

Voice over script word count guide

When writing for a voice over or video session, it's hard to estimate how long the final piece will be once it's been recorded. A good way to estimate the final length is to read it aloud while timing yourself. You might think that reading it in your head and timing yourself would yield the same result, but it won't. The final result will be significantly longer when read aloud.

It's also important to consider how you want the reader to perform. We're all familiar with the "fine print" language at the end of car and pharmaceutical commercials that are read so fast that they're almost unintelligible. It's highly unlikely that you're intending that result for the kind of work we do.

For the content we typically deliver, a read rate **between 2.1 and 2.6 words per second** is usually a good target. In the voice-over industry, this would be called a straight read. The table below will give you some guidance for other voice-over delivery styles.

The 30 Second Spot Word Count Guideline		
lots of inflection, sincere read	65 words	2.2 words per second
typical, straight read	78 words	2.6 words per second
fast read	90 words	3.0 words per second
hard sell, maximum speed read	100 words	3.3 words per second
The 60 Second Spot Word Count Guideline		
lots of inflection	130 words	2.2 words per second
typical, straight read	155 words	2.6 words per second
fast read	180 words	3.0 words per second
hard sell, maximum speed read	200 words	3.3 words per second
<i>Note that numbers (such as a phone number), symbols (@ symbol or www), etc., count as one word each.</i>		

Remember that if you're writing a voice over script that will be matched with video or animation, you might need longer pauses than usual between bullet points and sentences to allow the animations to build in or build out. That's why the suggested range could be lower than the 2.2 **sincere read** rate in the table above. If your final product will have music, remember to allow a couple seconds before and after the voice over to allow the music to build in and fade out.