

Recording A Voice-Over

For many the idea of recording a voice-over is greeted with fear and apprehension. In general we tend to feel that the sound of our own recorded voice is not good enough or suitable for this purpose. It is hoped that this guide will encourage you, using the techniques which follow, to make acceptable voice-overs. In the main successful recordings are made when using good techniques.

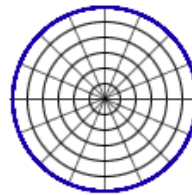
The information in this document is designed to help with the basics of choosing a suitable microphone and then looking at the various recording methods of producing a voice recording.

1 The Microphone

There are various types of microphone available and it is important, where possible, to ensure the correct selection is made.

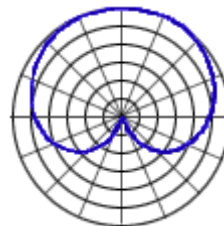
a. The Omni-Directional Microphone.

This microphone, as the name implies, will pick up sound from all directions. This may be suitable for atmospheric outdoor recordings but is *not* ideal for voice recordings as it will pick up all ambient sounds in the recording area.



b. The Directional or Cardioid Microphone

This microphone is more suitable for voice recordings as it mainly records sound from a conical area in front of the microphone and picks up very little from the areas outside this conical area. In general using a microphone with a medium cone angle of approximately 50° - 60° will give good results.



2 Microphone Level & Line Level

The electrical current generated by a microphone is very small. Before it can be used for anything serious the signal needs to be amplified, usually to *line level*. Being a stronger and more robust signal, line level is the standard signal strength used by audio processing equipment and common domestic equipment such as CD players, tape machines, VCRs, etc.

This amplification is achieved in one or more of the following ways:

- a. Some microphones have tiny built-in amplifiers which boost the signal to a high mic level or line level.
- b. The mic can be fed through a small boosting amplifier, often called a *line amp* or *pre amp*.
- c. Sound mixers have small amplifiers in each channel. Attenuators can accommodate mics of varying levels and adjust them all to an even line level.

3 Placing The Microphone

When making a recording, the voice is transmitted much better from the standing position and it is therefore useful to have a suitable microphone stand. If recording directly onto the computer it is as well to have the microphone situated away from the PC to minimise the noise of the cooling fan but make sure the floor boards don't creak where you will be standing.

In order to avoid the sound of breathing and the loud pops which can occur when expressing words with hard consonants i.e. "b", "d", "p", "t" and "k" etc, the position of the mouth relative to the microphone is important. Rather than speaking directly into and at very close range a better result is obtained by backing away a small distance and speaking across the microphone. Practice will enable the best position and technique to be established.

The room in which the recording takes place can also make a big difference to the final sound. A small room which is carpeted and has plenty of soft furnishings will generally provide a better environment for recording than a large empty room with hard floors and bare walls. Again practice and experience will determine the best locations in the home. Also ensure that external sounds are not included in your recording. Cars passing by may go unnoticed but will certainly be picked up by the microphone. Beware of ticking and chiming clocks, doors banging and the inevitable flushing of the loo!!!. It may mean making your recordings at particular times of the day when external influences are at a minimum.

Make sure you have something on which to rest your script as it will inevitably rustle if you hold it to read. Keep clear of any cables and take care not to kick the microphone stand.

4 Voice Techniques

Unless you have been trained in the art of broadcasting or public speaking it is likely that you will need to follow some basic rules when making your recording.

- a. Speak slowly. You will be surprised at how quickly you talk in general conversation. *Slow down* you only have a single opportunity to get your message across.
- b. Speak clearly. Whilst a local accent is acceptable, words must be spoken clearly and concisely.
- c. Raise and lower the intonation in your voice according to the content of your script. It may sound OTT to you but to your listeners it will portray emotion in the content. There's nothing worse than a monotone rendition.

5 Prepare A Script

Very few people can deliver an off-the-cuff presentation. Write a script and refine it to suit your presentation both in content and timing. The audience can see your photograph so it is not necessary to describe the image on the screen but rather give background information or express emotion to the subject shown.

Once you are satisfied the content and timing is OK, read your script over and over again and make sure you can accommodate the phrases which don't trip off the tongue easily. If you continually stumble over specific irregular phrases, change them. By the time you are ready to record you should almost know your script by heart.

6 Recording Directly Onto Your PC With A Low Cost Headset Microphone

If you do not have access to a more expensive directional microphone do not worry as a cheap microphone used correctly can give very acceptable results. Most of the major PC retail outlets sell a noise cancelling headset microphone which will plug directly into the sound card on your computer and they are very reasonably priced. Using this type ensures that the distance between the mouth and the microphone remains consistent and it can be positioned to eliminate the sound of breathing and those loud pops described earlier. The noise cancelling feature means that much of the surrounding noise is subdued if not eliminated altogether. The training CD which accompanies this document was recorded using one of these headset microphones.

7 If you make numerous voice-overs you may wish to consider purchasing a more expensive microphone and possibly a digital recording device such as the Edirol R09 or similar. There are numerous companies which will advise you and one such company has a link on the Leeds AV Group website.