



SOUTHEASTERN THEATRE CONFERENCE

AUDITION GUIDELINES AND SUGGESTIONS

This material is endorsed and distributed by the Professional Division and Audition Committee of the Southeastern Theatre Conference

Originally drafted by George Black and Joe Conger; revised in 1999 by members of the SETC Professional Division and Audition Committee

The effective professional audition consists of the best presentation of a particular product for a particular market. For the actor, this translates into awareness of one's own qualities, capabilities, and potentialities in a very real and tough-minded sense, and the ability to project oneself into the place of the casting director.

WHAT ARE THE SETC AUDITIONS?

Each spring over eight hundred student and professional actors, all of approximately the same age range and level of training, present themselves in 60 – 90 second auditions for the casting representatives of some 100 to 110 theatre companies (these numbers are approximately halved for the Fall SETC auditions). The companies cover a very wide range: outdoor dramas (i.e. Tecumseh!, Lost Colony, Unto These Hills, Lincoln Amphitheatre), theme parks (i.e. Hersheypark, Disney, Universal Studios, Dollywood, Busch Gardens), touring companies (i.e. Troika, Blue Man Group, Kaiser Permanente), dinner theatres (i.e. Circa ,21, Beef and Boards), summer musical theatres (i.e. Mac-Haydn, Shenandoah Musical Theatre), and resident classical repertory (i.e. New Harmony Theatre, Georgia Shakespeare Festival, Actor's Theatre-Louisville, Flat Rock Playhouse). Some of these companies operate under an Actor's Equity contract. Some are looking for apprentices, interns, or junior company members. In other cases, they will also be looking for leads and supporting leads. The casting directors see as many as three hundred actors a day in the open auditions and from ten to fifty in call-backs. The actor who is going to present an effective audition in the open call must be aware that the dynamics of the situation make it very unlikely that a low key or eccentric audition is going to meet with much success. Any deficiency or unusable peculiarity in an actor in the open call will almost always prompt disqualification from call-backs for most companies.

In general, the companies are looking for: 1.) The actor's performance personality. And 2.) The actor's technical proficiency.

SETC MATERIAL SELECTION SUGGESTIONS

- 1.) The play from which the selection is made should be modern and in prose.
- 2.) Ideally, monologues should have a dramatic shape (a beginning, a middle, and an end) which can be exploited in the time allotted. Try to display an emotional journey – staying at one "level" through a whole piece exhibits a narrowness in range and in comedic material, could turn into a stand-up routine.
- 3.) As you prepare audition material, you are well advised to keep it at around forty seconds. Material has a tendency to expand as you play it. Forty to forty-five seconds is also ample time to achieve the goals of #2 above.
- 4.) The material should have a rhythm and a vivacity that you feel capable of defining clearly.
- 5.) The material should not challenge your capabilities. Rather, the best audition material should be neatly within the middle of your acting range.
- 6.) The character should lend itself to being performed in standard stage speech. Do not exhibit any sort of accent or dialect.
- 7.) The character should require no eccentric characterization either physically or vocally. Do not use material that calls attention by the use of foul language, sexually explicit shock value or graphic scatological humor. Although it is not censored, this sort of material tends to alienate auditionors and should be carefully weighed by the auditionee.

You are trying to tell the auditionors who you are as a performer, that you are capable of speaking and moving fluently and with authority, and have no distracting or inhibiting problems that might limit your range and usefulness. It is perhaps instructive to note that a major source of effective audition material has come from the off-Broadway play of the last ten to twenty years; while this material is by-and-large by American playwrights, potentially good material can also be found in the work of contemporary European authors. Another large source is the lesser-known plays of major playwrights. If a piece is unusually obscure, there is a reason for this: it's bad writing. Use writing that flatters you. You need to read the play and know the context that your speech comes from.

PRESENTING THE SETC AUDITION

Choose your outfit as a personal statement, but avoid overly bright colors (that call attention to themselves), noisy jewelry, fancy hair, excessive make-up and busy patterns on clothes – things that will distract attention away from your performance. Avoid black – you will be against a black curtain. Feet attract attention, therefore women should not wear heavy, clunky shoes or excessively high heels; character shoes are recommended for both men and women. The best impression to create is that of a working professional, with the accent on the "professional." It is impossible to be over-rehearsed for an audition piece. Your audition begins the moment the focus leaves the previous auditionee, and ends only

after you are completely out of the line of sight of the auditioners. You should appear eager, composed, and businesslike. The sequence of the audition should be in clearly defined steps, each marked by an appropriate transition:

- 1.) If you are using a chair and it needs to be repositioned after the previous auditionee, or if you yourself need to get to another part of the stage, go smartly to the position on the stage where you will audition.
- 2.) Take a breath, “center” yourself, take in the room, and announce your name and number in a clear voice (i.e. “Hi, I’m Pat Smith, number three-twenty-one!”) This must be clearly understood by everyone concerned. The time limitation begins with the first syllable of this introduction.
- 3.) Transition. Do not waste time here, but don’t overlook this step. No matter how simple this transition is for your particular purposes, it should contain a breath and a change of focus. Make sure your preparation illustrates and distinguishes between you and the character.
- 4.) Begin the monologue. Exhibit a motive for beginning the action – your speech begins as a reaction to something or somebody. You are in a scene, a particular environment – make it specific. Keep the scene front. Appropriate movement through the space is essential, but over-elaborate blocking is not a good idea. Beware of props and miming them. If a particular prop is indispensable to the scene, it should be simple and one that you might conceivably be carrying as a matter of course as the character. Don’t do things that will pull attention away from you or restrict your character’s emotional world.
- 5.) End the scene with a beat; put a finish on the scene.
- 6.) Transition. Take a breath and shift your focus, this time back to the auditorium.
- 7.) Announce your name and number again in a businesslike fashion (i.e. “Thank you. I’m Pat Smith, number three-twenty-one!”)
- 8.) Leave the stage looking like you have just nailed the audition. If you are called for overtime, do not panic or be flustered. Don’t exhibit attitude: simply do #'s 6 & 7 above and leave the stage confidently. But prepare yourself so that you have a good, clean professional package that fits within the confines of the SETC audition ground rules.

SINGERS

SETC guidelines permit an acting (only) audition of one minute, a singing (only) audition of one minute, or an acting-singing combined audition of one and one-half minutes (used at the performer’s discretion). Be advised that you put yourself at risk if you attempt to sing and act when one or the other skill is below par. Ninety seconds can be tortuous and unflattering when someone is straining to perform material for which they are unsuited or not quite competent. If you cannot sing at a level of minimum professional competence, do not try. Do not, by word, glance or gesture, berate or belittle the accompanist. Be prepared with clearly marked sheet music in the key you intend to sing it. All sung material must be piano accompanied; no tape accompaniment is permitted in the open call. The song should show the range of your voice without punishing it. And don’t avoid acting the lyrics – treat them as you would a monologue: therefore movement, texture of the voice, etc. reveals an emotional world and journey. Finally, be sure to take a transition between each element of singing, acting and your “thank you.” *Equity Auditionees have 90 seconds.

A NOTE ON CALLBACKS

Obviously, requirements for callbacks will vary greatly between theatres. Even if you’re asked to repeat the audition you presented in the open call, the context will be vastly different. Following are some suggestions that you may find helpful to any SETC callback:

- Always try and schedule your callbacks with comfortable transit time between conference centers, hotels, and hotel floors in mind. You should not appear harried or unfocused when you enter the callback.
- When the auditioners(s) call for you, have your picture and resume out and ready to hand to them. Introduce yourself confidently and appear ready to work.
- Your ambition and curiosity should motivate you to find out as much as you can about the theatre and/or their season before auditioning. Asking intelligent questions and talking to the casting reps shows you are savvy to the business and interested in them. Remember, you are “auditioning” them as well.
- No matter your “specialty” (acting, singing, dancing or a combination of these), you should have a complete portfolio of material ready to present. This includes a minimum of two contemporary dramatic and comedic monologues each, two classic (usually Shakespeare or verse) dramatic and comedic monologues each and at least six songs (three ballads and three up-tempo ranging from Broadway to standards).
- Take your time. It’s your time – for them to know about you and for you to know about them. Take some time to “claim your space” in the smaller hotel rooms. However, if you’re indulgent, watching the clock, your mind is on the next audition or meeting friends in the lounge, the auditioners will read this immediately and you shouldn’t expect to get an offer from them. Focus completely on the job at hand.
- Do not allow yourself to be victimized. If a company harasses you or tries to make you do something you don’t want to, it could be a very difficult decision to make, but stand up for yourself. Whatever your decision, remember that how auditioners treat you and see you is a strong indication of what lies ahead at their theatre. Please feel confident that you may report an unprofessional incident to SETC central office, the auditions committee or professional division representatives.

Finally, use common sense and consideration, be over-prepared, *love* what you’re doing **and break a leg!**