Audio performance acting
Gail Deal
BTEC – Edexcel Level 3 Performing Arts

Introduction
As stated in the specification, the aim and purpose of this unit is to develop acting and vocal skills for the specialist demands required for solo and ensemble audio performance.

The unit can be delivered over two terms with two lessons per week, each an hour long, or over one term with four lessons a week.

Two teachers could deliver the unit with one looking at texts and vocal skills in acting as well as techniques for conveying character, situation and emotion in audio performance, while the other teacher might focus on microphone techniques and the recording of learners’ practical work in the recording studio.

Both teachers can contribute to helping learners develop their skills and analysing audio work.

Learners will keep a log book where they analyse professional audio work and their own performances, including the development of skills and techniques specific to audio performance.

Observation reports should be written by teachers at various points during the delivery of the unit. Witness statements can be written by technicians about practical work undertaken by learners in the recording studio. The templates are on the Edexcel website.

Much of the work in lessons will focus on practical work and analysis of existing audio performances, e.g. news bulletins, commercials, interviews, comedy programmes, radio drama and documentaries.

Assessment
- 1 solo recording lasting a minimum of 3 minutes
- 1 group recording lasting a minimum of 6 minutes.

Learning outcomes (LO)
On completion of this unit a learner should:
- Know performance techniques used in radio drama and other audio fields
- Be able to use vocal skills in solo audio performance
- Be able to use vocal skills in ensemble audio performance.

Here is a detailed breakdown of the learning outcomes taken from the Edexcel specification:

1. Know performance techniques used in radio drama and other audio fields
   Performance techniques:
   - Presentation styles, e.g. recording as self or as an acted character;
   - Actor planning techniques, e.g. character profiling, planning units;
   - Objectives and barriers;
   - Content and structure;
   - Target audience;
   - Vocal techniques using microphones;
   - Script annotation techniques, e.g. planning pauses and vocal emphasis;
   - Spontaneity and script reading;
   - Working with sound effects;
   - Studio and outside broadcast;
   - Recording conventions.

2. Be able to use vocal skills in solo audio performance
   Voice:
   - Volume/loudness;
   - Vocal inflection;
   - Changes in tone, e.g. hard, soft.

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Speech:
- Pace;
- Accent/dialect;
- Diction;
- Speech inflection;
- Use of ‘specials’ (vocal idiosyncrasies);
- Characterisation;
- Styles;
- Dynamics;
- Reacting to, and incorporating sound effects and ambient noise; using microphones to suggest distance/intimacy.

Context:
- E.g. solo storytelling,
- Interviewing guests,
- Radio presentation (including music radio and talk radio),
- Dramatic ensemble work,
- News reading,
- Commercials work,
- Documentary,
- Sight-reading,
- Comedy,
- Use of script/improvising,
- ‘Voice-overs’ in advertising,
- Audio dramatisations of poetry and novels,
- Character-based work in animation and video games.

Techniques:
- E.g. solo microphone technique,
- Live mixing,
- Script work,
- Inserting pre-recorded material,
- Links,
- Outside broadcast.

Solo genres:
- E.g. documentary narration,
- Dramatic monologues,
- Radio presenting,
- Commercials,
- News,
- Continuity announcement,
- Hosting trailers,
- Storytelling,
- ‘Mockumentary’

3. Be able to use vocal skills in ensemble audio performance

Ensemble:
- Group microphone techniques;
- Differentiation of individual voices;
- Timing in ensemble work;
- Listening/reacting;
- Use of space.

Ensemble genres:
- E.g. radio drama,
- Interviews,
- Commercials with character duologues,
- Documentary with character voices (e.g. historical figures), improvised work (e.g. comedy),
- Debate/discussion,
- ‘mockumentary’. 
Assessment and grading criteria
P1 Identify ways in which performance techniques contribute to radio drama and other audio recordings (RL)
M1 Describe ways in which performance techniques contribute to a range of radio drama and other audio recordings
D1 Critically assess ways in which performance techniques contribute to a range of radio drama and other audio recordings
P2 Present solo audio performance work using appropriate vocal skills (SM)
M2 Present solo audio performance work using a range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating some versatility
D2 Present solo audio performance work using a wide range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating versatility
P3 Present ensemble audio performance work using appropriate vocal skills. (TW)
M3 Present ensemble audio performance work using a range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating some versatility.
D3 Present ensemble audio performance work using a wide range of appropriate vocal skills, demonstrating versatility.

PLTS – personal, learning and thinking skills
IE – independent enquirers
CT – creative thinkers
RL – reflective learners
TW – team workers
SM – self-managers
EP – effective participators

Scheme of work
Lesson 4 each week takes place in the recording studio and all recordings form part of the learner’s portfolio.

Week 1: Introduction to the unit and mode of assessment

Lesson 1: Introduction to the unit, the learning outcomes, the assessment and grading criteria, the assignments and their deadlines.
Give the learners a copy of the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria.

Small group work: In groups of 4, learners should discuss the following questions in turn and find real life examples by looking at radio schedules on the internet, e.g. on iPlayer for radio/Radio Times, and make a mind map summarising the points made.

Each learner should make a copy of the mind map for their folder.
Each group presents their ideas to the class:
1. What is Audio Performance Acting?
2. What employment opportunities are there in this area?
3. What is a ‘voice over’ and where can it be used? (radio, cartoons, animations, video games, TV commercials)
4. List all the radio genres (types of programmes), e.g. drama.

The teacher might wish to use some radio schedules on hard copy to inspire discussion and analysis. These can be annotated and placed in the learner’s folder as evidence.

Lesson 2: Solo genres
Using the radio schedules and some commercials for films, cartoons and video games, learners discuss opportunities for solo work. See LO2 solo genres for examples.

The teacher should make a compilation of the different genres as listed in LO2 and play each clip to the class, asking them which genre it fits into. Podcasts on iPlayer are useful for this compilation. Sports commentary, e.g. football and cricket, is easy to find and offers good contrasts in style. Live football commentary can be read online on BBC 5 Live. This is useful for analysis and seeing how long a piece of commentary looks on hard copy. Learners can time 3 minutes’ worth of solo commentary and then see what it looks like on paper. Pauses and stressed words, e.g. ‘GOAL’ can be looked at as well as tone, pitch, volume and pace. Learners can discuss how emotion is shown through sports commentary.
Other sounds on the commentary track should be noted down, e.g. the roar of the crowd, the referee’s whistle.

Ask learners to note down the following for at least 5 programmes, each falling into a different radio genre:
1. **solo genre**
2. **target audience**
3. **techniques used**

At the end of each clip, give the learners time to note down their thoughts and then discuss the notes with the class.

Give each learner a short script for a voice over for a TV commercial. Play the commercial with the sound turned off and let the learners experiment with how they would deliver the script. Practise in pairs and perform to each other. Each learner performs the script with the commercial playing and the class gives feedback on timing lines with visuals, choice of accent/dialect and tone.

**Lesson 3: Discussion of ensemble genres (see LO3)**

Using the internet, learners should make a list of all the genres, research each genre, and find an example of each one, e.g. radio drama – *The Archers* or the afternoon play on Radio 4. For radio presentation – music radio and talk radio – learners can find examples on radio stations that they listen to.

Working in pairs, learners choose an ensemble genre, e.g. interview, comedy or radio drama. They find an example and note down the details of the programme. They find a clip and consider the context and speech used as listed in LO2. The pair creates a PowerPoint presentation of their findings. The template in the margin box could be used.

Images can be included even though the audience would not see the cast. However, there are websites connected to radio with photographs of actors/characters/DJs.

**Lesson 4: Recording studio**

Learners record the TV commercial voice-overs from Lesson 2. They learn how to use a microphone effectively and how to work as a professional in a recording studio. Notes are made in the log-book on microphone techniques and on mistakes made when recording, e.g. being too close or too far away from the microphone, muffled words, pace too fast or too slow, sibilance, non-verbal utterances, heavy breathing, etc. Technical language can be introduced at this point with regard to recording and depending on facilities and technicians available.

**Week 2: Recording as self/vocal techniques**

**Lesson 1: Further exploration of vocal techniques**

Play an episode of *Desert Island Discs* where the guest has a chance to talk about their life. Analyse the vocal delivery and draw up a profile of the guest (usually famous). Consider the format of the programme and how the life and work of the guest is explained through the discussion surrounding the choice of discs. This format could be modernised and instead of discs, maybe downloads or YouTube clips could be used. A guest could talk about their playlist.

A music programme could be analysed where a DJ talks in between playing tracks. There could be a theme, e.g. Halloween or summer holidays/travel, which would form the basis of the DJ’s choices. Games, quizzes, competitions and phone-ins could be introduced. Learners should consider the length of the programme and how it is subdivided.

Role plays could be a fun way to practise using the different radio genres. Put learners into pairs or small groups where one is the interviewer and the other the interviewee/s. Try the *Desert Island Discs* format giving the interviewee a celebrity to play.

The teacher can choose genres which will appeal to the learners. For example, for music lovers, BBC Radio 6 and a whole host of stations which the class should be able to cite.

In order for learners to start practising speaking on their own for a sustained amount of time, play the game *Just a Minute*. 

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of programme:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio station:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day and time of emission:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensemble genre:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast and crew:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance techniques:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target audience:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent/dialect used:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal delivery (pitch, tone, volume, pace, intonation, diction, speech inflection, dynamics, vocal idiosyncrasies – special):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 2: Storytelling
Start with a short discussion about why we like to be read to and what types of stories we like to hear. Play some clips from various talking books featuring a variety of voices and discuss which are the most effective and why. Learners can summarise their thoughts in a table.

BBC Radio 4 extra has a series entitled Made in Bristol which is a collection of specially-commissioned sound stories from the More Than Words Festival in Bristol. Birdsong Man by Timothy X Atack is about a man who fixes microphones to trees an hour before dawn. There are 3 episodes to listen to but learners need only analyse a section of the story and consider how music and sound effects can enhance a story.

Lesson 3: Reading the news and presenting the weather
The learners should listen to the news being read on different radio stations. Analysis should consider the aspects of vocal delivery, particularly tone when delivering stories which are serious and tragic. Consider which accent is used most often and why.
- Volume
- Vocal inflection
- Changes in tone
- Pace
- Pitch
- Accent/dialect
- Diction.

Each learner should find some local news and prepare a short bulletin of 5 items. A script should be put together and rehearsed. A weather bulletin and a traffic update could be added. The script should be annotated with regard to aspects of vocal delivery. This could be the basis of Assignment 1 where a solo recording should be produced lasting 3 minutes. (P2 M2 D2)

Lesson 4: Reading from a script – news/weather
Look at techniques for reading from a script and using a microphone. Try sight reading first and following the script while speaking into the microphone. Each learner should record their prepared news bulletin in the studio.

Week 3: Recording as an acted character/sight reading/vocal techniques

Lesson 1: Radio drama/storytelling
Listen to the following text on BBC Radio 4 extra:

Word from Cupid by Louise Oliver is performed by Alison Steadman as Lolly and George Costigan as Jim. Cupid is played by parrots, Percy and Poppy. It is a drama lasting 47 minutes first broadcast in 2003 on BBC Radio 4 and directed by Nadia Molinari with original music by Clive Bell. A husband and wife try to reignite their relationship with a little help from a parrot called Cupid. Direct address is used when Lolly speaks to the audience rather than her husband.

Learners should draw up a character profile for each of the characters Lolly and Jim where they make a list of aspects of their character including quotations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship to other characters</th>
<th>Personality</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
<th>Accent/dialect</th>
<th>Vocal delivery</th>
<th>Emotional state</th>
<th>Sense of humour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Learners examine the opening minute of the piece and discuss what they learn about the character, and how. Who is the target audience for this play? The learners must give reasons why they think this.
Learners should discuss what makes a play suitable for radio as opposed to stage. What are the main differences? The discussion can be recorded and used as evidence in the portfolio. A list of questions could be given to help discussion or a scene from a Shakespeare play could be heard on the radio and then watched on a DVD.

How does the actor bring a character to life when the audience cannot see them? Think about the physicality of the character and how it might be conveyed through voice. How would you prepare when working on characterisation?

**Lesson 2: Dramatic monologues and poems**

Monologues can be found in Shakespeare plays and there are lots of sonnets. Shakespeare monologues are useful for auditions so each learner should prepare one, rehearse it and record it. It is a good idea to start with the sonnets as they are shorter at 14 lines and helpful when introducing poetic techniques and particularly metre and the use of stressed and unstressed syllables.

Learners can work in pairs on the same sonnet and monologue so that each learner supports the other. RADA has produced a CD of sonnets read by famous actors. This would provide a wide variety of different voices to analyse.

**Lesson 3: Children’s cartoons and actors reading characters**

Ask learners to select some children's films and cartoons/animations on TV. Each learner should select a character from the audio-visual text and choose three scenes involving the character. A character profile should be created for the character and a close analysis of the voice of the character undertaken. The following aspects should be studied and notes made on each aspect in the form of a vocal profile for the character or as a presentation to camera:

- Volume
- Vocal inflection
- Changes in tone
- Pace
- Pitch
- Accent/dialect
- Diction
- Speech inflection
- Vocal idiosyncrasies
- Incorporating sound effects and ambient noise
- Characterisation
- Styles
- Dynamics
- Relationships with other characters.

A popular fairy-tale like *Cinderella* can be used where a comparison can be made between the audio performance for an animation voice-over and the performance of the character for a ‘talking book’ version.

The learner reviews the difference between the two audio performances and makes notes in their log-book.

Use fairy-tales for sight reading practice.

This could be the basis of **Assignment 1 (solo recording lasting three minutes)**.

(P2 M2 D2)

**Lesson 4: Dramatic reading of a monologue and a poem**

Each learner should record their monologue and poem in the studio. They should record one minute’s worth of sight reading and then record themselves talking over a cartoon version of a fairy-tale and playing a character of their choice.

**Week 4: Reading and annotating scripts/character profiles/hot seating**

**Lesson 1: The Archers**

Learners should listen to one or two episodes to have some understanding of the characters. The plotline following Helen's abuse by Rob is quite a gripping one resulting in a court trial. There is extra information on the BBC website.

Regional dialects and Standard English are used in *The Archers*. The accents vary from RP to Geordie.

Learners should work out the target audience and research the programme. Discuss the theme tune and who it might appeal to, as well as the time the programme is broadcast.
Using a script from The Archers or other radio soap or drama, put the class into small groups, cast them and ask them to read through the script. They should work on the script and hot seat characters. This can be recorded for the log book/portfolio. There are 45 minute plays every weekday afternoon on BBC Radio 4. There are also shorter plays to be found in the schedule.

Rehearse reading the script in a group session. Use the aspects of vocal delivery in LO2. Annotate the script accordingly.

Use a script from a radio drama for around 5 or 6 learners as the basis for Assignment 2: *ensemble recording lasting 6 minutes* (P3 M3 D3)

**Lesson 2: Comedy programmes**

Learners should listen to a variety of comedy programmes on the radio and analyse the structure of the programme and the style of comedy used. There might be panel games, stand up or mockumentary. A satirical programme is *Dead Ringers* on BBC Radio 4. Episodes are available as downloads and podcasts on the BBC website.

Learners could invent their own satirical programmes and start to work on improvised scripts.

This could be used for Assignment 2.

**Lesson 3: Carry on with comedy**

Improvise in pairs or trios around different subjects which the class choose, e.g. the auction room and the flying ducks; the prom and the lost invitation; out of control in a spaceship. The actors should try to speak for 6 minutes.

**Lesson 4: Rehearsed readings**

Use time in the recording studio to do rehearsed readings

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**Week 5: Outside broadcasts/documentaries/links**

**Lesson 1: Recording outside**

Many programmes are recorded outside, e.g. *Ramblings* which is recorded with Clare Balding as the presenter. Ask learners to listen to an episode, which lasts 30 minutes, and make a list of all the sounds heard beside the conversation that takes place during the walk.

How is the experience of listening to the walk different from seeing it?

Note down problems which one might encounter when recording outside.

**Lesson 2**

Set tasks to be recorded outside, e.g. interviews in the school or college grounds. If the appropriate equipment is not available, learners could use their mobile phone microphones.

**Lesson 3**

Listen to the interviews and evaluate them with regard to sound quality. Give reasons and solutions for any problems which arose.

**Lesson 4**

Live feeds, links from the studio to the live broadcast, outdoor recording equipment

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**Weeks 6–11: Learners working on their assignments**

For each assignment, set weekly targets for line familiarisation, practise run-throughs, annotating scripts, rehearsed readings etc. Even though learners can have their scripts in front of them for drama, they must still have prepared and rehearsed their lines thoroughly and learned how to share microphones for ensemble pieces.

**Week 6: Assignment 1 – solo (3 mins minimum)**

**Lesson 4**

Rehearsal in the recording studio.
Week 7

Lesson 4
Recording of each learner's solo work.

Week 8: Assignment 1

Deadline/assessment and grades given. Give out Assignment 2: ensemble (6 mins minimum)

Lesson 4
First read through of extract from script.

Week 9

Lesson 4
First recording of 6 minute extract.

Week 10

Lesson 4
Final recording of 6 minute extract.

Week 11

Deadline for Assignment 2/assessment and grades.

Week 12: Mopping up/resubmissions

The evidence for P1 M1 D1 should take the form of analyses and research into the genres being used for the two assignments.

The log book will contribute to the evidence.

Recordings of learner's work must be evaluated.

Teachers should write observation reports of rehearsed readings and final audio performances.

The unit requires learners:

▸ To research and have practical evidence of working within a range of audio performance styles.

▸ Learners may use edited extracts from published audio texts, as this unit does not require learners to prepare and perform, for example, full-length radio plays.

▸ However, the extracts should each allow for the exploration and realisation of key relevant 'stylistic' features, such as audience targeting, character-based voice work, and projection of emotions.' (As stated in the specification for the unit.)
RESOURCES

Textbooks advised in the specification:
Beck, A –

Elsam, P –
Acting Characters: 20 Simple Steps from Rehearsal to Performance
(A&C Black, 2006)
ISBN9780713675863

Fredman, R and Reade, I –
Essential Guide to Making Theatre
(Hodder & Stoughton, 1996)
ISBN 9780340655146

McCallion, M –
The Voice Book: for everyone who wants to make the most of their voice
(Faber and Faber, 1998)
ISBN 9780571195251

Shaw, B G –
Voice-Overs: A Practical Guide
(Theatre Arts, 2001)
ISBN 9780878301157

Journal
The Stage

Websites
Equity:
www.equity.org.uk

Skillset, the sector skills council for creative media:
www.skillset.org