

How  
to Jobs  
Get  
for the  
Voices  
in Your  
Head



Insider Secrets  
to becoming a successful voice actor!



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James R. Alburger

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Insider Secrets  
to becoming  
a successful voice actor.

James R. Alburger  
Author of [\*The Art of Voice Acting\*](#)



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Changing lives one voice at a time!



**VoiceActing Academy**

Training and Support in the Craft and Business of Voiceover

info@voiceacting.com

*Voice acting is the craft of telling stories through the creation of compelling characters in interesting relationships using nothing but the sound of your voice.*

James Alburger

Author, "The Art of Voice Acting"



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*One doesn't discover new lands  
without consenting to lose sight of the  
shore for a very long time.*

André Gide



## So, you think you want to “do” voiceover?

There are many books available on the subject of “voiceover.” Some are excellent, and others are... well... not. The not-so-excellent books are more about the author and how he or she “did it” than about how you, the aspiring student, can “do it,” or about helping you make an intelligent decision about whether you should even consider it. The excellent books will give you a lot of information about how the business works, performing techniques, “tricks of the trade,” and scripts to work on as you develop your skills. But all books on voiceover have one critical problem.

They’re books!

Voiceover, or more accurately voice acting, is a complex performing craft that requires a definite mindset and specific performing skills. In many ways voiceover is more

challenging than its sisters, acting for stage and on-camera. Because this is a craft based on performance, the only way to really learn and master the skills is through personal, hands-on, coaching. This is not something that can simply be “picked up” by reading a book.

Even in this enlightened age of digital production, the craft of voiceover is often not appreciated or understood by those who do the hiring. Many producers seem to think that anybody can “do voiceover,” as long as they can speak clearly and read a script. As you will discover in this book, the truth about voiceover is quite a different story.

This book is not intended to instruct you in how to perform, market yourself, or produce your demo. Although many of the essential elements are covered here, other books, like *The Art of Voice Acting*, do that more effectively and in much greater detail.

What you will get from this book is the critical information you need in order to make an educated decision as to whether or not voiceover is right for you. Many people who pursue voiceover take the leap

without doing the necessary research. They think voiceover work sounds like fun (which it is,) and that all they need to learn are a few basic techniques in how to work with a script and a microphone. What they often discover is that there is a great deal they should have learned *before* taking that first class or spending a lot of money on their demo. A little education can go a long way!

Within these pages you will discover the “insider secrets” about how to become a successful voice actor. OK, so most of what’s here really aren’t secrets, but this is vitally important information you need to know before you take the leap.

By the time you finish reading this book, you will know if voiceover work is something you want to pursue, either professionally or part-time. And, if it is, you’ll also know what your next step will be to begin down the path to becoming a successful voice actor.

Should you choose to take that path, I look forward to meeting along your journey.

James Alburger

*I used to work at  
The International House of Pancakes.  
It was a dream, and I made it happen.*

Paula Poundstone



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## About the Author James R. Alburger

Eleven-time Emmy award winner, James R. Alburger has been actively involved in audio for more than 30 years. He began by teaching himself to edit music for his performances as a young magician. Since then, he has worked in virtually all areas of audio production and sound recording, including: radio, location sound, recording studios, sound reinforcement, film sound design, and television.

His experience on stage and behind the scenes in theater and television has contributed to James becoming a skilled director and acting coach. With a strong background as a both a performer and voice actor, James is one of those rare individuals who truly understands what “works” on both sides of the microphone and camera.

He is also an expert music editor and author of several books, among them: *Get Your Act Together - Producing An Effective Magic Act To Music!;* *The Art Of Voice-Acting - The Craft And Business of Performing For Voiceover;* and *The Voice Actor's Guide to Professional Home Recording* (Ebook).

For 25 years, James was a Director and Audio Supervisor for the NBC television station in San Diego, and was responsible for the sound design of major projects for the station, as well as audio production for their on-air promotion.

James also teaches a variety of workshops on voice acting with his business partner, Penny Abshire. Together James and Penny are in demand as “The Voiceover Team,” for radio commercials and corporate narration projects, and as professional speakers and performance coaches teaching voice and acting techniques for effective business communication.

In addition to their voiceover work and coaching schedule, James and Penny are also executive producers of the only convention dedicated to voiceover talent,

the *VoiceOver International Creative Experience (VOICE)*. This annual event brings together hundreds of voice actors from around the world who are eager to learn from more than a dozen voiceover coaches and other experts in the business. Learn more about this amazing event at **[www.voice-international.com](http://www.voice-international.com)**.

*Decide what you want.  
Decide what you are willing  
to exchange for it.  
Establish your priorities  
and go to work.*

H.L. Hunt

*You have everything but one thing: madness.  
A man needs a little madness, or else—  
he never dares cut the rope and be free.*

Zorba the Greek



# Welcome to the World of Voiceover!

Voiceover is a specialized performing craft—a niche area of the performing arts that encompass the larger world of Show Business.

As with any line of work that requires specialized skills, it's simply not possible to teach everything there is to know about the craft and business of voiceover in a single book or even in a few short hours of an introductory workshop. For that matter, many students discover that there is so much to learn about voiceover, they will repeat a workshop several times and seek out as many different coaches as possible with whom to study. There is considerable wisdom in this as each voiceover coach approaches the craft and business from a slightly different point of view and will have their own unique ideas, procedures, and

techniques for performing, marketing, and many other facets of this business. To achieve the highest potential for success in this business, I highly recommend you study with more than one VO coach and read as many books on the subject as possible.

The voiceover business is complex and in a constant state of flux with new trends, styles, and performing techniques appearing on a regular basis. As a result, many professional voice actors continue their training long after they have become an established performer with a large client base.

It is my goal with this book and my introductory seminar to provide you with the essential information you need to know in order to make a realistic decision if further study of this fun and fascinating business is for you.

There's a lot of information to cover in a short time, but I promise that what you learn here will be accurate, up to date, and completely honest. You'll find a lot more information and hundreds of resources at **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)**.

If you want to learn more about the craft and business of voiceover, you might begin with my book *The Art of Voice Acting*, currently the best-selling book on voice acting (according to Amazon.com and other book sellers). My book covers every aspect of both the performing craft and the business of voiceover. Many highly respected professional voice actors have proclaimed *The Art of Voice Acting* to be “the bible of voiceover.” This and other books are available through **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)** and at most of our workshops and seminars.

If you are serious about studying the craft and business of voiceover, I invite you to consider attending one of our Art of Voice Acting workshops, which I teach with my partner, Penny Abshire.

*Those who dance are considered insane  
by those who can't hear the music.*

George Carlin

*What would you attempt to do if you  
knew you could not fail?*

Dr. Robert Schuller



## Types of Voiceover Work

Voiceover can be defined as any recording or performance of one or more unseen voices for the purpose of communicating a message.

By definition, **voiceover is anything where you hear the performer but do not see them.** Voiceover includes:

Television - Radio - Corporate/Industrial - Animation - CD Rom - Movie Trailers - Telephone Messages - Books On Tape. - In-store Announcements - Talking Toys, and more. New outlets for voiceover work are being developed on almost a daily basis.

**Radio:** There are two basic categories of radio voiceover work:

1. The radio DJ — this is a highly specialized job that requires a unique set of skills. Most radio DJ's

are not considered to be voice actors.

2. On-air promotion — many radio promos are produced in-house, using DJ and production station staff. Occasionally, outside voice talent will be used, but not often.

**Radio Commercials, promotion, and imaging:** most commercials are produced outside the station by advertising agencies. However, many radio stations do produce local commercials for their clients. Again, most in-house productions use station staff, but when the need arises, they will use outside talent.

**Television:** Commercials, promotion and programming all use voiceover talent in one way or another. Most television productions using voiceover talent are actually produced outside of the station.

**Corporate/Industrial:** There are literally thousands of locally produced audio and video presentations recorded each year for the business community. Here are just a few examples:

## *Types of Corporate/Industrial Voiceover Work:*

**Message-on-hold:** These are those informative (and sometimes annoying) sales pitches you hear while waiting on hold.

**In-store offers:** Usually played over a store's speaker system while you shop.

**Sales & Marketing:** Video presentations designed to attract clients and promote vendors or products. Talent could be either on-camera or voiceover. These are often ongoing product video demos in stores like K-Mart and Home Depot or in shopping mall kiosks.

### **Convention/Trade Show**

**Presentations:** Similar to Sales and /Marketing Presentations, but usually targeting potential buyers at a convention or trade show. Again, usually a video presentation.

### **Training and Instructional**

**Programs:** As the name implies, these tapes are designed to train personnel on anything from company policies and procedures, to the proper use of equipment.

### **CD-ROM, Video Games & Multimedia:**

This market for voiceover talent developed as a result of the explosion of computer-based CD-ROM games and instructional software. Some software manufacturers produce audio tracks for these programs entirely in-house, while others are produced by outside production companies.

**Animation:** This is a very specialized area of performing, and definitely not for everyone. It can be very challenging to break into this type of voiceover work. Good animation voice actors can do a wide range of character voices and have years of acting experience. Most animation VO work is done in Los Angeles.

**Audio Books:** These are recordings of books and magazines, and fall into two basic categories: Commercial recordings for sale and Audio Books for the visually impaired. Commercial Audio Books are usually read by a celebrity to make the recording more marketable. Audio recordings for the visually impaired may be produced locally by any number of service organizations or radio stations. The pay is usually minimal or non-existent (you volunteer

your talents). Most reading services prefer their “readers” to deliver their copy in a somewhat flat tone. For example, there may be several people reading chapters from a book over a period of days. In order to maintain a degree of continuity in the “reading”, the performers are generally asked to avoid putting much emotional spin or dramatic characterization into their reading. This type of work is excellent for improving reading skills and speaking for long periods of time, but will limit your opportunities to develop characterization and emotional or dramatic delivery skills. Check your local white pages under Blind Aids & Services or contact your local PBS radio station and ask about their reading service.

*Losers visualize the penalties of failure.  
Winners visualize the rewards of success.*

Dr. Rob Gilbert

*The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving.*

Oliver Wendell Holmes



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## It's Show~Biz...

### The Pros & Cons of Voiceover Work

You have probably heard most of the benefits of voiceover work: big money, short hours, lots of fun, working from home, celebrity status (without anyone actually knowing who you are), and more.

For some voiceover performers, these things are true — but it takes a long time, and consistently being in the right place, to get there. In other words, they had to work at it. Most overnight successes are the result of many years of hard work and dedication to the craft. Voice acting is every bit as much a part of show-business as film, TV, and theater.

Like most of the performing arts, voice acting is a hurry-up-and-wait kind of business. By that I mean you will spend a lot of time waiting: waiting at auditions, waiting for a callback, and waiting in the

lobby of a recording studio. Then, once you are in the studio, things will happen very fast. Even then, you may still find yourself waiting in the studio as the producer works on copy changes or the engineer makes adjustments to his equipment.

### **Auditions & Sessions:**

There are two distinctly different aspects to voiceover recording: the audition and the paid session.

Most studio voiceover sessions last from 10 minutes to about an hour, depending on the project, how much copy there is, and, of course, the performer's ability to deliver what the producer wants. Auditions will usually last anywhere from 5 to 10 minutes — just long enough for the producers to get an impression of what you can do as a voice performer.

If you're traveling to a recording studio—and you're lucky—you may get your script early and have a chance to read through it a few times. However, many times you will not see the copy until you arrive — and you may only have a few minutes to

prepare and do your best work. Producers assume that you know what you are doing and expect you to deliver your lines professionally and with a minimum of rehearsal. Direction (coaching) from the producer or director will often come very fast, so you must listen and pay attention. Sometimes, the producer or director will completely change the concept of the reading or make major copy changes in the middle of an audition or session — and you need to be able to adapt quickly.

If you are recording in your own home studio (which is a growing trend in voiceover work), you'll most likely receive the script in an email. If you are recording an audition, you'll have plenty of time, but there may be a deadline for you to submit your audition... and you will want to submit as quickly as possible in order to get ahead of other voice talent who are auditioning for the same project. So, once again, you should be able to prepare quickly and perform efficiently. With a home studio, you'll have the additional task of mastering your equipment and recording software. In today's world of home studio voiceover work, computer literacy is absolutely essential.

Your job as a voiceover performer is to perform to the best of your abilities. When you are hired, either from your demo tape or after an audition, your voice has been chosen over many others as the one most desirable for the job. Unless there is a serious technical problem that requires you being called back, you will not get a second chance after leaving the studio.

*When love and skill work together,  
expect a masterpiece.*

John Ruskin



## Making Money in Voiceover

There are only two ways to get paid for voiceover performing: Union jobs and Non-Union, freelance, jobs.

If you are just starting out, it is a good idea to do as much non-union work as possible before joining the union. The more experience you can get performing a variety of scripts, the more versatile you will be as a performer. Freelance VO work tends to be slightly less demanding than union work, in which there are higher expectations placed on the performer.

If you pursue voiceover work as a career, you may eventually join a union, especially if you live in a large market. However, it is not necessary to join a union in order to become successful. There are many independent voiceover performers in major

markets who are earning substantial incomes as non-union performers. The choice of whether or not to join a union is one that only you can make, and only after you understand the business of voiceover and the sort of work you will be doing.

### **Full-time vs. Part-time:**

Doing voiceover work on a full-time basis is unlike any other job you can imagine. You must be available on a moment's notice when you are called for an audition. And you must constantly market yourself — even if you have an agent. Full-time voiceover work may also mean joining a union, and even moving to a larger city — if that's where your destiny leads you. Los Angeles, New York and many major cities are strong union towns in which you must join a union to get well-paying jobs.

Smaller cities are a different story, however. The performing unions are generally not as powerful in smaller towns and there is a much greater opportunity for freelance voiceover work than in bigger cities. On the other hand, major market advertising agencies and big clients will often use only union talent. So, if you want those jobs you

will need to join the union local in your area. There are also many other ad agencies that do production in smaller cities, and many of them will use union talent. Non-union work is frequently limited to lower budget commercials written and produced by the advertiser, corporate/ industrial work and some local radio and TV voice work.

Doing voiceover work part-time is quite possible, although you probably won't be doing the same kind of work that you would if you working as a full-time voice talent. You will most likely do some corporate work and smaller projects for clients who have a minimal or non-existent budget. Some of your work may be voluntary, for barter, or you will do it for free just because you want the experience. The pay for non-union freelance work is usually not as high as for union work, but freelance work is a way of getting experience doing voiceover.

If you have a regular full-time job, you may find one of the biggest challenges with doing voiceover work part-time is that you may find it difficult to deal with last minute audition or session calls. You'll need to

work your voiceover work around your regular job.

Voiceover work can be an ideal opportunity for someone working part-time, for example a homemaker who is not working a 9-5 job and wants to do something creative, or for a retired person with good performing skills, or for the self-employed individual who has a flexible schedule.

*Destiny is not a matter of chance;  
it is a matter of choice.  
It is not a thing to be waited for;  
it is a thing to be achieved.*

William Jennings Bryan



## Four Things You Need

There are four things you must have to do voiceover work:

- 1) Excellent reading skills,
- 2) A decent speaking voice,
- 3) Directable talent (an ability to act),  
and
- 4) Passion - The willingness to devote time and energy to mastering both the craft and business of voiceover.

Most people think voiceover work is easy! For some, with a natural acting ability... it is. But for most people who choose to work in voiceover, the more they learn about it, the more they realize that there is a lot more they need to learn.

In addition to the four things mentioned above, there is a fifth quality which is important if you are to be a successful voice actor. And that is dedication. This

quality almost always goes hand-in-hand with the passion for performing.

For most professional voice talent, their work — just as with theatrical acting — is an on-going learning process. Even experienced professionals will tell you that voiceover work can be potentially more difficult than working on-camera or on-stage. After all, the advantage of props, scenery and lighting are not available to the voice-actor. The drama, comedy or emotions of a message must be communicated solely through the spoken word. This often requires a tremendous amount of focus and concentration, plus an ability to make quick changes in mid-stream. Prior acting experience is an advantage, but these are skills you can pick up as you go, so don't let a lack of experience stop you. As long as you can use your imagination and follow direction, you can do voiceover.



## Your Role as Actor & Story Teller

Your primary job as a voice actor is to effectively communicate the message contained in the words written on the paper in front of you. You are a storyteller.

You are an actor!

The words in your script, by themselves, are nothing but ink on a page. As a voice-actor, your job is to interpret those words in such a way as to effectively tell the story and meet the perceived needs of the producer or director. In other words, your acting abilities are the vital link between the writer and the audience.

You are the actor playing the role of the character written in the script. Unlike a stage performer, who will have several days to define and develop their character,

you may only have a few minutes. You must use your best acting skills to deliver your best interpretation of the copy. Your job is to breathe life into the script, making the thoughts of the writer become real. You need to be able to quickly grasp the important elements of the script, find the key elements of the copy, understand your character, and choose what you believe to be the most effective delivery for your lines.

Every script is written for a purpose and you must be able to find and give meaning to that purpose.

*Use your weaknesses;  
aspire to the strength.*

Sir Laurence Olivier



## The Unions

There is currently only one union in the U.S. that handles voiceover performers:

- **SAG-AFTRA** (the result of a merger of the **S**creen **A**ctors **G**uild and the **A**merican **F**ederation of **T**elevision and **R**adio **A**rtists).
- The purpose of the union is to assure proper working conditions, to make sure you are paid a reasonable fee for your work, and that you are paid in a timely manner and receive health and retirement benefits.

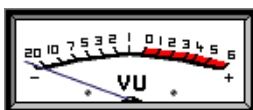
SAG-AFTRA is a closed union. This means that you must be hired for a union job in order to join the union. Depending on the actual job, and whether it is voiceover or on-camera, you might need to be “vouchered” several times before you become eligible to join the union. Union membership can be a complicated

discussion and is generally one that need not concern anyone just getting started in voiceover. Most voice actors begin as non-union talent and by the time they are offered to audition for union jobs, they will have some knowledge of the union, how it works, and the benefits of either joining or not.

The topic of voiceover union membership is discussed at length in *The Art of Voice Acting*.

*There is no security on this earth,  
there is only opportunity.*

General Douglas MacArthur



## Getting the Skills You Need

As you know by now, voice acting is a craft. A working knowledge of performing and communication skills is necessary to succeed. Specialized classes and private coaching are the best way to learn and master these skills. There are several good books on the subject that will get you started, but remember, the real learning comes when you work with a qualified voice acting coach.

If you are serious about voiceover work, you can begin by getting as much experience as you can reading stories out loud. Read to your children. Read to your spouse. Practice telling stories with lots of variety in your voice. Analyze the characters in the stories you read. Ask the basic journalism five “W’s”: Who, What, When, Where, and Why.

Try reading the same copy in different ways and with different emotional attitudes: loud, soft, happy, sad, slow, fast, angry, compassionate. If possible, record yourself and listen to what you did to see where you might improve. In the workbook we use for our *Art of Voice Acting* workshop we have a chart with dozens of emoticons and a list of emotions and attitudes that are a valuable tool for developing performing skills.

Take some more classes. Take classes in acting and voiceover. You can't take too many classes!

One of the best ways to develop your skills as a voice actor is to train yourself to listen to what other voiceover performers are doing. Mimicking other performers can be a good start to learning some basic voiceover performing techniques. But to really understand how to communicate on an emotional level, listen to how they deliver the lines. How do they interpret the message? How do they reach you emotionally? How do they use inflection, intonation, pacing, and express feelings? Is their delivery conversational or screaming — and what is your reaction?

In short, do they sound as if they are reading or do they sound natural and believable? Use what you learn from studying others and adapt that information to your own voice and style. One of the keys to successful voice-acting is to “make the copy your own.” This simply means that you bring to the performance something of yourself to give the character and copy truth and believability. That’s good acting!

*The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance,  
it is the illusion of knowledge.*

Daniel J. Boorstin

*Always listen to experts.  
They'll tell you what  
can't be done, and why.  
Then do it.*

Robert Heinlein



## A Few Notes About VO Workshops

There's a certain mystique attached to working in a recording studio: the recording engineer, studio equipment, expensive microphones, an acoustically isolated, perfectly sounding room, and a "big-time" producer on the other side of a double-glass window, all tend to create, what can be a very intimidating environment. Add to that the high cost to the client of booking the space, and you can begin to understand why professional voice talent are expected to be extremely proficient and highly skilled. Recording studio time can be very expensive—and the less time the producer needs to spend recording the voice track, the more time she can spend on editing and "tweaking" the final production for maximum impact.

The purpose of most voiceover workshops is to give students an opportunity to learn first-hand what it's like to work in the world of voiceover. This usually includes how to work in the studio, performing and acting skills, microphone techniques, studio etiquette, and to some degree the technology of the business.

Workshops are taught at a variety of locations, ranging from the coach's living room or home studio to a large professional recording studio. Regardless of where the workshop is held, the objective is the same: to provide the tools and on-mic experience necessary to learn the basics of the craft of performing for voiceover.

The skills taught in a voiceover workshop are similar to those taught in most acting classes, but they are more specialized. Acting for voiceover is, in many ways, far more challenging than acting on stage or on camera. The basic performing skills may be the same, but the application of those skills is very different. This is why training designed specifically for voiceover is so important.

Although we encourage students of voiceover to take as many classes as possible, it is important to research the coach or school before paying any money for the training being offered. There are, unfortunately, some VO coaches who will offer an introductory class with an evaluation that may give the student the impression that they are perfectly suited for voiceover work. Then the coach will lead the student toward registering for a moderately expensive class by telling them that after receiving their training, they can have a demo produced (usually for an additional fee) and immediately start working as a voice actor. Unfortunately, most students are not ready for a demo after taking only a single workshop or class—a fact that these VO coaches conveniently overlook.

Learning a performing craft like voice acting, and the business skills that go with it, will take some time. This is not a line of work that you can “learn today and start making money tomorrow.” It’s a rare individual who is “ready” for their demo after taking an introductory course. Of course, some people are “natural born actors,” but most people need to learn how

to detach from their ego so they can play and act. It's an on-going learning process that may take quite some time.

The goal of our Art of Voice Acting workshops is to provide the best possible training in both the craft and business of voiceover. Our philosophy is that we will work hard to encourage and help our students develop their acting, performing, and business skills to a level of high proficiency BEFORE producing their demo. We've even been known to cancel a demo session because we felt the student was not ready to enter the world of professional voice talent.

Although we will hold some of our events in recording studios, we generally strive to keep our workshops and seminar events affordable by holding them in conference centers and other meeting facilities that have a lot more space than most recording studios.

The purpose of our workshop on-mic sessions is to give our students a realistic experience of a recording session and what might be expected should an education in voiceover be pursued further.

Our workshop on-mic sessions are not intended to produce a marketable demo.

Another thing to keep in mind is that any voiceover workshop or training event is only an opportunity for you, the student, to receive the training and education that the instructor believes is appropriate.

A voiceover or performance workshop is not a guarantee of representation or employment in the voiceover industry. If a coach promises that you will be working immediately after producing your demo, my best recommendation would be to find another coach!

*Follow your bliss.*

Joseph Campbell

*“Come to the edge,” he said.  
They said, “We are afraid.”  
“Come to the edge,” he said.  
They came.  
He pushed them.  
And they flew.*

Guillaume Apollinaire



## You'll Need a Demo (but not until you're ready!)

In the world of voice acting, your demo is your calling card. It is your portfolio. It is your audio résumé. It is your letter of introduction. It is the single most important thing you *must* have if you are to compete in the world of voiceover.

Your demo is your best first opportunity to present your skills, talents and abilities to talent agents, producers and other talent buyers. Many times, you will be booked for an audition or for a session simply based on something the producer hears in your demo. The purpose of a demo is to get you work! Demos are most commonly delivered on audio CD or as an MP3 electronic file.

Since your demo may directly result in bookings, it is extremely important that you are able to match the level of your demo

performance when under the pressure of a session. It is quite easy for a studio to create a highly produced demo that gives the impression of an extremely talented and polished performer. If the performer's actual abilities are less than what is depicted on the demo, the shortcomings will be quickly revealed during a session.

Producing a demo too soon will only be a waste of your time and money. Before you even think about having your demo done, make sure you have acquired the skills and good performing techniques necessary to compete in this challenging business.

Remember that there are a lot of other people trying to do the same thing as you. Anything you can do to improve your abilities and make your performing style just a bit unique will be to your advantage. Study your craft, learn acting skills and develop a plan to market yourself *before* you do your demo. Take classes — lots of classes!

Don't rely on your coach to tell you when you are ready for your demo. Although your coach or instructor will be able to give you guidance and recommendations, you are

the best judge of your readiness when it comes to your performing abilities and in terms of your business plan. You will know when you are ready!

To learn more about what you need to do to prepare for your voiceover demo, consider purchasing Penny Abshire's book *Demo and Marketing Magic for Voice Actors*. As a voice actor, copy writer, director, and demo producer, Penny is an expert when it comes to demo preparation and marketing. You'll find her book at **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)**.

*If you want a place in the sun,  
you must leave the shade of the family tree.*

Osage Saying

*You can't expect to hit the jackpot  
if you don't put a few nickels in the machine.*

Flip Wilson



## You'll Need a Personal Recording Space (Home Studio)

One simple fact about voiceover today is that a tremendous amount of work is being done from the voice actor's personal recording space, or home studio.

The basic equipment for a home studio is pretty straight-forward:

1. A good computer
2. A good microphone
3. A mic stand
4. A mic cable
5. A pair of headphones
6. A USB digital interface (converter)
7. Recording software

Some additional considerations might be a "pop filter" to reduce plosives, and acoustical treatment of the recording

space to eliminate room echo and unwanted noise.

Aside from the computer, all the necessary equipment for a very functional home studio can be acquired for around \$400.

Effective acoustical treatment can range anywhere from around \$400 (or less) for a portable VO booth to several thousand dollars for an acoustic retro-fit of a room or a pre-fabricated vocal booth.

The choice of equipment is a very personal one, and every voiceover coach will have their own recommendations. Be wary, though of a coach that insists you purchase a specific brand of equipment or software. You should make an effort to learn about the different components of your home studio so you understand how everything works together before you begin to arbitrarily purchase your gear—and then only purchase the equipment that you feel is right for you.

You will need to decide if a conventional XLR condenser microphone will serve you best, or if you can make do with a less expensive (and perhaps lower quality) USB microphone.

## **The Voice Actor's Guide to Professional Home Recording:**

There are literally dozens of excellent books available that cover the subject of how to build or assemble a functional home studio. The specific equipment and studio capabilities will largely depend on how you are going to be using your studio. If you plan to record music in addition to your voiceover work, your home studio needs will change.

Regardless of the equipment you purchase, you will definitely want to know how each component part works and how to troubleshoot problems when they arise... and they will arise at some point.

You can learn everything you'll need to know about your home studio, from the basic wiring of a microphone to fixing acoustical issues, in my eBook, ["The Voice Actor's Guide to Professional Home Recording."](#) My eBook includes dozens of internal links with tons of information.

## **Technology has Advanced:**

Most voiceover talent do not need anything elaborate or complicated. However, many

VO coaches insist that their students purchase “the industry standard” Pro-Tools equipment and software.

Although Pro-Tools is the defacto standard for most major recording studios, it is serious over-kill for voiceover. Not to mention that the equipment can be expensive and Pro-Tools software has a long learning curve.

When you are just getting started, you’ll be much better off with the basic equipment and learning how to use Audacity. This is free recording software that is extremely easy to use for basic recording and editing. Audacity can be downloaded at [www.audacity.sourceforge.net](http://www.audacity.sourceforge.net).

As you become more proficient with your recording and editing, you will likely want to consider upgrading to more sophisticated software that you will need to purchase, and eventually, possibly upgrading your microphone.

However, keep in mind that if you start off with a good condenser mic in the \$250-\$350 range, you’ll be off to a great start. If you look hard enough, you can actually

find microphones in the under-\$200 range that sound very close to the quality of mics that cost more than \$1,000.

Still, the single most important aspect of your home studio will be the acoustics of your space. A great microphone will only be as good as the environment in which it is recording.

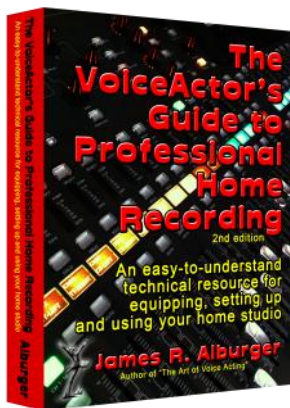
So... if your room has a lot of echo or reverberation, you will want to take steps to fix that before you start submitting auditions or seeking representation.

If you're on a budget or don't have a lot of space for your recording space, a very affordable way to deal with room acoustics is the **Carry-on Vocal Booth**, available from [www.VoiceActing.com](http://www.VoiceActing.com). This is a compact, portable recording booth that is designed for air travel. The CoVB sets up and breaks down in less than 30-seconds and is the only portable booth that can be securely and safely mounted on a microphone stand.

There are lots of portable recording booths on the market, but in my opinion, this is the absolute best-sounding, easiest to setup

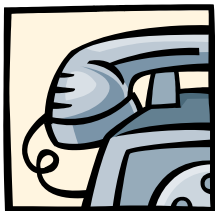
or take down, and most comfortable to use for personal recording.

The same company that makes the CoVB also makes acoustic sound blankets that will work wonders when hung from a ceiling to make a larger space, or when used with one of their pre-configured voiceover booth setups.



*It's all right to have butterflies  
in your stomach.  
Just get them to fly in formation..*

Dr. Rob Gilbert



## Promoting and Marketing Your Talent

Getting work in voiceover is largely a numbers game: the more contacts you have, the more you will work. The more work you do, the better known you will become. The better known you become, the more people want to hire you, and you get more work. It's really that simple, but doing the work that's necessary requires some knowledge and skill.

### **Working with Agents:**

Having an agent working for you is most definitely to your advantage. However, that does not mean you can relax and just wait for the work to come in. It is important that you constantly network and let your talents be known. Networking with other voiceover performers will keep you up on the current trends, and, if you are non-union, you may

get a better idea of the fees other performers are earning. Always keep a few demos and business cards with you and be ready to pitch yourself whenever the opportunity arises. Remember to always present yourself professionally.

Your agent, if you have one, will be pitching you to ad agencies and other producers in your area. Before embarking on an all-out promotion campaign for yourself, discuss your ideas with your agent. They may be able to recommend specific places for you to contact, or they may ask that you let the agency handle all your promotion. If you agree to let them do all the work, set a time limit of perhaps a few months to see how many auditions your agent books for you. Working with your agent is the best way to have an organized and consistent promotion campaign for your voiceover talents.

### **Self-Promotion:**

If you do not have an agent, and are not planning to get one in the immediate future, you are on your own. If you expect to get any auditions or any work, you must devise your own promotion and marketing

campaign and do all the legwork. This can be a time-consuming process, but you can make it go a bit easier if you take it in stages. As you create your promotion campaign, remember why you are doing it, and continue polishing your acting and performing techniques.

There are five chapters in *The Art of Voice Acting* that cover the business side of voiceover. Plus, you'll find many good books on marketing and advertising from which you can gain a tremendous amount of information. You can also learn a great deal by taking an adult education or college extension course in advertising and marketing. Not only will you learn some good ways to promote yourself, but you will also learn some of what goes into creating the copy that you work with as a voiceover performer.

*The real secret of success is enthusiasm.*

Walter Chrysler

*The important thing in acting is  
to be able to laugh and cry.  
If I have to cry,  
I think of my sex life.  
If I have to laugh,  
I think of my sex life.*

Glenda Jackson



## The Real Secrets of Success as a Voice Actor

Our P.erformance I.ntensive E.vent (P.I.E) workshops and performance coaching focus on seven core elements of performance. These are the essence, the core, of all performance and contribute to effective communication. Developing skills in each of these areas is critical to effective verbal communication. These are the real secrets to success in voiceover.

Although we teach these skills in the context of voiceover, the simple reality is that these techniques can be applied to many areas of your daily life and business.

The first five elements are techniques that can be understood with relative ease. However, mastery of these techniques can be a bit challenging—especially when working from a script that you didn't write.

The last two elements are critical reminders of what is necessary in order for the first five techniques to be properly utilized.

Here are the Seven Core Elements of Performance:

**A = Audience:** Every message has an intended (or target) audience. Once you understand who the audience is and your role in the copy, you will be well on your way to knowing how to perform the copy for the most effective delivery.

Figure out who you are talking to. Narrow it down to a single individual and relate to that person on an emotional level.

This is the first step to creating an effective performance and a believable character.

**B = Backstory:** What specific event occurred immediately prior to the first word of copy to motivate your character so speak those words?

In other words, what are you (your character) responding to? If you don't know what you are responding to, your delivery may be completely off-track. Choose an appropriate back story and your inflection, attitude, and many other aspects of your performance will simply fall into place.

**C = Character:** Who is your character? The more detail you can give to your character, the more believable you will be.

Your character is the role you are playing for a given script. You may develop a performing style that utilizes a specific sound or attitude, but the reality of acting is that each script holds within it a different character.

For an effective performance, it's critical that you create a believable character. This can only be done through an understanding of who that character is, how she/he behaves and responds in a variety of situations. This is why acting classes are an important part of mastering the craft of performing for voiceover.

**D = Desires:** The underlying wants and needs of the character. What are the results the character wants to achieve by speaking these words?

Every script is written with specific objectives in mind, and the character speaking the words has a reason, objective, or desire when speaking those words.

As the voice actor, part of your job is to determine the underlying wants and needs of your character and how they relate to the words in the script. When properly developed, communicating the character's desires can completely change the way a performance is perceived.

**E = Energy:** There are 3 aspects of energy to be considered.

**Psychological Energy**—what the character is thinking as the words are spoken. It is the thoughts behind the words that determine the attitude and ultimate meaning of the words.

**Physical Energy**—the physical movements that takes place as the words are spoken. Put your entire

body into every performance: face, gestures, body language, etc.

**Emotional Energy**—how the character feels or believes about the content of what is being said. There is an emotion in every script, and it can only be expressed through thoughts, followed by physicalization.

**F = Forget Who You Are & Focus:**

When working with a script as an actor, you need to allow the character to take over and speak the words. Get out of your own way! In your normal life, you need to understand the role you are playing and focus on the results you want to achieve.

**G = Gamble:** Be willing to risk! Know that the outcome of any performance is uncertain, so the best you can do is to make choices you believe to be valid.

Allow yourself the opportunity to succeed by being willing to risk stepping outside of your comfort zone.

*Try a thing you haven't done three times.  
Once, to get over the fear of doing it.  
Twice, to learn how to do it.  
And a third time to figure out  
whether you like it or not.*

Virgil Thomson



## Scripts to Get You Started

The following three pages have scripts that will give you a good idea of typical :30 copy for radio and television.

Each of these scripts should be delivered in 29 to 29 1/2 seconds, rather than in exactly :30. This is the ideal length for a dry voice track. The additional 1/2 to one second allows the production editor to include music and other production elements before or after your words.

Before performing any of these scripts, go through the Seven Core Elements, make some choices, and test several options for each choice. When you have determined what you think will be a strong delivery, perform the script, recording it if possible, and listen carefully to what you are doing as you perform. Above all, have fun!

CLIENT: FHP—Whales

TITLE: Health Care

LENGTH: :30

Health care it's on everyone's mind.

If you're looking for health care that really works, get to know FHP in San Diego. For over 33 years FHP has offered a variety of flexible health plans.

FHP - An idea whose time has come.

And another idea whose time has come is indoor whale watching at the B Street Pier. FHP is proud to sponsor the San Diego Natural History Museum's "Dinamations World of Whales at the Waterfront". Learn all about whales, their behavior and lifestyle, November thru January at the B Street Pier.

CLIENT: Dimille's

TITLE: "Dine In Take Out"

LENGTH: :30

Family owned and operated, Dimille's Italian restaurant has been serving San Diego since 1978.

Where Mama Dimille said to use high quality foods, fresh ingredients and most of all serve generous, healthy, portions. Dine in, Take out — Or we deliver.

Dining room or patio dining, where the atmosphere is fun and friendly. Let Dimille's cater that special event for you. We specialize in banquets, weddings, office parties, or special occasions.

Dimille's . . . Great Italian food in the heart of San Diego. Dimille's — Dine in, take out, or we deliver.

CLIENT: Recycling

TITLE: Start Recycling—Sarah

LENGTH: :30

By the time Sarah turns 12 years old, she will have produced 17 tons of trash — and she'll have no where to throw it away. By then, all the land fills in San Diego will be full.

We all need to start recycling, it's so easy, even a child can do it!

Watch for the “Closing the Loop” Recycling Awareness Campaign and find out how the things you use can be re-used.

In the coming months we'll be showing you how. This KNSD message is sponsored by the Closing the Loop Partnership.



## What's Next?

One of the biggest questions that every voiceover coach hears is: “OK... after I take a workshop and learn what voiceover is all about and how to interpret a script, what's next?”

That's not an easy question to answer... it will be different for each student.

Some students are immediately ready to start working on preparing for their demo, while other students may still need more training before they are competent performers. And some students—although they had a great time, and learned a lot—will simply stop after one or two workshops.

With that said, there are several things that can be done to start down the path of becoming a VO Pro, regardless of where

you are after some initial training (assuming, of course, you have decided to pursue voiceover).

Over the past few years, there have been literally hundreds of voiceover groups appear on the pages of Facebook and LinkedIn. A search for “voiceover” or “voice acting” will give you an opportunity to visit some of these groups and get to know them a bit. We strongly suggest that you join at least a few groups. There are often lots of discussions and commentary on various aspects of voiceover.

The same is true of voiceover talent who have decided to take up blogging. We recommend several excellent blogs to our workshop students.

And an excellent resource for information on other VO training, demo production, and SAG-AFTRA rates is:

[www.voiceoverresourceguide.com](http://www.voiceoverresourceguide.com)

Most people are eager to start auditioning and promoting themselves as “professional” voice talent. Joining a Pay to Play audition service or making phone

calls to possible talent buyers are just a few of the things that can be done while waiting for that first paid VO gig.

There are two things that we do NOT recommend doing immediately after your first workshop. OK, sure, you'll probably feel confident with your skills, but in all the years of teaching voiceover, I've only seen a handful of people who I would consider ready to immediately produce their demo and seek representation.

Your job after taking your first workshop, is to put everything you learned into practice and to continue studying until those skills become second nature.

As a professional voice actor, you will be expected to be able to take any script handed to you and, within one or two takes, deliver that script to perfection.

I know, it sounds unrealistic—and the reality is that this it usually takes a lot more than one or two reads before a client is satisfied... but that IS the expectation.

In order to get to that level of expertise, you absolutely need to know what you are

doing, understand how to quickly create compelling characters, and be completely comfortable in front of a microphone.

That's where continued training comes in. After your first workshop you might want to repeat the class, join a mastermind group (like our [Conductor's Club](#)), study with other VO coaches—especially if you are developing skills in a specific VO niche, or even arrange for private coaching.

As your study of voiceover continues, and you begin to network with other voice talent, you'll learn all sorts of things and become aware of all sorts of opportunities that will benefit you.



## A Review... and More on Getting Started in Voiceover

At VoiceActing.com, we receive a lot of email and phone calls from people who want to break into voiceover for cartoons or commercials. It can be difficult to locate practical information about voiceover on the Internet. What follows are my thoughts on “how to get started” in voiceover. The information here applies to anyone interested in this type of work—whether you are 8 or 80. Although there are fewer opportunities for children and teenagers, they will have the advantage of time to learn and master their performing skills, and with the proper training, opportunities do exist. Adults have the advantage of life experience from which they can draw when creating characters, emotions, and attitudes. If performing for voiceover is a

passion for you, it really doesn't matter when you get started—the performing and business skills you need to learn are the same.

### **The two most common Statements:**

*People tell me I've got a great voice  
and I should be doing commercials or  
cartoons.*

*I'm really good at making up funny voices  
and I'd love to do voices for cartoons.*

### **And the two most common questions:**

*Should I get into voiceover?  
How do I get started?*

Let me begin by laying it right on the line: you can have an absolutely wonderful voice (most people do, think they do, or have been told they do), but the business of voiceover today is not about your voice—it's about what you can do with your voice! In other words, voiceover work is about acting. It's about how effectively you can communicate a message, attitude, or emotion through only the sound of your voice.

You might be able to entertain your kids and friends with your ability to create unique or unusual voices, but once again, the business of voiceover is not about the voice—it's about what you can do with your voice. You must be able to sustain the character voice for long periods of time, and be able to instantly switch between different voices. Most people who are serious about doing voiceover work have the raw talent, but the challenges are finding out where to get the proper training and how to make the connections that will eventually lead to landing a job.

Unfortunately, the first question is one I can't answer for you. However, I can give you some guidance that will, hopefully, make your decision easier by answering the second question. After reading this, any remaining questions you might have will most likely be answered in the articles area at **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)**.

It's vitally important that you understand one thing . . .

**Voiceover is most definitely a niche area of show-business!**

As with every other area of show business, there are skills to learn and dues to pay. There are also many challenges to being successful and the potential exists for considerable rejection along the way. The single most important thing about doing voiceover is that you do it for the fun of it and because you really, really, really want to. If you get into voiceover only for the money, I can almost guarantee you won't be happy... or successful.

**Here are some important things you need to know:**

- Voiceover is very competitive—there are approximately 5 times the number of people “doing” voiceover than there are actors trying to break into movies.
- It can take several years to become an established voice talent in your market.
- It takes time to learn the skills and get established once those skills are mastered.
- It can also be a fairly expensive business - mostly due to the start-up costs of training and demo production, the cost of building a home studio, and the on-going costs of marketing and continued training.

Keep in mind that there are startup costs with any new business. And when you venture into performing as a voice actor, you are, most definitely, starting a new business. Still, if voiceover is something you want to do, nothing will hold you back. If you are still with me, good, because that's it for the harsh realities of voiceover.

### **The Good News . . .**

The good news is that voiceover is tons of fun. How many other kinds of work can you think of where you get to play, pretend you are other characters and get paid for it? A common misconception is that you need a special voice for voiceover work. In today's world of voiceover, you don't have to have a "golden voice" - most people with a decent speaking voice and directable talent can do voiceover—and be quite successful. In fact, if you listen to today's radio and TV commercials, you'll notice that the most effective ads sound like real people in believable situations.

### **The Challenge . . .**

It takes some acting ability to create a believable character from mere words in a

script. That's why we call it voice acting - and that's why you need to develop some acting skills! Actually, no one can teach you to act - you're either born with acting ability or you're not. What a good acting or voiceover coach does is give you performing tools and teaches you how to use them so you can develop your innate skills to become a better actor.

People often tell me that they are told they have a "strong, solid voice" (or something similar). Good vocal resonance can certainly be an asset in certain types of voiceover work, but I know of many people who have wonderful voices, but can't act. And when they work from a script, they "read" the words, rather than tell the story. It's not as easy as you might think to read from a script and sound like you're having a natural conversation—especially if the script isn't written very well. But that's the reality of voiceover, and again, that's where the training comes in. The critical skill is acting—which is why our website is VoiceActing.com, and the title of my book is *The Art of Voice Acting*.

But the single most important thing is it takes a passion for wanting to do this

crazy kind of work. Everyone I know who does voiceover work does it because they absolutely love it. They have also worked very hard to create a unique style of delivery and a niche for their individual talent—which means they've taken a LOT of training. If you have a passion for wanting to do this, then you absolutely can do it to. But you have to want to. And you have to be willing to first learn the skills of the craft and, second learn the skills of the business.

### **What can I do to get started?**

As for training, the first thing I would suggest is to take every acting class you can find. Check your local schools or colleges and call local theater companies for recommendations on classes. If you're still in school, start taking acting classes wherever you can find them. Not all schools offer acting classes, but most cities have community theater, professional theater companies, and acting classes of some sort. Don't be in too much of a hurry - instead, have fun and learn the skills at a leisurely pace. If you rush into producing your demo thinking you will instantly make your mark

as a voice talent—and you're not properly prepared—you'll be wasting your time and money. Find good training and master the performing skills first.

If there are any voiceover classes in your area - take them. We offer our VoiceActing Academy Performance Intensive Event Workshops in San Diego, and occasionally travel to different cities.

Our schedule of events and workshops is at **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)**. You'll also find a comprehensive list of VO coaches around the country on the website.

Another thing you might want to do is to subscribe to our free Art of Voice Acting Newsletter. Each month we feature an article on some aspect of voice-over plus lots of other info. You can subscribe or read the current newsletter at **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)**.

### **Other things to do to get started in voiceover . . .**

- Plan to spend a lot of time on **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)**. You'll find literally thousands of resources,

dozens of voiceover-related products, training resources, and much more.

- Read books on acting, singing, and dancing - and take related classes and workshops, My book, *The Art of Voice Acting* is a good start. You will find it in most book stores, on Amazon.com, or you can get an autographed copy from **[www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)**.
- Don't be afraid to talk to other actors and voice talent in your area to find out how they got started - you may get some interesting ideas.
- Keep at it. If voice acting is truly a passion for you, then you will reach your goal - just don't be in too much of a hurry.
- Do an internet search for voiceover in your area - you'll probably be able to find some interesting sites.
- If you are specifically interested in doing voiceover work for cartoons and animation, you'll need to become very good at creating character voices. And you'll eventually need to be in Los Angeles. Actually, all aspects of

voiceover are about creating believable characters.

- If you are unable to locate a voiceover workshop near you, you may want to consider purchasing one or more of our products or attending one of our Tele-seminars. You might also be interested in knowing that all of the seminar recordings from every VOICE convention are available for purchase. These recordings include a wealth of information taught by some of the top voiceover coaches from around the world.
- You might also consider our *See it With Your Ears Seminar Series*, a compilation of recordings of guest seminar panels from our weekend workshop, our *Comic-Con seminars*, and much, much more. The information in these recordings is priceless! You can get this as a bonus when you purchase “The Art of Voice Acting” from our website
- Before you produce your first VO demo, there are four things you’ll want to do:
  1. Develop your business plan. Penny Abshire’s book, *Demo & Marketing Magic for Voice Actors* will give you

guidelines on how to prepare for your demo, plus give you lots of ideas on how to market yourself as a voice actor.

2. Develop your performing skills. Study as many professional voice talent demos as you can find. You'll need to be able to perform at their level if you are going to compete as a professional voice talent—especially if you plan to work in a major market like Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, or New York. You'll find hundreds of demos at [www.voicebank.net](http://www.voicebank.net). Click on “House Reels,” choose a talent agent, and start studying.
3. Read everything you can on the subject of voiceover and attend as many workshops as possible to raise your knowledge and skill levels to their highest level.
4. You WILL need to put together a home studio. Your home studio will be essential for auditions, practice, and recording paid projects as they come in. The cost of equipping a home studio will vary anywhere from a few hundred dollars to several thousand, depending on your individual needs. You can learn

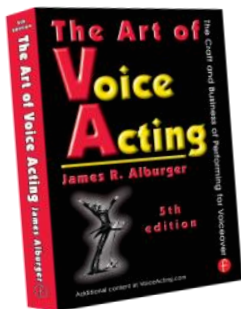
more about home studios in [\*The Voice Actor's Guide to Professional Home Recording\*](#) (eBook) available at [\*\*www.voiceacting.com\*\*](http://www.voiceacting.com).

One final comment... If you think voiceover is something you want to do—start learning about it now! Don't wait, and don't listen to anyone who tells you can't do it or that you need to be in a particular city or have to have a certain “sound” or “voice” to be successful. Success in voiceover is what you make it, and with today's technology, voiceover can be done from anywhere.

As with most things in life, you will never know how far you can go if you never take the first step. It's really up to you.

I encourage you to “Go for it!”

# What will you do with the voices in your head?



The #1 book  
on voiceover!

## *The Art of Voice Acting*

Is considered by many  
top VO professionals as  
“the bible of voiceover.”

If you've ever thought about getting jobs for all those voices in your head, you need to start by learning about what it takes to be successful in the world of voiceover. At more than 500 pages, *The Art of Voice Acting* is the most comprehensive book on the craft and business of voiceover ever written.

*This book is right on the money! Just the book itself is worth the money, but you also get links to audio files full of great warm-ups, exercises, examples, and demos. It's really like getting two for the price of one.*

*I'm an acting major at a major university, and this book takes you one step further than both voice classes I've taken already! Even if you are just "considering" any type of voice work, including acting, you MUST get this book!!!*

R. Adams, Illinois



Available at book stores everywhere

Or order [The Art of Voice Acting](http://www.voiceacting.com)  
on-line at [www.voiceacting.com](http://www.voiceacting.com)