

Rene Haynes Casting CSA

10 BASIC STEPS FOR TAPING YOUR OWN AUDITION.

by Rene Haynes

#1 BE PREPARED

If you plan to audition often - via taped auditions - invest in a video camera – or a phone that records quality video. If you do not live where you can routinely be seen by casting professionals in person – you are going to need to send them a recorded audition. If you do not have access to your own camera – find a friend who has one and would be willing to help you. If you do have a camera be sure to always pack it along with you when you go on trips – as you never know when an audition opportunity may come along – and you’ll need that camera – because often when you are asked to send an audition – you may only have a day or two to get it back to the casting director – and it will not wait for you to return from your vacation.

Once you have been contacted and asked to put your audition on tape – you will have receive the “Sides”, which are the pages from the script that you are required to record, and a brief description of the scene and the character breakdown. Often this information should be enough for the purposes of making your tape – however, if you are confused or have further questions – ask for clarification before making your tape. Sometimes, you may have the benefit of reading the entire script – if this is the case – READ IT – it will greatly inform the decisions that you make on how you play the scene. If you cannot read the entire script – which is more often the case - just get as much information as you can and make your character choices based on what you do know. Do make choices!

#2 LEARN THE LINES

The audition tape that you make is going to be your three minutes - or however long it may be - of the undivided attention of the decision makers on whether or not you are going to proceed to the next stage of being considered for the role. If you are “off book” and have the lines memorized it will allow you to fully engage with the scene partner and give the casting director a better sense of what you can really bring to the role. If you are constantly referring back to the script in your hand – it is likely that we will not be able to see the character’s “thought process”. Film acting is all about what is going on in the EYES. If you are reading from the page – we will see more of the top of your head than your eyes. Let us see your EYES.

As an aside – Even when auditioning in person - unless it is a late stage callback and you have specifically been asked to be “off book” – it is always permissible to have the sides in hand during an audition – but you should become very familiar with the lines so that you need only refer back to the pages when necessary. Since most casting office auditions are recorded – never allow the pages to block your face from the camera.

#3 APPEARANCE

Please wear appropriate, non-distracting (no logos) neutral colored clothing that relate to the character – but DO NOT wear a “costume” unless you are specifically asked. You always want to just hint at or give a flavor of the character – not go with what you think is the full-on look for the role – as your interpretation may be way off the mark from how the director envisions it – and this will be distracting when they are watching your audition. You want them to be looking at YOU – not at how well you’ve put together the character’s wardrobe. What you are wearing should never be distracting from your performance – only subtly complimenting it.

Please try not to wear primarily white or black. An over abundance of either of these two colors in the frame will cause the video camera to over-compensate on the “white balance” and you risk that your face will be heavily shadowed.

Please make sure that your hair is not obscuring your eyes. Sometimes, if you have heavy fringe (bangs) on your forehead it could cause a shadow that prevents the viewer from fully seeing your EYES – try to find a way to compensate for this.

#4 BACKDROP and LIGHTING

If at all possible do not film against a WHITE WALL – this will cause issues with the “white balance” on your camera and throw the lighting off and cause your eyes to be in shadow. IF you are an actor who does a lot of “self tapes” for auditioning purposes – think about painting a wall in your home a shade of sky blue or grey and then, if you need to make an audition tape - you will simply have to remove any hanging art – and voila – you have an ideal backdrop! Another suggestion is to invest in a blue blanket or curtains that you can hang – temporarily – when you need to make a tape. Please note – if you ONLY have white walls – do not let this prevent you from making your tape – just make sure that you are well lit.

In a home environment - NATURAL LIGHT – that comes from a window – will always be your best bet. Find the best light source – wherever you are - and then choose your taping space accordingly! The best way to know if your backdrop and lighting work for you is to do a test run and then look at the tape and if you

can clearly see your eyes and there is nothing in the frame that is distracting from your eyes – then you have selected well.

#5 CAMERA PLACEMENT

It is almost always going to be advantageous to have your camera on a tri-pod and not hand held. Place the lens of the camera at your eye level. Adjust accordingly if you are standing or sitting. If you are doing a scene that involves changing levels (standing to sitting, etc...) consider where you will be spending most of the scene and place accordingly. Try not to make this kind of move on your tape if at all possible – unless the camera operator will be able to follow you smoothly.

#6 READER PLACEMENT

Either to the right or the left of the camera and standing as close to the camera as possible. This will allow you to look at the eyes of your reader when acting the scene with them – but you will not be in profile... The viewers of your audition will be able to focus on your EYES. If you are having your camera operator also read the lines with you – please have a stationary camera and have them stand to the side (as stated above) and not behind the camera. You do not (unless otherwise instructed) want to look into the lens of the camera – just engage with your reader. The only exception is when you are introducing your self in your SLATE – then it is OK to look at the camera.

#7 FRAMING

This is what the viewer of your audition will be watching on their monitor. There can actually be different frames for each segment or scene of your audition.

- a) SLATE – or your INTRODUCTION: Please always stand for the slate and try to place the camera so that you can get a shot that ranges from your knees to the top of your head - or a full “head to toes” shot if your space will allow it. Do the best you can with this – if the space is tight and the best you can do is a “hip to head” slate – that will have to do. In your slate please say your NAME, the name of the ROLE you are auditioning for, how TALL you are and WHERE you live.
- b) AUDITION – Unless specifically asked to do otherwise – please film your audition in a “Head to Upper-Torso” frame. This will allow for some slight physicality and movement – but will still keep your EYES and FACE the focus of your audition.

#8 QUIET FEET

Because auditioning can be a somewhat nerve inducing endeavor – many people have the habit of shifting from one foot to the other – without even being aware

they are doing this. Become aware – from watching playback of your auditions – if you are doing this and take steps to train yourself to have “Quiet Feet” for auditions.

Here’s why this is important: You must command the viewer’s attention for the duration of your audition. If you move drastically and/or shift, even slightly, out of your “frame” – there is a big chance – unless you are riveting – that their attention will drift with you and then just keep drifting right off of the screen... and then you have lost them... You DO NOT want this. (Consider for the same reasons that “quiet arms” are important as well – unless otherwise called for.) Movement should be natural and movement should be meaningful. Likewise, being completely still with no movement at all is also distracting.

#9 WATCH IT BACK!!!

Please be sure to view and analyze your audition before up-loading or sending. Is this the best work you feel you are capable of? If so – then send it! If not – do not sell yourself short - please give it another try until you feel that the audition is how you want to be represented and the work is something that you are proud of. Make sure that you can see your eyes and that the sound level on your tape is good.

You may actually do the scene multiple times – but please only send one or two “takes” – and if you do send two takes of the same scene – please make sure that they are not identical. If you are asked to send multiple takes of the same scene they should show a range and a difference in each approach...

#10 MAKE THE DEADLINE

Time Matters!!! Casting usually moves VERY quickly! You are always given a deadline - Please get your audition there well BEFORE that deadline!

If you are sending the tape via post – please make a back-up – do not chance your original getting lost in the mail.

If you are sending via email or uploading to the Internet – do check to make sure that it posts properly.

Please NEVER post an audition to a public forum (such as YouTube... etc.) without written permission to do so. Posting or sharing this confidential material is highly unprofessional and frowned upon in the industry. Auditions are not for public viewing.

Best of Luck!