

# Audition Wisdom

## THE AGONY OF DEFEAT

Your name is not on the cast list. Why?

There might have been something in your presentation, preparation, audition piece selection, or your resume that created a negative impression. Below are some of the major “don’ts” that may have contributed to your downfall.

Resume:

1. No headshot.
2. No phone number.
3. No current address.
4. No alternate phone number.
5. Resume lacked organization
5. Overall ill-prepared resume.

Selection:

1. Inappropriate audition piece. Do you see yourself realistically?
2. Speech problem. Did your piece highlight that problem?
3. Song selection not show-appropriate. Did you research the production you’re auditioning for?
4. Piece selection did not show contrast in period, dramatic genre, style of character. What exactly are you capable of?

Preparation:

1. Pronunciation or word definition errors. Did you do your research?
2. Required accompanist to transpose accompaniment. Wasn’t that a risk?
3. Asked for a second chance or special consideration. Did you read the audition packet’s rules?

Presentation:

1. Sang a capella. Did that show your ability to sing rhythmically and in tune?
2. Didn’t show versatility in vocal pitch, rate, volume, and quality. What happened to the interpretation of the song?
3. Too much volume. Did you think the committee was deaf or stupid?
4. Selected a piece requiring an accent which you couldn’t do.
5. Poor articulation.
6. Weak imagery.
7. Physical characterization (gestures) were weak or nonexistent.
8. Didn’t adapt blocking to the space.
9. Did not create believable and appropriate actions for your character.
10. Didn’t acknowledge the committee as “the audience.”
11. No energy, no spark.
13. Lousy self-assessment.

## AUDITION DO'S AND DON'TS

by Janet E. McLean, Viterbo College, LaCrosse, Wisconsin

Audition Do's:

1. Choose appropriate material. Pieces of extensive anger and/or vulgarity can cause auditioners to tune out.
2. Time your audition carefully. Timing starts after your introduction.
3. Announce yourself and your piece clearly. If you are a replacement, say your wait list number.
4. Take time to shift focus between pieces.

Audition Don'ts:

1. Don't sing a cappella.
2. Don't use taped accompaniment. An accompanist is provided.
3. Don't sing if you can't. The same applies at the dance audition; it will only hurt your audition.
4. Don't choose a bad script just because it is obscure.
5. Don't choose a bad piece with obscene or offensive language.
6. Don't choose material that berates the audience.
7. Don't use a dialect or an accent.
8. Don't throw chairs onstage.
9. Don't speak to the floor, the chairs, or the sides of the thrust.
10. Don't spend excessive time arranging furniture.

11. Don't treat the timer or the accompanist with disrespect.
12. Don't turn your back to compose yourself or change the mood. It wastes time.
13. Don't rush through it to get it over with.
14. Don't speak so softly that you can't be heard.
15. Don't apologize for your mistakes.
16. Don't leave the stage with a negative feeling.

#### SUSAN'S AUDITION RULES

by Susan Rush, Viterbo College, LaCrosse, Wisconsin

1. Be yourself.
2. Be prepared.
3. Be prepared.
4. Be prepared.
5. Don't explain your scene or monologue. JUST DO IT!
6. Make choices. Don't give a neutral reading.
7. Dress appropriately.
8. Assume the auditioners have no imagination.
9. Don't apologize.
10. During the audition, don't use the director/producer as an audience.
11. Focus. Concentrate. Don't wander -- anchor yourself.

In a musical audition:

1. Don't use a taped accompaniment unless required to do so.
2. Don't sing acapella.
3. Don't ask the pianist to transpose.
4. If the pianist is lousy, don't turn around and glare at him/her.
5. Explain the tempo and cuts to the pianist before you start, and make sure the music will easily stay on the piano.
6. Rock songs don't sound good without rhythm; be cautious when using them.
7. Try not to use the "song of the moment;" it gets old fast.

#### AUDITIONS TIP SHEET

by Cynthia A. Ballard, Kellogg Community College, Battle Creek, Michigan

Here are some things to think about when you are preparing for an audition:

##### A. Preparation

1. Select appropriate pieces. They should be contrasting pieces, but not necessarily Shakespeare. Suit the selections to the types of theatres and productions for which you are auditioning.
2. Choose pieces that are within your character range. Try to stick with pieces that you have done before and with which you are comfortable. Untried pieces seldom work well. Remember that good dramatic material can help to sell your skills to prospective employers.
3. Pick a song that fits and shows your range. Don't do overdone selections. Eight bars is sufficient. Have more ready to go for callbacks.
4. Avoid weird or overdone selections, or selections not easily represented in a short speech.
5. Your selections should be fully memorized. No scripts!
6. Don't have someone come in and read with you. Do a selection that works as a monologue, or patch together several short speeches which are logically consistent.
7. Time your pieces. Stay within the limit. In general, be too short rather than too long.
8. If you plan to use a tape recording for your musical number, practice with it. It should be of the best quality you can afford. Know how to work the tape machine. It will be to your advantage to practice with the equipment.
9. Practice your audition from beginning to end including your introduction. Practice in front of a group of people to get reactions, and work with a coach.
10. Fill out the audition forms completely, including the important points of your resume. Often that is all the theatre has to look at until you present your full resume at an interview. Fill in accurate availability dates. Use a typewriter or print legibly.
11. Try to find out something about the theatres for which you are auditioning.
12. Make your resume as impressive as possible. Look for examples of the professional resume. It should be one page, neatly typed. Be honest about roles you have played and about your union affiliations. Have available some references with phone numbers and addresses. Ask those people if they would mind recommending you. Remember that your resume can help to sell you, once you've left the audition.

13. Get a good night's sleep. That's better than cramming. Get up early to prepare.
  14. Be careful what you eat and drink before an audition!
  15. Most of all, be positive about the experience. Look on the audition as further experience and as beneficial in and of itself. And remember that the worst that could happen is that you won't get the job you already don't have!
- B. The Performance
1. Arrive early to warm up and acquaint yourself with the audition area.
  2. The right clothing is very important. Visual identification is important to make you stand out. Strong, solid colors make a statement. Look your best!
    - a. Women should wear skirts or dresses; if dancers, dance attire.
    - b. Juvenile and young leading men should wear dance attire or simple shirt and pants and/or sweater.
    - c. Character men should wear a sports jacket and sweater or suit and tie.
    - d. Pay attention to your hair. Have an attractive hairdo.
    - e. Avoid clutter. No coins in pockets or jangling bracelets or keys.
    - f. Use basic stage makeup but not too much. Eyes are important.
    - g. Wear the right shoes. Clogs are rather noisy! Wear shoes that help you to move well.
  3. Remember that you start your audition from the moment that you enter. Sell yourself from start to finish. Remember also that in addition to the stage characters you present in your monologues, the other "character" you'll present is yourself.
  4. Clearly state your name and number at the beginning of the audition.
  5. You don't need a great deal of introduction. Don't go into the story of the whole play.
  6. Try not to take too long to "get into character." You'll go over your time limit.
  7. Do your best piece first. Do your song first or second so you are sure to get it in.
  8. Try not to make a major production out of costumes or props. You are auditioning, not your special effects.
  9. Don't ask the musician to transpose music. Make it as easy as possible for the accompanist and your audition will be more successful.
  10. Be simple and direct. Don't be static, yet don't block an entire scene.
  11. Don't begin by apologizing for your material. It's a bad start.
  12. Find your light and take the stage.
  13. Keep your volume up.
  14. Keep within your time limit. Stop when the time indicates your time is up.
  15. Relate to the audience as a group. Don't ignore them. Communicate with them.

## ESCAPE FROM AUDITION HELL

by David Pogue

The audition process is a cruel, heartless system that can make you feel exhausted and miserable. It's even worse if you're the only one auditioning.

Nobody has devised a better system for letting directors and producers envision each applicant, one by one, in the roles to be filled. The only thing wrong with the system is that it relies on human beings -- on actors trying desperately to embody the director's vision of the part (with no way of knowing what that is), add on the imagination and patience of the casting committee, who has sat there, probably for days, attempting to remain impartial, friendly, and awake.

As a professional musical director, I've watched more than one director ignore the perfect-for-the-role actress, as he unpacks a bag full of delivered Chinese food. Far more often, though, I've seen performers and roles fail to come together because of poor audition technique. Here are a few observations:

1. The pianist is your friend. The pianist can make or break you; treat that pianist accordingly. Be friendly and appreciative. BRIEFLY discuss your music. Indicate the tempo you prefer during a quiet, preperformance meeting; one good way is to softly sing the first line to the pianist. Come prepared with readable, easy-to-use music whose pages have been taped together. You wouldn't believe the crumbling, disordered music pianists are handed -- sometimes the music doesn't include a piano part at all.
2. Don't dress the part -- but hint at it. If you audition for FIDDLER ON THE ROOF wearing Russian peasant rags, you'll be laughed out of the room. Yet wearing clothes and hair that suggest the part can help. If

you're auditioning for an executive in HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS..., a three-piece suit might be overdoing it. But a shirt and tie would psychologically suggest the part to the audition committee. Theoretically, they should be able to imagine that; but in the real world, the less left to the imagination the better.

3. Eye contact -- Some directors love it; they believe that you are audience tuned, and your direct appeal satisfies their egos. Others find it annoying and distracting. The safest bet is to make occasional eye contact, but generally direct your presentation just over their heads.

4. Wierd is good, talent is better. You are aware that the audition committee have seen hundreds of people. You can tell by the bored expressions, the perfunctory "thank you." You wish you had been the first or last to audition, since people at either end tend to be remembered better. You decided to make an impression, no matter what it takes. You can't believe how far some have taken this. Once, an actor came up to the audition committee's table, took a long swig from the choreographer's Pepsi, and said, "Thanks. Man, was I thirsty." Another spent his audition muttering to himself. I even saw one young woman audition completely naked, in hopes of making an impression. (She did. She just didn't get the part.) Strangeness can make you memorable -- but only if there's talent to back it up. You don't want them just to remember you; you want them to remember how good you were.

5. Bottom line: It isn't just talent. It's also type. If you didn't get the part, don't be hard on yourself. You may be terrific. Trouble is, casting people don't just want talent; they want talent in the right package (e.g., hair color, height, age, body weight, vocal quality). It's not uncommon for somebody with the right body type to get the part over somebody with more talent.

CURTAINS...See how easy it is? Just be talented, wear the right thing, treat the pianist nicely, make an impression, use the right amount of eye contact, and, above all, be sure you match the director's unspoken mental image of the ideal performer's height, weight, hair color, age, and voice. The part will be yours.

#### RANDOM THOUGHTS ON AUDITIONS

Laurie Swigart, Upstage Review Theatre Company

Cold readings are OK -- Prepared Monologues are much better!

- selections should not be from show being auditioned for

- 1-2 minutes long

Theatre is not fair:

You must match the character the director has in mind.

Your body is your instrument and may not be what the director has in mind -- height, weight, vocal range.

Do you have:

Curiosity?

Willingness to learn?

Common sense?

Intelligence?

Imagination?

PREPARATION, PREPARATION, PREPARATION!!!!

How will the auditioning director answer this question about you?

"Does this person have a realistic concept of who they are?"

Directors WANT you to succeed in an audition.

DON'T perform! DO be honest and sincere in your presentation!

Dress appropriately -- your clothing, hair, and accessories shouldn't draw more attention than your performance.

Remember -- an audition is an INTERVIEW!

Dress so the director has an odea of your body type -- simple, but not baggy or faddy. No tennies or boots.

If you get called back the next day, wear the same clothing as you did the day before.

Make your introduction short and sweet. Don't set up the scene. Say thank you at the end of the audition.

When in the auditon venue, don't compalin, gossip, etc., because you never know who may be listening.

NO PROPS! If it's a proppy piece, don't do it. Even too much pantomime, such as telephones or teacups, are not good.

CATTLE CALL - (mass auditions) give your strongest piece first

CALL BACKS - do a contrasting piece

SINGING - no electric components