

Dear Volunteer Applicant,

We are delighted that you have expressed an interest in volunteering for Reading & Radio Resource. Our volunteers are the life's blood of this agency, and your participation is greatly needed. As with most prospective volunteers, you are probably interested in becoming a reader. You will soon learn, however, that some of our most important responsibilities are those utilizing non-readers. So, to begin your association with us, we invite you to join us in the two-part 'get acquainted' process explained below.

Of those applicants whom we initially feel will be fine readers, only 50% are finally selected. Because the requirements specific to recorded narration are so critical, we want you to become completely familiar and comfortable with our criteria as well as our screening process before you commit to audition. Few people, even those with stage or voice-over experience, are practiced in the unique art of recording books. .

Many of those wishing to volunteer with us are uncomfortable with our requirement of an audition, and are put off by the fact that acceptance as a reader is based solely on the results of this audition. We want you to understand that it's our listeners who, with nothing but a voice to hold their interest, demand that the voice, the interpretation of the written material, and the delivery all work together to bring the ideas to life, or they will not listen. To fulfill our mission, therefore, we must screen our readers carefully.

A tour of the agency will be your first step in the volunteering process. You'll learn more about the programs, see other volunteers at work and receive the criteria for the audition. This should take about an hour of your time. We strongly recommend that you take the audition materials home so that you can practice and hone your skills. We'll be delighted to schedule your audition appointment at that time.

Each audition is evaluated by the Station Manager, Recorded Books Manager and Volunteer Coordinator, and is responded to by letter or e-mail. Often, a copy of your recording is included so that you can hear exactly on what our evaluation is based. If there are elements that require some polishing before we can offer acceptance, we'll be very specific and include suggestions for practice. If either voice or delivery is deemed to be unsuited beyond our ability to offer help, we promise to be as gentle as possible in our explanation.

Applicants with borderline auditions will be invited to participate in a group training session prior to a second audition. It is at this point, consideration needs to be given to your desire to volunteer with us and your willingness to put forth the extra effort needed to improve those skills that are weak. The training sessions will be held on Thursdays, following the same schedule as the orientations: 10:30 am, 2:30 pm and 5:45 pm. Each will last approximately 1 hour.

When readers are accepted and begin their time of service, they may expect to be under review for six months. This is to insure that the qualities exhibited during the audition can be sustained, and that readers are willing and able to meet the criteria for the duration of their time with us.

It's our hope that you will understand and accept the possibility of not being accepted as a reader. We also hope your desire to work with us will open your mind to the consideration of a non-reading opportunity should one be available that fits your schedule. You'll learn during the tour that these non-reading tasks are equally vital to our production of services.

Orientations are held on Tuesdays at 10:30a.m., 2:30p.m., and 5:45p.m. If you have daytime availability, but are not free on Tuesdays, we will certainly accommodate your needs. Unfortunately, we are not staffed on weekends. Please call us at 214-871-7668 or 1-800-871-7668 to schedule your introduction to Reading & Radio Resource. You will find us in Mapsco grid 45E. We are eager to meet you and welcome you to our agency.

Best of luck!

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Individuals with reading impairments are often prevented from accessing information, entertainment, instruction and inspiration offered only in printed forms. Unless reading alternatives (personal readers, Braille, large-type books, scanning devices, recorded books, etc.) are provided, severe limits on mental stimulation, personal health and growth, positive self-image, education and job enhancement are imposed. A sense of isolation, or helplessness, is created when an individual cannot read, as print materials are often the best, most comprehensive and available method of securing in-depth information. Because a variety of circumstances create the inability to read, i.e. vision loss, dyslexia and other learning disabilities, paralysis, debilitating diseases, infirmities of old age, and illiteracy, reading alternatives must serve a wide range of age levels and a wide spectrum of needs.

Thank you for expressing an interest in Reading & Radio Resource. We hope the following information will answer your questions about our services and volunteer opportunities.

WHO WE ARE * * *

Reading & Radio Resource is a volunteer, 501(c)(3) non-profit agency dedicated to the provision of reading alternatives for the blind, the physically handicapped, or the learning disabled. We receive a portion of our operating expenses from the Dallas and Tarrant County United Ways; private contributions and the below-cost-of-production fees charged to educational institutions cover the balance of our funding and all of our capital expenses. All reading, technical and staff support is provided by volunteers.

WHAT WE DO * * *

RECORDED BOOKS PROGRAM records books for direct distribution to our clients. With the exception of "entertainment" literature (material that is readily available from many other sources), we will record requested materials on open reels, transcribe the reels on to standard two-track cassettes, and ship the recorded books to individuals or educational institutions. Current state adopted textbooks for grades one through twelve, along with supplementary classroom and outside reading, self-help, inspirational, religious, and job enhancement materials are but a few of the types of readings done by our volunteers. These tapes go to teachers of dyslexic, blind and physically handicapped students, adults with vision, learning or physical disabilities, and people with English as a second language. The service is free for the adults and for purchase by the schools. No enrollment process is necessary. A simple phone call is all that is needed to make a request, and the cassettes become the property of our client

NTRB - A RADIO READING SERVICE - are the call letters of a special radio broadcast. There are more than 40,000 people within the range of our signal who are potential listeners to our daily broadcasts for the blind and print handicapped. This coded signal goes out over a sub-carrier of KERA 90.1FM and covers a radius of 70 miles from their Cedar Hill transmitter. To decode the signal, a special receiver is provided free of charge to persons making application for service. This receiver is on indefinite loan to our to our qualified listeners. Programming is now on 24 hours every day. During this time, information and entertainment not available on TV or public radio is broadcast: local and national newspapers, magazines, special interest shows and unabridged novels are part of our daily programs.

WHO PRODUCES OUR SERVICES * * *

In our *Recorded Books Program*, volunteer readers (always needed) and duplicators (always needed)...

In *NTRB - A Radio Reading Service*, volunteer editors and readers are accepted when program slots become vacant. Subjects and suggestions for new programs are always entertained. Positions for Cover-To-Cover – recorded fiction and non-fiction – are always open. Substitute readers and editors are always welcome.

Staff Assistants (receptionists/secretaries), regular and substitute volunteers are always welcome.

HOW WE ARE FUNDED * * *

Reading & Radio Resource is funded by various United Ways, grant solicitations, volunteer matching gifts and private contributions from donors, clients and volunteers. Gifts may be made to the general operating fund or to specific services for designated needs. Examples of designated needs include funds for the purchase of radio receivers, cassettes and CDs, computer upgrades, books and periodical subscriptions. Donations may be made for the establishment of seed tape libraries within a school, church or care facility of their choice. We also encourage our long-time donors to consider us in their Planned Giving arrangements.

HOW TO JOIN US * * *

All recording is done in our studios in the Oak Lawn area of Dallas. Anyone wishing to become a volunteer is invited to attend an orientation/audition. The orientation will provide information about our volunteer opportunities. The audition will determine if your voice is suitable for our needs and if your oral reading skills are suitable to our clients' needs. These sessions are held each Tuesday at 10:30 a.m., 2:30 p.m. and 5:45 p.m.. For an appointment, please call (214) 871-7668.

HOW TO ACCESS OUR SERVICES * * *

To become a listener to NTRB or to receive a catalog of our recorded books, simply call (214) 871-7668 or 1-800-871-7668. We will take your order for taped books or send you an application for the radio service. Both tapes and radio will be sent through the mail.

READING & RADIO RESOURCE

BRINGING BOOKS TO LIFE (or “What Have I Gotten Myself Into?”)

Criteria for Narrators

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a volunteer reader for Reading & Radio Resource. Please know that your gifts of time and talent to those who are unable to read from a printed page are of inestimable value – to this agency and to those who benefit from our work. The following information is not meant to discourage or overwhelm anyone, but simply to provide a better understanding of what is involved in reading for an unseen audience. What you learn here will start you on the right path to becoming a better voice for those who are waiting to hear.

Creating an audio book, no matter what the subject, means ‘telling’ the written ideas as if they are coming from the reader, not the author. There is a great deal of difference between this ‘telling’ and simply reading words printed on a page. Almost everyone can speak the words, but ‘telling’ indicates that the reader is caught up in the subject, understands how the author has structured the writing, identifies with the characters, and can capture a listener’s interest with nothing but the voice.

Very few of our readers are professionals, with stage, voiceover or film training. Even those who are find that recording – which is primarily cold reading – is a far cry from speech that is rehearsed or directed before its final utterance. Here, readers must engage their imaginations, their ability to interpret someone else’s words as they read, and must use their voices to turn ink on a page into vocal ideas worth hearing.

VOICE

In a recording, your voice is *all* that conveys energy, authority, emotion, interest and meaning. No gestures, facial expressions or surrounding ‘business’ can help to convey the presentation. The voice must be one that listeners find easy to listen to for hours. It must have a moderate pitch, but with the ability to go lower or higher easily. It must be free of physical characteristics such as raspiness, nasality, growl or sibilance. It must have strength and resonance, and command the listener’s attention.

The voice must be ‘generic’, free of regional accent, or listeners in other parts of the country may not understand the pronunciations. Its pitch must be able to convincingly portray male and female, young and old, with all the emotions and attitudes humans experience. Recording allows one (or demands of one, depending on the point of view) to become a semi-actor in the privacy of a recording booth. But first, one must know what that entails.

INTERPRETATION

What is the author trying to say? What are the important ideas, and which words best convey them? Which words will you choose to emphasize? What are the attitudes you

will use to indicate a point of view? Who are the characters, their ages, their reasons for being in the story? What part of the world are they from? What emotions are being exhibited? What action is taking place? Are battles being fought, a child being hugged, or someone being inspired to change? Does the reader fully understand what is and is not important in the writing, and can he or she use the voice to speak for the author and characters in a convincing way?

DYNAMICS

Dynamics is simply the way a voice is used to indicate action, attitude, emotion, setting and color. Dynamics is: emphasis on certain words; pauses that set up the next point; speed that indicates how fast or how slow something or someone is moving; the age and emotions of the characters; the attitude of the author. Reading without dynamics is monotone and deadly dull.

PACING, PHRASING & PAUSING

Pacing is how fast or how slow the material is read. A steady pace throughout a reading is as dull as a monotone delivery. Even factual, pedantic writing needs variety in pacing. Pacing indicates a fast-moving scene, a hot day, an angry person, energy or repose. Pacing indicates punctuation marks, an idea, or dialogue. Phrasing and pausing are the ways ideas are tied together. Awkward pauses in the middle of an idea, words phrased together inappropriately make for a choppy sound and make the reader sound unfamiliar with the writing.

TIMING

It is amazing how much difference a fraction of a second makes. It can set one character's speech apart from another; it can heighten the listener's expectation; it can emphasize a point.

Timing is the appropriate use of pacing, phrasing and pausing. As a comedian times his or her punch line, so a reader needs to time his or her delivery in a way that compliments the writing.

PRONUNCIATION & ENUNCIATION

Words are the 'meat' of oral reading. They convey meaning, emotions, attitudes and information. To the listener, every "a", "and" and "the" – words that can easily be eliminated in silent reading – must be spoken. Correct pronunciations are vital. The dictionary must become a second right arm. Enunciation is crucial. No more "hunerd" for "hundred", "picher" for "picture", "liberry" for "library", "strenth" for "strength", or "runnin" for "running" unless the author is writing in vernacular.

Here is where regional speech may become a problem. We all have a comfortable, conversational speech that our friends and family have no problem understanding. To a listener hundreds of miles away, living in a different part of our country, we must offer standard American English pronunciations. Here in Texas, long vowel sounds in words such as 'real' (often sounds like 'rill'), 'like' (often sounds like 'lak'), 'just' (often sounds like 'jest'), dropped 'ing' and 'st' endings are troublesome. In recording, voiced vowels and consonants must be properly spoken and clearly heard. When people with strong

regional or national accents apply as volunteers, we have to tell them that what they read will be limited to writing that can be enhanced by that accent. Given that most of our work is dictated by listener requests, only occasional books will arrive to suit a specific accent, and opportunities for full volunteer participation are often few and far between.

CHARACTERIZATIONS

Because readers dedicate one day a week to their service, the creation of a strong 'character voice' that must be sustained throughout the book is discouraged. The voice may slip more than a little as time goes on. Besides, the listener has an imagination, too, and can use it effectively if the reader provides appropriate emotions and attitudes for each character that distinguishes the character from the narrator. Readers learn to produce 'attitude on demand' – the ability to sound angry, sad, frightened, shy, sarcastic, etc. if this is how the characters feel. Such specifics as age and sex may be slightly delineated by deepening or lifting the voice, by making one's own voice harsh or soft.

PREDICTABILITY

Predictability is repetition – of intonations, voice levels and pace. Predictability is a sure turn-off to a listener. Examples: beginning or ending every sentence on the same pitch; reading with a measured pace; punching words for emphasis; and raising the voice at the beginning of sentence, to drop it in descending waves to the end. And finally,

ACCURACY & TECHNICAL QUALITY

Unless the reader is part of a program that provides an engineer, he or she is responsible for the accuracy and technical quality of the recording. We know that human error will cause occasional stumbles, word omissions, heavy breathing and lip smacks. But each reader must be so attuned to his or her performance that 99% of these problems will be caught and repaired. Our digital recording system is so easy to use, the reading so easy to edit, that we expect readers to be their own best critic. Good recording volume; attention to noises created by paper, book and body movements; mispronunciations, stumbles, omissions and other disturbances need to be removed and corrected.

NOW, if these seem like unattainable goals, or of a difficulty that a volunteer is not willing to tackle, be assured that Reading & Radio Resource does not expect perfection, or even close to it. We simply want to assure our listeners that we care enough about their needs to give them the best that volunteers can possibly produce. In establishing these criteria, we have been assisted by professional recording artists and studios, listeners, teachers, parents and clinicians who deal with the needs of those who are unable to read for themselves. We rely heavily on the criteria set by the Library of Congress Talking Books Program, who have been recording books for the world for a very long time.

And our volunteers, who know that their voices are going out across the state and far beyond to reach thousands of listeners, are dedicated to giving their best. To those of you considering R&RR as a potential home for your time and talents we say that you are wanted, needed and greatly appreciated.