



# **ONLINE MEDIA KIT**

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# Company Overview

The Seattle Voice Academy began as the Seattle Voice Institute in 2015, and was rebranded the Seattle Voice Academy in 2018.

The Seattle Voice Academy trains voices in four areas:

- Vocal health
- Singing
- Voice-over
- Public speaking

Founded by Shana Pennington-Baird the company was built around an “ethics-first” tradition. The Seattle Voice Academy has brick and mortar recording studios, offers both in-person and online courses in singing and voiceover, and works one-on-one with individuals to improve vocal health, longevity and effectiveness of each individual’s unique voice.

Pulling directly from their professional theatre training within the United States and in Europe, the staff at the Seattle Voice Academy help students find their unique and individual voice using a collection of techniques that translate from the stage to the board room, behind the mic, or on a webinar.

In addition, during the past eight years, both the singing and voiceover world have faced significant disruption. For example, the advent of the USB mic, the availability of free recording software and the instant fame mindset created by television programs such as “The Voice.” The Seattle Voice Academy focuses on training students to find work in a continually changing landscape including: understanding online voiceover job sites, creating home recording studios, and avoiding “get rich quick” voiceover schemes.

The Seattle Voice Academy trains individuals to take full responsibility for their vocal health and training. Learning to effectively use their voice is critical to long-term vocal health. The human voice is part of our cultural fabric and part of our humanity. In a world surrounded by text messages, social media memes, and robotic voices, the voice is still humanity’s window to the soul.

# Executive Profile

Shana Pennington-Baird is the founder and head coach at the Seattle Voice Academy. She has helped thousands of students find their own unique style singing, speaking, creating memorable characters, and exploring new places with the human voice.

Shana started her work in the professional theatre scene in Seattle in 1996, following an international tour with the Missoula Children's Theatre. Prior to that she graduated Magna Cum Laude with a BFA in theatre from Stephens College.

In her first years in Seattle, Ms. Pennington-Baird was a company member of the Bathhouse Theatre headed by Arne Zazlov performing in *the Fantasticks* and Irving Berlin musical reviews. From 1998 - 2008, she spent 10 years as a company member of Cabaret Productions, singing at hundreds of corporate events. Other theatre companies include the 5th Ave Musical Theatre, Oregon Cabaret, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Civic Light Opera, Okoboji Summer Theatre, and Book-It Repertory.

Ms. Pennington-Baird entered the voiceover world and immediately found herself narrating audiobooks, performing voice work for corporations including Microsoft, Verizon, JP Morgan Chase, the Seattle Channel, South Lake Union Chamber, Audible.com, Mountain Credit Union, Impossible Acoustic and voicing characters for independent video games all over the world including Illustrum Games.

During her theatre work in the mid-1990's, the founder was diagnosed with vocal nodes at 24 years of age, while performing at the Village Theatre in Issaquah, Washington. Her vocal condition, "vocal nodules," was diagnosed by Dr. Dan Seeley, an otolaryngologist at Overlake Medical Center. Ms. Pennington-Baird immediately left the show at Village Theatre, began months of speech therapy and has full use of her voice today. Without treatment, the vocal "bumps" on her cords would have permanently damaged her voice. Working with a team of professionals including her doctor, speech therapists and singing coaches, she was able to continue performing after nine months of therapy.

After 2009, Ms. Pennington-Baird continued exploration into the human voice training with the Tuscany Project in Prague and then the ROY HART CENTRE at Malérargues in the Cévennes hills of southern France. The work at the Centre is based on a history of more than 80 years of research, study and practice of the human voice without boundaries. At the ROY HART CENTRE, her training has been dedicated to exploring unusual vocal flexibility and expressiveness, and to the human voice's application in life and art.

In addition to acting and voice work, Ms. Pennington-Baird produced four years of concerts and theatre arts while managing the Renton IKEA Performing Arts Center. Ms. Pennington-Baird also worked in the HR department at Western Wireless and planned events ranging from 50-1500 employees. In addition, she also planned and managed play reading festivals and summer camps for the Icicle Creek Theatre Festival. And through her work in fundraising with ACT

Theatre and Puget Soundkeeper, she raised millions of dollars through grants, major donor campaigns, corporate relationships and galas. This insight into the corporate world, especially human resources and non-profit work, has been incredibly helpful when teaching public speaking or vocal health in the corporate setting.

# Quotes from Shana Pennington-Baird

## Vocal Health

“If you wake up and your voice feels tired or scratchy, that’s fairly common. With a little rest, it will recover. But if that scratchiness... the feeling that you need to clear your throat all the time continues for more than two weeks, that’s a sign to go see a qualified otolaryngologist right away. It’s amazing how quickly major damage can occur.”

“Some performers come to us with major emotional issues after they have been diagnosed with vocal health issues. It’s scary to hear that your voice may never sound the same. Even following successful rehabilitation, many performers feel post-traumatic stress that may keep them from returning to performing. I injured my voice at 24. I left a show. I was told to tell no one or I would never work again. Nonsense. With the exception of the year I took off to rest and rehabilitate my voice through speech therapy, I have continued my work as a professional actor, singer, audiobook narrator and voice coach. I understand how it feels and that’s why I do what I do. I connect with others who need a cheerleader.”

## Voiceover

“A beginner misses all the good stuff in the script, and doesn’t know it. You know you’re ready to be a professional when you can hear you are terrible and can fix it, without the help of a director.”

“When a student asks me if they have what it takes to be a voice actor, here is my response. Do you have time to train like an Olympic athlete? With elite coaches? Will you learn how to edit all your sound files by yourself on a computer and how to be an exceptionally organized freelance business person? Do you have time to commit to the art of acting and become exceptionally good? Then, yes. You have what it takes. Just, don’t quit your day job and then start.”

“Voice over requires the depth of Shakespeare and the subtlety of film. And all of the acting required for both. Acting is not just for certain parts of the VO world like animation or video games. A great eLearning script should be embedded with just the right emotional content.”

“We never do a demo reel if a talent is not ready, just because they have the money,” Pennington-Baird says. “We will do it when the talent has the skills necessary.”

## Singing (adults and children)

“When an adult comes to us and wants to learn how to sing, we welcome them. And often, we find out that someone said just the wrong thing to them at just the right time somewhere in their past -- and that’s why they either never tried to sing or stopped singing. My job is to emotionally support them, get them past that negative person from their past, and then help them find their voice.”

“We rarely teach children under 12 to sing in private coaching. Instead, we recommend that children under 12 take piano lessons and sing in a school or community choir, since learning to read music will be a vital skill as they learn to sing. When a parent comes in with their seven-year old child and has videos they want me to watch from a past performance they recorded, we are concerned that the child is trying to sound like an adult and is pushing the delicate vocal cords of their small body far past what is healthy. This kind of hard pushing can permanently damage their child’s voice. We are gentle with children and parents, but honest that they need to take it easy and train correctly.”

“When we are approached for audition coaching and prep, often even the professional actor will wait a bit too long to come see us. We recommend coming in to see a coach about 4-6 weeks prior to auditions. A great audition takes about 4-6 weeks to prepare. Coming in to see an audition coach a week before the audition is cramming for a test the next morning.”

“We have seen an uptick in youth and young adults wanting a bit of training before auditioning at the regional auditions for television shows -- the Voice or America’s Got Talent. Our goal is to help in any way we can, which includes talking about the differences between television auditions and working in professional music or theatre. They are two completely different things. We are proud that students that came to us for those quick TV auditions and then stayed for years after that first audition. Now they study at American Academy of Dramatic Arts and other theatre/music schools across the country.”

## Public Speaking

“Great public speaking includes relaxation, which at first seems counterintuitive. The more relaxed we are, while keeping up the passion about what we are discussing, the more engaging we are.”

“Public speaking training is theatre training. We teach individuals how to enter the room, how to interact with their audience, how to *steal focus back* during interruptions (this means sharp physical movement or changing volume while talking to shift where the audience is looking). We may change the words, but it’s all theatre training.”



“Fear of public speaking is one of the greatest fears, even higher than the fear of death. We include in our public speaking training, meditations that help our students find the physical source of stress and then use it as an aid in their talk. This visualization can help in just one session and the resulting calm from the meditations are lasting.”

“Toastmasters and other groups help with practicing public speaking. We find that learning about vocal health, how to breathe correctly, how to watch harsh vowel attacks, how to change vocal energy and most importantly how to incorporate great vocal hygiene creates great speakers. Vocal health is often skipped in trainings for public speaking. Vocal health is the place where we start.”

## **Artificial Intelligence Voices**

“Artificial intelligence voices are part of our lives and they are here to stay. Will it affect the voiceover industry? Yes. I think the majority of interactive voice recording — your bank, phone trees, etc. — have already gone to the AI voices and will continue to do so. I think some eLearning will be narrated by AI voices. Some of it will be okay, but most will sound a little lifeless. However, audiobooks, commercials, television promotions for football season -- those require the passion and emotion that a trained voiceover talent brings to the performance. Artificial Intelligence will have to evolve to genuine emotion and intent to be believable in those roles. And when that happens, we’re all in trouble.”

# Mission and Vision Statements

## Mission

To train the human voice for long term health in three areas: singing, voiceover and public speaking.

## Vision

Our vision is to help humans improve understanding of the human voice and its critical nature for survival in singing, voiceover, and public speaking. Through our work we strive to help humans find and keep their unique voice -- the window to the human soul -- and in doing so make the world a better place by enabling our culture to achieve greatness, and nurture the human nature of our beings. We strive to protect that intricate spirit and are proponents in making sure the nature of the "voice" in our culture is not lost through technology. We believe the human voice must never be replaced by technology, but work alongside it.

# Target Market

## Target Market(s)

### Primary:

#### Demographics

- Age 18-65
- Gender 60% male / 30% female / 10% transgender
- Income \$45K-\$200K
- Marital Status 75% married / 25% single
- Occupation/Industry 30% actors / 20% teachers / 15% current Elearning content creators / 35% other fields
- Educational Level Majority of clients have college degrees or will be pursuing a college-level degree

#### Location

- Greater Seattle metropolitan area (and up to 50 miles away) for in-person workshops and coaching
- Bellingham-area for Western Washington students who drive down for weekend classes
- Washington State for online Zoom coaching
- Nationwide for online eLearning content courses

#### Interests/Activities

- Video game enthusiasts
- Authors who want to voice their own audiobooks
- Actors who want to work from home
- eLearning content creators
- Teachers with vocal fatigue
- Business leaders wanting to improve their job performance

## Secondary:

### Demographics

- Age 11-18 years
- Gender 60% male / 30% female / 10% transgender
- Autism 20% of youth are on the autism spectrum
- Income of parents \$150K +
- Marital Status 75% married / 25% single
- Schools 60% private school / 10% home school / 30% public schools

### Location

- Greater Seattle metropolitan area (and up to 50 miles away) for in-person workshops and coaching
- Bellevue, Kirkland, Issaquah - majority of students

### Interests/Activities

- Video game enthusiasts
- Children who write their own books
- Actors who want to work from home
- Summer camp opportunity that is different from all the others
- Recording studio enthusiasts
- Animation fans

# Industry Fact Sheet



The voice industry covers vocal health, singing, voiceover, public speaking and how we use our voices to effectively communicate. The human voice is one of the primary communication instruments for people throughout the world. No matter how the voice is heard, through technology, spoken, sung, chanted or whispered, human beings continue to use the voice to express thoughts, emotions and desires. Other forms of communication have radically changed the way we communicate. The use of email, texting, social media, and AI voice technology are allowing us to use our voices less often. In addition, few human beings, with the exception of actors and trained singers, think about vocal hygiene and keeping their voices safe and protected throughout their lives. People can and do cause permanent damage to their vocal cords, also known as folds, without even knowing they are doing so. The human voice is an important part of all cultures and throughout the world we find the human voice is a window to the soul. My industry fact sheet explores this and other elements within the industry to serve the media, students, and others looking for more information.”

Shana Pennington-Baird

## Vocal Health

- Whether you use it or not, vocal fry is a pattern of voice use that does not cause harm to your voice. However, if you're not satisfied with your voice, a speech-language pathologist can help improve its quality. These methods train you to produce a stronger, more powerful voice. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/is-vocal-fry-ruining-my-voice>
- What should I drink to have a good voice? Warm herbal tea. While caffeine does nothing good for your voice, decaf tea is wonderful for it. Herbal teas that are naturally decaffeinated work like a little sauna in your throat to get your vocal chords all comfortable and warm. <https://spoonuniversity.com/lifestyle/foods-for-voice>
- In laryngitis, your vocal cords become inflamed or irritated. This swelling causes distortion of the sounds produced by air passing over them. As a result, your voice sounds hoarse. In some cases of laryngitis, your voice can become almost undetectable.  
**Some self-care methods may relieve and reduce strain on your voice:**
  - **Breathe moist air.** Use a humidifier to keep the air throughout your home or office moist. Inhale steam from a bowl of hot water or a hot shower.
  - **Rest your voice as much as possible.** Avoid talking or singing too loudly or for too long. If you need to speak before large groups, try to use a microphone or megaphone.
  - **Drink plenty of fluids** to prevent dehydration.

- **Moisten your throat.** Try sucking on lozenges, gargling with salt water or chewing a piece of gum.
- **Stop drinking alcohol and smoking, and avoid exposure to smoke.** Alcohol and smoke dry your throat and irritates your vocal cords.
- **Avoid clearing your throat.** This action irritates your vocal cords.
- **Avoid decongestants.** These medications can dry out your throat.
- **Avoid whispering.** This puts even more strain on your voice than normal speech does.
- <https://newsnetwork.mayoclinic.org/discussion/home-remedies-helping-a-hoarse-voice/>
- Can acid reflux damage vocal cords? The theory is that there is some **reflux** of stomach **acid** into the **throat**, which irritates the already irritated **vocal cords**. If the **acid reflux** continues, the **damage** to the **vocal cords will** progress. The amount of **acid reflux** required to cause this is very small. <https://www.aboutgerd.org/laryngeal-pharyngeal-reflux.html>
- **Transgender** voice and singing. There are a few things to consider to keep the voice safe. Forcing the sound causes damage. Training with placement will help. [https://www.nats.org/Vocal\\_Wellness\\_-\\_April\\_2018.html](https://www.nats.org/Vocal_Wellness_-_April_2018.html)
- Video game performances may be permanently damaging actors' voices. In a letter sent to the state's Division of Occupational Safety and Health, SAG-AFTRA said that long hours, coupled with the need to record loud and strenuous noises such as violent screaming and inhuman voices, were damaging the vocal cords of its members. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/envelope/cotown/la-et-ct-sag-aftra-video-games-investigation-20160607-snap-story.html>

## Voiceover

- Different languages are gaining ground, but English is still the most popular language for voiceover. <https://www.debbiegattan.com/blog/voice-actors-voice-talent-seekers-trends/>
- For voice actors, making an emotional connection is top priority. <https://www.walshvoiceovercoaching.com/truetell>
- The *actual* age of voice artists doesn't matter, as long as they can tailor their voice to align with the age group being targeted. And the vast majority of clients are targeting audiences in the Gen X and millennial generations. <https://www.debbiegattan.com/blog/voice-actors-voice-talent-seekers-trends/>
- Chances are, if you make videos — especially how-to and explainer videos – you will need to record voice overs. In fact, depending on how many videos you create, you may have to do a lot of voice over work. It is more work than you think. <https://www.techsmith.com/blog/voice-over/>

- Working from home is the new reality in voiceover, here are ideas on being an audio book narrator and more <https://realwaystoearnmoneyonline.com/how-to-become-an-audiobook-narrator/>

## Singing

- What skills do I need to be a singer? There are no postsecondary education requirements for musicians or singers interested in performing popular music. However, many performers of classical music and opera have at least a bachelor's degree. All singers need training to keep their voices safe. <https://collegegrad.com/careers/musicians-and-singers>
- The Birth Process and Voice Training: The Glorious Chorus <https://www.vasta.org/vasta-links#health%20&%20science>
- Why do we sing and what first drove early humans to sing? How might they have sung and how might those styles have survived to the present day? <https://www.cambridge.org/us/academic/subjects/music/music-performance/history-singing?format=HB&isbn=9780521817059>
- Reflections on contemporary commercial singing: an insider's perspective <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23268263.2013.829711>

## Public Speaking

- Politics and vocal health - why do politicians sound so bad when campaigning? <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/lok-sabha-elections-2019-navjot-sidhus-vocal-cords-damaged-after-80-rallies-in-28-days-2036984>
- Practice and Knowing your Topic really helps with fear of public speaking. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/specific-phobias/expert-answers/fear-of-public-speaking/faq-20058416>
- Fear of public speaking affects 3 out of 4 people or 75% of individuals that suffer from speech anxiety. It also accounts for 19% and the largest majority of those suffering from some form of phobia out there. <https://brandongaille.com/14-fear-public-speaking-statistics/>
- Nerves before public speaking is natural. Here are horror stories from folks who lived to speak again. <https://www.shopify.com/blog/121468293-public-speaking-tips>
- Ted Talks celebrates 10 years of ideas worth spreading. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-47737613>

## Future of AI Voices

There are several industries moving forward, some of the technology we are seeing is in:

- **Automotive** – Ford was early to voice in 2007 with the launch of [Sync](#), a communications and entertainment system that lets users make phone calls and control music. The company predicts that “nearly 90 percent of all new vehicles will have [voice recognition] onboard by 2022,” [according to Forbes](#).
- **Healthcare** – [Kaléo’s AUVI-Q](#) is an epinephrine auto-injector that features voice instructions for administering the drug to patients experiencing an allergic reaction. One-way communication is the first step; allowing users to talk back could be next. [WebMD recently created an Alexa skill](#) that can answer basic health queries by describing treatments for common ailments and listing side effects of drugs.
- **Government** – The beta version of an [Alexa skill developed for the City of Los Angeles](#) offers [information about public events](#), and the city plans to connect 311 services to the skill in the future. [Mississippi and Utah are also developing skills for Alexa](#), and at the federal level, the [GSA’s Emerging Citizen Technology program](#) is exploring solutions for making government services available via digital assistants.
- **Hospitality** – [Wynn Las Vegas has installed Echo devices in each room](#), letting hotel guests use voice commands to turn on lights, set the temperature, and listen to music. Marriott and Four Seasons properties are also [testing Alexa and Siri in guest rooms](#). Eventually, hotels hope to use voice to power concierge-level services like requesting extra towels or ordering room service.
- **Finance** – [Capital One has developed apps for Alexa](#) and Cortana, and British bank Santander lets customers [make payments via voice](#) in its iPhone app. [UBS wealth-management clients in Europe can ask Alexa](#) for the chief investment office’s answers to financial and economic questions.
- **Artificial voices will take over a portion of the voice over industry.**  
<https://www.apnews.com/74783e69bdbb4ac0a0cb1f23ba7ebfea>



# Story Ideas for the Media

## Artificial Intelligence Voices

- Three reasons we need to Siri and Alexa to have male counterparts
- Why real voices will still matter, even after the robots sound human.

## Vocal Health

- Three reasons your voice hurts after you teach all day.
- Ways to recover emotionally after a vocal health injury. How performers get back on their feet after surgery or prolonged absence from singing.
- I didn't know warming up was important -- or even how to warm up at all.

## Voiceover

- Voiceover talents working from home are now expected to do everything -- they have to act, direct themselves, build quality home studios and all the editing. That's a lot of hats.
- Huge online casting sites are causing voiceover talent to make a lot less money. But the heads of these big casting sites are bringing in major dollars.

## Singing

- Online training? How do you know if you are getting quality instruction?
- What does it take to audition and perform on a TV show like America's Got Talent or the Voice?

## Public Speaking

- Politics and the voice. Why do our politicians sound so bad after campaigning for a few months? Are they permanently damaging their voices In many cases, yes!
- Why are TED Talks to terrifying to give, yet gratifying?

# Interview Questions and Answers

## Vocal Health

**Q:** How can people protect their vocal cords?

**A:** Every person is born with one set of vocal cords, one larynx -- and once damaged, you cannot replace them. Learning proper vocal hygiene (avoiding clearing your throat, learning to attack vowels softly, not shouting in loud environments for prolonged periods), that's what keeps a voice healthy for life.

**Q:** If you have been sick and lose your voice, how can you heal?

**A:** Most people find that when they are sick, they lose parts of their voice. This is caused by swelling and totally normal. As many doctors will tell you, in most cases it will go away by itself. The best way to heal is complete vocal rest, or talking as little as possible. If you do have to talk, avoid whispering and use a little voice.

However, if you notice a change in your voice for more than two-three weeks, it's time to go and see an ear, nose and throat specialist (ENT, but see one specializing in the voice) who can "scope" your cords. This happens by putting a camera down into the throat. Once they can see what's going on, that ENT can help with a diagnosis and further treatment.

**Q:** What's happening to the vocal cords when we sound hoarse?

**A:** Hoarseness is swelling. Or it can be the cords have been rubbing up against each other for so long that they have developed a "bump" or in extreme cases, they can callus. Hoarseness can also be caused by partial paralysis of a vocal cord.

**Q:** What causes damage to the vocal cords?

**A:** Number one damage concern revolves around overuse. In order of importance:

- Overuse of the voice. Talking all day and forcing the voice to be heard over other noise.
- Yelling at rock concerts or games
- Smoking
- Singing too loudly or with poor technique

- Uncontrolled [acid reflux](#)
- Forcing your voice when you have a cold or bronchitis.

If you have a sickness that's affecting your voice, give your vocal cords a break. Refrain from overuse while you recover. Be sure to see a doctor if your voice does not return or symptoms worsen after 10 days to two weeks.

**Q:** What can cause paralysis of the vocal cords?

**A:** There are many things that cause this. Some of the more common are:

- **Injury to the vocal cord during surgery.** Surgery on or near your neck or upper chest can result in damage to the nerves that serve your voice box. Surgeries that carry a risk of damage include surgeries to the thyroid or parathyroid glands, esophagus, neck, and chest.
- **Neck or chest injury.** Trauma to your neck or chest may injure the nerves that serve your vocal cords or the voice box itself.
- **Stroke.** A stroke interrupts blood flow in your brain and may damage the part of your brain that sends messages to the voice box.
- **Tumors.** Tumors, both cancerous and noncancerous, can grow in or around the muscles, cartilage or nerves controlling the function of your voice box and can cause vocal cord paralysis.
- **Infections.** Some infections, such as Lyme disease, Epstein-Barr virus and herpes, can cause inflammation and directly damage the nerves in the larynx.
- **Neurological conditions.** If you have certain neurological conditions, such as multiple sclerosis or Parkinson's disease, you may experience vocal cord paralysis

## AI and Voice Technology

**Q:** How will AI affect the world of voiceover?

**A:** We are not sure entirely. Right now, we know that interactive voice recordings, some eLearning will be narrated by Artificial Intelligence voices. There are hundreds of companies, including some of the biggest tech giants, hiring voice talent to create giant databases of spoken words. From those databases, the AI can create the response we hear on our devices. More and more, these new tech companies are focusing on making the AI sound as “real” as possible, including attempting emotional response.

**Q:** Where will we find AI voices in the future?

**A:** Everywhere. AI voices will not go any way time soon. They will be in our cars, our phones, our televisions. The question is determining *when* we want to hear a real person versus a robotic voice. Currently robot voices still sound a little inhuman. Soon, they won't. Except... even advanced AI voices will have a hard time with honest emotion. That's where we'll find human voices remain. Most audiobooks, cartoons and video games will remain voiced by human beings, even after the AI voices are advanced.

## Voiceover

**Q:** What does it take to make a career in voiceover?

**A:** You need great training -- and that includes acting. It's not a quick process and unfortunately there are a ton of programs right now selling the dream of being a voice actor and not being honest with the beginner. Dee Bradley Baker has a wonderful website called [Iwanttobeavoiceactor.com](http://Iwanttobeavoiceactor.com) where he clearly states, ""You have a great voice, you should try voice acting," which is the equivalent of "You have great legs, you should try running in the Olympics." You need high-level coaches who are working in the field, who are selective about who they train and who can, at first, show you how much you need to learn.

The first three-five years, most beginning voice actors need to treat it as a hobby and continue their learning. Keep your day job is not just a saying! This not a profession where you quit you job and suddenly you are competitive and working. It's an art that requires training and practice. That would be the same as quitting your job and walking into to the Metropolitan Opera to get your first singing job after taking one singing lesson.

**Q:** What kind of home studios are required for voiceover?

**A:** Most voiceover talent now record from home. Working in a studio still exists in bigger markets for animation, but for the most part, all auditions and the majority of other work is recorded in a voice talent's home studio. Eventually most voice talent spend a few thousand dollars investing in a studio, but for those learning or just starting out, they need:

A quiet space to record in, away from traffic noises, household appliances, kids, dogs, etc.

- Professional soundproofing materials.
- A good condenser Microphone and pop shield.

- XLR cable (most mics come with one).
- Mixer/interface.
- A computer.
- Recording software.

**Q:** Do you have to live in LA or NYC to make a living in voiceover?

**A:** No. Not for most types of voiceover work. However, if you want to work in full-time animation, yes. That market is in Los Angeles and the agents/studios want you to be local. You can find some animation projects in other towns, but it will be part-time. The studios up in Vancouver BC also hire out of Los Angeles (for example). For eLearning, audiobooks, video games and more, you can live anywhere there is high-speed internet and work in voiceover.

**Q:** There are people doing voiceover for \$5 on Fiverr. How is that affecting the market?

**A:** Voiceover has become a gold rush in the past five years with the advent of affordable USB mics and cheap online voiceover training -- some of it good, some not so good. Audible.com and Amazon teamed up to create the Audiobook Creation Exchange (ACX.com) and this has allowed anyone to upload a book or narrate one, regardless of talent or training. So, we have thousands of untrained voice talent. Fiverr, or other online marketplaces, allows freelancers to work cheap. This has brought the pay for other voice talent down significantly over the past ten years. It's become increasingly difficult to educate producers that to get quality voiceover, they should pay a fair rate. There are online rate guides that can help voice talent know what to charge. Because our pay includes what any freelancer has to cover: health care, studio costs, training and more. We recommend the Global Voice Academy Rate Guide online.

## Shana Pennington-Baird Background

**Q:** What was it in your career that moved you to start the Seattle Voice Institute that later was rebranded as Seattle Voice Academy?

**A:** I became interested in voice acting when I had my kid. My husband also works in theatre and I we wanted flexibility to raise our child. Voice acting is now done (for the most part) from home. This was something I could do! I could do audiobooks at home after being a mom all day! I studied with several local coaches in Seattle and then headed to New York for additional training. I quickly discovered that there are people all over the country who "teach" voice acting poorly, and will charge huge amounts of money to promise

people that they will make a fortune doing voiceover. I was sitting in one of these classes when I developed the business plan that became Seattle Voice Academy (SVA).

**Q:** What is the value system your company is based on?

**A:** We are based in ethics. We teach acting. We teach freelance business. And we do not make promises that anyone is going to succeed. We stand in our integrity. Instead we teach our students to look out for themselves, find ongoing training and treat voiceover like an olympic sport. You need great coaches, great training and a huge amount of commitment.

**Q:** What is your vocal training?

**A:** I started off in choir throughout high school and then I have a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theatre from Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri. Following that, I studied voice with the Roy Hart Theatre in France, the Tuscany Project in Prague and then studied privately with soprano Jackie Boreson in Seattle, Washington. Currently, I study with Dr. Stacey Mastrian. I will always have a coach. Singing is the equivalent of an olympic sport. I am always striving to improve.

## **Singing**

**Q:** How would a beginning adult vocalist find the right teacher?

**A:** You need to do a search for who in your city teaches singing. This can be online or by contacting NATS.org -- National Association of Teachers of Singing. They are a national organization available all over the US. VASTA.com (Voice and Speech Trainers Association) has a similar database of international teachers, including the US.

You can learn some techniques online through home study courses, which we don't recommend online singing classes unless you live in a very remote place and cannot get to a singing instructor in person. A great singing coach needs to be able to see your body and how you are breathing, where you are holding tension. Once you find a teacher in your area, you need to read reviews. Then, you need to meet them. If you don't like their style or anything about the lesson, move on. Singing teachers are all different and you need someone who can explain why they are teaching you what they are teaching you.

**Q:** Why would anyone need to warm down after singing?

**A:** Like any athlete, we need to warm up our voices -- and -- warm down after singing. First we start by stretching the whole body, then focusing on stretching the face. The best warm ups include humming, trilling the lips, tongue twisters. Then I also use straw phonation for the warm up and cool down. Straw phonation is using a small straw like a kazoo for about 3-5 minutes. Straw phonation is when you put a straw in your mouth and make sound through the straw. It is part of a series of researched warm ups called SOVT Exercises. SOVT means Semi-Occluded Vocal Tract, a fancy way to say the mouth is partially closed. During straw phonation there is less impact, collision, and stress on the vocal folds while they continue to stretch in a balanced position.

**Q:** What do straws have to do with vocal cords?

**A:** Straw phonation is when you put a straw in your mouth and make sound through the straw. It is part of a series of researched warm ups called SOVT Exercises. SOVT means Semi-Occluded Vocal Tract, a fancy way to say the mouth is partially closed. During straw phonation there is less impact, collision, and stress on the vocal folds while they continue to stretch in a balanced position.

## Public Speaking and Voice

**Q:** How can people defeat the fear of public speaking?

**A:** Practice. Rehearsal. Relaxation. The more we do something, the more we can relax when we stand up to speak. The thought of public speaking can make many people break into a cold sweat. [Surveys show](#) that the fear of public speaking ranks as one of the most common phobias. In fact, a pronounced fear of public speaking is even more common than the fear of death! We use a meditation that helps our clients learn to use their fear as an ally and find relaxation before speaking. In addition, we recommend practicing the talk as many times as possible.

**Q:** What does the average coaching session look like?

**A:** Every coaching session is different because every client--every person is different. We spend the first ten minutes talking with the client -- both to get to know them and also to listen to the sound of the voice and any issues that come up naturally while we chat. Then, we almost always move into breathing exercises, then we work on the techniques that fit the needs of that individual. At the end of the session, we create a plan for what

techniques will be worked on over the next few sessions. The client comes away with 3-5 things to work on and then the plan is emailed them.

**Q:** How do you know if your throat is just dry from speaking versus the vocal cords being fatigued or injured?

**A:** If you find yourself wanting to clear your throat habitually and your voice feels strained -- it's not dryness. You should hydrate -- but then see an ENT if it does not improve after two weeks.



# Praise for Seattle Voice Academy

“I would jump on any opportunity to enroll in any SVA Voice Over class, as I appreciate the professionalism in content and delivery, and know that by far there is no better option for such instruction, with regard to price, expertise, convenience, and customer service. SVA exceeds all other Voice Over options I have researched (and there have been many) and you will always be the first place I look for instruction and coaching, and the first recommendation I make for others looking into Voice Over. Thanks you for your dedication. It does not go unnoticed.”

Dave Tucker, VO II, 2018

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“I am so grateful for this class! I’m so excited about the path before me. Shana so eloquently and completely, provided the road map. Not just generally, but with agility she personalized it for each one of us. If a student came to this class with a true desire for a career in voice over, they left with nothing in their way. I recommend the work at Seattle Voice Academy with my whole heart.”

Melanie, Freelance 101: Creating Your VO Roadmap, November 2017

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“The booking system was easy. I found it straightforward and it worked efficiently. The VO II workshop was excellent – it is rare to find such a great combination of content breadth and superb teaching. The class helped me deepen my understanding of concepts and practices I learned in the VO I workshop at Freehold. The small class size also provided the opportunity for me to identify specific areas where I wanted to improve my understanding and skills. In addition to being truly educational, it was also fun and scary (in the best possible way). I had a great time and will take more classes at SVA. Thanks so much for what you do. I’m signing up for your Voice-over Freelance 101 class later this evening, so (as long as there’s still room) I will see you soon!”

Courtney, VO II Student, April 2017

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“It’s always a pleasure to collaborate with Seattle Voice Academy with our voice-over clients. In working with Seattle Voice Academy, you can always count on receiving the utmost, top-tier quality audio files post-recording. Our clients are always pleased and continue to request their services through our talent agency. We even have a client based in Texas who requests their services regularly so their services and great reputation extend far beyond the Seattle/Portland entertainment market.”

Tiffany Talent, November 2017

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“I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed the workshop. I found that at times I was just overwhelmed. The reality set in as to how much work it would be. But I left feeling that I might be up to it—it is always just put one foot in front of the other. Shana—I did realize later that there is no

reason I couldn't set up the PVC sound booth just where I planned to build the other one. Duh... You were very inspiring about the business and technical end of things. As I review what we did, I so appreciate the instruction on creating and setting characters—I can see miles to go with that... I am so looking forward to putting effort into this project—hopefully this phase of my life. Talk to you soon and thanks again!!! All my best.”

Valerie, 2016 Audiobook Narration student

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“I didn't know what to expect. Shana had been referred by a fellow actor. I was looking for basics ... breathing, projection, resonance ... and, most important to me, just letting go. Fear is a very big issue with me and the search for the right person to take me on this journey was critical. Too many past failures to find that “right” coach and partner made me leery of taking another venture. It was a great first session. I am greatly encouraged.”

Jim Patrick, singing student, February 2018