

# Estimating Cost for Producing Audiobooks

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## *Introduction*

One of the first questions an author or publisher will ask before committing to an audiobook is "How much will it cost?" The answer to this question first requires answering several other questions. These are:

1. Should the cost of production be royalty based or paid for in full, up front? The latter is referred to as pay-per-performance.
2. Who should narrate the book? The author or a professional voice actor?
3. How long is the book? This is determined by the total word count.

The sections below will address each of the three questions. Once these questions have been answered, the cost of the audiobook can then be calculated.

## *Royalty vs. Pay-Per-Performance*

There are two ways to create and pay for an audiobook. These are royalty based and pay-per-performance based. The differences are described below. Please note that Davis Sound does not engage in royalty work. The description here is used only to serve as a comparison since there are other production companies and solo narrators that will do royalty work.

The term rights holder is referred to either the author or the publisher, depending on who hold the monetary rights and decision rights to the book.

- Pay-per-performance
  - o Rights holder pays for all audiobook production costs up front.
  - o Rights holder owns all rights to the audiobook revenue. Davis Sound holds no ownership or rights after the audiobook is produced.
  - o Once released for digital download, 40% of the audiobook revenue from Audible.com goes to the rights holder.
  - o A wide range of professional narrators available is available.
  - o Davis Sound works exclusively on a pay-per-performance basis.
- Royalty work
  - o No up front cost from rights holder for audiobook production.
  - o A producer/narrator will record the audio in exchange for 20% of the revenue generated by audiobook digital download sales.
  - o The rights holder received 20% of the revenue generated by audiobook digital download sales.
  - o Very limited choice of narrators and usually less than professional audio quality (Few narrators have their own recording capability and are willing to work for royalties only)

### ***Who Should Narrate the Book?***

Audiobooks are commonly narrated by either the author or by professional voice actors. The choice is really the rights holder's, but there are genres that are better suited for one or the other.

In the case of non-fiction books, such as memoirs, business books, family history, or other genres that have a more personal story, it is often better to have the author narrate the book. This gives more personal touch to the story or content. Davis Sound has produced audiobooks in these genres that were narrated by the author. However, if the author is not comfortable recording their own book, it may still be beneficial to use a professional narrator.

In the case of fiction books, narration is almost always done by a professional voice actor. The actor is trained in delivery, expression, character voices, and making the fictional story come alive. All fiction books produced by Davis Sound have been narrated by professionals.

### ***How Long is the Book?***

The length of an audiobook is determined by the total word count. A desired read rate for audiobooks is 9,300 words per hour. Therefore, one can determine the estimated numbers of audio hours by dividing the total word count by 9,300. See the example below.

#### **Example**

- A book is 80,000 words
- Read rate is 9,300 words per hour
- $80,000 / 9,300 = 8.6$  hours for the audiobook

### ***Determining Cost for the Audiobook***

If the audiobook project is pay-per-performance, and is narrated by a professional voice actor, the cost per hour of finished audio at today's rate is \$300. The cost of the total audiobook project will then be \$300 multiplied by the total estimated hours of the book based on word count.

In the case of the 80,000 word example, at \$300 per finished hour and 8.6 hours of audio, the total production cost will be \$2,580. To calculate your book, divide your total word count by 9,300, then multiply by \$300. Please note rates may vary over time and may vary with agency voice talent. Please check with Davis Sound for a current quote for your book.

If the audiobook is to be narrated by the author, the cost will be the same. Authors typically do not have the studio experience of professional voice actors and generally require more studio time and editing. Therefore, the extra time required offsets the cost of the narrator.

## **About Davis Sound, LLC**

Davis Sound is an audio and video production company located in Hopkins, MN. Davis Sound specializes in audiobook production and is certified as an Approved Producer by Amazon's Audible.com business unit for audiobooks. Davis Sound has been involved with over 50 audiobook projects since 2013. Davis Sound works with a wide range of voice actors to do the audiobook narration, or can work with authors interested in reading the books themselves. Narration is done in Davis Sound's professional recording studio. Marshall Davis, owner of Davis Sound, has been involved with recording studios for 35 years as both a recording artist and audio engineer.

For more information on producing your audiobook, contact Davis Sound at 612-968-3384 or by email at [business@davisound.net](mailto:business@davisound.net).