

Want to Narrate Your Own Audiobook? Here's What You Need to Know

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Introduction

The audiobook industry continues to be one of, if not the, fastest growing part of the publishing business. As a result, more authors are publishing audiobooks every year.

Many authors choose to narrate their audiobook themselves. For certain authors, this is an effective strategy. Other authors would be better off using a voice actor. What you decide to do depends on your book's content.

Authors that are the best fit to narrate their own books write:

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

Authors that would benefit from working with a professional voice actor tend to write:

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

For the author who has an appropriate genre for author narration, here are some tips to help in the recording process.

How to prepare

Whether you are an author or a professional voice actor, it is always beneficial to read your book aloud before you record to get familiar with the content. The author, of course, is already familiar with their book, but the pre-reading helps in many ways that will make the recording process quicker and the final product better.

- Time yourself reading to try to come close to 155 words per minute. This is the standard target rate for audiobooks. Some authors have a tendency to get excited about their book and rush through reading. The goal is to keep things flowing conversationally.
- Look for any tongue twister sentences, or any individual words where you get hung up on the pronunciations. Practice these before going into the studio.
- Practice reading from a tablet or laptop. Don't record while reading from paper books, because the mic will pick up the noise of pages rustling.

Recording in the Studio

There are many things that can cause background noise or changes in vocal tone that you may not notice until you listen to your recording in the editing phase. Follow these tips to reduce your editing hours and improve the overall quality of your recording.

- Sit still. Movement can cause noise. A simple shift in your chair might cause your headphone cord to swing and hit something (yes, you will be wearing headphones), or you might bump the microphone or tablet stand.
- Stay the same distance from the microphone during the recording session. Moving your head away from the microphone not only changes your volume, but also changes your tone. Tone changes cannot always be fixed in editing and lower the quality of your narration.
- Always read from an electronic device to minimize page noise. (Davis Sound can provide a tablet if you don't have one.)
- Read at a natural, conversational pace.

Time Required for Recording

When recording an audiobook, the amount of studio time will be greater than the hours of finished audio. Studio time includes setup time between chapters, rerecording mistakes, discussion of difficult areas of the book, or stopping for quick breaks. For an author not experienced in studio recording, plan on 1.8 hours of studio time per hour of finished audio. Some authors record faster, but it is good to be a bit conservative in scheduling time to make sure you can finish the project. So, for a 9-hour long book, plan on 1.8×9 , or around 16 hours of studio time to complete the narration.

In general, all narrators, even professional voice actors, get tired and start making a greater number of mistakes after 2.5 to 3 hours of continuous recording. In addition, voices get tired and lose expression over time. To keep editing to a minimum and voice quality consistent, limit your recording sessions to 2.5-3 hours per day. In the above example of a 9-hour audiobook, 16 hours at 3 hours per day would be 6 different recording sessions, preferably on 6 different days. Once you know the number of recording sessions you'll need, you can come up with an accurate timeline for your audiobook.

Cost for Producing an Author-Narrated Audiobook

Some authors believe they can save money by doing their own recording rather than paying for a narrator. This is not really true. First, people who are not experienced in studio work take longer to record a book than a professional narrator. Second, all narrators, even professionals, make mistakes. But the number of mistakes authors make is often substantially larger than mistakes made by professionals, which greatly adds to editing time and costs.

For these reasons, the cost for an author-narrated book is roughly the same as for a professionally narrated book. Base your decision to narrate your book on the effectiveness of the storytelling, not cost.

The cost to produce an author-narrated audiobook depends on the total word count of the book. With a target read rate of 155 words per minute, or 9,300 words per hour, the total number of finished hours of audio will be the word count divided by 9,300. For a book with 84,000 words, the number of finished hours will be $84,000/9,300$, or 9.0 hours.

The total production cost for an audiobook is usually around \$350 per finished hour of audio. In the example above, a 9-hour audiobook will be $9 \times \$350 = \$3,150$. This cost includes all recording, editing, and final mastering to Audible specifications. The final product will be ready for publication on Audible.

Conclusion

With some books, like memoirs and personal stories, it can make sense to have an author narrate their own audiobook to add a personal touch. However, the narration quality may not be as good as a professional voice actor, and there is no cost advantage due to the increased time and labor of a self-narrated book compared to professionally narrated books. Consider all of these factors, so that you're prepared to create your audiobook the right way.