



# **THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO VOICE OVER**

**How the Industry Works, From the Other Side of the Mic**

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# Table of Contents

Author’s Note .....	3
Chapter 1 – Introduction – A Voice Actor’s View of the Industry.....	7
Chapter 2 – Who Voice Actors Work With .....	10
Chapter 3 – Hiring Voice Talent .....	13
Chapter 4 – Casting & Direction .....	17
Chapter 5 – Rates, Usage & Licensing .....	21
Chapter 6 – Union vs Non-Union.....	26
Chapter 7 – Recording Process.....	29
Chapter 8 – Revisions & Timelines.....	33
Chapter 9 – Long-Term Relationships .....	37
Chapter 10 – AI, Voice Cloning, and Where the Industry Is Drawing the Line .....	40
Final Thoughts.....	44
Legal & Usage Disclaimer .....	47

# Author's Note



If you're reading this, you're probably someone who hires voice talent, or works closely with people who do.

You might be a producer, a creative director, part of an agency team, or someone managing video, audio, or branded content. You don't need to become a voice actor to do your job well. But it is helpful to understand how this part of the process actually works.

Voice over is one of the most misunderstood parts of production. Not out of negligence, but because when it's done well it stays in the background where it belongs. When it's not handled well, it becomes a bottleneck that slows everything down and costs everyone money.

I wrote this from my perspective as a working voice actor. Not to lecture. Not to sell. And not to protect talent at the expense of buyers.

I wrote it to show you what's happening on the other side of the mic so you can plan better, communicate more clearly, and get better results with less friction.

When everyone involved shares common expectations, voice over can be one of the easiest parts of a production.

This guide is useful whether you've been through one session or a hundred. The friction points are the same either way. The only difference is how many times you've already run into them.

## Who This Book Is For

This guide is written primarily for:

- Video producers
- Creative directors
- Ad agencies
- Production companies
- Marketing teams
- Anyone responsible for hiring or managing voice talent

If you've ever wondered:

- Why rates change from project to project
- What "usage" actually means
- Why buyouts cost more
- How to avoid endless revisions
- How to get better performances faster

This book is for you.

Voice actors may also find it helpful, especially if they haven't seen how buyers experience the process.

## Why This Book Exists

I've found that most tension in voice over doesn't come from bad intentions or from lack of talent from the actor. It comes from missing information.

Producers don't always know:

- What talent is dealing with behind the scenes
- Why certain terms matter
- How small changes affect scope and cost

Voice actors don't always know:

- What pressures buyers are under
- How timelines shift
- Where budget constraints come from

This book will hopefully bridge that gap and help creative agencies gain a better understanding of the talent's perspective.

## What This Book Is (and Isn't)

This is:

- A practical guide
- A transparency tool
- A collaboration manual

It is not:

- A rate manifesto
- A union advocacy piece
- A how-to for becoming a voice actor

Everything here is meant to help you work more efficiently and confidently with professional voice talent.

## How to Use This Guide

You don't need to read this cover to cover. I hope you do, but you can extract information from any section that is relevant to what you need to know.

Some readers jump straight to:

- Rates and usage
- Revisions and pickups
- Union vs. non-union

That's fine. Each chapter is designed to stand on its own, but together they provide a complete picture of how the industry works from the talent side.

## A Quick Note on Rates

Throughout this book, I reference industry standards and the [GVAA Rate Guide](#).

These are not mandates. They are benchmarks. Useful starting points for fair, informed conversations.

### From the Talent Perspective

Rates are more accurate and easier to calculate when usage is clearly defined. It can seem confusing at first, but we'll get it cleared up in Chapter 5.

## My Goal in Writing This

My goal isn't to make things more complicated. It's to make them clearer.

When you understand:

- How voice over fits into production
- What talent is responsible for
- Why certain terms exist

You can make better informed decisions, and projects will move faster.

If this book helps you avoid even one frustrating back-and-forth situation with talent, it's done its job.

## How This Benefits You

After reading this guide, you should:

- Have more knowledge of what to look for when hiring voice talent and feel more confident with the process.
- Ask better questions upfront
- Reduce revisions and delays
- Build stronger long-term relationships

That's good for you.

That's good for talent.

And it's good for the final product.

# Chapter 1 – Introduction – A Voice Actor's View of the Industry



Voice over often looks a lot simpler than it really is. From the outside, it can feel like: “Here’s a script, record it, drop it in, done.” But any producer, agency, or creative director who’s actually worked on a project knows it’s not that simple. There’s a lot that goes into getting a professional recording that sounds right, fits the project, and works technically.

## From the Talent Perspective

Most projects go smoothly when expectations are crystal clear before recording even starts.

A voice actor doesn’t just read words. We interpret them. We give them tone, pacing, and life. We make sure the performance hits the right emotional mark. We check pronunciations, suggest tweaks when something sounds off, and make sure the technical side is solid so the file works for you the first time. Our work touches every part of the project... producers, creative directors, agencies, sound engineers, project managers... you name it.

Respecting what a voice actor brings to the table gets you a better final product, faster, and with fewer revisions.

## What We Actually Do

Most people don’t think about any of this. They shouldn’t have to. But understanding it helps you communicate better, which gets you a better result. Here’s what’s actually happening behind the mic when you hire professional voice talent:

- **Script Interpretation** - We figure out what the words are *actually saying* and how they should land. Is it friendly, authoritative, casual, urgent? Even short copy can be read in a dozen different ways.
- **Performance Control** - We deliver consistent energy across the session, adjust on the fly, and give you multiple takes that all feel like they belong together.
- **Pacing and Timing** - A 30-second spot has to hit 30 seconds. eLearning modules need to be easy to follow. IVR menus have to be clear and efficient. Timing is everything.
- **Technical Execution** - Microphone, acoustics, sample rates, file formats, levels, etc. These all matter. A good performance is wasted if the file isn’t ready for production.
- **Creative Collaboration** - We often suggest pronunciation fixes, slight copy adjustments, or alternate readings that actually make your project better.

## Where We Fit in Your Project

Voice actors aren’t working in a vacuum. We interact with producers, creative directors, agencies, editors, sound designers, audio engineers, and production managers, often all on the same project. Understanding each of those roles is what allows us to communicate clearly and keep things moving.

### From the Talent Perspective

Treat voice actors as creative partners, not just vendors. It makes everything run smoother and flow better, usually resulting in a better end product.

In my experience, the difference between smooth and painful projects is almost always the same handful of things. Any misunderstandings around revisions, usage, rates, or technical requirements cost time, money, and patience. My hope is that this book gives you a clear, practical look at how voice over works, from the mic side of the glass.

If you read this and take away one thing, let it be this:

When everyone understands what goes into voice over, projects move faster, cost less, and sound better.

My job isn't to make your job harder. It's to make it easier. You send the script, I deliver what you need, on time, without the back and forth. That's the whole deal.

# Chapter 2 – Who Voice Actors Work With



## The Voice Over Ecosystem

If you think hiring a voice actor is just “find a voice, record, done,” you’re missing half the story. Every successful project is a small ecosystem. Multiple people are involved, and each one has a different set of priorities, but the goal is the same: get the right performance, in the right format, on time, and on budget.

Understanding who’s responsible for what, and when to communicate with them, keeps projects on track and avoids headaches for everyone. I don’t think there is such thing as too many questions. It’s imperative that you get clarity on whatever you’re unsure of before moving forward.

## Who’s Involved

Producers make sure the creative director’s vision is actually achievable. They focus on the production itself and whether the ideas on paper can be executed. Creative directors handle the vision. They work closely with copywriters and designers to shape what the project should feel like. Agencies often act as the middlemen, handling casting, auditions, and approvals depending on the project. Sound designers and editors make sure the voice actually works in the final mix. Clean edits, proper levels, everything technical. Project managers keep the whole thing moving. Schedules, budgets, vendors, deadlines. They’re the ones making sure everyone else can do their job.

The voice actor works with all of these roles simultaneously, not just the person who sent the original email.

## From the Talent Perspective

Knowing the ecosystem helps you understand why we sometimes ask questions, request references, or suggest small tweaks. It’s not delay, it’s collaboration.

## Why Understanding the Ecosystem Matters

When everyone knows their role and respects each other’s expertise, the project flows. When they don’t, projects stall. Feedback conflicts. Revisions multiply. Deadlines slip. And the voice talent ends up caught in the middle of a conversation they were never part of.

### Example:

A creative director may ask for a “friendly, casual” tone, while the producer wants a more authoritative delivery for branding consistency.

I’ve found that projects move faster and smoother when feedback is coordinated. Communicating with a single individual usually saves time, money, and stress.

## How It Looks in Practice

Imagine a national commercial:

- The **producer** sets the schedule and budget.
- The **creative director** gives direction on tone and pacing.
- The **agency** organizes auditions and collects approvals.
- The **voice actor** records in a home or studio setup, following creative direction.

- The **editor** drops the audio into the mix, adjusts timing, and polishes.

Every step depends on the others. One misstep can ripple through the project, delaying delivery or causing re-records.

## **From the Talent Perspective**

When everyone respects deadlines, communicates clearly, and knows the workflow, the talent can focus on delivering the best performance... fast, consistent, and stress-free.

## **Bottom Line**

Understanding the ecosystem is about efficiency. Once you know the players, their priorities, and how they interact, your projects run smoother. You'll spend less time chasing approvals and more time getting the performance you actually want.

**Key Takeaway:** Treat voice over like any other professional service. Know the workflow, understand roles, and respect expertise, and you'll get a better result, faster.

# Chapter 3 – Hiring Voice Talent



## How Producers and Agencies Hire Voice Actors

Hiring a voice actor isn't just about finding a "nice voice." It's about finding the *right* voice for your project, in the right style, on the right timeline, and for the right usage. When you understand how the hiring process works from a voice actor's side, everything gets easier and projects get done faster.

Clear expectations at the start prevent wasted time, confusion, and revisions later. It's the difference between a smooth project and a frustrating one.

### Step 1: Define the Project

Before you even start looking for talent, you need to know exactly what you're after. That means understanding:

- **Project Type:** Commercial, eLearning, IVR, narration, or audiobook
- **Script Length:** This impacts recording time and rates
- **Audience:** The way you speak to senior executives is different than how you speak to teens on social media
- **Medium:** Broadcast, online, internal training. Each has different technical and performance needs
- **Timeline:** Deadlines determine scheduling and turnaround expectations

#### Example:

You're creating a 90-second social media spot targeting millennials. The script needs to be casual, energetic, and delivered within three business days. Knowing this upfront lets the voice actor hit the tone and schedule without surprises.

#### A Note on IVR

IVR stands for Interactive Voice Response. It's the recorded voice system you interact with when you call a company's customer service line. "Press 1 for billing. Press 2 for technical support." That's IVR.

It's one of the more specialized categories of voice over work and it has its own set of requirements that differ from commercial or narration work. IVR scripts tend to be highly structured, with consistent pacing and neutral tone across dozens or even hundreds of individual prompts. The talent has to maintain that consistency across a long session where every line sounds like it belongs to the same system.

IVR also has strict technical requirements around file naming, silence at the head and tail of each file, and delivery format. If your project involves IVR, flag it early and confirm that the talent has specific experience with it. Not every voice actor works in this category and the ones who do will tell you upfront what they need from you to deliver it correctly.

### Step 2: Finding the Talent

#### Demos and Portfolios

Start by listening to voice demos. They tell you:

- Range (can this actor do the tone you need?)
- Clarity (does it sound professional?)

- Versatility (can they adapt if the project changes?)

## Custom Auditions

Custom auditions of a small section of your exact script can prove invaluable. These let you hear how an actor interprets your words and tone. This allows you to hear whether or not the talent's voice is right for your project. It may not be a matter of the voice talent lacking the necessary skills. They may just not be the right fit. It's best to find this out before hiring them.

### Example:

For a 5-minute eLearning module, you might request 30-second audition clips in three different styles, maybe authoritative, friendly, conversational, to see which fits best.

## From the Talent Perspective

Detailed audition instructions, (tone, pacing, emphasis) help actors deliver exactly what you want. It reduces the need for back-and-forth messaging and speeds up casting.

## Step 3: Shortlisting and Selection

Once auditions are in, narrow it down to one to three actors who fit the project's voice, style, and technical needs. Consider delivery, clarity, and energy. Look for consistency across the read, not just a strong opening line. If the actor is recording remotely, check the technical quality of their audition. A great performance in a bad room is still a problem.

**Pro Tip:** Ask for reference work in the specific style you need. A demo that's perfect for commercial ads might not work for IVR or eLearning.

## Step 4: Negotiating Terms

We'll go into this in more detail in Chapter 5, but this is where rates, usage, revisions, and timelines come into play.

- **Rates:** Often based on project length, medium, and intended usage
- **Usage Licenses:** Local, regional, national, online, internal, or perpetual (aka "In Perp")
- **Revisions:** Minor vs. major revisions and how many are included
- **Timeline:** When auditions, recording, and final files are due

### Example:

A 30-second national TV spot might have a base rate of \$1,500, include two minor revisions, and a one-year usage license. Anything beyond that gets negotiated separately.

Confirming all terms upfront avoids surprises, ensures fair compensation, and keeps the project moving.

## Step 5: Booking and Recording

Once an actor is chosen, schedule the session if live direction is needed, whether that's in studio or remote. Provide the script, any pronunciation guides, and reference audio if you have it. Make sure file format and technical requirements are communicated before recording starts, not after.

## Example:

A remote eLearning project might be recorded in the actor's home studio at 48kHz, 24-bit, WAV, delivered via Dropbox. Two takes of the first 30 seconds of the script for client selection provided before final recording is completed.

## From the Talent Perspective

Clear instructions, reference materials, and technical details upfront save everyone time. A well-prepared talent delivers quickly and accurately.

## Step 6: Feedback and Revisions

Even with everything clear upfront, revisions happen. The key is giving specific notes and sending them promptly. "Emphasize the word security on that line" is actionable. "Make it sound better" is not. Specific feedback gets fast results. Vague feedback costs everyone time.

## Bottom Line

Hiring a voice actor isn't complicated when everyone knows what they're walking into. Define the project clearly, communicate what you need, and respect the process. Do that and the relationship starts on solid ground. That's where good work comes from.

**Key Takeaway:** Treat the hiring process as a collaborative partnership. When voice actors know exactly what you want, you get better results faster. That's where the relationship starts.

# Chapter 4 – Casting & Direction



## Casting, Auditions, and Creative Direction

Casting and creative direction are where voice over either comes together or falls apart. You can hire the right voice on paper and still miss the mark if the direction isn't clear. Strong direction elevates a good read into a great one.

From my side of the mic, this chapter is about helping you get the performance you're actually hearing in your head.

Clear, specific direction almost always leads to better performances and fewer revisions.

## Casting Is About Fit, Not Just Sound

A voice can sound great and still be wrong for a project. Casting isn't just about tone. It's about finding a voice that fits the brand, one where you can hear the actor's connection to the script. They understand what it's saying and why it matters. That's the difference between a read that's technically correct and one that actually lands.

When you're casting, you're really asking:

- Does this voice fit the brand?
- Does the voice feel believable for this specific audience?
- Can this actor sustain the tone across the entire piece?

A warm, friendly read might be perfect for a regional commercial, but totally wrong for a compliance-heavy training video. A bold, authoritative voice might sound great for a promo but just be "too much" in an explainer video.

## From the Talent Perspective

The more context you give about the brand and audience, the easier it is for talent to self-adjust and deliver the right read.

## Auditions: Keep Them Focused

Auditions don't need to be complicated. In fact, simpler is better.

A good audition request includes:

- A short script excerpt (20-40 seconds is plenty)
- A few words about tone and pacing
- Any "don't do this" notes
- Where the audio will ultimately live (We'll discuss usage in the next chapter)

What slows things down is vague direction. Phrases like "natural," "conversational," or "modern" mean different things to different people unless they're anchored to context.

"Conversational" can mean relaxed, confident, casual, or intimate. A single sentence of context can make all the difference.

## What to Include in Your Brief

The fastest way to get a great read on the first take is to give talent everything they need before they hit record. A good brief doesn't have to be long. It just has to be complete.

Here's what to include:

The script. Final and approved. If it's still being revised, say so and set a hard lock date before recording is scheduled.

Tone and direction. Not just "conversational" or "professional." Give it context. Conversational for a hospital brand spot sounds different from conversational for a tech startup explainer. One sentence of context is worth more than three adjectives.

The audience. Who is this for? A C-suite decision maker, a first-year employee, a consumer scrolling social media? The audience shapes everything about how the script gets delivered.

Where it lives. Broadcast, web, internal, social, IVR. This affects both the performance and the rate, so the talent needs to know upfront.

Pronunciation guides. Any brand names, technical terms, proper nouns, or industry jargon that could be misread. Don't assume. A quick phonetic spelling in the brief saves everyone time.

Technical specs. File format, sample rate, bit depth, mono or stereo, naming conventions, and delivery method. If you're not sure what you need, ask your editor or sound designer before the session, not after.

Timeline. When do you need the files? If there's a hard deadline, say so clearly. Most talent can accommodate tight turnarounds but only if they know about them in advance.

A brief that covers these points gives the voice actor everything they need to deliver on the first take. The less they have to guess, the better the result.

## How to Give Direction That Actually Helps

This is where most friction happens. Almost never from bad intent. Almost always from vague notes.

The most helpful direction is:

- **Specific** ("slower on the second sentence")
- **Actionable** ("smile through this line")
- **Purpose-driven** ("this line needs to feel reassuring")

Less helpful direction sounds like:

- "Make it pop"
- "Sound more professional"
- "Can we try it differently?"

Those notes aren't wrong, they're just incomplete.

## From the Talent Perspective

If you can explain *why* something isn't working, the fix usually only takes one take, not five.

### Live Sessions vs. Remote, Self-Directed

Live sessions work best when the creative team wants real-time control, timing is critical, or multiple stakeholders need to weigh in. Remote self-directed sessions make more sense when direction is clear upfront, the talent is experienced, and the timeline is flexible. Both are valid. What matters is choosing the right approach for the project. If you trust the talent and give clear direction, self-directed sessions are often faster and more cost effective.

### A Quick Real-World Example

I had a client ask for a “confident but not salesy” read. That’s a solid direction, but I still had some questions. Was this internal or public-facing? Informational or persuasive? Once those questions were answered, it informed the read and I was able to give them what they were looking for quickly.

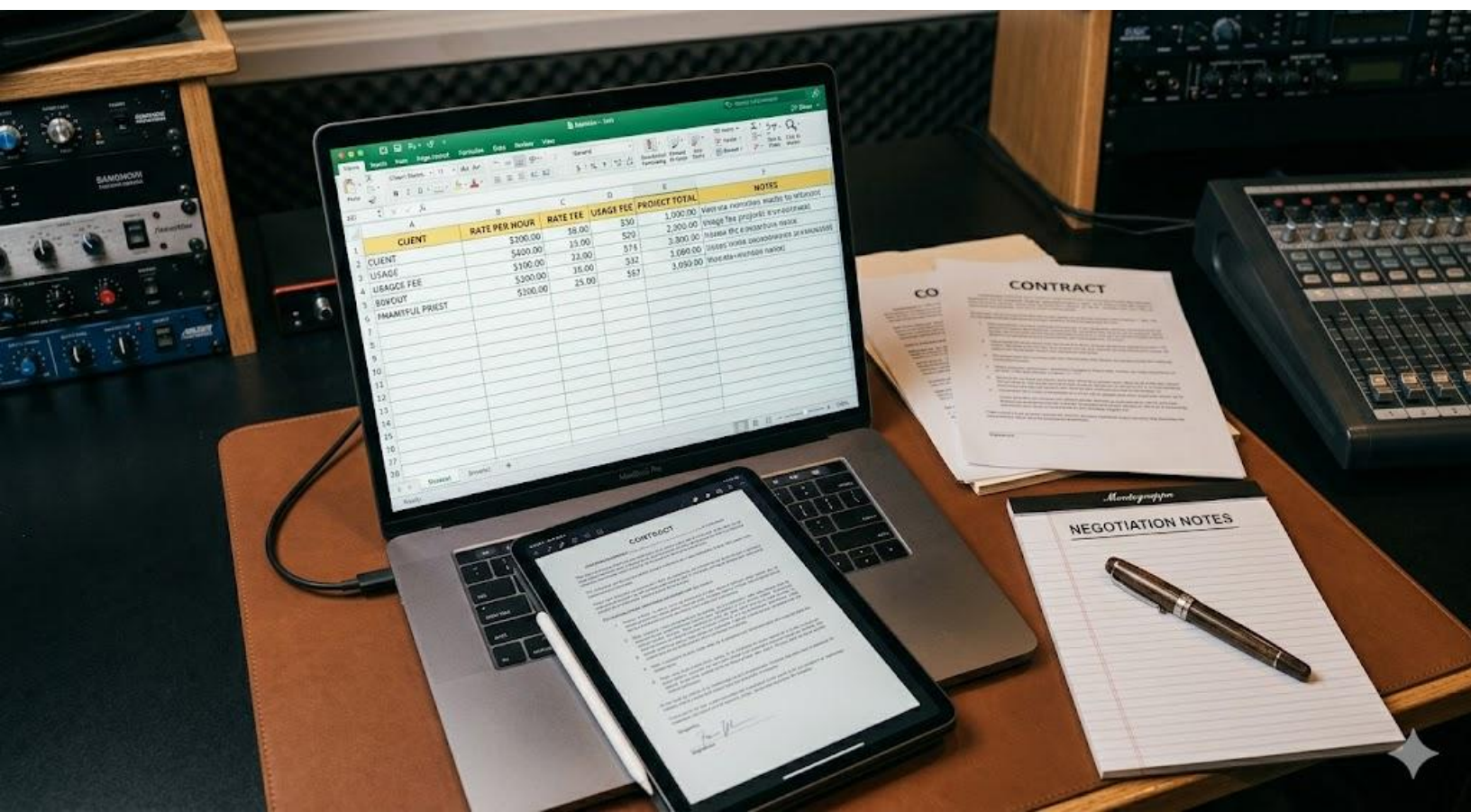
That five-minute conversation saved hours of revisions.

### Bottom Line

Great casting gets you to the right voice. Great direction gets you the right read. When you give talent the context they need and trust them to do their job, the session is faster, the output is stronger, and the revision count drops. That’s the whole point of this chapter.

**Key Takeaway:** The better the direction, the less work everyone has to do later.

# Chapter 5 – Rates, Usage & Licensing



## Rates, Usage, Licensing, Buyouts, and Revisions – (Non-Union)

Money conversations are where trust either solidifies or breaks. Rates and usage are the part of voice over that cause the most confusion and the most frustration on both sides. This chapter clears that up.

Voice over rates are not arbitrary. They're not ego-based, and they're not pulled out of thin air. They're built around **usage, reach, duration, and risk**. Once you understand that, the entire pricing structure starts to make sense.

### From the Talent Perspective

I've found that most rate disputes don't come from greed. They come from misunderstanding how usage works.

## What You're Really Paying For

### The Anatomy of a Voice Over Rate

Component	What it Covers	Why it Matters
<b>The Session Fee</b>	Performance, studio time, engineering, and raw file delivery.	This covers the talent's overhead and labor for the actual recording day.
<b>The Usage Fee</b>	Where the audio lives (TV, Web, Radio) and who hears it.	This scales based on the value the voice adds to your brand's reach. (Larger markets mean higher reach)
<b>The Duration</b>	How long the license lasts (3 months, 1 year, or "In Perpetuity").	Longer exposure means higher risk for the talent (brand conflict), which increases the price.

When you hire a voice actor, you're paying for two things:

- 1) **The performance and recording: often referred to as a "Session Fee"**
- 2) **The right to use that recording in specific ways: referred to as "Usage"**

The recording itself is the smallest part of the equation.

The real value lies in how the audio is used, where it's used, and how long it lives. A voice recording that runs once internally has a very different value than one attached to a national ad campaign.

Usage determines the value. Though the length of the script does have an impact on the rate, it is far less of an impact than the usage.

## Understanding Usage

Usage answers four basic questions:

- **Where** will this audio live?
- **Who** will hear it?
- **For how long?**
- **Is it paid media or organic/internal?**

Internal training videos, onboarding content, and corporate explainers typically have limited exposure. Broadcast commercials, paid social ads, and pre-roll placements have far greater reach, and therefore, greater value.

That's why rates change. When the recording reaches more people, it is of more value to the client. This is very similar to the way advertising rates are determined.

## Why the GVAA Rate Guide Exists

The [GVAA Rate Guide](#) exists to create **consistency and transparency** in an industry that used to operate entirely on guesswork.

It provides:

- Industry-standard ranges
- Context for different usage types
- A common language for negotiation

It is a guide, not a rulebook. It gives everyone a fair starting point and can be a valuable “shared language.”

## From the Talent Perspective

When I hear producers reference the [GVAA Rate Guide](#), it says a lot about their level of professionalism and respect for the craft.

## Session Fees vs. Usage Fees

Some projects bundle everything together. Others separate the costs.

A **session fee** covers:

- Performance
- Studio time
- Recording and delivery

A **usage or licensing fee** covers:

- How the audio is used
- Where it's distributed
- How long it runs

Separating these makes expectations clearer for everyone. In the case of non-broadcast or internal facing projects, the rate is usually presented as just an overall cost and not divided into session fee and usage. These are also frequently considered buyouts.

## Buyouts: What They Are (and Aren't)

From the talent side, buyouts carry real risk. Agreeing to unlimited usage means losing future licensing opportunities on that voice for that category, potential brand conflicts down the road, and indefinite association with a product or company they may not want to represent forever. That's why buyouts cost more. It's not about charging extra. It's about offsetting long-term risk.

## Why “In Perpetuity” Raises Rates

In perpetuity means forever. That can block the talent from future work in the same category, create brand conflicts years down the road, and remove their ability to re-license fairly. Many voice actors will still agree to it, but the rate reflects the permanent nature of that commitment. That’s not a negotiating tactic. It’s the math.

## Revisions vs. Script Changes

Most professional voice actors include minor performance tweaks and small pickups for delivery adjustments. What’s not included is new copy, rewritten lines, or messaging changes that come after approval. Those aren’t revisions. They’re new work and should be treated as such. The clearest way to avoid this conversation is to lock the script before the session starts.

## How to Keep Rates Reasonable

If budget is tight, there are options. Limit the usage duration. Narrow the distribution. Avoid unnecessary buyouts. And be upfront about your constraints from the start. Most talent will work with you if you’re honest about what you’re working with. What doesn’t work is discovering the budget limitations after the project is already in motion.

## Payment Terms and What to Expect

Rates are one conversation. Payment terms are another, and they’re worth having upfront.

Most professional voice actors invoice on net 30 terms, meaning payment is due within 30 days of delivery. Some work on net 15. Some require payment before releasing final files, particularly with new clients they haven’t worked with before.

This isn’t distrust. It’s standard business practice in a freelance industry where talent has no recourse once files are delivered and payment doesn’t follow.

If you’re working with a voice actor for the first time, expect the possibility of a deposit requirement, typically 50 percent upfront with the balance due on delivery. Once a working relationship is established, most talent will extend more flexible terms.

The simplest way to avoid confusion: ask about payment terms when you’re negotiating everything else. It takes thirty seconds and prevents an awkward conversation after the files land in your inbox.

## A Real-World Scenario

A producer once told me, “It’s just a one-minute video.”

What they meant was: it feels small.

But the video was paid social, running nationally, with no end date.

Once we reframed the conversation around usage instead of runtime, the rate made sense to everyone involved. Ultimately, they realized that “In Perpetuity” was not necessary and we agreed to a much shorter usage term and were able to agree on a new rate for the project.

## Bottom Line

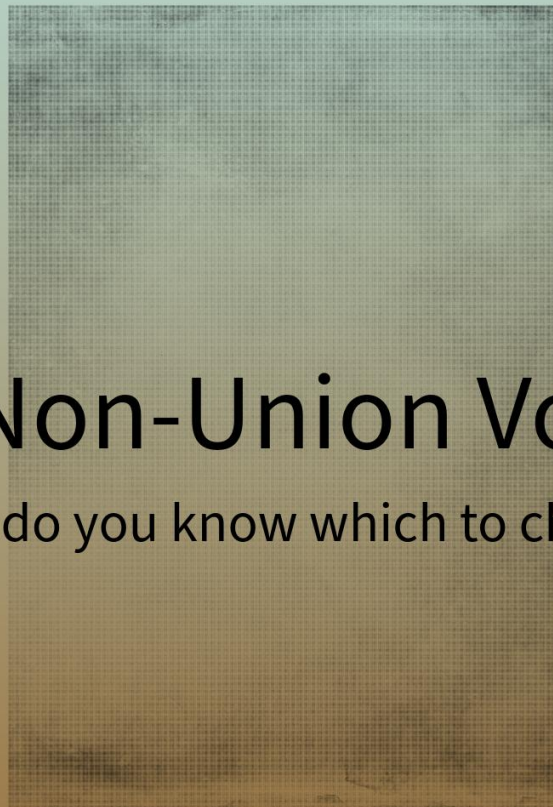
Rates aren't about the voice.

They're about the value created by the voice.

When usage is clear upfront, the whole conversation changes. The negotiation is faster, the relationship starts on better footing, and the project moves without the friction that comes from sorting it out after the fact.

**Key Takeaway:** Transparency around usage protects both the client and the talent.

# Chapter 6 – Union vs Non-Union



## Union vs Non-Union Voice Talent

How do you know which to choose

Union vs. non-union gets framed like a complicated decision. It isn't. It comes down to four practical factors: budget, usage, risk, and workflow. Once those are clear, the decision usually makes itself. This chapter explains how each option actually functions so there are no surprises later.

## Union vs. Non-Union: At a Glance

### Union ([SAG-AFTRA](#))

Standardized contracts, defined usage, fixed minimums, and residual structures for certain media. More paperwork, more predictability.

### Non-Union

Directly negotiated terms, flexible usage, simpler processes. Common across corporate, educational, internal, and digital-first content.

## What “Union” Means

In voice over, union work operates under established agreements.

Under union agreements, usage is clearly defined, rates follow established minimums, and residuals apply when broadcast is involved. For buyers, that structure offers predictability. You know what you're getting into before the project starts.

## What “Non-Union” Means

Non-union work is negotiated project by project. Rates, usage, and terms are customized to the work at hand. There's no standardized contract template, which makes the process faster and more flexible. That's why non-union dominates corporate narration, explainers, eLearning, internal video, and most web content. Non-union doesn't signal lower quality. It signals custom terms.

## Why Buyers Choose Union

Union is typically the right fit when the media is broadcast or national, residuals are expected, usage is fixed and long term, and legal protection is a priority. For large agencies and national brands, union often equals risk management.

## Why Buyers Choose Non-Union

Non-union is often preferred when budgets are leaner, timelines move quickly, and usage is limited, evolving, or digital only. There's also less friction when scripts change, schedules shift, or scope expands mid-project.

## The Talent Reality

Once a voice actor joins SAG-AFTRA, they generally cannot accept non-union work in markets where the union has jurisdiction. That's not a preference. It's a contractual obligation that comes with membership.

Some talent are non-union by choice, particularly those earlier in their careers or focused on corporate, eLearning, and digital content where union agreements rarely apply. Some are union-only. A smaller

group holds what's called Fi-Core status, which allows them to work both union and non-union jobs, though it comes with its own tradeoffs within the union community.

What this means for you as a buyer: always confirm union status before booking. A non-union talent hired for a union-signatory production creates a compliance problem. A union talent asked to work a non-union job puts them in a difficult position. Neither outcome is good for anyone.

Ask early. It takes thirty seconds and prevents headaches later.

## Residuals, Briefly

Residuals most commonly apply to:

- Broadcast television
- Radio
- National commercial campaigns

They're rare in corporate narration, explainers, training, and internal content.

If broadcast isn't part of the plan, residuals may never enter the conversation.

## Common Misunderstandings

Union rates aren't automatically higher than non-union rates. They're minimums, not ceilings. A union talent can negotiate above scale, so the final number depends on the project and the talent, just like any other negotiation.

Non-union work isn't a free-for-all either. Industry standards still apply. The absence of a union contract doesn't mean usage is unlimited or that licensing stops mattering. It means the terms are negotiated directly rather than governed by a standardized agreement.

Either way, usage has consequences. Expanding how or where audio is used after the fact without renegotiating terms is a problem regardless of union status.

## A Practical Filter

If the choice isn't obvious, ask:

- Where will this audio live?
- How long will it run?
- Is broadcast involved?
- Do we need long-term legal protection?

Those answers usually make the decision clear.

## Bottom Line

Union and non-union aren't moral positions. They're business tools. Ask the right questions early, understand how each option works, and communicate clearly with talent. Do that and the decision makes itself. The rest is just paperwork.

**Key Takeaway:** Know what you need before you start looking for who can deliver it.

# Chapter 7 – Recording Process



## The Recording Process - Studios, Sessions, and Deliverables

Once a voice actor is booked, most buyers assume the hard part is over. In reality, this is where the project either stays smooth or starts to wobble.

Understanding how recording actually works helps you avoid delays, reduce revisions, and get exactly what you need the first time.

Most recording issues come from assumptions about what happens behind the mic.

## Professional Home Studios Are the Norm

Today, most professional voice actors work from broadcast-quality home studios with treated recording spaces, industry-standard microphones and interfaces, and the ability to deliver clean, consistent audio fast. For buyers that means no studio rental fees, flexible scheduling, and faster turnaround than booking a traditional studio ever allowed.

### From the Talent Perspective

A pro home studio isn't a compromise, it's an efficiency upgrade.

## What "Broadcast-Ready" Actually Means

You'll hear professional voice actors use the term broadcast-ready to describe their audio. If you're not a technical person, that phrase can feel vague. Here's what it actually means in practical terms.

Broadcast-ready audio meets the technical specifications required for use in professional media without additional processing on your end. That includes proper levels, clean signal with no background noise or room echo, correct file format and sample rate, and audio that has been edited to remove mouth noise, breath artifacts, and mistakes.

When a voice actor delivers broadcast-ready files, you should be able to drop them directly into your edit without sending them back for fixes. That's the whole point.

The alternative is raw audio, which is the unprocessed recording straight from the microphone. Raw audio captures everything including room tone, breaths, and any ambient noise present during the session. Some editors prefer to receive raw audio so they can process it themselves. Most don't.

If you're unsure which you need, ask your editor before the session. Telling the talent upfront takes ten seconds. Finding out afterward and requesting a different format adds time to a delivery schedule that probably doesn't have any to spare.

## Live-Directed Sessions

Live sessions happen in a traditional studio or remotely via Source-Connect, Zoom, phone patch, or similar tools. They work best when timing is critical, performance nuance matters, or multiple stakeholders need to weigh in. The key to a productive live session is clear leadership. When direction comes from one voice, the session moves. When it comes from several people at once, it doesn't.

## Self-Directed Sessions

Self-directed sessions are common and effective when direction is clear upfront, the talent is experienced, and the project isn't heavily performance-dependent. In these cases talent will typically record multiple takes, flag options worth noting, and deliver clean labeled files. Trust plus clarity produces better results than micromanagement every time.

## Get Your Specs to Talent Before the Session

Before recording, buyers should confirm:

- File format (WAV, AIFF, MP3)
- Sample rate and bit depth
- Mono or stereo
- Naming conventions
- Delivery method

If you don't know what specs you need, ask your editor or sound designer before the recording happens. Finding out after the fact almost always costs you time you didn't budget for.

## Pacing, Timing, and Performance Control

Voice actors actively manage pacing for clarity, emphasis for meaning, breath control, and consistency across takes. These aren't afterthoughts. They're deliberate choices made in real time during the session. If exact timing is critical to your project, say so upfront. Otherwise, trust the talent to deliver a natural read that serves the content.

### From the Talent Perspective

If you have specific timing requirements, let the talent know up front. Finding out after the recording takes place often means the entire project needs to be re-recorded. That's very frustrating for the talent.

## Pronunciations and Brand Language

If your script includes brand names, technical terms, or industry jargon, provide a pronunciation guide before the session. Don't assume the talent will figure it out. A quick phonetic spelling in the brief takes thirty seconds to write and saves everyone from a re-record that could have been avoided entirely.

## File Delivery and Turnaround

Most professional voice actors deliver same day or next business day with organized, clearly labeled files. If pickups are needed, they're handled promptly. If your deadline is tight, say so upfront. Talent can often accommodate, but they need to know before the session, not after.

## What Talent Is (Quietly) Managing

Behind the scenes, talent is monitoring audio quality, eliminating mouth noise, managing room tone, and keeping performance consistent across every take. None of that shows up in the final file if it's done right. That's the point. Experienced talent may cost more upfront, but the time and revision rounds they save you more than make up the difference.

## From the Talent Perspective

What you don't hear is often the result of experience.

### A Common Pain Point

A buyer once asked for raw audio and later complained about mouth clicks and breaths. What they actually wanted was clean, lightly processed audio. Most experienced talent will save a completely raw version regardless, but the language you use upfront determines what lands in your inbox. If you're unsure what to ask for, just ask.

### Bottom Line

Recording is a controlled process, not a guessing game. When you give talent the specs they need, trust the professional setup they've built, and communicate your timeline upfront, the recording stage takes care of itself. Clean files, fast delivery, no surprises.

**Key Takeaway:** Clear specs and realistic expectations equal smooth delivery.

# Chapter 8 – Revisions & Timelines



## Revisions, Pickups, Timelines, and Project Management

Most voice over projects don't fall apart during casting or recording. They fall apart *after delivery*—when feedback gets scattered, expectations shift, or approvals weren't clearly defined.

This chapter exists to prevent that.

### From the Talent Perspective

The smoother the approval process, the fewer revisions everyone has to deal with.

## What Counts as a Revision (and What Doesn't)

This is one of the most common friction points.

A **revision** usually means:

- Adjusting pacing
- Slight tone changes
- Minor performance tweaks
- Fixing a genuine mistake

A **script change** means:

- New copy
- Rewritten lines
- Messaging changes
- Added sections

Script changes are new work. Treating them as revisions creates tension fast.

Clear definitions upfront prevent awkward conversations later.

## What Is a Pickup Session?

A pickup is a re-record of specific lines or sections after the main session has been completed and delivered. It's one of the most common parts of the voice over process and one of the least understood by buyers who are newer to production.

Pickups happen for a number of reasons. The client changes a line after hearing the final audio. Legal reviews a script and requires wording adjustments. A timing issue surfaces in the edit. These are normal parts of production and most professional talent handle them without friction.

What buyers sometimes don't anticipate is that pickups have a cost. If the change is due to a genuine mistake made by the talent, most will fix it at no charge. If the change is driven by a script update, a client revision, or a creative shift after approval, that's new work and should be treated as such.

A few things that help:

Lock the script before recording starts. The single biggest source of unexpected pickups is copy that wasn't fully approved before the session.

Consolidate feedback before sending it. Multiple rounds of notes from different stakeholders at different times almost always result in more pickups than one coordinated round would have.

Budget for at least one pickup session on any project with multiple stakeholders or a longer approval chain. It's not pessimism. It's realistic production planning.

## Why Consolidated Feedback Matters

When feedback comes from multiple people at different times, revisions multiply. The cleaner approach is one decision maker, one round of consolidated notes, and a clear sense of priority. That saves time for everyone and almost always results in a tighter final product.

## Approval Before Recording

If there's one thing worth repeating in this chapter, it's this: lock the script before recording starts. Every avoidable pickup, every re-record, almost every timeline problem in voice over production traces back to copy that wasn't fully approved before the session began.

### From the Talent Perspective

"Approved to record" is one of the most important phrases in the process. Be sure that all approvals are verified before giving talent the go ahead to record.

## Timelines and Turnaround Expectations

Most professional voice actors can turn projects around fast. Same day delivery is common. Rush jobs are often possible. But fast turnaround requires advance notice. A tight deadline communicated the morning of is a different problem than one communicated a day before. The earlier you flag it, the more options you have.

## Managing Late-Stage Changes

Late changes happen. When they do, be upfront about it, expect that additional fees may apply, and reset the timeline if needed. Transparency keeps the relationship intact.

## Project Management from the Talent Side

Behind the scenes talent is managing session scheduling, file organization, version control, and performance consistency across every take. Most buyers never see any of that. When it's done well, they shouldn't have to.

### From the Talent Perspective

The best talent isn't just responsive, they're proactive. They can even help you spot potential problems and address them before they become an issue.

## A Common Breakdown Scenario

Here's a scenario that plays out more often than it should. A project gets creative approval from one person, legal notes from another, and marketing tweaks from a third, all at different times. The result is multiple pickup sessions that could have been one if the feedback had been consolidated before it went to talent. It's preventable every time. It just requires coordination.

## How to Reduce Revisions

The fix is almost always upstream. Lock the script before recording starts. Get everyone aligned on direction and feedback before it goes to talent. Give clear references for tone and be specific about what you want the listener to do or feel after hearing it. When those things are handled before the session, most fixes never happen in the first place. That's where the time and money are saved.

## Bottom Line

Revisions aren't the problem. Unmanaged revisions are.

Define what's included before the project starts. Consolidate feedback before it goes to talent. Respect timelines and everyone's time. Do those things consistently and revisions stop being a problem.

**Key Takeaway:** Clear process beats endless flexibility.

# Chapter 9 – Long-Term Relationships



## Building Long-Term Relationships with Voice Talent

Most voice actors don't build careers on one-off jobs. We build them on relationships.

The same is true on the buyer side. The best producers, agencies, and creative directors aren't constantly reinventing the wheel. They work with people they trust and they get better results because of it.

Long-term relationships create better work, faster turnarounds, and fewer surprises.

## Why Consistency Matters

When talent understands your brand, your tone, and your expectations, the work improves over time. You spend less time explaining. They spend less time guessing. The reads get tighter, the sessions get shorter, and the relationship starts doing work on its own.

## Communication Is the Real Currency

The most valued clients aren't always the biggest budgets... they're the clearest communicators.

That means clear briefs, honest timelines, direct feedback, and upfront expectations. None of those things are complicated. They just require intention.

## From the Talent Perspective

When a client communicates clearly from the start it shows that they respect the talent's time and skillset.

## Fair Rates Build Trust

Paying fairly and on time signals professionalism more clearly than any other single thing a buyer can do. You don't need an unlimited budget. You need transparency. When talent understands the scope and the constraints upfront, there's almost always a workable path. What kills relationships isn't a tight budget. It's a tight budget that nobody mentions until after the work is done.

## Respecting Boundaries

Professional talent tracks their usage agreements, manages brand conflicts, and protects the associations they've built. When you honor the terms you agreed to, you don't have to be reminded. That's the foundation of a relationship that gets better over time, not one that has to be renegotiated on every project.

## Why Talent Goes the Extra Mile

When clients communicate clearly, pay promptly, and respect expertise, talent responds by prioritizing their projects, offering flexibility, and being proactive. That's not favoritism. That's professional reciprocity. The clients who treat this like a partnership get better work than the ones who treat it like a transaction. And they get it faster, with less friction, every single time.

## A Real-World Example

There are clients I'll move mountains for. Not because they pay the most, but because they're organized, respectful, and clear. They have become relationships over time, built on mutual trust, that I hold dear.

That reputation matters more than most people realize.

## Bottom Line

The best working relationships in this industry don't feel like transactions. They feel like the next call is one both sides are looking forward to. That happens when buyers treat talent as partners, communicate clearly, and honor what they agreed to. Do those things consistently and the relationship pays dividends on every project that follows.

**Final Takeaway:** Trust is the most valuable thing you can build in this industry. It's not there on the first project. It grows with each one. Over time the relationship shifts from transactional to collaborative, and that's when the best work happens.

# Chapter 10 – AI, Voice Cloning, and Where the Industry Is Drawing the Line



## AI, Voice Cloning, and the Future of Voice Over

AI isn't the enemy. Ignoring it won't make it go away, and pretending it's just a useful tool without understanding the rules creates real risk for you specifically. Used responsibly, AI can function as a placeholder or a support tool. Used carelessly, it's a liability. The biggest risk for buyers isn't the technology itself. It's the legal and ethical exposure that comes from not understanding how it works.

### How AI Impacts Voice Talent

AI voice tech analyzes recorded human speech and generates synthetic audio. With enough data, it can mimic a voice almost perfectly.

That's where the problem starts. A voice isn't just sound. It's someone's identity, reputation, and livelihood. Using a person's voice without consent creates risks that go beyond ethics:

- **Misrepresentation:** A voice can be used in ways the actor never agreed to.
- **Brand conflict:** Associating a voice with a product or message without permission can backfire.
- **Future work lost:** If a clone exists, it may replace paid work opportunities.

From a buyer's perspective, this is the critical takeaway: consent isn't optional, and liability is real.

### Legal Ownership: You Don't Own What You Think You Do

Under current US Copyright Office guidance, AI-generated content cannot be copyrighted in the same way human-created work can. Even if you commissioned it or paid for it, you may not have exclusive rights to it. Someone else could legally reuse it, leaving you exposed.

This area of law is actively evolving. What's true today may look different in two years. That's not a reason to avoid AI tools entirely, but it is a reason to stay informed and to build explicit ownership language into any agreement where AI-generated content is involved.

This is especially important for:

- National or commercial campaigns
- Corporate training or internal content
- Branding and messaging that relies on exclusivity

Simply put: paying for AI output doesn't automatically make it yours. Get the agreements in writing and revisit them as the legal landscape changes.

### When AI Can Be Used Safely

There are situations where AI makes sense:

- Temporary placeholders for script reviews or demos
- Accessibility tools or quick prototypes
- Explicitly agreed-upon, licensed AI usage with clear compensation

The rule is simple: get it in writing. Define what the AI can do, where it can be used, and how long it can exist. Anything less is leaving yourself, and the talent, open to problems.

## When AI Crosses the Line

Problems appear when:

- Past sessions are used to train AI without consent
- AI-generated voices are deployed commercially without licensing
- Voice clones are created or sold without the performer's approval

At that point, it's no longer just a tech question. It's a legal, ethical, and financial one, and the buyer carries the risk.

## Why Buyer Liability is Real

Even if you think "it's just AI," the law doesn't absolve you. Misuse can result in:

- Claims of intellectual property infringement
- Damage to your brand or reputation
- Unexpected disputes with performers or unions

Remember: the voice behind the AI created value. Without their consent, you've assumed their risk... and yours.

## Industry Protections and Best Practices

Here's what professional organizations were doing as of this writing:

SAG-AFTRA negotiated AI protections in their 2023 contract requiring disclosure and consent before a performer's voice can be cloned or replicated. The National Association of Voice Actors (NAVA) provides education, AI contract riders, and ethical guidelines for both talent and buyers.

These protections are a starting point, not a finish line. AI regulation in the entertainment and media industries is moving fast. What was negotiated in 2023 is already being revisited as the technology outpaces the agreements designed to govern it.

If AI is part of your production workflow, it's worth staying current on where these protections stand. What you agreed to two years ago may not reflect what's enforceable or expected today.

From the talent side, the goal hasn't changed: no one's voice should be used without consent, control, and compensation. From the buyer side, staying informed protects you from liability that didn't exist when you last checked.

## What Buyers Should Do

If AI is in play:

- 1) Disclose upfront to everyone involved.
- 2) Get written consent from any human voice used for training.
- 3) Define scope and usage explicitly.
- 4) Set clear compensation and licensing terms.
- 5) Avoid assuming ownership of AI-generated output without explicit rights.

Treat AI like any other professional tool: it's useful when managed responsibly, dangerous when left unchecked.

## Bottom Line

AI isn't going away, and neither are its risks. The biggest danger for buyers isn't the technology itself... it's assumed control without understanding the rules.

When you handle AI transparently, with consent and clear agreements, it can coexist with professional voice work. Ignore these rules, and you're exposing yourself, your brand, and your project. The technology isn't going anywhere. Neither is the responsibility that comes with using it.

**Key Takeaway:** Transparency, documentation, and respect for talent protect everyone. Always.

# Final Thoughts



FINAL  
THOUGHTS

## A Final Word

If you've made it this far, you now understand something most people hiring voice talent never see.

Voice over isn't just a line item. It's a collaboration that includes performance, production, legal usage, and brand representation.

When those pieces align, voice over becomes one of the easiest parts of any project. Clean files, on time, no back and forth. When they don't, it becomes the bottleneck nobody planned for. This guide exists to make the first outcome the one you can count on.

### From the Talent Perspective

Most great voice over work happens when nobody has to think about it twice.

## About the Author

I'm a working voice actor in Houston, TX. This guide comes from years of working inside the industry, across commercial, corporate, and eLearning production. Not theory. Lived experience.

I work with:

- Producers
- Agencies
- Creative directors
- Production teams
- Brands of all sizes

I've seen what works, what breaks down, and what creates unnecessary friction. Everything in this book comes from that experience.

If you take one thing away, let it be this: clear communication solves most problems before they exist.

## Industry References and Standards

Throughout this book, I reference commonly accepted industry practices, including guidance from the [GVAA Rate Guide](#).

These references are included to:

- Provide context
- Establish transparency
- Support informed discussions

They are not mandates or fixed pricing structures. Every project is different, and rates should always reflect actual usage and scope.

I have also referenced [SAG-AFTRA](#) which is the joint American labor union for talent. Created in 2012, it is the merger between the Screen Actor's Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. They currently represent approximately 160,000 members at the time of this writing.

I encourage you to take some time to get to know who they are and how they operate.

## Optional Risk-Mitigating Language (For Buyers)

You don't need to use this verbatim, but language like this prevents misunderstandings:

"Voice over usage is limited to the platforms and duration outlined in this agreement. Any additional usage will require written approval and may incur additional fees."

"One round of minor performance revisions is included. Script changes or new copy will be billed separately."

"Final script approval is required prior to recording."

## From the Talent Perspective

Clear language protects relationships, not just contracts.

## Why Relationships Matter More Than Ever

Technology has made voice over easier to access. Trust is still the differentiator. The clients who get the best work, the fastest turnarounds, and the most flexibility are the ones who communicate clearly, respect expertise, and honor agreements. Those clients get prioritized. Every time.

## If You Remember Nothing Else

Clear expectations. Defined usage. Honest communication. That's not a talent issue or a buyer issue. That's a professional standard. And it's what separates projects that run smoothly from ones that don't.

## Thank You

Thank you for taking the time to understand this part of the process.

If this guide helped you plan better, collaborate more easily, or avoid frustration, then it did exactly what it was meant to do.

## Contact & Collaboration

If you ever need:

- Guidance on usage
- Help structuring a voice over budget
- A voice that understands production realities

You now know how I work, and how I think.

If you have a project coming up and want to hear how your script actually sounds before committing to anything, a custom audition costs you nothing and takes me about an hour. Just reach out.

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# Legal & Usage Disclaimer



This book is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. Voice over rates, usage terms, and union regulations vary by project, region, and agreement. Readers should consult legal counsel or appropriate union representatives when drafting contracts or agreements. References to industry standards, including the [GVAA Rate Guide](#), [SAG-AFTRA](#), and [NAVA](#) are for educational context only.

# THE INSIDER'S GUIDE TO VOICE OVER

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