

WHEN IS YOUR WORK READY TO SUBMIT?

By Beverly Bremers



You know that song, “The Gambler”, where he says, “You gotta know when to hold ‘em, know when to fold ‘em”? Well, submitting voice over auditions & jobs is a pretty similar situation. The big question is – when is it ready to submit? You could record and tweak for hours, but you can’t and you shouldn’t. You’ll not only waste valuable time, but probably ruin your work in the process.

This has always been a dilemma for all artists, since you’re the only one who’s making the decision, and you’re the subject of the decision. In the voice over world, so much of the time now you’re recording in your home studio without a director, and it’s really hard to be objective about yourself. But that’s what you have to be. You need to separate yourself from the person you’re listening to as much as you possibly can and listen with fresh ears. Some voice actors have a consistent formula with a definite number of takes that they always do and then they usually go with the last one. Or cut & paste multiple takes together, thinking the first couple couldn’t possibly be good enough. Many others just muddle through willy-nilly, not really able to tell after a while which version is best or why, and simply get tired of recording & listening, and pick one and submit it. And keep their fingers crossed that the client will like it.

Unfortunately, there is no sure-fire procedure for this process. Every script has different requirements and each actor has a different style and thought process. Plus, this is a subjective art to begin with. So, what’s a voice actor to do? In my opinion, if you have the training & skills going in, it’s easier than you think. Just keep in mind that you can only do your best & use your best judgment. Then, don’t be too hard on yourself. We’re our own worst critics & if we let ourselves, we’d never think anything was good enough to submit. You can’t go for “perfect”, just “pretty damn good”. Jobs should take more fine-tuning than auditions, but not that much more. Here are a few of my guidelines to help reduce your angst and length of time it should take you to submit your work:

- 1) Warm up – Do some stretches & yawning to relax and focus. Then, say some tongue-twisters, first slowly, then faster, & then finally 3 times in a row in one breath at a good pace. This gets your mouth to sync up with your brain and sharpens your visualization skills as well. Do as many as you have time for, but be sure to do at least a few. A few “red leather, yellow leather”s will save you lots of re-take time later.
- 2) Read over the directions/specs given and the script, observing the structure, theme, pace, style, and target audience. Look for key words, plays on words, etc.

- 3) Create a scene in your mind in which you are the central character. Decide who you are (usually yourself, unless it's a character piece) and who you're talking to, preferably someone you know. Decide where you are & when this scene is taking place. Decide why you're saying these words, such as what just happened to you or what was said to you prior to your first line. And finally, what is your emotion or attitude toward the person you're addressing and everything else that you mention in the script. If the script is a dialogue, then a lot of these blanks will be filled in for you and sometimes the directions or lines in the script will aid you in creating your scenario.
- 4) Record it. Cold, no rehearsal, go for it. Let yourself be spontaneous and let it flow without censoring yourself. And don't use headphones, since they force you to listen to yourself and make judgments. That's for playback. Just do it. Then do a second or third one if you feel like it.
- 5) Listen. Pretend that you're listening to someone else, not you. As you're listening ask yourself these questions:
 - ✓ Did the performance follow the direction given (if any) or the direction you decided on?
 - ✓ Did the actor speak clearly enough to be understood?
 - ✓ Did the actor sound natural & believable?
 - ✓ Did the pace fit the nature of the content?
 - ✓ Was there enough vocal variety?
 - ✓ Can you visualize the person speaking?
 - ✓ Do you like the person speaking?
 - ✓ Are you interested in hearing what this person has to say?
 - ✓ Does the actor sound like they're reading?
 - ✓ Can you understand the points & theme of the script?
 - ✓ Do you feel an emotional response?
 - ✓ Is this performance in sync with the style and content of the script?
 - ✓ If playing a character, could you picture it? Was it consistent? Creative? Bold? Unique? Funny?
 - ✓ If the piece is narration or e-learning, does it hold your interest? Does it make sense?
 - ✓ If playing a "real" person, does the performance sound spontaneous? Believable? Conversational?
 - ✓ If performing one part of a dialogue, does it sound natural & conversational? Does it flow? Were there a few adlibs or utterances?
 - ✓ If a humorous script, was the timing right? Did it make you smile, chuckle, or laugh?
- 6) Decide what take you like. Amazingly enough, many times it'll be the first take that you like the best. If not all of it, maybe most of it. Then decide if you can edit parts of the different takes together to create the best performance. Listen for

continuity of pace, volume, style, mood/tone of piece, attitude/emotion toward the listener, and attitude/emotion toward the product or service.

- 7) Decide if you need to re-record a section or even all of it. If so, then go through the list again.
- 8) Clean it up technically by taking out mistakes, mouth noises, breaths, etc. Fix plosives, adjust volume, normalize, tighten, etc.
- 9) Ask yourself, "Is it pretty damn good?" If you answered, "Yes!", then save it and send it. Done. I'll bet you didn't go past 6 takes. 😊
- 10) Pat yourself on the back & move on.

