

Arizona Talking Book Library

Narrator Manual

Maria Pina, Brian Blackwell & Mary Alyce Grube
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Introduction

The Narrator/Director (Recording) team records the book. Narrators work with Directors at the recording booth to record a book.

General Volunteer Information

1. All Library Volunteers should sign in at the computer on the front desk using their assigned Volgistics number. When they leave the Library, they should sign out. If the volunteer forgets their Volgistics number, there is a list next to the computer.
2. Evening volunteers will need to ring the bell at the Library door to gain entry after 5 pm.
3. The only personal equipment Volunteers are permitted to connect any to the Library computer is personal headphones. If you need to move files from one computer to another, ask the Studio Manager for a stick drive.
4. The Studio Manager coordinates the Studio schedule with the Volunteer schedule.
5. Most Studio Volunteers will be assigned the same day and time on a recurring basis. They will also be scheduled on a specific booth or station.
6. If the Narrator cannot attend a scheduled Studio session, they should also notify their Director of their absence.
7. The preferred method of communication between the Studio Manager and the Volunteers is by email.
8. If a Volunteer is unable to be at the library at the scheduled time, they should email (preferred) or call the Studio Manager and their Director as soon as possible.

Arizona Talking Book Library
Library, Archives and Public Records
A division of Arizona Secretary of State Michele Reagan

Kim French Volunteer Coordinator (602) 926-3351 kfrench@azlibrary.gov	Brian Blackwell Studio Manager (602) 926-3343 * bblackwell@azlibrary.gov
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* Preferred method of contact is by email.

Selecting a Book to Record

1. New books are shelved in the Duplication area. The Recording Team and the Studio Manager look for a book that matches the reading style and preferences of the Narrator.
2. If the Recording Team is interested in one or more of the books, but would like to review them before making a selection, they can check out the book(s). The Studio Manager notes the book title(s), the Recording Team names, and the date they checked it out in an excel spreadsheet. When they return the book(s), the return date is added to the list.
3. Once the Recording Team has selected the book, the Studio Manager gets the Annotation from the Collections Development Librarian and has a Studio Volunteer prepare the Script.
4. Because of the time needed to prepare the script, the Recording Team should provide the Studio Manager with advance notice that they will be finishing their current project soon and will need to start the book selection process.
5. The Recording Team is provided with the script and two copies of the book they are producing, one for the Director and one for the Narrator.
6. The Directors copy of the book is stored on the shelf near Booth 1 to the right of the Studio entry door. The book should be bound with a rubber band so that the paperwork is not lost.
7. The Narrator takes their copy of the book home to prepare for the next recording session.

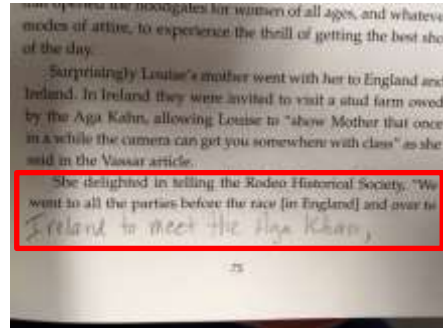
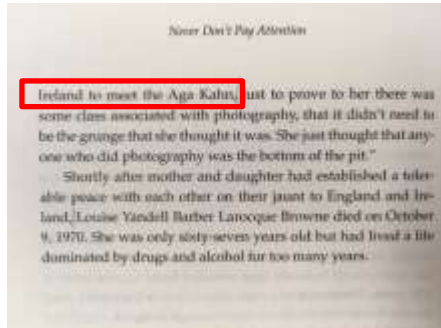
Script

1. The script is the outline for how the book is recorded. It includes the opening and closing announcements, the annotation and other text to be read by the Narrator.
2. If the book has Parts and Chapters, the script will explain to the listener the Parts are found at level 1 and the Chapters at level 2. Magazines may have articles at level 1 with sections at level 2.
3. If the order of the items to be read is unclear, the Recording Team should ask the Studio Manager.
4. Any text in brackets is for the Recording Team's information only and *should not be recorded by the team*. Example: [The items below are read in the order that they appear in print. Not all books have all items. Most do not.]

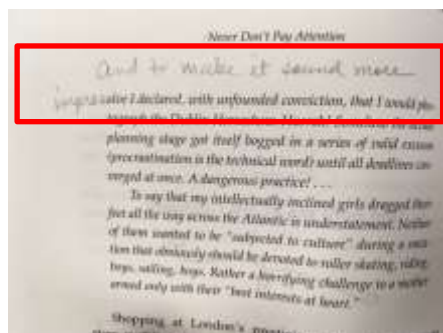
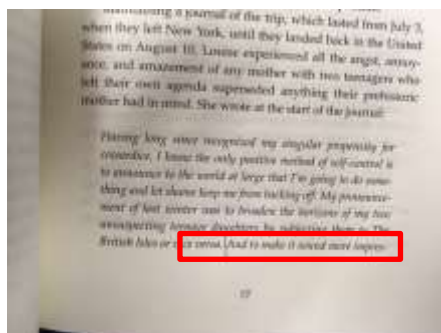
Preparation

1. Prepare for a recording session by reading the material in advance.
2. Mark up the script and book in pencil to aid you during the recording session.

3. Since the microphone may pick up the sound of a page turning, the recording should be paused while you turn the page. If the last sentence spans a page turn, you can use one of these techniques.
 - a. Write the end of the sentence at the bottom of the page.



- b. Write the start of the sentence at the top of the next page.



4. Look up the pronunciation of any unfamiliar words and note the correct pronunciation in the book. Use the Studio Text sheet (example in Appendix A - Studio Text) to record the pronunciation of these words.
5. If there is dialog in the book, decide how you will read the different characters' dialog.
6. Make sure you are well-hydrated before beginning a recording session. Keep water with you during the recording. Bottled water is available if you need it.
7. If you have a cold or sore throat that is affecting your voice, don't record. If you are not sure about your voice quality, ask the Studio Manager.

Warm up Vocal Cords

1. Before arriving for a recording session, drink plenty of fluids so you are fully hydrated.
2. If you are unable to hydrate before coming to the recording session, plan to drink fluids often while you are reading. Bottled water is available if you need it.
3. Learn what things will affect your voice. Caffeinated beverages, chocolate and other foods, and smoking can affect the quality of your voice. The key is to maintain a consistent voice quality through the entire recording of the book.

4. It is very important to warm up your vocal cords before the recording session by doing vocal exercises.
5. Practice breathing from you diaphragm.
6. See Appendix C – Narrator Aids for additional tips.

Set Up the Recording Booth

1. The Narrator is responsible for setting up the recording booth so that the recording will be clean and consistent. Remember that any change in the Narrator's position in relation to the microphone can result in a change in the voice quality of the recording.
2. Close the door tightly to create a soundproof seal.
3. Make sure the fan in the booth is on. This will make the Narrator more comfortable and provide a consistent ambient background sound.
4. The booth should be set up to minimize motion required during the recording session.
5. Position the book or magazine so that you can easily see it without the need to move your head around or move the book.
6. A book easel is available for your use. Use caution that the rubber bands on the easel don't cause noises during your recording. If you don't use the easel, it can be set on the floor, out of your way.
7. Sit tall but comfortable in a position you can maintain for the duration of the recording session. Positioning yourself with your back against the back of the chair can help you maintain a consistent distance from the microphone.
8. Position the microphone so that it is one hand span away from your mouth, slightly off center and slightly above your mouth. Make sure you are looking at the material you will be reading while setting the microphone position.
9. Make sure that your setup allows you to see the director as well as your reading material.
10. The microphone is sensitive enough that it may pick up background sounds in the booth such as the sound of a cell phone. Work with your Director to make sure there aren't any background sounds on the recording.

Reading Guidelines

1. Review the script and note what parts of the book will be read and what parts will be omitted. Any text on the script that is in brackets [] is for information only and should not be recorded as audio.
2. The Narrator is the storyteller; telling the story to someone while reading the book. Be engaged in the story to maintain consistency in your reading.
3. Don't emote the words, read in a natural voice and flow to tell the story.
4. The script tells the Narrator what to include in the narration and in what order to read the various sections of the book. Text that is within brackets [] provides direction to the team and should not be read.

5. Narration should match the book verbatim unless the book contains typos. It is permissible to edit the text if it is necessary to clarify the content. For example, a sentence with multiple footnoted words may require the Narrator to clarify which word is associated with a footnote.
6. The narration should flow naturally, matching the style of the book. Establish the speed for the narration.
7. For difficult and/or long, run-on passages, mark the places where you will pause or take a breath. This way, you will be prepared for such passages and maintain a clean recording.
8. If you are getting fatigued or your voice is changing, take a break to refresh before continuing with your recording session.
9. Breathe from your diaphragm, avoiding shallow, raggedy breathing. Try to sip breaths as you read rather than taking deep gulps. Watch for rattling breath and nose sniffs. Pre-reading the material out loud is key to knowing when you will need to take a breath.
10. Be aware of noises that might result from actions like hand motion, handling the book, running your finger along the page, etc. All of these can be picked up by the microphone.
11. Also be aware of noises from swallowing too often.
12. Don't clear your throat or cough during a recording session; this will irritate your vocal cords. Try drinking water if you feel the need to cough.
13. Footnotes should be read at the end of the sentence as follows: "Note: (read footnote) End Note."
14. As you record the book, you may find that the script set up (reading order, what not to read, etc.) doesn't seem right. If that happens, discuss your concern with the Studio Manager.

Appendix A - Studio Text

TITLE _____

List ANY word that you look up or have to decide how to pronounce. If the dictionary you choose uses diacritical markings that are different from those listed below, select from the list below what most closely represents the pronunciation given in the dictionary. Proper *and* consistent pronunciation is the goal. When in doubt, ask!

- | | | | |
|----------|--------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| ā take | ō hope | yōō use | ch chair |
| ǎ pat | ōō boot | ǔ cut | g great |
| ä father | ö pot | û curl | j judge |
| â care | oo took | Θ “shwa” as below | sh ship |
| ē bee | ô paw, caught | a about | zh pleasure |
| ě pet | oi boy | e item | [d], [n], [r], etc.,
suggested rather
than said, as in
French “bon” |
| ī pie | or horrid, hoarse,
mourning | i edible | |
| ĩ pit | ou out | o gallop | |
| | | u circus | |

PAGE	WORD	PRONUCIATION	SOURCE

Appendix B – Script

- “ _____[Book Title: Including Subtitle],
by: _____[Author].
Recorded in the studios of the Arizona Talking Book Library ,
DBC _____.
Edited by: _____[Name of Editor].
Translated by: _____[Name of Translator].
Illustrated by: _____[Name of Illustrator].
- **Copyright:** _____[Year] by _____[Whomever has copyright].
- **Read by:** _____[Narrator].
- This book contains ### pages.
- Approximate reading time: XX hours, XX minutes.
- **This book contains markers allowing direct access to the prologue, acknowledgments, contents, foreword, preface, introduction and parts at level one, and to the sections and chapters at level two.”**
- “Arizona Talking Book Library Annotation:” [_____ : _____ : _____]
- **“From the book jacket:”** [_____ : _____ : _____] [Reviews excluded. Read only most informative piece.]
- **“About the author:”** [_____ : _____ : _____]

[The items below are read in the order that they appear in print. Not all books have all items. Most do not.]
- **“Other books by the author:”** [_____ : _____ : _____] **If only one title is listed,** “Also by [Name of author/authors] Do not repeat previously mentioned titles.]
- **“Dedication:”** [_____ : _____ : _____]
- **“Introduction:”** [_____ : _____ : _____]
- **“Preface:”** [_____ : _____ : _____]
- **“Foreword:”** [_____ : _____ : _____]
- **“Acknowledgements:”** [_____ : _____ : _____]
- **“Reader’s Note:”** [_____ : _____ : _____]

- “The list of abbreviations in the back of the print edition has been moved to the front of the recording, after the table of contents. End reader’s note.”
- **[If appropriate, add the following:** “Explanatory notes have been retained.”
- **“Reader’s Note:** _____

End reader’s note” [_____:_____:_____]

- **“Glossary:”** [Read just prior to body of book and include in appropriate place in Table of Contents.]
- [Begin recording book.] [_____:_____:_____]

- [_____:_____:_____]“End of “ _____[Book Title: Including Subtitle], by: _____[Author]., _____[Spell out A-U-T-H-O-R’S N-A-M-E.]

- **Read by:** _____[Narrator] in the studios of: [indicate studio by circling one] The Arizona Talking Book Library / The Mesa Public Library / Recorded Recreational Reading for the Blind in Sun City for the Arizona Talking Book Library , _____,____. [Month/year that book was FINISHED being recorded.]

- **Directed by:** _____[Director].

- **Published by:**_____ [Publisher’s Name and address].

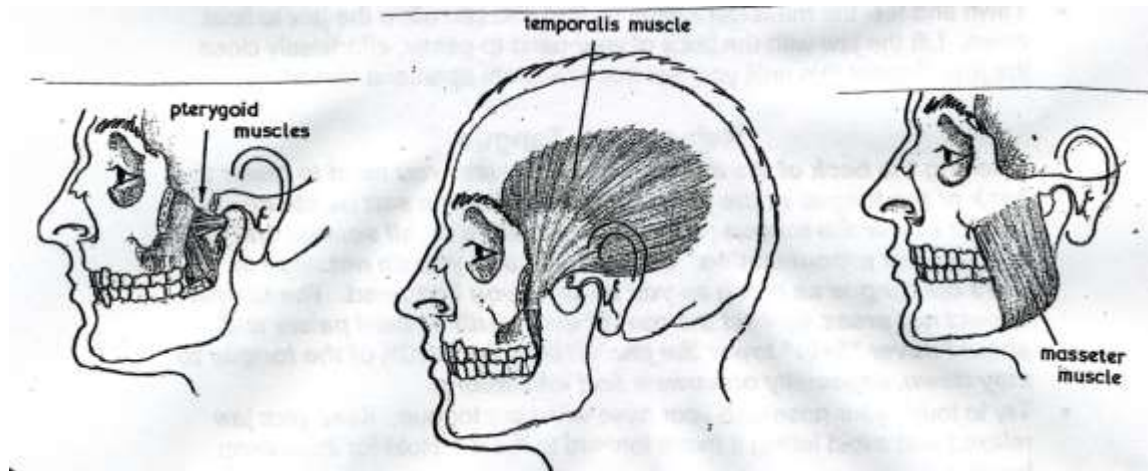
- Further reproduction or distribution in other than a specialized format is prohibited. If you experienced any difficulty with your copy of this recording, please call the library at 602-255-5578. Outside the Phoenix area, call 1-800-255-5578, or send an email message to talkingbooks@azlibrary.gov.”

Appendix C – Narrator Aids

Opening the Vocal Tract

Release the Jaw

The jaw has two bodies meet at the chin and side plates that extend from the angle to below your cheekbone. The ramus ends in two prominences separated by a curved notch. Closest to the ear is the condyle that forms the TMJ and the other prominence is the coronoid process that slips under the cheekbone when the jaw is closed.



Massage all three muscles that close the jaw to open the front of the mouth.

- Put your index finger in front of the flap of skin in front of the ear to feel the temporomandibular (TMJ) joint. As you lower the jaw, a space opens as the TMJ slides forward and down. With the jaw lowered, gently massage the joint for about 10 seconds.

Note: When the space is open enough to accommodate your index finger, the jaw is open wide enough for optimum projection. If you open the jaw too much you will feel the TMJ drop down and pop out.

- The masseter muscle is a powerful jaw closer that lies at the angle of the jaw. When you gently close your back teeth the masseter pops out. Press your thumb into the center of the bulge of the muscle for 10 seconds, as if you wanted to bring your thumbs together. Repeat this three times. Then massage the muscle for about 10 seconds.
- Gently press the side of your thumb upwards on the inside of the angle of the jaw to massage the muscle that anchors the jaw to the skull behind the nose. This spot is often tender, so press gently for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat three times. This muscle and the masseter form a sling that holds the jaw and raises it.

- The temporalis is a broad, fan-shaped muscle that extends from the side of the skull to the coronoid process that slides under the cheekbone. This is a fast closing, snapping muscle. Lower the jaw and feel an open space between the bottom of the cheek bone and the curve in the ramus. Press an index finger into the open space for about 10 seconds. Repeat three times.
- With the heels of your hands, apply comfortable, steady pressure starting at the temporomandibular joint and sliding down the jaw to the point of the chin. Let your jaw be so relaxed that the pressure of your hands causes it to passively open, as though you are ironing the tension out of your jaw. Repeat three times.
- Yawn and feel the masseter soften so that you can allow the jaw to float down. Lift the jaw with the back of your hand to gently, effortlessly close the jaw. Repeat this until you feel that jaw floats open and closed.

Release the Tongue

Opening the back of the mouth is complicated: you need to lower the back of the tongue at the same time you raise the soft palate or velum. Lower the tongue as much as possible on all sounds and still keep a clear pronunciation. You will find that you do not need to raise the tongue as much as you thought you imagined. The tongue should not press against the roof of the mouth or hard palate and should never "help" lower the jaw. TRAIN the BACK of the tongue to stay down, especially on vowels and inhalations.

- Try to touch your nose with your nose with your tongue. Keep your jaw relaxed and avoid letting it move forward to "help." Hold for three deep breaths.
- Stick your tongue out, down your chin as far as it will go, and hold for about 10 seconds. Keep your jaw relaxed. Notice whether your jaw feels tight as you do this, and release it if it does. When you bring your tongue back into your mouth, notice that it naturally returns to the resting position of lying low and flat. This stretch is a good way to find that low, flat tongue position.
- Stick your tongue out straight, parallel to the ground, without it touching your lower teeth or lips, and hold for 10 seconds. You may need to use a mirror to check-it is easy to accidentally rest the tongue on the bottom teeth. Keep your face relaxed. If you can't hold your tongue out, start by holding it straight but back farther in your mouth. As your tongue gets stronger, you'll gradually be able to inch it forward without needing the lower teeth for support.
- Tongue curls. Open your mouth and keep it open so that you feel the open space in front of the ear flap. Anchor your tongue tip behind your lower front teeth and keep it there for the entire exercise.
 - (a) Curl the tongue forward and out of the mouth and hold it for 10 breaths. Release tongue and see if it floats down flat in your mouth with the tongue tip gently nestled against the lower front teeth.

- (b) Curl the tongue forward and out and pulse it as you sustain a clear ah as in father. Pinch your nose closed. If you feel any vibration as you say ah, then you need to lift your velum by starting a yawn—only start to yawn!
- (c) Curl the tongue forward and out and pulse it as you feel the sides of your larynx. What happens to the larynx as your tongue moves? Release the tongue. As it tires, the tongue should lie down more easily.
- (d) Curl the tongue forward and out and pulse it as you sing a song.
- Massage under the chin to release tongue muscles. Raise and lower the jaw as you massage the muscles to see they do not harden, i.e., work.
 - As you say "ng" feel how your velum and back of the tongue touch to form this nasal and send all the sound up into your nose. Feel how the tip of your nose vibrates as you sustain the "ng" Raise the velum and lower the back of the tongue. What vowel is formed when the back of the mouth is completely open? Alternate between the "ng" and "ah."

Lip Protrusion to Open the Vocal Tract

Rounding your lips involves lifting the upper lip off the teeth, as when you say, "Wow." Lifting the upper lip triggers two reflexes:

(1) inhibits the masseter muscles in the jaw, so the jaw can relax and open easily, and

(2) lifts the velum or soft palate to open the back of the mouth, which is essential for rich quality, forward placement, and projection. This "uncorks" your voice that, otherwise, is trapped and muffled in the back of your mouth.

Benefits:

- (1) Creates a louder sound since more of your voice reaches your lips. Whatever sound reaches your lips reaches the audience, so they hear you better. When the velum hangs down, nearly touching the back of the tongue, more sound is directed up the throat into the nose, instead of entering the mouth. What sound does enter the mouth has a back placement.
- (2) Reduces hypernasality because more sound is channeled into the mouth, rather than moving up into the nose. Increased nasality is part and parcel of back placement.
- (3) Creates the richest vowel sounds because a large space in the back of the mouth and front of the mouth enriches the quality.
- (4) Doing more with the lips and less with the tongue produces accurate and clear diction, so the audience understands you better.

- Chant "woo, woe, war, wow" up and down the scale.
- Purse your lips to say "u" as in ooze and chant the scale.
- Kiss the air to call your French poodle, Fifi, and then say, "oui, oui."
- Say practice words with "u" as in ooze, booze, loose, twos, muse, clues, dues, fuse, etc.

Practice sentence: "Do you wonder if wicked witches wobble as they wander down the road to town."

Vocal Health

1. **Breathe deeply** through your nose imagining the air moving deep into your soft abdomen as you inhale. Deep breathing reduces adrenaline in the blood stream and reduces the effects of stress. As the diaphragm descends for a deep breath it pulls down the lungs, airways, and larynx, and relaxes the vocal folds. Shallow breathing, often a habit in today's busy lives, triggers more stress, feeding a vicious cycle. When you are speaking take quick, QUIET catch breaths. Breathe from your belly not your shoulders.
2. **DO NOT CLEAR YOUR THROAT.** Take a sip of water or swallow to stop your urge to cough or clear your throat. A swallow clears mucus down the esophagus. Consider using Thayers Slippery Elm Lozenges for your cough.
3. **Drink plenty of fluids: water is best.** When you fail to drink enough water, the vocal folds can become red and swollen and are more susceptible to strain and injury. Alcohol, caffeine, and sugary drinks tend to dry out the lining of the mouth, throat, and vocal folds. Caffeine is also associated with increased coughing. Avoid chocolate, dairy products, and highly spiced food before a performance, since they increase mucus production. Chewing gum sends saliva down the esophagus, not to the vocal folds. Throat sprays do not reach the vocal folds.
4. **Avoid irritants** to the throat such as second hand cigarette smoke, dust, or the drying effects of air conditioning. If the air is very dry, as it is on an air flight, take a break by breathing into a damp washcloth. And drink water.
5. **Use good technique: ease into the beginning of your words and don't press.** Adopt a "sleepy" voice, the one you wake up with in the morning before stress makes you squeeze or press your vocal folds too tightly for the loudness level you are using. Over time continuous pressing irritates the tissue of the folds and can lead to a vocal node, a tiny callous on the edge of the fold. If a "sleepy" voice eludes you, try putting an "h" at the beginning of a word to sensitize you to a more effective and efficient way of speaking. Another trick is to imagine you are about to yawn because a yawn is a reflexive activity that lowers and relaxes your vocal folds.
6. **Lengthen your spine and open your ribs, throat, larynx and mouth to speak and breathe.** Don't collapse your spine or squeeze your ribs and throat to "help" make your voice more emotional or louder. Also relax your arms so your ribs can expand.
7. **If you suffer from allergies, drink more water to thin the mucus.** If you take antihistamines or other drying agents, your fragile vocal folds may be susceptible to damage, so avoid pressing. Don't use sprays or lozenges to cover up throat pain and then try to push through the pain to produce a clear quality. Inhaling steam can

help if you have performance when you are stuffed up. If you consult a physician about your symptoms, advise her that you are a professional voice user and that you make heavy demands on your voice: you speak for sustained periods of time at 70-80 dB, like an opera singer.

8. **Relax your jaw.** Stress triggers a tight jaw and a tight jaw triggers stress. Imagine a tiny pillow cushioning your molars so they do not touch. Try massage and acupressure points to release tight muscles and then allow your jaw to float down and then close.
9. **Release your tongue** and don't push your tongue against the roof of your mouth or push down to lower your jaw. Do isolation exercises, especially the tongue stretch to relax it and allow it to rest on the floor of your mouth. Pay special attention to the back of the tongue. The tongue and larynx are connected through the hyoid, so the tongue directly influences the vocal folds.
10. **Build rest periods into your day.** Try yoga, meditation, naps, silence or visualizations of calm and refreshing scenes. Talk less on rehearsal and performance days.

Short Warm-Up

1. **Yoga stomach pump** (Stretch the diaphragm and intercostals for deeper breaths. Get use to the sensation of engaging your abdominals.)
 - Lean over slightly at the hips, not the waist Keep your spine long and make sure you do not drop or lift your head. Feel the cervical spine is not separate from the rest of your back by imagining your spine extends from the top of your head to your tailbone.
 - Blow all the air out and hold your breath.
 - Pull in your abdomen until you feel your navel can touch your spine. Push your abs out and pull them in as smoothly as you can and as far as possible. When you need to take a breath, stand and relax. Vary the rate. Repeat 3-6 times.
2. **Chuffing** (Builds good breath support and trains you to use your abdominals.) Flap or bubble your lips while exhaling- like a horse flapping its lips. Sing a song while chuffing. If you cannot flap your lips, then close them gently so you can feel vibrations as you hum—not too tightly or you will stop the sound.
3. **Massage jaw and tongue muscles** (Release these muscles to open the vocal tract Teaches control of your articulators.)
 - Press finger in the bulge of the masseter (near angle of jaw) for 10 seconds, then release. Repeat two more times.
 - Massage the side of the head to release the fan-like temporalis muscle that extends from the skull to the front of the jaw that slips under the cheekbone.
 - Press your thumb up into the angle of the chin to massage the tongue muscles. Press side of your thumb along the inside of the jaw bone.
 - Stroke your palms down the side of your face and allow the jaw to float down far enough to open the hole in front of your ear flap. Check the space with your index finger. Inhale quickly and feel the air hit the back of your throat. Say ah. Repeat several times, until you can inhale silently.
 - Lower and open the jaw with the tongue lying down flat and going along for the ride. Say "la, la, la, la."
4. **Tongue Curls** (stretches the tongue and vocal folds and relaxes them, helping you to extend your pitch range and improve quality.)

Open the jaw so that the hole appears in front of the ear flap. Keep the jaw still. Anchor the tongue tip behind the lower front teeth and push the body of the tongue forward so that it bulges out of the mouth, past the corners of your mouth. Pulse the tongue and do not allow the tongue to relax back into the mouth. Sing a song. Repeat three times.

5. **ng-ah** (Teaches isolation of tongue and soft palate.) Lower the jaw and keep it still. Keep the front of the tongue flat and the tip in contact with the lower front teeth while the back of your tongue and soft palate touch to form ng and move apart to form the ah. On ah you should see the back of your throat and the uvula and your tongue is completely flat. Push your tongue down to learn how to flatten the tongue.)
6. **Lip circles: woo, woe, war, wow** (Projection, rich quality, and isolation of articulators for improved diction. Find the balance between the powerful muscles that control breath and the delicate, tiny muscles of the larynx, so your sound floats effortlessly like a thistle on a spring breeze. Protrude your lips all the time.)

- Chant woo, woe, war wow up and down a scale.
- Chant a song with one of the words, such as woo.
- Purse your lips to say "u" as in ooze and chant a scale.
- Sustained phonations (Purse your lips. Inhale through your mouth quietly, by imagining you are surprised every time you inhale. Work on a steady, easy, rich sound as you sustain a vowel. Try different vowels and different pitches, but do not try to be loud. Over time you will dramatically increase the time you can hold a note. Focus on quality and you will eventually increase your pitch range and your breath capacity.
- Chant the sentence, then speak it, sustaining each vowel:

Do you wonder if wicked witches wobble as they wander down the road to town?

7. **Practice sentences.** First chant then speak these sentences. Open your jaw to a two-finger space between your incisors on each vowel, and anchor the vibrations on the gum ridge. Make sure you protrude your lips through the entire sentence. Link all the words as if the sentence is one word. Notice that when you actively engage your lips you say the entire word, never skimping on the final consonants and you spend a little more time on each vowel. Vowels carry your voice (audibility) and consonants carry the meaning (intelligibility).

1. **His bees reside in those golden hives.**

(Melt each word into the following. Buzz the z's and v's)

2. **Amy and I eat apples every August**

(Soften the beginning of words. Melt each word into the following.
Beware of plosive or glottal attacks)

3. **When the light is poor, oh, what your eyes will endure.**

(Round the lips for correct pronunciation: pooh + were = poor, what your is not wha cher, and endures is in + dew + er)

- 4. The lawyer's awfully awkward daughter ought to be taught to draw.** (Use a thumb-sized lip circle for the aw vowel)

Good Quality Tone

Good Quality

Definition: a full, rich quality of phonation. It does not sound strained, pushed or forced. The relaxed, deep quality you have the first thing in the morning is a token of your best, your optimum quality.

Cause: Ample breath support. Closing the vocal folds without undue pressure or force for a given pitch and loudness. The soft palate (velum) is raised and the jaw is released far enough to open the back of the throat so the sound is not bottled up in the back of the mouth. The tongue is relaxed and lies down as far as possible on all possible phonemes to keep the channel open.

To detect:

- (1) Feel strong vibrations on the gum ridge as you sustain a vowel.
- (2) Feel the sound vibrations with your little finger just inside the lips on an "ah" or "o" vowel.
- (3) Feel the sides of the thyroid, the shield-shaped cartilage of the larynx, for vibrations. The stronger the vibrations, the richer the quality.
- (4) Feel the sides of the thyroid cartilage. If they are soft and wide, the phonation is optimum.
- (5) As you chant, use your fingertips to feel strong vibrations on the sternum or the back of the neck.

Pressed Quality

Definition: a sharp, thin quality that is characterized by a plosive or glottal attack at the beginnings of words, such as "I, am, able, any, ever, always, all, add, ask, etc."

Cause: Squeezing your vocal folds together too tightly for the particular loudness level. Poor habits may cause the speaker to use muscles that are not even needed for the task, or to use more effort than necessary. You do not want to over use muscles in the "Bermuda Triangle," which includes the jaw, neck, throat, shoulder muscles, and arms.

To detect

- (1) Feel the sides of your thyroid cartilage with your fingertips. If the sides of your thyroid are hard and narrow, than your interarytenoids are pulling the sides of thyroid cartilage together, narrowing and hardening the sides.
- (2) If the vibrations on the back of your neck seem weak, than you are pressing.
- (3) If you sound as if you are trying to lift a heavy weight at the same time you try to speak, than you are pressing.
- (4) If your thyroid jumps on the initiation of words-especially words that begin with vowels such as "a" in add, "eh" in ever, "aw" in all, "ai" in aisle, "ei" in eat, "l" in "hit"—you are pressing and the little bark you hear on these vowels is a glottal attack or plosive attack.

To change:

(1) INCREASE YOUR BREATH SUPPORT.

(2) Use less force or effort to speak. Reduce effort to a 3 or 4. Yawn at the beginning of a sentence and feel how your thyroid widens and softens and keep talking gently as you monitor the sides of your thyroid.

(3) Use a "sleepy" voice in quiet, lulling tone of voice.

(4) Link all the words in a sentence as if a sentence were one, single word.

(5) Feel the thyroid for vibrations and keep the vibrations strong all the time. Feel the back of the neck and the sternum for vibrations as well.

(6) Your vocal folds are connected to your tongue, so relax the tongue.

(7) Check your jaw for tension or for evidence that you are pushing your jaw forward. A forward movement of the jaw pulls up the larynx and may cause the vocal folds to tense more than necessary.

Practice Sentences:

1. Amy and I eat apples every August. (Watch for plosive attack)
2. His bees reside in those golden hives. (Make one word. Sound z's)
3. The lawyer's awfully awkward daughter ought to be taught to draw. (Round lips in a thumb-sized circle for the "aw" vowel)
4. When the light is poor, oh, what your eyes will endure. (poor is pooh + er, what your is not wha chewer and endure is in + dew + er)

Tell Me a Story

By Ray Hagen

Recording a book would seem to be a pretty straightforward affair, but an inordinate number of complications do somehow manage to get in the way. Finally, though, when all the nervousness and self-consciousness and confusion and intimidation and downright panic have abated, it all comes down to one basic premise – Tell Me a Story. What story? The one the author wrote. Tell it how? The way the author wrote it. What could be simpler?

This is not to suggest that there aren't a few . . .

MINEFIELDS

Okay, there are a few minefields. For example; as one's eye is racing across the page while talking up a storm, it's pretty difficult to distinguish "bought" from "brought", "abroad" from "aboard", "county" from "country", "these" from "those", or "trough" from "tough" from "though" from "through" from "thorough" from "thought". And one should never have to speak of "wasps nests" or utter the word "listlessness" aloud. Each of us has our Enemies List of words we fear and loathe.

And while you're barreling your way through a sentence that takes up half a page or more – weaving your way through sub-clauses and parenthetical musings on the way to Armageddon – it's almost impossible to remember the point of the sentence, or how it began way back up there before your last birthday.

Then there's the book you hate, written by an author you detest, on a subject that bores you to death or a premise you heartily oppose – but that you nonetheless must sound utterly fascinated by, and in total agreement with, for every one of its five hundred pages. Sincerity is a must. Faking sincerity is a useful skill. (It's been said that a good book requires a good narrator and a bad book requires a great narrator.)

The above problems have one thing in common: they're inevitable and unavoidable. Like noisy page turns, they're just that, problems, and only slogging, practice, and patience will get you through them. No magic solutions. But let's now address some very common problems that can be corrected, at least in theory. We begin with an especially vexing conundrum:

YOU

Most Talking Book narrators are quirky, stylish, interesting people. But once in the recording booth, the most amazing transformation sometimes occurs: they cease to

exist. And in his or her place suddenly appears – gasp! – The Generic Narrator; a voice without a person, and an incredible crashing bore.

“I don’t want to intrude upon the text”, one hears, or “I don’t want to overdo it:, or “the listener should do the interpreting, not the narrator”.

You know the list. All very honorable, all very well intentioned; but, dear narrator, you passed your audition because of your particular abilities to breathe life into a printed text, not because you could simply string words together with lifeless clarity. What’s the point of trying to assume a whole other, and lesser, persona whenever you pick up another book? Your humor, quiriness, anger, sarcasm, passion, and compassion – all these qualities must be brought into the booth. Each particular author will tell you (just listen to them) which aspects of your personality to let loose and which to, for the moment, park outside. But without a menu to choose from, there ain’t gonna be no meal.

Often a well-meaning narrator, unable to decide how to approach a book, will opt for safety by making no decision, the “conservative“ approach. This spells death. As with an audition for a part in a play, you must approach the text with the same vitality and interest that he/she invested in writing it. Energy takes a lot of energy, but it’s always better than no energy.

Yes, of course it’s possible to go too far, to add too much, and overwhelm the story. This is where experience, discipline, and technique come in (not to mention other people’s opinions). But the other extreme, doing too little or noting at all, is equally inappropriate. That kind of flat, uninvolved, bloodlessly correctly distancing from the material claims two victims: it sabotages the author and puts the listener to sleep.

(Incidentally, this also applies to such mundane items as opening and closing announcements, bibliographies, acknowledgments, copyright info, and tables of contents. After all, these obligatory announcements will be the listener’s first introduction to you. Why not get off on the right foot?)

ON THE OTHER HAND – let us consider the reverse problem, as we enter the merry land of . . .

FUNNY VOICES

There is a dangerous tendency for some narrators to go totally bonkers at the sight of quotation marks, a sad affliction indeed. Let’s take the cases of two venerable narrators, Max and Laverne (not their real names). Give them third-person narratives and they deliver the goods in an efficient, professional manner. But hand them books filled with various peoples quoted dialogue and they become completely unhinged.

For such narrators, undergoing gender reassignment is most unsettling. For the listener, it's sheer hell. Every female character in Max's books sounds like a penny whistle, while every male character in Laverne's books sounds like a frog. See Max is convinced that in order to deliver any woman's dialogue, he must disguise his rolling-thunder manly bark by swooping into a piping falsetto. And lovely Laverne, when confronted by a man, digs deep down into her shoes to produce gravelly rumble that would register on the Richter scale. But a man speaking in a falsetto doesn't sound remotely like a woman, he just sounds like a man speaking in a falsetto (thereby making every woman sound stupid in the bargain). And a woman's bottom register sounds equally unlike a man. It just sounds like – well, a frog.

Well, all women aren't sopranos (Tallulah who?) and all men aren't booming basses. But it's not only a matter of gender. All children don't talk baby-talk (it's adults who do that), all older people aren't creaky-voiced octogenarians, all troublemakers aren't mustache-twirling villains, all pretty women aren't bubbleheads, all blue-collar men aren't half-wits, all blacks don't talk jive, and all southerners aren't redneck crackers or Designing Women.

Think of the last time you were telling some friends an anecdote regarding an encounter with people of varying personas and genders. Did you go to great throat-torturing pains to give each person a wildly different character voice? Were you ACTING to beat the band? Or did you simply TELL THE STORY? Did your audience have any problem keeping track of who said what? - Probably not. So why assume that when you read a book aloud, you have to come up with all these vocal disguises for every poor fool who enters the story?

Then there's the matter of range, if you want to use a character voice, does it have the same range, flexibility and color as your natural voice? Or are you stuck with a two-note rang and a sore throat? Keep in mind that the listener can tell the difference, and while he/she is pondering your vocal listener can't tell the difference, and while he/she is pondering your vocal gymnastics, the story (remember the story?) is out the window.

Does this all mean you should never, never, never use a character voice for anything ever? - Of course not. But if you do, it needs to be (1) justified, (2) a full-bodied characterization, not merely a funny voice, and (3) comfortable – for both you and the listener. Here's one useful guideline. If you've decided to use a trick voice for a comic character, consider whether you'd be able to maintain that exact voice if he or she were to be suddenly plunged into a profoundly tragic scene in the next chapter. If you can pull it off, then great, run with it. If not ditch it.

Playing characters is mainly a matter of attitude anyway. Get that right and the voice naturally follows. There are, after all, only so many people living in your throat. Consider the different ways you yourself sound when speaking to your spouse, your

boss, your parents, a stranger, a thief. The colors of the human vice are wondrous and limitless, with no need for superfluous exaggeration. Do a favor for yourself, the author, and the listener. Talk like a person.

Okay, we have now reached a state of Narrator Nirvana – not too little, not too much. But there may be yet another obstacle in our quest for perfection:

PUNCTUATION!!!

Narrators who aren't fazed by the fandangos of Faulkner, the caprices of Capote, the obstacles of Oates or the gripes of Roth can be made to cower in abject obeisance before the looming specter of one indomitable force: PUNCTUATION! Terrorized by comma, italics, and quotation marks, we fill sentences with enough dead air to turn a five-side book into a seven-side snoozer.

It's the "automatic pauses" syndrome. Consider the following sentence: "Billy Wilder next directed Double Indemnity, starring Barbara Stanwyck, Fred MacMurray, and Edward G. Robinson." A simple enough statement of fact--easily polished off in five seconds. But the over-zealous, easily intimidated narrator will render it thusly: "Billy Wilder next directed (pause) Double Indemnity, (pause) starring (pause) Barbara Stanwyck, (pause) Fred MacMurray, (pause) and (pause) Edward G. Robinson." A similar reference to an all—star MGM musical could take up a good half-hour of tape.

Punctuation marks are a convention of the written word. Let me repeat that: Punctuation marks are a convention of the written word. Writers use them as clues that enable us to hear, in our minds, the flow of their thoughts as we read the page. And when translating print to speech, that's exactly how we should use them – as clues, not orders. Clues that steer us through the intricacies of printed language, separating thought from speech, scene from scene, and text from subtext. I couldn't have written that last sentence without them. But that's where their usefulness ends, because punctuation marks are not a convention of the spoken word. When we speak, we don't use them. Ever! (Except for Victor Borge, but he's on a different pay scale.)

We use a different convention – phrasing. That's how we translate the written into the spoken word, and make no mistake, translating is exactly what we do. Quotation marks, commas, semicolons, paragraphs, italics, skipped lines, indentations, different typefaces, parentheses – all these print conventions can be translated artfully and naturally with the whole range of vocal phrasing available to us, and that we always use when we're away from a microphone without giving a thought to comma placement.

Is it really necessary to let the listener know where every bit of printed punctuation occurs? Do these Automatic Pauses improve the flow of the narrative? Let's try and

experiment. Tape yourself reading the following passage, pausing at every single punctuation mark:

“ Get out of here, “ he said. “no way, Jose, “ she countered, “I’ve leased this house for June, July, and August!” “I don’t care,” he replied, gathering up her red, green, blue, yellow, and gray dresses. “ Take theses with you, “ he shouted, “and be out of here, lock, stock, and barrel, before I get back from seeing “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly”!

Now listen to the tape. Have I made my point?

More specifics: when the page says “\$29.95”, we don’t have to say “Twenty-nine dollars and ninety-five cents”, we actually can say “Twenty-nine ninety-five”. For “him/her” we can say “him or her” (Him slash her” sounds so violent.) For “tsk tsk” we can do the tongue click. A “357 Magnum” is “three-fifty-seven”. “His favorite director(s)” means “His favorite director or directors” “S/M” is “S and M”. “Apartment 208” is “two-oh-eight” not “two-zero-eight”, and “2:00 AM” is “two AM” not “two o’clock AM”. Way to go!” is “Waytogo!” You’ll have dozens of such decisions to make in almost every book that comes along, and no, sorry, there are no rules to refer to. All such decisions should be based on the context of the sentence and on English as spoke, not writing as writ. - Common usage and common sense.

A marginally related oddity is the Double S reflex, though it applies to any letter. Read the following sentence: “The Andrews Sisters wore black kilts to celebrate the summer rain”. Ignore for the moment the surreal scenario and consider whether you’d read it differently than you’d say it in casual conversation. Would you double the S connecting Andrews and Sisters or the K connecting black and kilts or the R connecting summer and rain, just because the letters appear on the page? Why? No one hearing you say “AndrewSisters”, “blackilts,” or “sumerrain” would be in the least confused – that’s how people talk!

Keep in mind that the people who listen to recorded books are no strangers to colloquial, conversational speech. They hear it every day. They use it every day. We all know how human speech sounds. We’re supposed to be storytellers not diction teachers. Yaknowwhatimean?

So having unleashed our true selves, reigned in our excesses and conquered our dictators, we now come to every narrator’s “favorite” leisure activity:

RESEARCH

One of the biggest surprises to folks who inquire about narrating books – and a not altogether happy surprise – is that some books will require research. “Research? You mean, like, work?? You betcha, and thanks for calling.

Pick up any current non-fiction work (biography, memoir, history, expose, etc.) and flip to the index at the back of the book. There are lots of names there, maybe hundreds. How many of them can you pronounce correctly? How many of them do you merely think you can pronounce correctly? - A dozen maybe? Good for you. Now, what about the remaining six-dozen? Write them down. Then start thumbing through the book for the sort of stuff not found in most indexes: street names, grade schools, childhood chums, foreign phrases, local slang, favorite boutiques, Romanian airports, Flemish newspapers, character names from plays and movies, professional acronyms, names of pets, etc. Write them down, and don't forget the author's name. Not 100% positive? Write that down, too. (You are, of course, certain of how to pronounce the publisher's name, right?)

By now two weeks have gone by, you haven't set foot in the recording booth and you have five or six handwritten pages of names and words that you now have to RESEARCH. No, we're not having fun yet. We are having second thoughts. Time to hit the dictionaries – standard, biographical, geographical, technical (name your field), foreign, Biblical, mythological -- whatever you can get your hands on. After which you'll no doubt be left with such unanswered items as street names, grade schools, childhood chums, foreign phrases, local slang, favorite boutiques, Romanian airports, Flemish newspapers, character names from plays and movies, professional acronyms, names of pets, etc. Stuff, in other words, that only the author is likely to know.

Aha – the author! Who (if not dead) may or may not know this stuff either, but we're in dire straits now, so let's give it a whirl. Check out the "About the Author" section of the book jacket – any hints as to where he/she lives or works? Many authors are actually listed in the local phone book. Or maybe the book's editor can help. If you actually reach your author(s), and don't sound too much like a serial killer, they're invariably appreciative of your efforts and happy to help. Whatever's left, wing it.

But there is one last step – writing all this research down on your pronunciation list. And not just so you can read it; the reviewers, monitors and studio staff also have to be able to read it. Learning a consistent diacritical system is essential, as is writing it out clearly and carefully. That's how the staff communicates information in this peculiar line of work.

Now you can walk into the booth and finally begin. And try to remember why you wanted this job in the first place.

LISTEN UP

Common perception has it that all a narrator needs is a fabulous voice. WRONG! Not that there's anything wrong with a fabulous voice (as long as it isn't so fabulous it distracts from the story), but anything short of a really awful voice will do very

nicely, thank you. It's how you use it, how you Tell the Story, that counts. Which naturally leads us to a one-question quiz: What is the single most important requirement for narrating? Answer – a great ear.

That's what helps you to reproduce the rhythms of foreign accents and languages, discerns the subtleties of the mother tongue, keeps your dialogue natural and believable, and lets you hear with your eyes the cadences of the written word even as you're speaking them. For some folks such an ear is pure instinct, like a singer with perfect pitch, while other may have to consciously work at developing it. It's worth the effort.

That ear is useful outside as well as inside the recording booth. One should be constantly aware of all those voices you hear every day – while talking with friends, watching TV, listening to the radio, arguing with the boss, making phone calls. All that talk gets filed away in your memory bank, consciously or not, and is there to be retrieved when you're in front of the microphone.

A sharp ear has another solid use. An invaluable tool in learning how to do this kind of work is to listen to as many other narrators as possible, either as a monitor-reviewer or simply by borrowing tapes to listen to at home. You'll quickly find out whom you like and who you don't, what to emulate and what to avoid at all costs. Eventually you'll develop your own style, but attempted emulation is a pretty good way to start. This is how we all learned to talk in the first place.

Similarly the best way to gauge your own work is to listen to your tapes as often as possible. Listen for at least a half-hour at a time, preferably longer (without following the print copy – just listen). Far too often we sound nothing whatever we like to think we sound. Apply this standard: if someone started speaking to you this way, say at a social gathering, how would you react? Would you be fascinated? Bored? Amused? Offended? Irritated? Interested? Insulted? Would you be eager to hear more, or want to run screaming from the room? Does what you're hearing sound energetic and committed, bizarrely eccentric, stiff and lifeless? Try being your own audience for a while. You may be surprised.

But probably the most valuable use for a fine-tuned ear is to hear the voice of the author as you scan the page. The writing may be coldly factual, warmly compassionate, ironic, angry, humorous (shy to slapstick), snippy, cerebral, profound, laid back, pumped up, coy, cozy, inhibited, uninhibited, affectionate, affected, downright incomprehensible – or any combination of the above. The sensitive narrator will wean him/herself from concentrating on listening to "How'm I doin'?" to listening for the writer's silent rhythms.

None of which, you may have noticed, has much at all to do with the vice. A good ear is every bit as important, maybe even more so. With it, the most ordinary vice can be riveting to listen to. Without it, nothing else matters.

All right, enough about you. Now let's talk about

THEM

Namely, all those folks out there who'll be listening to these books. It is safe to assume that they: (1) speak and understand English, (2) have read a book before, and (3) have listened to a recorded book before. This absolves you of the need to talk v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y so as not to confuse them.

We may also assume that they listen to recorded books not because they're hard of hearing (you don't have to shout) or, shall we say, intellectually challenged. If a non-fiction book on any given subject is requested, do assume that the reader cares about that subject, has read other material on it, has some degree of expertise in or knowledge of it (possibly a good deal more than you have), and/or wants to learn more about it. And if the selection is fiction, the reader may be a fan of the author or of the genre, has probably read similar material in the past, and simply wants a good story well told, (gosh, just like the reasons we read books! amazing).

And they know more about you than you suspect. They know, for instance, that you are an adult human of the male or female persuasion; that you have certain human attributes (mouth, saliva, teeth, stomach, nose); that you are a person reading from a book into a microphone with the deliberate intention of having it listened to; and that you are not a roomful of people, just one lone soul. This should relieve you of the responsibility of trying to con them into thinking otherwise.

Also, except for the children, they're not children. And even the children have their own smarts. None of these listeners will appreciate being condescended to – that creepy tone of charity some well-meaning but ill-advised narrators use when they read to “those less fortunate”. And, having lives of their own, they tend not to much care about your needs or your insecurities or your artistic vision if any. They just want to read the book, and it's your job to get it to them. Tell them the story. What story? The one the author wrote. Tell it how? The way the author wrote it. What could be simpler?

By Ray Hagen, Update, April/June, 2000

To date, there are no official guidelines for reading web site names and e-mail addresses out loud. These “klever” sobriquets are showing up in more and more books, so deal with them we must; but not to panic. It’s not our job to explain to listeners the intricacies of the World Wide Web or electronic mail, just communicate the information in the book. So assume that the listener will have at least as much familiarity with the terms as the average radio or TV listener, and consider these suggestions:

Punctuation Codes:

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| · = always said as “dot” | ~ = “tilda” |
| @ = “at” | - = “dash” |
| / = “slash” | _ = “underscore” (torvill_dean) |
| \ = “backslash” | |

Abbreviations:

- *net* and *com* are said as words (the latter rhymes with “bomb”).
- *http*, *edu*, and *aol* are spelled out as initials.
- *org* and *gov* can be said as words or spelled, your call. Making them words is very common usage, and it’s easier and quicker to say them that way. As for *www*—well, it comes up a lot, just say “w w w.” (Just our luck that the most frequently used three-syllable letter in the alphabet.)

User Addresses:

- *torvill-dean* = say it as “torvill dash dean”
- *torvill_dean* = say “torvill underscore dean”
- *torvill&dean* = say “torvill and-sign dean”
- *torvillanddean@bellatlantic.com* = say “torvill and dean, one word, at bell atlantic, one word, dot com”
- *While we’re at it, the title of this article is said as “w w w dot can uh worms, one word, spelled k a n o worms at n l s dot com”.*

Spelling:

- *General rule re spelling: don’t unless you have to. But beware of traps. Uncommon words and names (or common ones with offbeat or multiple spellings) should be spelled out. For instance:*
- *For our old pals above, add the note: “spelled t o r v i l l .” NO need to spell Dean.*
- *For joeanderson, no spelling needed, but for joeandersen, say “spelled a n d e r s e n .”*
- *For chloesevigny, say her whole name (look it up) and add the spelling.*

- For *jm~83ent_who*, spell it all: “j m tilde-eight-three-e n t underscore w h o l e.”

Upper/Lower Case:

A general note can be added before or after the web sites/e-mail addresses are read, saying that everything is in lowercase letters, or that all are lowercase unless otherwise specified. Generally they are, but occasionally there are some uppercase letters as well (although that may or may not make any difference). For *claireTrevor* or *ClaireTrevor*, specify “capital T” or “capital C, Capital T.” Lowercase needn’t always be specified, but uppercase should be.

There can never be one consistent set of rules to cover anything as exotic as web site names and e-mails addresses, so you need to use judgment and common sense. Try to keep it as clear and conversational as possible. Strike a balance between listeners who are unfamiliar with the web and the ever growing number of listeners who use it all the time and will be bored to tears listening to all this stuff being over-explained, When in doubt, remember: people who’ve never used the web won’t care what you’re talking about, and those who do use it understand the lingo. Just give ‘em the facts.

Zero Tolerance

By Ray Hagen, *Update*, Jan/March 2001

I've pretty much run out of generalities, so it seems time to attend to some matters of singular particularity. I've noticed that various narration viruses seem to pop up periodically and infect narrators all over the country at the same time. How does this happen? "Don't know, don't care, doesn't matter" Let's just get to a few that seem to be all the rage right now.

Zero Tolerance

This one is going on all over America. The "0" in every series of numerals—phone numbers, credit card numbers, account numbers—must, it seem, *always* be said as "zero." I guess it says so somewhere. The old slangy "oh" seems to have fallen into deep disrepute, and narrators have followed the rigid lead of those wonderful new role models, telemarketers, by rigidly conditioning themselves to say "zero" every single solitary time the number "0" pops up in print. The old song "Pennsylvania 6-5000," once sung as *Pennsylvania six-five-thousand*, would now become "Pennsylvania six-five-zero- zero- zero." Addresses are now given as "one-zero-zero-three Main Street, apartment five-zero-four, Washington DC two-zero-zero-zero-five." This is no doubt meant as a service to the listener, who would of course be thrown into total confusion upon hearing "ten-oh-three Main Street, apartment five-oh-four, Washington DC two-triple-oh-five." Never mind that *this is how people talk*—we are above such mundane vulgarisms. *We are narroators!*

Foreign aid

In our quest for fulfillment and pronunciations, narrators have picked up on some wonderfully handy European rules, and boy oh boy, do we love rules. Two universal favorites: the French don't speak final consonants, and two vowels together in German means the final vowel is emphasized. So the "hors d'oeuvres" at a party in the Bronx turn from plural to singular, regardless of context, and every surname in America that ends in "s-t-e-i-n" is said as "stine" (or even "shtine"). Hey, that's the rule, right? Wrong! We're in America now, and the English language is rife with confusion and illogic. Leonard is a Bern-*stine*, but Carl is a Bern-*steen*. Same spelling. Americans both. Benoit isn't always ben-*wah*, sometimes it's just plain old ben-*oit*. A Bronx hostess is unlikely to inform her guests that "the orderv are terrific today, hon." (And if her name is Eva, for heaven's sake don't assume she pronounces it Ava just because Hitler's girlfriend did. Maybe she was born in Montpelier. No, not *maw[n]-pee-LYAY* in France, *mont-PEEL-yer*, in Vermont.)

Name game

Biographical dictionaries are pretty essential tools for getting specific people's names right. Duh. But may I put up a warning flag? First, multiple choices; it's one thing for a dictionary to give eight or nine pronunciations for "prescience," but quite another thing to give multiple choices for how to pronounce George Cukor's last name. Do you know what it means when a dictionary gives multiple choices for a specific person's name? It means *they don't know how that name is pronounced*. When such waffling greets your eye, your research remains incomplete. Go elsewhere.

Flag 2: If you need to find out the name of a 1923 baseball player named Skinny Dubois, do not just look up "Dubois" in the bio, find some French sculptor with that name, and figure your research is complete. You should be looking for *Shinny Dubois*, not just *Dubois*. Lazy is good, and I'm all for it—but not that lazy.

The moving cursor, having vent, moves on...

Marks of Terror

Update October-December 1997



Ray Hagen

This article was written by Ray Hagen, NLS studio narrator.

Audio Art

Marks of Terror

Narrators are a hardy breed. We aren't fazed by the fandangoes of Faulkner, the caprices of Capote, the obstacles of Gates, or the gripes of Roth. But we can be made to cower in abject obeisance before the loom-ing species of one indomitable force: punctuation! Terrorized by commas, capitals, and quotation marks, we fill sentences with enough dead air to turn a five-side book into a seven-side snoozer.

It's the "automatic pauses" syndrome. Consider the following sentence: "Billy Wilder next directed Double Indemnity, starring Barbara Stanwyck, Fred MacMurray, and Edward G. Robinson." A simple enough statement of fact—easily polished off in five seconds. But the overzealous, easily in-timidated narrator will render it thusly: "Billy Wilder next directed (pause) Double Indemnity (pause) starring (pause) Barbara Stanwyck (pause) Fred MacMurray (pause) and (pause) Edward G. Robinson." A similar reference to an all-star MGM musical could take up a good half-hour of tape.

Punctuation marks are a convention of the written word. Let me repeat that: Punctuation marks are a convention of the writ-ten word. They guide the reader through the intricacies of printed language as our eyes scan the page, separating thought from speech, scene from scene, text from subtext. I couldn't have written that last sentence without them. But that's where their usefulness ends, because punctuation marks are not a convention of the spoken word. When we speak, we don't use them. Ever! (Except for Victor Borge, but he's on a different pay scale.) We use a different convention—phrasing. That's how we translate the written into the spoken word. Punctuation marks, paragraphs, italics, skipped lines, indentations, different typefaces, parentheses—all these print conventions can be translated artfully (and naturally) by the whole range of vocal phrasing available to

us and that we always use when we're away from a microphone without giving a thought to comma placement.

Is it really necessary to let the listener know where every bit of printed punctuation occurs?

Does taking "automatic pauses" improve the flow of the narrative?

Let's try an experiment. Tape yourself reading the following passage, pausing at every mark:

"Get out of here," he said.

"No way, Jose," she countered. "I've leased this house for June, July, and August."

"I don't care," he replied, gathering up her red, green, blue, yellow, and grey dresses.

"Take these with you," he shouted, "and be out of here, lock, stock, and barrel before I get back from the screening of *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly!*"

Now listen to the tape. Have I made my point? Keep in mind that the people who listen to recorded books are no strangers to colloquial, conversational speech. They hear it every day. They use it every day.

We all know how human speech sounds. Writers use punctuation as clues that enable us to hear, in our minds, the flow of their thoughts as we read the page. And when translating print to speech, that's exactly how we should use them—as clues. Not orders.

Yaknowwhatimean?

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Bring Yourself with You

Update



This article was written by Ray Hagen, who has narrated books for the NLS studio since 1973 and compiles the Update column "But that's the way I've always heard it"

Audio Art

Bring yourself with you!

Most talking-book narrators are funny, quirky, dramatic, intense, boisterous, bawdy, opinion-ated, stylish, passionate, distinctively unique people. But when some of them go into the recording booth and sit in front of a micro-phone, the most amazing transformation occurs: they cease to exist. In their place, The Generic Narrator suddenly appears. A voice without a person; an incredible, crashing bore.

"I don't want to intrude upon the text," they explain. "I don't want to overdo it." "The listener should do the interpreting, not the narrator." And the list goes on. While this is all very honorable and very well-intentioned reasoning, narrators must exercise the ability to breathe life into a printed text, not simply string words together with lifeless clarity. Your humor, your outrage, your passion, your compassion—all these qualities must be brought into the booth. Each particular author will tell you which aspects of your personality to let loose and which to edit out (just listen to them).

When an actor is cast in a play, he is expected to bring the words in the script to life, not just to stand there and mouth them. He got the part because the director saw specific qualities in that actor that uniquely fit the needs of that character. The same applies when a narrator is assigned a book to narrate; of the talent pool available, you were judged to be the narrator most suited to the demands of that particular book.

Yes, of course it's possible to go too far, to add too much to the text, to overwhelm it. This is where discipline, judgment, and technique come in. But the other extreme, doing too little or nothing at all, is equally inappropriate. That kind of flat, uninvolved,

bloodlessly correct distancing from the material claims two victims: it sabotages the author and puts the listener to sleep.

The best way to gauge your work is to listen to your own recordings' as often as possible. Listen for at least a half hour at a time, preferably longer (without following the print copy—just listen). Apply this standard: if someone started speaking to you this way, how would you react? Would you be fascinated? Bored? Amused? Offended? Irritated? Interested? Insulted? Would you be eager to hear more, or want to run screaming from the room? Chances are the more energetic and committed the presentation, the longer the listener's interest will be held. Try being your own listener for awhile. You may be surprised.

Incidentally, this also applies to such "mundane" items as opening and closing announcements, bibliographies, acknowledgment and copyright information, and tables of contents. After all, these obligatory announcements will be the listener's first introduction to you. Why not get off on the right foot?

So, once again: the next time you go into the recording booth, bring yourself in with you.

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Abandon Hope

Update July-September 1998



Ray Hagen

Ray Hagen, NLS narrator

Audio Art

Abandon hope

Recording a book would seem to be a pretty straightforward affair, but an inordinate number of minefields do somehow manage to get in the way. We've discussed some of them in previous articles, but there are countless others.

For example, as one's eye is racing across the page while talking up a storm, it's very difficult to distinguish bought from brought, abroad from aboard, county from country, woman from women, or trough from tough from though from through from thorough from thought. And one should never have to speak of wasps nests or utter such words as rural or listlessness aloud. Each of us has an Enemies List of words we fear and loathe.

And while you're barreling your way through a sentence that takes up half a page or more—weaving your way through sub-classes and parenthetical musings on the way to Armageddon—it's almost impossible to remember the point of the sentence, or how it began way back up there before your last birthday.

Then there's the book you hate, written by an author you detest, on a subject that bores you to death or a premise you heartily oppose—but that you, nonetheless, must sound utterly fascinated by, and in total agreement with, for every one of its five hundred pages. Sincerity is a must. Faking sincerity is a useful skill. (It's been said that a good book requires a good narrator and a bad book requires a great narrator.)

The above problems have one thing in common: they're inevitable and unavoidable—there are no solutions. Give up hope! Like noisy page turns, they're

just that— problems—and only slogging, practice, and patience will get you through them. No magic answers.

Then why bring them up? Because there are enough problems to worry about that can be solved (see previous articles), and because sometimes it helps to just give up and surrender, and stop imagining that one swell day a solution will suddenly appear. It won't. Figuring out the difference between solvable and unsolvable is sort of like figuring out the difference between paranoia and real fear—tricky, but possible. And you wind up with less to obsess over.

Narrating, like most occupations, is hard work, and even though it gets easier with experience, it'll never be a romp in the clover. A clumsily written book is hard for the beginning narrator, and it's still hard for a twenty-five-year veteran. Trust me.

There! Don't you feel better already?

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Look it Up: Where?

Update April-June 1997



This article, written by Ray Hagen, NLS studio narrator, also appeared in the recent Projects and Experiments. People interested in narration can request copies of Projects and Experiments from the NLS Reference Section.

Ray Hagen

Audio Art

Look it up? Where?

One of the biggest surprises to folks who inquire about narrating books—and a not altogether happy surprise—is that some books will require research. "Research? You mean, like, work??" You betcha, and thanks so much for calling.

Pick up any current nonfiction work (biography, memoir, history, expose, etc.) and flip to the index at the back of the book. Lots of names there, maybe hundreds. How many of them can you pronounce correctly? How many of them do you merely think you can pronounce correctly? A dozen maybe? Good for you. Now, what about the remaining six dozen? Write them down. Then start thumbing through the book for the sort of stuff not found in most indexes: street names, grade schools, childhood chums, foreign phrases, local slang, favorite boutiques, Romanian airports, Japanese newspapers, character names from plays and movies, professional acronyms, names of pets, etc. Write them down. And don't forget the author's name. Not 100 percent positive? Write that down, too. (You are, of course, certain of how to pronounce the publisher's name, right?)

By now time is passing, you haven't set foot in the recording booth, and you have five or six handwritten pages of names and words that you now have to RESEARCH. No, we're not having fun yet. We are having second thoughts. Time to hit the dictionaries—standard, biographical, geographical, technical (name your field), foreign, whatever you can get your hands on. After which you'll no doubt be left with such unanswered items as street names, grade schools, childhood chums, foreign phrases, local slang, favorite boutiques, Romanian airports, Japanese newspapers, character names from plays and movies, professional acronyms, names of pets, etc. Stuff, in other words, that only the author is likely to know. Aha—

the author! Who (if not dead) may or may not know this stuff either, but we're in dire straits now, so let's give it a whirl. Check out the "About the Author" section of the book jacket—any hints as to where he or she lives or works? Many authors are actually listed in the local phone book. Or maybe the book's editor can help. If you actually reach your author(s), and don't sound too much like a serial killer, they're invariably appreciative of your efforts and glad to help. Best of all, this is your last stop. Whatever's left, wing it.

But there is one last step—writing all this research down on your pronunciation list. And not just so you can read it; the reviewers, monitors, and studio staff also have to be able to read it. Learning a consistent diacritical system is essential, as is writing it out clearly and carefully. That's how the staff communicates information in this peculiar line of work.

Now you can walk into the booth and finally begin. And try to remember why you wanted to be a narrator in the first place.

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