

# The Excellent Audition Guide

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# Introduction

Winning a place at drama school is difficult. Really difficult. Way more difficult than getting into Oxford or Cambridge – and Oxford and Cambridge offer many thousands of places. The competition is fierce!

My research reveals that, for a typical three-year acting course, some schools have over two thousand people chasing sixteen – yes, sixteen – places. A couple of institutions report that they accept *less* than one per cent of the candidates they see. There are tens of thousands of auditionees out there every year, chasing very few offers.

However you tally the figures, the odds are extremely slim, and stacked against most applicants. But you don't need to fall into the dreary catalogue of 'most applicants'.

***To get in, you are going to have to stand out.***

- **You are going to need to be original, really creative, highly disciplined and totally positive.**
- **You will have to be calm, courageous, truthful and completely focused.**
- **You are going to have to know stuff and do stuff that 'most applicants' don't know and don't do.**

Tall order? This book will show you exactly how to harness and tap in to all these winning ways.

You'll be strong, confident, brave, inventive and articulate.

These pages will arm you with all the essential weapons and the mental stamina for what might turn out to be a sustained campaign. You will know how to access that crucial 'edge' at your auditions and in your thinking, because of your preparation.

An audition is over in a flash. You only get one chance once you are in the room. Many people blow it because they are underprepared and unfocused. This means they make mistakes, in the audition room and in their own heads.

Your work and thinking will be enhanced at all times, especially when in front of the dreaded audition panel. You have to give a performance that is mature, engaging, 'watchable', believable and not inevitable or predictable. Your audition won't be full of the basic errors in taste and style that 'most applicants' will be committing. It will be tellingly different.

You will know what you are doing. You will be in control of your work and your thoughts.

The panel will be able to concentrate on you and only you. The auditioners won't experience your fear, anxiety or bad habits. Neither will they focus on 'inner voices', or the strange commentator that plagues the heads of so many applicants the instant they start their speech.

### **If you want to apply for drama-school training, this is what you will have to do:**

Research schools, fill forms, write personal statements and CVs; spend money on applications, audition fees and travel; choose up to eight contrasting pieces, work on them, get better at acting, brush up technical and vocal skills, learn about Shakespearean verse; do auditions, interviews and then recalls.

This book will guide you through every step and give you a major edge.

# Mantras

Your drama-school campaign will be all about courage, persistence and self-esteem.

Sticking to the following mantras will give you all of this – and more. They are the underlying philosophy of this book and they need to become a part of your mindset from now on. Some of the mantras are about positive thinking; others are for your work.

Although I shall return to these and other maxims time and time again, please visit these pages often throughout your auditions and during your rehearsal period. If you can embrace and ingrain the ideas below, you will be armed and protected throughout your preparation and for the auditions.

## 1. Mantras for your head

**It's all good and nothing bad!** No matter what your confidence levels are, or where you are or how you feel, always remember, 'It's all good and nothing bad!' This will help to keep you positive and confident. These are the two major weapons that you will need. You'll obviously have to be objective in your observations on what you are doing, but by remembering 'all good and nothing bad', you ensure that you don't beat yourself up or allow situations to overwhelm you and/or your work. Use this in all aspects of your life from now on. Get – and stay – positive.

**Make fear your friend** We all run on fear, every day. It's part of nature: Darwinian, if you like. There will be times when you are going to be afraid, nervous, worried, even feeling the tingly onset of panic. Embrace these instances and accept that you are nervous, but then use this force to help your focus, or to aid productive work, honestly and with confidence. If you make fear your friend, you can utilise the fear to gain an edge over those who are merely

## Which Drama School?

- Find out what each school does.
- Find out how they work.
- Find out what they are looking for.
- Find out how their application process works.
- Discover what you want.

### Research

Ideally, you want to study at the establishment that provides the kind of training you are looking for. But whatever your vision is, don't narrow your options. Find the sort of place where you feel you might flourish in terms of the working and social environments. All the various institutions have their own ways and individual merits. Naturally, people will have their favourites, but try not to be *too* singular about where you want to be. There is a sort of unspoken ratings list, where *everyone* has an opinion and where schools slide in and out of fashion. Personally, I'm currently very excited about what they do at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. They are terribly good, friendly and really interested in people. But that's just me... The fact is, drama schools are *all* very

# Preparing and Working On Your Monologues

*'I find it hard rehearsing alone because I'm quite self-conscious. I haven't got anybody to comment or help me properly so I'm worried it's all a bit sh\*t.'* Georgina

## **Sort your head before you begin – make your rehearsals anxiety-free**

Working alone can be... lonely, and scary. The following thoughts will help reduce excess anxiety and needless self-slaughter.

Have you ever done that thing where you are working with a speech or a part in a play and you've diligently done the research so that you have a really firm idea of the character? You've worked out in your head how they move and sound at every point in the speech. On paper, you've marked up the text with notes and beats and intentions and all that stuff. You have really strong ideas about the whole of the character and the ultimate soundtrack of how it should all sound, 'feel' and be at precise points in the speech.

Then, as you deliver your 'perfect speech', you begin to realise – what comes out is nowhere near all these ideas! What you have just presented sounded and felt nothing like your planned scenario was meant to sound and feel. Then you get a bit depressed, a bit like you can't act; a touch agitated and frustrated. Maybe you even want to cry a little, because now you fear that when you do the speech again, it will be even less like the lovely but concrete version that's in your head. Then you start to feel untalented, small and rubbish... alone?

Don't worry. Many people get into this situation. It makes them *not* want to practise. Every time they go to do work, they become fearful and have to drag themselves to it. Well, it doesn't have to be like this, because here is the big news: you do not have to get it right *immediately*.

**Who does what and why?** Find facts about what happens and who does what. These will all build a complete picture, not just of your character and the speech.

### Who says what - and try to think why

**Abigail** (or your character)

- 'A wild girl may say wild things.'
- 'I never sold myself. I'm a good girl. A proper girl.'
- 'I have been hurt...'

Open your notebook so that there are two facing pages. On the first, write down everything **your character** says about **herself**.

### Other Characters

On the other side, write things that **other people** say about **your character**.

- 'She frightened all my strength away.'
- 'Why, she's mad.'  
'I wish she was.'
- 'You'll be clapped in the stocks before you are twenty.'

On these pages, also sketch together the 'whys'. Thinking about why things are said will help you to find what people want. Fundamentally, it boils down to what your character wants at any given moment. If you start getting into *why* things are said, you will at least start to avoid wasting time on *how* they are said.

# In the Room:

## Individual Auditions

### What to do and how to be

**Walk in well, but normally** One of the hardest things in the world is to walk into a room full of strangers and say ‘hello’, however confident you are. Try to compose yourself and centre on being natural – nervous if you are, but neither nuts nor withdrawn.

**Own the room – feel okay in the space** When you get into the performance space, look around; get the feel of it. The room may be huge, it may be tiny – it doesn’t matter. Whatever size or shape it may be, just be ready for it. Don’t be intimidated by the room or what’s in it: it’s merely the space that will allow you to do – yep – your best work.

**Don’t try to figure out the panel – it doesn’t matter** The panel may be friendly (and usually they are), or indifferent, or tired, or quiet, or jolly. It doesn’t matter.

Often, panel members don’t look up much if they are listening and writing. They may be writing good things; they may be making less positive comments. What does this matter to you? They may laugh, they may not. *It doesn’t matter.* Go with whatever happens. It’s all good and nothing bad while you are in there, especially when you’re performing. Let nothing put you off.

They may talk with you before or after your speeches – *it doesn’t matter.* There may be no talking. This, too, means nothing. I have known people get recalls who simply went in, did their stuff and left – nothing more. Others get the full interview, directed, joked with and even shouted at. *It doesn’t matter.* Just go with whatever happens.

## Likely Questions at Your Interview

If you take time to think about these questions, what lies behind them becomes much clearer. I will give some pointers as to what the panel might really be asking.

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Be honest, but don't flood the place with negativity. Critical, objective awareness is the thing here. Think about what went well and the things that you might have hit a bit better. The keyword here is 'think'. As with any question, give yourself time to consider what is being asked, and then work out what you want to say.

**'What have you been doing with yourself lately?'**

**'How do you think it went? [They mean your pieces.] How do you feel?'**

These are popular and universal questions, but can be very tricky. It's really worth having a think about what you have been up to. This can include any jobs, travel, marathon-running, etc., as well as things theatrical. In your reply, be fluent and interesting but not rehearsed. Even if you think what you've been doing is really mundane, celebrate that.

**'Who is your favourite actor/actress?'**

They might mean stage not screen, so check with them. This question is harder to answer if it means stage acting, because it is not