

## **Recording Your Voice: VO Equipment Basics**

By Voicetrax Recording Instructor Jim Edgar

This is truly a great time to be setting up a home-based recording studio. The offering of tools gets better every year. The constantly improving nature of modern gear means that quality once reserved only for top-end studios can now be put to use in your recording setup.

On the other hand, trying to choose between all of the options can be overwhelming. On the internet, everyone seems to have an opinion on the “best mic” or what equipment you “need.” People are always willing to help you spend lots of money on your studio.

The fact is that most decent quality gear can sound good if you know how to use it appropriately - one of the reasons Voicetrax offers technical recording courses. But question remains - 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 a high quality setup in their home or office, they also need to produce work that goes directly to air. It can take a while to soundproof and acoustically treat a room to achieve this level. (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.)

As a new student working with scripts at home, you may only need to simply record and play back your voice reliably so you can hear what you did. Voicetrax Intermediate level classes often require students to record at home and email the audio for an instructor's pre-class review.

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. It may use equipment you already have.

### **HOW TO RECORD -**

#### **Your Phone -**

Simple and functional - your phone should have very basic “dictation” type recording apps. The only downside with this is that the audio is typically not of quality for production or class 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 devices. The good news is that prices have fallen tremendously on these, as most people are using software-based systems to record. So if you are on a tighter budget, these could be a more economical option while you begin. 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/](http://tascam.com/applications/recording/handheld_recorder/)

### **Computer-based Recording Software -**

Some of the most popular recording applications are less than \$100 (or free). Most work on Windows and MacOS operating systems, so you can use the computer you may already own. These allow you to record via a “USB mic” or other type of microphone via a converter. You can then edit and save your recordings, keeping them for easy reference or class assignments. All of these can produce industry-standard audio formats.

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

**OcenAudio** - Good stable program, Mac/Windows/Linux versions - <https://www.ocenaudio.com/>

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

**Studio One** - Another multitrack option with a free-level version - Mac/Windows versions - <https://www.presonus.com/products/Studio-One>

### **EQUIPMENT FOR YOUR SETUP -**

#### **Simple & Direct: USB Microphones**

Just to get slightly pedantic, these are technically “Condenser microphones with a USB connection” which means that you can attach 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>

#### **Use A Standard Microphone: USB Interface/Converters**

This is a device that goes between a traditional “XLR” 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. 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](https://www.steinberg.net/en/products/audio_interfaces/ur_serie/start.html)

### **Talk Here: Good Basic XLR-Connected Condenser Microphones**

Everyone has a favorite microphone and you can certainly spend a lot of money on one. These are good quality models at an affordable price. They connect through a USB Interface (above - you'll need both to make it work). You will also need a microphone stand - they are not "hand held". Most of these microphones are extremely sensitive to sound, so they will tend to pick up environmental noises and reflections which you might not notice - something we address during my **Intro To Home Recording class**.

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

**SE X1 S "Vocal Pack"** - <https://www.seelectronics.com/se-x1s-microphone/>

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

### **Now Start Practicing!**

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 a bit of practice to record well.

Remember - the space you record in 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.

### **Recording Basics Checklist -**

- Enthusiastic VO student
- A quiet and non-echoey space to record
- Microphone w/ pop screen
- Microphone stand
- Copy stand to hold scripts
- Cable to connect mic to converter (or directly to your computer)
- Converter (unless you are using a USB-direct-connected microphone)
- Computer running recording software

**For upcoming VO and recording classes, visit the Voicetrax website -**  
[www.voicetraxsf.com](http://www.voicetraxsf.com)