

Name *Dread Pirate*
Khan

Race mutt

Class Narrative Designer

Level Lead

Alignment chaotic, ^{mostly} good

XP 18 years in the
industry at 8 studios
in 4 countries

XP adjustment +15%

Treasure

Fearsome red pen for editing
Discontinued perfumes
Cocktail recipes
Be-stickered e-reader

..*.*.*
the friends I made
along the way
..*.*.*

STRENGTH

6

DEXTERITY

9

CONSTITUTION

8

INTELLIGENCE

18

WISDOM

14

CHARISMA

17

Equipment

Over-full bookshelves
2 black cats (stupid) (but sweet)
Hand fan
Insomnia
Colour-coded calendar
Good intentions
Overactive imagination
Open mind
Accidentally high-falutin
vocabulary

Weapons & Armour

Professional experience

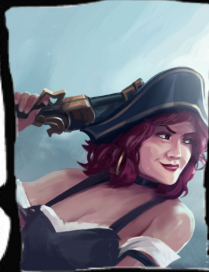
Comfy shoes

Vast font of memes, pop
culture, & trivia

Sass

AC

too low lol



Special Abilities

Excellent with languages
All math-related skill checks have disadvantage
Annoyingly good at karaoke
+6 to concealment of public speaking nerves



PREPARE RECORDING SCRIPTS LIKE A PRO

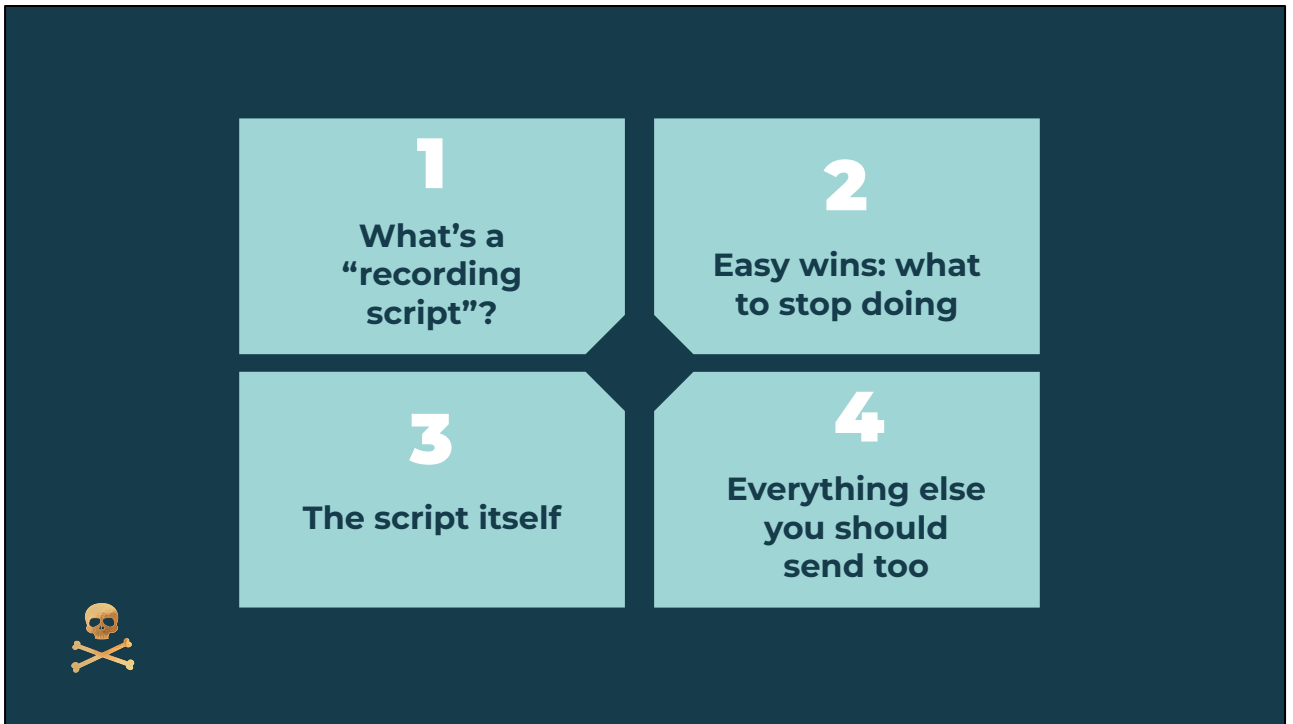
"But... it sounded right in my head!"

KHAN

Lead Narrative Designer, Ubisoft Reflections

dreadpiratekhan.com

Hello, and welcome! Thank you for coming. A bit of housekeeping first: please silence your noisemakers! And don't worry about having to take notes, or photos of my slides, because at the end of the talk will be a QR code that will take you to a version of this deck with a little extra credit info. I'll try and leave time for Q&A at the end, but whether or not I manage to, please do come find me in the overflow area after the talk!



Here's what I'll be talking about today. / What recording scripts are, / your easy wins – what to stop including in your scripts, and why; / what to START including in your script, and why, and / what else you should send off ahead of time. And I should probably introduce myself, too!

Studios

- Ubisoft Reflections
- Dambuster Studios
- Splash Damage
- MegaZebra
- Bigpoint
- Gameforge
- Realtime Worlds (RIP)
- Turbine (now WB Games Boston)



Projects

- Dead Island 2
- Gears: Tactics
- APB: All Points Bulletin
- The Lord of the Rings Online
- *(Uncredited or post-launch)*
Wizard101, DarkOrbit Reloaded, Game of Thrones: Seven Kingdoms, Drakensang Online, Hocus Puzzle, Farmerama, Battlestar Galactica Online, Desperate Housewives: The Game (2017), SeaFight, Pirate Storm, Shards of War, Skyrama 2...



I'm Khan – and though I work for Ubisoft, my logo has nothing to do with Skull & Bones; I've been in the industry / as “dreadpiratekhan” for nearly two decades. I've worked at a bunch of studios in four countries, on a bunch of projects ranging from AAA to free-to-play. This checkered past has often involved game voice over.



I've written every kind of voiceover line there is, I've done voice acting when needed at most of my studios, I've turned internal scripts and documents into recording scripts, and I've directed several-many recording sessions. I'm pretty confident in my directing skills. Amelia Tyler, who you might know as Baldur's Gate 3's Narrator, once called me a "shit-hot director" / and I've been riding that high for *years*. Which is not the only reason that I'll be quoting a couple of times from her excellent document "Working with voice actors". OK! Before we dive into it: three notes.

**These are best practices and may
need to yield to necessity**



One is that all of this is a rampant ret-con. These are best practices that I have identified by doing it wrong or wishing we'd done this last time cause it would have made things so much easier! I think they will work for any project size or type and can be implemented or enabled by anyone in a narrative team – dialogue designer, audio producer, cinematic scriptwriter, narrative designer – whoever. But! I know that required workflows or tools or short deadlines mean that sometimes you have to just charge in with little or no prep. I've certainly had to do so at some point during every single project that involved voiceover. So don't beat yourself up if your results fall short of all this.

The best results come from co-creation



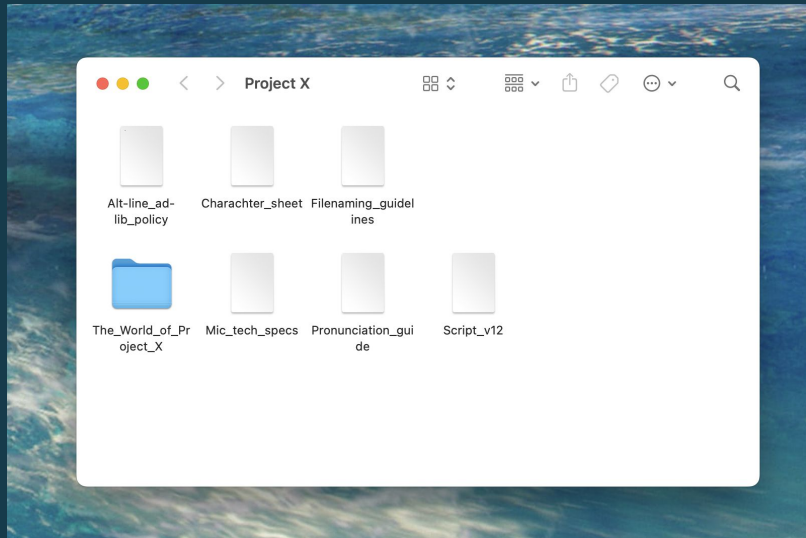
Second: you'll get the best quality results when your recording script leaves room for co-creation by making project requirements clear and getting out of the way the rest of the time. Co-creation is when the whole recording team has the agency and authority to riff off each other and iterate on the character, making something together that the script alone couldn't predict.

The goal is always to prevent wasted time and confusion during the recording session



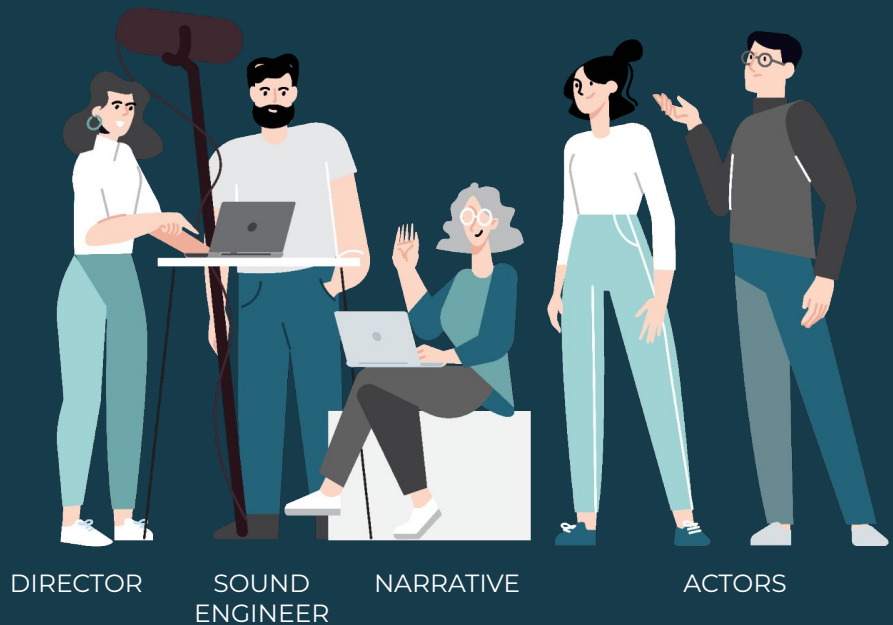
And lastly, all my advice has the same goal in common. The more clarification and discussion have to happen during the session, the fewer lines get recorded, and the less time you'll have to workshop difficult lines. Your budget and your level of quality will both suffer. So whenever I mention saving you time, it's short for "saving time, which saves money and improves quality." And speaking of saving time – the inevitable side effect of a talk about scripts is that a lot of my images are screenshots or transcriptions of scripts. I'm not expecting you to read all that text! Look at anything highlighted and otherwise just let the vibes wash over you.

What's a “recording script”?



If one thing is true about game dev, is that we all use different terms for the same thing. Here, I'm using the term “recording script” to mean everything the narrative team sends off ahead of time: a whole package of information that includes, but is not limited to, a recording-specific version of your script.

Meet the recording team



And it's an infodump for an audience that game writers aren't used to keeping in mind: not players or fellow devs, but a recording team. They are: the project's narrative representative, the recording session's director – and sometimes those two are the same person – the sound engineer, and one or more actors. All but one of the recording team might be learning about the project from scratch -- and they may not even be gamers, and so are coming to the whole genre blind! It's a different audience.

How is a recording script different from an internal script?

The screenshot shows a dialogue editor interface. On the left, a flowchart starts with an orange box labeled "<START>". It branches into two paths: one leading to a box "Any luck downloading the I" and another to "You got the codes! Now we". The first path leads to a blue box "I'm still working on it. [", and the second path leads to a blue box "Let's go. [END]". Below the flowchart is a credit: "Credit: https://www.pixelcrushers.com/dialogue_system/manual2x/html/dialogue_editor.html". On the right, a "Dialogue Entry" form is visible, containing fields for ID, Title, Description, Actor, Conversant, Group, Menu Text, Dialogue Text, Sequence, and Events.

effort – doubtless the rumors are born of enthusiasm and eagerness to support the noble victors!

VO_Project_Character_YourAudioTeamRequirements_11

RC
(Relenting and mellowing once more)

11: The eagerness is commendable. Remember however: It is not the weapon that wins the battle, but the warrior!

JOURNALIST
(Hurrying to agree)

Very true! Speaking of which, rumour has it you are yourself familiar with the battlefield – some even hint at past distinctions!

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P
Line Number	Line ID	Character	Scene Name	Master Text	Parenthetical	Recording Status	Take	Comment	Audio File Name	Variation Names	Variation Values	Path	Dialog Name	Scene ID	Time Constraint
1	ABCDEF01	RC	Scolding Worker	You: What do you get paid to be here?		Not Recorded			VO_Project_Character_1			Scripts > VO > Dialog1	ZYXblablah1	Strict TC	
2	ABCDEF02	RC	Scolding Worker	And yet still more than you deserve. This facility is failing, but all you seem to be doing is taking up space.	(dropping veil of civi	Not Recorded			VO_Project_Character_1			Scripts > VO > Dialog1	ZYXblablah1	Strict TC	
3	ABCDEF03	RC	Scolding Worker	Don't be sorry, be productive. Go to your station, get your head down, and help sort this fucking mess out.		Not Recorded			VO_Project_Character_1			Scripts > VO > Dialog1	ZYXblablah1	Strict TC	
4	ABCDEF04	RC	Scolding Worker	It must be true, I don't know, but I've seen it before. The factory	(GEL)	Not Recorded			VO_Project_Character_1			Scripts > VO > Dialog1	ZYXblablah1	Strict TC	

This infodump is not an internal script. That's what's written using your project's dialogue database or quest tool, or Final Draft, or a spreadsheet, whether it's a working script or a locked final export. Or a quote "final export dash locked dash FINAL all caps underscore this one dot version 3" unquote. And though many people do just send off an internal script as their recording script, they're different, and I'll spend most of this talk trying to convince you not to do that, along with other stuff you shouldn't do.

Easy wins: what to stop including and why



- Restrictive or prescriptive requirements
- Dev-facing or repetitive parentheticals
- Too much detail in the parentheticals

The biggest thing to stop doing is trying to control the delivery of your lines if you don't have to. Co-creation is vital both for good results and for good relationships with voice talent. This is what they do for a living; give actors space and freedom to let them help create the character and you WILL get better results.

**“Don’t tell me how to
sound.
Tell me how to feel.”**

from [“Working with Voice Actors”](#)
by Amelia Tyler

Telling people how to sound famously involves line reads, and we all know those offend actors, right? They’re not parrots. Demanding that they repeat after you to deliver a line the exact same way both takes away their creative agency and tells them you think you could do their job better than they can, so most directors know not to do that.

Require emphases only as needed

*“Line up for inspection.
If you try to hide, you will get hurt.”*

It's a common sin for us writers, but just because emphasizing certain words makes the line sound right in YOUR head doesn't mean that someone else will deliver it that way. “If you TRY to hide, you WILL get hurt, mwa ha ha. If you try to HIDE? You will get HURT! And I worry about you.” Which words are stressed is an important creative choice, so don't demand an emphasis unless you NEED it for player comprehension – or for a joke to land, because that's sacred. Also, leaving this more open makes your director's life easier, as an emphasis read offends much less than a line read – like, “let's get one more, but this time stress the word ‘if’, okay?”

Require emphases only as needed

“He never told her he loved only her.”

That said, English is a tonal language, though we pretend it's not, and sometimes what you stress DOES change the meaning of the line. Take this phrase as an example. “HE never told her he loved only her” might mean she's remembering the wrong guy. “Well, he never TOLD her he loved only her” might mean he showed it, but he's bad with words.

How to require emphases

“He never told her he loved ONLY her.”

Lastly, remember that bold or italic formatting doesn't always export or import cleanly from your internal tools to recording scripts, so if you do actually need an emphasis, all caps is the only reliable choice. He never told her he loved ONLY her.

Spelled-out accents or dialects



Credit: <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FunetikAksent>



Sidebar: avoid accents or dialects written out phonetically. You risk performances that sound weird and/or land anywhere on the stereotype spectrum from cliché to cancellable offense. You can still write in well-researched dialect, just don't spell it out. Use regional slang, phrasing, and vocab, sure. But unless you're dealing with two actually different words – some British people use both *arse* and *andass*, and they mean different things – just spell the word the standard way. If the character's writer doesn't personally speak in the accent or dialect you want, you have just two options: Hire an actor who does, and **APPLY THEIR FEEDBACK ON PHRASING!** Or perform an accent-ectomy, and remove or change it altogether.

Parentheticals

anything the actor should read
about their line(s) which is
not dialogue

SUMMER
I said. I love The Smiths. You have
good taste in music.
A beat as Tom processes this information.
TOM
(amazed)
You like the Smiths?
SUMMER
(singing)
"To die by your side is such a
heavenly way to die." Love it.
The elevator doors open and she gets off.
TOM
(accidentally out loud)
Oh my god.

excerpt from *500 Days of Summer*

Master Text	Parenthetical
You. what do you get paid to be here?	Addressing nervous working on factory floor
And yet still more than you deserve!	Dropping pretense of civility

Parentheticals are gonna come up a few times, so lemme just clarify what I mean. You might call them stage directions, wrylys, or notes to talent. They are anything the actor should know about a line that is not the line itself AND is not obvious from the line's wording – you don't need to add "angry" to the line "go to hell", but if you want that said fondly, with a laugh, that would go into your parenthetical. And for games, our recording scripts also have to find room somewhere for anything that would go into a screenplay's scene descriptions.

Master Text	Parenthetical
Something smells amazing!	Plays on Hub Tavern trigger volume enter.
Wonder if I wanna wet my whistle... Ooh. Alliteration.	Loca: "wet my whistle" is an idiom for drinking alcohol. 1% chance of playing on Hub Tavern trigger volume enter.
[off-key humming]	Plays on remaining in Fountain_B trigger volume for > 30 seconds.



Dev-facing parentheticals

Parenthetical

As they approach the tavern in town.

As they approach the tavern in town. Line ends playfully
impressed with self.

Enjoying hanging out near a nice fountain.

They provide context that is useful TO THE RECORDING TEAM. This script is not for level design, or translators, or brand & marketing – ditch anything THIS audience isn't going to use. / Reading that info wastes session time and distracts the actors as they try to figure out how to interpret it or if they should. Distract your actors too often and they might lose the character, which wastes more time or causes pickups. Also, / translate any dev-speak into human context: so change "plays on Hub Tavern trigger volume enter", which someone's gonna have to clarify, to "as they approach the tavern in town", which requires no session time spent in explanation.

Repetitive parentheticals

Master Text	Parenthetical	Scene	Master Text	Parenthetical
Everyone in one piece?	(Just survived a skirmish with the player)	Survived skirmish	Everyone in one piece?	"Survived skirmish" scene lines are all reactions to having just survived combat with the player
Stay alert.	(Just survived a skirmish with the player)			
There could be more.	(Just survived a skirmish with the player)	Survived skirmish	Stay alert.	
There'll be more. There's always more.	(Just survived a skirmish with the player)	Survived skirmish	There could be more.	
Check your suits.	(to make sure there aren't holes in the hazmats)	Survived skirmish	There'll be more. There's always more.	
Sure it's over?	(Just survived a skirmish with the player)	Survived skirmish	Check your suits.	Due to risk of holes in their hazmat suits
		Survived skirmish	Sure it's over?	

Get rid of repetition, even if that's inconvenient because your internal tool auto-populates your script exports with it. If six barks all have the same notes to talent / except for one, actors AND directors risk missing those important variations. / Wherever possible, context that applies to every line in a section should be specified in its first line's parenthetical.

Over-long parentheses

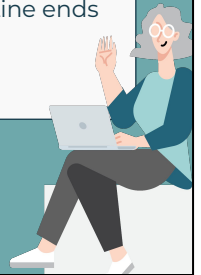


Character	Scene Name	Master Text	Parenthetical
Character A	Water_Supply_Drain	We're gonna have to cut the city's water pressure. They're putting out our fires faster than we can start 'em.	Audio filter applied to make it sound like this conversation is happening over the radio. Character A's father having been a sewer system engineer, she's identified the issue right away and is making an executive decision; she hasn't been able to raise HQ for several hours and is acting above her paygrade. There's a thread of fear in her voice: is this the right call? She doesn't want to be the person who dropped the ball here. She knows she can depend on her team, especially after the ambush they pulled off two missions ago.
Character B	Water_Supply_Drain	I'm not worried. This filth'll all be gone in a few days. Then we'll have a free hand to do what we got to do.	Character B has a sociopathic attitude towards unhoused people, so though "filth" should be referring to the dirty water flooding the streets, he meant it to refer to the neighbourhood's indigent population. He's entertaining fantasies of gunning them all down one day.

You can't replace the knowledge of the narrative department with parentheses, and if you try, / you'll lose expensive chunks of the session as people read your novellas. You'll also get stiff performances as the actor and director / try to understand and remember all that detail!

Over-long parentheticals

Master Text	Parenthetical
Guys, we're gonna have to cut the city's water pressure. They're putting out our fires faster than we can start 'em.	Matter-of-fact and professional, into her radio.
I'm not worried. This filth'll all be gone in a few days. Then we'll have a free hand to do what we got to do.	"Filth" is repulsed, contemptuous. Line ends in sadistic anticipation.



Rely on the narrative person in the room to fill in context as needed. So take a long look at your long notes before sending that script off. What will the director and actor ACTUALLY NEED to know, and what's just a fun fact? What should be obvious from the line itself, and can therefore be cut?

Useful parentheses

Logistical
context

Emotional
context

Consistent
tone & level
of detail



Now, for a palate cleanser, let's look at useful / parentheses, which provide logistical and emotional context in a consistent tone and level of detail.

Logistical context



If you get a wonderful, low-voiced, intense performance, but the character being addressed / is atop a wall far above the speaker, putting that wonderful performance into game is going to sound / wrong and weird through no fault of the actor. Logistical context is what makes sure your gameplay needs are met, and might include answers to /

Logistical context

- Where am I?
- Where's everyone else?
- How am I feeling?
- What am I doing?
- What else is happening?

from "Working with Voice Actors" by Amelia Tyler



the following questions / that a voice actor might have about their character: / Where am I? Cave? Forest? Pub? The location will help tell me what to feel, and how much to project. / Where is everyone else? How far away is the person I'm speaking to? Are we worried about being overheard? / How am I feeling, physically? What's just happened – what gameplay event triggered this line? What's about to happen? Are we gearing up for a fight or getting ready for bed? / What am I doing while speaking – standing? Running? Fighting? The action affects how I breathe and speak. / What else is happening in-game, either right where I am or in the bigger picture? And what's competing with this line for the player's attention? Keep in mind what I said about TMI – not all of these things are relevant to all lines. I'll cover section headers and the onboarding kit later, but both of those should do much of your context heavy lifting – and if more details are needed / the narrative person in the room is right there, ready to help.

Emotional context



Emotional context answers the other half of the question “How am I feeling?” Am I confident? Do I like this person? What do I really think about this organization? You want to clarify the emotional intention. / For important scenes, instead of saying how the line should be delivered, consider describing how you want both the character and the player to FEEL when those play in game. This lets the actor approach the performance that was in YOUR head, while leaving room for them to surprise and delight you.

Emotional context



Master Text	Parenthetical
Ow! Dammit!	Triggered by successful bite attack from a lvl 1 Locust Wretch
Master Text	Parenthetical
Ow! Dammit!	As though a grocery store shopping cart were viciously rammed into your ankle



Analogies are your friends here

Analogies are basically my favorite recording script and directing tool, / because I don't know how it feels to receive a bite attack from a level 1 subterranean reptilian humanoid, and neither does the actor. But we probably both know how it feels / to have your ankle viciously rammed by someone else's shopping cart. Analogies are especially effective for very short lines, reactions, and pain noises.

Consistent contents and level of detail



Many projects involve multiple characters, writers, recording teams, recording sessions, or all of the above, which is why I strongly recommend creating an in-house style guide for how your parentheticals get written – like, “include this, but not that, and the emotion goes last.” If the notes in your scripts are all over the place in tone or level of detail, it’s hard for your results to all sound like they’re in the same game, talking about the same topics. One good tip is to add a pronunciation note in the parenthetical for the first line that uses any game-specific name or phrase, so that the same NPC isn’t called Ah-LEE-sha by one character and Ah-LISH-a by the other. That is a thinly disguised real thing that happened, in case that wasn’t clear.

“Who gives a **** about an Oxford comma?”

Vampire Weekend



Who...? Me. That's who. I do. But hot take: I don't care about the grammar of YOUR scripts. I'll sort myself out over here, and you do you, baby; as long as everyone can understand what your script says, perfect grammar is just icing on the cake. What I DO care about is formatting – though even then, most formatting doesn't matter as long as it's consistent enough to avoid confusion.

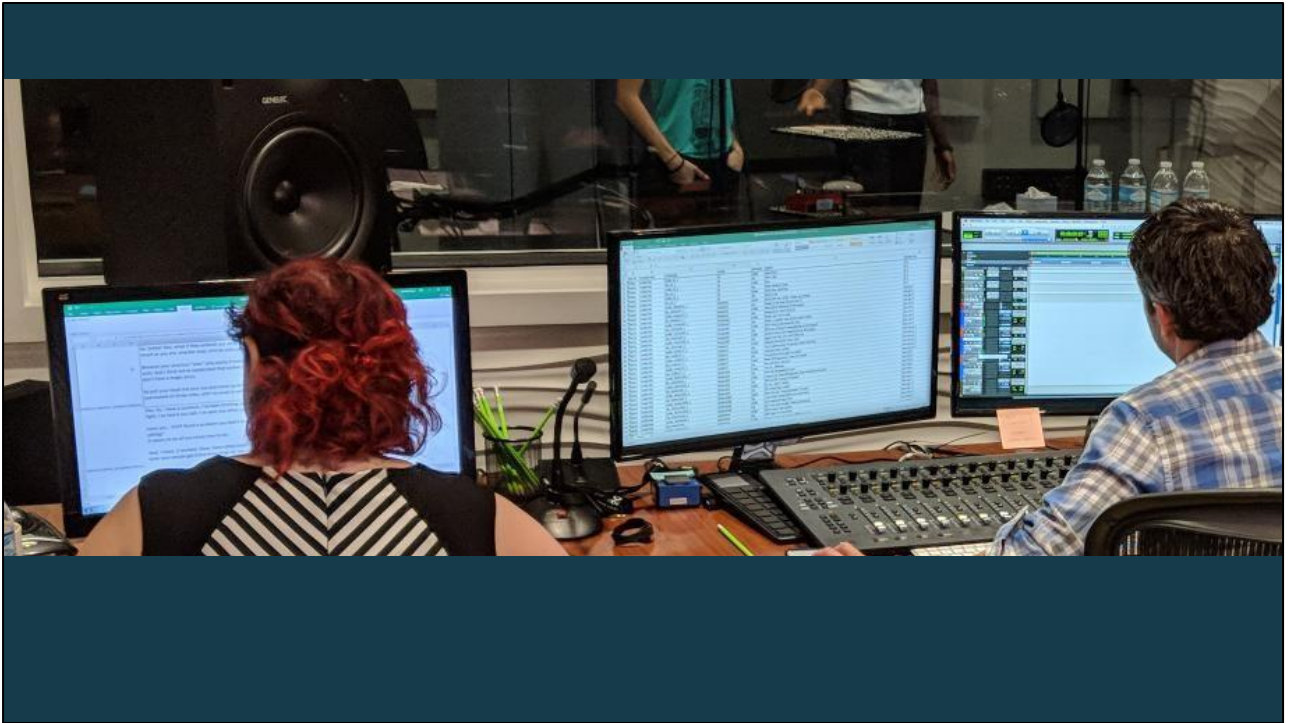
- Formatted for YOUR recording studio
- Organized into sections
- Prioritized



The non-negotiable is that your script should be formatted for YOUR recording session and setup, not for table reads or director feedback OR for your dev tools. Then I suggest that all of your scripts be organized into clearly differentiated sections, ordered by priority while keeping the actor's wellbeing in mind.



Step one: get in touch with the recording studio you'll be using ahead of time, and confirm with them EXACTLY what the actor will see on the day AND HOW it will be displayed. And find out what specific information the sound engineer needs from you to work with their tools and apps. Once you know all that, format accordingly. This was me at an LA studio, pre-pandemic, recording VO for Gears: Tactics. The engineer and I are actually using the same recording script spreadsheet, /



but even from here you may be able to see that we are using it very differently, with different columns hidden and different information highlighted. (That's why it's essential for every line to get a unique ID that's consistent across all script versions, so you're always certain you're talking about the same line.)



And then the actors in the booth are looking at a monitor showing them something else entirely! Here it's some key art, but the rest of the time was a THIRD view of the script, with the studio's software automatically highlighting the current line and including other characters' lines in the conversations. But at other studios, the actors might be working from printed-out hard copy scripts on a music stand, so then priorities become anything that helps prevent paper rustling or confusion: larger font sizes, page numbers as well as line IDs, section headings in all caps... The point is, format for YOUR setup.

Clear sections, each with context

Line ID	Character	Scene Name	Master Text	Parenthetical
				viciously rammed into your ankle
ABCDEFGH1	RC	Scolding Worker	You. What do you get paid to be here?	Scolding Worker lines all happen on a factory floor between RC and a bullied, frightened worker.
ABCDEFGH2	RC	Scolding Worker	And yet still more than you deserve. This facility is failing, but all you seem to be doing is taking up space.	Dropping the pretense of civility
ABCDEFGH3	RC	Scolding Worker	Don't be sorry, be productive. Go to your station, get your head down, and help sort this fucking mess out.	
DUMMY12	A, B, and C	Quest Hub 2 proximity barks	Usually have a good time in Alnwick	These lines all happen in the town center when not



I encourage granular sections in your script: make every related bark trigger into its own section, along with every separate quest's dialogue, every cutscene's script, and every scripted walk-and-talk. You can separate these out with a heading row or a big bold line -- but /

Clear sections, each with context

Line ID	Character	Scene Name	Master Text	Parenthetical
DUMMY12	A, B, and C	Quest Hub 2 proximity barks	I usually have a good time in Alnwick.	These lines all happen in the town of Alnwick (ANN-ick) when not much else is happening. CharacterA is usually finding or finishing up a quest here and maybe doing some shopping.
ABCDEFGH4	CharacterA		Something smells amazing!	Approaching the tavern
ABCDEFGH5	CharacterA		Wonder if I wanna wet my whistle... Ooh. Alliteration.	Approaching the tavern. Line ends playfully impressed with self.
ABCDEFGH6	CharacterA		Maybe I'll stop in later.	Moving away from the tavern.
ABCDEFGH7	CharacterA		[off-key humming]	Enjoying hanging out near a nice fountain.



if that will cause the recording studio's software to throw up, a good workaround is a dummy line at the start of every section, with a parenthetical that provides that section's context. That's a good place to put pronunciation reminders, too. If you're gonna have to be too long, this is where you do it.

First session onboarding section

Scene	Master Text
Mono- logue	<p>I'd just... I'd really like to catch a break. Every time I think something might be going right, life is all "oh yeah??"</p> <p>And then, one-two, right in the breadbasket! Like, "oh, I'm sorry, were you looking forward to that, kid? It's cancelled. It went to someone else. It was yesterday. It burned to a friggin' crisp."</p> <p>And I'm just -- here, knee-deep in rubble, trying to find something else to look forward to.</p> <p>I'm... tired. I'm so tired.</p>

In the script for the very first session with any actor, I strongly recommend starting with an onboarding section. Plan for it to take 10 to 15 minutes of that first session, and you can even build in the viewing of gameplay videos or other assets from your onboarding kit. I like to start off with a short audition-style monologue, to help find the character. Bonus: keep a good take of it to kick off future sessions with that actor and they'll be able to get back into character much faster, even if it's been weeks or months since their last session.

First session onboarding section

Speaker	Master Text
Caitlin	I tried to be nice about it to the nurse, you know?
CB	Your customer service voice?
Caitlin	Exactly! Like, "if you saw this in my blood tests last year... I do wish we'd gone over it then, as I hadn't realized things were this serious."
CB	For real.
Caitlin	Through my teeth, kid. And she's all, "my records show that we texted you to call us." So what, I miss one friggin' text and I deserve to live a shorter life?

Then I might include some dialogue that features the character's most frequently used catchphrases or verbal tics and unusual in-game words, to help troubleshoot pronunciations. This whole process helps shortcut the actor and director forming a rapport while they agree on the intent for the performance, and the more comfortable they are with each other, the higher the quality of what you'll get back.

Prioritized content

→ Order sections by priority, highest first



The easiest way to make sure that important content gets the time it needs, is to put whatever the project needs you to nail early on in the session. The recording team won't waste time perfecting low-priority lines, and everyone will still be fresh and willing to workshop tricky scenes. But also, protect the actor's mental health. /

Prioritized content

- Order sections by priority, highest first
- Don't group difficult content; intersperse with neutral lines



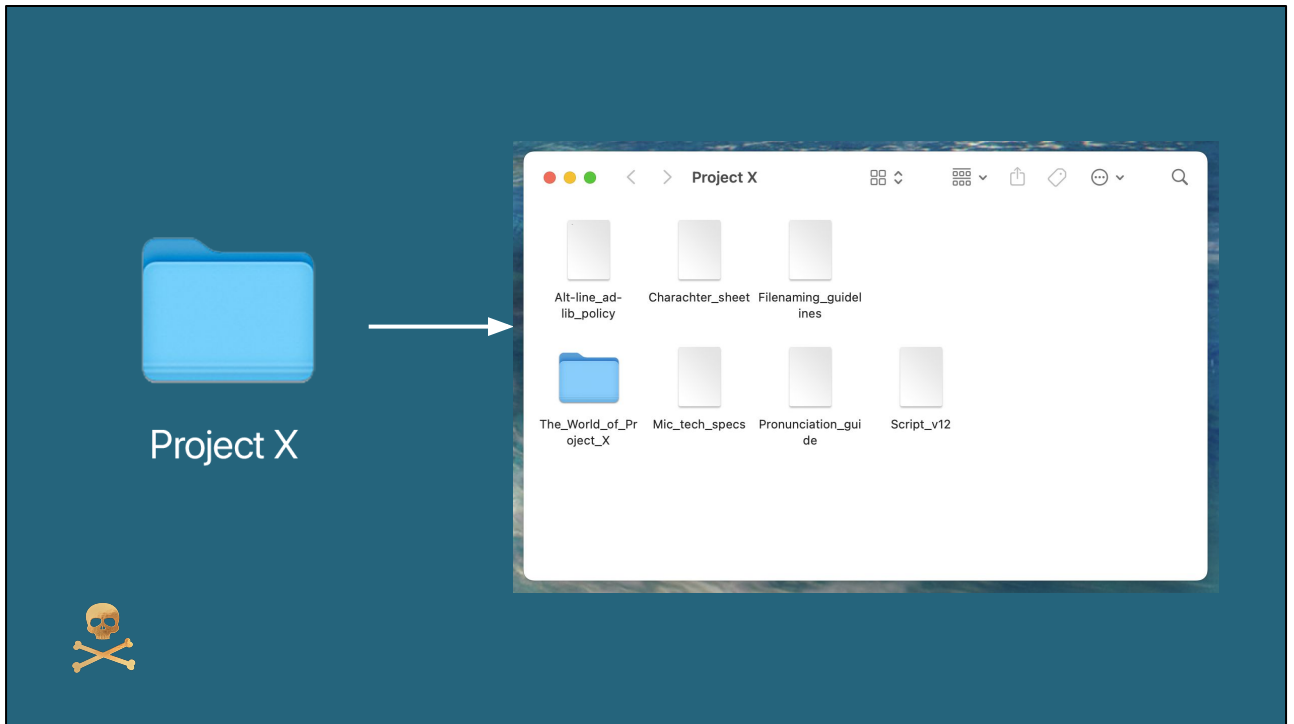
Don't string a bunch of emotionally difficult content together. Like, going from an intense pre-battle speech declaimed from the ramparts straight to sobbing over their friend's corpse is emotional whiplash. Let the actor reset with some neutral material in-between, and in general try to avoid wild mood swings from scene to scene. Similarly, protect the actor's physical health, by which I mean their voice.

Prioritized content

- Order sections by priority, highest first
- Don't group difficult content; intersperse with neutral lines
- Sprinkle breaths / onos or short reaction lines throughout (& put screams and deaths at the end)



I'm sure we all know to put screams and deaths at the end of the session. But also sprinkle / throughout the script your sections of very short combat barks, emotes, reactions, and breaths or grunts. They make for useful breaks between other kinds of content, and trying to do them all in a row is really tiring. Last thing you want is someone hyperventilating and passing out from doing four post-combat panting sections one after the other.



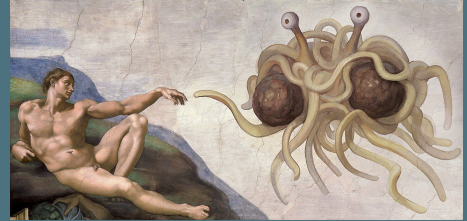
So now your script is consistently formatted for your recording setup, prioritized in order of importance, and all your parentheticals have been checked over. Let's turn to your onboarding kit: your best friend for saving time on the day.

Onboarding kit

A folder of reference materials sent over ahead of time to the recording studio, director, and/or actor.

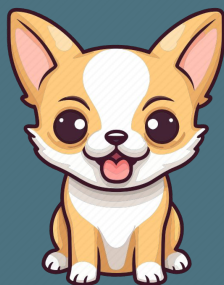
Recommended inclusions:

- Pronunciation guide
- Character sheet
- Project context
- Documented alt-line & ad-libbing policy



When people do bother to send one, it's often just a character bio, maybe some background worldbuilding material for the director, and the project's technical and file naming requirements for the sound engineer. I think that aside from those tech specs, which are between you, your studio, / and your deity of choice and none of my business, you'll want four specific things: / a pronunciation guide, a character sheet, project context, and a documented alt-line and ad-lib policy.

Onboarding kit: pronunciation guide



chihuahua

Term	Pronunciation	Context
Alicia	ah-LISH-ah /əˈlɪʃə/	His older sister
hérisson	EH-ree-so /ˈɛʁisɔ̃/	His Parisian girlfriend's nickname for him; French for "hedgehog"
Alnwick	ANN-ick /ˈæɪnɪk/	A town in northern England

When I was a kid, I read a lot and wasn't comfortable talking to people, so I learned a lot of words before I heard them being spoken. Which is why one day, I went up to my dad and asked him what a chee-hua-hua was. / To this day I have to think for a half-second before saying the word, because once you've heard something being pronounced one way in your mind, and as an actor maybe practiced those lines, it's REALLY HARD to then say them correctly on the day. / A guide helps prevent this, making in-game terms in your dialogue sound more natural, and decreasing the retakes needed. Doesn't really matter what phonetic system you use, but it HAS to be consistent from writer to writer. You can use the IPA, the International Phonetic Alphabet, but not everyone reads it, so it can't be the only thing you use. Make sure the emphasized syllables are in all caps, and provide BRIEF context or definitions for each terms, because we often say place names a bit differently than we would nicknames.

Onboarding kit: character sheet



Gameplay elements

Weapon



Caitlin uses an intimidating ray gun that has a huge range but doesn't do much damage.

Mount



A beloved horse named Caligula, who can be called to her side wherever she is.

Key relationships

The Shadow Line



A secret association of corrupt cops. Caitlin hates what they do and is obsessed with discovering their identities, but grudgingly respects their competence.

Alicia



Technically a Countess; Caitlin appreciates that she doesn't act like a snob and generally enjoys her goofy sense of humor.

Hanif "Habibi" Jamil



A well-liked social butterfly. Caitlin thinks of him as her secret weapon and turns to him whenever she needs a diplomatic solution.

Verbal mannerisms & typical phrases

She will let her natural northern New England accent become pure thick Boston when joking, mocking, or self-deprecating; will then call people "kid" or "guy" and use "wicked" or "stupid" as intensifiers.

Rants in an entertaining way about whatever's annoying her at increasing volume, showing her roots in stand-up comedy.

Tends to use "friggin'" when cussing, saving "fuck" for serious situations.

Attitude & tone

Used to being one of the smartest people in the room. At heart an optimist, but has grown tough protective layers over years of being let down. Prone to vocal and visible frustration with incompetence, real or perceived. Deals with negative situations with dark humor and sarcasm.

How she'd react to...
...a surprise birthday party: "AUGH! Oh! YOU GUYS!! You gave me a friggin' heart attack!"

...being fired: "I understand that you believe this is the correct decision, and I look forward to hearing back from you when you realize it wasn't... and telling you to take a flying leap."

...finding a large sum of money in a wallet on the street: "OK, where's their ID? Losing this much'd hurt ya."

Character sheets help the actor and director better prepare. Most just list the character's name, age, a little bio, and / maybe some notes on their gameplay. My suggested additions are a / key relationship guide, the / character's verbal mannerisms and typical phrases, and / their typical attitude and tone.

Onboarding kit: character sheet



Key relationships

The Shadow Line



A secret association of corrupt cops. Caitlin hates what they do and is obsessed with discovering their identities, but grudgingly respects their competence.

Alicia



Technically a Countess; Caitlin appreciates that she doesn't act like a snob and generally enjoys her goofy sense of humor.

Hanif “Habibi” Bedi



A well-liked social butterfly. Caitlin thinks of him as her secret weapon and turns to him whenever she needs a diplomatic solution to a problem.

This is what prevents the character from talking about the Big Bad Evil Faction in a cheerful, approving tone just because the actor and director hadn't come across their name yet. Key relationships – for just the few in-game people or places that are most important to the character, touch on what they really think of them or feel about them. Add key art whenever you can so the actor can picture what they're talking about, keep the entries short, and format them consistently for easy comparison.

Onboarding kit: character sheet



Verbal mannerisms & typical phrases

Puts on a thick caricatured Boston accent when joking, mocking, or self-deprecating; will then call people “kid” or “guy” and use “wicked” or “stupid” as intensifiers.

Approval: you GUYS! (as in “you shouldn’t have!”), F yeah (said “eff” as in the letter F), hot

Cussing: friggin’ (saves F-bombs for serious situations), goddamn, dumbass

What are their catchphrases or preferred slang? Are there any setting-specific terms they use a lot? – again, no need to cover every single angle; you’re just trying to cement in the actor’s mind the phrases that the player will hear this character use the most.

Onboarding kit: character sheet



Attitude & tone

Used to being one of the smartest people in the room. At heart an optimist, but has grown tough protective layers over years of being let down. Prone to vocal and visible frustration with incompetence, real or perceived. Deals with negative situations with dark humor and sarcasm.

How she'd react to...

...a surprise birthday party: "AUGH! Oh! YOU GUYS!! You gave me a friggin' heart attack! That was hilarious."

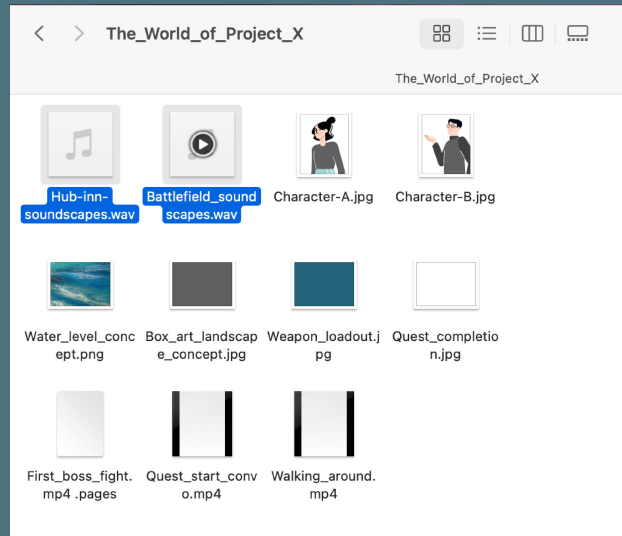
...being fired: "I understand that you believe this is the correct decision, and I look forward to hearing back from you when you realize it wasn't... and telling you to take a flying leap."

...finding a large sum of money in a wallet on the street: "OK, where's their ID? Losing this much'd hurt ya."

For this, you trying to create a baseline. Who is this person when nothing unusual is happening to them (like in-game events or combat)? Mention if that changes significantly over the course of the game, too. This one is especially helpful for large or ensemble casts, so you don't accidentally get two characters who fill the same narrative or tonal roles because of their performances, even if you didn't design them that way. / One very useful tool is to provide example lines matched to a mood or trigger situation – something relatable, like how they would react to being fired or to a surprise birthday party, not a level 1 Locust bite. It's a favorite tool of my writing teams during character creation that actors have also told me they found very helpful.

Onboarding kit: project context

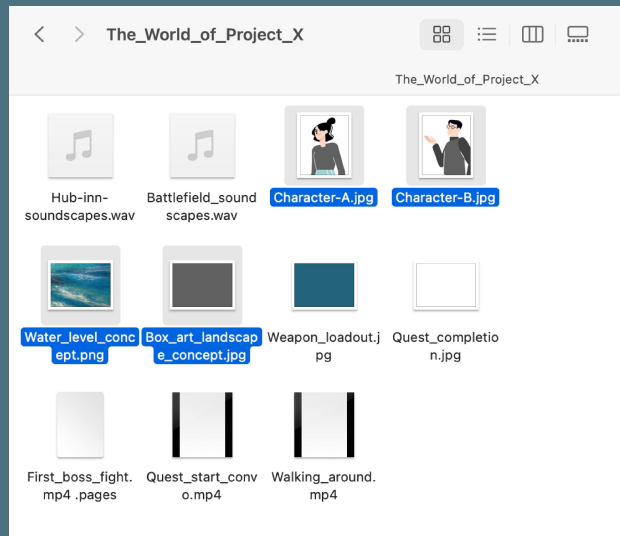
→ Soundscapes!



Project context is a snapshot of the game to clarify its tone. Irritatingly, a picture, video, or audio file is worth a thousand words here, and will do a lot of heavy lifting that otherwise would require a lot of room in your parentheses. Please note that these kits often won't be automatically sent to the actor, so again, you may want to build viewing them into the beginning of the actor's first session on your project during their onboarding section. / Soundscapes are very helpful – literally a recording of what other audio, including music and walla and SFX, would typically be competing with the actor's voice for the player's attention. They allow for informed decisions on the day regarding volume and projection. If you don't have audio ready, it's worth knocking up a short concept track of representative noise.

Onboarding kit: project context

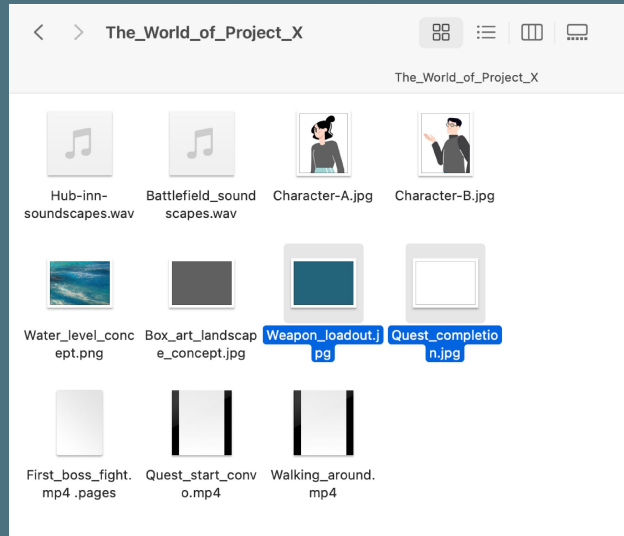
- Soundscapes!
- Key art



Key art is amazing, especially when you don't yet have final assets. But even if you do, they provide a good visual summary of your project's tone and aesthetic priorities. Key art and /

Onboarding kit: project context

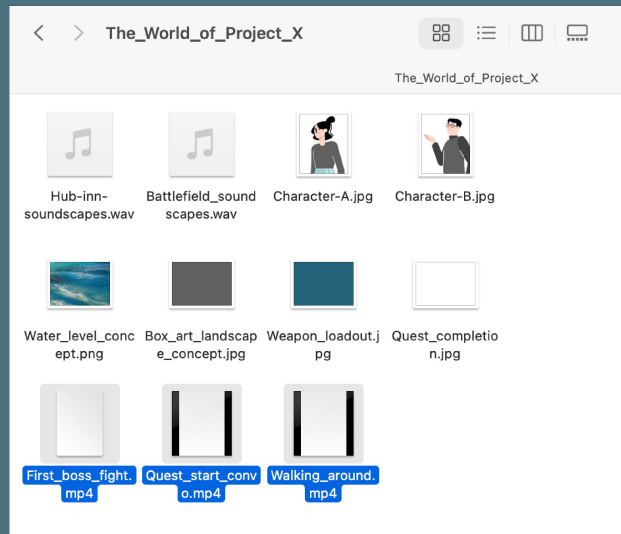
- Soundscapes!
- Key art
- Screenshots



screenshots are also GREAT to include as part of a section header, like “this whole bit is in our ocean level, which looks like this – Could we please get ‘water level concept’ up on screen? Thank you. So CharacterB is on your left...” And you can do the same with /”

Onboarding kit: project context

- Soundscapes!
- Key art
- Screenshots
- Gameplay videos



gameplay videos. Include them even when they're full of gray boxes, because seeing how this character moves through the game world communicates a lot about tone. They don't have to be long – 30 seconds is fine.

Onboarding kit: alt line and ad-lib policy

- Define what's permitted and not
(differentiate between type of line if needed)
- Specify how alt lines & ad-libs should be marked or
filenamed



Making sure everyone knows what the studio's or project's requirements and expectations are will prevent retakes that can't be used, or great performances from being lost or rejected post-session. Like, if you're recording ADR lines and need to match the duration of an already captured performance or already animated cutscene, a single ad-lib line can be horribly expensive or troublesome. But if you're recording death sounds, ad-libs can save you time and money later if your combat designers add another way for the PC to die. This doesn't have to be a long document at all; / it just needs to define what's allowed and not, and how to mark or name files so that two different directors or sound engineers in different sessions don't decide on different naming conventions, which will make your audio department later curse all of your names.

An aerial photograph of a vast, turbulent ocean. The water is a deep, vibrant blue, with numerous white-capped waves and swirling eddies visible across the surface. The perspective is from directly above, looking down at the water's texture and movement.

IN CONCLUSION

Phew! OK! I've given a lot of advice here, but let's boil it down to the essentials.

Write your recording script for its specific audience: the recording team



Write for the audience of THIS document. Only include information that is useful to the actors, directors, or sound engineers – not to level designers, translators, QA, or anyone else.

What you include and don't will have a measurable effect on your budget



The time and energy you spend making a good recording script and onboarding kit will save you money. Spend expensive session time recording the lines you need, instead of talking about the lines. And also, you're not psychic. Do your best to include relevant info, and then have that living encyclopaedia of a narrative person in the room.

Leaving room for co-creation will produce higher-quality results



Nobody can hear what's in your head, and trying to force them to deliver exactly that will just make for unnatural deliveries and expensive pickups. Only require what is actually necessary. Your script should leave room for the director and actor to do their job.

Extra credit:
some other stuff you can do
to try and ensure success on the day



Free of charge, here's some extra tips.

Create a checklist for all your studio's recording scripts



This goes along with the style guide I suggested earlier. The goal is for the recording scripts your team sends out to all contain the info you need, even when different people are preparing them. Make this a living document that works for you and your studio.

Send your recording script out
as **soon** as feasible



A mostly-final version – or even just the onboarding kit, for example – can precede the final recording script, which should be sent out at least two weeks before the recording session.

Sit down with someone
and have them **read the whole
dang script out loud to you**
before sending it



And then advice that looks like it immediately contradicts the previous thing: have someone else sit down and read you the whole dang script out loud. Bonus points if this is separate from your table reads, and more point if they are not a narrative person. You'll get an idea of where there's too much info or too little in your parentheses, when you've accidentally written a tongue-twister, what needs to be added to the pronunciation guide... Super useful.



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Thanks for your time, and I hope you found all this useful. I'm Khan; come find me online!

<http://ameliatyler.com/advice/>