APA New Member Learning Journey

Welcome to the APA! We're so glad to have you be part of our community. If you're a new narrator, it can be hard to sort through all the information available (the internet is a big place!), so we've curated a one-month guided learning path to help you find your footing.

Here's how it works:
1. Each week focuses on a different topic
2. For the week, we've included our favorite resources, key takeaways, and tangible steps
3. Feel free to follow these sequentially or binge them in a single sitting
4. If you have questions, don't hesitate to reach out to the [APA office](#) and we'll point you in the right direction of someone who can help

Week 1 - The Industry and the APA

The audiobook industry is growing rapidly, and it's an exciting time! Because being a successful narrator requires some industry knowhow, we start our journey here.

The APA

Formed in 1986, the Audio Publishers Association (APA) is a not-for-profit trade association that advocates the common, collective business interests of audio publishers. The APA consists of audio publishing companies and suppliers, distributors, and retailers of spoken word products and allied fields related to the production, distribution, and sale of audiobooks.

Members of the APA work together to increase public awareness for the audiobook industry by engaging in advocacy, events, networking, publicity efforts, and national consumer surveys.

Resource	Description	To-Do List
APA Committees	Want to get involved with the APA more deeply? Start here. There are a wide variety of committees available so you can find a cause that's most meaningful to you.	● Complete your member profile ● Explore the committee list ● Volunteer for a committee if you find something you would like to contribute to
Mentorship Program	The APA wants to provide peer support to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and other underrepresented narrators entering (and navigating) the audiobook business. You must be 18+ to apply. Mentors will guide mentees in building professional relationships; finding coaches, studio/equipment research, proofing, editing resources; and connecting with voice talent communities (Facebook groups, etc.).	● Review program details and apply if applicable

The Industry

The audiobook industry has changed a lot over the last 20 years, but this has not: The best narrators are also thoughtful readers. Bringing a love and understanding of the detail of language and books is a key part of excellence in the craft. In years past, the most successful actors recorded books working only in professional recording studios, guided and supported in their performances by audiobook directors and professional sound engineers. Today, many books are recorded by narrators working alone in home studios, self-directing and self-engineering their work before sending their digital recordings to publishers for editing and proofing.

Resource	Description	To-Do List
News Hub	The market is booming, and this link has a repository of news from our industry.	● Bookmark the news site ● Explore a few articles by using the Tags on the right-hand side of the news page
Sales Data *(members only)*	The APA performs yearly surveys on the audiobook market. These reports are a great place to see trends in genres, sales, audio formats, and more.	● Read the most recent sales report (log in to APA site, Resources, Sales Data)
Consumer Data *(members only)*	The APA also surveys consumers on a yearly basis. These webinars walk through the results of listener surveys.	● Watch the most recent consumer survey webinar (log in to APA site, Resources, Consumer Data)
AudioFile Magazine	This is the leading publication for the audiobook industry, which is full of news, reviews, profiles, and information about the world of audiobooks.	● Subscribe to AudioFile ● Create an AudioFile profile

Week 2 - Learning Opportunities

Now that you've had a chance to explore the APA and the industry, it's time to focus on building skills. Invest in specific audiobook acting training. Even if you're a trained actor with credits on stage, on screen, or in voiceover, you still need to learn technical skills specific to audiobook narration. As in any industry, not every person who claims to be, is, in fact, an expert.

If you're not a trained actor, begin with some basic acting courses at your local college, or join your local community theater. Read out loud, record your voice, and listen to the playback. Listen to professionally-produced audiobooks and take notes on how narrators create excellently-done performances with emotional depth and truth as they bring work off the page.

Here are a few learning resources:

Resource	Description	To-Do List
APA Presentations *(members only)*	The APA hosts an annual conference with great presentations to up your game and deepen your learning. You can benefit from previous years' content by reviewing the repository. Attendees include publishers, casting directors, and studio directors; voice actors with a range of experience; and members of the media who cover the industry. The conference includes performances from seasoned narrators, offering a great opportunity to experience live the excellence of the craft of audiobook voice acting.	• Find a presentation that looks interesting to you and review it (log in to APA site, Resources, APAC Presentations) • Register for APAC
APA Webinars *(members only)*	The APA hosts fun and informative events. There are records of the past sessions so even if you've missed them, you don't need to miss out on the information.	• Find a webinar that looks interesting to you, and give it a watch (log in to APA site, Resources, Webinars)

narrator.life	With decades of combined experience in the industry these narrators, directors, coaches and mentors, have come together to share our expertise with you. They provide coaching, classes, and community.	● Explore the educational offerings
Narrators Roadmap	All of the info and links on this site have been carefully curated for credibility and value. You'll find invaluable advice from industry pros that you will want to read and absorb. Some sections are free to all, while others are offered only to subscribers.	● Explore the resources
Deyan Institute of Voice Artistry and Technology	If you're based in LA, you can find onsite training here. They also offer online courses.	● Explore the course offerings

Week 3 - Your Setup

Just breaking into audiobook narration, you will need some degree of sound recording and engineering ability, a reasonably sound-proof space, a computer, a microphone, a preamp, and the appropriate software. While one can get started in audiobook narration with a fairly small investment (using a low-end microphone, inexpensively stealing a closet to serve as a recording booth, using free recording software, etc.), over time, a successful narrator might invest thousands of dollars in training, space, and equipment.

It is important to achieve professional studio sound even if you are recording from home. This can be difficult to do on a budget, but it is possible. Many new narrators start with the highest quality gear and environment they can afford (which can be modest and inexpensive) and move up to the next level when they can reasonably do so.

A wide range of articles and social media groups exist that discuss the best gear for every recording type, and you can research the best fit for your voice, recording needs, and budget. Here is a list of some commonly used items to get you started in researching your studio. The options presented are by no means comprehensive but are meant to show you a sampling of what is available, and these items can be obtained from a variety of sources. The links are not meant to be a recommendation to buy a particular product or from a particular company; rather they are meant to provide a quick view of the item - most of these items can be obtained from a variety of sources. You may also want to look at the Facebook page VO Gear Exchange for used items (even booths), as well as the usual places online where you would buy used gear, such as Craigslist, eBay, or reverb.com. Some of the bigger studio suppliers offer used as well as new options of some items.

Gear

Gear	Why it Matters	Sample Gear Options
Microphone	You can't have an audiobook without a microphone and a human voice. A solid microphone that captures your unique sound is critical.	- Microphone: Rode NT1A http://www.rode.com/microphones/nt1-a - Audio Technica AT4047SV https://www.audio-technica.com/en-us/at4047-sv

Essential Microphone Tools	A microphone needs to be placed appropriately and connected to your recording interface. These tools get that job done.	• Shockmount (many mics come with this automatically) • Mic stand (desktop, swingarm attached to desk or wall, or standing) • XLR to XLR microphone cable (aim for 15 feet)
Recording Interface	This allows your microphone to be captured by your recording software	• Scarlett 2i2 USB - https://focusrite.com/en/scarlett
Computer	This will run the recording software and allow you to edit your work. You can record using iOS (apple), Windows, Linux, or Android operating systems.	• Intel core i5CPU • 16GB of RAM
Monitor, keyboard, and mouse	Some computers have fans which make noise, so you'll want to have a monitor, keyboard, and mouse in your booth with you.	
Recording Software	This will be how you capture your great sound! There are many options here to choose from.	• Adobe Audition: https://www.adobe.com/products/audition.html • Audacity: https://www.audacityteam.org/ • Pro Tools: https://www.avid.com/pro-tools • Reaper: https://www.reaper.fm
Headphones	These allow you to hear your recording while you work for quality control and performance adjustments. They also look pretty cool :)	• Sony MDR-7506 - https://bit.ly/3nOtgKL • Beyerdynamic DT770 Pro - https://bit.ly/2QV7Dw3 • Headphone extender cable - https://bit.ly/3ekWCNL

Booths and Studios

Let's talk about booths. There are a few options here, and the choice you make will depend on your budget.

Minimum Requirements	Booths and Studios
Walk-in closet, preferably with clothes to muffle sound, or blanket fort vocal booth in a small, quiet, carpeted room away from street noise. Please note that building a blanket fort for sound treatment only reduces the amount of unwanted room reverb that gets into the recording ("roomy" recordings are generally not accepted by publishers and are not recommended), it will not lessen outside noise.	While these minimum environments can be effective, to obtain the best possible quality recording quality and noise reduction, we strongly recommend recording in a booth or studio. Some available studios to explore include: ● Studio Bricks - https://studiobricks.com/studiobricks-one-4/ ● Vocalbooth - https://www.vocalbooth.com ● Whisper Room - https://whisperroom.com/

You will want to adhere to your publisher's guidelines for recording specs. However, if you would like a jumping off point, here is a sample of commonly used home studio specs:

Max Peak: -1.1dB
Optimal Peak Range: -5dB to -7dB
RMS: -28dB to -26dB average
Max Noise floor: -60dB

Additional Resources

Helpful information on building your own studio:

Narrator's Guide to Pro Tools *(members only)*	A sample guide for how you can use Pro Tools for audiobook production (log in to APA site, Resources, Narration Resources).
Narrator's Guide to Reaper *(members only)*	A sample guide for how you can use Reaper for audiobook production (log in to APA site, Resources, Narration Resources).

Narrator's Guide to Adobe Audition *(members only)*	A sample guide for how you can use Adobe Audition for audiobook production (log in to APA site, Resources, Narration Resources).

Note that none of the sites below are affiliated with the APA and their inclusion here does not suggest an endorsement by the APA.

How to Build a Vocal Booth in a Bedroom	A do-it-yourself building approach.
Building a pop-up vocal booth in 30 seconds	A video walkthrough of how to use blankets and clamps to improve a space
Moving Blanket Vocal Booth	A video discussion of how to build a booth with moving blankets.
Ways to Get a Vocal Booth	A walkthrough of a few options for building booths.
ACX Gearing Up for Audiobook Production	A two-part series from ACX on the appropriate gear and the equipment side of production. ● Part 1 ● Part 2

To-Do's

- Create your budget for gear
- Create a shopping list for needed equipment
- Determine your booth approach

Week 4 - The Job

Whew! We've covered quite a bit so far; this week let's focus on exploring the job of an audiobook narrator from start to finish.

1. **Audition Appropriately -** Before accepting an audition or job, make sure it's a good fit. For example, if the description says it's set in Ireland and the heroine is South African, you will need to be able to deliver those accents throughout the book. Don't audition for a book if you have reservations about the content; the last thing you want to do is accept a job, then realize that you don't want to narrate it after all, and back out of the contract.
2. **Become an Expert** - Unless you are assigned a director, the performance is yours. You are responsible for finding out how the rights holder/publisher/etc. expects you to handle citations, chapter headings, figures/charts/illustrations, whether or not to read the dedication, and asking for pronunciation help if you have exhausted all other options. If you have done your prep and read the publisher specs sheet and you are still unsure, it is best to ask any questions prior to recording.
3. **Pre-Read and Prepare the Material Before Recording -** See the Prep/Research document for more information on prepping a book.
4. **Make Every Single Deadline -** This is vitally important, and an essential requirement of being a narrator.

For an example of best practices for narrators just getting started, check out https://hersmoothvoice.com/just-for-narrators-best-practices/.

Prepping a Script

You are expected to pre-read your book prior to recording. Some publishers will provide detailed research, but many will expect you to research pronunciation as part of your role in the project. Some will be able to ask the author for help on words or names outside the scope of what you can reasonably find in your research, such as made-up words from a fantasy novel (if so, be sure to allow enough time to hear back from the author before recording; two weeks lead time is recommended). If you need additional help, be sure to follow the publisher's protocol; many will not want you to reach out to the author directly.

If you don't know what level of assistance your publisher or producer offers, you should ask. No matter what, you will want to make sure to go into your session prepared. You may want to ask if the publisher has a style guide with information like, "Please read the epigraph (introductory quote)," or "Do not read the dedication," or, "Always say the word 'Chapter,' even if the text only has a number; e.g.: 6 would be Chapter Six," or: "II Corinthians 5:1 is read as, Second Corinthians, Chapter Five, Verse One."

While there are many tablet and app options, most narrators read their script from a tablet with an app iAnnotate, PDF Element, Notability, or FoxIt Reader. Paper scripts are no longer considered best practice, as it takes time for an editor to delete page turn noises.

Preparation options:

- Some narrators will pre-read the book twice; once as if discovering the story through the eyes of a first-time listener, then the second time to make notes. Others will make notes as they do one read-through.
- Make vocal and accent notes, e.g.: Lila, 87, had a stroke and words are slurred; Jim, Kindergarten-age, lost two front teeth and has a lisp; Frannie, Scottish, Great-Grandmother; Stanley, grew up in the French Quarter of New Orleans; Hal, voice like "reeds hitting a dock;" Tomoko, "surprisingly deep voice for a ten-year-old girl;" Jones, "deep, rich voice," etc.)
- Take character notes (e.g.: Bill, protagonist, ex-con, smoker, tough but optimistic; Sally Ann, hardened by 60 years of farm labor, bitter; Mari, sullen teen, kills Marco in self-defense, etc.)
- You can highlight character dialogue with different colors if it helps you to stay organized in session, or mark notations on your script.
- Many annotation tools include a microphone feature to record a pronunciation or character voice on the script, and there is a notes feature you can type into.

Pronunciation resources:

(These are suggested resources only and are not affiliated with or officially endorsed by the APA).

Forvo	Foreign words, place names, some notable person names. Note: look for options, e.g.: if there are 3 options and you click on the word, 3 different refs pop up and you can sometimes choose between, say, a British or Scottish source. You can also look for options along the top to select the country of origin to get the closest match. In a pinch, try Googling the word and "pronunciation." Sometimes, this can be a back door into something you can't find at first look on Forvo.
Merriam Webster	Merriam Webster is a favorite of publishers.
Oxford Dictionary	Oxford dictionary is another common favorite.

One Look	Generally has a dozen online dictionaries; the most credible like Merriam Webster, are generally at the top. Most have audio refs so you can hear the word pronounced. Note: some break words out into most used/seldom used, and others show British and American pronunciation
Youglish	A shortcut to finding your pronunciation on Youtube. Try typing in "Descartes," and you will see multiple instances pop up. Click Play, and it will play the part of the video where the name is said. You can click the right arrow to flip to the next clip, and so on.
Youtube	Type your word or name in and look for related videos. Often, if you click the ellipses button (three dots) on the mid-right section under the video, the dropdown option "Open Transcript" will pop up, and you can scroll through it to find your word in the video. Sometimes you have to look for the AI translation that most closely matches your word. If the name you're looking for is Tor Coates and you see "four goats" in the translation, it's probably what you're looking for. There are also other video sites, so if you don't find it on YouTube, try Googling the term and sorting by video.
Wordreference	This is primarily a dictionary tool, at the bottom there are often to discussion boards that might be helpful if you're trying to decide between two pronunciations
Pronounceology	A paid pronunciation app that pulls from many sources and integrates with script.
Pozotron	Pozotron now offers a research service that pulls from several sources and also enables you to add your own preferred pronunciation.
Audio Eloquence	Has additional resources for hard-to-find pronunciation, such as Latin, etc.

A few other notes on prepping and pronunciation
- Many narrators have noted that they will bypass the more general resources like Howjsay or pronouncenames or emmasays, in favor of more specific sources, like Merriam Webster. Use common sense in determining if a general site's pronunciation sounds credible. If it uses a computer voice, you may want to look elsewhere.
- Google Translate (search Translate on Google and click the link) can be useful, but for many narrators this will be the last stop just to verify a pronunciation they think they know; often the pronunciation is faulty.
- Some narrators may hire someone to research a book with difficult words, others will do their own research. In a pinch, you can always call the Chamber of Commerce in a town with a difficult place name, or you can try typing in the place name and

"library," or "school," e.g.: Willamette Elementary School and you can sometimes call and listen to the outgoing message with the name pronounced or ask a librarian for help. Last ditch efforts, call local restaurants or hotels and see if a helpful person will solve your problem.

To-Do's

- Explore the pronunciation sites
- Try prepping a book
- Create a project plan template for preparation and recording

Week 5 - Networking and Finding Jobs

Narration is a marathon, not a sprint. This applies not only to the narration process, but also to a career in audiobooks. If a client shows interest but doesn't hire you right away, don't despair; sometimes it can take years to land a client. It is helpful to cast a wide net so that if you're having a fallow period with one client, another will pick up the slack, ensuring a steady workload. Most of the advice in this document is geared towards marketing yourself for traditional publishers, rather than garnering a fanbase. Both are important, but if your goal is to be hired by publishers, positioning yourself as hirable is your first goal.

Must-Haves

Must-Have	Description	To-Do List
Website	It is helpful (many would say essential) to have a place for producers to find you online – especially one in which you control your branding. So even if it's simply a SoundCloud page with a bio, several samples, and your contact info, you will need a place that represents your work and your persona, that shows off the genres and styles in which you excel.	• Purchase a website domain

Demos	Even if you have not yet narrated any audiobooks, this is still the first step. The average number of sample clips on a website is 3-7. Clips should be separated into genres, e.g. Literary Fiction, Mystery, Romance, Young Adult, Nonfiction, Children's. Do not mix genres or books in one clip – one scene is adequate for each clip. Average length of each clip is 2-4 minutes. Try to pick a compelling scene with some dialogue that the listener can jump into easily.	• Determine which demo's you want on your website • Find excerpts to use for your demo recording
Bio	This is your first best chance to establish your credibility. If you're new, include things like your acting training, stage, or screen work. Related work like being a singer, an acting teacher, a director, a dramaturg, can all be helpful in establishing your credentials. If you've been in the industry for a while, you can list awards and distinctions, notable books you've narrated, or notable publishers you've worked with. Any details that might help a producer cast you more widely – fluency in languages (even if you're not fluent, just conversational, this can be helpful), having lived abroad, experience in industries that might make you desirable for a certain genre (e.g. if you worked in the military, you might be cast for a thriller or a soldier's memoir).	• Write your bio

In-Person Networking

1. Make a habit of checking the APA Events page regularly to be sure you don't miss potential networking opportunities.
2. APAC (the Audio Publishers Association Conference) is held annually. Be sure that you check all your APA emails to ensure that you are aware of early registration dates (special sessions can close out quickly), and look for add-ons in your registration, like a reduced cost for your annual AudioFile Talent Guide listing and entering special sessions like Speed Dating or Meet the Producers.

3. The Audies Gala – the annual APA audiobook awards ceremony, often held in conjunction with APAC. Another networking opportunity.
4. Socials – the APA has socials online and in different regions throughout the year.
5. Classes where a producer is present – it's a great way to learn about what they like and to get in front of them.
6. The APA has 4-6 virtual Speed Dating events throughout the year. This is an opportunity to take part in the lottery to present yourself to APA member producers and publishers.
7. Literary conferences – narrators sometimes attend literary conferences to network with other narrators, authors, and publishers. Some narrators attend locally, and others travel to participate. Look for audiobook-related panels to attend, and you'll find your people. Offering to volunteer can be another way to become involved and part of the literary scene.
8. Get involved. Volunteering for organizations like the APA can be a great way to contribute, network, and build your community. Reach out and ask about joining.

Online Listings

1. AudioFile Magazine offers paid listings for narrators in their Talent & Industry Guide. With the listing, you receive a free newsletter every Thursday that lists reviews and awards. You can use those to see when your work gets an AudioFile review or Earphones Award – something to post about on social media.
2. Some publishers and producers have their own casting databases that you can add yourself to, e.g. Penguin Random House has a database called AHAB. Typically, the publisher's website contains sign-up directions.
3. You can make a listing for yourself on ACX and Findaway Voices to audition for author projects, and visit Spoken Realms to explore their model.

Online Networking

1. Social Media – a lot of industry people are on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. TikTok is more fan-facing but can help build your following. Join audiobook-oriented social media groups – search "audiobooks" to find ones relevant to your interests. Be cautious about your sources and cross-check everything until you determine which groups are most credible. And be professional if you post – you never know who might be reading.
2. Clubhouse – many narrators host informational chats, interviews, and workout groups on Clubhouse.
3. Some narrators are using Discord to record in real time with an audience watching. Don't do this without permission from your publisher.

Following Up with Publishers

- When following up with producers, make it easy for them and safe for company firewalls. Don't use attachments. Include a link to your website and relevant links to reviews in the body of the email.
- After events in which you meet producers, you can follow up with a friendly and informative email. You can also send cold emails to producers, send a personal newsletter, or follow up with existing clients. Here is a sample shape for a pitch email to a new client.
  - *Lead with something friendly or appreciative, harking back to a recent conversation or why you would like to work together. o Let them know you are credible (even if this info is on your website, state it more briefly here).*
    - *If you're new, include acting training, stage, screen or audio experience, dialects, or relevant background.*
    - *If you're experienced, add things like number of narration jobs completed, awards and distinctions, a quote from a recent review, a linked review, genres you most often work in and any specialties.*
  - *Let them know your location in case they want to bring you into a studio. Let them know if you have a pro-quality home studio. Add a link to your website.*
  - *A quick, optimistic signoff.*
- If you're emailing someone you already work with, it can be even shorter. Thank them for the work. Let them know what you've been up to. Highlight genres in which you've been successful and would like to continue working.
- Some producers prefer newsletters, others like personal emails. Some like more frequent outreach from narrators, such as once a month or quarter, while others prefer contact only once or twice a year. It's hard to know, so ask friends, listen to podcasts and webinars in which the producers are interviewed about their work – there's usually info about how they prefer to be approached. The APA webcasts have a lot of archived info on the industry, producers, networking, and branding

To-Do's

In Person Networking	- Register for APAC - Register for an APA social - Put APA Speed Dating application deadlines on your calendar - Research Literary conferences in your area

Online Listings	- Create an ACX profile - Create a Findaway Voices profile - Create an Ahab profile - Explore Spoken Realms
Online Networking	Join a few online audiobook communities on your social media platforms
Following Up with Publishers	- Draft your introduction letter template - Create a list of initial publishers you would like to reach out to - Research their communication preferences using the webinar listing on the APA website