

# Voiceover Tips

*Essential information discussed in  
The Beginners Voiceover Workshop*



The Showreel.com

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# Moving Forward

So have you got the ‘Voiceover Bug?’

We get calls and emails every day from people who want to know how to get started in voiceovers and they come from all walks of life not just from the ‘acting’ side and we always give them the same answer. Why not try our Beginner’s Workshop? It really is a great way to find out more.

So, having attended the Beginner’s workshop & read your personal feedback, I hope you too have discovered the ‘voiceover bug’ and want to explore further with us. There’s no pressure. We like to keep things simple here at Showreel HQ. If you want to build on some of the skills you learnt on the workshop and invest in some personal training with a view to recording a demo, then we are here to help you all the way. If you don’t, then it was FAB to meet you and hopefully some of the ideas and techniques you discovered will help you in every day life.

Ok, we know it’s not possible to teach you everything there is to know about voiceover in a single workshop, but we hope it will help you make an educated decision about taking things further.

We also know that you can’t get practical ‘hands-on’ information in any one book, on the internet, via skype or at the end of a telephone. The only true way to learn is to get behind the mic again.

Voiceover is a ‘doing thing’ and the more you do it, the better you get at it.

# Welcome To Showreel HQ

Showreel HQ opened in 1990, when we had the idea to open a studio that focused purely on voiceover training, demos and production but with one big difference. Not only was our mission to be the very best in the business, but also to be the first company to open a dedicated UK voiceover school.

We knew there were drama schools out there offering radio training, but no one was offering a dedicated voiceover course to their students. So we decided to change that and form The Showreel.

Now, 25years later, we still strive to be different and deliver the very best training and production services we can to all our clients. Voiceover is all we do and we like to think we're pretty good at it.

We've learned from every voice we work with, every demo we've produced and every pro session we've been lucky enough to direct and have now decided to pass on some of the top tips we have learned over the years to you in this short E-Book.

Some of what you'll read is of course common sense but not always common practise even to the working pro's out there, but we hope as a new voice emerging into today's busy market place, you will gain some basic fundamental knowledge on what it takes to be successful in this business.

If you're really thinking about getting started in voiceovers, then it should give you a good insight into the skill set needed to compete with working professionals as well as give you plenty of food for thought before you decide to invest in further training with us.

If you decide that voiceover is not for you, then at least you will have done your homework and made an informed decision before spending money on a demo that you may end up not using.

'No voice artist plans to fail, the fail to plan'

# Today's Voiceover World

*“Keep one step ahead of the game and keep your tools sharp”*

One upon a time - all those years ago, voice artist's simply relied on their voice, good sight-reading technique and the ability to take direction and that was it. They just rocked up to a studio, read the script and left. Job done. They didn't have to worry about the technical side of things, after all this was the studios responsibility right and not part of the required skill-set for a working professional.

They had a physical agent that provided their work and that was enough. No need for any 'jiggery-pokery' or inter-web confusion. Their voiceover demos were also longer and full of accents, impressions and funny voices. In fact loads of vocal gymnastics went on that simply said 'look how good I am' and rarely showed their natural voice at all. Well, things have changed.

Due to the amount of voices out there in today's VO World, you have to be natural and not be a 'Jack of all trades'. You have to be yourself, trust your own voice and focus on what you are really good at and be open to learning new skills to keep up.

Today's successful voices have the know how to be able to record from home as well as the marketing skills needed to be found on the web.

The NEW Voiceover World is growing every day and NEW emerging voices need to keep up with it to succeed in today's market. Up for the challenge? Then keep reading. Faster internet connection, ISDN, Skype, Source Connect, cheap studio software and virtual on-line agencies have now made it even easier for you to get your voice heard around the world. All you need now is some training and a Demo. That's how we can help.

Good News. With so many ways to market your voiceover business to the rest of the world, the traditional voiceover agency business model is now being seriously challenged by the huge opportunities available to grow your own independent voice based business from home as well as allowing you to keep your day job.

Because setting up a broadcast quality home studio is now so affordable, as a home studio believer, you will be on a par with any working London pro voiceover studio and be able to offer a quality pro voice product at an affordable price to the open market that right now, are looking for a professional but cost effective solution for their projects.

We believe this approach, combined with a physical agent will prove to be the best way to make money in today's voiceover climate.

These are exciting times to be involved in voiceover and those of you that will get the most work are those that are increasingly aware of what is expected from them. So with the increased 'voice choice' available to global clients, do you have the skills needed to plan and record a demo with us that will get you work or do you feel you need more personal 1-2-1 training with us? Food for thought and we are here to help you whatever decision you make. It's our job and we take it very seriously.

The Beginner's workshop you attended was designed to see if you have the 'Voice Bug'. If you have, then we would love to help you explore further and eventually help you make money in voiceovers.

Before you panic, you don't have to have a home studio, or indeed look to the inter-web to get work. Traditional agents will still want to hear your voice. We only mention this as option for your voiceover plan. The more options you have the better chance you have of success.

'Just be yourself, trust the voice you have, learn the skills needed to get started and it will all go very well'

# Voiceover Genres & Styles

*'I can do many voices, but where should I focus?'*

Being able to do accents & character voices is indeed a skill. But remember, no voiceover agent will take you on for funny voices alone. You have to be able to show your natural or signature voice as well on a demo.

There are many opportunities out there for you but it makes sense to pursue the style most marketable for your individual vocal tone, delivery, interests, and goals and we here at Showreel HQ can help you with all of them based on our personal workshop feedback.

Here are just some of the genres you can choose to showcase your vocal skills to get the kind of work you want. There are many more out there - get "Googling".

## **Voiceover Genres:**

Commercials, Documentary, Corporate (Industrial)

Cartoons and Animation Productions

Playstation/Computer Games

Impressions & Sound-a-Likes

Radio Drama, Audio Books

Instructional & Educational Videos

Sales & Power Point Presentations, Museum & Stately Home Guides

In-Store Promotions

ELT: E-Learning & Education, (English Language Tapes)

Web-Viral's, Internet Videos & Training, Website Audio

Infomercials

Kids Presenting

TV, Movie Promo & Trailers

In-Store Promotional Audio & Video

Transportation, Documentary, Government

Exercise Videos, Inspiration, Meditation, Hypnotherapy & Relaxation

Internet & Website Audio

Medical, Technical & Pharmaceutical

IVR: On-Hold & Telephone Answer Systems

Podcasts, Bus Tours

Automated Dialogue Replacement (ADR)

Biography

Public Service Announcements, PA Stadium Announcements etc

# Top Tips

**Read out loud:** Everyday, to your loved ones, partners, neighbours and pets. Do this whenever you can, in the bath, on the loo, in the car, while cooking, don't just mumble, do it for real - like you are behind the Mic. It's the only way to improve your vocal delivery & style. Trust me, it works.

**Do your homework:** Give yourself a timeframe. Book your 1-2-1 personal training sessions with us and get a demo date in the diary. This way you have a date to focus on and prepare towards. Plan, Plan, Plan.

**Think like a business:** You are going to be a professional voice artist, so plan to keep accounts, receipts and work out an hourly/daily/project rate for your work. Register a web domain and plan to build a website (sound cloud - is free) & use Google Adwords to get your brand noticed. We will of course answer any questions you have and help you get started.

**Know your market:** Keep an eye on the internet and become an expert on new trends and media. Join our FaceBook Group to ask questions and get more top tips. Social media is a great way to keep ahead of the curve.

**Think about setting up a home studio:** Or find a good one near to where you live. Make friends with the owner/sound engineer & get a good hourly rate from them. This is perfect option if you are not interested in learning the 'jiggery pokery' and just want to use your voice behind the microphone.

**Volunteer:** Join a hospital radio station, or offer to read for your local RNIB (talking newspapers). Good practice - Good cause.

**Listen to your competition:** Really listen. Listen to their demos and learn from them as they already have an Agent & are getting work for a reason.

**Let the world know you exist:** Advertise. Set up a website/soundcloud account. Hand out your CD to anyone at anytime and send your mp3 files to anyone you know. Let the world know you exist.

**Keep Your Demo Fresh:** When you do a job, always ask for a copy of your performance and add this to your voice reel. Review the content every few months and update it every year.

# Planning Your Demo

*'No Voice Artist plans to fail - they fail to plan'*

I'll keep this nice and easy for you. The simple fact is that agents and clients want to hear your natural vocal tones. There is a time and place to show your funny voices, but on a commercial or narrative demo we just want to hear you and not all the voices in your head. We've been producing voice demos for over 25 years and have listened to many, many, many demos (trust me) & have noticed that many budding voice artist's fail at the first hurdle. They choose material that is not age or style appropriate and fail to show their signature ( natural ) voice anywhere on their demo. They try to show off with vocal gymnastics in a hope to impress the listener. Keep it natural and try not to show off. Remember, you can always record a character/animation games demo to show your acting ability and funny voices. Simply keep your commercial and narrative demos to just that and please choose scripts that are suited to your age, ability and style - Less IS More!

## **Common Demo Mistakes**

- \* Demo too long: (90 seconds max for each demo)
- \* Demo showed lack of training & experience
- \* Poor demo quality. Sounds home produced or done on the cheap
- \* Lack of believability. Sounded written by the voiceover and not real text
- \* The voice sounded like they were reading and not improvising.
- \* No flow - it sounded placed or too thoughtful in delivery. No smile
- \* Too much acting. No natural delivery - remember it's a Mic not a stage
- \* No Corporate or Documentary reads - Just Drama or Poems on demo
- \* Poor character or regional accents - stick to your own!
- \* Dry production. No Music or FX beds to add believability
- \* Choice of material is too old or too young for the voice
- \* Singing on a Voiceover Demo - AAAhhh - Keep this to a singing demo
- \* Dated material - over 2/3 years old
- \* Fake brand names - Use real ones
- \* Using a Broadcast/Announcer voice or VO voice & not your own
- \* Lack of variation in tone, pitch, pace and style.
- \* Demo is all on one vocal level/tone/pitch & musical note
- \* Using well known ads from TV - Oops, we know it's not you
- \* Over production - DJ radio station promo production
- \* Bad mic technique, pops mouth noises & nerves.
- \* I'm sure there are more mistakes, but these will do for now.

# Microphone Technique

*‘One way to drive your Engineer crazy, is to Pop the mic when reading’*

As we discussed on the workshop, basic mic technique is placing yourself 6-8 inches from the mic. This will give a great sound for normal VO delivery.

But you need to learn how to work the mic. This comes with practice. Remember, the closer you get to the mic, the more chances you have of popping.

So, how can you Permanently Prevent those Painful Pesky Plosives’ so you can record a script that is perfect & pop free?

Ok, imagine for a moment that you are at your local dog show or a charity fete. The sun is shining you’ve had a beer or two and the main event is about to start. The announcer steps up behind the Mic to welcome you all and then disaster strikes. Their delivery is ruined by loud popping and low-end banging noises over the PA system. The moment is lost and it becomes increasingly harder to listen. So, you switch off and make your way back to the beer tent. Sound familiar?

It’s funny that we never seem to hear these noises in every day life when people are speaking normally to each other. So, what are microphones hearing that we’re not? If these noises kill a live performance, you can bet they’ll cause disaster in a pro studio recording situation. So what can we do to stop them?

## **What causes Popping?**

Just like mouth noises, Plosives are always a Problem when we record the human voice in any studio, no matter what mic you use.

They are ‘B’, ‘P’, ‘G’, ‘T’, ‘D’ & ‘K’ sounds & if for instance, you hold a lighted candle in front of your mouth while speaking (watch your nose) the flame would flicker because of the expelled air emitted when making these sounds. Try it, but be careful.

Sounds simple enough to understand this I know, but the problem is made worse if your mouth is close to the microphone as in most voiceover work.

The plosive air blasts are obviously strongest close to the mouth, and when it crashes into the microphone's diaphragm, it produces a large asymmetrical output signal that in some cases is so large, it can saturate or distort the microphone or overload the mic preamp, making the sound even worse and impossible to edit.

In other words – Plosives force a large amount of air into the microphone which then distorts the microphone signal and renders the take unusable. Not good!

Ok, are you still with me? The problem is made even worse because studio quality microphones are very sensitive and a plosive blast will cause a loud, low-frequency thumping sound that will drive your engineer mad.

### **How can I prevent Plosives?**

There are many simple ways to make sure you don't pop the Mic.

The microphones we use in a pro studio are susceptible to popping because their diaphragms are big & very sensitive. That's why we use a pop shield. It is also worth mentioning, that even with a pop shield (or wind sock) you may still get pops. It's all down to the amount of air you release from your mouth when speaking. But there are also some tricks you can use, that when performed correctly will make you 'Master of the Mic' and the engineer's best friend.

### **5 Fast Fixes to stop popping**

#### *Tip 1 – cross the mic*

Talk across the Mic and not directly into it. Remember plosives are caused by blasts of air hitting the microphone. These blasts are most powerful when talking directly into the Mic. If a script looks like it has a lot of plosives (easy to tell) then try altering your delivery direction. Instead of being bang in front of the mic, turn 45 degrees to the left or right of the mic. You don't have to talk out of the side of your mouth – just talk normally. The Mic will miss the plosives and still pick up your voice and low end richness from your chest etc.....

### *Tip 2 – The Dodge*

This is a tricky one, but when ‘bang on’ the mic, try to dodge the plosive. Ok, I know this sounds like a game and it is to a certain point, but what I mean is whenever a plosive appears in a script, try and ‘flick it’ to the side then return to the centre of the mic for the rest of the script. This takes time to perfect and be careful not to go too far off mic as your engineer will have to tell you so and this looks V bad in front of a client.

### *Tip 3 – The Half Closed Mouth*

A simple and effective way to also reduce ‘plosives’ is to half close your mouth on problem sounds in a script. To practice this technique, put your hand in front of your mouth, and monitor how much breath is exhaled when you say the problem words. (thanks to Paul Bridge for this tip)

### *Tip 4 – Smile*

Simply smile when you speak – it really does improve your overall delivery but also reduces the ‘pops’ trust me, a simple smile is a powerful tool for preventing those ‘pops’.

### *Tip 5 – Change The Words*

If all else fails – rewrite the script. Ask your client you may be surprised.

### **NOTE:**

On tough ‘plosive’ written scripts (and I do this when recording an audio book to save session time stopping starting etc) your engineer will usually move the mic slightly higher so that your ‘air flow’ misses the mic’s diaphragm and no ‘plosives’ ever get recorded. The downside is that the vocal sound becomes slightly ‘thinner’ but can be corrected by increasing you ‘bottom end’ (bass) when mastering.

# How To Mark Your Script

Scripts, Scripts, Scripts ... They come in many shapes and sizes and you're very lucky if you have a chance to read them before your session, so great sight reading skills are needed to bring a script to life. Before you begin to mark your script, always ask your client what they have in mind. Finding out what style they want will really affect the way you mark the script. Do they want you to contract words like 'it is' to 'it's'? Also a technical narration may require more pauses so the listener can follow more easily. Here a few tips that may help.

The first thing you should do when you get your script is read it out-loud. Don't be mute read it out loud. This gives the engineer time to set up a sound, the client will get excited as the session has started - but it's for you. A time to mark your script and put your teeth in.

Really search for the clues in a script. This will help you find a believable delivery. Then mark it with your own code to get the delivery your client wants. By marking your script you create visual cues that will help you give a much better voiceover performance once the red light switches on.

Marking your script with upward and downward inflections, highlighting the 'hit/stress' words, marking where to pause, breathe and change pace will help you create a framework for a consistent vocal performance.

## **Top Tip**

Always use a pencil to mark your script. This allows you rub out and make new markings without complicating matters. Make as few markings as possible. Too many markings on a page will cause your brain to go into thinking or reading mode. (less is more).

Remember, voiceover scripts come in all shapes and sizes, but if there's one common factor it's that they're often written for the 'page' and not for the 'voice'.

Being able to quickly mark a script with your own shorthand will help you lift the words off the page and make your delivery sound more believable. Trust me.

## **Top Tip**

Always write the client, engineer and voice producers' name on the top right hand corner of your script. It's very embarrassing if you forget in the booth. Remember to rub them out after the session and don't steal the script. Hand it back.

# The Code

Although you are free to mark your script in any way that helps your delivery, there is a general set of marks used by working voice artists.

You can pause for both pacing and effect as well as giving you time to breath. Pausing for a breath is indicated by a single slash. For a pause for pacing use a double slash.

For indicating up & down inflections, use an angled arrow for an up or downward inflected syllable or word.

Underscore ( underline ) words that require more stress. Put a double or triple underscore under a word or syllable to indicate even more stress or underline the beginning or end part of a word or phrase you wish to stress.

Use a wavy line to remind you to modulate your voice.

For a change in attitude, you can use any visual mark that works for you. Circles, boxes, lines, squares, dots, brackets, smiley faces, or just write a word that gives you the right energy.

Try letters in circles. A letter in a circle can help you find a change in attitude. For example: an “H” for happier, a “C” for calmer "A" for angry etc. Use whatever you think helps you find a more believable read.

Marking your script can take a few minutes – but it is time well spent and a habit you should get used to. It gives you visual cues that will bring a script to life. Take some time to find and fine-tune your own personal system. It will help you every time you get behind the “Mic”.

## **Top Tip**

Always use a pencil when marking your script and at the end of the session rub out all of your markings. You don't want to give away your 'secrets; to any other voice artist testing' for the same job that happens to find your discarded script lying around in the booth.

# Caring For Your Voice

As a voiceover artist, you talk a lot. It's how you earn your money. No voice, no money. The worst thing you can do is turn up to a job with an under par voice. You will let everyone down - including yourself.

## **Here are some tips that will help keep your voice in top condition**

Don't forget, if you get ill you can't work. Use hand wash whenever you venture on public transport. Remember it's door handles, buttons and hand rails that contain all the nasties and you don't want to get them in your system and the simplest way to get a germ is through the largest surface area - your eyes.

Always warm up your voice and body before you practice, audition, or record. These warm ups may include humming, tongue twisters, yawning, stretching, singing, jumping up and down, etc. Do what works for you. Your vocal chords are muscles that need to stretch and warm up before a workout just like any other muscle.

Loosen up. Your whole body needs to relax before a session. a tense body will result in a tense voice. Relax and stretch especially your back, neck, shoulders and jaw. This is really important to getting a stress free recording.

Keep Hydrated. Your vocal chords must be lubricated to work properly. Forget to lubricate and your vocal performance will suffer. Drink plenty of room temperature water, not cold as this will tighten your vocal chords. So will very hot drinks. Other great choices are lemon and ginger tea or a squeeze of lemon in your water. Don't forget that your chords are like rubber bands and need to be able to vibrate to produce sound. If they get cold they lose elasticity, if they get too hot they can't keep tension and strain to produce any sound.

Remember to breathe. It's so easy to forget when behind the mic and the red light goes on. Try and stand whenever you can on a job as your diaphragm will thank you for it. Good relaxed posture produces a better sound. Don't breathe from your chest, breath from your belly.

Get a good nights sleep before any recording session. Rest is really important. Make sure you get 6-8 hours sleep the night before a session. Like any other muscles, your vocal chords need proper rest to repair and function.

**Avoid these for at least 24 hours before recording**

Dairy – produces mucus & makes you sound blocked, nasal and phlegmy.

Caffeine – dehydrates and tightens the vocal chords.

Greasy and Fatty Foods – produces mucus and promotes acid reflux.

Spicy – promotes acid reflux.

Alcohol – dehydrates.

Smoking – produces mucus – also horrible for vocal health in general Mucus happens sometimes. Allergies or illness can be culprits of producing unwanted mucus too. Tips for dealing with mucus include gargling with salt water, adding fresh lemon to your water, drinking more water.

Coughing is tough on the vocal chords. Avoid coughing by putting your chin to your chest and swallowing. The mucus will usually clear quickly.

Your vocal health is important for so many reasons. Protect your vocal chords and you will reap the rewards of a strong and healthy voice for years to come.

# The Competition

*'How to listen your competition's demo & beat them'*

Before you record your demo it's wise to find out what your competition is up to and more importantly how they're doing it. Without a clear understanding of what they're doing you will find it harder to compete in today's Industry. You need to hear what they are doing and be able to critically analyze their vocal delivery to get closer to producing your own "Killer Demo".

Thanks to the good old "Interweb" it's really easy for you to find thousands of Demos to listen to online from the comfort of your own home and best of all the Demos you will find cover:

Commercials, Documentary, Animation, Character, Promo, Technical, On-Hold, Radio Drama, Video Games, Audio Books, Instructional & Educational, Power Point Presentations, Corporate, Museum Guides, Stately Home Guides, In-Store Promotions, English Language Tapes, Web Virals, Internet Videos & Training, Website Audio, Imaging, Infomercials, Kids, Continuity, Trailers, E-Learning & Education, Impersonations, Medical & Pharmaceutical, Technical, Podcasts, Video/Computer Games.... And many more.

## **Here are some of the things you should listen out for on someone else's Demo**

What's the overall sound quality of their demo like? Have a good old listen. Use headphones if you can as you'll hear more than through your computer speakers.

Does their demo sound "home produced" or is it professionally recorded?

Can you hear any "pops" or "clicks?"

Does the overall sound appear "muffled" or "boxy?"

Can you hear any background "hiss" or "mouth noises?"

Does the music sound "contemporary" or is it "old and dated"?

Do you "believe" the reads or do they sound "faked?"

Does the demo have flow & movement?

Is the demo cut fast leaving you wanting to hear it again, or does it bore on and make you want to switch off?

Are the individual clips too short or too long?

Does the demo go over the magic 90 second mark that the voice agents want?

Does the demo have enough vocal variety? In pitch and tone. In pace. In attitude. In production. In music and SFX. In script style and choice. In Mic proximity?

Are the acting skills up-to-scratch or do they sound mediocre and painful to listen too?

Can the voice artist actually read or can you hear them thinking"and simply reading off the page with no emotional connection being made to the listener?

Do they sound energised and behind the words or do they sound bored?

Do the scripts sound believable or do you think they are dated or even worse written by the artist?

*'Listening out for all of the above will teach you about what to include and what NOT to include on your own demo'*

# Evaluate Yourself

We record with 'Working Pros' everyday. Voice actors who not only have an agent, but in most cases also have their own home studios. We're often impressed with their vocal quality and ability to effortlessly 'lift' the words off the page and deliver the right emotion and style in the allotted time. How DO they do that? Practice!

However, there are also times when a voice fails to deliver on a session and we really for them. We want to help them get the read to sound better, but it's often tricky in front of a client who thinks they have hired a 'Pro' voice and expect pro results.

This got me thinking. Why can some voices deliver session after session while others can't? Even as a working Professional Voice artist, you need to keep your tools sharp! By evaluating how you deliver and interpret a script, you will continue to improve and ultimately get more work.

So, Pro or not, Agent or no Agent, Home Studio or no Home Studio you need practise a lot.

## **Keep Your Tools Sharp**

Okay, here's the reason why "God" invented GOOGLE. Just do a quick search for "Tellyads". This is a great website were every commercial ever made is now on-line and will be a good friend to you, in many ways.

All you have to do is find any advert (and there are many) that you like, write it down and record it on your iPhone, Dictaphone or Gooseberry. Don't read it through first, just sight-read it and record it once only. Don't worry about the audio quality, this isn't going to broadcast – this is for 'self evaluation'.

## **Question to ask yourself on Playback**

Did you go too fast? Did your teeth get in the way?

Did you stumble on any words? Which words and why?

Did you hesitate on any words? Which words and why?

Did you leave any words out of the script? If so, which ones?

Did you add or change any words? If so, which ones?

Did you run out of breath or breath in the wrong place?

Did you have energy or did you sound flat or monotone?

Did you have too much energy and pitch it too high?

Did your delivery sound sing-song? Or another odd pattern to its delivery. ( starting each phrase with a rising inflection and ending each one on a downward inflection ) Describe what you heard.

Did you stress or hit the right words or the wrong words compared to the original recording? Do you over emphasize certain words? Ask yourself why?

Did you come in on time? Was your recording too long, too short or around the same time as the original?

*By doing this exercise on a regular basis with Commercials and Narrative reads you will start to understand what you are really doing behind the Microphone.*

# Decision Time

This short E-Book is designed to be a simple follow up to The Beginner's Workshop. It will hopefully give you enough information to consider moving forward with us here at Showreel HQ. It's aim is to reinforce some of the topics covered in the workshop and give you more food for thought. We hope to work with you again soon."

The Showreel Team