



The Power of Voice

You only have to hear the clear, commanding tones of some of the finest actors – men and women – to believe in the power of the voice to influence.

When you have control of your voice, you have the ability to:

- **Engage**
The way you speak can draw listener in or leave them feeling alienated or, half-way, just plain bored. Once drawn in, you can hold them, or let them slip away.
- **Convince**
By conveying confidence – even certainty – you can assuage doubt in your listener. If you get it wrong, you will sound merely arrogant and much of the difference is in the tone of voice.
- **Move**
By using your voice effectively, you can trigger powerful emotions in your listener.
- **Clarify**
How you articulate the words in your sentence can make the meaning more or less evident – especially with complex technical information.
- **Embed**
Say your words poorly and they will flow easily into one ear and out of the other. Yet, get it right and they will resonate inside your listener's brain and start to stick.

All of this is part of the craft of influence.

How can you become skilled in using your voice to influence?

Knowing the power of your voice to persuade and get results can only make you hungry to learn how. I was fortunate to meet a real expert recently, who showed how he has developed a range of skills and methods from rhetoric, performance and advertising into a powerful structured technique.



Steve Hudson has done many things in his life from sales to acting, but he found his real forte with TV and radio voiceovers, advertising Old Spice, Guinness, Martini and winning the coveted 'Best Radio commercial in the world' for voicing and producing "Sound International" at the Hollywood Radio and Television Society awards. He worked for 3M Company and Xerox (London and Washington DC) as International Communications Trainer. Working in Washington, he trained politicians and became Communication Consultant for members of the Senate and many of the Fortune 500 companies.

Steve recently invited me to his studio to show me some of his techniques and let me record some readings for myself.

The Hudson Voice Technique

There are seven elements to Steve's technique, which he teaches to professional voice over artists and to business and public service professional who need to speak with power and precision. Rather than repeat those steps in Steve's straightforward listing – and give away all of his secrets, let me talk about the elements that made most impact on me.

Steve has investigated what works, systematised it, documented it clearly and, most important, found a direct method of teaching it. After that, your success – my success – in using it is down to us and the amount of practice we put in.

Red Flag Words

It is “obvious” that we should seek out the words that convey the real meaning of the sentence. Yet many speakers and even advertising voice overs emphasise little words that add nothing to the listener’s understanding, conviction or retention.

“Velvet is the best chocolate in the world”

may sound good at first hearing. It is certainly a familiar stress pattern.

Yet wouldn’t you really want your voice over to say:

“Velvet is the best chocolate in the world”

After all, what do you want your audience to remember?

1. The product name
2. The quality standard
3. The comparator

Really, “the” conveys nothing: “a” best chocolate would be oxymoronic. And you don’t need to stress “chocolate”, because the advert is about chocolate. So “Velvet”, “best” and “world” are **red flag words** in the sense that they convey the key message.

But Steve taught me something that I had never considered. “Velvet” is a red flag word here in another sense. It tells you how to read the sentence: like velvet.

Or should I say: *“like velllvvvetttt”?*

Look out for the words that give you cues about how to read the sentence and you will impart far more meaning, emotion and conviction. Your use of your voice can conjure images as powerful as pictures.

The Hudson Voice Technique is a systematic process for using your voice like a precision tool to convey emotion and conviction, draw your listener in, and enhance memory retention. This is an essential part of your influencing toolkit.

Let’s look at another couple of elements of the technique that I found particularly compelling. I knew already that a falling intonation at the end of a sentence conveys certitude, whilst a level intonation can leave the listener uncertain, confused or even doubtful. A rising tone betokens a question.

And I also knew – as many of us do – that I speak too quickly to optimise my vocal impact. I was taken with Steve’s simple exercise to help slow me down and have been practicing it sporadically (sorry Steve). What rather grabbed me though were two other elements of Steve’s end of sentence drill.

Ending a Sentence

1. Stop on a falling inflection
2. Breathe
3. Count two beats (there is no magic in two, but they will get you comfortable with a proper pause)
4. Start your next sentence with vigour

It sounds simple, but I am astonished how much difference two beats can make to the way I read text – and speak in seminars (I was fortunate to be doing two seminars on the day after I visited Steve, so could practice).

Punctuate the Un-punctuated bits

Steve used a memorable phrase that:

“Written words are a set of instructions from the author, to the reader”

Sometimes, however, some of the instructions are missing and Steve showed me how to insert mental commas into the text to create small blocks of text – each carrying one idea only. These make it easier for the listener to follow, to assimilate the ideas and make sense of them. Remarkably, the technique will help you read un-punctuated and technical text in a way that will make sense to the listener, even if you have no idea what it is about.

And there is more

I’d love to tell you all about the other elements of Steve’s technique, but it would hardly seem fair. I had a good session with him and am grateful for the opportunity to pass it on, but if you want more, then now’s the time to go the [Voice Master website](#) with contact details (UK and other countries with licensed trainers), downloads and before/after tapes