



NARRATING YOUR OWN BOOK

Excerpted from “The Author’s Guide to Audiobook Creation” by Richard Rieman
<https://www.amazon.com/Authors-Guide-AudioBook-Creation/dp/0997100206>

Richard can be found on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Google+](#) and [You Tube](#).

Should You Be a “Do-It-Yourselfer?”

There are a few good reasons to narrate your own book, and some reasons why you should not.

Why you should:

1. It's your book and your words, so you can tell your story best. You know your characters, your story or subject, and the thinking behind your words better than anyone else.
2. You keep more money. If you pay a narrator, you will either share royalties or pay them upfront to produce your audiobook. When you narrate your own book, your audiobook’s royalty payments go to you (after your publisher or ACX takes a big chunk of it).
3. You can be your own *narrator* if:
 - You are a trained voice actor
 - You are a professional actor
 - You have a background in public speaking
 - You are a radio air talent or news anchor
 - You have read a lot of books for volunteer studios like Learning Ally and feel comfortable behind a microphone.

None of the above? Then get a professional to do it—please. It really is a lot harder than it looks. You could perform surgery on your own brain, but wow, what a mess!

What if you have been told what a great voice you have? Having a good voice is a very small part of audiobook narration. Even experienced voice-over talent can struggle when they try the long-form audiobook narration format. Imagine a bunch of reviews on your book page complaining about the narrator. That's not something you want your readers to see.

OK, if you are going to go ahead and narrate your own book, here are some tips: First, take the test created by top audiobook narrator (and one of my inspirations) Sean Pratt, who writes in his blog at SeanPrattPresents.com:

Set up a table and chair, along with a book or music stand, in some confined place in your home, i.e. a walk-in closet, alcove, or facing into the corner of a room. Put the book on the stand, grab a lamp or something to shine on the text, and then turn off any overhead light. What you're doing is mimicking what it's like to be in a sound booth.

Now, read aloud for at least three hours a day for the next two weeks. If you stumble on a word, stop ... and begin that sentence again. If you come across a word, phrase, or person that you don't know and can't pronounce, stop ... go online and look it up ... NO GUESSING! And don't just drone on and on, people! Your job is to entertain me, the listener, so keep up your energy, delivery and tempo. Got that? Good! That's the test.

Now that you've passed the test, listen to the playback. That will go a long way to tell you whether you should narrate your own book!

Narration Tricks of the Trade

- Unless you are paying a producer to be in the recording studio with you, you are entering the world of "directionless storytelling." Almost all audiobooks are now narrated by actors without directors.
 - Showcase the story, NOT your voice. Stop trying to sound good. Don't try to be careful as you read, when the person you are trying to be is not being careful.
 - Use an iPad or Android tablet. You can scroll quietly, see the words better in a dark reading environment, and there are built-in programs that allow you to add notes when absolutely necessary. Reading from your book or 400 pages of paper, creates many problems beyond killing trees.
 - First, turning pages is noisy, and it's a noise that will need to be edited out of your recording. With paper pages you will be tempted to write lots of notes about emphasis

or pronunciations. Looking at those notes while you read takes you out of the words,” and you won’t be paying attention to the most important thing of all ... telling the story!

Recording Studio Tips and Etiquette

For the highest quality narration, record in a local professional studio. Rates can be as low as \$50 per hour of studio time or can run as high as \$100-\$200 per hour. It will take you up to two hours of recording time to get one finished recorded hour of narration.

Taylor Franklin, Managing Audio Engineer at the Denver Media Center Recording Studios, has some tips:

One of the worst things a narrator can do in the studio is to change something without talking to the engineer. Everything is set up a particular way. You might not realize it, but moving a microphone just an inch or two will change the sound quite a bit. On top of that, if you tip over a \$3,000 mic, you are going to have a bad day.

I had a narrator in the studio that wanted to stand, I always recommend sitting while you read as long as you maintain good posture. The narrator kept inching away from the mic, by the time we were done he had moved about three feet back! Slow changes like this are hard to catch right away, but they make a huge impact.

Taylor adds that studio prep is key:

When you come into the studio, make sure you are rested and relaxed. Your job is to narrate and the engineer’s job is to make you sound fantastic. Focus and consistency are key elements to a great audiobook.

As a professional narrator, my own tips include:

- Make sure you eat a meal before you record, but no sooner than two hours before you start. Otherwise, the dreaded growling gurgling tummy rumbles will be the background track.
- Drink lots of water, preferably warm water up to two hours prior to recording. Sip water during breaks. Avoid coffee and strong teas. These can add lots of mouth clicks and smacks.
- For long recording days, hot tea with honey or “Throat Coat” brand tea can help soothe your throat post-recording.

Editing

You can have a professional edit the files for you.

AudioBook producers talk in terms of “finished hours.” Finished hours are the actual running time of the book after the final editing is complete.

Because it can take two to four hours (or more) to edit together a finished hour of audio, \$25 to \$75 per hour of actual editing time, or \$50 to \$100 per finished hour, the finished hour” methodology is not that expensive. If you haven’t edited your own audio before, you can expect a huge learning curve that requires at least six hours to get one hour of audio.

Tech Stuff

There are minimum technical standards for audiobooks. Amazon’s Audiobook Production company ACX specs are minimums. Please be aware that the major production studios would not accept audio levels at ACX minimums. And guess what? Recording yourself on your iPhone or other Smartphone won’t be good enough!

Your audiobook submitted to ACX must:

- be consistent in overall sound and formatting and be comprised of all mono (preferable) or all stereo files;
- include opening and closing credits and a retail audio sample that is between one and five minutes long;
- contain only one chapter/section that's shorter than 120 minutes and the section header must be read aloud;
- have room tone at the head and at the tail and be free of extraneous sounds;
- measure between -23dB and -18dB RMS and have -3dB peak values and a maximum -60dB noise floor; and
- be a 192kbps or higher mp3, Constant Bit Rate (CBR) at 44.1 kHz.

Is this all gibberish? That’s a good reason to use a professional audio editor, or use an experienced narrator who speaks in “decibel.”

Creating Your Own Low-Cost Home Recording Setup

If you are going to record your own book, plan to spend hundreds or thousands of dollars on the necessary software and equipment. Let’s look at the least expensive basic ways to produce your own audiobook.

1. A Good Microphone

Some microphones my fellow narrators recommend are the AT2020 USB, the Shure PG42 USB, and the Rode NT 1-A. Your built-in laptop, tablet, or smartphone microphones will

NOT generate high enough quality recordings. Want to know how you will sound? Some music stores, such as Guitar Center, will allow you to hear yourself on different mics you are considering.

2. Recording Software

Most of the expensive Digital Audio Workstations (DAWs) are overkill for audiobook narration. Recording and editing software can be found for free (Audacity for PC), for less than \$20 (Apple's GarageBand) or for under \$100 (TwistedWave for Macs or TwistedWave online for PCs). Each one has a learning curve!

3. Recording Interface

If you have a higher quality condenser microphone, you will need a box that makes computers play nice with microphones. Inexpensive interfaces are made by Focusrite, Grace, Behringer and PreSonus.

4. Tablet (Kindle, e-Reader, iPad)

Reading off paper pages is the cheapest (but not cheap, when you consider the cost of ink and paper). It is much better to read a PDF or Word document off a tablet computer to cut down on noise. If you have excellent eyesight, you can even read off your smartphone.

5. Acoustic Treatment

You need to cut down background noise and sound reflections for a decent quality recording. If you are not going to spend thousands of dollars on a professional audio booth, try these alternatives:

- Moving blankets hung on curtain rods.
- Using a walk-in closet filled with sound-dampening clothes.
- Using a portable sound "booth" such as those made by sE Electronics, VocalBoothToGo, and Harlan Hogan's Porta-Booths.

None of these will be "soundproof," but you can get basic acceptable audio quality.

Richard Rieman of AudiobookRevolution.com is an audiobook self-publishing consultant, a top Audible narrator, and an in-studio producer of authors narrating their own titles. Richard is author of "[The Author's Guide to Audiobook Creation](#)," Gold Medal Winner of the 2016 Global eBook Award in Writing/Publishing.