Lead-ins and Prompts Resource Guide

Lead-in lines and Prompts are tools used to produce natural, spontaneous performances. They can be used by Coaches to direct talent and by voice-over actors to “self”-direct. The technique is equally effective with beginners and seasoned professionals.

Lead-ins and Prompts are phrases heard in everyday speech that express common attitudes and emotions. “You won’t believe what I just heard…”

They serve as a shortcut to a character’s point-of-view and intention. “When you get to be my age…”

They can be thought of as a “pitch pipe” that helps identify and isolate specific emotional notes. “I was so embarrassed…”

Lead-ins and Prompts enable an actor to simultaneously uncover and tap into emotions and attitudes. “Pay attention. I know what I’m talking about…”

Colloquial phrases have a familiar ring that ease voice over artists into natural, believable performances. Lead-in lines draw on intuitive dramatic instincts. “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times…”

Lead-ins and (Self)-Prompts can be used to explore alternate reads. They are effective tools for experimenting with novel interpretations and off-beat treatments. “I know you’re not going to like what I am about to say…”

They keep actors from falling into repetitive, uninspired reads. They open the door to a range of possible treatments. The BEST reads are almost always variations on expected reads. “I hate to say this, but…”

Lead-ins and Prompts are limited only by imagination and ingenuity. They can be concocted on the fly to solve particular problems. They can be used to communicate with actors regarding performances that go beyond mere technical directions like rhythm, pace, emphasis and phrasing.
The well-crafted Lead-in or Prompt can also produce very specific reads. For example, most commercials are about comparisons—either implied or explicit. A strategically designed Prompt can help the actor find the emphasis in a line that underscores the implied comparison.

**Script:** At Pure Leaf we know the best things in life are real.

**Prompt:** Do you believe the best things in life are artificial?

**Read:** No! At Pure Leaf we know the best things in life are *real*.

Here is a list of common attitudes and points-of-view found in commercial and narration scripts: As you’ll discover, alternate Lead-ins and Prompts can trigger a range of varying reads.

*(Lead-in lines precede the opening line of the script and should be incorporated into the read.)*

**Announcer/Spokesvoice**

Could I have your attention…

Now it can be told…

Just what you’ve been waiting for…

Here’s what I want you to do…

In case you didn’t know…

This just in…

Listen to this…

No doubt about it…

This may come as a surprise to you…

—TAGS—

Just remember this…
In case you’re wondering…

Just for the record…

They tell me I have to say this…

Confidentiality

Just between you and me…

Let me tell you a little secret…

Keep this to yourself…

You probably didn’t know this, but…

Have you heard…

Authority

I know what I’m talking about…

Don’t argue with me, I know what I’m talking about…

I’ve heard this before…

Let’s get one thing straight…

I get this all the time…

One thing I know for sure…

Like my dad used to say…

Conviction

I feel strongly about this…

This matters to me…

I love this…
I hate this…
You have to believe me…
I’m not going to mince words…
I’ve never told anyone this before…

**Empathy**

I know how you feel…
I’ve been there too…
I know you’re skeptical…
You’re right to be concerned…
We have one thing in common…

**Motivation**

What are you waiting for…
It’s about time…
Let’s face facts…
You can do this…
I believe in you…

**Reassurance**

Your worries are over…
Things are about to change…
Just what you’ve been waiting for…
You have nothing to worry about…
Everything is under control…
Relax…

Rational/Logical

Have you ever considered this…

Have you ever thought about it this way…

Here’s where most people go wrong…

Things aren’t always what they seem…

You can’t believe everything you hear…

Let’s look at it this way…

Instructional/eLearning

You can do this…

Let me explain how this works…

It’s not that hard…

I think you’ll find this interesting…

Here’s something you need to know…

Narration/Storytelling:

Once upon a time…

The story goes something like this…

This is how I remember it…

Most people have never heard this before…
In a time long ago, in a land far away…

Conversational/Down-to-Earth:

The other day I was telling my mom…

It was pretty cool when we…

Hey, have you tried that…

I really like when he told me…

It was a tough few days, but then…

Compound Sentiments

Empathy and Reassurance

I know how you feel, you have nothing to worry about…

Authority and Reassurance

I’ve seen this before, I know how to help…

Prompts

How are you different?

What makes you so special?

Why are you telling me this?

Why is this important?

Does this really matter?

How would you rate yourself?
Prompts can be effective in directing actors to specific reads.

**Script:**  Save money, live better.

**Prompt:**  What two things will happen if I shop at WalMart?

**Read:**  (You’ll) save money.  (And, you’ll) live better.

Prompts are also useful in directing actors to ALTERNATE reads.

**Script:**  Ireland is a land of wild seacoasts and misty rolling hills so green it’s sometimes called the “Emerald Isle.”

**Prompts:**

**Factual:**  How would you describe Ireland?

**Sentimental:**  What do you miss most about Ireland?

**Contrasting:**  How is Ireland different from other countries?

**Practical:**  What do I need to know if I want to invest in Ireland?

**Enticing:**  What’s the least understood thing about Ireland?