

VoiceActing Academy



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Taking Your Voiceover Work to the Next Level

**The Psychology of Voiceover
&
The Seven Core
Elements of Performance**

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The Psychology of Voiceover

NOTES:

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

As voice talent, we are in the business of delivering a specific message to a specific audience. We do all of the following every time we are in front of a microphone:

- Communicate
- Motivate
- Inform
- Educate
- Inspire
- Sell

But most importantly, we are performers.

We are expected to be able to instantly interpret a script and deliver its message effectively to meet the objectives of our client.

THE NATURE OF VOICE ACTING:

Voice Acting is all about making an emotional connection with your audience through the use of acting, voiceover, and performing techniques.

Your job, as a voice actor, is to create an “illusion of reality” in the mind of the listener through the use of compelling characters in interesting relationships. The key word here is **relationships**.

HOW YOUR BRAIN WORKS:

You have two ways of thinking:

Judgmental thinking is negative and will impede growth.
(e.g.: listening to the voices in your head - negative self-talk)

Critical thinking is observing from an objective point of view with an attitude of “what can I do different to improve this next time”.

GET TO KNOW BROCA & WERNICKE:

Broca's area of your brain is where speech production begins. Broca's area is also where associated physical gestures (facial and upper body) begin. Verbs (action and being), and anticipation are processed by Broca's area.

Wernicke's area is closely associated with Broca. It is in this part of the brain where incoming auditory information is processed and interpreted. Wernicke's area deals with the nuance of spoken language and helps to produce the imagery and physical response to the spoken word.

Our job as a voice actor is to use Broca to create visual imagery that keeps Wernicke entertained in the mind of our audience.

Broca and Wernicke also serve as filters to block unnecessary information and prevent sensory overload.

NOTES:

LEFT BRAIN—RIGHT BRAIN:

The left hemisphere of your brain controls the right side of your body and is the center for logical and linear thinking.

The right hemisphere of your brain controls the left side of your body and is the center for creative and non-linear thinking.

Reading a script is a left brain function (sequential and linear). Performing is a right brain function (creative and often non-linear).

In voice-acting, both hemispheres of the brain need to work together.

Our challenge is to develop a creative and inspirational performance while reading. This often results in a conflict between the left-brain and right-brain functions.

THE CREATIVE PERFORMANCE:

The 3 levels of knowing are: Knowing what you know.
Knowing what you don't know.
Not knowing what you don't know.

Allowing yourself to experience NOT KNOWING what you don't know opens you up to the infinite possibilities of a creative performance and helps you to get out of your way.

Listen carefully to yourself, your director, and your instincts to get the “big picture”, then **respond** by letting go of inhibitions to allow yourself to “get out of your box”.

Visualization is the key to uncovering the mood and emotion of a script and is a very effective acting tool.

Fruits, Foods, & Places

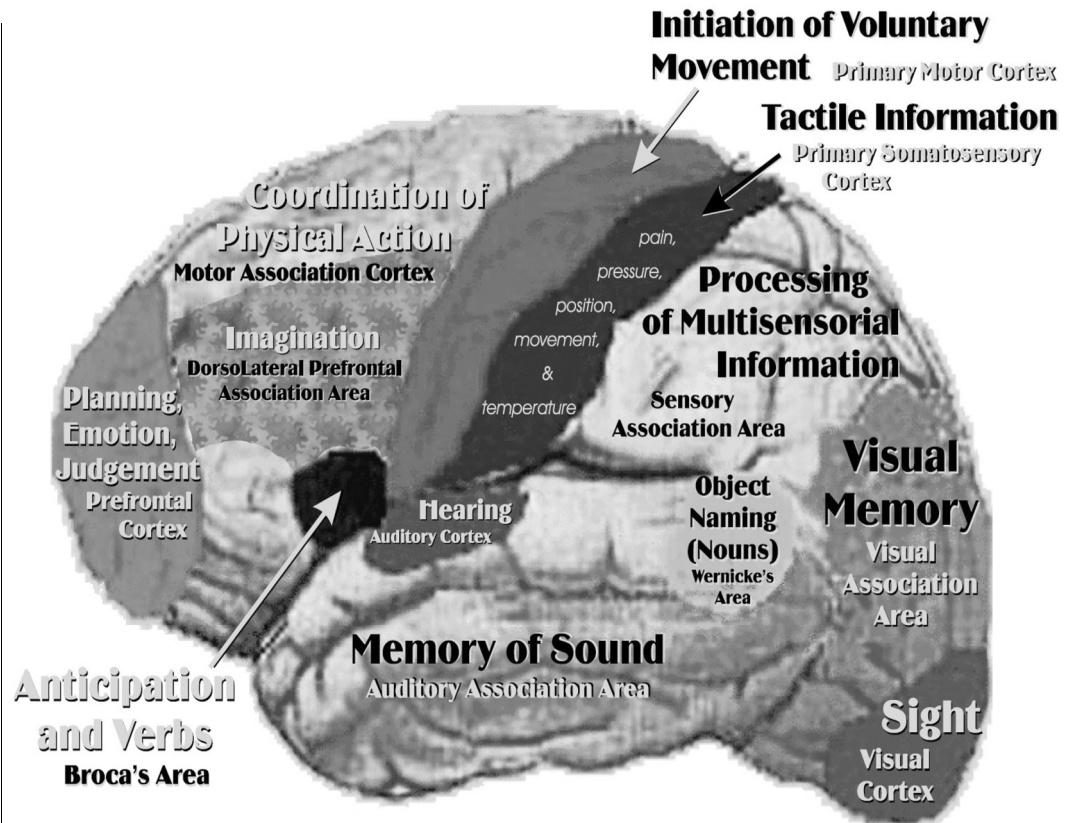
At the Romantic Swan Court in the Hyatt Regency Maui, you'll bask in the grandeur and elegance of old Hawaii.

In this peaceful and tranquil setting, you are surrounded by cascading waterfalls.

Savor classic continental cuisine created with local ingredients: Crispy Duck Lumpia . . . sautéed Hawaiian Snapper . . . Pepper Seared Bison, and basil scented prawns.

Call and reserve your candlelit evening at Swan Court . . . The Hyatt Regency Maui, Kaanapali.

NOTES:



Named for Paul Broca who first described it in 1861, Broca's area is the section of the brain which is involved in speech production, specifically assessing syntax of words while listening, and comprehending structural complexity.

Auditory and speech information is transported from the auditory area to Wernicke's area for evaluation of significance of content words, then to Broca's area for analysis of syntax. In speech production, content words are selected by neural systems in Wernicke's area, grammatical refinements are added by neural systems in Broca's area, and then the information is sent to the motor cortex, which sets up the muscle movements for speaking and physical gestures which accompany speech.¹

Vision and vision words happen at the back of the skull, action and action words happen at the front, in Broca's area, right next to the prefrontal cortex. The ear is right in the middle, the key to everything.

Describe what you want the listener to see, and she will see it. Cause her to imagine taking the action you'd like her to take, and you've brought her much closer to taking the action. The secret of persuasion lies in our skillful use of action words. The magic of advertising is in the verbs.²

1. Gray, Peter. (1994). *Psychology*. New York, NY: Worth Publishing.

2. Williams, Roy. (1999). *Secret Formulas of the Wizard of Ads*. Austin, TX: Bard Press

NOTES:

CHOICES... CHOICES... CHOICES...

You must make interesting and compelling choices to create a believable performance.

Interesting choices are arrived at only when you fully understand the story, your role in it, its purpose, you know how to apply the Seven Core Elements of a Performance, and are familiar with the Four Simple Steps to Effective Communication.

Boring and uninteresting choices are those based on taking the script literally.

Choices must be based on information, either known or unknown, that you glean from the script.

Begin by justifying your choices to insure that they are “right and reasonable” for your character and the story being told. When your choices change, make sure your justification is still valid.

To be real and believable, you must express confidence, honesty, and truth in your performance. If you “guess,” make arbitrary choices—or worse, make no choices at all, your interpretation and performance will be missing a critical element of believability. Make certain all of your choices are consistent with your character.

Commit to the choices you make - until you need to change. You will know when you need to modify your choices because either your director will tell you, or it will be clear in other ways, that what you are doing is simply not working.

Trust the director in your mind to keep you on track.

I think lunchtime is about the worst time of the day for me. Always having to sit here alone. Of course, sometimes mornings aren't so pleasant, either... waking up and wondering if anyone would really miss me if I never got out of bed. Then there's the night, too... lying there and thinking about all the stupid things I've done during the day. And all those hours in between... when I do all those stupid things. Well, lunchtime is among the worst times of the day for me.

NOTES:

HOW TO PUT YOUR CHOICES TO WORK:

Acting is the process of applying your choices to create a ***suspension of disbelief*** in the mind of the audience that results in a believable illusion of reality.

An aspect of acting is the process of adapting your behavior in a manner appropriate to your audience to result in a desired effect.

Sense Memory is a technique for looking within yourself to find your personal, emotional or intellectual connection to what is taking place in the script.

All emotional experiences have a physical tension attached. Your mind has a record of every experience in your past.

Any of the 5 senses: sight, sound, touch, taste and smell - can be used to trigger a sense memory. Music is a powerful trigger as are certain smells that you associate with people, places or events from your past.

Let go of your inhibitions. Allow yourself to play.

Make the words your own. Search for ways to say the words differently. Look for places where you can change the tempo, rhythm, and phrasing.

Think “vocal variety”. Use energy, volume, emphasis, pacing, tempo, rhythm, and physical movement to create variations.

That’s not what you said

Add ***drama*** whenever possible.

Find ***emotional hooks*** in the script. These are often key words or phrases that you can use to make the connection with your audience.

Stay in the moment of the story in the script. Stay focused on what is taking place in the story you are telling.

See the ***big picture*** of the story. Understand your character’s role in the story and how your character interacts with other characters.

Listen and respond. This is the key to creating a believable performance.

Discover the ***subtext*** of the story. Subtext is the underlying thought or purpose for whatever is taking place in the story at a given time. It’s the story behind the story. The result of subtext is how your character responds to situations, events, and other characters in the story.

Make it the first time EVERY time. Strive to maintain the spontaneity and energy you had early on. But be flexible and willing to adapt to direction.

It’s all about listening and forgetting who you are.

(Shirley MacLaine, when asked by James Lipton: “How do you define acting?”)

Four Simple Steps to Effective Communication

NOTES:

INTERRUPT — Get their attention:

It is essential to get the attention of your audience before any communication can begin. For most voiceover work the *Interrupt* refers to a statement or question at the beginning of the script that is intended to get the audience to STOP thinking about what they are currently thinking about and START thinking about what it is you are about to say. Using an example of a commercial for a restaurant, a powerful interrupt might be "*I am never going to eat ever again!*" As a listener, wouldn't you be just a little intrigued as to why I'm saying I'll never eat again? Sure you would! And *viola!* Your current thought process has just been interrupted.

As a voiceover talent, part of your job is to discover how your character might speak the first line of the script in a way that will instantly grab the attention of your one-person audience. The challenge is to do this even when the script is poorly written or may not include an interrupt.

ENGAGE — Keep them listening:

The most effective way to keep someone listening is to tell them a story. Every script contains a story of some sort—even if it's a poorly written script that contains nothing but a list of items. As voice talent your challenge is to discover how your character can tell the story in a way that is captivating, intriguing, and compelling. Generally speaking, one of the best ways to keep the audience listening is to simply have a conversation with them. Most "announcery" or "in-your-face" deliveries (usually referred to as "hard-sell") will tend to *dis-engage* the listener, whereas a one-to-one conversation will tend to *engage* the listener and keep them listening. If properly delivered in an engaging manner, even the telephone directory can be compelling.

EDUCATE — Give them the information they need to know:

This is the "meat and potatoes" of a script. For a commercial, it's usually the sales message (which may be cleverly woven into the content of the story); for an industrial, it's usually the instructional, training, or marketing content. Regardless of the script, your job as voice talent is to deliver the information "in character," and in a manner consistent with the purpose of the message. To be effective, delivery of the information portion of a script must be consistent with your delivery of the rest of the script. If you have properly *interrupted* and *engaged* the listener, and your character is having a personal conversation with your one-person audience, the informational content will be completely natural and will not be perceived as "selling."

OFFER — Give the listener an opportunity to take action:

What action do you want the listener to take as a result of speaking to them? (see **Desires** from the A-B-C's?) In commercial copy, the **offer** is often referred to as "the sell," a "tag," or "the call to action," and will frequently be delivered by a different voice talent. "Call 800 123-4567," or "Order today—only \$19.95," or "Go to www.companywebsite.com" are all

The 4 Critical Elements of Effective Communication

NOTES:

direct forms of the **offer**, but it can also be very subtle or cleverly written to not appear as a direct call to action. As voice talent, your job is to keep the listener engaged through the entire script so that when the time comes to wrap it all up, the **offer** simply appears to be the natural conclusion of your message.

People will buy or take action on a message only when they have an “itch” that needs to be scratched. It’s the job of a voice talent to scratch that itch in a way that the intended audience can understand, relate to, and be motivated by.

Original script:

With locations throughout the valley, Providence Hospital offers the most advanced technology and therapies for treating cancer in Southern California. We have an excellent staff of doctors and nurses who are here for you. Call 1-800 HEALING for your annual checkup or second opinion. You’ll be glad you did. The road to healing leads to Providence.

Revised script:

[Interrupt] When you’re faced with this kind of news, you want answers.

[Engage] It’s a scary time when you need information to help you make difficult decisions.

[Educate] Providence Hospital of Southern California offers the most advanced technology and therapies for treating a diagnosis of cancer.

[Offer] If you’d like a second opinion or you’d like to schedule a yearly checkup, call 1-800 HEALING. The road to healing leads to Providence.

NOTES:

“WOOD-SHEDDING” - NO GUESSING - SCRIPT ANALYSIS:

Two aspects of working from a script are the **black** and the **white**.

The Black = words on the page

The White = that which is not spoken, yet which is still heard

The purpose of “wood shedding” is to get the information you need, so you can understand the big picture and make intelligent, relevant, and interesting choices.

No Guessing! - Ask lots of questions: about pronunciation, attitude, meaning or anything unclear. If you're not sure about something in the copy - ask. The more information you have, the faster you will be able to uncover the true message and the best way to communicate it - without guessing!

Look for copy points: key words and phrases that provide clues to your character, the message, and the “big picture” of the story.

Look for question marks in the copy: These are short phrases that you can turn into a question and make up answers. Use “question marks in the copy” to reveal details about audience, back story, character, desires, and the 3 types of energy.

Look for relationships in the copy: Every script includes a variety of relationships. Uncover the relationships to create believability. Relationships can change or shift during a performance.

Determine your character's relationship in regards to:

- Feelings about the product, service, or subject of the script
- The distance, personal and/or physical relationship to people, objects, places, or actions in the script
- Time, space, and environment
- What is happening, or has just taken place in the scene of the story
- Other characters in the story

Consider the Four Simple Steps to Effective Communication: Find the **Interrupt**, **Engage**, **Educate**, and **Offer** in the story or script.

MARKING YOUR SCRIPT:

Marking your script gives you a roadmap for your interpretation and performance, and can help guide you through your performance:

Use a pencil when marking your script.

- - Important words and phrase
- - Key elements of conflict
- - Peak moment
- - resolution or non-resolution of plot
- ↗ - take inflection on a word up
- ↘ - take inflection on a word down
- ~ - modulate your voice
- // - pause or take a beat



Trick of the Trade:
Marking your script with notes of how you feel about the words or message may help you find ways of expressing your feelings. The goal is to make the words uniquely yours.

NOTES:

MARKING YOUR SCRIPT:

Analyze *this script* for its relationships, and other details:

Some people think they're a mistake! But most people think they're delicious! OK... So, they've got a big seed and they're green... Avocados... they're still my favorite fruit. Great in salads... or all by themselves. Get some today.



BONUS MATERIAL:

“TRICKS OF THE TRADE” YOU CAN USE:

The “2 - 4 Shortcut”: Many people are lazy when articulating certain word sounds. Specifically, the “to” in a word like “tomorrow” and the “for” in “forget” can often sound like “tamarrow” and “ferget”. The “2 - 4 Shortcut” fools the brain into saying the correct pronunciation. When you want to say “to” or “for”, simply cross out the letters in the word and write the numeral “2” or “4” instead. Your brain is trained to pronounce the numerals as “two” and “four”. When your eye sees the number in your script, your brain thinks the numeral, and your mouth will automatically say the word correctly.

Linking: Many people drop the ends of words. Without the articulation of the last letter, a word can often get “lost in the mix” of a radio commercial or song. Singers will often take the last letter of a word and attach it to the beginning of the next word. For example, the phrase “... and everyone was there” might be spoken as “... an everyone was there” (with no “d” on the “and”). Using linking, the phrase would be spoken as “... an d-everyone was there.” The “d” becomes the first letter of “everyone.” When spoken quickly, the phrase sounds natural with the desired articulation.

Substitution: Change the context of the copy when you need to find a mood or attitude. Replace key words in the script with something from your personal experience, then deliver the line from your internalized point of view. When you have a sense of how you would say the words if they were really yours, go back to the script and let your character speak from your emotional center. For example, your favorite color is red, you personally dislike purple, and the script says: “Purple is my favorite color.” Change “purple” to “red” and say the line to experience your personal passion for red. Use that internalized feeling as your character says “purple.”

The Seven Core Elements of Performance

NOTES:

POWERFULLY EFFECTIVE PERFORMING TECHNIQUES

With a little practice, you'll be able to use the Seven Core Elements of Performance to completely change the way you work with a script and communicate a message.

A = AUDIENCE

Your audience is ALWAYS ONE person - figure out WHO that person is— ideally, the one person who most needs to hear the story or message.

Some things to look for in the script to help define your audience:

Age group	Relationship to the product or service
Lifestyle	Familiarity with the product or service
Social attitudes	Attitude toward the product or service
Philosophy	Any regional or ethnic indicators
Belief systems	Does the writing style give any clues?

The way a script is written will give you clues as to the ideal audience.

In a single voice script, the audience is generally the listener.

In a dialogue script, the audience may be the listener, but is often another character in the script.

Understand as much as you possibly can about your one-person audience. The more you understand about your audience, the more believable your character will be.

Her real name isn't Ginger Rogers, you know. Her real name is Virginia McMath, and you know how she got started? She used to dance in Charleston contests, and somebody saw her, and that's how she became a star. I was thinking of taking dancing lessons, tap dancing and things like that, but they don't even have any place there in Hagerstown where they teach that. Do you know of any?

NOTES:

B = BACK STORY

The back story is what you are responding to. It's the reason for the words. It's the specific event that occurs immediately before the first word of the script. (James Alburger, *The Art of Voice Acting*)

In theater a back story is often referred to as "The Moment Before!" and sometimes as "motivation."

The back story is the cause, or reason, for your character speaking the words of the script. It's what your character is responding to. Often, the back story is something done or said by the one-person audience to which your character responds with the words in the script.

Every story travels in an Arc from beginning to end. The back story is what takes place just prior to the beginning of the Arc, and sets the tone for everything that follows.

The back story can change during a script or be different for every line.

Use visualization to create a vivid mental image of the back story to help create a more believable reality for your character. Make your mental picture of the back story and story scene as vivid as possible. The more real you create the image in your imagination, the more real it will be as you perform.

First, I thought they were making dimmer light bulbs. Then, I was sure they were using smaller print in books. Finally, I admitted; I needed glasses! But who do you trust for an eye exam? Then I remembered the K-Mart Optical Centers, in 23 Detroit area K-Mart stores. K-Mart has never let me down. And their doctors of optometry didn't either. I got a complete eye exam, and some glasses which, I now see, give me a rather distinguished look, actually.

NOTES:

C = CHARACTER

I want you to understand the words. I want you to taste the words. I want you to love the words. Because the words are important. But they're only words. You leave them on the paper and you take the thoughts and put them into your mind and then you as an actor recreate them, as if the thoughts had suddenly occurred to you.

(Daws Butler—from *Scenes for Actors & Voices*)

Who is the speaker of the words? Hint: It's NOT YOU!

What other characters exist in the story, either known or unknown. These other characters may play an important role in defining your character. How do these other characters interact with your character (or not).

What does your character have in common with the audience or other characters?

What relationships exist between your character and other characters, your character and objects, and your character and events in the story.

How does your character feel about what he/she is saying? What is your character's principal attitude—and does it change as the story evolves?

What are the dynamics of your character? How does your character speak (pace, volume, attitude, movement, etc.)

What other choices can you make about your character?

The more detail you give to your character in your imagination, the more believable your character will be.

He thinks he runs the house! He's totally out of control!
I never know where he is. I hear him at the piano when
I'm trying to sleep. He's in and out of the kitchen a
million times a day.

We've had counseling – does he listen? No! They say
he'll outgrow it... but I didn't have time for that. So
there was only one thing I could do. I called... and they
sent over some new, improved Friskies Buffet. And I
must say, we've definitely started to communicate.

NOTES:

D = DESIRES

What does your character WANT and NEED as a result of saying the words?

How will your character go about getting what he/she wants and needs?

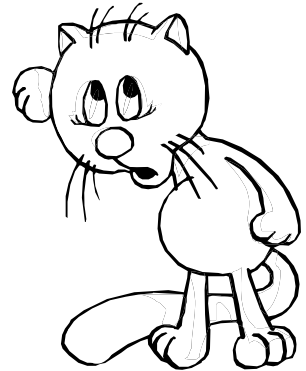
What is your character's ultimate intention behind saying the words?

Are your character's desires, or intentions fulfilled at some point in the story? Why or why not? How or how not?

Example #1:

Golly... I'm sorry mister... I was just trying to...

If I promise to never chase your dog again... can I still come over and play?



Example #2:

Hey there. I see ya got your eyes on that there deluxe model. She's a beauty alright. Comes fully loaded, too. Take a look. Beef patty, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, and pickles. Now, I know what you're thinking... what's a burger like this cost? Well friend, today is your lucky day... 'cause I'm gonna let you have her for just 99 cents. Can't beat that price, huh? Whatya say pal?

NOTES:

E = ENERGY

Physicalize the moment and your voice will follow.

(Bob Bergen - official Warner Bros. voice of Porky Pig)

The three kinds of energy:

- 1 - **Psychological Energy:** The thoughts going through your character's mind as your character speaks the words. Psychological energy can be in alignment with the message or in conflict (sarcasm).
- 2 - **Physical Energy:** The physicalization of body and face of your character.
- 3 - **Emotional Energy:** The feelings and emotions taking place in your character during the course of the story.

In normal conversation, your physical movement comes from who you are, the thoughts behind your words, and your intentions.

When delivering a scripted presentation, allow yourself to use gestures, facial expressions and body language to “get off the page,” “get out of your box,” and add impact to the words you speak.

Voice-acting comes from your entire body. If only your mouth is moving, that's all anyone will hear.

(Corey Burton—Daws Butler's “Scenes for Actors & Voices”)

The most effective delivery will take place when your physical movement is coordinated with your words as you speak.

Physical movement includes: face, arms, hands, torso, hips and legs.

In voice-over, your head must remain in a constant position to the mic.

So... your son's been a good boy and you raised his allowance to a whole five cents! He takes that nickel, amazed by your incredible generosity. Just as you tell him not to spend it all in one place... the ice cream truck pulls up and he dashes over to treat himself and his friends to an entire 5 cents worth of frozen confections. What! Are we dreaming? A kid can sue you for a 5 cent allowance these days!

NOTES:

F = FORGET WHO YOU ARE & FOCUS

The biggest challenge any actor faces is giving himself permission to stand, move, breathe, and think as his character would, and in doing so, get out of his own way so that the character can speak the words. (Penny Abshire, "The Characters in My Pocket")

In order to create a believable character who expresses emotions, attitudes, or beliefs that are *different* from your own, it necessary to get out of your box and get into the box of the character.

Use your personal knowledge, experiences, and feelings as a starting point for adapting to those of the character you are playing, then ***forget who you are.***

Bring your uniquely individual experiences and skills with you as you climb into the "box" of your character, making your knowledge and experience available for your character to tap into.

Focus on becoming the character—not just "doing" the voice. Allow the character to become real through you. If you have to think about what you're doing, the character won't be real.

The best acting (including voice acting) is not acting! In other words, the best acting appears to the audience to be completely real.

G = GAMBLE

Fear is nothing more than a feeling. You feel hot, you feel angry, you feel afraid. Fear cannot kill you.
(Joel Gray as "Chiun", *Remo Williams, The Adventure Begins*, MGM, 1985)

Be willing to risk! The outcome of a performance is almost always uncertain. It may be a risk of possible failure, a risk of possible mispronunciation, a risk of making poor choices, or a risk of achieving a high level of success.

All acting is based on a willingness of the actor to risk by becoming someone (or something) outside of him or her self. By its very nature all performance, including standing in front of a microphone, is a risk.

Success in any aspect of life involves risk at some level. In voice acting, the level of risk requires a willingness to be vulnerable and possibly reveal some things that the actor might prefer remain hidden.

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