STRETCHLEARN · WORKBOOK

Audiobook Production — Workbook

This workbook accompanies the Audiobook Production course and gives you the hands-on exercises, worksheets, and templates to build your ACX-ready studio workflow from scratch. Complete each section alongside the corresponding course module to verify your setup before moving forward. Every template and checklist is designed to be reused across multiple audiobook projects.

Studio Setup and Acoustic Treatment

Assess your recording environment, document your gear, and confirm your noise floor meets the -60 dBFS ACX requirement before recording a single word of narration.

Exercise: Noise Floor Audit

Record a 10-second silence clip in your proposed recording space. Open it in Audacity, select the entire clip, and run Analyze > Measure RMS. Repeat this test in three different locations or configurations (e.g., open room, closet, blanket tent) and compare results.

• What was the RMS noise floor reading for each location tested? Which passed the -60 dBFS threshold?

• What was the primary noise source in your worst-performing location (HVAC, traffic, electrical hum, room echo)? How did you identify it?

• Which budget treatment option (closet, reflection filter, blanket tent, or panels) produced the best result for your space, and what was the improvement in dBFS?

• What is your plan to maintain a consistent noise floor between recording sessions — for example, a pre-session HVAC shutoff routine?

Worksheet: Studio Gear Inventory

Fill in the details of your recording equipment. Use this sheet as a reference when troubleshooting audio problems and when recreating your session setup after equipment changes.

Microphone model and type (condenser/dynamic)

Audio interface model and firmware version

DAW software and version

Shock mount model

Pop filter type and distance from capsule

Boom arm or mic stand model

Recording space type (closet / treated room / blanket tent / other)

Acoustic treatment materials installed

Noise floor measured RMS (dBFS)

Date of last noise floor test

Checklist: Pre-Session Environment Checklist

[ ] Turn off HVAC, fans, and all motorised appliances
[ ] Place mic at marked position using desk tape guides
[ ] Record a 10-second room-tone clip and verify noise floor below -60 dBFS
[ ] Connect interface to a power conditioner (not a shared circuit with fridge/fluorescents)
[ ] Set interface preamp gain so normal speech peaks at -18 to -12 dBFS
[ ] Perform 30-second vocal warm-up before first take
[ ] Confirm DAW session is named with chapter number and date
[ ] Disable Wi-Fi notifications and phone alerts for the session duration

Recording and Narration Technique

Practise punch-and-roll recording and narration performance, then document your session results to build a reliable per-chapter workflow.

Exercise: Punch-and-Roll Practice Run

Select a 500-word passage from any non-fiction book. Record it in your DAW using punch-and-roll: every time you make an error, stop, rewind 3–5 words, and punch in. Do not stop to fix anything in a second pass — the goal is to practise the real-time punch-and-roll rhythm. Time yourself.

• How many punch-ins did you make in the 500-word passage? At what word rate does your error frequency feel manageable?

• Were there any cases where the punch-in created an audible splice or tone mismatch? What caused it, and how did you fix it?

• Compare your total recording time (including punch-ins) with your estimated finish time at 155 wpm. What was your actual effective narration rate in finished words per hour?

• What is one specific narration habit you identified (for example: rushing on long sentences, dropping breath before em-dashes) that you want to correct before your first full recording session?

Worksheet: Chapter Recording Log

Fill out one row per chapter as you record. Use this log to track session performance and identify patterns — for example, which time of day produces the cleanest takes or which chapters required the most punch-ins.

Chapter number and title

Recording date and start/end time

Word count

Number of punch-in corrections

Session noise floor RMS (dBFS)

Input peak level (dBFS)

Notes on vocal performance or technical issues

Raw file location and filename

Estimated editing time (minutes)

Checklist: Narration Performance Checklist

[ ] Completed vocal warm-up (lip trills, tongue twisters, test passage) before recording
[ ] Drank still water within 30 minutes of session start; avoided caffeine and dairy
[ ] Verified target narration pace is 145–170 wpm for the genre
[ ] Breathing only at punctuation — not mid-sentence
[ ] Left 2 seconds of silence before and after each chapter
[ ] Character voice sheet consulted and test clips replayed for fiction chapters
[ ] Room-tone clip recorded at session start and saved as RT reference
[ ] All files saved in the correct folder with zero-padded naming convention

Editing and Post-Production

Apply your editing and mastering workflow chapter by chapter, tracking loudness measurements and verifying each file against ACX specs before moving to submission.

Exercise: Mastering Chain Calibration

Take one edited (but unmastered) chapter file and process it through the five-stage mastering chain: high-pass filter (80 Hz), EQ, compressor, noise gate, limiter. After each stage, note the RMS level change. Then apply Loudness Normalization targeting -20.5 dBFS RMS and run ACX Check.

• What was the RMS level after each stage of the chain (record the dBFS reading at: raw edited, post-EQ, post-compression, post-limiter, post-normalization)?

• Did the chapter pass all three ACX Check criteria on the first attempt? If not, which criterion failed and what did you adjust?

• Did the noise gate affect any voiced passages — for example, cutting off the tail of a soft word? What threshold adjustment resolved it?

• How does the mastered chapter sound compared to a commercially released audiobook in the same genre at the same loudness? Note any tonal differences.

Worksheet: Mastering Measurements Log

Record the ACX Check measurements for every chapter file after mastering. This log is your pre-submission verification record. Do not upload any file that does not have all three values in the pass range.

Chapter number and filename

Mastering date

RMS level (dBFS) — target -23 to -18

Peak level (dBFS) — target below -3

Noise floor (dBFS) — target below -60

ACX Check result (pass/fail)

Auphonic or manual mastering method used

Notes on any corrections applied

Final export format and bitrate

Sign-off (listening pass completed Y/N)

Checklist: Post-Production Quality Gate

[ ] Truncate Silence applied to remove gaps over 2 seconds
[ ] All breath intakes at sentence starts reduced by at least -12 dB (not deleted)
[ ] Room-tone fill used for all edit splice gaps
[ ] Noise reduction applied only where noise floor is above -60 dBFS
[ ] Mastering chain applied in the correct order: HPF > EQ > Compressor > Noise Gate > Limiter
[ ] Loudness Normalization applied targeting -20.5 dBFS RMS
[ ] ACX Check plugin confirms all three values in pass range
[ ] Full-speed headphone listening pass completed with manuscript open
[ ] Chapter start has 1–2 seconds room tone before first spoken word
[ ] Chapter end has at least 1 second room tone after final word

QC, Submission, and Distribution

Complete the final QC pass, prepare your submission package, and build a distribution strategy that maximises your audiobook's retail reach.

Exercise: Submission Package Rehearsal

Before submitting your full audiobook, do a dry run with one chapter file and your retail audio sample. Upload them to ACX, observe the automated QC result, then withdraw the draft. Repeat with Findaway Voices if you plan wide distribution. Document every step and result.

• What did the ACX automated QC report for your test chapter? Did it pass immediately or were there corrections needed?

• Were all required file types present in your submission package: Opening Credits, chapters, Closing Credits, and retail sample? Which were missing and why?

• What distribution model did you choose (ACX exclusive, non-exclusive + Findaway, or Findaway only) and what was the reasoning based on your target audience?

• What is the estimated publication timeline from first upload to live date, based on ACX and Findaway stated QA review windows?

Worksheet: Distribution and Pricing Tracker

Use this worksheet to plan and record your distribution decisions for each audiobook title. Update it each time you publish a new book or change pricing.

Book title and ACX/Findaway project ID

Distribution model chosen (exclusive / non-exclusive / Findaway-only)

ACX royalty rate (%)

Findaway Voices commission rate (%)

List price set on ACX (USD)

List price set on Findaway (USD)

Retail audio sample file name and length (minutes)

Opening Credits file confirmed (Y/N)

Closing Credits file confirmed (Y/N)

Submission date

Human QA approval date

Live publication date

First 30-day unit sales (fill after publication)

Checklist: Final Submission Checklist

[ ] All chapter files pass ACX Check (RMS, peak, noise floor in spec)
[ ] Retail audio sample is 1–5 minutes from the interior of the book (not the preface or introduction)
[ ] Opening Credits file is present and references the correct title and narrator name
[ ] Closing Credits file includes the required ACX rights statement
[ ] All files are MP3, 192 kbps CBR, 44.1 kHz, 16-bit
[ ] Files are named with zero-padded chapter numbers (e.g., ch001, ch002)
[ ] Total finished audio runtime is at least 1 hour
[ ] Mastering measurements log is complete and all rows show pass status
[ ] Distribution model is confirmed and royalty rate is set before clicking Submit
[ ] Backup copies of all delivery files are stored in at least two locations

Your Action Plan

1. Set up and test your recording space: record a 10-second silence clip and confirm the noise floor is below -60 dBFS before purchasing additional equipment.
2. Install Audacity 3.x and the ACX Check plugin, then open the free ACX Technical Requirements page and save it as a reference bookmark.
3. Create your project folder structure (raw-takes, edited, mastered, delivery, assets) before recording chapter one.
4. Record chapter one using punch-and-roll and time yourself; calculate your effective finished-words-per-hour rate to plan your full recording schedule.
5. Edit chapter one and run the five-stage mastering chain; use ACX Check to verify all three values pass before proceeding.
6. Run a full-speed headphone listening pass on chapter one while following along in the manuscript; fix any content or quality issues found.
7. Create your Audacity mastering macro and save your session as a project template so future chapters use identical settings.
8. Complete all remaining chapters using the same workflow, recording your measurements in the Mastering Measurements Log for every file.
9. Submit a single test chapter to ACX as a draft and verify the automated QC passes before uploading your full book.
10. Choose your distribution model, set your pricing, upload the complete submission package, and confirm Opening Credits and Closing Credits are included.