

Unit 22: Audio Performance Acting

Unit code:	A/502/5398
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The focus of the unit is on developing acting and vocal skills for the specialist demands required for solo and ensemble audio performance.

● Unit introduction

In recent years, the employment opportunities for performers in radio and audio recording have grown. The increased number of radio stations, the use of 'voice-overs' in advertising, the sustained demand for radio drama, the growth in demand for audio dramatisations of poetry and novels, and the emergence of character-based video games have enabled performers to broaden their range of work. Many performers find the intensive demands of studio-based audio recording exciting, and the short-contract nature of the work leaves them available for other opportunities in theatre, television or film. The work can also be financially lucrative: leading film actors now often 'voice' major cartoon characters, while television 'stars' often provide voice-over for TV commercials.

In this unit learners will concentrate on developing effective and versatile vocal technique. They will develop their ability to record as solo and ensemble performers, focusing on responding to the demands of different genres within the audio recording industry. By listening to and analysing the work of professional voice artists, and shaping and reviewing their own radio and other audio recording work, learners will discover how to improve and broaden their own skills.

Learners will be assessed on one solo recording lasting a minimum of three minutes, and one group recording lasting a minimum of six minutes.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know performance techniques used in radio drama and other audio fields
- 2 Be able to use vocal skills in solo audio performance
- 3 Be able to use vocal skills in ensemble audio performance.

Unit content

1 Know performance techniques used in radio drama and other audio fields

Performance techniques: presentation styles eg recording as self or as an acted character; actor planning techniques eg character profiling, planning units, objectives and barriers; content and structure; target audience; vocal techniques using microphones; script annotation techniques eg planning pauses and vocal emphasis; spontaneity and script reading; working with sound effects; studio and outside broadcast; recording conventions

2 Be able to use vocal skills in solo audio performance

Voice: volume/loudness; vocal inflection; changes in tone eg hard, soft

Speech: pace; accent/dialect; diction; speech inflection; use of 'specials' (vocal idiosyncracies); characterisation; styles; dynamics; reacting to, and incorporating sound effects and ambient noise; using microphones to suggest distance/intimacy

Context: eg solo storytelling, interviewing guests, radio presentation (including music radio and talk radio), dramatic ensemble work, news reading, commercials work, documentary, sight-reading, comedy, use of script/improvising, 'voice-overs' in advertising, audio dramatisations of poetry and novels, character-based work in animation and video games

Techniques: eg solo microphone technique, live mixing, script work, inserting pre-recorded material, links, outside broadcast

Solo genres: eg documentary narration, dramatic monologues, radio presenting, commercials, news, continuity announcement, hosting trailers, storytelling, 'mockumentary'

3 Be able to use vocal skills in ensemble audio performance

Ensemble: group microphone techniques; differentiation of individual voices; timing in ensemble work; listening/reacting; use of space

Ensemble genres: eg radio drama, interviews, commercials with character duologues, documentary with character voices (eg historical figures), improvised work (eg comedy), debate/discussion, 'mockumentary'

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 identify ways in which performance techniques contribute to radio drama and other audio recordings [RL]	M1 describe ways in which performance techniques contribute to a range of radio drama and other audio recordings	D1 critically assess ways in which performance techniques contribute to a range of radio drama and other audio recordings
P2 present solo audio performance work using appropriate vocal skills [SM]	M2 present solo audio performance work using a range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating some versatility	D2 present solo audio performance work using a wide range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating versatility
P3 present ensemble audio performance work using appropriate vocal skills. [TW].	M3 present ensemble audio performance work using a range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating some versatility.	D3 present ensemble audio performance work using a wide range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating versatility.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

Much of the delivery of this unit will be through practical workshop activities, in which learners explore the different demands and opportunities relating to acting within audio recording. Learners should therefore be encouraged to listen to a wide variety of recorded and broadcast performances. They should then experiment with their own versions of such performances, for example listening to, emulating and analysing radio commercials and audio storytelling before attempting to record examples of their own. This approach can also shape assessed outcomes, for example after listening to commercial recordings of protest poetry, they could employ their increased understanding of the vocal requirements of such material to produce their own CD of protest poetry. The identification and development of vocal skills required could take place in both normal workshop and studio conditions.

As solo performers, learners should adopt and develop professional techniques, such as annotating scripts for performance, and adopting informed methods for working with a microphone; they should do this in different recording contexts, for example within both studio and outside broadcast situations.

As contributors to group performances, learners should expand their solo skills to meet the needs of the group. This is likely to involve practical work on developing the behavioural skills of listening and reacting, again within different recording contexts, and there should be experimentation with improvised, as well as scripted work.

This unit requires learners to develop some understanding of the technical aspects of the recording process from the performer's point of view. It does not require a high degree of specialist technical recording knowledge.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to unit and structure of the programme – whole class. Survey of radio drama and audio recording.
Self-presentations focusing on voice and speech communication. Analysis of personal communication styles and linking to character work. Assessing contemporary naturalistic audio production (listening/discussion). Assessing other production fields, eg commercials, narration styles, character comedy. Script planning workshops (objectives/barriers, annotating scripts for voice use). Practice exercises using sample scripts.
Assignment 1: Solo Recording Portfolio – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, M2
Participate in script selection. Planning: individual 'uniting' exercise working on scripts from different genres. Line-familiarisation and independent character work. Microphone/studio rehearsals prior to recording. Recording of solo work. Post-performance review and evaluation.
Assignment 2: Ensemble Recording Portfolio – P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3
Participate in ensemble script selection. Planning: individual 'uniting' exercise working on scripts from different genres. Line-familiarisation and independent character work. Microphone/studio rehearsals prior to recording. Recording of ensemble scenes in small groups. Post-performance review and evaluation.
Review of module and process.

Assessment

Evidence for this unit will be generated via both practical workshop classes, and rehearsed recordings, underpinned by appropriate research and textual analysis. Evidence for the research and rehearsal phases will be in the form of an actor's log that will document the investigations, theoretical and experiential, into approaches to audio performance. The log should conclude with an evaluation of the assessed recordings. Although this log will generally be written, learners should be encouraged to use a range of supporting material and to express their creative process in a personal manner. In order to support a range of learners' needs, it may be appropriate to consider different methods of collating the evidence, for example video diary, *viva voce*, discussion groups. Further evidence of learners' working processes and creative contributions to recordings will be in the form of documentation, such as minutes of meetings and tutor statements. Supporting tutor statements may be contained either in the feedback given to learners in interim recorded feedback sessions, or through the use of an observation report of the learners' work. It may also be appropriate to consider the use of audio recording to provide evidence at key stages during the rehearsal process, eg of formative activity such as character hot-seating, participation in voice workshops, etc.

The unit requires learners to research and have practical evidence of working within a range of audio performance styles. Learners may use edited extracts from published audio texts, as this unit does not require learners to prepare and perform, for example, full-length radio plays. However, the extracts should each allow for the exploration and realisation of key relevant 'stylistic' features, such as audience targeting, character-based voice work, and projection of emotions.

Learning outcome 1 could be evidenced through a range of artefacts that combine to represent learners' investigation of approaches to text and character within audio performance. Learners' response to different types of audio work should produce observable differences in content. For example, planning work for a radio commercial using a solo character stereotype would feature a high degree of character-based preparatory work, with focus on audiences and on the contrasting vocal qualities of 'the actor' and the fictional character; work on a narrated documentary would focus on the style and genre of the piece, as well as an analysis of appropriate narrative technique.

Learning outcomes 2 and 3 will be evidenced primarily through documentary evidence, including audio recordings that demonstrate learners' successful progress through rehearsal to recording.

NB: When applying the grading criteria tutors should follow the advice given below. Please note that the examples of evidence given here are indicative only: examples need not be included in a learner's work in order for that learner to achieve the exemplified grade.

To achieve a pass, learners must be able to demonstrate a basic level of participation in an exploration of the various requirements for acting in recorded work. For P1, learners must be able to identify their recorded work and acting techniques. They will provide a correct but unelaborated outline of effective audio acting, and offer some basic observations that accurately identify the acting techniques being employed. For example, 'When you're working on a 15-second commercial, you need to remember that the audience has very little time to recognise the character type, so you have to make clear choices'.

To meet P2 and P3, the application of acting techniques demonstrated in the finished performance will be at a basic level, and aesthetic understanding and capabilities will also be basic. It is likely that pass level learners will be hampered in expressing their intentions fully by their limited grasp of audio acting technique and role development skills.

At merit level, learners' participation throughout the process will be competent and disciplined, working in a more organised way than pass-level learners. In performance learners will show focus and creativity, and will communicate well, for example there should be few, if any, diction problems.

Learners must, for criterion M1, discuss performance work and acting techniques with reference to examples of recorded material, for example sections of play text, commercials and narration. Work on text will thus be subjected to some commentary, and the acting techniques employed will be made more explicit using detailed examples from the material to illustrate the points made. Though these examples will not be elucidated further and comments will not be supported or developed further by argument there will, nonetheless, be a sense of thoughtfulness in learners' work. So, in a discussion of a non-naturalistic performance in a radio comedy, learners might describe the content of the scene as a pass level learner would, but then note, 'The playwright wanted the audience to see how unfair things look from the teenager's point of view, so the actors stereotyped the parents as being pompous and not listening. Since their main audience was aged around 18-30, this added humour to the recording.'

The performance production work of merit level learners will be competent – that is, learners will give some thought to the generation of a role and will develop it with care, working in a more organised way than pass level learners. Their planning work, for example character profiling, script annotation will contain some detail, and the final product will show that a specific acting technique, for example use of vocal inflection has been understood and employed to some effect. To achieve criteria M2 and M3 learners will need to be competent in the technical skills of acting in order to be able to express their intentions, though the merit level learner will still need occasional advice or support in many aspects of the work. Aesthetic decisions will be based on some thought and will be on the whole satisfying.

Distinction level learners will develop ideas, show initiative in conducting research, and make an energetic and significant contribution to the success of the project at all stages. In performance, learners will show a level of sophistication in synthesising their creative work with the technical demands of the recording process.

Distinction level work will be characterised throughout by creative thinking and activity. Whether developing their understanding (D1) or engaging in the production process (D2, D3), learners will achieve high quality results and will create recordings that are beginning to move beyond the purely conventional. Acting techniques will be used with facility and to good effect and character work will be deployed creatively – distinction level learners will blend technique and creative skill to serve their intentions. They will be able to think laterally and come up with ideas and solutions that others might have not thought of. This will come through in the way they articulate their understanding of audio acting techniques through their work in rehearsal and recording, and in the aesthetic qualities of the final piece of work. They will be able to work independently.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, M2	Assignment 1: Solo Recording Portfolio	<p>This assignment incorporates the planning, rehearsal and performance stages of learners' creative work on solo audio projects.</p> <p>Strategies may include character profiling, dividing up an audio script using units/objectives/barriers, and analysing power in relationships. Learners will demonstrate skill in solo working using acting and microphone techniques.</p>	<p>Portfolio of evidence consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • character planning notes • actor's log, including reflections on own style of communication; reflections and analysis of own contributions; and analysis of microphone techniques used • script showing actor's analysis, eg of units • notes (with actor comments) from audio project director • tutor witness statements • performances (recorded).
P1, M1, D1, P3, M3, D3	Assignment 2: Ensemble Recording Portfolio	<p>This assignment incorporates the planning, rehearsal and performance stages of learners' creative work on ensemble audio projects.</p> <p>Strategies may include character profiling, dividing up an audio script using units/objectives/barriers, and analysing power in relationships. Learners will demonstrate skill in ensemble working using acting and microphone techniques.</p>	<p>Portfolio of evidence consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • character planning notes • actor's log, including reflections on own style of communication; reflections and analysis of own contributions; and analysis of microphone techniques used • script showing actor's analysis, eg of units • notes (with actor comments) from audio project director • tutor witness statements • performances (recorded).

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Exploring Acting Skills	Acting Skills and Techniques	Principles of Acting
		Applying Acting Styles
		Developing Voice for the Actor
		Voice and the Actor
		Drama Improvisation

Essential resources

For this unit learners will be rehearsing and recording solo and ensemble audio performance work in a variety of styles and genres. Accordingly, resources used should match this scenario. There should be a dedicated recording studio (fixed or adapted), with supporting audio technology that allows for high-quality recording of learners' work both within the studio and outdoors. An appropriate range of texts and supporting research material is required and learners should also have access to the internet for research purposes. Learners should have access to the production means to record under 'work in progress' conditions, for example access to portable recorders when studio access is not available.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

The opportunity to hear recordings of professional actors' performances in the styles of the work being prepared is integral to enhancing learners' understanding of key differences between acting styles. Centres should develop links with local recording venues, for example regional radio stations. Visiting experts, for example actors and presenters may be willing to visit and offer insights into creative processes.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Beck A – *Radio Acting: Studio Work, Radio Adverts, Voice-overs, Voice Production, Technical Production* (A&C Black, 1997) ISBN 9780713646313

Elsam P – *Acting Characters: 20 Simple Steps from Rehearsal to Performance* (A&C Black, 2006) ISBN 9780713675863

Fredman R and Reade I – *Essential Guide to Making Theatre* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1996) ISBN 9780340655146

McCallion M – *The Voice Book: for everyone who wants to make the most of their voice* (Faber and Faber, 1998) ISBN 9780571195251

Shaw B G – *Voice-Overs: A Practical Guide* (Theatre Arts, 2001) ISBN 9780878301157

Journal

The Stage

Websites

www.equity.org.uk

Equity

www.skillset.org

Skillset – The sector skills council for creative media

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Creative thinkers	trying out alternative ways of constructing their work, eg approaches to creating a character, using improvisation to develop scripted relationships, following ideas through to produce a successful recording adapting their ideas as circumstances change
Team workers	taking responsibility for their own role in group recordings managing discussions to reach agreements and achieve results
Self-managers	seeking out challenges or new responsibilities and showing flexibility when priorities change dealing with competing pressures, including personal and work-related demands responding positively to change, seeking advice and support when needed
Effective participators	sustaining work on a role through the various stages of planning, rehearsal, recording and evaluation communicating effectively to a targeted audience maintaining a professional attitude throughout a creative process.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	planning and carrying out research into differences in audio acting styles carrying out research to develop creative ideas for their own character(s)
Creative thinkers	trying out alternative approaches to character development, eg hot-seating adapting their ideas as circumstances change
Reflective learners	setting goals with success criteria for their production work inviting feedback on their own work and dealing positively with praise, setbacks and criticism evaluating their experiences and learning to inform future progress
Team workers	taking responsibility for their own role when working in a group managing discussions to reach agreements and achieve results
Self-managers	seeking out challenges or new responsibilities and showing flexibility when priorities change dealing with competing pressures, including personal and work-related demands responding positively to change, seeking advice and support when needed.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	exploring, extracting and assessing the relevance of information from websites which contain significant ideas, eg archive recordings of previous productions
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	participating in scene rehearsals and recordings that involve other performers/director participating in production meetings
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	working on a script as an actor, eg dividing scenes into units, annotating script conducting creative research, eg text- or web-based information on character completing a character profile sheet
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	maintaining a performer's log producing minutes for production meetings.