Working with MSC: Producing High-Quality Voiceovers

Great voiceovers make our campaigns shine! We're excited to partner with talented artists like you to help connect New York State agencies with the New Yorkers they serve. Our in-house team of editors created this guide to prepare you for recording high-quality voiceovers.

Necessary equipment

- Microphone with stand
  - There are many **microphones** available, but if you're unsure about what to buy, we recommend the [Rode NT-USB](#) (which has a built-in **pop filter**) or a [Shure MV7](#) (for which you can buy a [pop filter](#) separately).

- Recorder
  - A **noiseless recorder is best**, like a **laptop** (as long as you can't hear its fan or any alerts that may be sounding from it).
  - Your phone, even a cutting-edge model, is not an acceptable recording device.

- Headphones
  - Quality, **over-the-ear headphones** are the key to success. It's important to **listen closely to your work**, especially after you record. We recommend the industry standard, the [Sony MDR-7506.](#)
  - AirPods or earbuds are not an acceptable solution.

- Paper stand
  - You'll want **[something](#) to hold your script** at an angle that allows you to read comfortably and keep your scripts organized. Relatedly, please be mindful not to rustle papers while reading.
  - We don't advise recording while looking straight down at a piece of paper.

Your recording space

Record in a relatively **small, quiet, dead space** and avoid rooms with hard, flat, untreated walls. If you aren't sure, visit the quietest space in your home, close the door, and clap your hands. If it's a "live space" (where there's an echo or reverberation off hard surfaces), keep moving. If it's a "dead space" (where fabric absorbs sounds before they're reflected), you're ready to set up to record.

If you don't have a dedicated studio or your space is limited, we recommend a walk-in closet with racks of clothes: The **fabric will absorb wayward sound**, and your

recording will be relatively free of reverberation, which is difficult to remove from a recording.

It's important to record in a room **free of background noise**, even if you may not consider the sounds to be loud or noticeable. Take inventory of the room: If there is an air conditioner, a refrigerator, an open window, a ticking clock, or an affectionate pet, the microphone is likely to pick it up.

The recording session

If you're using a laptop, always **record using software familiar to you**. A platform that lets you to **control the input level** is key, and one that also allows for **simple post-session editing** is even better.

Set the mic eight to ten inches from your mouth, and the pop filter about an inch from the mic. Grab a glass of water to keep nearby. Put your shoulders back, head up, and make sure your airway isn't constricted.

Make a test recording and adjust your settings: Your file should be in **WAV or AIF format** (not MP3), with at least **16-bit** depth and **48 KHz** sample rate. Record at a level that **peaks between -6 and -18 decibels**. "Clipped" peaks that go up to and over the top of the decibel scale can't be used or repaired, and levels that are too low have to be amplified in post-production, raising the overall background noise level.

Now listen with your over-the-ear headphones. How does it sound? How does the waveform look – like big peaks with flat tops ("clipped" peaks) or like a row of tiny ants walking (signal level too low)? Adjust accordingly.

Here are a few nuts-and-bolts tips for your recording session.

- Spend some time thinking about the final product before you record.
    - If it's a **long-form project**, discuss with the producer or editor whether they would like **alternate versions**.
    - For **short-form content**, it's helpful for the editor to work with **several takes** for variety.
    - **Don't worry about the length of your recording** too much. Sounding rushed can't be fixed, but reading a 30-second script in 34 seconds can be remedied.
    - If you have concerns about running too far over, or scripting issues like awkward phrasing or tricky pronunciation, **talk with your MSC contact**, who can work with you to make changes so you don't compromise the quality of your read. We are happy to take time to get it right ahead of time!

- **Define your takes** audibly. For instance, say something like, "This is script one, take two."

- **Rehearse** and get comfortable with the copy.

- Think about your **breath** and the **tone** that the content commands.

- If you need to re-read part of the script, **start the sentence over and read the complete sentence again** instead of picking up in the middle of a thought.

Post-session work

Listen again with headphones and **check your levels**. If everything looks good, feel free to **edit out the fails and flubs**, but avoid removing breath sounds or performing major surgery to your track.

Save your work in **WAV or AIF format**. We don't advise sending MP3s, even if they're small file sizes and easy to send – they are harder to edit if the settings are less than perfect. We can help you deliver larger files if needed.

Title your files with your name, project name, the date, or other descriptors.

If provided in your contract or agreement, **be ready for retakes** just in case. Sometimes the client thinks changing the words in a document is the same as changing a voiceover, or we just want you to sound as good as possible. Either way, it's not personal. We truly value your expertise and are excited to continue working with you!