

# Cattle Call Auditioning Tips

By Steve Ray

Treat your monologue as just another chance to perform—a chance to give the gift of a compelling performance to the auditors. They will appreciate it and remember you, even if you don't get the part. If you are pleasant and confident and give the auditors a good performance, they will remember you the next time they are casting a role for which you are perfect. Take the pressure off yourself. Sometimes actors in their neediness and desperation can suck the life out of the auditors. You may or may not get the part and this may or may not have anything to do with your talent. If you don't get the part it may be because you are not a freckle-faced redhead.

Choose a monologue that doesn't tell a story about the past. It should be about the here and now. Most monologues in monologue collection books are stories about the past because most longer bits of one character's words in a published play are when that character is telling stories about the past. These monologues only show if you are a good storyteller. Find a character in a play that you like and see if there is a scene in which that character has longer bits of dialogue that you can string together eliminating the need for the other character to actually speak. The book *The Perfect Monologue: How to Find and Perform the Monologue That Will Get You the Part* by Ginger Howard Friedman describes in detail the process of condensing dialogue into a monologue. NOTE: As Friedman's book instructs, do not pretend to listen to an imaginary scene partner. Find creative ways to eliminate their half of the dialogue, so there is no need for them to "speak."

Choose a monologue that is about one person that desperately needs something from another person (the imaginary scene partner to whom you are speaking). Create relationship. Keep the stakes high.

"Place" that other person directly out. Talk to them as if they are slightly above the auditors' heads. However, as in real life, you don't have to always face or look at the person to whom you are speaking.

Don't speak directly to the auditors. They will feel the uncomfortable need to "respond" or act with you. This has two adverse effects: they will stop watching you act and they will resent your need to have them be part of your scene.

Don't place the other character to stage right or left. This will force you to spend a good deal of time in a profile or quarter left/right position. The auditors will see less of your eyes, which convey so much of the acting. Full front is the strongest position on stage. Use it. Don't weaken your performance unnecessarily.

Find out how long the auditors want the monologue to be and stick to it. If no length is prescribed, choose a one to two minute monologue. If singing, bring in 16 bars of a song, but be prepared to sing all of the song, if requested.

Music should be on stiff paper that will stay open so the accompanist will not have to fight with it. Either photocopy it onto card stock and tape the pages together or glue the music to a manila folder. Clearly mark where you want the accompanist to start and stop. Music should be written in the key that you will sing it in. Don't expect the accompanist to transpose on the spot. Treat the accompanist as a friendly colleague. Take a moment to talk to them, sotto voce, before you begin. You may even softly sing a phrase or two to the accompanist or pat out the rhythm in order to set the tempo.

Project your voice adequately. You will not be hired for stage work if you don't have a stage voice.

Vocal variety is good, but depending on the character, can be overdone. Extreme vocal variety is not a substitute for good acting.

Physical levels are good, but depending on the character, can be overdone. Don't be so frenetic that the auditors are distracted by all the movement.

Find as many tactics as possible to get what you want from the other character.

Physicalize your tactics and intentions. This will help motivate movement and gestures (and cure the "what do I do with my hands" syndrome).

Don't shuffle, rock or wander aimlessly. All movement should be motivated. When in doubt, just plant yourself. You may not be aware of physical ticks that you have, especially ticks that only manifest when you are nervous. Have a friend/coach scrutinize your audition piece for these bad and distracting habits.

Wear clothing that might *suggest* the character, but isn't a literal costume. For example, if you are auditioning for a cowboy, you might wear boots, jeans and a nice button up shirt—not chaps, a lasso and a ten-gallon hat.

Your clothing should be slightly distinctive, but not outrageous (i.e., a rare color that looks good on you or an accessory that is tasteful, but unusual). Let us know you have an interesting personality by your acting choices more than by your clothing.

Always wear the same clothing to call backs that you wore to the audition. Often this is how auditors distinguish you from the other 20 actors who were the same type as you.

Show your body type. Don't layer so heavily that the auditors can't tell if you are large or thin. Know your body type. Own it and sell it.

No "purple" (overdone) monologues, unless you do them REALLY well. If you don't know if a piece is purple, ask a director or casting director. If a monologue is in a monologue book or on a website, chances are it is purple. The best way to find a good monologue is to read plays, not monologue books.

Always say your name and audition number before and after your monologue unless the auditors have specifically requested a different protocol.

Always say hello (or some other appropriate greeting such as "Hi, my name is Marlon Brando, and I'm number 752).

Always say a quick thank you when you finish ("Thespis, number one. Thanks.")

Remember you are on stage (and therefore auditioning) from the moment the auditors can see you until they no longer can. Be friendly and smile when not in character. Send them the message that you are a friendly, hard-working actor—someone who will be pleasant and easy to work with. Whether working at the RSC or McDonalds, no one likes to work with someone who is temperamental, needy or arrogant. Leave your diva shoes at home.

Stage fright is often a result of perceiving yourself to be in a "fight or flight" situation. Adrenaline fills your system and stops all non-instinctual brain activity (such as remembering memorized lines). Oxygen dilutes adrenaline, so breathing is the primary weapon against stage fright. If you "go up," your response should be to take in a good, cleansing, deep breath. Then think about your intentions and what you want from the other character. The line you've forgotten or one

farther into the monologue should pop into your head. Of course, there is no cure for being ill-prepared or under-rehearsed.

Being cut off early by the auditors does not mean you didn't get the part. It simply means the auditors have seen enough to decide for or against calling you back. It really is true that auditors usually know all they need to know within the first 15 seconds of a monologue or song. Even though being cut off is unnerving the first few times it happens to you, try not to take it personally. Just graciously smile and say thank you and your name and number and exit confidently from the stage.

If you are auditioning for a specific role or show, it is good to find a monologue from a similar genre/character type. Auditioning with a monologue from the show or character for which you are auditioning is a risky proposition.

If you are auditioning for a season of shows or for a repertory company or school, you will want to have two prepared monologues, unless the company/school/theatre states otherwise. One of these monologues should be contemporary and the other classical (pre-20<sup>th</sup> century). Also, one of these should be dramatic (serious) and the other comic. (i. e., a Moliere comic monologue paired with a Shepard dramatic monologue.) Transition smoothly and clearly between these monologues. Often a quick adjustment of a costume can make for a nice transition—unbuttoning the top button of a shirt or blouse, making a scarf a sash, rolling up your sleeves, etc. Don't make a production of this change. Do it efficiently and confidently.

Rehearse your whole audition—from the moment you walk on the stage or into the room to the moment you walk off or out. Rehearse transitions thoroughly.

Be confident. If you don't believe you can, you can't. The auditors are on your side. They want you to do well—they are looking for talent. They want you to be *the one*, so they can stop their seemingly endless search.