

Steve Ember–VOA Special English The Making of a Nation

A recent conversation with Steve Ember, a retired 28-year employee for the Voice of America, revealed the challenges he faced authoring Special English stories for the VOA.

Steve founded “The Making Of A Nation” a Special English VOA broadcast that was popular worldwide.

Using the Special English dictionary of about 1,500 words, Steve learned firsthand how those restrictions challenged his ability to tell an interesting story.

The following are comments Steve made about those challenges.

“The difficulties I recall most vividly had to do with maintaining that very slow nine-lines-per-minute pace after my previous 20+ years as a commercial and public broadcaster.

I have vivid memories of sitting in my boss's office, droning into a microphone connected to his Ampex 601 ... praying that I could make 10 minutes of nine-lines-per-minute copy time out to 10 minutes, as he timed me with a stopwatch! He, of course, had long ago mastered that Special English pace and made it



Steve Ember



Ampex 601 Tape Recorder

sound ... well, about as "natural" as often stilted copy could.

It may have taken some months, but I finally got those skills in place, but I'd sure not want to have to listen to my early efforts! Happily, it wasn't all droning drudgery.

Indeed, by 2010, there was a change in the landscape and one of the editors who was familiar with my production skills in the "world outside" took advantage of an opportunity to engage them; as well as my more congenial sort of delivery in the direction of re-imagining the long-running American History series "The Making of a Nation," and let me run with it.

I also had several opportunities to voice and produce an American travelogue series called "This is America." These were both (for Special/Learning English) long-form (15-minute) programs, so there was much more opportunity to stretch out and be creative. I was very proud of this body of work, which aired weekly from 2011 until I left the agency in mid-2014.

Here is a short clip from a [Long-Form Narration Montage](#) prepared for the 2013 New York Festivals Awards. Content is from my VOA Learning English series "The Making of a Nation." The delivery is intentionally slow, as the program is for people around the world with varying skills in English.

I was delighted to receive Finalist honors in the "Best Narration" category in this prestigious international competition."

[Here in an online listing for clips by Steve Ember.](#)

Leland L. Hite

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