

Talking Book Voices Podcast  
Season 2, Episode 12  
People of TBP- Day in the Life of an Audio Technician

December 4, 2025  
Podcast Transcript  
Laura, John, and Shane

**Summary:** In this episode, Laura, the Volunteer Coordinator for the Talking Book Studio, chats with TBP Audio Technicians Shane and John to get a feel for what it takes to record books and magazines for patrons!

**NARRATOR INTRO:** Welcome to Talking Book Voices, the podcast. Get ready to embark on an adventure with us as we dive into and celebrate the magic of the Texas Talking Book Program. Let's raise our voices together and make the world of literature accessible for all. The Texas Talking Book Program is a division of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission and serves as a regional library for the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled, a division of the Library of Congress. The Talking Book Program provides specialized library services to individuals who have a qualifying visual, physical, or reading disability, such as dyslexia.

In each episode of Talking Book Voices, we will delve into the heart of the program, uncovering its history, sharing inspiring stories, and exploring the vast collection of materials it has to offer. We will bring you the latest updates, interviews with program experts and

patrons, and useful tips to make the most of this invaluable program for Texans and beyond.

So, whether you're an avid reader, someone with a print disability seeking accessible materials, or just curious to learn more about this great program, this podcast is made for you! Don't forget to visit us at [www.texastalkingbooks.org](http://www.texastalkingbooks.org) for more information. So, let's begin Texas Talking Book Voices, a podcast by the Texas State Library and Archives Commission.

**LAURA:** Hello TBP Voices listeners. My name is Laura Jakopak and I'm the volunteer coordinator for the Talking Book Studio. That's where we record books and magazines for our patrons. I am here to share a little bit of the behind the scenes action that's involved in the production of the audio books and magazines that we work on throughout the year.

After our volunteers have recorded and reviewed the books or the magazines, the materials are turned over to the true magic makers, our audio technicians. Today we'll be hearing from John Densmore and Shane Elam. So let's get into it. Hi, John.

**JOHN:** Hello. Hi, Laura.

**LAURA:** How are you?

**JOHN:** I'm doing well. Yeah. Happy to be here.

**LAURA:** Thanks for coming away from your busy work schedule to chat with me. I just have a couple questions. I'm curious, uh, can you give a brief description of what an audio technician is?

**JOHN:** Yeah! An audio technician is someone who works with audio, you know, a lot of audio equipment and audio production. In Shane and I's case, we are making sure that the microphones all work correctly, we're doing the editing post-production after the books have been recorded, we mark up the books, um, to put the chapters in. We do help a little bit with, I guess what would be audio book production. But I would say Laura sets up a lot of the production in terms of thinking ahead about how the book's gonna be planned, who's gonna be recording it. Um, we're involved with that a little bit. So we go a little bit beyond what would be the standard technician kind of role.

Because we're also thinking in terms of how it's gonna be when it's finally done. Shane and I also work with that part of it. We work with the end result, which would be like the compression of it, the export of the files, making sure they go up to the system to where they can get played, come back in the BARD application, and also to the little disks that you get in the mail.

And there's a whole other world to that, but I don't wanna go into the granular details completely of that. But our main role here is basically making sure that all the audio tools are correctly working, like microphones and um, making sure that the computer applications are working correctly so they can be recorded. And then doing what they call post-production. That's the short and long of it.

**LAURA:** Nice. Thank you. It sounds very detailed and like a lot. A lot of balls in the air. How long have you done this work?

**JOHN:** For here, the Talking Book Program, it's coming up on three years. It's not exactly three years, but I'll just roughly estimate three years here.

I had also done audio technician work where I was doing sound for musical groups in music venues for a couple years, you know, like bars and other small venues. And I went to school for musical engineering for a while and then multimedia production. Um, I have a master's in library science, so that helps with a lot of the, uh, other details about the work that we do because it's so book oriented, it goes beyond just being just audio work for us. There's a lot of kind of more librarian skills that also come into play or multimedia type production skills that come in here.

**LAURA:** Oh, that's interesting.

**JOHN:** There's a lot of time put into learning how to do this work, but I would say here, specifically, three years.

**LAURA:** And it, you feel like it took you, what, like a year to start to feel comfortable with what you were doing?

**JOHN:** I would say it probably took a couple years, um, to be able to actually do the work well and we're still learning every day.

**LAURA:** That makes sense. What are the most challenging aspects of your work?

**JOHN:** Hmm. Well, the most challenging aspects of the work would be that we are working with recordings. We have computers that we're working with, so there end up being computer problems.

So that's one issue that comes up. But generally, you know, the, the humans involved, the volunteers are pretty dependable, I would say, you know. Think about how many people are volunteering. I mean, is it roughly a hundred people?

**LAURA:** We have approximately a hundred at this time.

**JOHN:** And you know, and I think in the last six months there's probably been two books, maybe more that really weren't completed out of all those people.

**LAURA:** Yeah.

**JOHN:** So they're super dependable and they show up all the time.

**LAURA:** What does a typical day look like for you?

**JOHN:** A typical day would be... go to my desk, start up the computer, check my email, look at the production database, talk to Laura-

**LAURA:** That's me.

**JOHN:** And talk to Shane, possibly Jaclyn...

**LAURA:** Jaclyn's our boss.

**JOHN:** -and just to see about what the day looks like. I'll look at the calendar. So, the production database is basically telling me, um, what work is available or where it's at, what stage it's at in the production cycle. The emails are giving me updates about what's been done, you know, in the last day or so, what possible changes there could be that Laura's notifying us about, like if someone

suddenly got a dental appointment and they're not gonna be here today, so they need another monitor. So. So also as, um, audio technicians, we will step in and do roles that usually would be assigned to volunteers, but we will take their place if needed, if they're out for the day, if something needs to be rerecorded or fixed or whatever.

Those things are coming in those emails, so that can, and things just kind of come up. So each day we're looking at those production databases, we're looking at the emails, we're talking to each other. Looking at the calendar, seeing what's going on for the day. So that's the beginning.

And then from there, you know, it's like, well, okay, so then am I gonna master some files today or am I going to kind of finish up to production on a born digital book (is what we call a book that's actually recorded in the studio).

Or am I working with an audio transfer, like a reel to reel or a cassette? And they each have their own aspects to them and their own details. Um, so there's working with those...

**LAURA:** In addition to working with the recordings that our volunteers have put together, you and Shane are also like taking the old analog materials, stuff that's been recorded in the past, but since technology has evolved, you're taking that and you're digitizing it to preserve it, to preserve all that work our previous folks have done.

**JOHN:** Yes, we are, we do four track reel to reel-

**LAURA:** Oh wow.

**JOHN:** -so we have reel to reel machines here that we, um, work with and there's a whole other technical aspect to that in terms of like cleaning them and then being able to use this old equipment. We're using four track, uh, cassette tape machines to transfer work, and they all have their own production specifics to them.

**LAURA:** When you say production specifics, what do you mean?

**JOHN:** Well say like when they are recorded, they're pitched up so they get recorded at a faster speed. A tape has a specific pitch change that has to happen to it. A cassette tape versus a reel to reel. We de-noise the tape after they've been transferred. There's a whole mastering job that we're doing to this audio and the reel to reels, the born digital, and like a cassette tape all have specifics to them that are unique to them in themselves when they're being worked with, with the cassettes and with the reel to reels, we record or put together new intros and outros for them. There's notifications that go with each one specifically for the type that it is that you would have with the cassette tape versus digital.

**LAURA:** It sounds complicated!

**JOHN:** Yeah. Yeah, so it's all unique. We also do NLS conversions, which is a fourth type, which is another conversion that we're downloading, and they have their own set of instructions that are specific to create beginnings and endings. And how to mark them up. So that's a fourth type that we're doing. So yeah, there's a lot to it. And each one gets marked up. We're adding chapter markers, we're adding intros and outros. We're, you know, uh, you're, you're listening to the book. If you don't have the book to look at, which we

get from archive.org or if we have the physical book, we're looking at the copies to find out where the chapters are.

Some of these books have many details when you have like cookbooks or something in Spanish or something. So you're finding someone that's a volunteer that speaks Spanish, they can help you to be able to translate and look at these things and understand. So that's, that's part of the day. They each have their own production cycle and the way that they're done.

When those are all done, we encrypt them, specifically compress them, and make them so that they're protected and they can only be played in talking book players. We're also managing the database from NLS to make sure that these books get approved and that they play correctly, and there's, there's, there's a lot of different things that happen throughout the day.

**LAURA:** Excellent. Thank you very much. Is there anything else before we switch over to Shane that you would like to share with our listeners?

**JOHN:** Um... oh, yes. I'm just always continually surprised at how many people come from Austin and outlying cities that volunteer here that put in their efforts to make the program work.

**LAURA:** They are amazing indeed. Thank you. Thank you for chatting with me. We're gonna switch out now. John stepped out and he is now monitoring for us, and we have Shane with us.

**SHANE:** Hello.

**LAURA:** So, Shane, how long have you been doing this work?

**SHANE:** I have been with the Talking Book program... It'll be four years coming up on Valentine's Day. But I've been in radio since '95.

**LAURA:** Woah!

**SHANE:** Which makes me old.

**LAURA:** Me too. What are the most challenging aspects of your work?

**SHANE:** I think it's, uh, juggling, but it's also kind of the most fun part of the work, 'cause you know, we have different volunteers coming in every day. We have our magazine cycles, we have audio books uh, we might be transferring from NLS.

**LAURA:** What for you, does a typical day look like?

**SHANE:** I guess going back to that, there's, I think one of the things I like most about the job is there kind of isn't a typical day, 'cause there's different volunteers. I guess you have typical Mondays because of our regular Monday volunteers or regular Tuesday volunteers or et cetera.

But the ebbs and flows kind of go with the volunteers. But you know, it's kind of different every day. And there's different challenges we have our digitization. Sometimes they're super easy and you can go through 'em in a breeze and sometimes they take a lot of TLC to get them sounding good for our patrons.

**LAURA:** When you say TLC, can you tell me a little bit more about that?

**SHANE:** Processing like, uh, denoising sometimes that you have, uh, naturally in a recording you'll have a 60 cycle hum, which comes

from US electricity has a 60 hertz signal, so you might have little thumps in there that you, you have to get rid of.

Somebody might have a cough in there. You have to get rid of nuances of the recording that you're processing at the time.

**LAURA:** Oh, I see. What's the most surprising thing you've learned while working here at the studio?

**SHANE:** There are a whole range of romance genres that I never knew existed.

**LAURA:** Like what, for example?

**SHANE:** The one that was most surprising to me was the, uh, Texas historical romance.

**LAURA:** That's its own specific genre?

**SHANE:** Yeah! We've converted a few of them. It's like a Frontier Romance except for Sam Houston shows up, or Travis or Stephen F. Austin shows up in their community or whatever in the romance.

**LAURA:** Sounds intriguing, I'm into it! What's something you know about the process now that you wish you'd known when you first started?

**SHANE:** That's a good question. I'm not sure if there is anything about the process. There's the technicalities that you don't get to until you're, you're actually doing the job. I wish I knew the job existed. Yeah, I would've loved to have come aboard the Talking Book Program much sooner in my career, but, uh, I don't know if there was anything I would say particularly that I wish I'd known before I started here.

**LAURA:** Thank you. Is there anything else you would like our listeners to know or anything else you'd like to share?

**SHANE:** Well, we appreciate our patrons. Give us your feedback and, uh, keep enjoying your talking books. We're trying to get your books out to you as quickly and as best that we possibly can.

**LAURA:** Thank you, Shane. Thank you, John, and thank YOU for listening! John, Shane, and I hope you enjoyed hearing from us. Recording Studio signing out.