

Earn a Role

Now that you have your tools in shape and your regimen in place, you are ready to flex your artistic muscles in a role. But first, you must earn that opportunity. You must audition. The word strikes fear in the hearts of many an actor! But, your success rate will increase and your attitude will improve when you learn to enjoy auditioning. It is a reality of the business. Admittedly, we are in one of the few professions requiring the masterful execution of one set of skills in order to earn the opportunity to apply another. Successful auditioning is only vaguely related to acting in a play. Nevertheless, until someone comes up with a better way to cast a show, you're going to be auditioning a lot!

As you prepare an audition, it helps to consider the expectations of the auditors, those for whom you are auditioning. Upon entering the audition hall and standing alone in front of a few people, many actors begin to feel the insecurity of facing judgment. Am I good enough for them? Will they like me? Are they waiting for me to do something stupid? Will they laugh at me? Will they sit in stony silence? What if I screw up? These questions, while understandable, grossly mischaracterize most auditors. Actors must know, and continually remind themselves, that they are standing before future collaborators who seriously, desperately hope for a stunningly successful audition! They need you. Those conducting this audition cannot achieve their own artistic journey without you. In no way should the audition ever be considered an adversarial situation.

Many actors mistakenly believe that proper auditioning involves following a prescribed set of rules. Some go so far as to assume that, if they do not break any of "the rules," their audition will be successful. They approach auditioning like the sculptor who, when addressing his block of marble simply chips away all that is not the sculpture, and they work diligently to rid themselves of any choice that does not adhere to the imagined protocol. More often than not, these actors find themselves feeling that the process is "unfair" when they discover that someone has been cast who did not follow "the rules."

With regard to auditioning, there are no rules. There are only guidelines. As soon as an actor finds a rule that seems carved in stone, someone will successfully break that rule! So how do you go about preparing an audition that will earn you a role? Focus on those elements of the audition that will ensure confidence and enjoyment when you get in front of the auditors. Get control of everything you can control.

What can you control? You cannot control other people: the mood of the auditors, the other actors auditioning. You cannot control the serendipitous elements of life: the power could go out, an alarm could go off, an auditor could sneeze. You can control every aspect of your own preparation. Accomplish those things that are under your control.

Choose appropriate material for the audition. The selection should be appropriate for your goal, which is earning the role. The audition piece should suggest to the auditor that you are capable of a particular role in the production for which you are auditioning. The pieces should fit your age range and type. If you are asked to perform two contrasting pieces, this usually means one dramatic selection and one comedy. Sometimes the auditors require a period or stylistic contrast such as one selection from Shakespeare and one contemporary monologue. Most audition postings clearly state the desired audition selection and time limits. If not, don't be afraid to contact them and ask. Give them the desired material. *Do not go over your time limit!*



Read audition notices carefully. If you need more information, call and ask!

The length of your audition is entirely within your control. Time yourself during rehearsal. An audition is one time when the old show business saying, "Leave them wanting more," certainly applies. It is better to go a bit under the time limit than to have the stage manager cut you off in the middle of your final, dramatic sentence. Actors occasionally operate under the mistaken opinion that their audition will be so riveting that they will be allowed to exceed the time limit, or that they cannot possibly perform any less than the entire speech the playwright has provided, even if that speech is two pages long. This certainly is not the case. If you find yourself needing to cut an audition piece, the most effective choice usually involves starting later or ending sooner. When you begin to cut interior lines from a monologue, you risk altering the rhythm the playwright established. When this happens, those listening often sense the disruption of rhythm and attribute it to bad acting or a forgotten line, especially with a well-known selection.

Preparation creates confidence. You are completely in control of the quality of your preparation. Audition pieces should be selected and rehearsed well in advance of the audition date. Often actors find that audition monologues benefit from a fallow period. Early rehearsal allows the actor a period of time to leave the piece alone before returning to work on it again. This practice often deepens the understanding and command of the material. Do not second guess yourself as the audition approaches and decide to work up a different piece of material the night before the audition. While some actors get by with this approach, these are happy accidents. More times than not, shortchanging the preparation period backfires. You want to go into that audition confident that you have command of this material and that you know exactly what you're doing with it.

The first part of your instrument presented at the audition is your body. You can control this presentation. In a theatrical audition you should look your best. Treat the audition with respect. This is your job interview, and you should dress as if it is important. Directors know that they can always make an actor look dirtier or more slovenly, if the role calls for it, but they are unsure how much they can "class up" a slob! Some general guidelines serve the actor well. First, make sure your face is visible. Get your hair off your face and out of your eyes. Women, wear lipstick and blush. Men, trim your beard or moustache. When people can see your lips moving, they hear you more clearly. (Hint: Blue-red lipstick makes your teeth look whiter.) Stage light often makes an actor appear pale and washed-out. A little blush puts the blood back under the skin. While some men refuse to consider makeup at an audition, remember that you wear makeup onstage when in a play. The women who audition will be wearing makeup, so they will fare better under the stage light than a barefaced man. Male auditionees do not need to show up with an outrageous full face of makeup bordering

on drag, but a bit of color on lips and cheeks doesn't hurt a thing! (Hint: a pale pink dress shirt helps create the illusion of a healthy, glowing complexion.)

Generally speaking, directors appreciate a woman's choice to wear a dress and heels to an audition. Admittedly, sometimes pants are a better choice for the particular audition material. But, if your legs will be visible in the role you hope to win, it's never a bad idea to make your legs visible in the audition. Choose colors that flatter your hair and eye color. Flat shoes almost never flatter the woman auditioning in them. Many roles require women to wear heels, and the ability to negotiate them has become a particular skill in contemporary society. If you possess this skill, show it off. (If you don't possess this skill, you might consider working on it.) Don't choose outrageously high heels or big platform shoes. Take care in the selection of jewelry. The most memorable thing about the audition should be your performance, not your accessories. With this goal in mind, avoid anything too tight, too short, or too low cut.

Generally, gentlemen should wear dress pants and a dress shirt. A tie and jacket are not necessary but might be good choices if appropriate for the character in the audition piece. Ties tend to draw the eye up to the face, so you might want to consider wearing one. Hard-soled shoes often benefit the physicalization of character, particularly if the character is from the mid-twentieth century or before.



Alex is dressed in good, basic audition wear. Claire will be remembered for her hat rather than her audition. Chase wants to call attention to his instrument!

In all cases, take care not to blend in with the audition environment. If possible, take a look at the audition venue in advance and plan your audition wardrobe accordingly. If you choose to wear black and find yourself surrounded by black curtains, you will appear to the auditors as a disembodied head and hands.

A few other wardrobe hints prove noteworthy. Auditions often take place in hotels, which are notoriously dry environments. In such a situation, a can of Static Guard® might be invaluable. Check to be sure your pants don't stick to your socks or your dress does not hug your behind! If women are wearing pantyhose, they should tuck another pair in their bag for insurance. A Tide Pen® stain remover can also save the day. Be sure to visit the restroom well in advance, and take care not to splash water on your clothing!

In general, shine your shoes, comb your hair and secure it out of your face, whiten your teeth if needed, and do everything you can to fix yourself up. The confidence resulting from the knowledge that you look your best will go a long way toward a successful audition.

Finally, you can control your attitude. Until you learn to embrace and enjoy auditioning, you will not work consistently. Arrive early. Be respectful to the staff. Don't waste your energy in the wings. Often actors can be spotted at auditions rushing in out of breath, flinging their resumes at the staff, and moving to a corner where they make a great show of their warm-up. Such activity constitutes grandstanding. Warm up thoroughly before you arrive at the audition venue. If your wait time causes you to feel that you need some additional warm-up, find a private place to check your readiness. Do not make a show of your homework. Make the attention you'll receive by performing a great audition the satisfying moment of the day. If you're truly prepared, you won't feel the need to gain attention by other means. People who draw attention to themselves through flamboyant warm-up routines in full view of other auditionees are either unsure that their audition will net them any attention, attempting to intimidate the competition, or trying to get a date.

Do not gripe about typecasting! Without typecasting, there would be no casting at all. You should know your type and have realistic goals regarding the particular roles for which you might be considered. Your audition begins from the moment you are visible to the auditors. If the auditor attends the audition to hire an actor to play a character who is referred to in the script as "a strapping fellow," and you are 5'8", you will more than likely be typed out as you enter the space. You should not be surprised or dismayed by this. Your instrument simply does not play those notes. If you are typed out early in the audition, there is a chance that the auditor may not focus on your audition. Try not to let this upset you. The more auditions you do,

the more you improve at auditioning. At the very least, you have an opportunity to hone your skills. If the auditors don't seem to focus on your audition, they probably don't need your particular instrument for their current production. Resist the urge to try to force the auditor to pay more attention to you. This effort results in less-than-truthful delivery, and at the very least diminishes the quality of the work. Remind yourself that just because an auditor might not need you for this show doesn't mean she can't use you in the future. Always do your very best work. For those few short moments when you are auditioning, there should be no other place on the face of the earth that you'd rather be!

Celebrate your accomplishments, but wait until you leave the venue. If you have a very good audition experience, you may feel the urge to jump and shout and dance around the room. If you indulge those feelings as you exit the venue, auditors will hear. This reaction may seem unprofessional, or as if this was the first time you accomplished good work. And, just as your warm-up is private, do not use the celebration of a good audition to intimidate or impress those still waiting to audition. Wish the other auditionees well. Graciousness is its own reward.

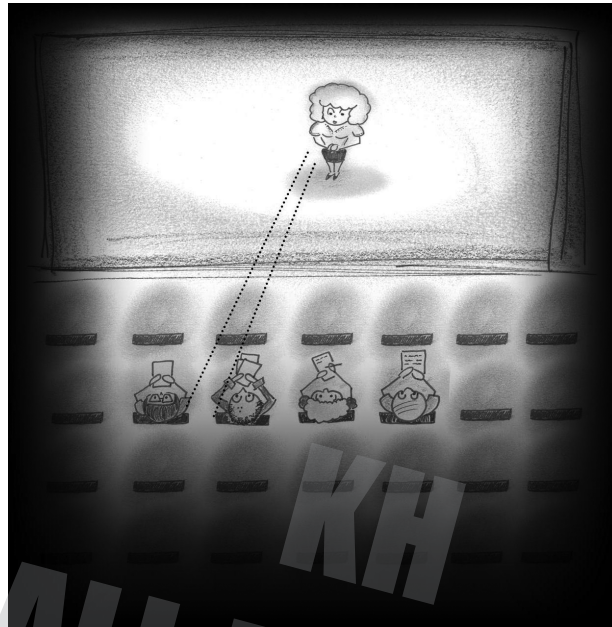
What to Do

1. Walk in smiling. Look at the auditors as you approach the playing area and smile. Greet them. They want to get a sense of the person as well as the talent. You must project the image of a person with whom they would like to spend a significant amount of time. Remember that during the walk to the performance area, the auditors also form their first opinions regarding your type. They are looking to see if your instrument might play a role in their show.
2. Find your light. It's acceptable to look up and see where the bright lights are focused. Eventually, you will be able to feel yourself in the light without looking. Get in the light even if it puts you a bit off center. The first responsibilities of the actor are to be seen and heard. Make sure you don't shirk them!
3. If you need a chair, place it before you introduce your audition. There should be a chair provided near the audition space for those who need one. Check with your stage manager to be sure a chair is available. Placing the chair a bit downstage of you will allow you to begin your audition by moving forward and help you know the exact location of the chair. If you have to look upstage and find your seat, you dismiss the auditors by removing your face from them. Then, they begin to drink coffee or dig in their bags for a mint!

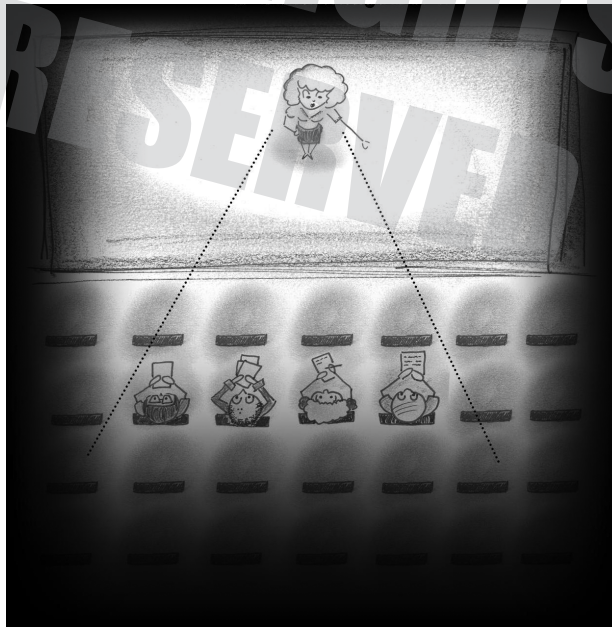
4. Stand still in actor neutral for your introduction. Actor neutral allows the auditors the opportunity to view your instrument devoid of physical choices specific to the character. If, at this moment, you discover a part of your body taking on a life of its own, such as shaky knees or fumbling fingers, take a deep breath and release that tension on your exhale. It might help to accompany the exhale with relaxing imagery. You could imagine cool water soothing those shaky knees.
5. Greet them and state your name clearly. If you choose to say, "Hello," be sure to execute pure vowels. This greeting has the word, "hell," in it! It is not pronounced, "hullo!" You may also choose to say, "good morning," or something similar. Whatever the greeting, it should come from the heart and be delivered naturally in vocal neutral with clear diction and pure vowel pronunciation. After the greeting, tell them who you are. As odd as this may sound, you must rehearse saying your name. Most of us say our names the way our family members say them, and our family members already know our names. In an audition, we are giving our names to strangers who are trying to locate that name on a sheet of paper or are writing it down. If you have an unusual name, give the auditors a moment to process that name, or to write the phonetic pronunciation. My last name is Midyett, pronounced, "midget." This name proves ironic when compared to my instrument. In a typical audition, the pronunciation of my name may illicit a chuckle, or at the very least a look of surprise. I have learned to enjoy this moment and know that it makes me memorable.
6. Introduce your selections. You may say, "Today I will be performing," or "my selections are," or "this morning you will see," or any number of variations. Because of contemporary connotations, it may not be the best choice to say, "Today I will be *doing*!" Then, state the name of the character and then the title of the play, as in, "Biff from *Death of a Salesman*." If you are performing two monologues, state the character and play as in the example above and say, "followed by," and give the next character and play. If you are playing the title character, it is not necessary to say the title twice as in, "Hamlet from *Hamlet*."
7. When you are ready to begin the actual monologue, your first task is to locate the other character or characters with whom you are interacting. Because you are performing a monologue, the character(s) to whom you are speaking are imaginary—they are not actually present for the audition. You should place

these imaginary characters among your auditors on their eye level. This will maximize the auditors' view of your face and will place them in an intimate relationship with your character. Thus, they may gain a sense of what it might be like to act with you. You may discover an auditor looking at you expectantly as if she wishes to play with you, to serve as your other character. While generous and encouraging, this situation proves dangerous for the auditionee. If you enter into a relationship with an auditor, then you are required to react honestly to what she gives you, and her reactions are not in your control. Unlike acting in a play, an audition remains the one situation where you have complete control of the other character's actions and reactions because they are your creation. Therefore, you may rehearse your actions upon that character and that character's reactions to you and acquire absolute confidence about what occurs. If you give this relationship to a stranger in the audition hall, you forfeit this control. For safety's sake, place the other character on eye level near or between auditors and proceed with the audition you prepared. When your character speaks to a single other character, or two characters, this is called *specific address*. When your character speaks to two other characters, place one slightly left and the other slightly right of center. If your character speaks to a group of people, then you commit *general address*, which requires a slightly different initial technique. When you begin your monologue, you must establish the perimeters of your listening audience right away. Begin with a look that covers the boundaries of the group you address. If there are several auditors in the room, your look should include the entire space occupied by them. If only one or two auditors are present, you will have to enlarge the imaginary group a bit, but resist the temptation to make the listening characters cover too vast a space. Remember to keep your face in optimum view of your auditors.

8. As you locate the other character(s), depart from actor neutral into the specific physicalization of your character. The easiest and often most effective way to do this involves taking a step forward. If the script provides a specific reason for your character to step back, then by all means do so. Your monologue might begin with the other character assaulting or scaring you. In such a case, a step back would be appropriate. However, if your character does not have a specific, reactive, textual reason to step back, then a step forward is the most active choice. When performing a seated monologue, move forward and take your seat in the chair you placed before your introduction as you locate the other character(s). Accepted wisdom suggests that when performing two monologues, only one should or may be seated. If only performing one



For *specific address*, the actor locates the imaginary other character at eye level between two auditors.



For *general address*, the actor's gaze covers all the area occupied by the auditors.

monologue, try to find an appropriate moment to get out of the chair. Auditors are interested in your movement ability.

9. As you begin to speak, depart from the vocal neutral that you exhibited in your introduction to the specific vocal choices for your character. These departures might include a dialect, or a change in placement, pitch, tone, tempo, or any combination of these qualities. The script provides specific guidelines for these choices just as it does for your physicalization. Accepted wisdom with regard to dialects suggests that, if you audition for a play requiring a dialect, you should exhibit that dialect in your audition. If you are performing two monologues at a general cattle call audition, you may choose one dialect piece.
10. When the monologue begins, you are involved in a relationship. Do something to the other character right away and be sure to see how your action lands on him or allow the other character to do something to you (react), which compels you to speak. An audition involves the manifestation of action occurring between your character and the imaginary characters (which are your creations). You are not delivering a lecture. Something happens that changes your character. Your auditors expect to see a change. Be sure your character does not begin and end in a static state of being.
11. Allow the auditors a moment to process the end of your monologue. To do this, you must react to the effect of your final line on the other character(s). Sometimes an actor gets the idea that a quick jump from one monologue to another demonstrates facility with changing characters thereby demonstrating range. This effort invariably backfires because the auditors are shocked out of the experience of the character and made aware of the actor himself. Auditors need a moment to register the result of the action committed by the character in the monologue. They require an opportunity to think, "Aha!" By checking to see how the final line of the monologue lands on the other character, you complete the action and satisfy the auditors.
12. You do not need to return to actor neutral between characters. After completing the first monologue, simply locate the other character(s) involved in the second monologue, move toward them a step as you land in the physicalization for the next portrayal and proceed as before. Usually,

effective locations for other characters exist at eye-level between the auditors with the character to whom you are speaking for one monologue slightly left of center and slightly right of center for the other. Be careful not to place your reactive characters so far apart that they cause you to perform in profile to your auditors.

13. Return to actor neutral at the end. Say, “thank you.” Give the auditors a moment to view your instrument in neutral again. This allows them the opportunity to ask you a question or give you a bit of direction and ask you to perform again.
14. Walk off with confidence and a smile.
15. Thank the staff as you leave the venue.

A WORD OF CAUTION

These audition guidelines are strictly intended for theatrical auditions only. Film and television auditions follow different guidelines. While acting is acting, the techniques employed vary from medium to medium.

THE CALLBACK

Oftentimes your monologue audition, casually referred to as a “cattle call,” will be followed by more extensive auditions specific to the particular project. If a director or producer views your monologue audition and would like to explore your potential for a specific role in his play, he will call you back for additional auditioning; hence, the name, “callback.”

These auditions usually involve reading from the script with the producer, director, or another actor. The popular name for this kind of callback is, “cold reading.” The name implies that the actor has never seen the script before and must read a character “cold.” Never do this unless there is no way around it! In most cases, a copy of the play for which you are auditioning is readily available. You should be very familiar with this play. If you are auditioning for an original work, call the producer’s office and see if it is possible to read the play at least once before the audition. Familiarity with the script helps with selection of monologue material as well. When you know the play, you can select material for your cattle call that best suggests your suitability for a particular role(s), and you can rehearse for the callback.

Be honest with yourself about which roles your instrument can create. You may really want to play the lead role, but if you are 20 years old and the lead is 50, that probably will not happen! Of course, there are exceptions as in the case of a university production intended as a training lab for students. But, in the real world, they have 50-year-old actors to play 50-year-old roles! If you are afforded such an opportunity while in training, employ careful research and do your best to learn from the experience. However, when you actually get to age 50, you will realize how lacking your 20-year-old understanding of this particular human behavior and motivation was!

After you pinpoint the roles for you, study them. Read the lines aloud, research all terms and contexts that you don't understand. A successful cold reading requires a good deal of preparation. You do not need to actually memorize scenes for the callback, but you should be very familiar with them. Sometimes the director will pair you with another actor and give you a few minutes to rehearse on your own. Do not waste this precious time. Use this opportunity to stand under the action the other actor performs upon you and make strong selections to respond as your character would. Other times, you may not have the luxury of reading with another actor. You may find yourself reading with a member of the production team or a hired reader, and this person may do nothing at all except read. When the other reader does not feel obligated to make active choices with the text, you must create them and respond appropriately just as you did with your monologue work. You must do the work of both characters. Do not allow the other reader to influence you negatively. You must make active, energized choices; do not let his boring delivery rub off on you!

Once you begin to “read” with another person, your focus should be on him. When you speak a line, move your thumb to the next line and hold it there while you look at the other actor and listen and respond appropriately to him. After he speaks to you, allow his action to land on your instrument—take his action in. Then, check your line quickly and look up and use your line to offer appropriate response to him. Do not keep your head buried in the script! Make some choices about what your character does to the other character to try to get what you want. Apply those choices in the callback and be open to other suggestions from the director. Do not wait to be told what to do with the role—make a choice and go for it! You are not a talking head. Mere oral recitation of written words satisfies no one.

Callback auditions can also include many other components such as dancing, singing, and improvisation. Be prepared to satisfy the requirements of the particular situation. Bring sheet music and dance clothing if needed. Sometimes members

of the production team who did not attend the cattle call will attend the callback. If this is the case, you may be asked to repeat your monologue audition. The director may wish to give you some direction to change your monologue performance. The auditors may ask for additional monologues. You should always have additional monologues!

Immediately, you must begin an audition file and a notebook. Your file could be on note cards, on your computer, or in a notebook. Whatever the format, you should always be collecting potential monologue and scene work. Everything you read has performative potential. Each time you read a play, make a record of any scenes or monologues that might be appropriate for you either at this point in your career or in the future. Novels, newspapers, and magazines sometimes provide potential monologues. Make a record of this information so that, when you need it, you can find it.

Your audition notebook should contain all your prepared audition material. Put your headshot and resumes in the front of the notebook for easy access. Always carry extras—you never know when someone might ask for one. The notebook should include typed copies of every monologue you have rehearsed and now have ready to perform. You should work up monologues from every genre and style. Include any notes from coaches, directors, or auditors from previous performances. Bring your notebook to every audition and callback you attend. Then, when someone asks you for another monologue, you will be prepared. If a director asks for another monologue, it is perfectly acceptable to ask for a few minutes to review. Consult your notebook. Review the text and go over your notes about the performance of this piece. Rehearse the additional monologue a few times, and return to the callback to perform with confidence.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Occasionally, at a cold reading, you will find yourself paired with another actor who literally attempts to push you around while reading. This habit, born of nervousness, serves no one well. If you find the other actor continually forcing you to back away from him, simply take one significant step upstage facing full front. When you do this, the other actor must then back off, or upstage himself!

ANOTHER WORD OF CAUTION

Large cattle call auditions conducted by an association of theatres often require individual companies to conduct callbacks in hotel rooms. While most people you encounter will treat you with the utmost courtesy and professionalism, you may

encounter a situation that makes you uncomfortable. Callbacks in hotel room should be conducted with at least one member of both sexes present or with the door open. Auditors should give you as much space as possible while in the room. You should see a sign-up sheet on or near the hotel room door, and there should be evidence of other actors coming and going. If you sense something dangerous or shady in a callback, trust your instincts and get out of there.

A FINAL WORD OF CAUTION

Accept all casting decisions graciously. You do not have control over this decision—you can only control how well you auditioned. Even the best auditions do not always net roles. You will be told, “Thank you, but no thank you,” hundreds of times in your career. You must deal with this in a professional manner. If you cannot take rejection, you are in the wrong field! Do not make a grand show of your achievement or lack thereof. A good audition is an accomplishment in itself, and there will always be another audition.



Accept all casting decisions graciously!