

Getting a clean, warm, consistent voice recording – in the studio, at home, and out at events. A few simple habits make a bigger difference than any piece of kit.

Good audio starts at the microphone, not in the edit. The golden rule of recording is "**rubbish in, rubbish out**" – no amount of editing fully rescues a recording made too far from the mic, in an echoey room, or with the levels wrong. The good news: the basics are quick to learn and the same wherever you record.

THE BASICS (THESE APPLY EVERYWHERE)

1 · Distance – closer than you think

Aim for roughly **a fist's width** (about 10–15 cm) between your mouth and the mic. Too far and the room creeps in and you sound thin and distant; too close and you get boomy and pop. Once you find a good spot, **keep it constant** – drifting in and out is the most common cause of uneven, amateur-sounding audio.

2 · Angle – talk across the mic, not into it

Speak slightly **off-axis** – angle the mic about 20–30° to the side, or position it just above or below your mouth so your breath passes *across* the front rather than straight into it. This alone removes most "p" and "b" pops (plosives) before they happen.

3 · Use a pop filter or windscreen

The foam windscreen or mesh pop shield is your second line of defence against plosives and breath. Cheap, and worth it.

4 · Set your levels

Speak at your normal performing volume and set the gain so the loudest moments peak around **-6 dB** and sit comfortably below the red. If the meter touches the top and "clips", it distorts permanently – back off the gain. Too quiet is safer than too loud, but aim for a healthy, strong signal.

5 · Wear headphones

You don't hear yourself the way the mic does. Headphones let you catch pops, rustles, hum and distance problems *while* you record – not after.

6 · Kill the noise you can control

Fans, fridges, ticking clocks, phones, rustling scripts, jingly jewellery, squeaky chairs, bumping the desk or mic stand – all of it ends up on the recording. Pause, listen to the room for a moment, and switch off what you can.

One trick for warmth: smile slightly and lift your energy when you speak. It genuinely changes the tone of your voice and is the easiest way to sound friendly and engaged – especially useful when voicetracking, where there's no live audience to bounce off.

THE THREE SITUATIONS

1

The Studio Mic

Presenting shows and voicetracking from the WVR studio

The studio mic is a broadcast dynamic microphone on a boom arm, feeding the mixing desk. The technique is **the same whether your show goes out as-live or you're voicetracking** it for a later slot.

- Pull the boom arm so the mic is about a fist's width away and just above or to the side of your mouth – not dead-centre in front.
- Keep that position steady through the whole link. Don't lean back to read a screen and then lean in for the punchline.
- Watch the level meters on the desk as you talk and ride your gain if your voice naturally rises and falls.
- Headphones (cans) on at all times so you can hear yourself, the music beds and any callers.
- Handle scripts gently – turn pages quietly, or scroll on screen. Don't tap the desk or knock the mic stand.
- If you're voicetracking, record a short test link first and play it back before committing to a full session.



Consistency is king. A listener should not be able to tell which links were live and which were voicetracked. Same distance, same energy, same level – every time.

At home, **the room is the enemy**. Hard walls, bare floors and big empty spaces create echo and "boxiness" that's very hard to remove later. You want your voice to arrive at the mic before the room does.

- **Pick a soft, small space.** A room with carpet, curtains, sofas and bookshelves sounds far better than a kitchen or hallway. Soft furnishings soak up echo.
- **Get close.** The closer you are (within reason), the more of *you* and the less of the room the mic hears. A fist's width is ideal with a dynamic mic.
- **The duvet / wardrobe trick:** recording inside a wardrobe of clothes, or with a duvet draped over you and the mic, deadens the room dramatically. It looks daft; it works.
- **Hunt down noise:** turn off the boiler, fan, washing machine and dehumidifier; close the window if there's traffic; put your phone on silent; warn the household.
- **Record a few seconds of "room tone"** (silence, no talking) at the start. It's gold dust for noise reduction in the edit.
- Test, play it back on headphones, adjust, *then* record for real. Sit still and keep your position.

Avoid recording into a laptop's built-in mic or earbud mics for anything going on air. They pick up the whole room and the keyboard. Even a budget USB mic (see buying section) is a night-and-day upgrade.

Outdoors and in crowds you're fighting wind and background noise, so technique matters even more. A **handheld dynamic mic or portable recorder** is the tool here – dynamic mics reject background noise far better than sensitive condenser mics.

- **Hold it correctly:** about a hand's width from the mouth, angled slightly across the chin rather than pointing straight at the lips. Get closer than feels natural – the background noise makes it necessary.
- **Find the quietest corner** you can – step away from the PA, the generator, the burger van and the busy walkway. Even a few metres helps.
- **Always use the windshield** (foam, or a furry "dead cat" if it's breezy). Wind rumble ruins a recording instantly and can't be fixed.
- **Move the mic with the conversation:** point it at *you* for the question, at *them* for the answer. Keep a steady, equal distance for both voices.
- **Mind handling noise:** hold the mic still, don't slide your grip or tap it. Keep cables from rubbing.
- **Do a level check** before the real interview – get them to say their name and what they had for breakfast while you watch the meter.
- **Grab some "wild track":** 30–60 seconds of the event's atmosphere (crowd, music, applause) on its own. It's invaluable for setting the scene in the edit.

Always ask before you record, and make clear it may be broadcast. If you're recording a child, make sure a parent or guardian is present and happy – the same care we'd apply to any contact with under-18s.

Pre-record checklist – pin this up

- ✓ **Distance:** a fist's width, and keep it constant
- ✓ **Angle:** talk across the mic, not into it
- ✓ **Pop filter / windscreen:** on
- ✓ **Levels:** peaking around -6 dB, never in the red
- ✓ **Headphones:** on, monitoring
- ✓ **Noise:** fans/phones/appliances off, household warned
- ✓ **Room tone:** grab a few seconds of silence (home & field)
- ✓ **Test & play back** before the real take

THE FIVE MOST COMMON MISTAKES

- **Sitting too far back** – thin, distant, echoey. Get in close.
- **Drifting position** – volume and tone wander. Lock your distance.
- **Clipping the levels** – permanent crunchy distortion. Watch the meter.
- **Pointing the mic straight at the mouth** – pops on every "p". Go off-axis.
- **Not wearing headphones** – you don't catch the problem until it's too late.

WATCH & LEARN – YOUTUBE FOR VISUAL LEARNERS

Channel names are given rather than fixed links, because individual videos move around. Search the channel plus the suggested phrase on YouTube.



Mike Russell / Music Radio Creative

Our top pick. UK-based, 25+ years in radio, focused entirely on making voices sound great.

Brilliant for presenters and voicetrackers – covers mic technique, home setups and software. A point of pride for us: Mike actually started out right here at Wey Valley Radio back in the 1990s, spending about a year with us before going on to national radio and audio production.

Try searching: [Mike Russell microphone technique](#) · [Music Radio Creative home studio](#)



Podcastage

In-depth, no-nonsense mic reviews and technique demos. Great if you want to hear the difference between mics and positions before you buy.

Try searching: [Podcastage microphone technique](#) · [Podcastage how to sound better](#)



Booth Junkie

Voiceover-focused, superb on home recording and treating a room cheaply. Ideal for the "pre-recording at home" situation.

Try searching: [Booth Junkie microphone technique](#) · [Booth Junkie cheap room treatment](#)



The Podcast Host

Friendly, beginner-pitched explanations of distance, plosives and levels — a gentle starting point if the others feel too technical.

Try searching: [The Podcast Host mic technique](#)

BUYING A MIC FOR RECORDING AT HOME

First decision: dynamic or condenser?

Both can sound excellent — it comes down to your room and your setup, not one being "better" than the other. A **dynamic** mic only really hears what's close in front of it, so it shrugs off room echo and background noise: the easy, forgiving choice for an ordinary untreated room, and most USB ones are true plug-and-play. A **condenser** mic is more sensitive and detailed — several of our team use one for voicetracking and love it. The catch is **power**: a USB condenser draws what it needs down the USB cable (still plug-and-play), but an XLR condenser needs **48V "phantom power"**, which usually means running it through a mixer or audio interface (as some of our team do) rather than straight into a laptop. Condensers also reward a quieter, softer room, since they hear more of it.

In short: for the simplest plug-in-and-go setup, a dynamic mic is the safe bet. If you already have — or are happy to add — a mixer or interface for phantom power, and your room is reasonably quiet, a condenser is a lovely option too.

✓ **Best of both worlds:** buy a mic with **both USB and XLR** outputs. Plug it straight into a laptop today via USB; if WVR ever adds a mixer or audio interface, the same mic works over XLR. No need to buy twice.

Recommendations by budget

Prices are approximate UK street prices and move around — always check a current retailer (Amazon UK, Andertons, Gear4music, Thomann). Most below are **dynamic**; the last is a **condenser** for a quiet room.

Samson Q2U

BEST STARTER

~£60–75

The classic community-radio first mic. USB *and* XLR, and the pack includes a desk stand, windscreen and both cables – genuinely everything you need in the box. Forgiving, robust and hard to beat for the money. **Start here unless you have a reason not to.**

Maono PD200X

BUDGET

~£55–65

A strong, cheap USB/XLR dynamic with a built-in headphone socket and on-mic controls. A solid alternative to the Q2U at a similar price.

Audio-Technica ATR2100x / AT2020USB-X

RELIABLE

~£80–130

The ATR2100x is a Q2U-style USB/XLR dynamic from a trusted brand – another safe, plug-and-play pick.

Rode PodMic USB

STEP UP

~£180–200

A noticeable jump in quality and build. USB and XLR, with on-board processing (compression, noise gate) that helps a voice sound polished straight out of the box. The one to grow into if a budget appears.

Rode NT-USB+

CONDENSER

~£150

If you'd rather a condenser and your room is quiet and soft, this is a lovely USB plug-and-play option – no separate phantom power needed – with a built-in pop filter and headphone socket. More detailed than a dynamic, just less forgiving of a noisy room.

Don't forget the cheap extras that punch above their weight: a foam pop filter (a few pounds), a small desk stand or boom arm so the mic sits at mouth height, and a pair of closed-back headphones for monitoring. These three do more for your sound than spending an extra £100 on the mic itself.