

VoiceActing Academy

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The Seven Core Elements of Performance

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(Learn more about performing for voiceover! Read "The Art of Voice Acting," by James Alburger)

- 1) **AUDIENCE:** Who, specifically, are you talking to? Define in as much detail as possible the ONE person to whom your character is speaking. The best audience is the ONE person who most needs to hear what your character has to say.
- 2) **BACKSTORY:** Why is your character speaking to this person? What is your character responding to? What is the specific event, action, or statement that provoked a response of the words in your script?
- 3) **CHARACTER:** Who are you as the speaker? What is your character's role in the story? In most situations (especially when working from a script) the speaker is NOT you. Even if you are presenting your own material, you will be more effective if you create a character your audience can relate to and easily understand.
- 4) **DESIRES:** What does your character (speaking voice) **want and need** as a result of speaking? In other words, what is your character's **intention, objective**, or desired result from speaking to his/her one-person audience in response to what has just happened?
- 5) **ENERGY:** There are three essential forms of energy that combine to create a compelling and believable character. To be perceived as real, all emotional expression must begin with a thought:
 - 1) *Psychological Energy:* How does your character **think**? The thoughts that underscore the words will help to determine how the words will be heard.
 - 2) *Physical Energy:* How might your character **move** within the context of telling the story? What physical energy is appropriate for your character's attitude, mental state, emotional involvement, and interaction with other characters (gestures, facial expressions, etc.)?

M.O.V.E. = Movement Orchestrates Vocal Expression.

 - 3) *Emotional Energy:* How does your character **feel** about the situation, activity, or relationships in the story? The emotion or attitude of a performance is achieved through the use of thoughts combined with appropriate physical action:

Thoughts + Physical movement = Emotional expression
- 6) **FORGET WHO YOU ARE & FOCUS:** Master the skill of "getting out of your own way" to allow the character you are playing to become real. Learn how to focus on the character to a point where you no longer need to consciously think about what you are doing, how you are moving, or how you are behaving.
- 7) **GAMBLE:** Be willing to risk! Learn how to step outside of your comfort zone to express thoughts, feelings, attitudes, emotions, and physical movement that you might never express in your everyday life. Understand that the outcome of every performance is unknown . . . and be willing to accept the risk.

The 4 Critical Elements of Effective Communication

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? (remember **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.commercialclinic.com" are all 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.