

What Disney Expects from Its Voiceover Talent

Let's face it voicing characters for Disney and other animation studios' is the dream of every **voiceover talent**. But before you go to audition you need to have a strong voice over reel to submit. I'm not just talking about a professionally produced demo reel that highlights your voice. I'm speaking about a reel that demonstrates your ability to switch emotions from one line to the next without missing a beat. While staying in character your demo reel needs to have pitch variations and speed up as well as slow down the pacing to reflect the emotional shift of the character. Voicing animation is physically and mentally strenuous on the actor. You must stay in character while simultaneously shifting from laughing to crying to anger and excitement all within 10 seconds. And that is just the tip of the iceberg. Scripts written for animation, especially television series have time restrictions for the story. So once you have mastered reading through a script and voicing each emotion, you still need to be within the allotted 22 minutes of runtime for the episode. As part of the professional **voiceover talent** training I received I had the profound opportunity to be coached in a semi-private session by the head of Disney animation casting, Sara Sherman. Her advice to me was to rehearse the script in your own voice and know where the different beats are and where the emotional shifts take place before using one of your character voices. Ms. Sherman reiterated the importance of having a strong animation demo that gives casting directors a real idea of just how versatile your voice is before you attempt to audition or your agent submits you to an animated project.

Disney does not hold open auditions for voice actors, which is why you need an agent who can submit you for projects that are seeking professional actors. Your agent will know if you are ready for to submit your audio reel to the studio casting director or if you need to polish your demo before submitting it. Being able to voice a lot of different sounding characters is often what casting directors look for. If you watch the credits you will see many of the same names appearing on multiple animated series. Tom Kenny, Jim Cummings, Frank Welker, Jess Harnell, Maurice LaMarche, Rob Paulsen, and Mark Hamill to name a few each offer a range of animated voices to a variety of movies and TV series. Don't be discouraged if you don't have the vocal range of characters and accents that Hank Azaria of "The Simpson's" has. There are actors who maintain a single voice for animation and have very successful careers such as John DiMaggio, Patrick Warburton, Jack McBrayer and Bill Fagerbakke who have very distinct and recognizable voices. The beauty of being a voice actor is that you are an individual voice and that has merit. While it helps to be have a repertoire of

accents and characters at your disposal to present to casting directors it is not a requirement to be an animated **voiceover talent**. As long as you have trained your voice to reach a wide range of pitches and understand pacing, inflection, and the dynamics of emotion you can succeed as an animation **voiceover talent**.

The reality that every **voiceover talent** will face is that they must be members of SAG/AFTRA if they want to have the kind of success that animation voice actors enjoy. All the big studios including Disney only hire union actors for their shows and movies. It isn't easy to qualify for SAG/AFTRA union membership, but it is worth it once you have booked a national commercial or have on camera lines in a SAG affiliated production. While it is considered best for actors in certain states to achieve a SAG/eligible status for film and television, voice actors who want to do more than narrate corporate videos or voice regional commercials must have their SAG/AFTRA union card if they are serious about voicing characters for animation. The majority of motion picture studios, including Disney will not even consider a **voiceover talent** who is not a member of SAG/AFTRA.

The truth is that voiceover acting is a fun and exciting career, but along with being one of the most rewarding things you can do it is also one of the most difficult to break into. There are literally hundreds of thousands of **voiceover talent** across the country. The good news is that there is more voice over work today than ever before, however there is also greater competition for each job. Even at the local level competition can be fierce. The great thing is that even with all the competition, your voice is unique, one of a kind, and that is casting directors are looking for. Once you have the proper training and you understand how to deliver the perfect tone and inflection, you are on your way. Just remember that you have to be quick to submit to job postings and you must provide quality work each and every time you send in a custom demo. To do this requires having your own soundproofed recording space and professional grade recording and editing equipment. But that's a topic for another blog.