

Recording Equipment for Today's Voice Actor

By Voicetrax Recording Instructor Jim Edgar

This is truly a great time to be setting up a home-based recording studio. The quality of tools available to current voice actors simply boggles the mind. Much like the leap forward when recording shifted from analog tape to digital systems back in the early 1990's, the constantly improving nature of modern microelectronics means that quality reserved only for top-end studios can now be found, purchased and used in a home-based recording setup.

On the other hand, it can be quite overwhelming to try to choose between all of the offerings when searching for microphones, recorders or other equipment. The fact is that most decent quality gear can be made to sound good if you know how to use it appropriately - one of the reasons Voicetrax offers technical recording courses. But, what is "decent" when it comes to recording your voice? It depends a bit upon what you need to do.

Your equipment needs will be based on where you are in your learning curve as a voice actor. While most working voice actors have access to quality setup in their home or office, they also need to produce work that goes directly to air. When first learning, you may only need to record and play back your voice reliably. Voicetrax Intermediate level classes often require students to record at home and email the audio for an instructor's pre-class review. Pro VO's have been known to record auditions (and even final audio) in the strangest of places when time is tight and they are on the road.

The good news is that you can start simply. As you upgrade, that gear can become your backup system, or be sold to folks starting out.

The most basic system would be simple and portable - best used for practicing and listening back to your performances.

Your Phone -

Yep - iPhone for sure and now Android has caught up with some very simple "dictation" type recording apps. The only downside with this is that the audio is typically not of quality for production work, as the phones actively reduce the file sizes by compressing the audio.

Dedicated Hardware Recorders -

Zoom and Tascam both make hand-held recorders which are truly pro-level. The good news is that the prices have fallen tremendously on these, as most people are using software-based systems to record. With some models, you can produce full-spectrum audio and transfer that to a computer for detailed editing. The downside is that the interfaces tend to be a little difficult to understand, so there can be a technical learning curve.

Zoom - <https://www.zoom.co.jp/> - Field & Video Recorders

TASCAM - http://tascam.com/applications/recording/handheld_recorder/

Computer-based Recording Software

Some of the most popular recording applications are less than \$100 or even free. Most work on Windows and Apple operating systems. These allow you to record into your computer with a USB mic or converter. You can then edit and directly work with your recordings, saving them for easy reference or class assignments. All of these can produce industry-standard audio formats.

Twisted Wave - My personal favorite, though Mac OSX only - <https://twistedwave.com/>

OcenAudio - Newish free software out of Brazil - Mac/Windows versions - <https://www.ocenaudio.com/>

Audacity - Free multitrack recording environment with wide support - Mac/Windows/Linux versions - <http://www.audacityteam.org/>

USB Microphones

Just to get slightly pedantic, these are technically “Condenser microphones with a USB connection” which means that you can connect them directly to your computer’s USB port and start recording. But, since most folks call them “USB Mics,” you can too... This is the area where there have been most of the improvements in recent years. The price of the technology continues to drop, which has significantly increased the quality of this microphone type. This will continue to be a place where new models frequently appear. But, the following three are proven and popular.

Rode NT-USB - <http://en.ode.com/microphones/nt-usb>

Audio Technica AT 2020 USB - <https://tinyurl.com/mic-at2020-usb-plus>

Apogee MiC - <http://www.apogeedigital.com/products/mic>

USB Interface/Converters

This is a device that goes between a traditional microphone and a computer. It allows you to use a wider variety of microphones, including specialty mics which are more directional. Although some people refer to these as “preamps” they actually do a lot more. This is another place where we have benefitted by the quality improvements at various price points. We get deeper into the how/why specifics in the recording classes, but two popular models are below. The models which accept two and one microphones as input are listed.

FocusRite Scarlett Series - the 2i2 and Solo models - <https://us.focusrite.com/scarlett-range>

Steinberg - UR22 and UR12 models -

https://www.steinberg.net/en/products/audio_interfaces/ur_serie/start.html

Good Basic XLR-Connected Condenser Microphones

Everyone has a favorite microphone, but these are excellent quality models which connect through a USB Interface. Most of these will need separate cables and stands - they are not “hand held”. Most of these microphones are also much more sensitive, so they will tend to pick

up environmental noises and reflections - something we work on during Intro To Home Recording.

Rode NT1-A - <http://www.ode.com/microphones/nt1-a>

Studio Projects C1 - <http://www.studioprojectsusa.com/c1.html>

Audio Technical AT4040 - <https://tinyurl.com/mic-at4040-xlr>

Once you get all that gear home and unboxed, it can be a little overwhelming. But hang in there, keep it simple and experiment a bit. Just as the first time you read a script, it takes familiarity and practice to record well.

Remember - the space you record it has a huge influence upon the quality of your audio. Pillows and clothes hanging in closets can work to damp vocal reflections, and then you can refine things as you develop a better sense of how things should sound.