
Advice for Scripture and Drama Recording

A guide for narrators and actors

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This is a list of advice for narrators and actors working on audio products for promoting Scripture Engagement - especially radio programmes. These could be dramatised Bible portions or Scripture relevance dramas. The advice comes from a drama team with many years of experience in producing radio programmes in West Africa.

General attitude

1. You must realise that what you are doing is above all to the Lord. Begin any work session with prayer.
2. Have an attitude of humility and learn to criticise yourself. Know how to accept criticism and suggestions from others. If you make a suggestion, do not precede it with unkind words, and beware of too much teasing of others!
3. Do help each other to relax. At first we might feel tense. Add some humour during the recordings!
4. The director should never get annoyed. A bad reaction can ruin everything for someone. Patience and encouragement will ensure success.

Individual preparation

1. Read the entire script at least twice to familiarise yourself with the whole story, all the characters, etc.
2. Take a pencil/pen/fluorescent marker to mark your lines, or mark where you need to remember something (where you need to speak up, where to put the stress/intonation, where you need to pause, etc.)
3. Make a big effort to understand the full meaning of the text. It is very important to understand what you read. Otherwise, there will be too much hesitation.
4. Try to put yourself in the shoes of your character. Think of their character, their temperament, their behaviour. What do they like? What don't they like?
5. Identify the emotion of the person in each scene: sad? happy? angry? suffering? surprised?
6. Before arriving at the rehearsal or recording, read your lines aloud to a friend/relative.

Reading for the radio

1. Learn to read without sounding as if you are. Read each sentence to yourself, then look up from the text and repeat it by looking at the person in front of you. Or ask a friend (a good reader) to read a sentence and you repeat it after them.
2. Try not to think of all the listeners! Speak as if just one is in front of you.
3. Avoid monotone. Vary (without exaggeration) the volume, speed and intensity of your voice to communicate emotion. On the radio we see neither the face nor the gestures!
4. Open your mouth wide so you can pronounce all the words. Be careful not to 'swallow' your words (which becomes difficult in scenes of great emotion). Listeners will have no opportunity to ask you to repeat the part they have not understood.
5. If your character is present in the scene, but does not speak for a few moments, remember the appropriate responses to give (even if they are not in the script). For a natural dialogue, you need to hear the natural reactions of those who are listening - in the small pauses between the speaker's phrases.
6. Improvisations: you should feel free to suggest improvements to the drama script, e.g. perhaps one or more sentences (by one or several voices) which are not in the text, but which would be useful to insert so as to make a scene more lively, more realistic or lighter.

In the studio

1. If you have several microphones, place them so that the different actors in the scene can look each other in the face. This avoids the need to turn one's head to look at the person to whom you are speaking.
2. Learn to keep your mouth at the same distance from the microphone (so choose a comfortable position - sitting or standing). It is sometimes useful to measure the distance between mouth and microphone as follows: put your thumb on your lips, and extend your hand so that your finger extends to just in front of the microphone.
3. Do not turn pages while you are being recorded. The paper-turning noise will be picked up by the microphones.
4. It is useful to have a glass of water handy to moisten dry mouths.
5. Beware of tiredness! If errors begin to multiply, leave the studio a few minutes to catch a breath of fresh air.
6. Ensure that at least one or two people (speakers of the language) who are not in the scene are in the studio to listen to others. They should signal if they find that there was an error somewhere.