

# The Art of Auditioning

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## Preface

So, you want to be an actor? Well so do a lot of people! That is why it is imperative for any working actor, who wishes to be successful, to master the techniques required to perform a brilliant and memorable audition.

So what is an audition? Essentially, an audition is a trial performance that allows assessors to appraise an artist's work. In an audition an actor, singer, musician, dancer or any other performing artist presents a sample of their work. Auditions are used in the casting process for a performer to demonstrate the level and range of their talent. Furthermore, an audition functions as a job interview for the performing arts. A typical audition involves the performer displaying their talent through a previously memorized and rehearsed solo piece: for example, a monologue for actors or a song for a singer. Quite often, performers are asked to present a "cold reading" from the text of the play for which they are auditioning. While most auditions are conducted live, they can also be conducted via video and audiotape.

Auditions tend to be one of the least attractive components of a performer's job, as the task is both quite stressful and demanding. However, despite this fact, they also happen to be *the* most imperative task that a performer must face, as unfortunately, auditions are the standard way for actors to attain work in the theatre and film industry. The importance surrounding the audition process and how seriously all performers must take it is evident.

In this package I will be sharing with you a variety of information concerning auditions and the audition process. While I will briefly address the audition process that dancers and singers will be faced with, the major focus of this package is on actors. In the contents of this package you will find information addressing things such as the various kinds of auditions that you may encounter and how you can go about finding appropriate material for your auditions. You will also find suggestions that professionals have made about the process of preparing an audition piece. This package will also touch on issues such as audition behaviour and etiquette, in addition to providing you with some general audition tips from experts that you may not have thought of yet. Hopefully, the information in this package will assist you into getting into the headspace of the audition panel, as understanding the expectations of casting directors is a crucial tool that will unquestionably improve your chances of success when you walk into the dreaded audition room. Finally, I will also direct you to further readings from several professional sources that can help you in your process of improving and refining your audition skills!

## Take One: The Types of Auditions You May Encounter

So let's get started!

The first few parts of the audition process begin before you even enter the audition room. And that is why it is absolutely vital for performers to always put in an immense amount of effort in preparing for their auditions. While some of the steps in this process may sound obvious to you, it is important that you do not overlook *any* of them. Sometimes, performers overlook certain aspects of this process because they believe that they are trivial or even just plain common sense. However, I would argue that this is a fairly large mistake. An audition is something that one can never be too prepared for- expect the unexpected, because absolutely anything can be thrown your way. It is of utmost importance for professional performers, especially beginners, to take the process of preparing for auditions extremely seriously.

If you do chose to ignore certain aspects of this integral process your audition will likely suffer, as attention to detail is what is going to stand you apart from the rest of your competition and get you noticed!

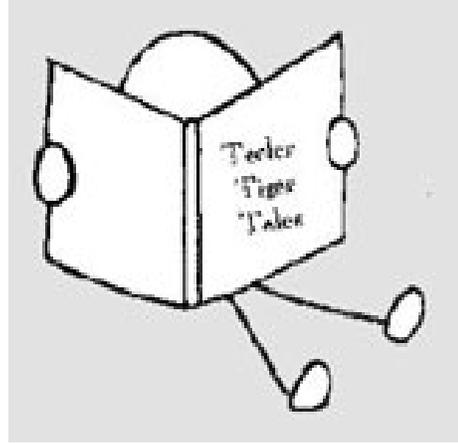
The very first thing that a performer needs to know about their audition is **what type of audition** they are going to be attending. These are just some of the possibilities of kinds of auditions that you may encounter:

- Musical Theatre Auditions
- Acting Auditions for Classical Theatre (Shakespeare, Greek Tragedy, Restoration Drama/Comedy etc)
- Acting Auditions for Contemporary Theatre
- Acting Auditions for a Canadian Contemporary Theatre
- Dance Auditions (ballet, tap, jazz, modern, hip-hop, movement pieces etc)
- Singing Auditions (opera, pop, musical theatre, blues etc)
- TV and Film Auditions
- Student Film Auditions
- Commercial Auditions
- Conservatory Training Auditions
- Voice-Over Auditions
- Radio Broadcasting Auditions
- Solo Auditions
- Group Auditions
- Cattle Call Auditions



It is really helpful if you are able to come into the audition with prior knowledge of how the event is going to be set up. For example, you may want to try and find out if you will be participating in a group or solo audition. How large is audition the panel going to be? Who will be on the audition panel, and what type of material do they like and don't like being presented to them? What is the audition space like? Will there be cameras at the audition?

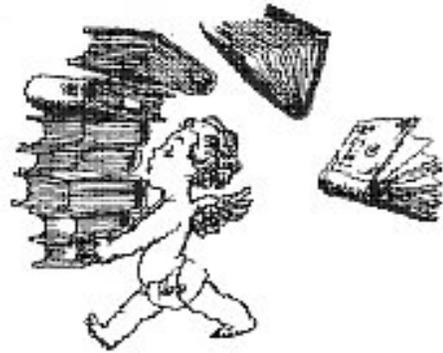
While for most auditions that you attend, particularly for film and television, you will not be able to find out all of this information beforehand; yet it is still a good idea to keep these things in mind. However, if you do have the privilege of having access to information that will answer any of these specific questions, use this knowledge to your advantage. For example, if you know you will be auditioning for a theatre where the artistic director has a very particular pet peeve or dislike, it would be wise not to showcase those things when auditioning for that individual. **Researching** is the best way for an actor to find out what they are in for at their upcoming audition. It is an **extremely strong recommendation** that actors who are attending auditions for theatre companies show up to their audition knowing some background information about that specific company. When going to an audition some of the things that an actor should always be aware of are the company's mandate, past productions, information about the founding members of the company and the current ones etc. The more you know the better you can prepare. As with any job, actors are hired not only for their stellar talent and capabilities, but they are also hired as people. Directors and theatre companies want to know that you are interested not only in the work they are doing currently, but also that you as an individual can contribute positively to their theatre company, its environment and long-term goals. Demonstrating that you have taken the time to familiarize yourself with the company in which you are auditioning puts you ahead of the pack, as it reveals your true eagerness and desire to work with that specific company.



Choosing to neglect this step may lead an actor to a very uncomfortable place. It is not uncommon for an artistic director of a company to ask the actors auditioning for them **why** they wish to work with their company. If an actor cannot produce a meaty answer to this question instantaneously, they will not only embarrass themselves and not get the gig, but they have also jeopardized a future career with that company and any other theatre company that is associated with it. Without question, the Canadian theatre industry is small and everyone in this business talks. If you fail to make a good impression, you will be remembered- in a negative way. People want to work with those who are motivated and enthusiastic about the organization.

## **Take Two: Piece Selection**

Once you have identified the type of audition you will be attending, the next step in your process is selecting appropriate audition pieces. For a theatre audition it is generally standard that you will need to present between 1-2 monologues of a contrasting nature that each run under the time of 2 minutes. Sometimes you will be required to sing a few bars of a song, either acapella or accompanied by a pianist. You should also expect to do a cold read and answer some questions about your resume (SO BE FAMILIAR with it!!)



### *General Factors to Consider:*

Sometimes the theatre company for which you will be auditioning will request that you chose a monologue from a list that they have composed, and other times the choice of your piece will be up to you. Either way, you are responsible for coming to the audition with a complete understanding of the text that you have chosen. You should be also be extremely familiar with the play it is from so that you can understand the monologue's context in the larger picture, and unless otherwise stated, you will likely be responsible for demonstrating the piece as accurately to the context of the play as possible. Furthermore, even if you chose your monologue from a list, you still must assume the responsibility to justify why you chose the piece that you did. The pieces that we choose, from a list or not, usually say something about us. This is something that the audition panel will likely be trying to figure out about you. There are various factors that should be considered when making this choice. The most important factor in selecting a piece is to find one that matches your target audience. For example, if you were auditioning for a Shakespearian tragedy, it would certainly not be advisable to perform a monologue from a Neil Simon comedy. The pieces that you chose to present in an audition reflect your ability to play the role that you are trying to win. While it is always tempting to use your favourite monologues for an audition, unfortunately, sometimes those pieces are just not appropriate for your target market.

This is not to say that you should be doing pieces that you do not like. First, it is really important for an actor to enjoy and commit to the piece wholeheartedly. You need to be able to connect, relate and empathize with your character and the situation that they are going through. When an actor does a piece that they don't enjoy, it is usually very noticeable to their audience. It will lack the life, energy and integrity that it needs to really be believable and captivating. Just as in any job interview, in an audition the people who are seeking to hire you want to see that you really love and enjoy what you do. Moreover, they also want to see how great your potential is, and you will certainly struggle to demonstrate your outstanding talent if you are trying to sell yourself with material that is a burden to you.

Furthermore, selecting new pieces for each audition that you attend is actor suicide. As a general guideline it takes at a minimum of two months of hard work for a monologue to be

fully prepared and polished. The purpose behind auditioning is to get a job and therefore auditions are not the appropriate time for experimenting and building your performance skills. If anything, auditions are the time to nail your performance absolutely perfectly. Select something that you have worked on seriously and are very good at! It is also strongly recommended that you perform materials that you have worked on with a coach or other professionals.

At this point you may be wondering, so how on earth can I go about finding audition pieces that fit all of this demanding criteria? And how will I know if the pieces that I chose to work on are up to standard? The best way to locate pieces for an audition is immersing yourself in the world of theatre. See as much theatre as you possibly can and read any and every play you can get your hands on. This way you will have a breadth in your options when selecting your audition pieces. In addition, being acquainted with as much theatre as possible will allow you to become more familiar with your professional field and develop your taste for theatre. Knowing both what you like and what you don't like and the reasons why will factor into some of the most important artistic decisions that you make in your career. Also, if you are thinking of writing some of your own material at some point in your career, knowing what is out there will help you understand what the popular theatre conventions are, so that you can keep with or even deviate from them in your writing.



### Monologue Books:

One way that many actors try to find audition pieces is through monologue books. Monologue books are essentially collections of monologues suggested for auditions by a particular editor. As a result, there are drawbacks to using these books for auditions. Firstly, these books are mass produced, and for that reason alone, it is a likely bet that the pieces found in that collection will be incredibly overdone! Overdone pieces are certainly something that you should attempt to avoid and on page 7 I will explain this in more detail. Secondly, the pieces that are found in these books have been tailored by the editor of the collection. What this means is that the editor of the collection may have made certain edits to the pieces at their discretion or if the piece was originally written in a different language they may have used a weak translation of it. Another trap that actors get into when they use monologue books to find audition pieces is that they get lazy and do not end up reading the play. This causes problems because they will be unable to do any justice to the piece if they have not read it in its original context. Actors using pieces from monologue books without checking out the play first may be cheating themselves of a quality edit that demonstrates a wide range of emotions. If an actor puts all their trust into the editor of the monologue collection and does not

examine the play on their own, they may be missing better parts of the scene they could have potentially included in their personal edit.

Furthermore, there are times in an audition when directors may ask actors questions about the play that the actor is performing from, or about certain acting choices that the actor made in their performance in relation to the play. Without reading the play there is absolutely no way an actor will be able to answer these questions adequately which will result in both an embarrassing and extremely unprofessional situation. If you do find yourself in this terrible situation it is best not to lie about your knowledge about the play as if you are caught, you will jeopardize your credibility as both an artist and person in your professional circles. Do not pretend to be an expert on a subject you know little about as you never know who in the room knows more about it than you, and can call you out on it.



If you do happen to find yourself browsing through a monologue book and stumble upon something that you like or find interesting, you can certainly pursue the piece, just do it carefully. First thing to do is to locate the play that it is originally from. **READ THE PLAY** and then evaluate if you still like the piece in its original context. From there you should make sure that you also evaluate things such as the edit of the piece and the quality of the translation (if that applies). After reading the play in full, you may find that the monologue book does not do justice to your piece. If you come to this conclusion, you now have the option to make your own edit of your piece or search for an alternate translation that you feel works best for you. Also, just to be warned, a frequent question that casting directors ask actors in auditions is how they came across the piece that they are presenting. If you feel uncomfortable telling a casting director that you simply found it in a monologue book, briefly explain to them your search process. Tell them that when you were browsing through a monologue book you stumbled across the piece and it caught your eye, so you went out and got the play to read it. After reading the play you fell in love with the character and that is how you found the piece and how you came to love it enough to perform it. If you give a casting director an answer like this, it assures them that you were only using the monologue book as a reference guide, rather than a primary source of theatre. This type of explanation is great because it demonstrates both your professionalism and honesty.

### Overdone Material:

As I mentioned earlier there is a large canon of work throughout the acting community that is completely overdone for auditions. Now, the reasons that this material happens to be overdone has to do with the fact that the material is popular and often very good. Nevertheless, it is usually smart to try and steer clear of these pieces. Put yourself in the shoes of a casting director: if you are seeing 500 actors and/or singers for a part, imagine how taxing it must be to hear the same song or monologue performed over and over again. Choosing material to present in an audition that is different or less known is always a good idea, as the freshness of the material will be greatly appreciated by your potential future employer(s).

However, caution must be taken when choosing to take on material that is too rare or unknown. This is simply because if you are performing intriguing material that the audition panel has never heard before, it is likely that they will pay closer attention to the text of your piece than they will to you. While you do want to select attention grabbing material, ultimately, you are the one who should be the star of the show. Now, while there is not a universal or master list of material that you should avoid auditioning with, and it must be said that material to avoid varies and depends heavily on who you are trying to sell yourself to, there are several works of theatre that have been consistently recommended by professionals across the board to steer clear from. Many websites such as <http://www.monologueaudition.com/overdone.htm> have approached industry professionals to put together lists of material that they feel have been overdone. However, while these professionals do warn young actors away from certain pieces, they also warn them to take caution when making the decision to avoid doing material because it is popular. Their website posts a disclaimer which states the following:

**“DISCLAIMER:** It is *not* my intention to make actors abandon these overdone pieces only to do other pieces that are terrible, or terrible choices for them. As noted below, most of the pieces are done a lot because they are great, or good, or at least catchy in some way. But mainly they are done a lot because they are the most popular ones in the monologue books. Actors (especially ladies, especially ladies doing comedic), you are going to have to do a little more work to find lesser-known, good material from plays. I think that ultimately those who do this work, and rehearse effectively, will have better results, and a better time. If you are not *willing* to put in the work, you probably should stick to the beaten track; just know that many of your auditors, male and female, could perform Libby’s monologue from *Blue Window* (a great play by one of my favourite writers), or Phil’s monologue from *Boy’s Life* (ditto), right there along with you.” (Kohlhaas, Karen)

Here are just a few of their most popular suggestions. The numerical value that you see on the left hand side is the average rating of how bored the industry professionals who took this survey are of that particular piece. The averages that you see are out of 4. And the criteria for their grading was as follows: survey participants graded the piece a 1, if they had not seen the monologue, a 2 if they had seen it, but are fine seeing it again and a 3 if they have seen it so often that they don’t even care how well an actor does it, because they are “completely sick of it”. For full details please visit their website at <http://www.monologueaudition.com/overdone.htm>.

### Overdone Contemporary Monologues for Women:

Average Score	Playwright (Last Name)	Play	Character	Identifying Line
3.4	Durang	Laughing Wild	Woman	Tuna fish
3.0	Silver	Fat Men in Skirts	Popo Martin	My name is Popo Martin
3.0	Durang	Dentity Crisis	Janet	Peter Pan
3.1	Guare	House of Blue Leaves	Bananas	All of them

### Overdone Contemporary Monologues for Men:

Average Score	Playwright (Last Name)	Play	Character	Identifying Line
3.0	Albee	Zoo Story	Jerry	Jerry and the dog
3.3	Durang	Laughing Wild	Man	Tuna Fish
3.2	Korder	Boy's Life	Phil	Destroyed myself
3.0	Korder	Search and Destroy	Ron	Baseball bat night
3.0	Rudnick	I Hate Hamlet	Andrew	To be or not to be

### Overdone Shakespearian Monologues for Women:

Play	Character	Identifying Line
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Helena	How happy some o'er other
Macbeth	Lady Macbeth	Was the hope drunk wherein
Hamlet	Ophelia	What a noble mind is here
Othello	Emelia	But I do think it is their husbands
The Merchant of Venice	Portia	I pray you, tarry: pause a day

### Overdone Shakespearian Monologues for Men

Play	Character	Identifying Line
Hamlet	Hamlet	ALL
Macbeth	Macbeth	Is this a dagger I see before me
As You Like It	Jacques	All the world's a stage
King Lear	Edmund	Thou, Nature, art my goddess
Othello	Iago	And what's he then that says I

Also it is with strong recommendation that you do not perform material from the show that you are auditioning for, unless otherwise stated. The idea is to select material from other shows that are similar to the show that they are casting for, so that you can vividly demonstrate how perfect you are for the part, without exhausting the production's primary source of material.

### Original Material:

Sometimes, as performing artists, we come across material in non-dramatic sources to which we find ourselves feeling very strongly connected. In these cases, an individual may want to make appropriate edits to the material and manipulate the narrative that they have found into a dramatic active monologue so that it can be used as an audition piece. Now, while this is a very creative and innovative way to find audition material, it can generate mixed results. Sometimes, taking this innovative step will take you very far, as directors will admire and recognize your creativity, passion and desire to look at theatre performance alternatively. However, there are other directors who do not view this type of material as valid. These directors will want to see you perform material that is exclusively from a play and may even see it as an insult that you did not try and find a piece from the dramatic canon, which is what they feel exclusively represents the theatre. While this response is not common, it does exist and it is something of which all theatre artists should be aware. I would recommend that if you are deciding to do monologues that are not originally from plays, try to make sure that the members of the panel who you are auditioning for are not opposed to an audition piece of this nature. If you are going into an audition blind, and have no idea as to what the specific pet peeves of your panel are, go with your gut. If you are committed and passionate to the work that you are doing, you can never go wrong- if you love the piece, do it. Pleasing everyone in this business is impossible and trying to make everyone happy will just fray your nerves and make your job so much more stressful than it already is.

### Knowing Your Hit:

“Knowing your hit” is a phrase that you will hear a lot in the performance industry, and it is something that you must seriously be aware of when selecting audition material. So what does this famous phrase mean? In basic terms, this phrase means: “Know what parts that you can realistically be cast as and pick material to audition with that suits these specific roles”.

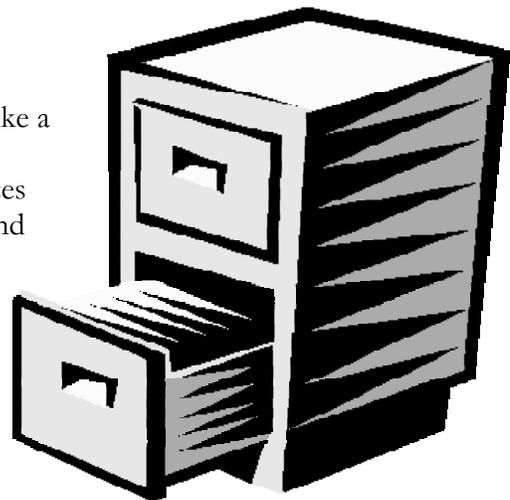
There is a saying in the industry, that casting directors have no imagination. While I am not sure if this is true, the lesson behind this saying lies in the idea of selling yourself appropriately. If you want a certain part you need to look like the character. When you show up for an audition, try and make yourself look like whatever part that you are trying to win. In terms of monologue selection, choose to play characters that match your age, gender and physical appearance. For example, if you are a petite beautiful blonde, you may not want to choose to perform a monologue as a towering and full cavewoman (unless you are striving to demonstrate range). This is particularly true for film and television, as the producers in the film industry usually want their work to appear as realistic as possible. Theatre on the other hand, has slightly more flexibility as there are all sorts of alternative shows and young companies that cast actors in parts that they may not physically suit in reality.

However, as a general rule of thumb, the closer you can get to appearing to be the character you are auditioning for, the more realistic your audition will seem to the panel, and the more likely that you will get hired. In an audition you should show the panel of directors how perfect you are for the role that they are casting- the closer you are to their vision in both the way you perform and look, the easier it is for them to see how perfect you are for the role!

One additional thought about piece selection. While I have continually pointed out the importance of using material that one has had previous experience with for an audition, it is important to remember that this advice must also be taken with some caution. Sometimes, after doing a piece for a very long time, it tends to get very dry and stale. This is something that audiences can also sense, and it makes them quite unhappy. It is important to remember whenever you perform a piece it must always be fresh and new. If you ever feel that you are having trouble finding the freshness in some of the pieces that you have been working on for a while, do not hesitate to put them on the back burner and let them recharge for a little while, or even retire them. Overly rehearsed material can be just as detrimental to an actor as under rehearsed work. Moreover, if you are going to audition with material that you have previously done in full-blown production that you have been directed in, it is important to remember the influence that that specific director had over your performance. A piece in a play and a piece for an audition are two separate entities. While it is great idea to audition with a character that you have already been cast as, it is also important to take the time to give the piece the attention it needs to make the transition from a scene in the context of a play to a two minute solo snap shot of that play.

### *The Audition File:*

Now you're probably thinking that this seems like a lot of demanding work. How can one even fathom organizing themselves to ensure that their audition pieces satisfy all these details. The first is a lot of experience and hard work. Yes, you will need to spend the time researching plays and finding diverse material that you like, and you will also need to spend the time working on your performance both individually and with the help of professionals. However, working actors do have a tool that they use to organize this complicated process, the **audition file**.



Audition files are essentially a very organized folder or binder that actors keep. Within it is a collection of **“audition appropriate”** material that actors have collected over the course of their careers. The term audition appropriate refers to the following factors: the pieces within the file are kept under 2 minutes in length, and they are already prepared at the performance level, thus they can be used for any audition, at an time, providing that the piece suits the part that the actor is trying to attain. The purpose of the audition file is for an actor to be able to quickly access a wide variety of material that demonstrates their strengths. The file should possess a range of pieces that can accommodate any genre, time period or style. This tool is extremely helpful as it allows actors to prepare for spontaneous auditions, which occur extremely frequently. After a quick flip through their organized catalogue of material, an actor should be able to locate a piece that they feel will represent them best for the part. As mentioned earlier, this tool is something that takes a lot of time, hard work and experience to develop. Nevertheless, it is something that all working and prospective actors should be trying to consistently build, as it will undoubtedly prove to be an essential tool in any performing artist’s success.

### Take Three: Preparing Your Material

Now that you have bravely and wisely chosen the material with which you will be representing yourself, you need to embark on the long and taxing journey of preparing your material and bringing it up to professional standards.

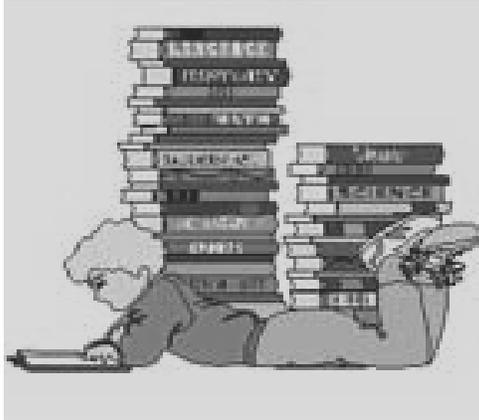


There is no professional in this business that would discourage an actor from taking a piece to an acting coach before using it in an audition. As mentioned earlier, the audition is the time that an actor wants to shine, and there is no better way to make your monologue glitter than to get it a little polish from an outside source. Here are a few key pointers that may help maximize the quality of your session with your coach.

- Try to book an appointment with a coach that you like or who you have heard positive things about, maybe someone you have seen perform before, or have been recommended to by a fellow actor. Trusting your coach is extremely important if you want to learn well from them, and it is also really important that your coach knows you and has an adequate feel for the style of your work. Otherwise they may guide your pieces in a direction that is not fitting with the image that you are trying to sell. The better the relationship you have with your coach the better the work that you do together will be. You are paying your coach (likely a lot of money) to serve you and your art, so to ensure that your hard earned money is well spent, do as much research as you can to make sure that you are investing in a person that will provide you with the type of service that will befit your individual and specific needs. You and your coach should share the same artistic vision and taste, work ethic and similar working habits. Once you have established yourself with a coach it is a good idea to try and stick with them for at least a little while to give your work consistency and overall flow. Once established remember that there is also benefits to working with multiple professionals on the same material, as you will likely come up with various interpretations, which can always make for a more diverse and full final piece.
- For singers or actors who need to prepare a song for an audition, there is one vital detail that they must pay close attention to before they hire any professional to assist them. The important detail that they must sort out is the following: are they looking for a singing coach or a singing teacher?? Let me begin, by distinguishing these two titles from one another. In basic terms, a **singing teacher** is a teacher who specializes in teaching their students how to sing. They focus on teaching their pupils technique and building their vocal skills. A **singing coach** on the other hand, is a professional that one would hire to assist them in polishing a song. They would help guide you in putting together a final performance that you can bring to an audition. Advice that they would give



you would be surrounding things such as which notes in a song that you should accentuate, or they could even help you perfect your overall final performance of the song by helping you select appropriate and tasteful gestures that will aid you in your delivery. When going to visit a singing coach you should arrive having the lyrics and melody of your song memorized. **A teacher helps you learn a song and a coach helps you perfect it.** Remember this when preparing for their sessions.



Another way that actors can help themselves prepare for an audition is taking a look at some acting books. These days, there are countless acting books on the market that have put out numerous suggestions for exercises that actors can do to help themselves put together a strong audition piece. When looking at these professional sources remember to remain patient and be selective. Without question, when beginning your search for acting exercises you will be overwhelmed with the sheer volume of material that you will find. Different schools of acting will propose “the best” suggestions, which can certainly be confusing and

complicated to deal with. When looking through books, keep in mind that you are looking for tips that will be helpful for you. The art of acting is extremely subjective and if you forget that you are searching for techniques that will be helpful to you personally, you will find yourself bombarded with a large volume of useless material. When you find ideas that you feel are interesting write them down, take them home and try them out! There is no way you will really know if an exercise is useful for you personally, until you put it into practice. Keep the ones that work for you in mind and quickly discard the unsuccessful ones. If you keep organized track of the exercises that you like, you will slowly be able to come up with your own exercise routine that is both efficient and successful. This self made routine will serve you well, as it will be a resource that you will be able to apply to any future material that you must prepare.

Here are the names of some books that may be useful for you to look at to assist you in putting together your own warm up routine that you can use to help you to get ready for auditions and into character.

### **Improvisations in Creative Drama**

by Betty Keller

**Publisher:** Meriwether Publishing Ltd (1988)

### **Let's Improvise: Becoming Creative, Expressive & Spontaneous Through Drama, Third Edition**

by Milton E. Polsky

**Publisher:** Applause Books; 3rd edition (May 1, 2000)

### **Improvisation for the Theatre, Third Edition**

by Viola Spolin

**Publisher:** Northwestern University Press (December 1963)

**Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre**

by Keith Johnston

**Publisher:** Theatre Arts Book; 1 edition (January 7, 1987)

**Improvisation: Learning Through Drama**

by David Booth & Charles Lundy

**Publisher:** Holt Rinehart & Winston (June 1985)

**The New Dramathemes**

by Larry Swartz

**Publisher:** Pembroke Pub Ltd; 3RD edition (February 2002)

**Improvisation, Inc. Harnessing Spontaneity to Engage People and Groups**

by Robert Lowe

**Publisher:** Pfeiffer; 1st edition (January 15, 2000)

**101 Improv Games for Children & Adults**

Bob Bedore

**Publisher:** Hunter House (February 9, 2004)

**Exploring Character**

R.E Myers

**Publisher:** Good Year Books (March 29, 2006).

All of these titles are available to purchase at  
<http://www.theatrebooks.com>



Now, I hope by the time you have reached this point in this package, the next piece of advice that I am about to give you will be more than obvious. There is no better way to prepare an audition piece than to READ THE PLAY!! As I have expressed throughout this document, if you do not know the source that your material has come from, absolutely nothing good can come of it!

Other ways that you can become more familiar with the material you are preparing is to see a production of it (if that is an option) or view a film version of it (again, if that is an option, as not all theatrical texts have been adapted to film). While these are perfectly legitimate ways to learn more about your material, and bring yourself closer to it, there are some precautions that you must take if you are going to exercise these options. Firstly, you must keep in mind that you are seeing a particular director and actor's take on the material. You must watch the material with a very open mind, realizing that the particular way that this company is interpreting the material, is not necessarily the "right way" and is by no means the only way. While they may have an interesting take on the material, it is not necessarily a take that will work for your purposes, and so while it is informative to see how other people manipulate material, it is not useful to watch other professional's rendition of a play, as the guideline on which you will base your performance. Moreover, when you view films that are

particularly famous renditions of a play, there is also a strong level of caution that you exercise. For example, Marlon Brando has a very distinct and well known characterization of Stanley Kowalski from Tennessee William's *Street Car Named Desire*. If you were auditioning for that play, and watched the famous film version as a means of character research, I would be extremely cautious to make sure that you do not fall into the trap of mimicking the performance that you see on film at your audition. While it is great to watch other people's interpretations of characters and plays, it is really important that you remember that your job as an actor is to come up with your own interpretations and represent the character you are auditioning for in both a truthful and unique way.

Keeping all the suggestions that I have made above in mind, the best advice that I can think of to give you in terms of preparing pieces for auditions is **taking your time**. Never present a piece at an audition with which you have not taken the time to prepare thoroughly and never present a piece at an audition that you do not feel 100% comfortable. If you take the proper amount of time (and there is no limit) to ensure that you have done all you can to research your material and get your piece into your mind and body as thoroughly as you can, you will not regret it. Taking your time will demonstrate both to yourself and your future employer how professional and talented you really are. Ultimately, whether you get the particular gig you are auditioning for or not, leaving a strong impression is crucial for future success.



## Take Four: The Audition Day and in the Audition Room

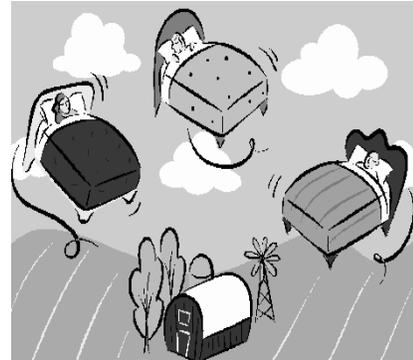
The big day is finally here!! You have done all your preparation work, your adrenaline is pumping and you are ready to go! So what personal measures can you take to make sure that you are mentally and emotionally prepared for the big event?

**Being Rested:** The nature of an audition is really no different than any other job interview. If you are well rested your performance will be significantly stronger, as rest provides you with the refreshing boost that you will need to be alert and respond appropriately to your impulses.

**Eating a Meal:** Arriving for your big day nourished and energized is without question of utmost importance. This is especially true for those early morning auditions. If you tend to be an actor who finds their appetite to be affected



by audition nerves, make sure that you try to get past this hurdle, especially when it comes to eating a complete breakfast. If



you can't bring yourself to eat more than one meal before your big audition, make sure that it is breakfast. According to the University of Ottawa's Health Services, "breakfast provides the energy your body needs to start the day. When you wake up in the morning, you haven't eaten for 8 to 12

hours: it's time to "break that fast." Research has shown breakfast helps to improve mental and physical performance and contributes many important nutrients to your diet". <http://www.uottawa.ca/health/information/nutrition-breakfast.html>

that

**Look Amazing:** Ok, so while beauty isn't everything, looking great in a harsh industry such as this one can certainly take you a long way. The reasons why actors should try and look good for their auditions are the same reasons as to why any person going to any job interview should take time to concentrate on their appearance. Firstly, just as in any job interview, in an audition your attire can play your supporting role. If your audition permits, you can show up in an outfit that is particularly suited for a part, or you can show up in something very clean cut and neutral that will not upstage your astounding performance. Moreover, while neutral colours are great to wear, it has been recommended that actors try and include a distinct piece of clothing to their outfit. The reason for this lies in the fact that an audition panel will see possibly hundreds of people that look similar to you within a short time span. Eventually, every performer that they screen starts to look the same. If you wish to avoid being included in pile of performers who become indistinguishable, wear something that will subtly make you stand out from the crowd. If you get called back for a second audition, you should show up for your next screening in the exact



same outfit as you did in your first audition, as it will help to trigger the casting directors memory of you and your brilliant performance. Changing outfits for a call back is like changing your identity, as the people screening you do not know you personally and at this point hold your identity in things such as your red sweater.

**Arrive Early:** Make sure you know exactly where your audition is being held. If you are unsure, contact your agent or other contacts you may have to verify. Make sure that you have enough time to get there with ease. Arriving early is not only professional but it also allows you take a few moments to relax and prepare yourself mentally.



**Warm Up:** Warming up your body, voice and mind is always the best way to put yourself into the right audition “zone”. Being focused, concentrated and ready are all things that you will want to be for your audition and warming up is the best way to get you into these emotional and mental states. Where and how you conduct this warm up is completely up to you. You can do it at home when you wake up, in the car on your way to the audition and even at the audition, in a bathroom or outside.

Now that you have finally made it into the auditioning room, here are some basic tips on etiquette that you may want to consider.

**Be Polite:** I think that this one is fairly self-explanatory, if you want to be hired for the job, you should try and be courteous to the people who will potentially hire you. Being courteous will always take you a long way, even if you do not end up getting the job. The theatre and film industry is fairly small, particularly here in Canada, and everyone in this business talks. If you want a good name for yourself, it is up to you to create that image.



Moreover, when you go for an audition it is more than likely that the people who are screening you may screen you again in the future. If you leave a good impression you have left the prospect of future employment open for yourself. Also, as I have mentioned earlier on in this package, when casting directors hire actors they hire them for their personality in addition to their talent. If you are a starting actor with no name for yourself, you will severely diminish the chances of landing a job if you do not behave extremely well in your audition.

**General Slating Pointers:** For those of you who are unfamiliar with the term, slating is when actors formally introduce themselves to the audition panel. Actors will state their name, and announce the pieces that they will be performing at the audition. When there are cameras at an audition, actors should slate directly to the camera. The reason behind this is to help the casting directors during their casting process. Later on, when they are reviewing all of the audition tapes, your slating will make their lives a lot easier, as they will easily be able to identify which scenes were done by which actors. Slating is also a unique opportunity for actors to show the panel their awesome personalities, enthusiasm and professionalism. Believe it or not, when slating many actors come off as very self-conscious, especially when they have to say their names. When it is your turn to slate at an audition say your name proudly. If this is something that you have never done before, practice at home, as it is more challenging than it seems!! Be friendly, professional and most importantly try to be yourself. This is one of the only opportunities that the audition panel will have to see you when you are not performing. Even though slating only requires a few sentences, speak those sentences with as much sincerity as you can and try to give the panel an accurate idea of the type of person that you are.



**Do NOT Make the Panel Uncomfortable:** Believe it or not during an audition there are a few things that you can do that will make the members of your panel very uncomfortable. These are not blatantly obvious things such as rash or aloof behaviour, but rather uncomfortable performance choices that you may carry out that will invade their sense of personal space. So what is the most common thing that actors do in their auditions to make their panel cringe? They try to involve the panel in their work! This is an absolute no- no!! Firstly, you should never get too close to your panel on a physical and or emotional level. To avoid this make sure that you define a clear acting space, which is exclusively your own. Avoid making eye contact with the panel members. If you need to look in their direction, look directly above their heads. Remember: **your panel is not your scene partner**- they are your critiquers. Allow them to fairly view your work from an objective 2<sup>nd</sup> party stance, this means that they cannot, under any conditions, be included into your performance as anything more than a spectator. If you attempt to let your panel do more than judge your performance you will quickly regret your choice, as there is nothing casting directors find more uncomfortable than having the role of scene partner thrust upon them unexpectedly. The acting that is to be done in the audition room is your job alone, and if you try and make it any other way, you will not be getting a call back.

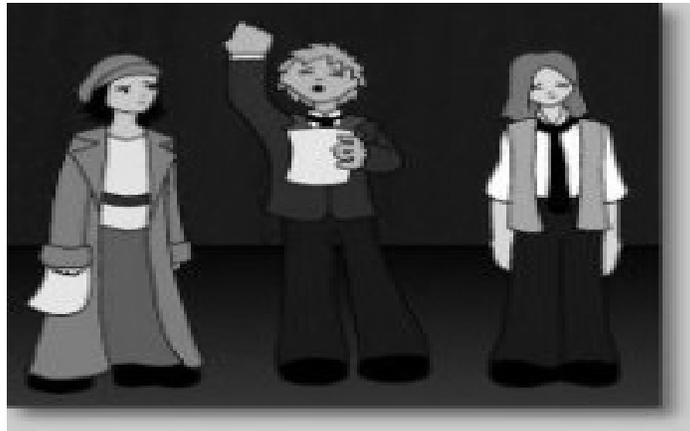
**Kind, Sincere and Quick Exit:** After your audition leave quickly and politely. Say thank you, shake the hands of your panel if you get the chance to (although you would have likely done



that before hand, so the chances of doing it again are slim) and exit gracefully. The panel who is auditioning you is likely very busy and has several more appointments that day, so holding them up is not a good idea. For this reason, trying to make chit chat or sweet talking with the panel after your audition is not advisable. Insincere flattery or sweet talk makes you seem dishonest and really insults both your talent and capabilities as an actor. When you behave in this way towards your audition panel it makes you look like you are only able to get the job through sweet talk, and not through your genuine talent and finely crafted technique. Ultimately, as much as your awesome and sincere personality is a factor in the hiring process, casting directors will end up hiring you based on your acting abilities. Therefore, after the panel sees what

you are capable of artistically they have seen enough, until they make the choice to call you back themselves.

**Audition Crashers:** If you ever have an urge to crash an audition for which you failed to get an appointment, seriously reconsider this temptation. The people who organize auditions spend a lot of time and money putting together these events. It is very annoying to these people if actors try to squeeze themselves in at the last minute. If you do crash an audition, and get the chance to perform, you must be prepared to deliver the performance of a lifetime, because if you can't bring everything they are dreaming of for their character to the table, you will not only not get the gig, but you are also potentially jeopardizing your future career with that director and other directors in their circle.



### **Take Five: How to Find Auditions**

So now that you have a basic idea as to how to participate and get ready for an audition, it is time to gain some insight as to how to get auditions so you can begin your acting career!

There are various ways for actors to perform job searches, and these methods will vary based on decisions that an actor has made throughout their career, how far along in their career that they are, and the type of acting career that they are trying to pursue.

The first major thing that will affect an actor's job search is if they are represented by an agent or not. If an actor is represented by a good agent, trying to find auditions will be a lot easier for them. One of the purposes of hiring an agent is to have professional assistance in getting auditions. Agents are really useful to have if you are pursuing an acting career that involves film and television, as many of these auditions are harder to come by independently. Also, the world of television and film works on a really fast clock. In this world, agents are the only ones who have the resources to locate these auditions and the information about them fast enough for their clients. Also, these types of auditions fill up fast and are usually very last minute, thus it is the job of good agent to be able to try and do everything in their power to make sure that their client gets a chance to put their foot in the door.



Actors who are predominately interested in theatre however, do not face the same pressures as film and television actors do to obtain representation. This is because in many ways, theatre actors can govern and manage their own careers. It is by far easier for theatre actors to locate auditions by themselves, especially now with the internet. Many websites have devoted themselves to posting theatrical auditions. Moreover, once an actor is walking in the theatre circle all the time, they will always be in the know of who is doing what and when, which will certainly make their job search easier. With that being said, there are some reasons for a busy working theatre actor to seek representation. It can be beneficial for theatrical actors to have an agent is because an agent deals with all kinds of other things, that may be too time consuming or challenging for a busy or shy actor to deal with. For example, an agent is responsible for negotiating their clients paycheque for a project. Some actors may not feel comfortable engaging in this type of negotiation with their future employers, and thus it would really benefit those individuals to have someone to do that type of work for them, who has their best interest in mind and will take care of these types of dealings. Moreover, if an actor has a good relationship with their agent (and they should as this is integral to any positive working relationship) they may be able to negotiate the commissions that the agent will make for the work that the actor finds independently. Of course, there are no hard and fast rules

about how this type of negotiation takes place, and it will vary from person to person and case by case.

Also, if you wish to be a working actor in Canada, it is important to try and involve yourself in as many performance mediums as you can. The more you restrict yourself, the harder it will be for you to find work. Therefore, it is not a bad idea to be represented by an agent, as working with an agent will likely open doors for you and allow you to dip your toes into all types of performing waters. When considering agents, remember that different agents specialize in different things. For example, there are voice over agents, commercial agents, principle agents, theatre agents etc. It is up to you whether you wish to be represented by an agent who overlooks several different mediums, or try and get a different agent who specializes in the different types of mediums in which you are interested. This choice will depend on both your relationship with your agent(s) and their level of competence. Sometimes it is better to take on several different agents, because this will ensure that they are concentrating solely on trying to improve your career in one very specific area. Again, this type of decision is based completely on the needs of the individual artist.

As a starting actor, you may get tempted to take on the first agent that comes your way. While this isn't always a bad idea (as they are investing their trust in you, so why not give them a chance too?), you have to keep in mind that YOU are the person HIRING the agent, not the other way around. You have every right to check the background of the agent as they will be the person(s) who will be assisting you in managing your career. It is very important that you make sure that the two of you mesh on both a professional and personal level. Believe it or not, when starting your career it is not always a bad idea to sign on with a small agency. Some small agencies have very eager young people working for them, who are determined to make you successful so that they can take their agency to the next level. Remember, the size of the agency is truly irrelevant- finding an agent of quality is what really matters in the long run. A good agent, big or small, will be the one who will get you the work and look out for your best interests as both a person and an artist. In your hunt for an agent, be cautious, particularly of money scams. Any agent that asks for any money or advertises their services is a scam artist.

If you are at the point in your career where you are looking for work independently of an agent, here are some reliable websites and databases that you can check out for information about who is auditioning in your local city:

- Breakdown Services LTD:  
[www.breakdownservices.com](http://www.breakdownservices.com)
- Theatre Ontario: <http://www.theatreontario.org>
- Canadian Actor Online: [www.canadianactor.com](http://www.canadianactor.com)
- The Casting Workbook:  
<http://www.castingworkbook.com/index.htm>
- Aaction: <http://www.aactionauditions.com/>
- E Drive: <http://www.caea.com/edrive/>



## **Take Six: Additional References to Visit**

If you found that some of the tips in this package were helpful, and feel encouraged to look at some more sources to learn even more about the art of auditioning, here are names of some best-seller literature written by industry professionals.

**The Complete Professional Audition  
A Commonsense Guide to Auditioning for Musicals and Plays**  
Darren Cohen & Michael Perilstein  
**Publisher:** Back Stage Books (June 1, 2005)

**How to Audition for TV Commercials  
From the Ad Agency Point of View**  
W.L. Jenkins  
**Publisher:** Allworth Press (July 1, 2005)

**You Got the Part! A Casting Director Guides Actors to  
Successful Auditions for Film and TV**  
Marsha Chesley  
**Publisher:** J.Gordon Shillingford; 1 edition (June 1, 2004)

**Actor's Guide to Auditions & Interviews  
Third Edition**  
Margo Annett  
**Publisher:** A&C Black; 3RD edition (December 30, 2004)

**An Actor's Guide to Getting Work  
Fourth Edition**  
Simon Dunmore  
**Publisher:** A&C Black; 4th edition (December 30, 2004)

**Audition**  
Michael Shurtleff  
**Publisher:** Bantam; Reissue edition (December 2, 1979)

**Auditioning: An Actor Friendly Guide**  
Joanna Merlin  
**Publisher:** Vintage; Vintage edition (May 8, 2001)

**How to Audition for TV, Movies,  
Commercials, Plays and Musicals**  
Gordon Hunt  
**Publisher:** Collins; 2 Sub edition (June 21, 1995)

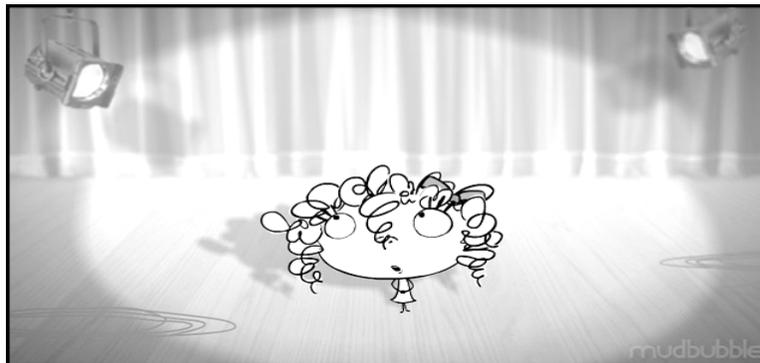
All of these titles are available to purchase at <http://www.theatrebooks.com>



### Take Seven: That's a Wrap!

I truly hope that all of you readers feel that this package has helped you gain a new and more educated perspective on auditioning. Without a doubt, auditioning is one of the most gruelling and frustrating parts of an actor's career, but for obvious reasons it is also the most important. The most important thing you can do to help yourself succeed in an audition, besides working hard to be as prepared as you possibly can, is believe in yourself. You would not be walking into that auditioning room in the first place if you were not worthy of being there. Own the space, take a breath and be the best you can be. While success in this business is very hard to come by, the same can be said about any industry. If you work hard, fight hard and keep your eye on the ball, you will certainly find great success on your own terms eventually. In the words of the famous Disney character Cinderella, "No matter how your heart is grieving, *if you keep on believing*, the dreams that you wish will come true..".

Break a leg and see you in the spotlight!!



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