



Case Study - Script Preparation for Voice Talent: Before and After

Purpose:

The following is one in a series of tip sheets you might use as a guide for preparing cost-effective voiceover scripts.

Outcome:

No matter the type of script you're preparing, you can reduce recording and talent costs by consistently sticking to a few basic rules in preparing your voiceover copy for the engineer and talent.

Actors, directors, marketers, PR managers and copy editors all have an idea as to how the voicing of their words will create a desired impact. The following is NOT about artistic interpretation; rather it is a guideline for preparing your final copy in the clearest and most concise manner to prevent confusion on the actor's part, especially if the recording is being done remotely. These simple techniques are also used in radio for newscasters for smooth reading on the fly. Retakes in recording cost money, and are often unnecessary and due to poorly managed copy and unfamiliarity with how actors work with words on paper.

In general, make phonetic edits directly within the copy; interpretation guidance should be given verbally or written on a separate page for the actor to be clear as to your intent without you inserting a lot of direction in the actual script that make the copy hard to read.

In advance of your recording think about:

Word pronunciations:

Is your company name hard to pronounce or unfamiliar? Spell out any potentially tricky words phonetically and don't take *anything* for granted:

Confusing in print	Spell out as
Coccelli Corp.	koh- CHELL -ee Corporation

Numbers:

This is especially critical for ESL texts (English for Speakers of other Languages). Depending at what level the language is being taught, how exactly do you need numbers (for example) to be read?

Confusing in print	Spell out as
150	One hundred fifty (or) One hundred and fifty (or) One-fifty

Who is your audience?

Once again using ESL as an example, think about how well-enunciated the copy should be. More advanced classes may teach a more relaxed, colloquial sound than beginner classes. Indicate as much as possible verbally and in written form what you need from the actor. How natural do you want the copy to sound; or is clarity more important? A funny commercial will be more relaxed sounding than a PSA about annuities.

Confusing in print	Spell out (or indicate to actor in advance)
would you	would you (or) would ya
did not	did not (or) didn't
Let's go shopping in Greenwich Village!	Let's go shopping in GREN-itch village (or) Let's go shopping in the Village!

Inflection:

When writing copy with numbers or lists of items, sometimes it's helpful to indicate whether the actor's voice should rise or fall to give certain emphasis and meaning. Good actors will intuit this but if you feel the need, inflection is often indicated using the ellipsis (...) Placement of the ellipsis will tell experienced actors your "inflection intention":

Confusing in print	Spell out (or indicate to actor in advance)
1-20	"Read the numbers one through twenty with a neutral inflection throughout and a brief pause in between each number" (or)
5, 10, 15, 20...	...5...10...15...20... (<i>Ellipsis on both sides of the number indicates a neutral inflection throughout</i>). "Speak the numbers slowly, with three seconds in between each number to give the student time to repeat."
I needed clothes, books, paper, pencils, and a calculator.	"End all lists with a downward inflection." I needed clothes...books...paper...pencils...and a calculator. (<i>Ellipsis following word indicates upward inflection.</i>)

Final copy:

Important: Make sure you are working with final approved copy. You'd be surprised how many times the wrong version comes into the studio, is recorded, and then must be edited or re-recorded. Note that anything eliminated from your draft copy should be completely removed (not just crossed out), and a final, clean copy presented to the actor. (Strike-throughs in this copy are presented for draft copy illustration only):

Sample voice prompt scripts:

Before	Better
<p><u>Coccelli Corp. voice prompt:</u> Thank you for calling Coccelli Corp. Please note our menu change for tax questions. For tax information, press 5. For automated information on Life or Annuity products, press 1. For personal assistance on Life or Annuity products, press 2. For Mutual Funds press 3. For Long-term care press 4. For Group life or Group Life conversion press 6. Otherwise, please press 0 for assistance.</p> <p><u>Chase Manhattan voice prompt:</u> Welcome to Chase—where the right relationship is everything. If you are you're calling from a touch-tone phone, please press one 1 , now. Our 24-hour touch tone</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Put overall instructions on a separate page. • Double space your copy. • Use a sans serif font (Arial, Helvetica, MS Sans Serif) that is at least 12 point in size. • Leave wide margins (1.25) for actor notes. <p><u>Coccelli Corp. voice prompt:</u> <i>On separate page of instructions:</i> <i>Unless otherwise noted, all prompt numbers should be spoken with a “downward inflection.</i></p> <p>Thank you for calling koh-CHELL-ee Corporation. Please note our menu change for tax questions. <i>(brief pause)</i> For tax information, press five. For automated information on Life or Annuity products, press one. For personal assistance on Life or Annuity products, press two. For Mutual Funds press three. For Long-term care press four. For Group life or Group Life conversion press ...six...<i>(Note: An ellipsis on both sides of the number indicates a neutral inflection but you should not have to spell it out other than with an ellipsis. You can clearly see it would muddy the reading of copy here)</i> otherwise, please press zero for assistance.</p> <p><u>Chase Manhattan voice prompt:</u> <i>All asterisks should be read as “star”. The “#” sign should be read as “number”.</i> Welcome to Chase—where the right</p>

service allows you to obtain information easily and privately. You will be guided step by step. Simply press the number of your selected option. For most transactions, you will be asked to enter your account number or banking card number and a password. The first five digits of your social security number or your tax **id** serve as your password unless you have requested a special password used exclusively for this service. For Pay by Phone, you will be asked to enter your checking account number, and your Pay by Phone password. To access Pay by Phone, you first must sign up for this service. To sign up for Pay by Phone now, press ***0**.

Once you are familiar with our system, you may skip over the instructions simply by selecting an option. If ~~you would~~ you'd like to speak to a representative at any time, press the * button, and then zero, and your call will be transferred. You can press the number sign to skip to the next transaction or rate. To return to your list of accounts, or to enter another account number, press * six. To return to the previous menu, press * 8. To return to the main menu, press * nine. Many requests will require you to press the **# sign**. The number sign is located in the lower right corner of your touch tone phone.

relationship is everything. If you're calling from a touch-tone phone, please press one, now.

(pause) Thank you.

Our 24-hour touch tone service allows you to obtain information easily and privately. You will be guided step by step. Simply press the number of your selected option. For most transactions, you will be asked to enter your account number or banking card number and a password. *(pause)* The first five digits of your social security number or your tax I.D.

(eye-dee) serve as your password unless you have requested a special password used exclusively for this service. For Pay by Phone, you will be asked to enter your checking account number, and your Pay by Phone password. To access Pay by Phone, you first must sign up for this service. To sign up for Pay by Phone now, press star-zero. *(Pause for 2 beats)*.

Once you are familiar with our system, you may skip over the instructions simply by selecting an option. If you'd like to speak to a representative at any time, press the **star** button, and then zero, and your call will be transferred. You can press the number sign to skip to the next transaction or rate. *(pause)*

To return to your list of accounts, or to enter another account number, press **star** six. To return to the previous menu, press **star** eight.

To return to the main menu, press **star** nine. Many requests will require you to press the **number** sign. The number sign is located in the lower right corner of your touch tone phone.

*Did you find this information useful? Find other tips in the **Making Impact Series** at www.panright.com on the **ARTICLES** page.*

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