

AUDITION POINTERS

A queasy feeling settles into your stomach. You are surrounded by a group of gossiping men and women who sip cafe mochas while complimenting each other's headshots. Suddenly, the casting director calls your number. "What monologue will you be reading for us today?" she asks.

"Oh, sorry," you reply. "I didn't know I was supposed to bring one." Her annoyed expression tells you everything. You won't be getting a callback.

This scenario can easily be avoided by following these simple audition tips:

Read the Audition Notice Carefully

Actors should arrive at auditions fully prepared, not just ready to perform, but also to present any requested material. Examine the audition notice. Should you prepare one monologue? Two? Make certain you match the material to the play. For example, if you are auditioning for Sweeney Todd, prepare a scene from a drama, not a comedy. Finally, based upon the audition notice, make certain you are trying out for an appropriate part. If the casting director is looking for a tall, bald man in his 60s, don't show up hoping that they will change the script for your short, frizzy-haired, thirty-year-old self. Follow whatever guidelines are offered to ensure that you arrive at the audition as organized as possible.

Be Professional

Show the casting director how reliable you are by showing up at least fifteen minutes before the audition. Be courteous, but don't be too talkative. Don't pester crew members or fellow actors with idle conversation. Spend your time privately readying yourself. Most casting directors expect you to bring a headshot and resume. This might not hold true for community theatre productions. However, if you are committed to a career in theater, you may want to bring these along just to make a favorable impression. In general, think of an audition like a job interview. Avoid inappropriate behavior, whether its chewing gum, using profanity, behaving too shyly or brashly, or making long-winded speeches as to why you are perfect for the role.

Dress Appropriately

Usually, it is best to wear "business casual" attire. You want to exhibit charm and professionalism, but you don't want to look like a stock-broker or a banker. Remember, many new actors make the mistake of wearing costumes to audition. Perhaps they say to themselves: "Hey, I've got a great pirate outfit from last Halloween! I'll wear that!" Sadly, this is bound to cause casting directors to chuckle under their breath. They might be amused, but they will definitely not take the actor seriously. If you are auditioning for a dancing part in a musical, wear dance attire. It should not be anything flashy or expensive. Any choreographer worth her salt will focus on your dancing ability, not your sequins.

Perfect Your Monologue

If you are asked to bring a monologue, make certain that you have rehearsed it completely. Do not just know the lines, know the character you are becoming. Let the

directors see a striking difference between the person that just said hello to them, and the character that is now coming to life on the stage.

At the same time, be flexible with the audition material. They might have you read the lines over, asking you to take on a different personality. Sure, you may do great when you perform the monologue with tears in your eyes, but be prepared if they ask you to do the same lines in a calm, icy voice or a whimsical British dialect. If given the chance, show them that you can interpret the role in many different ways.

Get to Know the Play

Many auditions involve reading “sides.” Sides are small, hand-picked portions of a script. Sometimes they are a brief monologue. Sometimes they are short scenes involving two or more characters. Most of the time, you won’t know exactly what scene you’ll be reading. In that case, you’ll want to familiarize yourself with the play in general.

If you are auditioning for a popular play feel free to buy a copy of the script online or at your local book store. Better yet, visit your local library. Watching a film version of the play might help as well. However, don’t simply mimic the movie actor’s performance. Casting directors want to see what you can create, not what you can imitate.

Practice Cold Reading

If the play is rather obscure or brand new, it may be difficult to purchase a copy. In that case, you’ll want to polish up your cold reading skills. Cold reading is the act of performing lines as you read them for the very first time. It can be a nerve wracking experience, but with practice most actors can become quite adept at it.

The best way to become a fluent cold reader is to read aloud as often as you can. When you cold read during your audition, do not worry if you stumble over a word or two. The important thing to remember is to stay in character. Create chemistry between you and your fellow actor. Make the casting director, and anyone else watching, believe that you are thinking and feeling the words on the page.

Don’t Apologize

After an audition, an actor becomes his own worst critic. Often times, hopeful thespians are tempted to explain themselves to the directors. They provide excuses or even apologies in hopes of gaining sympathy. Avoid this as much as you can. Thank the casting director and leave the stage knowing that if you are right for the part, they will contact you. If not, know that you did your best. And remember: there are many other wonderful roles out there just waiting to be filled.