



Auditions happen everywhere at every level, from middle school plays, to high school musicals, to college admissions. Audition styles range from prepared monologues, to cold readings, to group activities.

Students go through the same set of emotions, issues and concerns when auditioning:

- *Will I get the part?*
- *What if I don't even get cast?*
- *What if I forget the words?*
- *How do I stop being so nervous?*

**The Ultimate Audition Guide: Students** takes you through activities and exercises you can give students to prepare them for the task of auditioning for a show, program, or class.

Auditions don't have to be nerve wracking experiences!

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## Choosing material

Choosing the right audition piece is the by far the most important step for students. It's also very frustrating. There are so many pieces to choose from! Just because a student likes a piece doesn't mean it's suitable audition material. Just because a monologue is in an audition book or a collection of monologues doesn't mean it's a good choice.

How can you guide your students through this process?

One path you can take is to build your own library of great monologues. If you build your own library, you can include detailed information from the play, character questions students can ask for their prep work. If it's in your library, you know exactly what your students are choosing.

This process takes time, however. Who has time to read through plays for great monologues, write up descriptions, and provide questions? Here is an exercise that will help.

### Exercise

This is a great extra credit exercise for your senior students.

Have your seniors read plays for monologues given a set of criteria (see below for suggestions).

- Identify the monologue.
- Write a brief description of the play identifying any specific information for the character in the monologue.
- Come up with five character questions an actor should ask about the monologue.

Not only can this act as an analysis exercise for students, you'll end up with a collection of monologues for future students to use.

### What should I look for?

Students are going to ask this question. A big pile of monologues can be overwhelming. Suggest the following to students:

#### Choose pieces with a journey

By a "journey" I mean that the character is in one emotional state at the beginning of the piece, and through the piece they transform to another emotional state. Something happens to the character.

Don't confuse emotional journey with intensity. Don't pick pieces that are all yelling, or all crying, or all anything. They are boring because they don't change. If you want to show that you can cry, for example, then start happy and transform to sad throughout the monologue. Or start sad and transform to a state of understanding.

Whatever the transformation, make sure it's character-driven. Don't apply an emotional journey "just because" even though it doesn't fit the piece.

Finally, if you want to raise your voice in a monologue, you get one shot. You can yell **one sentence**. Any more than that is self-indulgent. Yelling feels great for an actor, it's very cathartic. But nobody wants to hear it for a whole monologue.

### Choose Short

If you're to prepare a two minute monologue, don't bring in a five minute monologue. More is not better. It's better to wow the director in one minute than to try and sustain a director's attention for five minutes. Remember the old showbiz adage: *Leave 'em wanting more.*

### Answer these questions

The top three questions every students should ask when choosing a monologue are:

1. *How does the material fit the play?*

If you're audition for a specific role or a play with a specific style, your audition piece should reflect that style. You want the director to **see** you in the play.

2. *How does the material showcase my abilities?*

*Choose a piece that lets you shine. You want to put your best foot forward in an audition and the first step is the piece you choose.*

3. *Why is the piece interesting?*

*Never choose a piece you find boring. If you find it boring, so will those listening. Never choose a piece because you think you should. Choose it because it fits the play and it showcases your abilities.*

I've put all this information into a handout form at the end of the guide.

### Exercise

Model and practice the act of choosing a monologue with your students. Go through the process with them so that when it comes time for them to choose a monologue they have some tools at their disposal.

Discuss with students the criteria of a good audition monologue. Go through the *Choosing an Audition Monologue Handout*.

Divide students into groups. Give each group a couple of monologues. You can choose your own or use the ones provided. If you choose your own, make sure to include monologues that are not suitable audition choices. One of the monologues I've provided is a good audition monologue and one is not.

Have the students read through the monologues aloud. Once each group has done so, give them the *Monologue Assessment Handout*. There are five questions on the handout:

1. What is the subject of this monologue?
2. How does the character change throughout the monologue?
3. What makes the monologue interesting?
4. How would this monologue showcase an actor?
5. Is this piece a good audition monologue? Why or why not?

Students discuss their answers and arrive at a conclusion for each of the monologues. They present their findings to the class. Discuss any discrepancies in their findings. Disagreements are fine so long as groups back up their reasoning.

## Preparing Material

After students choose their monologues, the next step is to prepare. More often than not, students think that preparing a means learning the lines and throwing in a few moves. When students do this in an audition, it shows. The character is one-dimensional and the movement looks out of place. You want to see three-dimensional characters. You want to see characters brought to life both physically and vocally.

Preparing a monologue centres squarely on the character. Students have to know:

- **Who:** Who is the character in the monologue? Who is the character in the monologue talking to?
- **What:** What does the character want?
- **When:** When does the monologue take place?
- **Where:** Where is the speaker? Where is the listener?
- **Why:** Why is the character speaking? Why now?

The answers to all of these questions are put together in a *Character Profile*. I've included a blank profile below. The What, When, Where and Why can be answered in one sentence. The Who needs more details such as Name, Age, Job, Family make up, and Background. The more a student knows about their character (whether these details are found in the script proper or are created by the student) the more they can bring the character to life.

Once students have completed the *Character Profile* students complete the *Physical Profile* and the *Vocal Profile*. These solidify how the character stands, gestures and moves, and how the character speaks. These will take the students' work to another level.

## Exercise

Once students have chosen the monologue, hand out the three profiles (character, physical, and vocal) to students. Have them complete the profiles for their piece.

Afterward have students write a reflection in which, based on all the work they've done on the character, students reflect on how they'll will perform the monologue. What blocking will include? How will they incorporate variety into the piece? How will they bring the character to life in the piece?

## Exercise

As students work on their monologues, have them perform their pieces for each other in pairs. Coach the observers to look for a fully-developed character who has a specific physicality and voice. The observers should be able to identify physical and vocal traits that are unique to the character and not to the actor.

## On the day

The audition itself is proof of how well students prepared. That's not entirely true, however. Even a well-prepared actor can fall apart on the day of the audition. Why? Auditions are unnatural. In order to succeed you have to perform well. Not everyone performs well under pressure. Nerves can get the best of everyone.

## What can students do on the day?

- Learn to control your nerves. Have an arsenal of breathing exercises to focus on while you're waiting to go on.
- Don't compare yourself to others. There's only one audition you can control and that's yours. Don't let the work of others affect yours. Block out everyone else by putting on headphones. Or sit outside until it's your turn.
- Learn a couple of meditation mantras. Don't knock it till you try it. If you want something to focus on, a mantra will do the trick. The purpose of a mantra is to focus on a series of sounds as you breathe in and out - nothing else. They're a great way to keep you focused, calm and under control.

I've included a *Pre-Audition Exercise Handout* in this guide.

## Dealing with the aftermath

Every audition is going to have aftermath. Students take the audition process personally. Not only should *you* prepare for student aftermath, you should also prepare the students themselves.

Go through the scenarios with your students beforehand. You'll never completely avoid post-casting drama but you can give students tools to help reduce it.

## Exercise

Ask students to reflect on the following scenarios. This can be an oral discussion or a written reflection.

- I got the part I want.
- I got the part I want... but my friend didn't.
- I didn't get cast at all.
- I got a part but it isn't the part I want.

Ask students: *How do you feel about each scenario? Can you control any of these scenarios? Can you control your reaction to these scenarios?*

They can't control whether they get cast or not. They can only do their best. They can't control whether their friend gets casted or not. But they can control their reaction to the casting.

Remind students that you'll be watching their reactions. If a student doesn't get the part they wanted, yet they shake it off and take on the role you've given them, you'll remember that in the future. If a student pouts, drops out of the play completely, or badmouths the process, you'll also remember that in the future.

Try roleplaying the aftermath. Divide students into groups and have them create short scenes where they play out each scenario. Have fun with it. Let them go to extremes with their joy and then their disappointment. Note how silly the overreaction looks.

## Exercise

If you're doing a class project, have students write a reflection after you've cast the show, and outline what they're going to do next. What action will they take? Move students away from the "drama" of the moment and into action. *I'm going to do my best even though I'm nervous. I'm going to prove I deserved a bigger part. I'm going to work on my skills so that I can do better next time.*

I hope this guide and the subsequent handouts give your students the tools they need to put together an ultimate audition piece. Auditions shouldn't be a chore, they should be fun! Auditions offer an opportunity for students to experience both success and failure on a small scale. These are valuable lessons.

It's not just what they do to prepare for the audition or how they handle the audition day, it's how they handle the outcome. That single act will give your students a real world skill that will serve them for many years to come.

# Choosing An Audition Monologue

## What should I look for?

**Choose pieces with a journey.** What is the emotional journey of the character in the monologue? How do they change? Choose monologues where the character changes. Avoid pieces that are all YELLING or all crying. Yelling isn't interesting for an audience, watching a character change is.

**Choose Short.** If you're to prepare a two minute monologue, don't bring in a five minute monologue. More is not better. It's better to wow the director in one minute than to try and sustain a director's attention for five minutes. Remember the old showbiz adage: *Leave 'em wanting more.*

## The top three questions to ask when choosing a monologue

1. *How does the material fit the play?*

If you're audition for a specific role or a play with a specific style, your audition piece should reflect that style. You want the director to **see** you in the play.

2. *How does the material showcase my abilities?*

Choose a piece that lets you shine. You want to put your best foot forward in an audition and the first step is the piece you choose.

3. *Why is the piece interesting?*

Never choose a piece you find boring. If you find it boring, so will those listening. Never choose a piece because you think you should. Choose it because it fits the play and it showcases your abilities.





# Monologues

Read these audition monologues. Answer the questions on the Monologue Assessment Handout.

## Eliza Doolittle, *Pygmalion*, George Bernard Shaw

**ELIZA:** Wring away. What do I care? I knew you'd strike me some day. (*she realizes he can't*) Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You can't take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! That's done you, Henry Higgins, it has. Now I don't care that (*snapping her fingers*) for your bullying and your big talk. I'll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself.

## Nina, *The Seagull*, Anton Chekhov

**NINA:** Men and lions, eagles and partridges, antlered deer, geese, spiders, the silent fishes dwelling in the water, star-fish and tiny creatures invisible to the eye--these and every form of life, ay, every form of life, have ended their melancholy round and become extinct. . . . Thousands of centuries have passed since this earth bore any living being on its bosom. All in vain does yon pale moon light her lamp. No longer do the cranes wake and cry in the meadows; the hum of the cockchafers is silent in the linden groves. All is cold, cold, cold. Empty, empty, empty. Terrible, terrible, terrible. [*A pause*] The bodies of living beings have vanished into dust; the Eternal Matter has converted them into stones, into water, into clouds; and all their spirits are merged in one. I am that spirit, the universal spirit of the world. In me is the spirit of Alexander the Great, of Caesar, of Shakespeare, of Napoleon, and the meanest of the leeches. In me the consciousness of men is merged with the instinct of animals; I remember everything, everything, everything, and in myself relive each individual life. I am alone. Once in a hundred years I open my lips to speak, and my voice echoes sadly in this emptiness and no one hears. . . . You too, pale fires, you hear me not. . . . [*A pause*] Like a captive flung into a deep empty well, I know not where I am nor what awaits me. One thing only is revealed to me, that in the cruel and stubborn struggle with the Devil, the principle of material forces, it is fated that I shall be victorious; and thereafter, spirit and matter are to merge together in exquisite harmony and the reign of Universal Will is to begin. But that cannot be till, little by little, after a long, long series of centuries, the moon, the shining dog-star and the earth are turned to dust. . . . Till then there shall be horror and desolation. . . . Behold, my mighty antagonist, the Devil, approaches. I see his awful, blood-red eyes . . .

# Character Profile

*On a separate piece of paper complete the following for your character*

## Who

Who is your character? Record the information given about your character in the script. Make sure you know the following:

- Name, Age, Job
- What's their family make up (who's in their family)
- What's their background (Are they rich, poor? Did they come from struggle? Did they have a happy childhood? What's their favourite memory? What's their least favourite memory?)
- Who is the character in the monologue talking to?

## What

What does your character want? What makes this want important?

## When

When does the monologue take place? Is there anything significant about the time period?

## When

Where does the monologue take place? Is there anything significant about the location?

## Why

Why is the character speaking? Why now?

# Physical Profile

*Based on the character profile, write a description of your character's physicality. Use the following questions as a guide.*

- *How do you stand?* Everyone stands differently. Choose one of the following stances or pick your own and describe why your character stands this way.
  - Ramrod straight legs - a military stance.
  - All the weight on one side of the body - a lopsided stance.
  - Constantly moving - a distracted stance.
  - One of the five main positions of ballet - a dancer stance.
  - The body is tight together - a narrow stance.
  - The body is wide apart - wide arms, wide legs - a wide stance.
  
- *How do you move?* Choose one of the following movement patterns for your character and describe why your character has this specific movement pattern. If you don't think your character moves in any of these ways, come up with your own.
  - Slow and heavy
  - Fast and direct
  - Fast and scattered
  - Slow and wandering
  
- *How do you gesture?* Everyone has a unique specific gesture. Choose one of the following (or pick your own) and describe why your character does this gesture.  
Does your character:
  - Wring their hands?
  - Wipe their hands on their jeans?
  - Fix their hair?
  - Shove their hands in their pockets?
  - Shrug their shoulders?
  - Point?
  - Ball their hands into fists?
  - Wrap their arms around their body?

After you define the Physical Profile for your character, write about why you made these decisions. Why does your character stand, move and gesture in this way? How does creating a Physical Profile help you prepare your monologue?

## Vocal Profile

Based on the Character Profile and the Physical Profile define a Vocal Profile for your character. How do they speak? Circle the answers that best fit your character.

### MY CHARACTER SPEAKS:

<b>Speed</b>	Slow	Medium	Fast
<b>Tone</b>	Melodic	Neutral	Shrill
<b>Volume</b>	Soft	Medium	Loud
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Small	Medium	Large
<b>Rhythm</b>	Slow	Metered	Quick
<b>Rhythm 2</b>	Tight	Neutral	Loose
<b>Pitch</b>	Low	Neutral	High
<b>Strength</b>	Weak	Neutral	Strong
<b>Primary Punctuation</b>	Ellipses	Period	Exclamation point
<b>Sentence Length</b>	Clipped	Measured	Run on

After you've define the Vocal Profile for your character, write a paragraph on why your character talks this way. What defines their speed? Their tone? Their vocabulary? How does defining the character profile help you prepare your monologue?

## Pre-Audition Exercises

*While you're waiting to perform your audition, try these exercises.*

- Sit quietly and close your eyes. **Breathe in slowly** on a two count and out for a two count. Breathe in slowly on a four count and out for a four count. Breathe in slowly for a six count and out for a six count. Breathe in slowly for an eight count and out for an eight count. For each of these rounds, focus only on the in and out of your breath. Keep your eyes closed and block out any outside noise. Count the breath **slowly** in your head, and above all else, keep your count consistent. Don't rush. If eight beats is too long, dial it back down to six or four. The aim is not to see how long you can hold your breath, but to maintain control of your inhale and exhale.
- Say your **first line over and over** in your head. The first line is always the hardest to get out and the easiest to forget. So repeat that first line so that it becomes part of you.
- **Use a mantra.** A mantra is simply something you repeat over and over, slowly, with your eyes closed and with calm breathing. A mantra could be *I am calm*, or *I am prepared*. You could even say *Breathe In, Breathe out*. You could repeat your first line as a mantra. A simple mantra that works with the breath are the words "So" and "Hum." Say the word "So" on an inhale and the word "Hum" on the exhale. Really draw out the words to match a slow even breath.
- **Tighten and release.** Start with your toes. Tighten the toes on your right foot, hold for a count of four and then release. Tighten the toes on your left foot, hold for a count of four and then release. Slowly move up your body, the foot, the leg, the butt, the stomach, the fingers, the arms the shoulders, the face. Do each side separately. Always hold for a count of four before releasing. Focus only on taking action with each separate body part and don't get distracted by anything going on around you.
- **Fake it till you make it.** Sometimes that's what you have to do with an audition. When you are afraid, don't say anything. Don't let on how scared you are. Don't say you're nervous. Don't use nerves as an excuse. Smile, go on stage, and do your best. **Never give anyone a reason to second guess your work.** It's not cute and it's not going to give you a better chance at a part. What's going to give you the best chance, is your best work.