



Deep Dive 1: Essential Gear and Studio Secrets

Turning Your Quiet Corner into a Professional Recording Booth

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The first question every voiceover hopeful asks is, "**Which mic should I buy?**" The truth is, the best microphone in the world won't save a bad room. This guide will walk you through the essential gear choices and, more importantly, how to treat your space to achieve the clean, professional audio clients actually pay for.

Special Tip at the bottom – Only for the technically minded and have the budget!

Microphone Wars: USB vs. XLR

Your microphone is the most important component of your signal chain—it's the ear of your client. You have two main routes to choose from:

1. The USB Microphone (The Beginner's MVP)

- **Pros:** It's simple, plug-and-play, and affordable. It connects directly to your computer. Great for starting out, especially for e-learning and simpler narration jobs.
- **Cons:** Limited upgrade path. You can't easily change the pre-amp or signal chain. They are often less sensitive and may pick up more computer noise.
- **Affordable Recommendation:** Look for models like the **Audio-Technica AT2020 USB+** or the **Blue Yeti** (though use the Yeti with caution—it's very sensitive to room noise).

2. The XLR Microphone and Audio Interface (The Professional Standard)

- **Pros:** This setup offers the best audio quality and the biggest upgrade path. The XLR mic connects to an **Audio Interface** (a small box that converts the analogue signal to digital for your computer). This allows for much cleaner audio, better pre-amps, and more control.
- **Cons:** Higher initial cost and a slightly steeper learning curve. You are buying two pieces of equipment instead of one.
- **Professional Starter Recommendation:** A fantastic entry-level combo is the **Rode NT1** or **Sennheiser MK4** paired with a simple two-channel interface like the **Focusrite Scarlett 2i2**. This is the standard setup used by thousands of working professionals.

The Golden Rule: Spend money on a **large-diaphragm condenser microphone**. They are best suited for capturing the subtle nuances of the human voice.



Building a Whisper-Quiet Sanctuary

Clients demand clean audio, which means **NO** buzzing, humming, air conditioning noise, or room reverb (echo). Your room is more important than your mic.

Soundproofing vs. Sound Treatment

- **Soundproofing** stops sound from coming *in* or going *out* (think building a new wall). This is expensive and rarely necessary for beginners.
- **Sound Treatment** stops sound from bouncing *around* inside your room (killing echo). This is your primary goal.

The Low-Cost Studio Checklist

1. **Closet Conversion:** The best starter studio is often a walk-in closet. Why? The clothes on hangers act as fantastic, naturally occurring acoustic treatment, deadening the sound.
2. **The Bookcase Barrier:** Fill any empty shelves you have with books. This breaks up flat surfaces that cause echo.
3. **The Moving Blanket Method:** Heavy, thick moving blankets (not regular bedroom blankets) are cheap and incredibly effective. Hang them directly behind you and behind your microphone to absorb reflections.
4. **The "Duvet Fort" (The Emergency Test):** If you need an emergency clean recording, simply drape heavy blankets around your recording area. This proves that an enclosed, dampened space is the secret to clear sound.

Pro Tip: Your microphone should be aimed away from the largest, flattest wall in the room to minimize echoes bouncing back into the mic capsule.

The Perfect Signal Chain: Accessories that Save Takes

Clear audio means fewer client requests for retakes and faster job completion. These cheap accessories are non-negotiable for professional sound:

- **Pop Filter:** A thin circle of mesh placed between your mouth and the mic. It stops plosives—the harsh bursts of air caused by "P" and "B" sounds—from hitting the mic diaphragm. **Essential.**
- **Shock Mount:** A cage that cradles your microphone, separating it from the stand with elastic bands. This stops vibrations (like bumping your desk or tapping your foot) from traveling up the stand and into the recording.
- **Headphones:** You **MUST** monitor your voice through closed-back headphones while recording. This allows you to immediately hear any background noise, clicks, or hums that your microphone is picking up—problems you can fix *before* you send the file to the client.



The Software Starter Pack: From Recording to Ready

You need a Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) to record, edit, and finish your files.

1. **Audacity (Free!):** The gold standard for beginners. It's powerful, cross-platform, and free. You can record, trim, and apply basic effects easily.
2. **Reaper (Affordable):** A full-featured, professional DAW with a generous free trial and a low purchase price. A great step up once you're comfortable.

The Three Crucial Post-Production Processes

Before you send any file, you must master these steps:

1. **Trimming and Editing:** Remove any false starts, long breaths, and obvious stumbles. Leave a clean, 0.5-second silence at the beginning and end of the file.
2. **Normalization:** This is the process of setting your audio to a consistent, industry-standard volume. Your clients will have specific targets (called LUFS or RMS). **Do NOT skip this.**
3. **Noise Reduction (Use Sparingly!):** This tool attempts to remove a constant low-level noise (a "noise floor"). Use it with extreme caution. Over-applying noise reduction makes your voice sound underwater and highly unprofessional. **It's better to fix the room than the file.**

Conclusion: Clarity is King

You now have the technical roadmap for getting great-sounding audio. Remember, your gear and room are the foundation. A client listening to your voiceover wants to hear your performance, not your buzzing laptop or a ringing echo.

This gear is useless without the right **business strategy** to land a client and the skills to perform perfectly.

Ready to move beyond the technical setup and learn how to actually *perform* the script like a pro?

Stay tuned to www.simonlewington.com for Deep Dive 2, where we tackle "Performance Power-Up: Mastering the Script," and I show you how to truly interpret the client's intent and command the microphone!

Special Tip:

If you know how to set up Chrome Remote Desktop. Have your PC/Laptop in your main room and a Chromebook or lanless laptop in your recording space. No sounds, no machine noise. It makes for the perfect recording environment.