

## Should Authors Narrate Their Own Books?

Written by Marshall Davis, Davis Sound, LLC, Oct 23, 2019

A very common question asked by authors who want to have an audiobook is, “Should I read it myself,” or the statement is made, “I want to narrate it myself.” This is an important topic. Sometimes it makes sense and other times not. This article goes into when it does and doesn’t make sense for the author to narrate his or her own book.

The general belief and industry practice is that it is acceptable for authors to narrate their own books if they are non-fiction. To take it further, there are certain genres and styles that work better for author narration. These include:

1. Memoirs
2. Personal or family stories
3. Professional advice (if the author is an experienced public speaker)

In other words, it works if:

1. If the author has a personal story to tell
2. If the author feels a professional voice actor could not adequately tell their story
3. If the author has a voice that is clear and easy to listen to

These types of books work for author narration because the author is telling a personal story or giving personal advice. The key word is “personal.” Some authors are like pros when it comes to working in a recording studio, but most are not. Listeners can be a bit more forgiving of poorer voice quality and imperfections if they know that it is the author telling their own story and which makes for a more personal touch. As long as the author’s voice is clear and easy to understand, author narration can add to the enjoyment of the book.

However, there are examples of non-fiction categories where it would be best to have a professional narrator. As I mentioned, some authors do well in a studio, but as a general practice, professional voice actors would be beneficial in the following genres.

1. Business books (unless the author is promoting their own business methods)
2. Academic or technical books
3. History
4. Biography
5. How-to guides

For example, if a business book is targeted at corporate executives, or if a history or academic book is targeted at wide audience, it would have a greater effect for the narration to have a very polished sound. Voice actors can have a voice that is easy to listen to, add drama where needed, and make the book come alive.

So overall, if a non-fiction book is one that tells a personal story, and the author has a voice that is easy to understand, it can work to have the author read their own book.

Even with the right genre and personal story, there are reasons why it might be better to have a voice actor do the narration. The drawbacks to author narration include:

1. Most authors are not experienced with recording studios. Poor proximity or inconsistent proximity to the microphone causes poor voice quality.
2. It is difficult for many authors to sit still in a studio for 2-3 hours, and they typically make more noise while reading than professional voice actors. These noises can come from mouth sounds, shifting in their seat, bumping the microphone or stand, headphone cords hitting the chair, or any number of causes. Many of these movements are unconscious but cause stray noises that are difficult to remove in editing and distracting to the listener.
3. Expression, enunciation, and delivery are usually not as good as professional voice actors.
4. Authors who narrate their own books typically make substantially more reading mistakes than professional narrators. This adds to higher editing cost and could possibly create poorer quality recordings.

Now we move to fiction. It is almost never recommended that authors narrate their own fiction books. There is a host of reasons why. One of the biggest is that fiction books usually have a lot of character dialog, and having unique and consistent character voices really adds to the success of the audio. Another is the voice actor's ability to add moods and drama where needed. The listener can more easily get absorbed into the story if the voices are recognizable and fully act out the parts. This is the same with live theater. The better the actors, the better the story. Most authors don't have the acting skills that professional voice actors have.

So, here are some questions to ask yourself if you are thinking about narrating your own book.

1. Are you telling a personal story where listeners would like to have a more personal experience?
2. Who is your target audience? Do you have the voice to address that type of audience?
3. Are you promoting your business or brand? Do you sound professional enough to represent your business or brand in a recording?
4. Would narrating your own story be an advantage in marketing your audiobook?

Davis Sound has experience both in recording and working with professional voice actors, and with recording authors who narrate their own books. To date, Davis Sound has produced over 20 non-fiction audiobooks narrated by the author. That is 17% of all audiobooks produced by Davis Sound. So with the right book and the right voice, narrating your own audiobook can work.

For more information or to talk about your book project, please contact Davis Sound at [business@davissound.net](mailto:business@davissound.net).