



Bring it

Good preparation is crucial to a successful audition

TWO MINUTES. On a good day, it can pass in a heartbeat. On a bad day—the day you come down with strep throat, or split your jazz pants while warming up, or space on your monologue, or face an auditor who never looks up from her smartphone (all real-life reports from the college tryout trenches)—it can feel like an eternity.

But these are *your* two minutes, or ten, or however many moments in the spotlight you've been granted by the school of your dreams. Only you can make them count.

The first thing you should know about auditions is that everyone involved in the process—except maybe your competition—sincerely wants

Performing a monologue for a panel of about fifty college representatives at the 2013 Thespian Festival.

you to do your best. So do we. Over the years we've consulted a long list of directors, actors, college representatives, and teachers to find out how students might successfully present themselves at the college audition. Here's a Cliffs Notes version of what they had to say.

Your material

Most of the experts agree that finding the right monologue is crucial. That means:

- A piece that fits you. No sixteen-year-old King Lear, please.
- An unusual piece. If it's in a monologue book, it's probably done to death. DIY monologues, however—anything written by yourself or a friend—are even worse.
- A multidimensional, dramatically active piece. You should be working toward a goal with respect to the other character in the scene; silence on his or her part does not equal absence. If your character is telling

a story, why must that story be told right now? Why doesn't anyone interrupt you? How do your listeners react? How does that reaction affect you?

- A piece you know well. Don't rely on adrenaline to get you through.
- A piece that reflects your good taste and artistic sensibility. Students who barrage auditors with profanities are indeed remembered, but not fondly.
- A piece, or pieces, that can be performed safely within the pre-

Stop!

Is your college audition piece on the do-not-fly list?

IT SEEMS IMPOSSIBLE, we know: finding great monologues and song selections that a) fit the various and sometimes conflicting requirements for all your college auditions, b) fit *you*, c) reveal your unique gifts and skills to best advantage, and d) aren't the same tired pieces everyone else is using.

How do you even know that? The line between "Please, not this again!" and "How refreshing!" shifts constantly: for a while, some *Les Misérables* selections were safe (*not* "I Dreamed a Dream"—Susan Boyle ruined that one for everybody), but last year's hit film bumped the entire score back into over-popularity. For now, best *éviter*. And even if you dig deep into the script and score libraries to find something truly special, as you should, chances are that with thousands of college hopefuls headed to the same proverbial prom, some kids are going to show up wearing the same dress. That's okay.

"Auditionees need to know that they should be picking pieces that show off something about themselves," says Peter Cocuzza, a professor in the Department of Theater and Dance at Southern Illinois University in Edwardsville. "I don't care if I hear the same piece more than once as long as it is being done well and for a reason."

Still, there are some selections that, trust us, you really don't want to perform at your college audition.

"At a time when I want to learn more about an actor, as we contemplate spending four years together," says Richard Hess, chair of drama at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, "something inside me dies a little" when that actor pulls out one of the top offenders—and even worse, does nothing to redeem it.

Here are a few particular audition pieces that Hess and other college reps told *Dramatics* they hope never to hear again.

Monologues:

Sophie from *The Star Spangled Girl*

Phil from *Boys' Life*

The "tuna fish" bit from *Laughing Wild*

Juniper kissing the grocery-store bag boy in *Tomorrow's Wish*

The engagement monologue from *An Ideal Husband*

Monologues about auditioning

Monologues about eating disorders or other psychoses

Songs:

"Defying Gravity" from *Wicked*

"Astonishing" from *Little Women*

"One Song, Glory" from *Rent*

Anything from *Thoroughly Modern Millie*

"I Believe" from *The Book of Mormon*

Iconic songs "owned" by a legendary singer such as Barbara Streisand or Judy Garland

Anything Pippin sings

For more ideas on what to avoid, see the lists of overdone monologues on such websites MyCollegeAudition.com or the College Audition Blog, <http://auditioningforcollege.wordpress.com>. You might also try searching for your chosen monologue or song on YouTube; if you turn up tons of clips of people your age doing it, what does that tell you? Be wary, too, of hot Broadway material that's newly published—we predict a lot of young men this year will be effusing "The Smell of Rebellion" from *Matilda*—or anything ever featured on *Glee*.

Many auditioning schools even post their own tips for prospective students; this one from Webster University is particularly helpful: <http://www.webster.edu/fine-arts/midwest-theatre-auditions/audition-dos-and-donts.html>. By all means, if a school you hope to attend provides such specific advice, *follow it!*

—Julie York Coppens

scribed time limit. Assume the clock will be running as you introduce yourself and make your transition from one piece to another.

- A piece that doesn't require a dialect (unless you do it brilliantly), props, or gimmicky staging.
- A piece that reveals something about you, and that truly excites you.

Your preparation

No actor in his right mind would wait until opening night to start working on a role. So, college reps ask, why do so many student actors pick up monologues at the last minute and expect the inspiration of the moment to save them? Here's a better strategy:

- Give yourself at least two months to get ready for this very important (though very brief) performance. Spend one month reading scripts, screenplays, poetry, fiction, and other sources for audition material. Find or adapt the perfect piece or pieces. Spend the other month rehearsing, every day, alone and with a scene partner, preferably under the guidance of a trusted director.
- Know the play and the character as well as if you were performing the role in a full production. Do the same research. Fully understand why you say every word you say.
- If you've used the piece in the past, don't assume you know it. Start from scratch, find something new in it, make it fresh.
- Give yourself sufficient rehearsal time to play around. Improvise, experiment with different tactics, go to

extremes. Avoid the recitation trap.

- Don't forget to practice your introduction. Keep it short and upbeat. A sincere greeting, your name, the play from which your piece is taken, and the author is sufficient information. If you need to place a chair or set the stage in some other way, do so before your introduction. It will calm you down.

- Begin and end strongly. Too many actors let their pieces trail off. There should be no doubt as to when your character is finished speaking.

- Practice your entire presentation (moving the chair, introducing yourself, piece number one, piece number two, your dignified "Thank you" and exit) in front of as many different people as possible. After your dad's bowling team, a panel of friendly college reps should be a piece of cake.

The night before

Assuming you've followed the experts' advice so far, you can focus your energy now on trying to relax, psyching yourself up, and figuring out what to wear. Some guidelines:

- If you're traveling, pack carefully, and bring back-up *everything*. A surprising number of college audition horror stories have to do with shoes: mom packed my little sister's jazz sneakers by mistake, no place near the hotel to buy super glue for a split sole, etc.
- Dress as comfortably as you can while maintaining a polished, professional appearance. Jeans, sandals,

sneakers, and miniskirts are taboo. Avoid noisy footwear and jewelry.

- Make sure your printed materials (résumé, application) are neat and error-free.
- Take care of your voice.
- Get a good night's sleep.

Audition day

This should be the easy part. Some tips:

- Eat lightly before the audition.
- Double-check the location—too many students miss their auditions completely due to last-minute room/hotel changes or outdated online information—and arrive early enough to scope out the audition space, if possible. You'll also want to find a quiet place to warm up your voice and body.

- Know where you will focus your eyes during your presentation. Most experts suggest visualizing your partner at some point just above the heads of the auditors.

- Be sensitive to the acoustics of the space. Use sufficient breath to fill the room with your voice.
- Don't apologize or make excuses. If you blank out, take a breath, remember your character's objective, find a line, and continue. You should never ask to start over.

- Be prepared to answer auditors' questions when your presentation is over.

- Above all, enjoy yourself. Remember why you love performing, and share that love with your audience. They will thank you for it. ▼