

# Scheduling Actors

by [Sarah Elmaleh](#)

## *Actor schedules are a puzzle!*

*These industry terms and practices will help you ensure their availability when you need them.*

---

*Scheduling an actor comes in two phases:  
expressing interest in a certain time ("Avail") and confirming the time ("Booking").*

*Avails can be moved or cancelled without a paid penalty,  
but can also be challenged by other parties.*

---

- *What's so special about actor schedules?*

Making a living as a professional voice actor means work can come in sparse drips or in sudden waves, with different clients expecting different degrees of responsiveness and availability. 99% of professional voiceover sessions take place during the local business day, and sessions vary in length depending both on category/contract and on client need. Sometimes a job request is for a same-day session, sometimes for many sessions in a set window a month or more out. Typically, it's somewhere in between (and sometimes exceptions to protocol are needed to make it all come together.)

The industry has developed some terms and paradigms for reconciling these different needs and time sensitivities. Whether your actor is represented or not, union or not, applying this model goes a long way to keep everyone's communication and expectations clear - and fulfill both the client's need for talent, and talent's desire to make it all work.

The important thing to remember is that, for actors, any **time not spent in-session is time that *could* be spent in a different session or auditioning for other work** - and the likelihood of that time being filled productively by another job goes down the closer to the wire that a session is cancelled. If you can appreciate this consequence on an actor's ability to adapt and make a living, at scale - juggling multiple moving parts from potential and actualized jobs - these terms and practices will begin to make sense to you.

- *Okay - I'd like to schedule an actor! Who do I talk to?*

First things first - **if your actor is represented, do schedule things through their agent.** It can be tempting to arrange something directly with talent - and sometimes this is fine, especially if the agreed-upon session parameters are already in place - but the agent serves an essential buffer function for many actors. Many actors appreciate how agents can take

# Scheduling Actors

by [Sarah Elmaleh](#)

responsibility for setting industry-standard (or talent-specific) boundaries that the actor may feel too eager-to-please to strongly advocate for themselves. Actors can offer to be contacted directly, but always double-check and defer to going through representation unless otherwise encouraged.

Agents are also often the central, integrated information hub for the actor's scheduling, juggling interest from a multitude of producers, and making it simple and clean on the actor's end ('please just tell me where to be and when') is also a highly appreciated part of their job. Actors have to keep all of their scheduling and availability up to date with their agents in the end, anyway - having a reliable picture of the talent's calendar allows agents to respond more rapidly and effectively to interest.

- *What language should I use when scheduling an actor?*

It depends on how solid and precise the ask is! Use/recognize the following terms:

- ❑ **If the time request is less than 100% definite but you want to put a placeholder in the actor's schedule (recommended!), then use "Avail." An Avail - or being "put on Avail" - is a "pre-contractual agreement to be available for work at that time".** These can be half-worked around, or moved pretty freely without penalty - but they can also be "challenged" in case another client really wants that time. If the other client is more ready to "Book", they will likely win that time window. Avails can be very loose - a morning, a few days, a week - and then will typically "narrow" into the size of an actual session or sessions as the likely time becomes clear. **Avails have no penalty to cancel (but *do* remember to cancel them if you realize you no longer need them.) Actors, also, have the right to cancel an avail at any time.** If competing avails/bookings arise they should give you time to challenge back/book the time, but it's possible they need to release the avail for personal reasons. Ideally, (but not contractually,) both parties communicate promptly about these adjustments.
- ❑ **If/when you want the time guaranteed - i.e. no/minimal risk of "challenges" from other clients or conflicts - you can go ahead and "Book" the actor for the session (or put them on "Hold"<sup>1</sup>.) If a Booking or Hold is cancelled after noon the day before the session, legally (per the union agreement) you still have to pay**

---

<sup>1</sup> My agency doesn't use the term "Hold" since it has the same contractually specified penalty as a "Booking", and it can be confusing when people think of them as "Avails". When I was working in NYC, agents freely referred to holds in the manner of avails, so it may be a regional thing - but it has a specific, legally binding definition in the contract. Always use "Avails", to be safe. If the agent tries to clarify by saying, "I will treat this as a booking," or asks "if you're ready to book", be aware of what that entails!

# Scheduling Actors

by [Sarah Elmaleh](#)

**them the session fee.** It becomes a firm session for both parties. The actor is not available to consider or submit for other work at that time.

- ❑ **Two more terms you may hear in this conversation: “Hard-out”, and “Booked out”.** If an actor absolutely has to leave/finish a session by a certain time, they have a “Hard-out.” If your session is running late and the actor has a hard out, do not ask them to go over. They or their agent have given you the heads up so you can plan accordingly; if you ask for more time you can put the actor in an awkward position. If an actor is not available at the requested time, they are “Booked out” already. This can be for other jobs or personal time, and it would be rude to demand specifics, although the agent may share the nature of it or indicate some flexibility in the Bookout of their own/the talent’s accord.

- *When should I have these conversations?*

**There’s a balance to be struck between checking early so you can get your desired requests in before other jobs, and waiting until those times are looking more likely to become real and less likely to move** (which saves administrative back-and-forth). The busier the actor, the more advance notice or, potentially, last-minute openings you can expect to need/get.

It also varies by type of work - actors with major promo accounts are often on-call at certain times every day and work can come in with high priority almost any time; commercials can move at a slightly less rapid but also unpredictable pace. Animation and games *tend* to be a bit less frantic, as far as planning.

For games, as an actor I often receive a **day or a few days marked out as Avail first (maybe a week to a month in advance)**, these narrow to session-sized slots as you get closer, and then are **confirmed as a Booking with a day or a few days notice** (unless other clients start to investigate those time slots and it all has to solidify earlier/faster.)

It can be tempting to ask about the actor’s general availability during a certain time, but bear in mind their availability is always changing, and when you circle back it may look different - so it’s often better to try and suggest some specific avails from your end, instead.

*Thank you for reading!*

*Actors love working with those who understand and respect their scheduling needs!*