

Auditioning for College Acting and Musical Theatre Training Programs The Do's and Don'ts

"In his excellent book *Acting Professionally*, Robert Cohen suggests that an actor needs a strong personality. For him, the most undesirable quality for an actor is to be bland — a "good little boy or girl"— nice, dull and unmarketable. These qualities should be evident in a theatre audition. They can transform a routine audition into a memorable one and make your prospective professors eager to enroll you as a student. The personality you project is the basis for your audition. It includes the clothes you wear, the way you introduce your material and your ability to answer questions. Even the materials you choose to perform can be revealing. But remember, please, personality is not an alien *persona* affected for the occasion. It is just the simple use of the characteristics that make you distinctive as a performer and a human being." (CCM Audition Guidelines 2008)

To assist you in preparing for the college audition, consider these simple
DOs and **DON'Ts** of theatre auditions.

Material Selection:

- **DO NOT** prepare a choreographed routine. This applies to both songs and monologues. **DO**, however, approach the material with a free body and move whenever appropriate. Body movement should be relaxed (not casual) and should not "illustrate" the lyrics or dialogue (pointing at your head then at your watch on the words "I know now.")
- **DO NOT** attempt an audition monologue or song without reading the entire play and understanding your character in the context of the play.
- **DO NOT** ever perform a work from a television show or film.
- **DO NOT** select pieces that attempt to shock with their use of bad language or obscene physical action. Remember that you are using the words of *others* in order to sell *yourself*.
- **DO NOT** perform pieces written in a dialect or style (unless requested). The auditors want to hear *your* voice expressing emotion or making us laugh.
- **DO** avoid overly familiar material, songs or monologues that are performed continuously.
- **DO** avoid pieces associated primarily with particular artists. "New York, New York" is Liza's song, "Don't Rain on My Parade" is Barbara's and "Over the Rainbow" is Judy's. Comparisons are inevitable.
- **DO** avoid the current hit from the current Broadway smash or revival. These are simply performed too often at auditions to work to your advantage.
- **DO** select material suitable for youthful performers. Many students hide behind phony elderly voices and mannerisms. Remember, the auditors want to see who *you* are.
- **DO** avoid *excessively* emotional pieces. It is difficult to build a sentiment quickly and honestly. On the other hand, avoid dull and passive pieces which dwell on character or plot exposition. Your character should be actively involved in overcoming obstacles in order to fulfill an immediate objective or intention.
- **DO** avoid material specifically written for monologue books.
- **DO** look for selections with contrasting characters, moods, intentions, rhythms, emotional levels, and content.
- **DO** beware of choices that are difficult to perform under stressful conditions. Many of the patter songs ("If," "Another Hundred People," "Funny," "Giants in the Sky") are notoriously difficult and require careful coordination between pianist and singer. These songs are hard to perform without adequate rehearsal and under the naturally competitive circumstances of an audition.
- **DO** avoid monologues from anthologies.
- **DO** select a piece that allows you to make strong and supported character choices.
- **DO** pick material that reflects your strengths as a performer, suits your age, and demonstrates the image you wish to create. Differentiate between monologues that have

literary value (good pieces of writing) and those that are dramatic (they play well). Opt for the latter.

Rehearsals:

- **DO NOT** ever rehearse with a mirror. It builds inhibiting self-awareness.
- **DO** work hard on memorizing the pieces in the context of rehearsal, and know what the monologue means, what all the words mean, and how to pronounce them.
- **DO** have someone time your entire audition during rehearsals. During your audition you should be thinking about character objectives, not about conforming to time limitations.
- **DO** approach your song as you would a monologue- with clear wants and actable character circumstances.
- **DO** rehearse with an acting partner who can help you discover your pieces with honest responding and irreverence.
- **DO** rehearse your introduction in a manner that allows you to be yourself when you step onstage.

The Audition:

- **DO NOT** imitate your favorite performers.
- **DO NOT** outstay your welcome, argue if you are cut off, or be evasive about your experience or expertise.
- **DO NOT** utilize props. A chair should always be provided for you, but be prepared in case it is not.
- **DO NOT** wear loose jewelry during a dance, movement, or group improvisation session.
- **DO** bring sheet music in the correct key and with all cuts or repetitions *clearly* marked. **DO** place your music in a binder or tape the sheets together for the benefit of the accompanist. **DO** speak clearly to the pianist and articulate the tempo by singing a few phrases.
- **DO** a proper warm-up that helps you relieve tension and focus on your audition.
- **DO** wake up early and have a good breakfast.
- **DO** pay attention to your personal appearance. Make sure your clothes are appropriate both for your personality and for the institution to which you are applying. It may be hard, but take a long, objective look at yourself in a mirror and assess what you see. Decide on your best physical presentation. If you need to lose weight or gain muscle, begin as soon as possible — but *please* do it *safely*. Visit the dentist, invest in a good haircut, pamper your complexion, learn the fundamentals of make-up, get in shape, start working out or jogging. You want to present yourself as a prospective student who will be fun to teach and highly employable after graduation. For musical theatre auditions, bring two "outfits"—one for the dance audition and one for the song and monologue.
- **DO** invest in dance wear for dance auditions -- an ensemble that will show your figure or physique in action. Women may wear character shoes, jazz shoes or ballet slippers, leotards, tights, dance skirts or non-bulky warm-up wear. Men may wear jazz or ballet shoes, tights, t-shirts or shorts. No-one should wear oversized sweat pants or shirts (in fact, you *will* likely be asked to remove them!) Sneakers are not recommended -- how can you do a double pirouette when your Nikes keep you nailed to the floor?
- **DO** be respectful and supportive to your fellow auditionees.
- **DO** be prepared to discuss your audition material (objectives, conflict, etc) and to re-perform it with specific direction.
- **DO** be respectful and professional to all audition personnel (stage managers, assistants, etc.).
- **DO** consider your deportment. That means the way you behave (and are seen to behave) from the moment you arrive at the audition to the moment you leave. Show that you are well prepared and have done your research about the school and the program.

- **DO** ask questions about the school or the program. Remember you are auditioning the faculty, too. But- always keep the questions logical and to the point. If possible, take an opportunity to talk to current students of the program for which you are auditioning—they'll be happy to give you the dirt of the school, the faculty, the classes and the productions. And remember, they often give the professors feedback on the behavior of prospective students, too.
- **DO** feel free to use the whole stage during the audition.
- **DO** be confident. *Be yourself*. Be proud of who you are. In short, make the faculty *want* to teach you. Arouse their interest through the sheer force of your personality. In other words, be honest and true to yourself.
- **DO** thank the auditors for their time and attention.
- **DO** have fun at the audition.

One Last Consideration:

At Missouri State University, admission to the Acting or Musical Theatre programs is very competitive. However, the audition itself should not be viewed as a competition. Each year we accept an estimated body of 12-14 students for each program- some of whom have an enormous amount of experience and some of whom have little to none. While exceptional talent is certainly appreciated, we are not always looking for *readiness* for the profession. What we *are* always looking for is readiness to *train* for the profession!! During your audition experience we encourage you *leave your ego* at the door, *be yourself*, be *giving* to your audition colleagues, and allow the day to be an enjoyable one.

Sources:

- *Drama Audition Guidelines*, University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music. http://www.ccm.uc.edu/drama/apply_frameset.html.
- *Acting Professionally* by Robert Cohen.
- *Musical Theatre Audition Guidelines*, University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music. http://www.ccm.uc.edu/musical_theatre/dos.html.
- *Auditioning for Professional Acting & Musical Theatre Training Programs*, by Kurt Gerard Heinlein, SETC.