What to Look for in a Script

This section was originally included in Chapter 4 of previous editions of *The Art of Voice Acting*. It is included here as an additional resource.

Now that you know some of the basics for creating an effective voiceover delivery, here's a script for you to work with. Read it through once to get a feel for the copy. Notice that you instinctively make some choices as to how you will deliver the copy. Deliver the script using the choices you make. Then scan this code or listen to the "Slip and Fall Accidents" audio in the AOVA Extras area at **VoiceActing.com**.

It happens everyday . . . in hotels, restaurants and other public buildings . . . without warning. It's responsible for 20,000 fatalities – and it's the second leading cause of death and disability. Slip and fall accidents – learn how to protect your rights if it happens to you. Tonight at 11 on Eye Witness News.



Do you think your delivery achieved the objective of communicating the message effectively? An effective voiceover delivery requires looking beyond the words of a script to dig out the details and subtlety hidden in the message. Now, read it a second and third time, looking for the following points. Finally, read it out loud for time, to see how close you can come to 15 seconds.

- Who is the audience this copy is trying to reach?
- How can you create interest within the first few words?
- How can you create an emotional response to keep the audience listening?
- What is the single primary message in the copy?
- What are the supporting statements for the primary

message?

- What is your role (your character) in the story?
- Why is your character telling this story?
- What does your character want or need from telling this story?
- What is the primary emotion, if any?
- What sort of delivery do you think would be the most effective to create the strongest memory of the message—strong, hard-sell, happy, smiling, mellow, soft-sell, fast, slow?
- What is your attitude as the character in this spot—serious, comfortable, happy, sad, and so on?
- In what way can you make the audience feel safe, comfortable, and in control of their decision to keep listening?
- What visual images come into your mind as you read the copy?

How did you answer the questions? By the way, there are no wrong answers! Each of your answers represents a choice that ultimately results in your personal interpretation of the story. This spot is a TV promo, so there are visuals that go with the copy. You might discern that from the format of the script, from a notation at the title, from written directorial notes, or from the producer telling you. Sometimes, however, you will not have anything more than the words on the page. Here's an interpretation of this copy:

- The target audience is men and women who spend time in public places, and who are concerned about safety issues. The focus is primarily on adults who travel or work in large buildings. To effectively reach this audience, you need to speak to one person.
- The message does not answer any questions, but instead, creates awareness of a potential problem. Your delivery of the first line of copy should instantly grab the listener's attention and you should deliver the remaining copy in a way that hints at solutions, but reveals that solutions to the problem can only be resolved by the viewer watching the program.
- There are several very visual and emotional references that can be used to help create a mood or tone for the message: The words "hotels," "restaurants," and "other public places," all conjure up powerful images in both your mind as a

performer, and in the mind of the listener. By the same token, “it happens every day,” and “without warning” are phrases the listener can identify with. The words “death” and “disability” are emotionally charged words that are intended to illicit a response. Each viewer’s response to these words will be unique, but the intent is to create an impact in the viewer’s mind as to the potential for serious injury.

- The person speaking here is telling a story—a sort of mystery story about a serious problem. The telling of this story is done with a sense of drama and suspense, which leads up to the revelation of exactly what the problem is and what the listener can do.
- The overall delivery is sincere, compassionate, and concerned, with a serious, almost foreboding tone. This attitude is retained throughout the delivery. Each element—almost every word—of the message is given value and importance. The end of the copy is delivered in a more matter-of-fact manner, but still keeping a tone of compassion about the story.

All these answers combine to provide the basic information you need to effectively deliver the copy. The visual image is important because it sets the scene, a solid framework for your character, and helps establish the attitude of the spot. As an actor, you need to know these things. Otherwise, you are just reading words on a page—and that’s boring!

With experience, you can analyze a script in a matter of seconds, just from a single read-through. You’ll instantly know what you need to do in your performance to make the message both interesting and compelling. Trust your instincts and use what you have learned from your interpretation to give depth to your character and life to the copy. Above all, bring your unique personality into the copy and everything else will come naturally.