

AUDITION WORKSHOP

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The two most important elements for the actor in any audition process are:

1. the preparation of the audition material
2. the attitude that the actor possesses toward the audition phenomenon

PREPARATION: Preparation does not begin with the choice of audition material. The choice of material will be dictated basically by two other factors --

1. who the actor is
2. the type of theatre for which the actor is auditioning

The first responsibility of the actor is to arrive at an honest appraisal and perspective of who he is -- what kind of actor, what type of roles he would be best suited for, his age and range, liabilities and assets, whether he is a leading actor or a character actor, and whether he approaches his craft as a job, as a hobby, or as an artistic purge.

The actor's self-awareness is the single most important factor for his development. To acquire such knowledge is the responsibility of the actor himself and one other person -- someone who will unflinchingly tell him the truth.

The second factor -- the type of theatre for which the actor auditions -- is probably the one most overlooked when the actor chooses audition material.

There are different types of theatre and each theatre possesses a slightly different artistic philosophy that governs their choice of plays and the kinds of actors that they will need in order to produce their respective seasons.

An actor would not be well-advised to use the same audition material for the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre in Minnesota that he would use for the Cleveland Play House as the artistic focus of those two theatres is substantially different. On a terribly simplistic level, don't audition with Hamlet if the theatre only does American plays.

CHOICE OF MATERIAL: In selecting proper audition material, there are several important considerations:

1. An actor should not, under most circumstances, choose an audition using a character that he would not play for that theatre. Again, over-simplistically, if you are 20, don't audition with a character who is 80. This requires again the actor's self-awareness of who he is and what roles he could conceivably play. One of the most interesting exercises that can be done with actors in a training situation is to ask them all to read a given play and then ask them to name the roles they feel they would be cast for. The answers will run the gamut from ridiculousness to shock - with a few honest ones in the middle. It is a good exercise to create an awareness in the actor of how he sees himself and how a potential employer might see him.
2. Each selection must be self-contained. It must possess an over or implied beginning, middle, and end.
3. Contrast and variety - Most theatre will ask for two or three contrasting pieces. The idea of contrast and variety can be achieved in several ways: modern vs. classic, comedy vs. drama, verse vs. prose, verbal vs. active, odd vs. normal.

The actor should not limit himself by immediately assuming that contrast implies a contrast of period or a contrast of Shakespeare with anybody else.

4. "Over done," "dumb," and "oddball" choices - The "overdone" selections include those audition pieces that every employer has seen at least a hundred times: Hotspur, Rosalind, Viola, Blanche, Tyrone. The actor is inviting a small catastrophe by choosing to do such a piece simply because repetition forces boredom or anger and such is usually the response from the employer.

The "dumb" selections include those characters which are totally unplayable even in a finalized performance situation. These include Hamlet, Lear, Blanche, Maggie the Cat. They are characters that are impossible to present in an audition situation because of their immense depth.

The "oddball" pieces are among some of the most effective audition pieces that can be used because they are fresh, unknown, and create an impression by their mere existence. Such pieces might include Ophelia's mad scene without the other characters, selections from a novel, or characters and situations created totally out of the actor's imagination.

5. The actor should choose material that will maximize his assets and minimize his liabilities. If the actor does not possess a trained vocal instrument, it is probably best not to choose a selection from *Lear*. If he doesn't possess a trained physical instrument, it is probably advisable not to perform a selection from *Jumpers*. Again, the actor's awareness of himself is the key factor in making these judgments.

THE ACTOR

1. Pay attention to the way that you dress and the way you are groomed.

Be very careful of clothing or accessories which will detract from the audition. DO NOT wear clogs, platforms, outrageous ties, dangling jewelry. All of these items and other comparable ones are wonderful topics of conversation. If the employer is talking about them, he is not talking about you.

Again, clothe and groom yourself to maximize your assets minimize your liabilities. If you are heavy, do not wear horizontal stripes, etc.

2. Recognize the space and the lights. For the time that you are auditioning, it belongs to you. You own it, you live in it. It is your space, your audience, and your time. Do not fear it, use it.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

1. Develop an audition repertory of at least 12 pieces, any one of which may be done anytime, anywhere, and keep the pieces current.
2. Request an evaluation and feedback from any audition. Then follow it up, either by letter or by telephone. It is even better if you can force an interview on the spot.
3. Do not be afraid to audition the theatre after they have auditioned you. Ask questions. Be cognizant of the responses that you receive. Find out what this theatre does, what it pays, what its artistic philosophy is.

Again, this is your audition.

ATTITUDE: The actor must develop, for his own sanity, a proper audition attitude. Auditions can be the single most destructive force to an actor's self-esteem and confidence. The actor must come to grips with a perspective concerning the audition process. The following thoughts might help:

1. An actor does not control his own destiny. He is constantly at the mercy of and under the judgment of potential

employers.

The employer is looking for something specific in an actor to fill his company or to fill a given role. If the actor is not what the employer seeks, it is not the fault of the actor.

Whether an actor is employed or not depends totally upon company or production requirements. It is very seldom the result of an actor's incompetence or lack of inherent talent.

An audition which does not result in employment should not be considered by the actor as a negative judgment of his ability. If the actor does consistently construe it as such, he must immediately remove himself from the pursuit of the professional theatre.

The actor must never try to give the employer what the actor thinks he wants. Give what you have in the best way that you can and the rest is due to circumstances beyond your control.

3. An audition is a process by which the actor does a favor for the employer. The actor is graciously allowing the employer the privilege of sampling the actor's work.

The actor does not need the theatre, the theatre needs the actor. If that were not the case, the theatre would not be holding auditions.

4. This is the essential point to any perspective of the theater. Contrary to advertising campaigns, the theatre never has been and never will be a necessary facet of human existence. It is a luxury. All of us can survive without it.

As Bernard Shaw once said, there are a hundred cheaper, less troublesome, more effective pleasures than an uncomfortable gallery can offer.

There are also a hundred more highly-paid, more comfortable, more effective employment opportunities that the stage can offer.

At the very moment that the theatre becomes less important to the actor is the same moment that the actor is free, not only in terms of his employment potential and the fears which accompany it, but also in terms of his creative potential.

The very moment that the actor doesn't need work is usually the moment when work becomes available.

WHAT CAN TRAINING SITUATIONS DO TO ASSIST THE ACTOR IN DEALING WITH THE AUDITION PHENOMENON:

1. Require the development of an audition repertory. Require the student to prepare pieces and to present them consistently.
2. Begin a file of audition pieces. Each audition piece that is chosen for presentation by an actor should be logged, including name of play, author, name of role, actor, scene, beginning line, ending line.
3. Vary auditions for productions within the training situation. Change the type of audition that is used. It is a very simple fact that most auditions in college or community theatre are very boring and uninteresting because the audition process itself never changes. There are several types of auditions that can be employed:
 - a. open vs. closed
 - b. prepared auditions vs. cold readings
 - c. auditions from the play vs. auditions from a comparable play
 - d. improvised auditions vs. textual
 - e. monologues vs. scenes
 - f. auditions with other actors who are auditioning vs auditions with "readers"
 - g. don't be afraid to pre-cast a show - the students might as well learn what it's like to simply not have auditions and to have roles assigned.
4. Do the student a favor and don't use callbacks or the position of assistant director as a kindness, as a consolation prize.
5. See audition. The most valuable training that can be gleaned in an audition process is to see the process as employed by other theatres and to see unknown actors involved in the audition process. It is a valuable and surprising experience.

If you know after the first round of auditions that there are certain actors you do not intend to use, don't create false images or false hope by calling them back another round in order to be nice to them.

Audition time is valuable. Don't waste their time by having them read for roles that they won't play and don't waste your time by having to sit there and listen to them. That is a lie which they will not appreciate and which will do them no good.

By the same token, the actor must use all the tools that he has and display as many assets as he possesses in the audition.

A caution to the “coach”: Never lie to an actor. Do not give him a mistaken awareness of himself because you don’t wish to hurt his feelings or because you wish to encourage him. Encouragement, understanding, and kindness are all based upon truth.

And do not pass the buck by saying to yourself that it’s only your opinion which probably doesn’t matter anyway. Your opinion is all the actor has. It does not matter whether your opinion of the actor’s work is right or wrong.

It only matters that it is an honest opinion as you perceive it.

6. The final element in the choice of material is the element of RISK. Respected actors have always possessed courage, the desire to take risks and chances. Cautious actors are usually not very interesting and very seldom achieve anything onstage that will be memorable.

Try to choose one piece that involves the element of RISK, that is unpredictable, and that will take the potential employer by surprise. The actor has the advantage if the employer has no basis for his judgment.

PREPARING THE MATERIAL: The preparation of audition material is usually uninteresting and totally predictable because an actor generally prepares his material in the same way that he chooses it -- without a specific focus in mind.

1. The actor’s focus in an audition should be upon one of his creative assets.
2. Remember that the audition piece does not necessarily limit you to a characterization that must be consistent. You are auditioning yourself, not the character. It is the actor who is being considered for reemployment, not the role which he is playing.

Forget not that the audition piece is a vehicle for the actor.

3. Avoid the use of properties. You will never know what will be available to you or what you can afford to use. Make your imagination do the work and force the involvement of the employer’s imagination.
4. Keep the audition flexible in terms of the space being used. You must be able to do this audition in an office or a

hotel room or a 10,000 seat auditorium. Prepare the piece with all of those contingencies in mind. When you see the space, you should then be able to adapt your audition effectively.

5. Be careful of the use of full profile or full front positions. Auditions are usually more interesting if they are performed on an angle to the audience.
6. Pay attention to the time limit that is required of you. Do not overstep the length of the allotted time.

Remember that a potential employer will know within the first 15 seconds if you can work in his company or not. If he doesn't know with those 15 seconds, he's not worth working for anyway.

Their time is valuable and yours is also. Use a minimum of time with maximum effectiveness. The rule is -- hit and run

7. Use the element of RISK in the preparation of the material as well. Do not allow the employer to be able to predict what you will do with that given piece. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

COMBINATION OF AUDITION PIECES:

1. Because of the requirements on time, stay within the total time limit for the audition or use less time. If you can't do what you do in 30-60 seconds of a single piece, don't bother doing it. If the piece afforded you builds character and variety, use the time. If it does not afford you those items, don't.
2. Begin with your strongest audition first. You must be able to immediately interest your employer and hold his attention. Once you get him, it's hard to lose him. If you lose him in the first piece, you'll never get him in the second or third.
3. It makes no difference whether you introduce all your pieces at the beginning or introduce each one as it comes up. But do not allow the introductions or the interceptions to be "negative time."

The audition is not confined to the pieces themselves. The introductions must be part and parcel of the creative work that you have done on the pieces. Give some thought to the lag time. What kind of assets can you offer even in the introduction of the audition pieces.

Here, again, remember that you are auditioning and not simply the pieces.

This has been an attempt to offer guidelines and suggestions, primarily for the purpose of assisting an actor in dealing emotionally and intellectually with the fears and problems of auditions.

Auditions must be experienced. But in order for the experience to be positive and worthwhile, an actor must approach it from the standpoint of truth and perspective, because the primary problem in an audition is the actor's emotional survival.