



Acting should be effortless, as easy as breathing and being alive, and the key to getting there is adequate preparation. “Cold Reading” is a misnomer. In fact, cold reading or auditioning for a role requires thoughtful planning and concentrated practice so that when you read for a role you’re not “winging it” and hoping you pull it off, you’re going in fully rehearsed. You wouldn’t appear in a play or movie without rehearsing. Preparing for an audition is a similar process. As a general rule, among those actors who are being seriously considered for a role, the actor who gives the most accomplished, most prepared reading has the best chance of booking the job.

You can and should study with qualified coaches, read insightful books on acting, and pay close attention to skilled actors’ performances, but the only really effective way to learn the craft and develop your chops is by getting “up on your feet” and doing it - on stage, in front of a camera, in a workshop or a class, wherever an opportunity presents itself, as often and consistently as possible.

I believe there are no “right” or “wrong” methods to learn and develop your acting skills. Because every actor is a unique individual, whatever works for you, whatever makes sense to you, whatever you instinctively respond to is probably the “right” approach for you, at least for a while. There are many amazing, inspiring acting coaches (and a few who sell nonsense) but only *you* can decide what methods or new ideas makes sense and are useful for you. Bottom line - trust your instincts and your own common sense.

Every audition is important because it's an opportunity to show them your talent. They might have already decided when you walked in the room that you’re wrong for the role but if you give a powerful, polished reading they'll remember you. Not to mention that going in fully prepared to give an appropriate, creative performance can only make you feel that much more confident. You’ll walk in the room and feel like an actor who belongs there.

All of the following preparation should be done before you go to the audition.

Print the script (which may require re-typing it) on a heavier weight paper, called “cover stock,” available at Staples, Office Depot, etc. This will make it easier to hold the sides and the pages won’t flop over and make noise. Also, don’t staple together the pages of the script - it’s quicker and easier to slide one page behind the other rather than turn stapled pages up and over. If you do re-type the script, **bold** your lines, which will make it easier for you to see them quickly, but...more importantly...

### **MEMORIZE YOUR LINES**

not necessarily right away. but as you work on the scene so that, by the time you audition, you’re as close to off-book as possible (see *MEMORIZATION HINT* below).

It’s fine to hold the script during the audition, not only because you might forget a line, but it also lets the auditors know that you’re in still in process and flexible, ready and willing to take direction. Hold the script comfortably at about chest level so that, if you do need to look for a

line, it will only require a quick, efficient glance down. Pretend the pages you're holding is a prop that your character might actually be holding in the scene so that, if you must look down for a line, you'll stay in character. For example, if it's a restaurant scene it's your menu, if you're a doctor in a hospital it's a medical chart. The whole idea is to treat the script as if it's perfectly okay for you to be holding it rather than dealing with it as a distracting nuisance.

To begin with, read the sides to learn as much information as possible and make sure you understand all of it. If there's anything in the text that you don't understand or are ambivalent about (especially the meaning of the words and their correct pronunciation) *look it up*. Never say even a word in an audition if you don't completely own it. Whenever possible, read the entire script if it's available, if for no other reason, because there will almost certainly be information in the script about your character or something relevant to the scene you're doing that might influence your reading. The more informed you are the better.

Say your lines **out loud** several times until they flow comfortably. Take note of any words, phrases, lines, or references in the text that are unfamiliar, awkward, or difficult to say and work those words, repeating them over and over, until you can say them easily.

Acting is all about making and playing choices. The more you work on the material, the more choices will come to mind, but make sure your choices are relevant and make sense, both for the character and the script. Don't make irrelevant, "crazy" choices because you want to be "different" or "stand out" from the other actors. You'll probably just end up looking foolish. Be creative, don't be clever. Remember: your number one job as an actor is to serve the script.

There are five, basic choices that must always be considered:

### **1. Who is your character and how will you play that character?**

*Start with your body:* what is your character's physicality? What does it *feel* like to be that character? How does your character use their body when they walk, sit, stand? What part of your character's body is most prominent and why? Walk around the block in character. Develop a physicality that will eventually feel natural for you if it doesn't already. Ask yourself how are you and your character different and how are you alike. Which of your character's characteristics aren't normal, or even comfortable, for you? And what is your character's overall emotional state? What is your character's general attitude? What is your character's energy? How does your character breathe?

### **2. How does your character *feel* about the other character or characters in the scene?**

What is your character's attitude and feelings about the other character you're talking to as the scene begins? How do your character's feelings about the other character change as the scene progresses and *why* do they change? Playing a clear relationship to the other character makes it easier to stay fully, consistently present in the scene. It's also especially important in an audition because you probably won't be reading with another actor but with a casting person who may give you very little to play against. This choice will also be a critical element of your "moment-before" (see below).

*Remember: Saying the lines is only half the performance; the other half - every bit as important - are your honest, believable, in-the-moment reactions to what the other character says to you.*

**3. What is the environment of the scene?** Indoors, outdoors, day, night, hot, cold, your home, their home, a comfortable or hostile environment, a private space or a public space, etc.? How does the environment affect your performance? And what do you see when you look out, at the fourth wall? Make a choice that will allow you to stay open and accessible to the camera and the auditors without breaking your concentration or the reality of the scene. Imagining the specific environment will make the scene more real and alive for you; it will influence the level at which you play the scene, and allow you to be more truthful and spontaneous. Usually the environment will be indicated in the script.

**4. What is the moment-before?** What happened before the scene began that has led to the events or actions of the scene? The moment before might be what happened in the prior five minutes or the past fifteen years but it will influence how you begin. Before you say your first line, use your body to become the character and instantly connect to your character's thoughts and feelings, including your feelings about the other character. It should only take a second or two but go there first and don't rush into the scene. The most common mistake actors make when auditioning is that they rush through the reading. Playing a strong, clear moment-before can make all the difference in your performance and it's most often the choice actors forget to play.

**5. What is your objective?** What does your character really want? Why is your character saying what they're saying? What is your purpose, your desire, your overwhelming need? What are you trying to achieve, or make happen, or stop from happening? And, whenever possible, connect your objective directly to the character you're speaking to.

After you've taken the time to decipher the script, make choices, find the beats and transitions, then it's the time to *rehearse*. Don't start rehearsing by doing it the way you think you should do it in audition. Play the script in pieces, phrase by phrase, line by line, beat by beat, and play them individually. Make strong choices and allow yourself the freedom to exaggerate your choices, your emotions, your physical and vocal choices - what might be referred to as going "over the top." Don't worry about over-acting as you rehearse - do it on purpose. Experiment... the key word here is to *play*.

Also, as you rehearse, don't practice the pace of the scene. Of course, timing is important but if you go for the pace when you begin rehearsing, you'll tend to skip past finding and exploring the individual beats, including pauses. To repeat what I said earlier, the most common mistake actors make when auditioning is that they rush, which usually indicates nerves, a lack of confidence, that you just want to get it over with and go home, or, even worse, that you're not listening and responding to what the other character is saying. Practice not rushing. More than likely, when you really feel you "own" the character, know your lines, and are fully engaged, you will settle naturally into the appropriate pacing of the piece and a believable, honest, moment-to-moment portrayal.

Of course it's terrific if you can rehearse with another actor if one is available but, if not, it also helps to rehearse with a significant other or friend, just to experience relating to the other character as a living, breathing person. They can also help by feeding you cues so you can practice the lines. It shouldn't be too difficult to recruit a willing volunteer. Most civilians think it's fun.

In the end, if you've taken the time and made the effort to prepare for the audition, you'll go there knowing that you'll more than likely give an acceptable reading - or better. When you do the reading just go with it - don't try to do it exactly as you rehearsed it or think about your choices, motivations, feelings, and don't judge what you're doing as you do it - just allow yourself to be in the moment and let what happens happen. After all, you'll have the confidence of knowing you did your homework. The key is to get out of your head and focus your concentration on the other character. Don't try to be "good" - just be honest - and enjoy the experience. After all, you're an actor and an audition is nothing more than an opportunity to ply your craft, even if it's only for an audience of one.

*MEMORIZATION HINT: After you've read the scene over several times, cover the first page of the sides with a blank piece of paper. Slide the paper down just enough to read your first cue, then write what you think your first line is on the blank paper. Then slide the paper down and compare what you wrote to your actual line. Continue this process, line by line, for the entire script, then repeat the process with new blank paper. By the third or fourth time of doing this you will probably be writing your lines just as they are written. It's the process of actually writing out the lines that helps your brain retain them and, although it may sound like this will take extra time, it's often faster than just repeating the lines, over and over, silently or out-loud.*

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