

Tips on Selecting a Narrator for Your Audiobook

*Insider's Guide to Choosing a
Narrator You'll Be Thrilled With!*



by

Becky Parker Geist

Tips on Selecting a Narrator for Your Audiobook

Insider's Guide to
Choosing a Narrator
You'll Be Thrilled With!

by

Becky Parker Geist

Edited by Jai Conley

**Nothing is more critical
to the success of your audiobook
than the selection of the Narrator/s
who will bring your story to life!**

Published by Pro Audio Voices

San Rafael, CA 94901

www.proaudiovoices.com

© 2017 by Becky Parker Geist

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be produced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system without prior permission in writing from the Publisher or Author.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9862465-9-3

ISNI: 0000 0004 5949 771X

Cover illustration and Book Design by Andy Parker

www.andyparkerdesign.com

Introduction

Your book is published (or maybe close to being published)! Congratulations! You've clarified your goals and developed a strategic plan for marketing your book in each of its formats: print, ebook, and audiobook.

You've prepared your audiobook manuscript, and perhaps figured out how you want to deal with all the details: front and back matter, footnotes and endnotes, images and charts, etc. If you still need help with any of that, I recommend you get the *Audiobook Toolkit for Authors: How to SUCCESSFULLY Record Your Own Audiobook*, available at www.authortoolkits.com. Even if you ultimately decide to hire a professional narrator, this would be a valuable tool for you.

It's time to learn how to get your audiobook created. You've come to the right place if any of these questions are still lingering in your mind:

What should I be looking for when hiring a narrator?

Where do I look for narrator/s for my book?

How will I decide which narrator/s to hire?

What is the process for auditioning narrators?

What's the difference between an audiobook producer and a narrator?

What key information do I need to know as I move forward after the hiring?

What if I realize I made a mistake in hiring?

The narrator can make or break the success of any audiobook. No matter how great the content of the book is, a weak narrator can turn off your listener. That can also lead to a fan giving up on other books *whatever* the format. By the same token, a great narrator can leave your fans begging for more by the same author/narrator

combo. These tips will help you find a narrator that can help you soar to the top of your listeners' lists of favorites and speed up the word of mouth marketing to boost your sales.

What should I be looking for when hiring a narrator?

Gender

Some books provide clues as to which gender your narrator should be. If your book is written in the first person, you'll be seeking a narrator of that gender. If the book is written in the third person but has a strong character perspective, that will usually suggest the gender. Even the topic of your book may point to the preferred gender. If you're a guy writing about motorcycles, for example, it might seem obvious that you would want a man reading your book. But consider this: whom do you think your audience might most want to hear your book from? Motorcycles can be sexy. Might a hot *female* voice be more appealing? Maybe not, but the point is: *think* about whom your followers would most want to hear your content from.

With many books, you *could* go either way. Often, the gender of your protagonist may guide you in your decision. If you have characters, as most fiction books do, is the "cast" fairly balanced between male and female? Is there a lot of dialogue? If so, you'll want to find a narrator who can do both male and female voices distinctly and well.

Age range

If the story is written in the first person, what is the age of that person at the point in time from which the story is being told? Does it change over the course of the book? What is the age of the protagonist, and does *that* change over time? What do these factors indicate about the ideal age range of your narrator?

To clarify, I am not referring to the actual chronological age of the narrator. You need only to know the age range that your narrator can effectively portray. Think about the age range your book would best be narrated in, then listen for that in the voices you audition.

For non-fiction, these factors are often irrelevant. However, consider who your target audience is, and the kind of voice that will best deliver your information to willing ears. More on this below, in “Audience.”

Accents/Dialects/Culture

If any of your characters have accents or dialects that absolutely must be done accurately, please make sure you select an audition passage that allows you to make a clear assessment of that. If you have characters from specific cultures, and those are clearly reflected in their voices, make notes about who those characters are, then seek out and listen for those specific vocal qualities.

As a general rule, accents are not critical to the success of an audiobook. The acting quality is FAR more important than one’s ability to do an accent. Usually the vocal *suggestion* of an accent is enough, but that depends on how important it is in

context. For example, if one character comments on another character's thick Irish brogue, then you're going to need enough of a brogue for that reference to make sense.

For non-fiction, some different rules apply. If you're a well-known expert in your field, then you may well want to search for a voice similar to your own. That usually extends beyond just the "sound" of the voice, but also your manner of speaking, the way you express yourself in pauses, your inflection, etc. – a kind of "vocal relative."

Style/Genre

As suggested earlier, some narrators excel in specific genres. Some know how to pull off that chilling voice that sends shivers down your spine, others, how to do that fun voice that matches kid energy, and some have that confident leader voice that speaks to business executives. The next section on "Audience" takes the style or genre of your book into consideration, and also who your fans are.

Audience

Think about who your listeners are mostly likely to be. Who did you write this book for? This comes back to that previous example, a book about motorcycles. Who might your book's audience want to hear? If it's for kids, you may not want a guy who specializes in recording thrillers. If it's a thriller, you may not want a soft, sweet voice that sounds like your grandmother. Or, maybe you do.

In the realm of non-fiction, you might have content that is directed to high-level CEOs, for example. It would probably sound inappropriate if a young-sounding voice

narrated your book. Books targeted to an audience in their 20's may be less eager to listen to a slower-speaking "senior" voice. For titles written for baby boomers, they may be more resistant to listening to a twenty-something tell them about retirement than someone who sounds like a peer. The point, again, is to make a conscious choice about this aspect of your decision.

Where do I look for narrator/s for my book?

Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX)

The audiobook production site for Amazon (and Audible, a division of Amazon) is www.acx.com. If you sign up with an author account on ACX, you can peruse their narrator base. There are about 20,000 narrators in their system. You can narrow your search by using their search tools.

To search for an ACX narrator, you can:

1. Search for narrators and invite them to audition, AND/OR
2. Post an audition and wait in hopes of auditions coming in.

More on your ACX options in the sections that follow.

Audio Publishers Association (APA)

APA is the professional organization for audiobook publishers, narrators, producers, technicians, and others in the audiobook industry. There are many member

narrators who can be found on the APA website, www.audiopub.org. The fact that these narrators take their audiobook careers seriously enough to join APA speaks to their attitude of professionalism.

Voiceover Websites

There are several websites devoted to voiceover talent and clients seeking voices for various projects. Voiceover, however, includes a very wide range of work, including radio, commercials, animation, etc. These sites thrive because so many people want to have a career in voiceover, and these “wannabes” will pay to be listed and have their demo reel on these sites. I do not recommend this route, largely because you’d be wading through so many people who have no experience recording audiobooks. The quality of talent on these sites is very uneven, and your search will likely be much harder and less efficient.

Freelance Websites

There has also been a proliferation of sites where freelancers can connect with work opportunities. Some of these, such as Upwork.com, allow you to review the qualifications of those who have profiles where they promote themselves as voiceover talent. If you use one of these services, you will be responsible for clarifying the terms of any agreement you make. Once you contract with a narrator, you will need to put all the money you’ve agreed to pay into escrow, which will then be paid out according to established milestones. Make sure the narrator’s experience includes audiobooks.

Online search

Many narrators also maintain their own websites, and an online search may yield some possibilities. For any narrators you find this way, be sure to find out what other titles they have recorded, find them, and listen to their retail samples (if not the full book). I've had a narrator tell me that he had narrated several audiobooks available on Audible; when I checked, I discovered that the guy had none. When I asked about that, he said he had some... pending.

Audiobook Producer

A bit further on, I'll talk further about the difference between hiring a narrator on your own, vs. hiring a producer to help you find your narrator. My own company, Pro Audio Voices (www.proaudiovoices.com), for example, is an audiobook production company. In helping you find your narrator, producers save you from the search and vetting process, while still giving you the final say in narrator selection.

Retail Samples

Every audiobook retailer provides retail samples of the audiobooks they sell. If you listen to lots of these samples, especially of books in your genre, you may find one or more narrators that you'd like to have audition for your book. You can then search online to try to find that narrator.

How Will I Decide Which Narrator/s to Hire?

If you've narrowed your choices down – or if you are trying to narrow them down – then this section may be helpful.

Listen to Retail Samples of Narrators You are Considering

Since you really want to hire only an experienced narrator, you need to find audiobooks that person has recorded. Listen to as many as you can; it may help you get a sense of the narrator's vocal range. If your book has dialogue, pay particular attention to samples that include dialogue. If your book is non-fiction, listen for the tone you are seeking for your own book.

Experience

Audiobook narration is a craft that involves far more than just speaking clearly into a microphone. There are so many experienced audiobook narrators available that you really have no excuse for choosing someone without experience. Does the narrator have experience in your genre?

Actors, Not Just Readers

I firmly believe that the best narrators are actors. Ask about the talent's acting experience and/or training. This is NOT to say that every actor who excels on stage is also great behind the mic. Not so! But as far as helping your story come alive is concerned, actors are trained in the skills that your audiobook requires. Even non-

fiction books are usually better off in the hands of an actor, because they best understand how to address the specific audience to which your book is targeted.

Dialogue Differentiating Voices

In books with dialogue, differentiated character voices make a huge difference in the success of an audiobook. I highly recommend that when you post your audition passage, you select a scene with many voices, if your book has such a scene. That way, you'll be able to hear how well the narrator changes the voice in the treatment of each character. You want to be able to tell when the speaker changes and who is speaking.

Give Direction

You may think that once an actor has done a reading for you, that you can't ask for changes in that reading. On the contrary, it's a good idea to come up with something you'd like to hear done differently in some way, ask for a specific alteration. This way, you will be able to assess how well the narrator can take direction, and then implement it. If what you want comes out sounding the same after the adjustment, then you know that you'll need to rely on the actor to get it right the first time, since she or he may not have the skills to implement any changes you request.

What is the process for auditioning narrators?

Select Audition Passage

You will probably only need a passage of about 700-1000 words to determine whether you like the narrator's work. If your book is fiction, select a passage with lots of dialogue, or any more challenging elements, like accents or emotional turns. If the book is non-fiction, select a section that you think may be one of the harder parts to understand. With non-fiction, sometimes the biggest challenge for the narrator is to make the content really comprehensible, even assuming you've written it clearly.

Determine Your Offer

The common ways of compensating a narrator are one, or both, of the following.

- **Work for Hire (WFR):** This means that you agree to pay a designated amount of money for the work the narrator will do. It's best to have a written agreement, mostly so that you both know that you are on the same page about exactly what you are agreeing to. Amounts and terms of payment, etc., should all be in that agreement.
- **Royalty Share (RS):** This means you are agreeing to share the risk and the rewards. ACX allows you to do a royalty share with their narrator, assuming you find a narrator you like, one who is willing to take on that risk of his or her time. Typically, only those new to audiobook narration will audition for these offerings, because, under this arrangement, such narrators rely on you to market the audiobook effectively, in order to earn anything at all for all their hard work.

- **Combination:** Some audiobook producers will consider a combination WFR and RS agreement, based on your track record with book sales in other formats (ebook and print).

WFR offerings are often made on a Per Finished Hour (PFR) or Per Finished Minute (PFM) rate. That means that when the audio is completely finished and ready for uploading, its finished length is the basis for the cost. A typical range for PFH rates is \$200-\$400. The longer your book, the more work has to go into it, and thus the more you'd pay. Consider that it takes the average professional narrator about 5-8 minutes to produce each single minute of finished audio. It's a time-consuming process.

Posting Auditions

If you are posting an audition on ACX or a freelancer site, remember that you need to allow a couple weeks, minimum, for potential candidates to find your posting. If get no response after about 4 weeks, you can:

- be more proactive - go searching and invite actors to audition,
- hire a producer, and/or
- increase your offering.

Review Auditions

As auditions come in, review them to cull out any that you know you are not interested in. The most important thing to remember here is: don't settle for a voice you don't like! Your choice of narrator is absolutely critical to your audiobook's success. If you get to a point where you get frustrated, because you can't find a voice

you believe will do a great job in bringing your book to life, you may want to get the help of a professional audiobook producer.

Get Feedback

If you are trying to decide on one or more narrators, get more opinions. Ask friends who regularly listen to audiobooks for their help, since they have listening experience and often can tell strong narrators from weak ones.

Agreements

When you are ready to hire a narrator, make sure you've got a written agreement in place. That agreement should state clearly that you retain all rights to your book. It should also clarify what boundaries there are on corrections, changes in text you may request, how many re-reads the narrator is willing to do to get it "right" for you, payment agreements, and the anticipated time line for getting the work completed.

15-minute Segment

After you've selected your narrator, you should request that he or she record the first 15 minutes and send it to you. This way you can evaluate it, to make sure the narrator is going in the right direction, has the tone you want, etc. If you've hired through the ACX system, this is a built-in part of the process.

Hiring a Producer

If you hire an audiobook producer or production company, these are the kinds of services you should expect them to provide:

- Producer does the narrator search and offers vetted options to you
- Producer gives guidance and direction to narrator to ensure the best quality audiobook
- Producer facilitates communications between author and narrator
- Producer handles uploading of files
- Producer makes sure the audiobook meets the required technical specifications
- Producer manages process with the distributors, making sure your cover image is done correctly, etc.
- Some producers help with marketing (but not typically)

Stay in close touch with your narrator. Request that finished chapters be provided to you as the actor progresses, so that you can make any course corrections as soon as they are needed. And start spreading the word about your audiobook, so that when it launches, your fans will be ready!

Support

Feel free to contact Pro Audio Voices for assistance with your audiobook.

www.proaudiovoices.com

pav@proaudiovoices.com

About the Author

Becky Parker Geist is the founder and owner of Pro Audio Voices, serving clients internationally as a go-to place for exceptional voiceover for audiobooks, and has a deep passion for helping great stories come alive! Every time a great story comes alive, doors open - in the heart, in the mind, in the spirit. With each great story we bring to life and each door we open, positive change becomes possible. Becky firmly believes we are changing the world one story at a time.

Pro Audio Voices is dedicated to providing an easy path for authors and publishers ready to build audiences, increase revenues, and expand market reach by entering the audiobook market. She records under the narrator name Becky Parker.

After receiving her M.F.A. in Acting in 1981, Becky began narrating Talking Books for the Blind through the Library of Congress, narrating over 70 titles in two years, and quickly became one of their most popular narrators. As a professional stage actress, she has toured nationally and internationally. She performs a wide range of voiceover work, and has a particular love for creating audiobooks with sound effects, when they are appropriate. Becky brings her broad range of theatre skills – acting, directing, producing, marketing – to bear in all her voiceover and production work.

Committed to leadership and building strong, long-term relationships, Becky serves as President of BAIPA (Bay Area Independent Publishers Association) and is a member of IBPA (Independent Book Publishers Assn), APA (Audio Publishers Assn), TBA (Theatre Bay Area), and BNI (Business Network International). She presents frequently on the subject of audiobook production, and is launching her new Audiobook Toolkit for Authors: How to SUCCESSFULLY Record Your Own Audiobook on March 16, 2017, in partnership with Joel Friedlander and Tracy Atkins. This Audiobook Toolkit will be available at www.authortoolkits.com.

Becky is married to classical composer John Geist and has 3 adult daughters who are also her very best friends: Elise, Jes and Jerrilee. Becky works bi-coastally, going back and forth between New York City, to work Off Broadway, and the San Francisco Bay Area.