

# Finding voice-acting work in Seattle

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**Experts urge aspiring voice actors to learn the craft before auditioning for work in Seattle, where most of the parts are commercial. (But don't quit your day job.)**

By [Lora Shinn](#)

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Myth or fact: If you have a “golden voice,” you’ll get all the voice-acting gigs.

Myth, according to Bob Tomazic, the general manager at [Tiffany Talent Agency](#), a Seattle-based agency that represents on-camera and voice actors.

“There’s no such thing as a voice that books all the work — it’s the acting behind the voice,” says Tomazic.

Producers often want to hire the average-sounding individual, someone who sounds like your neighbor or best friend. Voice work in the area is primarily commercial, Tomazic says. That doesn’t mean just television commercials, but also radio ads, how-to videos, and other short promotional works for social media and the Internet. For example, a promotional video of a desk set-up may be overlaid with instructions provided by a professional voice actor.

Typical voice actors on Tiffany Talent’s roster have a “playable age range” between their early 20s through their early 50s, and live anywhere between Portland and the Canadian border.

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“A beginner misses all the good stuff in the script, and doesn’t know it,” says Shana Pennington-Baird, director at [Seattle Voice Institute](#), where

aspiring voice artists go to learn the skills of the trade, and how to perform for niches including animation, commercials and promotional videos. “You know you’re ready to be a professional when you can hear you [stink] and can fix it, without the help of a director,” she adds.

As an example, if asked to “warm it up,” a professional voice actor will know how to achieve that effect, including moving the body and dropping precise diction.

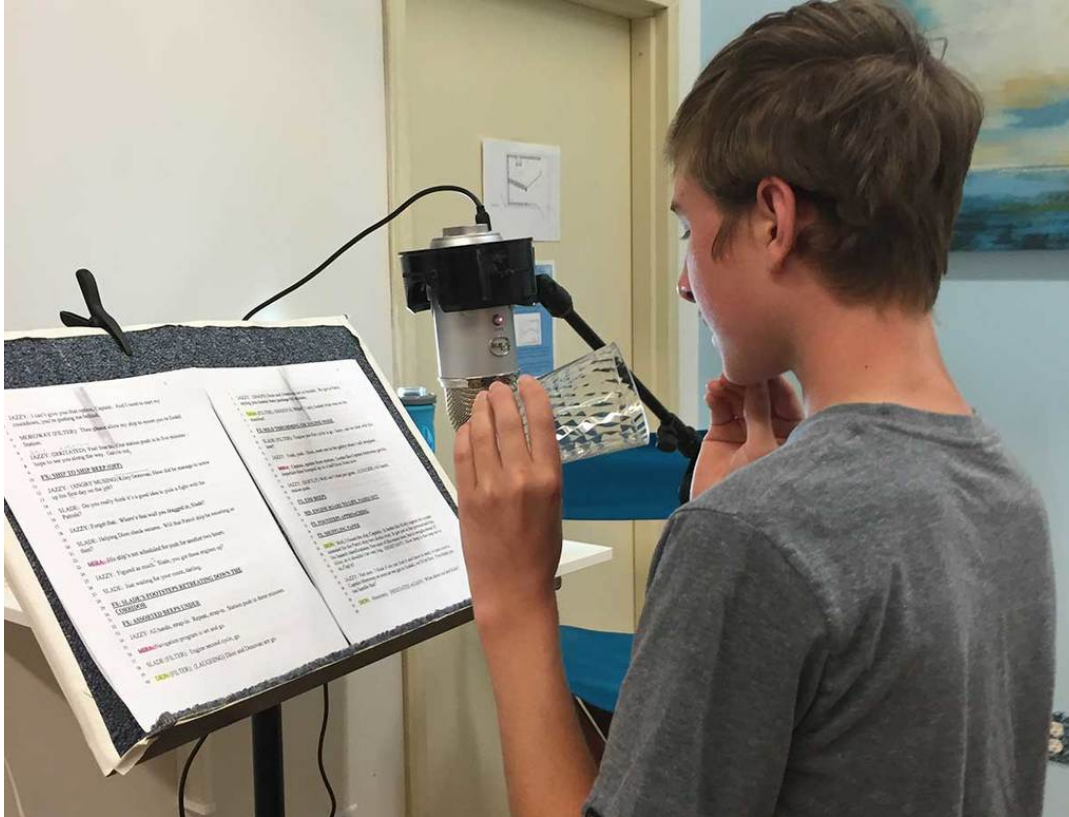
Even a six-word assignment can be performed in a wide variety of emotional tones — enough to fill an hour, Pennington-Baird says.

At Seattle Voice Institute, students typically take a few courses, then go into private coaching to work on individual weaknesses and boost strengths. Aspiring voice actors need to tick all the boxes on an SVI checklist — including breath management, storytelling and conversational tone — before a demo reel is recommended. “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.”

### **Auditions, jobs and pay**

The audition process has changed in the past decade, Tomazic says. While actors once went into studios to vocally audition, now actors receive a script and basic directions, then read and record their auditions in a home studio. If hired, final work is typically done in a professional recording studio.

Some aspiring Seattle voice actors think that requires a \$10,000 custom-built room, while others think they can just record an audition on their phone. “The most effective talent invested \$150 to \$500 in a simple studio,” Tomazic says.



*At Seattle Voice Institute, students typically take a few courses, then go into private coaching to work on individual weaknesses and boost strengths, says Shana Pennington-Baird, the director at SVI. (Courtesy of Seattle Voice Institute)*

As for daily work, “For most voice actors, it’s a side job,” Tomazic says, as Seattle is considered a mid-market city and doesn’t offer the huge volume of opportunities found in Los Angeles, New York, and Vancouver, B.C. Local voice talent is often hired for smaller projects with smaller budgets, he notes.

National television ads, higher-budget games known as AAA video games and other quality gigs offered by major Pacific Northwest-based corporations usually cast professional or recognizable voice actors based outside the Seattle market, Tomazic says. Large budgets allow them to hire big names from Los Angeles.

“Acting and voice acting are similar to athletics when trying to earn money doing it,” Tomazic says. “You can play soccer locally on a league. If you’re

good, you can join an elite league.”

The best, he says, might get into a semi-pro league and maybe get paid a stipend, but even then, you’re not “good enough” to make a living playing soccer on a pro team. “Only the top 1 percent of 1 percent could be on a pro team, and actually make a living playing soccer,” Tomazic says.

But that doesn’t mean voice acting isn’t worth the effort. “It depends on how you define success,” Tomazic says. “If you make \$5K in a year as a voice actor, it’s not a living, but it’s more than you’ll make playing golf, rock climbing or hiking. It can be a fun and lucrative hobby.”

A gig’s pay can be all over the map, says Pennington-Baird. Those who are union members are paid union rates, usually through their agents (with the agent taking a cut). So, she says, “it can be \$150 or \$1,150 for 20 minutes. Or \$250 for an entire audiobook.”

Non-union freelancers set their own rates, Pennington-Baird says, usually through an online tool like the one at [globalvoiceacademy.com](http://globalvoiceacademy.com). A voice actor becomes eligible to join SAG-AFTRA guild once they have been invited to perform on at least one union production. From there it get complicated, Tamozic says. “We work closely with each of our talent to weight the pros and cons of union membership when it is appropriate in their careers, but the rule is learn the voice acting craft first.”

**Lora Shinn**