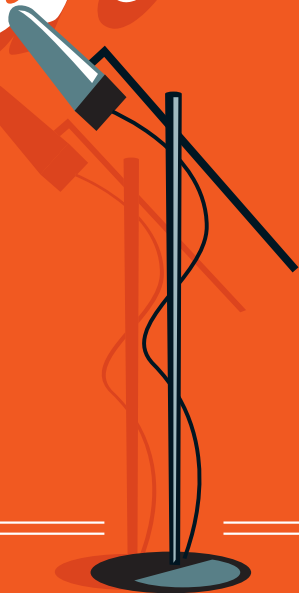


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YOUR GUIDE TO
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Audio work





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*This booklet has been compiled by experienced **AUDIO ARTISTS** to share information and knowledge about the industry, with members. There are specific sections for each area of this work. Equity rates, where applicable, are detailed at the end of each section. First, there is some general guidance.*

1) Is it necessary to have a dedicated voice agent?

If you are intending to work solely in the audio industry, it is advisable to find representation, because some areas are more accessible this way, and a good voice agent has legal and financial skills. However, some voice work can be accessed via online directories, such as Spotlight and Voiceovers.co.uk, casting websites and 'Pay to Play' sites. More on this in the relevant section.

studio. One reel is not enough if you wish to demonstrate the full range of your skills. You should have a separate reel for each: commercials, animation, narration, video games, drama, audiobooks, etc.

3) Is it necessary to have a home studio?

No, it's not necessary, but increasingly there is more work available for those with this facility. Please see the section on Home Studios.

2) Is it necessary to have a professional voice reel?

Yes. If you have the skills to produce your own to a high standard, this would be acceptable. Otherwise, it should be produced in a professional studio. Some studios offer discounts for members, details of which can be found in the Members Resources section of the Equity website. There are also a number of commercial studios. An agent would insist on a professional reel and probably advise on choice of



3) What are the rates of pay for audio artists?

Audio artists are generally self-employed, whether as a freelance, sole trader or limited company, and so are free to negotiate their own rates. What fee they charge will depend on a range of factors: who the client is, word count (for some types of work), whether the work is for broadcast, etc. In some specific areas, Equity has been able to negotiate agreed minimum rates. You will find these in the Members' Resources section of the website under Agreements & Rates. Where there are no Equity agreements in place, we have attempted in this guide to offer an idea of the scale of rates that are common in the industry. It is important to know your worth and never undersell yourself.

5) What are usage and buyout?

Usage is an extra payment for use outside the basic contract and is for a fixed period, after which you would be entitled to negotiate further payment for additional usage. Buyout means a one-off fee and no entitlement to ongoing payments. However, you can restrict your Buyout to a single type of Usage, e.g. on a website, but not as a pre-roll ad (pre-rolls are explained under Radio Commercials). As with other areas of the industry, buyouts are becoming more frequently offered.

6) What is a NDA?

NDA stands for Non-Disclosure Agreement. You may be asked to sign a NDA before you are allowed to see a script or work on a production, as data privacy is an important

Audio artists are generally self-employed, whether as a freelance, sole trader or Ltd company, and so are free to negotiate their own rates

issue in this industry. NDAs are particularly common in video games, ADR and some corporate work. It is a legal document, the terms of which must be adhered to.

7) What does Equity offer Audio Artists?

In addition to negotiating fees with employers, including the BBC (for Radio and ADR) and some of the larger UK radio groups (for commercials), Equity offers the same basic services to all its members, i.e. insurance, legal advice, tax advice, chasing up late payments and discounted products and services. The union also offers services to members in sorting out grievances, such as underpayment of agreed rates.

More information on these and other topics can be found on the Equity website and by searching online. You can also direct any questions to the Audio Organiser.

ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement)

Principal ADR

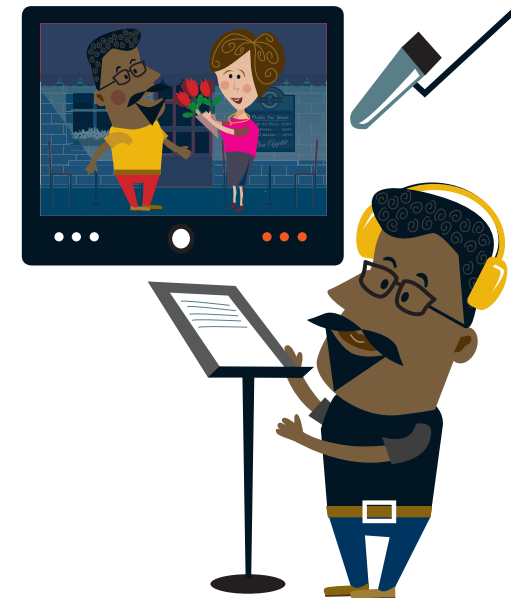
There are two main types of ADR. If you find yourself appearing in a Film or a TV Drama it is likely that you will be asked to re-record some of your own dialogue in the ADR studio. This is often for technical reasons, for example, a plane flying over during the best take, or to add rewrites to your performance. This is often Lip Sync (synchronisation), which is a skill in itself. You have to recreate your performance, often some months after the shoot, usually with the director present but not always, at the correct level and with the requisite emotion. This is sometimes included in your contract for the job which means that there is no extra payment. However, a lot of agents are wise to this and have it put in the contract that you must be paid for recording your personal ADR. You can make or ruin your performance at this stage of Post Production.

Group ADR

Group ADR is when a group of actors are brought in to record all the necessary ADR during Post Production. An ADR group can range from two actors up to 15 or more (rarely). During a group ADR session you are required to record all the atmospheres in a production as well as the individual ADR for some of the smaller characters. This can be a pub or restaurant scene, somebody talking on a mobile phone, police call signals as radio transmission (RT), train or coach announcements, hospital

background chatter and announcements, sports commentaries and very often battles including charges and all types of fights and deaths. Very often you will be required to lip read the background artists and decide what they are saying and then record it. Sometimes a whole performance of a character is revoiced by an ADR actor. In this case you would be booked in to the studio for a solo session often with the director. Only actors with sufficient ADR experience would be asked to do this.

All these things and more are recorded in the ADR studio so that the sound editor can mix in the ADR along with the music and the sound effects to make a final soundtrack. They need to have everything recorded cleanly and separately in the ADR studio to be able to mix it in at the level that they require.



Often in ADR you will need to improvise while watching the scene & only speak when the character you are voicing is speaking.

On an ADR session it is very important to be able to improvise. Often you will need to improvise while watching the scene and only speak when the character you are voicing is speaking.

When a good knowledge of a particular subject is required then you will usually be asked if you have the requisite knowledge before you are booked. If you are asked if you have good knowledge about any specific subject don't say you have if you haven't! Many a keen actor has been caught out trying to improvise on a subject that they don't know about, only to be embarrassed in front of everybody in the studio. The ADR Casting Companies must be able to trust your word. Equally these days a Dialogue Editor (the person who directs the session) will often ask for a genuine accent. If that's what they ask for then that's what they want. Don't lie your way into the studio; you may never be

asked back. If you're from Lancashire and you can do a good Yorkshire accent then tell them that, not that you're from Yorkshire. They'll decide if they want to employ you or not. Similarly if you are asked if you are an experienced ADR actor and you're not... tell the truth. If you get yourself in the studio and you are with a group of experienced actors you will be caught out. Sometimes experience is necessary but also sometimes they'll be looking for new voices.

Getting Hired

This is what everybody wants to know and there is no easy answer. If you become known for being a good ADR actor you will be hired again and again. The difficulty is getting the first job and being good enough to be asked back. People are always looking for new, young voices but there are so many excellent experienced older voices who are well established that it can be difficult to get an opportunity.

You are most likely to be given an opportunity if your agent suggests you, although many voice agents can't be bothered with ADR. A few voice agents really work at it and if they suggest a new voice then the Casting Director will often take their recommendation. Alternatively, if an experienced ADR actor recommends you for a job and is willing to vouch for you then that can lead to an opportunity.

There are workshops in ADR available which can really help you learn the techniques required and also give you the opportunity to practice and gain

confidence. These are run by ADR Casting Companies so they will see your potential during the workshop and this has led to many new actors being employed in ADR. However, these workshops should be seen as an educational opportunity and not an audition.

There are several Equity agreements in place for ADR recording. These cover cinema and television through the Pact/Cinema agreement and the Pact/ITV and BBC agreements. Check the Equity website for the most up-to-date rates.

ANIMATION

Animation is one of the classic areas in which voice artists work, and has been around for nearly a century. Whether it's a



series or a one-off feature film, animation requires voice artists to flex their skills with characters, accents, and different types of voices. The key skill with animation is versatility. Although you will often be hired for one main voice, you are almost always asked to provide several others, so it's important to have a consistent range of accents and character voices you can call on. Sometimes they will ask you to come up with suggestions yourself, so be ready to think on your feet. Improvisation is another great skill to have, as well as good timing.

Scripts can usually be obtained in advance, especially if you have particular needs, such as dyslexia, but sight reading remains important. Ways of working differ from studio to studio and project to project. Sometimes you will be in a single studio with the entire cast, and record together; other times, each voice will be recorded in separate sessions. You might be fed previously recorded cue lines, but this does not always happen, so you have to be prepared to react to imaginary conversations. You will also often be asked to provide a 'library' of sounds for each character – laughing, crying, reaction noises, etc. – that can be used at different moments in the project.

Other important skills for animation are lip synching and voicing to picture. Sometimes a project is recorded wild (i.e. not to picture) but at other times, if the animation is available, you may be required to voice to picture. This is often the case when providing a different language or accent for a project that has already been recorded

for another country. Lip synching isn't always easy, as you have to speak exactly when the character's mouth is moving, and not when it's not. This can be made even more difficult if you are hearing the original language in your headphones, so don't be afraid to ask for it to be removed.

A good animation showreel should be short, but show a contrasting range of accents and voices. Often with animation, a more heightened and exaggerated performance is required. However, make sure only to include the voices and accents you are best at and confident in; better to have just a few strong accents, than a muddle of mediocre ones, or ones you can only sustain for a sentence. Remember that you don't have to include full scenes on your reel; a line or two spoken in the voice or accent is usually sufficient.

A final note pertaining to money. Often, when working on a cartoon series, you will be recording more than one episode in a single session. While this is common practice, do make sure you know before going in whether you are being paid per episode, or per hour. This can make a big difference to your take home pay, so it's better to have that kind of detail sorted out in advance. Also, for any type of animation project, there may be "extras" you are asked to do alongside it – adverts, voices for toys, promotions, etc. Be sure that any extra payments you are entitled to are clear in advance and get in touch with the Organiser for Audio Artists at Equity if you have any questions or concerns.

It is essential to prepare in advance of the studio session, because there is no rehearsal period

AUDIOBOOKS

Breaking into the market

Most publishing companies – audio or print – are prepared to listen to voice reels and sometimes will audition new readers. The reel should consist solely of short extracts demonstrating your skill as a narrator and your versatility with character depiction. Note that material used for other voice work reels would not be suitable. The charity that records for people with impaired vision – RNIB – might be a good, though low paid, starting point for the inexperienced reader.

Preparation of an Audiobook

It is essential to prepare in advance of the studio session, because there is no rehearsal period. You will be booked for the number of days the company believe will be needed for that particular book and you will probably be expected to record

between 100 and 150 pages a day. Fluency is essential if the job is to be done in the allotted time. The time you spend on preparation is up to you – you are paid only for the finished recorded hour and that payment will, in most cases, be a buyout. Some companies require you to return to do pick-ups. If this is so, try and establish beforehand when this will be and whether this time is included in your final fee. The time needed for preparation will vary from book to book. The more prepared you are, the easier the recording sessions will be. It is fair to say that a whole day spent recording is exhausting. There will be breaks, some short and some longer, such as that for lunch, which is sometimes provided and sometimes not. Depending on the company you are working for, these breaks can be at predetermined times or left to you and your producer to determine. If you need a break you should take one.

Establish a good rapport with your producer if you have one – that way the atmosphere

is more relaxed. In many cases, there will be only the engineer and in that event, you should not expect artistic or specialist help with the text.

Some Tips for Preparation

1) The number of times a book should be read before going into the studio is up to the individual and is often determined by how long there is between receiving the script and the date of the recording. Hopefully, there will be a minimum of a fortnight. Twice is probably essential and three ideal.

2) Read No.1 A first read without making notes gives you a feel of the style and the author's intention.

3) Read No.2 The second read will be more technical. Make notes on the characters, the type of person they are and the voice you consider appropriate. Keep those notes with you, because you will not always remember, especially if a character appears early on and not again for a hundred pages. Make sure you have read

to the end of the book before deciding on the voice because authors can, say, omit to tell you until you are some

way into the story that although the character is Welsh, and speaks with a lisp, he has a Northern accent. During Read No. 2, make a note of any word you do not know or cannot pronounce.

Annotate your paper script or iPad, (there



are apps for this), and make sure you have checked on these before reaching the studio.

There are three helpful websites for pronunciations, Forvo, IDEA (the International Dialects of English Archive) and howjsay.com. If a book contains complicated foreign speech or technological expertise, consult the producer if you have been given a contact number, or the employing company – you may be able to ask for extra payment for this or for any additional preparation or research. Keep all your notes in case you are asked to record a sequel to the original book.

4) When using a paper script and a sentence is split between pages, transfer from the bottom of one page to the top of the other, or vice versa, to ensure a smooth read.

5) Read No 3 Reading the book aloud helps to highlight things like convoluted sentences, where a passage may require attention to breathing. It identifies difficulties in switching from narration to dialogue or interchanges between characters who may be speaking a foreign language or a dialect. It also enables you to sort out how you will pace the reading, ensuring that you will keep the listener's attention.

PLR (Public Lending Right)

PLR payments have recently been introduced. Readers should be sure to register each title that they record. This refers specifically to physical copies lent by libraries, who so far, do not offer downloadable versions. For more on this go to www.plruk.com.

Public Lending Right payments have recently been introduced. Readers should register each title that they record

While Equity does not have a collective agreement for audiobooks, there are some agreed minimum rates with some publishers. For more information, contact the Audio Organiser.

AUDIO DESCRIPTION

Audio description provides an additional commentary for blind and partially sighted people who have difficulty seeing a screen, stage, exhibition or live event.

In theatre, the audio describer helps patrons to follow what is going on by describing the essential action, the characters and their body language, facial expressions and costumes, lighting effects, scenery and props and choreographed fights, chases and dances. Audio description does not interfere with a performance, but conveys

information in dialogue gaps so that people with a sight problem can follow the plot. It is delivered via a headset or earpiece using radio or infrared transmitters. A touch tour of the set and costumes beforehand, plus a pre-show introduction describing the visual elements of the production, can further enhance the performance.

Similarly, in film, DVDs or on television, the visual aspects of the action are described.

Audio description is also offered in a variety of ways in many museums, galleries and heritage sites and is now available at some architectural sites, football grounds and other live events.

An audio describer should have:

- ▶ **the ability to summarise information accurately and objectively**
- ▶ **a good command of language**

Audio description is offered in a variety of ways such as museums, galleries and heritage sites

- ▶ **a clear pleasant speaking voice**
- ▶ **good sight and hearing (whether aided or unaided)**
- ▶ **the ability to work as part of a team**

An audio describer should also have a commitment to access for disabled people, and the provision of quality audio description to blind and partially sighted people.

Fees paid within the industry vary, depending on the nature of the work, the organisation, the venue and the location. Screen describers are all paid professionals, but in theatres, museums and galleries, the workforce is a mixture of freelance professionals, volunteers and venue staff, depending on local policy and practice.

There is advice and guidance available from The Audio Description Association (ADA), which is a registered charity, set up in 1999 to meet the growing demand for a national organisation to promote and support audio description.

ADA works to raise the standard and profile of audio description nationwide by:

- ▶ **supporting audio describers and facilitating a quality service for blind and partially sighted people**
- ▶ **advising venues**
- ▶ **liaising with users**
- ▶ **offering training and guidance for describers**

There is no actual Equity agreement but guidelines for the use of audio describers have recently been agreed by them. The accredited courses for stage and screen

describers have led to the establishment of the Certificate in Audio Description Skills, which is the nationally recognised qualification for describers in the United Kingdom.

ADA believes that all describers working for professionally-run venues and companies should be trained to a professional standard, regardless of whether, or how, they are paid for their services, although, whilst recognising the value of volunteer input, it is ADA's policy to encourage venues to pay their describers. Consumers are entitled to the same professional standard that would be applied to all other areas of the venue's work.

For more details about training and any other queries please contact ADA by email at: office@audiodescription.co.uk

via the website at:
www.audiodescription.co.uk

For information about audio description provision in Scotland please refer to the Audio Description Association (Scotland) website at:
www.adascotland.com

COMMERCIALS (Radio, In -Store, TV, Internet)

Radio Commercials

Radio commercials are sometimes produced in-house by radio stations, but often by independent production companies. Some prefer to direct and record VOs using ISDN or other remote recording methods, while others will email

Strict timing is essential, as commercial breaks are scheduled uniformly and the airtime sold accordingly

a script for a VO to record, edit and return as a WAV file or MP3 file, (see the Home Studio section).

Strict timing is essential, as commercial breaks are scheduled uniformly and the airtime sold accordingly. More often than not, an ad will be 30 seconds in length, or another multiple of 10. Voices are expected to read a script to time, which can often mean adjusting the pace of the read during a session to shave/stretch the duration by one or two seconds.

As a voice artist, you need to be available. Given the number of ads being produced on a daily basis for the hundreds of commercial and community stations broadcasting across the UK, turnaround tends to be fast. Expect to be asked if you can record in an hour's time. For this reason, flexibility and access to a studio (your own home studio or another close

by) are a great advantage in general, but a necessity for those wishing to grow their radio commercial client base.

In-Store Radio Commercials

Commercials for in-store radio stations are charged based on the number of stores in which the ad will be played, with the modest basic fee applying for up to 149 stores, increasing for 150-299 stores and again for 300+ stores.

Rates of Pay

Rates of pay for ads on commercial radio stations are calculated according to the licence held, the area covered by the station and the number of listeners tuning in, and can vary from less than £20 for a community station to three figures for a national radio station. Additional fees may apply if a station is also on DAB (Digital Audio Broadcasting). The fee is per voice

script, per station, not per session. If a voice artist is contracted for a commercial or campaign through an agency, additional fees apply, as detailed on the rate card.

If an ad is to be transmitted on more than one station, the fee is multiplied accordingly. Sometimes this will mean a straightforward doubling or tripling of the basic fee, sometimes a second or third station will be charged at a percentage of the basic fee.

With broadcast now being common on more than one media platform - for example, on DAB and the Internet, as well as FM - the way VOs charge for commercials is changing, too. In addition, there is a growing use of app pre-rolls. A pre-roll is an ad that plays when you download or click on an app, before you get to the content you actually want.

If that all sounds complicated, that's because it is.

As an individual artist, you are free to negotiate your own rates with clients. As a union, Equity cannot unilaterally set rates, but it can work with employers and with agencies to agree recommended minimum rates.

At the time of writing, Equity is looking at new ways to approach this sector. In the meantime, it has negotiated with several of the largest commercial radio groups in the UK and there is an agreed rate card for these available on the website. Go to the Members' Area > Members Resources > Agreements and Rates > Independent Radio.



When using the rate card, make sure you read the “small print” at the top of the page. It includes details like additional charges for tags (usually a single line of additional information that can run on more than one ad), remakes, and duration of usage (usually one year, after which time an ad should be relicensed and an additional fee paid if it is to continue to air).

A list of commercial and community radio stations and contact details can be found at:

<http://licensing.ofcom.org.uk/radio-broadcast-licensing/>

Radio listening is monitored and measured by RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research). For more information, go to: <http://rajar.co.uk>

TV Commercials

Voiceovers for TV commercials may be recorded using home studios, with producers - and often the commercial client - directing via ISDN, phone patch, Skype, etc, (see Home Studios) or in professional recording studios, usually with clients in attendance. As with radio, TV ads will be tightly timed. Scripts often need to be delivered to match visuals precisely.

You can download the Equity Guide to TV Commercials from the Member Resources section of the Website.

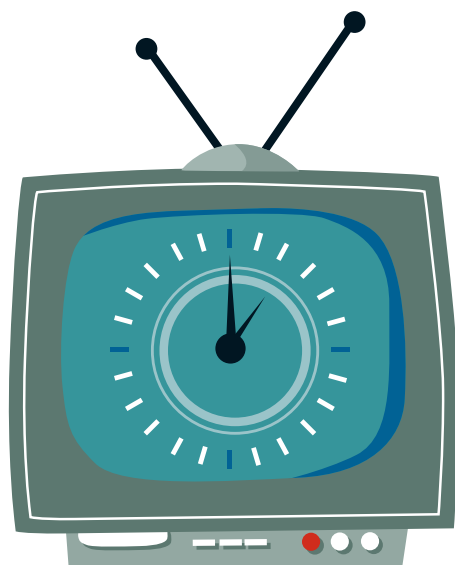
Fees are calculated based on TVRs (Television Viewer Ratings). Airtime is sold based on TVRs, so a client who engages you to record for a TV commercial should

know the TVRs. There is an online calculator at www.usefee.tv into which you can enter your BSF (Basic Studio/Session Fee) and the TVRs to arrive at an appropriate fee. This is useful whether you are being asked to quote for a job or want to ensure the fee you have been offered is fair.

Internet TV Commercials

Advertisers buy TV airtime for a limited period, whereas a commercial posted on a website could, in theory, stay there forever. If a TV commercial will also be used online, then this should be clear in any discussion about usage and/or buyout, so you can consider what additional charge may apply.

Some ads are made specifically for Internet-only use. For these, artists should ask where and how they will be used. A pre-roll ad for a YouTube channel or programme that



Continuity is a specialist field that utilises a very different skillset from most other types of voice work

regularly enjoys millions of views will attract a higher fee than a low-budget ad on a niche channel or site with much lower virtual footfall. It can be helpful to start with your BSF and negotiate accordingly.

CONTINUITY

The principle role of a continuity announcer is to act as a navigational guide. Announcers write and read multiple scripts, with the aim of enticing the viewer to continue watching the channel. They also introduce off-air support messages, commercial messages and legally required on-air content warnings, as well as promoting content across other channels and platforms. All of this is done with a tone and delivery appropriate to the channel, often live and normally within the space of fifteen seconds. If broadcasting live, an announcer may

have to react to breaking news or technical difficulties. They need to be able to produce a script to time, accommodate last-minute scheduling changes and keep unsociable hours. Nothing says “live broadcasting” more than finding yourself in the studio at quarter to midnight on Christmas Day.

It is worth considering that Continuity is a specialist field that utilises a very different skillset from most other types of voice work, including the need for good editorial judgement and the ability to write punchy scripts to strict deadlines.

Continuity announcers tend to be employed directly by the broadcaster, or the associated transmission company tendered to provide transmission services. Some broadcasters deal with the broadcast technology union BECTU, while others recognise no union at all. There is currently no established relationship between these employers and Equity and no rates agreement in place.

CORPORATES

Corporate work covers a host of different types of jobs. It might be providing the voiceover for a video that a company will use on the Internet, or perhaps only on their own internal Intranet. It might be e-learning for employees (see e-learning section), narrating a business-to-business presentation or being the ‘Voice of God’ for a company awards ceremony. Explainer videos - short web videos that explain products, services or ideas - are also booming and many require voiceovers.

The variables for corporates are similarly broad: you may be asked for straightforward RP delivery or for several accents and voices for situational role play; you may be expected to record at a studio or to record and edit the audio yourself and return as one or multiple files. You might be asked to record to picture - that is, time your read to a video that has already been produced, matching the words to the visuals. Some clients, particularly once you have worked with them, are happy to send scripts for you to record and return. Others will want to listen in and direct the session, or to attend in person.

Before quoting for a corporate - as with any job - it is important to know where and how the audio will be used, as well as how long the script will be, whether you will be expected to edit it and whether or not a client wants to direct, in which case many VOs will charge an additional fee.

Most voice artists have a BSF (Basic Session Fee), that's likely to be somewhere between £125 - £300. It's common to use that as an hourly rate and charge depending on how long it is likely to take you to record - or to record and edit, if editing is required. There may also be an additional charge for usage, depending on the size and nature of the company, as well as what its ultimate use will be. For example, a small local business might want a script of 250 words recorded for a video that will only play on a loop inside their shop. In which

case, a VO might choose to charge their BSF as an hourly rate, or perhaps charge for half an hour. If the same script were to be used online and in shops around the country for a large, well-known company, potentially reaching millions of customers, then the artist might wish to charge their BSF, plus usage, with an agreed licensing period of 12 months.

DOCUMENTARY NARRATION

Actors are often required to record Documentary Narration. More often than not producers are looking for a well-known or familiar voice, however this depends on the budget. Generally it's a certain quality in the voice that a producer will look for, e.g. warm, friendly and down to earth or educated, confident RP. Usually this work comes through



Most documentaries require a fairly low-key read, as the priority of a narrator is to enable the viewer to listen to the words

Voice Agents or Theatrical Agents who are approached by the Production Company with the description of the kind of voice they require. If they want a particularly well-known actor and don't have the budget, they will often use the well known actor as a reference and cast somebody with a similar sounding voice.

When recording a narration you will work to a screen with the script. The timings have usually been worked out so there will be visual cues on the screen for when to begin and sometimes when to finish. Your delivery will depend on the subject matter and the style of the documentary. Most documentaries require a fairly straight, low key read, as the main priority of a narrator is to enable the viewer to listen to the words, although at times a more dramatic or high energy delivery is required. The best way to research documentary narration is to watch a lot of documentaries.

You will often see documentaries with people speaking in a foreign language with their voices replaced by actors' voices in English. This is a slightly different technique as you may be required to replicate the original delivery. You will hear the original voice and be asked to work strictly to time. Once again a cue system is used.

The payment for narration depends on many factors. If you are a well-known face or voice the payment would be higher. It is generally negotiable depending on your experience but a lot depends on the usage. A basic studio fee for a voice artist to record a narration would generally be between £200 and £300 an hour. On top of the Basic Studio Fee (BSF), any added buyout would depend entirely on the usage. A UK or US wide buyout would be much bigger than a regional or internet only showing.

ELT (English Language Teaching)

There are many publishing companies that use drama as a way of teaching English. There are courses specifically designed for countries all over the world where there is a hunger for the English Language. These can be classroom materials, recordings for CD or downloadable files. Actors are required to present and perform these courses.

The main technique required is the ability to speak slower than normal but sound as natural as possible particularly for the drama sections. Clarity is also of paramount importance along with versatility. Often on an ELT session you can be required to

use various accents. These can be British accents or International accents. The more genuine accents you can deliver, the more opportunities for work will come along.

For beginners courses an actor is required to speak extremely slowly while injecting energy and sounding as natural as possible. As the level of the courses improve then the speed of delivery increases. On an advanced course you will be asked to work at natural speed and sometimes improvisation is used for the really advanced courses.

Always remember that the whole point of the recording is for the listeners to learn the language so never let your characterisation get in the way of the clarity of your delivery.

There are a number of publishers and producers that specialise in ELT recordings and the best way to get that first job is through recommendation, either through your agent or an experienced ELT actor. Sending reels and emails directly to the producers is less likely to work unless you have a reel of some previous ELT work or a recording in an ELT style.

There is a recommended Equity rate for ELT work which has been agreed between the publishers and Equity that can be found on the Equity website. Actors offered work in ELT should work at these rates and never below as it would undermine the Equity agreed rates.

E-LEARNING

E-learning (electronic learning) is another area of growth for voices. The term describes courses that are delivered via a computer, either in part or in their entirety. E-learning is used by schools and other educational institutions, by businesses, public organisations - anywhere that has a need for teaching and training. It might be accessible on the internet, or it might be confined to a company's own intranet, or even just a few workstations.

The form that e-learning takes will vary. A voiceover might be required to narrate a slide presentation covering detailed lesson information, or to narrate a video depicting a typical workplace scenario, then voice questions (often multiple choice) which users will answer using their keyboard or touchscreen. Often, it will be a straightforward read, but some



*You're
as likely to
find yourself as the
voice of a red squirrel
as you are the
authoritative narrator
of the history of
nuclear power*

courses require different voices, accents or acting skills. You are just as likely to find yourself as the voice of a red squirrel discussing Health and Safety information as you are to be an authoritative narrator of the history of nuclear power generation.

The e-learning sector is huge and there is no single way to charge for this kind of work. There is no Equity-negotiated minimum rate, or indeed, one industry body with which negotiations could be conducted. Fees will depend on the size of the job, the word count, whether or not the VO is expected to edit as well as record and what is the final destination of the recording. A voice might then choose to charge an hourly rate, or might - particularly with larger jobs - quote per word.

As an example, an intranet-only library induction for students at a local college

might be charged as a simple BSF. Some large companies will require one voice for a series of e-learning programmes. In this case, an artist might quote 15p-30p per word up to 1,000 words, with a sliding scale, which gradually reduces as the word count rises. Some jobs can run to hundreds of thousands of words.

If you are expected to edit as individual files, you should be able to negotiate a separate fee for this, depending on the number of files requested.

As with any quote, it is wise to ensure that all parties are clear in advance what is expected in terms of delivery, editing, deadline, script revisions and pick-ups.

HOME STUDIOS

A good home studio is a big investment, but the cost should be covered eventually through the work you get.

Studios range from an alcove built into a corner of a room (a cellar is ideal) and lined with acoustic foam, to a fully professional vocal booth, installed in a room or outbuilding in the garden.

For a minimum of noise, you will need a computer operating your software outside your booth and a monitor with a computer keyboard and/or mouse inside the booth. It may be useful to employ a sound engineer to set this up, but make sure you understand how it works and know how to adjust settings and trouble shoot when things go wrong.

Some degree of sound-proofing is also a must. A client whose session is interrupted by the sound of your neighbour mowing the lawn is unlikely to hire you again.

Other expenses would include:

- ▶ **A very good quality microphone. These vary in price, from around £150 upwards, and will also require a pop shield and stand, as well as cables;**
- ▶ **software for recording and editing, such as Audition, Pro Tools or SADiE (you can search for software online);**
- ▶ **headphones.**

Bee Audio and ACX (an Audible platform website) both cast audiobooks to be read in home studios and have different recording specifications and different pay structures. Be wary of being paid only by shared royalties.

Various online companies cast voice work for which you can audition. Some charge you a yearly fee to be on their site. Some operate as an online directory, charging an annual subscription for a limited number of voices, who are vetted and approved before appearing on site.

The last few years have seen a proliferation in the number of 'Pay to Play' sites. Companies wishing to hire a voice artist can enter descriptions of the type of voice they would like, (age range, gender, vocal style, etc). Artists pay to have their details and demos displayed on the website. These sites are not agents and how they operate varies, but most take a commission on any jobs booked; some

will negotiate rates with clients, others will leave voices to negotiate for themselves.

It's worth noting that many of these P2P sites will accept anyone prepared to pay a subscription. They can vary greatly in terms of cost and what they offer, so make sure you research the company before signing up and definitely before paying any fees. Read the fine print carefully, and check how they treat Usage - you may find you're signing for any usage, "in perpetuity". Also treat with caution any site that encourages bargain basement rates or advertises "cheap" voices.

To ISDN or Not To ISDN?

ISDN stands for Integrated Services for Digital Network. It allows data to be sent over a range of media, including using the telephone network. It means that users can send and receive studio quality audio, using a dedicated telephone line. It also requires an ISDN codec that encodes/decodes the stream of data. Codecs come either in hardware form - a box that is connected directly to the ISDN phone line - or as a piece of software, loaded onto a computer, which will then be connected.

Codecs can be expensive, and you will need to add to that the cost of ISDN line installation and rental.

Many VOs find they no longer have a need for an ISDN line for a connection to clients; others, however, will tell you that they still use it on a daily basis.

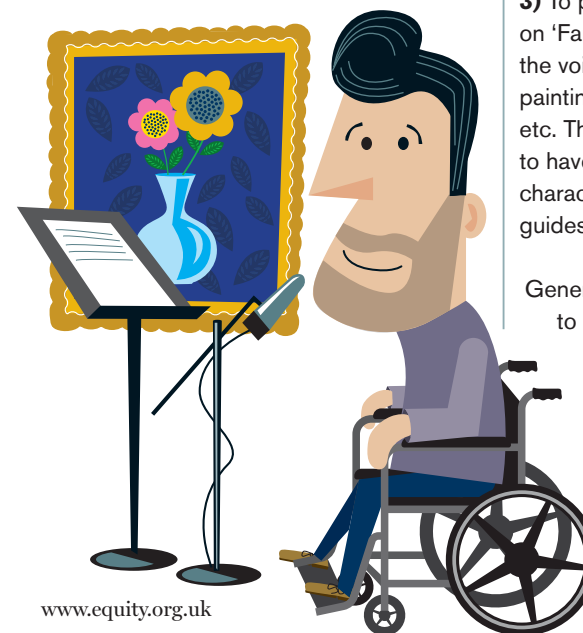
Although some radio stations and

production companies do still use ISDN, it is rapidly being replaced by browser-based alternatives, like ipDTL and Source-Connect, which run on Google Chrome. Be aware that both of these require a stable, high-speed Internet connection. And, while there is no financial outlay for digital lines and codecs, there may still be a charge for monthly subscription.

MUSEUM AND OTHER AUDIO GUIDES

We are asked to do one of three things when working on an audio guide.

1) To narrate it - i.e. be the main 'presenting' voice or host telling the visitor to the museum, stately home, etc, how to use the guide, find their way about, and often talking about the pieces, artworks, etc, in a conversational, friendly,



enthusiastic and informative manner as if very familiar with what you describe (even though it's extremely unlikely you'll have seen a picture of anything you're talking about, let alone the real thing). Some guides will share this job between two voices, usually one male, one female.

2) To be an expert ... or at least pretend to be. Often audio guides will be an English version of a native language guide, for example in a museum in Italy. The original recording may feature a local expert (perhaps the museum/exhibition curator) talking about what the visitor is looking at. Our job here is to re-voice them (not that you get to hear them), a bit like when an actor/voiceover speaks over someone speaking in another language on the radio/TV news. There may be more than one expert, although it's unlikely they would use the same voice for more than one.

3) To play a character – more common on 'Family' or kids guides, one gets to be the voice of perhaps a statue, person in a painting, servant who worked in the home, etc. This is an acting job and it's common to have to play a number of different characters, so versatility is a boon. Some guides will have a character narrating.

Generally audio guides are quite 'close to the wire', we don't get the script very far in advance, the night before is common, and sometimes one is sight reading. Fortunately there is a producer to help with difficult/alien pronunciations (which are common).

Not for the faint-hearted, recordings can be quite intensive, especially if working against the clock. Fortunately the fee reflects the level of expertise needed, and is usually undertaken for an hourly rate not below £220.

Search online for the range of companies that produce audioguides.

RADIO DRAMA

Casting for BBC Radio Drama is in the gift of directors - producers as they are called in radio - for each play. These will either be made in-house or through Independent Companies. For information on Independent Companies see their website www.radioindies.org where all the members of RIG (Radio Independents Group) are listed.

The BBC offers some excellent advice on how to get started in Radio Drama at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/2RSmkTIT319KR9yd9DmzBb6/acting-for-radio>

Students at Drama School should be aware that awards are made each year for places on the Radio Drama Company (Carleton Hobbs and Norman Beaton). If you are lucky enough to achieve one of these, it is a good way to break into radio, because you will become a member of the Company for a few months.

Advice from a Seasoned Radio Actor

1 Always read the script thoroughly before the first read-through, bearing in mind that rehearsal time is limited and that you may have to change some of your ideas

to fit in with how the other actors play their parts. During rehearsal, mark the script carefully, so that you know exactly where you should be in relation to the mic. The writer's stage directions, though not always helpful, often give important clues to the character. Make particular note of places where you speak at the top of a page which will necessitate a smart turn over. It sometimes helps to write the beginning of your speech at the bottom of the preceding page.

2 Always face the microphone unless specifically directed to do otherwise to achieve a particular effect for distance etc.

3 Make sure you can see the cue light clearly and pick it up promptly if it is for you. A prompt pick-up on verbal cues is essential... which doesn't mean that you should never pause. Writers often use the expression "BEAT" between speeches, indicating that they think there should be a momentary pause in the flow of the dialogue. But, as in the theatre, don't overdo them so that the audience (and the rest of the cast) think you have died or lost your place!

4 Avoid the temptation to deliver your lines to the actor beside you, or even behind you.

5 It is vital when using a script that there is no noise when you turn the page. Nothing is more annoying than having to re-record an otherwise perfect scene because of script rustle. Everyone discovers for themselves how best to use a script to avoid making noise.

6 Don't hold the script in such a way that it gets between you and the mic or, indeed, between other actors and the mic.

7 The old axiom that you are speaking to an audience of one is good advice, but don't let this make your performance so internal that your fellow actors have difficulty in hearing their cues. The same goes for read-throughs. Everyone needs to hear you.

8 When an 'approach' to or 'retreat' from the mic is indicated, remember it only works if you move forwards or backwards while speaking.

9 There is no hard and fast rule for the distance one should stand from the mic. It will vary according to the mood of the piece and the way the recording engineer chooses to balance the microphone. He or she will tell you where to stand and from where to start any approach. You can rely on the expertise of the technician.

10 Sound effects. These will be indicated by FX in your script. They may be pre-recorded background played in behind the dialogue which you may hear played back into the studio or which you may have to imagine and pitch your voice accordingly. If you have to react precisely to such an effect, make sure that you can hear it. If not, ask to be given a green light cue. Spot effects such as pouring a cup of tea or using a knife and fork will be done for you by a technician standing beside you - but you will be expected to provide the sound of drinking the tea or chewing the

bacon! You will be provided with something to drink or chew but some actors prefer to make the necessary vocal sounds without actually eating or drinking. You would also be expected to provide the sound of action or reaction while, for example, the spot technician provides the sound of chopping wood or punching. Kissing can be done by kissing your own hand, but it has become common practice for the actors playing a love scene to actually kiss. Careful with the scripts!

TELEPHONE ON HOLD & IVR

On hold messages range from a single, simple answer-phone greeting to more complex IVR (Interactive Voice Response) - the system that enables callers to respond using their voice or telephone keypad and so be ushered though to the desired information or call centre.



The individual messages or information paragraphs are generally called “prompts”. Simple prompts are different from longer, more complicated IVR menus that require a caller to go through a sequence of responses. These conventionally attract different pricing structures.

You may be approached directly by the company who wishes to use your voice for their system, or it may be through a production company that specialises in making prompts. The rates for the latter are likely to be lower (often around £5 per prompt), with the end client paying the On Hold company significantly more for the final product.

Most voice artists will have a ‘per prompt’ rate, with a minimum fee and, perhaps, a sliding scale for bulk recordings. So, for example, you might quote £5-£10 per prompt for a minimum of 10 or 20 prompts, with a lower per prompt rate for 50+ messages, or perhaps an hourly rate above 40 prompts. It can also be helpful to be clear from the start with clients about word count, too, to ensure individual prompts don’t become too lengthy.

For the IVR menus, it’s particularly important to understand a little more about the client. As with other types of corporate work, what voices charge may depend on the size of the company, as well as the scale of the work. So, for a simple menu for a smaller company, it may be appropriate to charge a BSF or a percentage of your BSF. For a bigger company, who may have thousands of callers in one or more countries, you might consider charging BSF + usage.

VIDEO GAMES

Video Games are a huge worldwide industry and one in which actors are increasingly called upon to lend their voices to. Many games have incredibly in-depth worlds with hundreds of different characters brought to life by a sizeable cast of audio actors. Some may also require voices such as narrators or commentators, depending on the genre.

As with other voiceover disciplines, the first time you see the script will often be in the studio when you are recording, so keeping your sight reading skills at their best is really important. That being said, it’s always worth asking for the script beforehand. Do mention if you are dyslexic and need some time with the script ahead of the recording session, producers are generally very accommodating.

While you will mostly be cast in one main role, you will regularly be asked to voice minor characters with a few lines throughout the session, so be ready to think on your feet. These will either have a different vocal quality / accent or both, so versatility is highly valued. Keep your accents well-honed, but also be prepared to try something out of your comfort zone.

The nature of video games means that you can frequently find yourself playing a character in very bizarre, non-naturalistic circumstances, with the use of fictional language extremely common. Whenever scanning through a script, look out for any words with which you are not familiar. If in doubt, always ask the director for the correct pronunciation. The same goes for any plot point or line that you don’t quite

understand; games are often recorded out of sequence and it can sometimes be confusing as you rapidly skip from one scene to another.

Sometimes you will be asked to record ‘soundscapes’, which tend to consist of battle sounds (punches/battle sequences/being hit/dying etc.). These will generally be left towards the end of a session as they are vocally demanding. Drink plenty of water and have a warm up before you go in, so that you are ready for your most blood-curdling ‘death cry’. This will reduce the risk of straining your voice.

A couple of the main producers of audio content for video games in the UK have central London recording studios. There are also a number of other smaller producers in the capital and beyond.

In terms of casting for video games, it’s important to be able to display your vocal dexterity and range. Your video games (or character/animation) reel should have a good variety of your strongest believable characters and accents, which show your versatility. ■

FINALLY, SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS THAT APPLY TO THE AREAS OF VOICE WORK COVERED

- ▶ **Sound like you know what you’re talking about**
- ▶ **Sound like you care what you’re talking about**
- ▶ **Make sense of the script**
- ▶ **Don’t expect a rehearsal**
- ▶ **Give a performance, not a reading**
- ▶ **Keep it conversational, and (usually) warm**
- ▶ **Fulfil the brief given (even if you don’t like it)**
- ▶ **LISTEN to, but don’t expect, direction**
- ▶ **Be flexible, friendly & focused.**
- ▶ **Be open, optimistic & ON TIME.**
- ▶ **Be polite, positive & persuasive.**
- ▶ **Give ‘level’ at the appropriate pitch from the script until told to stop**
- ▶ **Stay fully hydrated. A litre of water before recording will not be sufficient. Preventing a dry mouth starts in the hours - and days - before a session.**
- ▶ **Monitor and avoid what foods or drinks give you indigestion causing mouth or throat noises.**
- ▶ **Hot water, herbal teas and indigestion tablets can help.**
- ▶ **Clutching a cushion can muffle stomach rumbles.**
- ▶ **Avoid shirts or jackets that rustle. Remove noisy jewellery.**
- ▶ **Performing a physical action, like raising an arm, can help with an inability to say a word.**
- ▶ **When you stumble, rumble or otherwise “fluff”, ALWAYS GO BACK (with minimal fuss)**



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