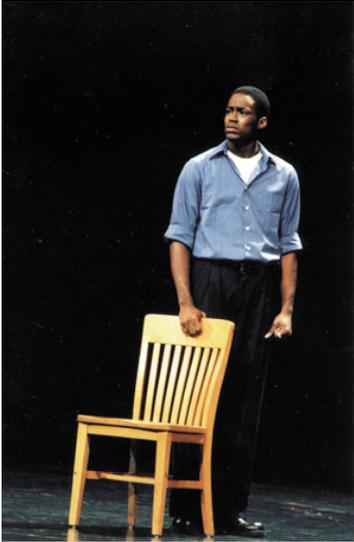


The audition

How to make yourself look good



If you're planning a career as an actor, auditions are going to be a fact of your professional life. Might as well get used to the idea now.

There are almost certainly some auditions in your near future if you're considering majoring in theatre. Virtually all B.F.A. acting programs and conservatories and some theatre departments in liberal arts colleges require an audition as part of the admissions process. Auditions are usually an important element of merit scholarship selection, too.

The first thing you should know about auditions is that everyone involved in the process—except maybe your competition—sincerely wants you to do your best. So do we. Over the years we've consulted a long list of directors, actors, college representatives, and teachers to find out how students might successfully present themselves at the college audition. Here's a Cliffs Notes version of what they had to say.

Your material

Most of the experts agreed that finding the right monologue or song is crucial. That means:

- A piece that fits you. No sixteen-year-old King Lear, please.
- An unusual piece. If it's in a monologue book, it's probably done to death.
- A multi-dimensional, dramatically active piece. You should be working toward a goal with respect to the other character in the scene; silence on his or her part does not equal absence. If your character is telling a story, why must that story be told right now? Why doesn't anyone interrupt you? How do your listeners react? How does that reaction affect you?
- A piece you know well. Don't rely on adrenaline to get you through. Singers, especially, should not attempt material beyond their grasp.
- A piece that reflects your good taste and artistic sensibility. Students who barrage auditors with profanities are indeed remembered, but not fondly.
- A piece, or pieces, that can be performed safely within the prescribed time limit. Assume the clock will be running as you introduce yourself and make your transition from one piece to another.
- A piece that doesn't require a dialect (unless you do it brilliantly), props, or gimmicky staging.
- A piece that reveals something about you, and that truly excites you.

Your preparation

- Give yourself at least two months to get ready for this very important (though very brief) performance. Spend one month reading scripts, screenplays, poetry, fiction, musical scores, and other sources for audition material. Find or adapt the perfect piece or pieces. Spend the other month rehearsing, every day, alone and with a scene partner, preferably under the guidance of a trusted director or coach.
- Know the play and the character as well as if you were performing the role in a full production. Do the same research. Fully understand why you say every word you say.
- If you've used the piece in the past, don't assume you know it. Start from scratch, find something new in it, make it fresh.
- Give yourself sufficient rehearsal time to play around. Improvise, experiment with different tactics, go to extremes. Avoid the recitation trap.
- Don't forget to practice your introduction. Keep it short and upbeat. A sincere greeting, your name, the play from which your piece is taken, and the author is sufficient information. If you need to place a chair or set the stage in some other way, do so before your introduction. It will calm you down.
- Too many actors let their pieces trail off. Begin and end strongly. There should be no doubt as to when your character is finished speaking.
- Practice your entire presentation (moving the chair, introducing yourself, piece number one, piece number two, your dignified "Thank you" and exit) in front of as many different people as possible. After your dad's bowling team, a panel of friendly college reps should be a piece of cake.

The night before

- Dress as comfortably as you can while maintaining a polished, professional appearance. Jeans, sandals, sneakers, miniskirts, and solid black (you'll likely be standing against a black background) are taboo. Avoid noisy footwear and jewelry. Dancers should not hide their bodies beneath loose clothing.
- Make sure your printed materials (résumé, application, sheet music) are neat and error-free. Music should be in the proper key, with returns, tempo changes, and other irregularities marked clearly.
- Take care of your voice.
- Get a good night's sleep.

Audition day

- Eat lightly before the audition.
- Arrive early enough to scope out the audition space, if possible. You'll also want to find a quiet place to warm up your voice and body.
- Know where you will focus your eyes during your presentation. Most experts suggest visualizing your partner at some point just above the heads of the auditors. In some cases (comedic soliloquies, for example) it's better to address your listeners directly.
- Be sensitive to the acoustics of the space. Use sufficient breath to fill the room with your voice.
- Don't apologize or make excuses. If you blank out, take a breath, remember your character's objective, find a line, and continue. You should never ask to start over, particularly in a singing or dance audition.
- Be prepared to answer auditors' questions when your presentation is over. Dancers, especially, should remain in their places until excused.
- Above all, enjoy yourself. Remember why you love performing, and share that love with your audience. They will thank you for it.