



Volunteer Handbook

Revised 2021, updated 2023

The Audio-Reader Network fosters independence by providing access to information and the arts for people who have difficulty reading standard print due to vision loss, physical or learning disability, mobility challenges, and age.



Painting by Mary Ann Saunders, Audio-Reader Volunteer, in honor of Audio-Reader's 30th anniversary

FOREWORD

Welcome! We are grateful that you have chosen to volunteer your time and talents at Audio-Reader Network. Audio-Reader's success depends on the hard work, dedication and talent of our volunteers.

Please read this guide carefully and use it as a reference tool throughout your time at Audio-Reader. This handbook will help you understand your role at Audio-Reader, guide you through the different volunteer assignments and help you with broadcasting techniques. We hope it will make you a confident Audio-Reader volunteer and enhance your experience with us.



What is Audio-Reader?

Audio-Reader is an audio information service that provides **free** audio recordings of newspapers, magazines and books for individuals who experience difficulty accessing the printed word. We broadcast across Kansas and parts of Missouri 24 hours a day, seven days a week via closed circuit radios, our website and Alexa devices. Audio-Reader also has a dial-in service called the Lions Telephone Reader. Telephone Reader allows listeners to hear on-demand recordings of the numerous publications recorded by volunteers.

In addition, Audio-Reader provides recordings of materials requested by individual listeners; audio description of theatre performances, museum exhibits, and educational materials; and a Sensory Garden designed to appeal to all of the senses.

The History of Audio-Reader

Audio-Reader is the second oldest audio information service in the United States. The first broadcast was on October 11, 1971. Our founder, Lawrence philanthropist Anne “Petey” Cerf, had been reading to a friend who was paralyzed by multiple sclerosis and began to wonder about a way to share reading with others who were unable to read for themselves. She began to research how to make printed materials available to people with vision loss in a more efficient and widespread way. Petey decided to support a radio reading service in Lawrence, similar to one already in place in Minneapolis, MN (Minnesota Radio Talking Book Network). She approached the University of Kansas for funding and they agreed.

We began with just 80 hours of programming each week and about 250 listeners. In 1985 we started broadcasting 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Audio-Reader now serves about 7,000 listeners.

Who Are Audio-Reader's Listeners?

Anyone who has difficulty reading standard print materials can apply for Audio-Reader service. This includes people with vision loss of any kind (blindness, Macular Degeneration, glaucoma, etc.) as well as an intellectual disability or physical or cognitive condition that prevents them from reading normal printed materials (Dyslexia, Multiple Sclerosis, brain injury, stroke, arthritis, etc.).

Most of our Radio listeners range in age from 60 to 90. Many suffer from Macular Degeneration, an age-related eye disorder. They are new to the blind community, do not read Braille and may be uncomfortable with using technology. These listeners like the simplicity of the Audio-Reader radio or Alexa device.

Lions Telephone Reader listeners tend to be younger, more comfortable with technology, and prefer access to a wide range of unabridged information at their fingertips. Telephone Reader listeners often use Braille and have other “enabling technology” in the home. They also have specific material they want to hear.

How Do People Acquire Service?

Listeners fill out a short application for the services they want to receive. The application is available on our website at <http://reader.ku.edu/application-service>.

In addition, any listener is encouraged to send in special request materials. These can include anything from newspapers and magazines to books, instruction manuals, newsletters or even textbooks.

How is Audio-Reader Funded?

Audio-Reader is a non-profit organization and a part of the University of Kansas. All services are provided free of charge to eligible individuals. Funding for Audio-Reader comes from a variety of sources including individual donations, grants, foundations, service clubs, and legacy giving. In addition, fundraisers are held each year; a golf tournament (<http://reader.ku.edu/audio-reader-golf-classic>) in June and used audio product sales (<http://reader.ku.edu/audiosale>).

To learn more about development at Audio-Reader, contact Development Director Beth McKenzie at (785) 864-5336 or bethmckenzie@ku.edu or Development Assistant Meredith Johanning at (785) 864-4634 or mjohanning@ku.edu. There is also information available at <http://reader.ku.edu/ways-donate>.

Audio-Reader's Volunteers



Many of our 300 volunteers have been reading for 5, 10—even 45 years. The commitment and dedication of our volunteers is the backbone of Audio-Reader's service.

Volunteers range in age from their late teens to mid-90s. While many live in Lawrence, we have readers all over the country reading from their closet, basement and living room studios. Audio-Reader has a volunteer run satellite location in Pittsburg, KS in addition to our Lawrence headquarters.

Audio-Reader Absence Policy

Your service keeps our operation running smoothly and ensures all materials are read in a timely fashion. Please make every effort to meet your recording deadlines. **If you are unable to read for any reason let a staff member know.** We request two weeks' notice; the sooner you let us know you will be away the better chance we have of finding a substitute for you. This keeps us and our listeners happy! In addition, we encourage you to make up missed time by filling in as a substitute prior to your departure or upon your return.

To report an absence:

- Contact Coordinator of Volunteers Trish Dowd Kelne at (785) 864-4604 or tdk@ku.edu.
- If the absence is within 12 hours of your assignment, or on the weekend please call the main number, (785) 864-4600.

Frequent no call-no shows will result in removal of assignment. Book readers will be checked for progress every three months; you must complete a minimum of one book reading per month to remain active.

If you need to **miss several weeks** due to a medical condition, family emergency, changes in job or school-related activities, travel etc. please notify the Coordinator of Volunteers. We will find a substitute or replacement reader for your assignment.

When To Retire Or Make A Change

Our listeners expect and deserve easily-understood readings. If age or illness prevents the vocal production of a clear and pleasant tone, we suggest you cut back or take a break from reading. If you develop vocal quality issues that will not resolve with rest it may be time to talk with the coordinator of volunteers about shifting to a non-reading volunteer assignment.

If you become unable to commit to a weekly volunteer assignment or have to cancel frequently you may need to consider retirement or becoming a substitute reader.

Other Volunteer Opportunities

Audio Description

Audio Describers use colorful, succinct language to describe theatre to the visually impaired. This is done live. Description covers everything from sets and costumes to setting the scene and action on stage. The describer must do this when the actors are NOT speaking or singing.

Requirements include serving as a listener liaison, a two-day training and evaluations. For more information about the audio description process or program, see our describer handbook at reader.ku.edu/volunteer-resources

Sensory Garden

The Sensory Garden is designed to appeal to all of the human senses. It allows the visually impaired to experience the imagination and spirit of plant life through textures, fragrances and sounds. Some items may not be in an optimum location for a visual experience, but they afford touch and sound experiences for many people.

The garden is cared for by a small group of dedicated volunteer gardeners. The type and amount of work varies depending on the season. If you are interested in volunteering in the Sensory Garden, please contact Audio-Reader's Development Director at 864-4634.

Front Desk Volunteers



Audio-Reader's front desk volunteers greet volunteers and the public, edit audio files and assist volunteers in locating technical help and/or reading materials, and other office tasks. Shifts can be scheduled to fit around your other activities.

Fundraising



Volunteers can provide support to fundraising events! We can always use help sorting gently used audio products, including CD's and LP's, speakers, turntables and musical instruments. For more information please contact Audio-Reader's Development Assistant, Meredith Johanning at 864-5336 or mjohanning@ku.edu.

Outreach

We need YOUR help to spread the word about Audio-Reader! Anyone is a potential audience. Need to give a program presentation to your civic group? Communications and Listener Outreach Coordinator Martha Kehr can set you up with the materials you need. She is also available to speak to groups about Audio-Reader's services, including our radios, Telephone Reader, Special Request and Audio Description. Your group does not need to be visually-impaired to learn about Audio-Reader! We could also use your help exhibiting at area events. To find out how you can help contact Martha at (785) 864-2900 or mkehr@ku.edu.

CREATING QUALITY AUDIO PROGRAMMING

Best Practices for Reading

1. Complete your assignment by its deadline. Digital broadcast readers should finish/upload programs at least one-hour before air-time. Live readers should arrive at least 30-minutes prior to the start of the broadcast. Call 785-864-4600 if you are running late. Telephone Reader assignments should be completed by 10 a.m. during the week and 11 a.m. on the weekend unless otherwise specified or specific arrangements have been made with staff.
2. Monitor yourself by wearing headphones during your recording. The microphone picks up lots of sounds that your ear won't hear or notice **UNLESS** you are wearing headphones.
3. Read all materials as they are written, **without commenting, censoring or editorializing**. It is equally important to keep your tone neutral. If in the course of your reading you run across any offensive material, **DO NOT CENSOR IT**. Instead, let staff know so we can add a disclaimer before it airs. Offensive material can include excessive profanity or explicit sexual scenes or graphic violence. If in doubt, ask.
4. Is an article **REALLY** long? You can always abbreviate articles in order to cover more variety in a publication. Announce that there is more to the story/article so a listener can call us to hear the rest if they are interested. The rule of thumb is to spend no more than 5 minutes on a single article. You can always return to it if you have time.
5. **Keep it local**. If you are reading a local paper, **look for the news they can't get anywhere else**. Read articles with local by-lines first. Choose articles about the community such as card showers, cards of thanks, Locks of Love donations, community meal calendars etc. These items build the character of a community. Avoid reading about events that have already happened.

6. **Always make time for the obituaries!** When reading obituaries for broadcast, give the name of the deceased, their age, city or town and the date of their death. If they passed away in another locale, you may list a local connection. If there is time in your recording you can read more of each obituary but skip the long survived-by lists. If you are reading for Telephone Reader always read the complete obituary!
7. When reading from a newspaper or magazine **always read the title and byline at the beginning AND end of an article.** This is important information to our listeners and also serves as an important transition between articles.
8. Keep up with names and topics in the news. If you are unsure of a pronunciation, look it up in a dictionary or on the internet.
9. Make your reading style appropriate to the material, but don't be overly dramatic. Book readers should never use character voices.
10. Pause your recording or leave the room when recording live if you need to cough or sneeze. If it makes it onto your recording, please go back and take it out.

Voice and Audio Quality Hints

When you read, you want to read smoothly, clearly and with expression. Here are some tips to help you along the way.

1. Before you begin recording or go on the air for a live broadcast, please remove any jewelry, such as loose bracelets or beeping watches, which could produce distracting noises during your broadcast. Turn off cell phones.
2. Always have a glass of some kind of liquid available. Room temperature water or tea is best. Avoid carbonated beverages, milk or cheese products before and during a broadcast.
3. Arrange your book, magazine or newspaper so that it is accessible and easy to handle. If possible, hold your reading material slightly raised in front of you. Don't turn pages or adjust your reading material while recording, we cannot edit out sounds layered onto your reading!
4. Sit up straight! Keep your neck and shoulder muscles loose and your head level as you read.
5. Be sure your microphone is six to eight inches away from your mouth and at an angle to avoid popping p's.

Reading the Written Word

(excerpted from How to Speak the Written Word by Nedra Newkirk Lamar; published by Fleming H. Revell Co., copyright 1934, 1939, 1945.)

Parenthesis

A parenthetical expression should be read in a much lower tone of voice than the rest of the sentence. This is true whether the parenthetical expression is set off by parenthesis, by dashes or by commas.

Phrasing

A phrase is a group of related words that conveys a thought. A phrase gives the reader an opportunity to breathe, look ahead and heightens the effect of a reading as nothing else can.

Quotations

Quotations should be indicated by the inflection of the voice. Do not say “quote” and “end quote” to indicate someone else is speaking.

Italics

As a general rule, italicizing a word indicates that the idea it carries is important; therefore, the word should be emphasized appropriately in your reading.

Footnotes

Footnotes may be read if they appear on the same page with their referent. If they do not appear on the same page, or if their content is more distracting than helpful, they should be omitted.

Dedications, Forewords, Prefaces, and Prologues: When you record a book or other material which contains introductory information such as a dedication, foreword, etc., we suggest that you read this material unless it is “dry” and unhelpful, such as an extensive list of acknowledgements. When in doubt, consult a staff member.

Picture Description

1. Describe the pictures like you read the articles. Be neutral, but have interest in your voice. Don't use opinion words like ugly or pretty unless it is obviously a "beauty shot" like sunsets, wildflowers, and clouds then you can say it is a pleasing, pretty photo—just be sure to say why.
2. Credit the photographer if they are mentioned.
3. Specify if it is a black and white or color photo. Most of our listeners have a reference point with those terms.
4. READ the caption and scan the article before you record. Let them do the work for you - often much of the description is contained there.
5. Captions are generally repeated word for word in the body of the story. Rather than be redundant, choose where you will say that part, and say it only once. If you say that phrase as a caption, cross it out in the article. If you read it in the article, paraphrase the caption.
6. Choose what is important (often the largest element in the photo). Start there.
7. Sometimes the newspaper does the work for you. Don't try to describe a bridal gown yourself. Contained in the article is all the information about re-embroidered lace bodices and organza trains with rosettes than you will ever need to know.
8. Use imaginative, colorful, specific language. "Awesome" does not tell us anything. Use your adjectives. Look for color, texture, size, movement, and approximation to other items in the picture.
9. Plan what you are going to say. Write it down if you need to until you get the hang of it. For example, if there are a NUMBER of people in the picture, like athletes lined up on a stage, count them ahead of time.
10. If you don't know what something is, say you don't know. Then try to describe it as best you can or choose another photo to describe.