

the four 'R's of voice-over



Bolingo

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Introduction

Hi! Thanks for downloading this e-book.

Visiting Bolingo's website means you have great interest in voice-overs and probably know why you want to become a voice-over talent. We assume that you have great motivation.

Now, let's talk about a few pointers to note when working on any project as a voice-over talent. We will categorize them into four (4) groups which we call "***the four 'R's of voice-over***". They are Requirements, Reponsibilities, Recording Tips and Recording Room Etiquette. We will take them one after the other.



1. Requirements

The specific role of a voice-over recording varies depending on the type of video it accompanies. In infomercials, commercials and promotional videos, voice-overs can be used to provide additional information or create excitement about a product or service.

Television shows and movies often employ voice-over artists to narrate important plot elements, while documentaries and news broadcasts can use voice-over talent to add commentary and context to video and images.

As such, the specific requirements for a voice-over talent varies as well. The key requirements for a successful voice-over talent however are a good speaking voice and the ability to read a script with the appropriate tone, emotion, clarity and enunciation.



2. Responsibilities

- **Bringing the script off the page:** The primary responsibility of a voice-over talent is to read a pre-written script out loud in order to make a voice recording that will overlay a video production.

Developing a strong and clear speaking voice as a voice-over talent is a crucial part of the process of bringing the script to life.

In addition, the voice-over talent is often called upon to employ a range of acting techniques in order to bring life and emotion to the script while maintaining a correct and believable attitude and tone.

- **Conveying the message:** Every voice-over project will have a different message depending on the purpose of the video it accompanies.

For example, the voice-over narration for a public service announcement will need to leave an emotional impression on the audience, while the message of the voice-over accompanying a commercial may be excitement about the advertised product.

In each case, the voice-over talent will need to decide how to convey the message through the tone and attitude of their narration.

- **Crafting a voice:** Depending on the role of the voice-over narration in a particular production, the voice-over artist may be asked to create a distinctive voice in which to read the script. For commercial work, this unique voice may help with branding, while fictional pieces such as television shows may require the creation of a certain type of character and voice.

You as a voice-over talent will need to rely heavily on any acting experience or training in order to accomplish this task.

- **Creating alternate versions:** Certain productions will require that the voice-over talent record several different versions of the script. In these variations, the voice-over talent may be asked to read the script in a different tone of voice or to emphasize different words or sentences.

The goal of creating alternate versions is to allow the director/project manager to choose the voice-over narration that best matches the purpose of the production.



The logo for Boldingo, featuring a stylized 'B' with an orange and blue swoosh to its left, followed by the word "oldingo" in a grey, sans-serif font.

3. Recording Tips

- **Watch your posture**

If possible, stand to read. If not, at least sit up straight. Good posture will help you maintain good breath support, which makes it easier to speak in a strong, clear voice.

- **Stay Hydrated**

Always have a drink close at hand while recording. Water works very well, either hot or room temperature. If your mouth gets dry, it will make noises (smacks, clicks, pops, etc) that may distract from the message.

- **Remember that speaking is not the same as talking**

Though talking is the most natural thing in the world, “speaking”, especially into a microphone, is pretty unnatural. When you’re talking to another person, you’re not only using your voice, but also facial expressions, body language, gestures – all things that help you to be fully understood in a face-to-face conversation but don’t translate well to voice-overs. To make sure that each word is understandable, speak clearly. Make sure that you’re not speaking so quickly that words slur together, nor so slowly that you’ll put the listener to sleep.

- **Warm up your voice**

Warm up your voice by reading the script aloud before starting the recording. This lets you find the right combination of volume, projection, and pacing for the voice-over.

- **Pre-read the script**

It’s not uncommon for a paragraph that is written very well – one that is concise, understandable, and informative – to be challenging to read aloud. The only way to know is to actually read the script aloud, to see where the difficulties lie. Then find a way to bring clarity to those difficult sections, by inserting pauses to break up a hard section or, if the client approves, by changing a sentence or even a single word if that solves the issue.

- **Don’t Be afraid to mark up the script**

As you read through the script, keep a pencil (or two, with erasers) handy; make marks to remind you when to breathe, when to pause, and even when to pitch your voice lower or higher for emphasis. The goal is to make your voice-over sound natural, comfortable, and appropriate for the spot. And finally, when you make a mistake in your reading, pause for a couple of seconds. Then, back up a sentence or two, and begin reading again. Those pauses will give the engineer a great visual cue when editing your voice-over for broadcast.



4. Recording Room Etiquette



When in the studio, you're sure to find that engineers are protective of their equipment. So, if you get the honor of being invited to attend a recording session, there is some studio etiquette to be aware of.

Whether you are recording from your home booth or a professional studio, follow these recording studio dos and don'ts in order to pull off a faultless read that impresses your studio mates and gets you invited back to record again.

- **Do not show up late**

In the language services industry and for that matter voice-overs, first impressions are everything. You do not want someone to remember you as the voice actor who forced them to wait for you to arrive. Every minute inside a recording studio is precious. Plan to arrive about 15 minutes early for your session so that you have a moment for proper introductions. If your session is in-person, budget extra time for travel in case you run into any transit or traffic delays. If you have to be late because of an accident or emergency, do well to communicate this, where possible. If you have to cancel the session for any other reason, it is prudent to communicate this several hours ahead of time; the studio will understand, but when you show up late, you are disrespecting them and saying you don't care about their time.

4. Recording Room Etiquette_continuation

- **Always arrive prepared**

While this definitely means that you should show up prepared to deliver your strongest vocal performance, it also means that you'll have already put in the preliminary work to understand the project and character that you've been hired to read for. You'll ideally pull up to the recording studio having interpreted the meaning of the project and carried out multiple read-throughs of the script aloud. All the work you put in before stepping foot into the studio will cause you to be more familiar with the characterization, pacing, and general tone of the entire production.

- **Have supplies on hand that will keep your voice in tip-top shape**

Arrive armed with lots of water especially. It can be difficult to articulate yourself with a dry throat and mouth. Keeping hydrated can help reduce pesky mouth noises the mic might pick up. As someone whose vocal conditions can make or break a recording session, you never want to underestimate the importance of having warm or room temperature water on standby at all times.

- **Go with the flow of the recording session direction**

Creative directors are just that: creative. The direction of a recording session can take some unexpected turns, including last-minute script revisions, experimentation with different styles of voice over, and unconventional directorial decisions. Different clients will have different workflows, so be ready to be spontaneous and show that you can go with the flow.



4. Recording Room Etiquette_continuation

- **Ask questions (But not while you're recording)**

If you find yourself uncertain about how to pronounce a certain word, the punctuation at the end of a sentence, or if any other questions arise, don't be afraid to respectfully ask for some guidance. Your colleagues at the recording studio will be happy to lend you a hand. Just remember not to wait until you're mid-delivery to interrupt your own reading and pose these questions—odds are that this will cause some frustration.

- **Be courteous and professional**

Check your ego at the door. Every recording session is a collaborative process, and everyone present in the room is an integral piece of the puzzle who shares the same interest in achieving the best recording possible. It doesn't matter whether you're a seasoned professional or an industry newcomer: you're providing a service, so put on your customer service hat and be friendly and respectful.

- **Do not cough, clear your throat or make other sudden, unexpected, loud noises directly into the mic**

This is particularly true when you are connected to a sound engineer wearing headphones! Not only is this bad for the equipment, but once the engineer can actually hear again, he probably won't be too interested in hearing YOUR voice in their studio any more!

- **Don't bring food or drinks into the recording studio**

Don't bring food or drink into the recording studio and you will never spill on an important form or the expensive recording equipment. It is also disrespectful to eat or drink while you are working (and talking) with others. Show respect and take a break to snack or drink your coffee/Juice before you get to the recording studio.

NB: Because water is essential to voice-over talents, it is allowed in most studios, but on the condition that it comes in a bottle or well sealed container to avoid spillage.

- **Do not wear noisy clothing and accessories**

Be warned: microphones pick up everything. If you're wearing "jingly jangly jewelry", the sound of your outfit will disrupt the recording any time you move your arms or body. Replace any accessories that jingle, jangle, clink or clank, with a loose-fitting, comfortable outfit comprising cottons, knits, jeans or khakis..

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4. Recording Room Etiquette_continuation

- **Do not leave your phone on in the recording booth**

The one place your phone doesn't belong is inside the recording booth. Besides the fact that it can be distracting and take you out of character, if you receive any texts or calls, the sound will damage your whole recording. In fact, even anticipating texts or calls can affect your focus. To be respectful of others' time, turn off your phone and leave it in your bag, or lock it away in your vehicle. Calls can wait until after you're finished recording.

- **Don't touch anything that isn't yours**

Show respect to the person in charge of the recording studio and don't touch anything that is not yours to touch. Ask permission before changing or even suggesting anything during a session.

- **Do not change your delivery**

While it can be impressive to arrive with your own creative take on the project, veering from the actual content within the script is highly discouraged. Unless you are instructed to improvise, it is not your job to write original material. When you're hired to serve as the voice for a project, don't overstep your boundaries by additionally trying to act as its copy editor or director.

- **Do not always apologize if you make a mistake in your vocal performance**

Everybody makes mistakes. So, if you slip up while performing a read, resist the urge to break character and apologize. Simply take a breath, remain in character, and reread the sentence that you had an issue with. The clients will appreciate a brief pause between takes, so if you happen to stumble on your words, just take a few seconds to regroup before beginning afresh. Although you may feel bad about your mistake and want to make that known, your restraint and professionalism will pay off.



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Voice overs is at the core of our media localization offering.

Bolingo's specialization is in African languages and in 2021, our work covered more than 15 languages including Amharic, Arabic, Bambara, English, French, Kirundi, Oromo, Portuguese, Sesotho, Shona, Somali, Swazi, Tigrinya, Tswana and Wolof.

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