thin.

When you're with your lover at midnight in an intimate candlelit restaurant, how do you sound then? Exactly!

You may be wondering how you can relax in front of the microphone, cameras or audience. As time goes on, you will feel less and less nervous about performing. It will become more of a "job" and you may even feel that it's boring!

T

hat's fine, I felt the same when I was TV newsreading; you'll explore new areas to stretch into to expand your full capabilities.

When you're starting a new series or working on a new TV or radio station however, you're bound to feel tense; try all the usual calmers...whistling or humming a song, forcing yourself to sit in

complete quiet for five minutes before the performance, thinking that it's "only a job" and you don't need the money, and so on. It's so important to relax to ensure that your full resonance potential is realised. There is little point in having a deep resonant voice if it can't be understood. Many presenters on the radio make the error of gabbling running words and sentences into each other; keeping music too high in the mix behind them; or English DJs putting on a lazy "mid-Atlantic" accent.

Television presenters have a slightly easier time in vision, since lip-reading and facial expressions give the viewer subconscious clues as to what is being said. This is no excuse for sounding slurred of course, and all broadcasters should constantly monitor themselves to ensure that they don't slip into bad habits.

Everybody has different reasons why they may not speak as clearly as they might; teeth formation, lack of confidence, laziness...but here are a few general tips on how to counteract things which affect us all...for example, tiredness.

There can be nothing worse than having to present a bright and zany children's TV programme or a fast-moving radio breakfast show when you've had a late night for whatever reason. Some people over compensate and go wildly over-the-top, clarity of speech taking a back seat.

Some nervous presenters have told me that they PREFER to feel a little tired on-air. If they were fully awake, the realisation of thousands or millions of people listening or watching them would scare them to death.

VOICE EXERCISE # 2 : CLARITY

Say aloud the letter "**A**". Say it loud and say it clear. Really move the mouth and cheek muscles. Now say "**B**". Get those lips moving to produce a super-clear sound. Now smile like a Cheshire cat to say "**C**".

Keep it loud and clear. Go through the entire alphabet in a similar manner, over-enunciating each sound as if teaching a child. If you do this first thing in the morning, you'll be exercising muscles that will not yet have been used in the morning mumble around the breakfast table.

Repeat the entire alphabet, this time slightly faster, using all the mouth cheek and tongue work you put in earlier. You should be able to speed up sufficiently to speak the entire 26 letters in ten seconds, without losing clarity.

I believe that I can still sound clear at 5.5 seconds, but there again I haven't got a more creative party-piece. This exercise is brilliant for unjamming a tired brain and mouth, as well as promoting general clarity and tight mouth control.

Sibilance can be a real bugbear of any broadcaster's voice. The "splashy", high frequency hiss surrounding any "s" sound can be really irritating and be technically difficult to record. To make matters worse, a badly tuned or cheap radio receiver can make a sibilant presenter sound even worse.

A qualified speech therapist or even a dentist may be able to help a bad case of sibilance, but here's an exercise to help cut down that dreadful "s" sound.

Another exercise is to clearly read aloud the alphabet, repeating and speeding up until the whole alphabet is spoken, clearly in about 6 seconds or so. It IS

VOICE EXERCISE # 3 : CLARITY (QUICK ONE!)

If you're in a rush, no single exercise beats the good old QEQR one! Say "Q" but really pronounce it well, screw your lips really tight, and push the air out. Now stretch the mouth sideways to say "E". Now back to "Q" again, and finally stretch the mouth wide by saying "R".

Now repeat..."Q – E - Q – R" and again, and again. You can do this in the car on your way to your presentation; it sends your lazy lips to the gym! To be honest we are all very lazy when it comes to opening our mouths. Doing QEQR makes your mouth "perk up" and suddenly you'll find yourself speaking clearly the ends of beginnings of words far, far clearer.

VOICE EXERCISE # 4 : SIBILANCE

Say this:

*"SIMPLY SUPER TO SEE SO MANY SCOTTISH SAILORS AT
STV'S SUMMER SPECIAL SPECTACULAR!"*

Record it on a quality machine, better still in a studio, and analyse the result. If you're not happy with the hissing "s" sounds, try again, this time

try not to run all the words together without making it sound too staccato or jerky. Also, speak as loudly as you can in the circumstances. Sibilance is much more pronounced at lower volume speech levels.

Cut down on the length of time you give to the "s" sounds in each word. Do this by psychologically "aiming" at the SECOND syllable not the first if the word starts with "s". Start off by saying **"ImPLY Uper to ee o many ailors.."** etc. Then re- introduce the "s" bit by bit, until the sense returns, but not the sibilance.

Reading skills are essential for broadcasters and actors. The trick is to read as if the words are coming from the head, not from the page.

We all know that newscasters are not ad-libbing, those bits of paper they shuffle over the end credits aren't exactly their expense forms; but watch a top network news presenter tonight and you will hardly notice that he or she is reading from a prompting device..

You will also feel the authority they are exuding. They speak as if they have a personal knowledge of each story of the day.

Of course in reality, many stories, or versions of stories may be just as much news to them as it is to you. Late stories are often included

in the running order, and have to sound just as professional and authoritative as the ones which have been practised all day.

Later on, I'll give you more presentation tips on this unique aspect of broadcasting, but all areas rely on scripts of one sort or another. The idea is to not to give the game away that you're merely reading someone else's words.

Listen to an inexperienced radio presenter change style from ad-libbing a record outro with an anecdote and a timecheck, say, into a weather report, which has been printed out from the weather centre. You'll hear words the DJ would not normally use, like "precipitation", "occluded" etc., and the whole style will be stilted, slower, and obviously "READ".

Here's how to sound natural when reading any script, news cutting or any other written material on-air.

RE-WRITE IF IT'S NEEDED

Change the script into something nearer YOUR style. Replace words and sentence constructions you wouldn't normally use in your speech.

TEACH YOURSELF TO READ AHEAD

This is essential on sight-read scripts. You should be able to look at and comprehend up to four or five words ahead from the ones you are actually speaking. You have to learn this ability to some extent so you can spot errors before you stumble. You'll also get the sense of the sentence correctly. If you put the emphasis on the wrong word, it's a real give-away.

AD-LIB 'MISTAKES'

Try adding a few minor fluffs like "er", "you see", "mm" into a script. You'll sound like it's coming from your head, not your piece of paper. (Exceptions being NOT in a news bulletin) Don't get into the habit of using the same 'mistakes' all the time, however.

VARY THE PACE

Go **FASTER** over obvious parts of sentence construction, **SLOWER** over unusual words, phrases or facts. This is what we all do in everyday conversation, so by adding this imperfection to a script helps to make it sound more natural.

SHOWCASING

Here's a technique used by commercial voice-overs, but is very useful for all of us. When a broadcaster has to pack a lot of words in, there's a danger that key words may be lost. In an average "overwritten" radio commercial, for example, even the client's name may be slurred in the race to pack all the words into 30 seconds. "*Showcasing*" is a technique in which certain words are highlighted without merely speaking them louder. Here's how to showcase:

You leave a tiny gap **BEFORE** and **AFTER** the selected word, and the word is also given a **SLIGHT** emphasis. The gaps are not long enough to take breath. Neither are they long enough to sound obvious to the listener.

A professional commercial voice-over artiste will automatically showcase certain things in a script, usually the product and client's names. I've only touched on the huge subject of voice training. There are plenty of specialist books you can buy and classes you might like to attend. If you feel you do need more help in improving your voice, make sure the book you buy or the teacher you hire are relevant to your needs.

A theatrical voice class may help you to recite Hamlet well, but not to help you pass the audition to voice the latest commercial for Nobby's grommets!

VOICE-OVER WORK

There are many radio and television presenters who supplement their income by hiring their voice out for various projects. There are also a small group of people who are full-time voice-overs, and do virtually nothing else.

This elite team stay elite due to the fact that advertising agencies and production houses tend to use the same people most of the time. They know the work of their favourite voice over and know how they'd handle their material, and many scripts, especially commercials are often written with a particular voice in mind.

Another reason why there tends to be few full-time voiceovers is that there are real skills unique to this kind of work, and the simple truth is that not everyone can make the grade. It's all very subjective, but if you really want to break into the world of the voice over, don't be put off, the financial rewards can be phenomenal. Once you have voiced particularly successful videos or commercial campaigns, you could find yourself being asked back to do more and more.

Obviously a clear, resonant voice is a real plus. Acting skills might be useful for character parts in commercials, but time is so limited in the world of advertising that all the timing, pace and character development which you learnt in drama school goes out of the window. (Producer on talkback: *"Fit those last two lines into three and a half seconds, will you lovey?"*)

Radio commercials in particular tend to be written using stereotypes such as 'George, the hen-pecked husband' and 'ello, 'ello, 'ello policeman' and virtually anyone can ham-up these sorts of clichéd parts to the producer's satisfaction. This has come about because of the time restrictions. Subtle characters cannot be developed in 20 second ad!

SPECIAL SKILLS OF A VOICE OVER

PATIENCE, CONCENTRATION AND TOTAL PROFESSIONALISM

Remember you'll be stuck in a stuffy soundproofed booth with

direction from the control room given over your headphones or foldback speaker. Quite often clients are among the people who invite themselves into the control room, along with the producer and engineer and all will be listening to your every nuance.

A session with a room of backseat directors all chipping in with ideas is bad news. Or what is worst, is hearing a client in the control room exclaim that you're performing poorly, not realising that you can hear his or her every word over your talkback headphones?

INSTANT ENTHUSIASM

Could you sound genuinely excited about "*Brian's Plumbing Service*", or a new type of business training system that they are telling staff about in an internal video? If you can't, they will book someone who could.

VOICE FLEXIBILITY

To save money in radio commercials, they often ask you to play all the parts. Could you make your voice sound like two or even three completely different people? How are your accents? Could you read this paragraph in an acceptable cockney, Bronx, Italian or Australian accent?

Try it now.

Now read some sentences in ham character voices.

Men, give me:

- a)** An aged judge **b)** Tramp in gutter **c)** Smarmy game show host.
- d)** Motor racing commentator

Women, give me:

- a)** Bored shop girl **b)** High flying executive **c)** Offhand receptionist.
- e)** Drunk tart in a club trying to pull a man

SPEED

In commercials, every split second counts. Scripts are usually over written and you may be offered a script which can be comfortably read in 45 seconds but needs to fit into exactly 30 seconds.

The skill here is to read fast but not sound rushed.

Don't be tempted to shout or raise the pitch of your voice unless that

is what you are asked to do. You'll end up with a sore throat and an ineffective advertisement.

You will find that you can read much faster if you actually relax the vocal chords, keep your pitch at the normal levels, and speed your brain up. If this sounds bizarre, it will all make sense after a lot of practice.

SENSE OF TIMING

Good voiceovers develop an accurate stopwatch in their heads.

They can sight read a script and fit it into the correct time without even looking at the second hand on the wall clock.

An occasion where your sense of timing will have to be spot on is where you're asked to fill in the gap in a pre-recorded sub-mix of a commercial.

You may have exactly 4½ seconds to say your bit in between the sung sections of a jingle. Clip any words and it's re-take time, along with black looks from the producer.

Now you can appreciate why the top professional voiceovers are used over and over again. Newcomers are an unknown quantity and may cost a fortune in studio hire charges, whereas the old pro's can deliver on the first 'take'.

Don't let this put you off though, as new voices have to come from somewhere.

HOW TO GET VOICEOVER WORK

First, as with any job, you need a good website. If you're technical, make it yourself; buy some cheap software, such as Serif's excellent WebPlus (which is dead simple to use) and make the thing with good clear pictures, tweaked in Photoshop and the whole thing looking really professional. It doesn't need to have loads of pages. I designed my own site in Serif WebPlus: www.PeterBakerVoiceover.com

Next, you need to compile mp3 audio showfiles. If you're a radio presenter, your VO "showreel" will be completely different from the files you send round when looking for work as a radio presenter.

First, think what you're best at. Then record it. If you're hot at impressions, put an ad with three or four characters all played by you. Follow it with a few straight reads. If you've a deep, resonant voice, start

your tape with a few reads which show you off to your best. Follow this with something different to display your flexibility. If you're already in the market, you should have collected a good variety of real commercials and voice-overs to compile your audio showtape with. If you haven't done much or any voicework, you have a choice:

Write commercials and extracts from commentaries which sound as if they could be real. In other words, make up names of shops and services which you could have voiced for someone on the other side of the country and they're not going to know about. If your tape is going to Bournemouth, make up Preston addresses. It may be a cheat, but why not give the impression you're an established voiceover in another region?

Or why not write comedy spoof commercials which are obviously made up, but still show your voice talent to the full. Make the whole tape a concept with genuinely funny gags which the recipient will appreciate. Give them a reason for listening to the whole of your tape, and they'll remember you.

Where to record your demos? You could hire a commercial recording studio or even a radio station studio, but if you are serious about voiceover work, you'd be building your own voicebooth and buying your own gear. Here's what you'd need as a minimum:

A soundproof booth – I got mine from vocalbooth.com; a good choice is also at whisperroom.com. It'll be big and very, very heavy, needing at least 2 people to erect it, so no good for a top floor flat!

You'll need a decent mike stand, a music stand for your scripts and a light.

Don't buy the optional fan; they always are too noisy to use!

Forgotten anything? Of course, the microphone itself! At the very least, you'll need a AKG C3000 microphone

Buy the best you can though; the Rolls Royce is the Neumann U87 or the cut down transformerless TLN 103 or 102. Check them out in a big music / pro audio store that can offer demos.

Whatever you choose, get a quality acoustically transparent “pop” filter. This is put about three inches in front of the mike and you shout and scream words starting with “p” and it won’t make the nasty “popping” explosion sounds in the microphone. It won’t get all gummed up with your saliva either!

So what do you record on? You could record direct into your computer, but you’ll need a really decent sound card. Call me old fashioned, but I like to record on a physical solid state recorder, my trusty Marantz PMD661, then connect it by USB after the session.

When you are happy with your recording, upload an mp3 to your site at 192Kb/sec at least for quality.

Call the production houses or radio stations you want to target, and simply find out WHO makes the decisions about booking voice-overs. Websites won’t tell you this info, if you do find a directory of commercial production producers; I bet you it’ll be out of date anyway! www.mandy.com is great for a free international production house directory.

Three or four days after e-mailing a link to your site, call up your contact and ask if they have had a listen yet. Ask if there are any projects coming up or empty voice-over sessions where you could help out.

Radio stations don’t pay as well as TV so they tend to pile up a load of cheap scripts to make it worthwhile for a voiceover when they visit, either in person or down an ISDN line. You don’t care about this, you need to get an “in” so one or two scripts is fine by you!

Don't be as desperate as saying you'll do them for free, though. Remember, radio stations do tend to book up their weekly or twice weekly sessions months in advance, so don't be too put off by being given a date way after Christmas.

A good tip is to pretend that you are "in the area" next week so could "pop-in" to voice a few scripts.

Most commercial producers hate to put people to a lot of trouble just for a few little radio scripts, so if you give the impression you're working anyway in their region, they may give you a try. Of course, you may have to travel 100 miles just for £30, but actually MEETING people can really pay off when it comes to securing future work. Once you have the relationship, you continue to supply via the internet.

FEMALE VOICE-OVERS

Listen to radio and television and you'll hear a majority of male voices. Could it be that women like the sexy voice of men selling things to them, and men don't like being told what to do by a woman?

Could it be that producers and clients feel that a male voice carries more authority?

I'm not sure about these factors, but I do know that female voice-overs as well as female presenters are scarce.

Women may not have the empathy for this kind of work for some reason, but a really good female voice can earn a good deal of money, simply through lack of decent competition.

Of course, you may get landed with the stereotypical "housewife over the garden fence" and "girl in the night-club" - type parts, but if you've a clear, pleasant voice with all the skills we've discussed, there's no reason why you cannot also be booked for straight commercials or commentaries.

ACCESSIBILITY

Quite often, voice work has to be recorded at the very last minute. If an agency or recording studio want you, they have to be able to contact you fast.

If they can't get you, or if it's a hassle, they may go elsewhere. A mobile phone or Blackberry is invaluable of course, but don't forget to switch it off during any session; even leaving it on silent will cause interference in the studio. It may give the impression that you're in demand when it rings, but sod's law states that it will always ring during a really good take!

