

SELF-DIRECTING IN VOICE ACTING

CRITICAL APPLICATION OF YOUR CRAFT

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What I have written here in the following pages is a summary of what we will be covering in the class. Voice acting is an art form and takes constant study and honing of the craft. I encourage each of you to always practice, create and learn, without hesitation or excuse.

Approach your scripts (commercial, animation or narration) with curiosity and deductive reasoning. You have to be a good detective about your script in order to render excellent performance. This is particularly true with voice over, since we can't see the subtlety of your facial expression; effective emoting must come through the voice. Practice random association (and random acts of kindness too!) But random association is a wonderful tool to use as you approach any script. What does each element of the script make you immediately think of? Just by thinking of these things, you are creating a new reality for yourself in relation to this script. Let your inner child come out and play. Give your imagination license to soar!

Just as with film acting, you have to be completely present and vulnerable in the moment. Flexible, and ready to bend, jump and fly, the physicality that you develop should be channeled into your voice, bringing inner life to animated characters, and approachable, emotive qualities to otherwise dull or "silly" commercial copy.

Find out more about what is going on in your script, with curiosity and intent.

This is what a director does. Now is your moment to be that director! Embrace this opportunity. Then, separate the directing job from your acting job. By the way, you also have to treat your sound recording as a separate trade. So, as you see, in order to successfully self-direct and record on your own, it is necessary to not only be a great actor, but a great director and competent sound engineer too.

Be able to critique yourself objectively. Don't be too hard on yourself (i.e. "I don't like the way my voice sounds"). Don't be too easy on yourself either (i.e. "Good enough, I have something else I have to get to.") I find that a great time to work on my VO auditions and projects is in my studio, late at night, when all the other chores are taken care of, then I can focus on the script without the distractions of the daytime. Don't think of it as just laying down some copy and getting on with your life. Enjoy each word that you say as if you

love what you are saying; and that is why you are sharing this performance with everyone. This doesn't mean to let your voice get pompous sounding (as if you love sound of your own voice), unless that is a character trait specifically called for! No matter what, have fun!

Approach your copy and your home recording session as if you were the director of the project. Anticipate the elements that are needed to make this script come alive. What would you want from the project if



you were the advertiser, the advertising agency, the director or the writer? Ask yourself those questions and start being able to apply a broader frame of reference to the script than you would if you were approaching it only as an actor.

After your contextual frame of reference begins to broaden, it will never want to stop! How wonderful! Now the challenge is to not let your newfound left-brained, critical analysis approach cloud your right brain's emotive, intuitive and expressive qualities. You are striving for a blend of logical script analysis with intuitive, organic and creative vocalizations based on the way the dialogue or monologue makes you feel.

Take a good piece of animation copy. There is some animated copy on the following pages that I have written. Understand the parentheticals and the visual descriptions that are interspersed between lines of dialogue. These parentheticals are your secret skeleton key to success. Good scripts have most all of the acting choices written in. Use it! Don't try to reinvent the wheel. If you want to ad lib or improvise — go ahead — play! But do so in between and after the beats, lines and plot points that the writers have already given you. In other words, you may add to the script in improv, but don't change it.

Over the years, I have noticed that many actors — particularly voice actors — are so sure of themselves, that they are ready to read the lines before they have understood or read the writer's parenthetical notations. This is such a basic thing, but I can't tell you how many times these little clues get missed by performers.

Also, when you are working with other directors, please be professional, a good listener and feedback what they've asked for without a reticent attitude. Don't think that you are doing a bad job and get in your head just because a director asked for

something different than the performance you gave. Also, don't be offended by line readings. Directors give you notes and readings because they like you and like your work. A director is your best friend in a session; and if you are fully invested in the actor/director relationship, you will realize that the director is the proverbial muse to your artistry! Listen carefully. If there is a director that you particularly enjoy working with, get to know that person. Understand how and why they ask for what they do. Then when you are working by yourself, you can apply what you have learned to your self-direction.

Now for a few notes on self-sound engineering: Mic and recording technique are where a lot of VO actors fall flat. Their home studio auditions sound like they were recorded, well, at home. I can't tell you how many poor sound quality auditions and demos have come across my desk. I usually delete them, unless the content is stellar despite the poor sound quality. Most of the time, poor sound quality is a dead give away that there wasn't much though or effort put into the audition or demo.

So, make sure that you have a good quality condenser microphone and that it is properly mounted on a sturdy stand. Don't cut corners here. Use high quality cables. If you buy good tools, they will last you a very long time. A great microphone to get started with is the Shure KSM 27, large diaphragm condenser mic. You can go up from there if you like. However, "gig type," dynamic microphones are generally not articulate enough for really good sounding VO. See me for more info on this.

Run any of the MBox systems with ProTools LE software that is compatible with your computer. Get good at audio editing. While recording often seems ancillary to your VO performance, there is so much control and creativity in your hands once you really understand this craft. While

this particular segment isn't about editing and engineering, it should suffice to say that you should get properly trained on the technology. ProTools is the industry standard of recording software. It's a good idea to get used to it.

When working on commercial copy, a great question is: "Did ya believe any of that stuff . . .?" In other words, ask if you believe yourself; would you buy the product from yourself? This is where playback is important. Do several takes in a row. Play them all back and listen critically. Compare takes. Make edits. Choose portions from one take that are compelling and different portions from another if they fit together and move the story along.

Remember that your performance isn't all about you. It is actually all about the story (even in commercials). Stories are what compel viewers and audiences. Stories compel people to laugh, cry, let go of their own troubles, and more importantly — buy things! Moving the story needs to be your first priority. You need to feel good about it, but that is only secondary, at least while you are nailing down technique. After your technique is solid, then you have artistic license to focus more on your emotive feelings.

Any art form, when successfully employed, is really an articulate balance between your feelings as an artist, and years of trained technique, of course with guided muse input. Under no circumstances do I recommend "flying by the seat of your pants" as a business model for trying to succeed in voice over, or any other aspect of the entertainment industry. Most importantly, you've gotta have fun! If it isn't fun, choose a different career that is! Your creative time is your playtime. Commit to it. Fly with it. Collaborate with it. Make others laugh and cry. Only then, are you changing the world!

If you want to discuss any of these concepts further, please schedule a private coaching with me.

*The following pages contain sides from a new animated pilot. We will be working on these sides in the class. The material is property of Allport Productions. It is unpublished and may not be duplicated, disclosed or distributed to unauthorized third parties.



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