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Hi and thanks for considering Steve Hart for your voice over.

Over the years we have seen voice over scripts of every kind, some with text centred, others where the entire script in CAPITAL LETTERS MAKING IT QUITE HARD TO READ.

Some scripts have been intermingled with instructions to the video editor. While others have arrived without any timings, meaning we don't know the duration of the VO - is it a fast-paced 2 minutes or a leisurely, thoughtful, 3 minutes.

We've been presented with some real tongue-twisters too, because no one had read aloud the script before sending it in.

A smooth recording session starts with a well-written script. Conversely, a poorly written or badly formatted script causes problems - problems that adversely affect the project's budget, create longer session times, increase tension in the actor's delivery, and produce an outcome that just sounds less professional.

The aim of this quick guide is to save you time and money, so the VO artist can deliver the first take as close to your requirements as possible.

Presentation

Keep the layout of your script simple. Upper and lower case text, set left with special instructions presented in [square brackets]. Instructions could be timings or how the text should be delivered.

Read the copy out loud.

That's the best way to spot spelling mistakes, missed words, extra words, and tongue-twisters.

Until you read the copy aloud, you might be surprised at how many difficult phrases there are in ordinary copy.

Reading your script aloud will also help you...

- Identify sentences that are too long to say in one breath
- Identify sentences that are too long or convoluted to follow
- Catch rhetoric that might be confusing
- Keep to one thought per sentence
- Discover redundancies, cliches and jargon.
- Realize if the draft is boring, or note where listener interest might lag

And even with voice training, at the end of a long, single-breath passage, the voice necessarily sounds physically different.

Just as good voice actors try to make things easy for you and your audio engineer, try to make it easy for your voice actor.

Write like you speak

In general, we speak much more informally than you write.

You may find that it helps to imagine you're talking to someone, rather than writing. You will naturally use smaller words, a more conversational tone, and shorter sentences. (And notice how we wrote "you're" instead of "you are"?)

Keep it super simple - KISS.

Writing so that a 10-year-old can understand it can overcome some of these things. i.e.; don't assume prior knowledge of your subject.

Short and sweet

Aim for short sentences that vary in length. This is closer to how we speak. To keep sentences on the shorter side:

- 1) keep to one thought per sentence;
- 2) delete any surplus verbiage; and
- 3) break sentences into two whenever possible.

Duration

How long do you want the VO to run for? You may have a total time, such as 30sec for a commercial, or each paragraph may be timed against a scene in a video.

Delivery

How do you want your script delivered, Excitable, Thoughtful, Hard sell, Soft, business-like,

Make it flow

Remember that, unlike readers, listeners can't go back and re-examine what has just been said. So it's important the listener can keep up with the train of thought. In complex items, some scripts tell people what is about to be said, then they say it, then they tell people what they just said.

Use sentence transition words (such as "Yet," "But," "However," "Therefore," and "Meanwhile") to let listeners know that a change from the previous thought is coming.

And be sure to only use "sharp turn" transitions when separating statements that make sharp contrasts.

Here is poor use of a "sharp turn" transition:

"Member Card Services provides hundreds of benefits. But the best one is the daily special you'll receive!"

In the above example, the transition "but" triggers the listener to assume that the following statement will be in contrast to the previous – probably a negative statement. But that is not the case. And it takes the mind a moment to catch up.

The solution? Use a different conjunction:

"Member Card Services provides hundreds of benefits. And the best one is the daily special you'll receive!"

Silence

Silence is your friend. Use it with purpose. It is to audio what whitespace is to visuals, it provides a moment of air or thinking time, it can also punctuate a statement.

Silence is also another way to help listeners process what they have just heard. And if there is video, it lets them take in what's on the screen.

To work brief pauses into your script, simply indicate where the talent should stop for a moment.

The clearest indicator is probably the ellipsis (...), but commas or a hyphen will do. If a long, noticeable pause is desired, you can even type: [pause].

Punctuation

For a voice actor to sound natural when reading your words, insert appropriate punctuation marks in the script, where you would pause if speaking.

Do this even if not always grammatically correct. But also, don't overdo it or you'll end up with a choppy delivery.

Example script

No segments, with timeline, emphasis indicated by underlining, direction in brackets

00:00-00:10 [formal, but friendly] Finding a professional voice talent to record your project is not as simple as it seems.

00:12-00:18 [ironically] The Internet is flooded with amateurs who simply plug in a 5\$ computer microphone and call themselves a voiceover service artist.

00:25-00:32 [pondering] So how can you ensure that you get the read you need and the service you deserve?

00:35-00:40 Well, the first thing you need to do is actually listen to prospective talents' online demos.

Need to time the VO against your visuals? Try this:

Intro	Time	Script	Onscreen action
Intro	00;00 - 00;05	[Formal-friendly] The innovative technology removes surface rust using radio frequency technology.	Pan of machine

Scanning	00;06 - 00;20	The system scans the surface to identify imperfections during two fast sweeps.	We see the machine scanning metal
Brushing	00;21 - 00;28	Cleaning and polishing is also performed in a two-step process that removes imperfections and restores shine.	brushing polishing seen. Ends with shot of finished product.