

MAKE IT FEEL REAL

ACTING

IN THIS GUIDE

YOUR PERFORMANCE

How do you make your performance as convincing and engaging as possible?

PREPARATION

What do you have to do to get ready to play your big part?

BEING CALM

Calm those nerves and tap into your imagination.

STAKES & STATUS

How do you make sure the audience really cares about your performance?

GENRE

What kind of movie are you making? This plays a huge part in how you perform your role.

TECHNICAL TIPS

Tips and tricks from the experts to help you shine on screen.



YOUR PERFORMANCE

KNOW THE STORY YOU'RE TELLING

Make sure you've read your script carefully and talked about the story with your director. Ask any questions you may have about the story, your character or any of the relationships/ plot

points within the film. Then do whatever you can to make this story come alive and your audience care about your story.

RESEARCH

Be a detective when you get your script and find out everything you can about your character and the other characters in the story. Write down everything you know about your character,

like what other characters say about them, what your character says about themselves, and the things your characters does and says in the script.

ENGAGE YOUR IMAGINATION

Your imagination is crucial to your acting. Whether you're doing something simple like catching a bus or running from a dragon ask yourself **HOW WOULD I RESPOND IN THIS SITUATION?** If you don't believe yourself your audience won't either – and we're in for a bit of 'bad acting'.

Think about all the sci-fi/action/adventure films you've seen. Most of the things people see and are reacting to in those films are not actually there with them on set during filming. If they're running from a big monster, they are usually running in

front of a green screen and the monster is put in later with CGI (computer generated imagery). The actor needs to imagine how they would feel and what they would do if that monster really was chasing them.

If you know you're different to your character in real life you'll need to engage your imagination. i.e. if your character is scared of dogs and you love dogs, try and think about something you are scared of and imagine this in the dog's place. This is called substitution and is used by all great actors.

PREPARATION

USE THE 5 W'S TO PREPARE

WHO AM I?

Do all the research you can into your character. How old are they? Where do they live? What is their home life like? What are their likes and dislikes? Find what is similar to you and acknowledge those things. Then engage your IMAGINATION to explore the differences.

Similarities - if your character is 12 and you are 12 – easy!

Differences - if your character grew up on the streets and you didn't – imagine what you may be like/feel like/how you would respond to situations if you had grown up on the street.

Also spend some time thinking about the other characters in the story.

WHAT DO I WANT?

This is your character's **objective**. It is very important to explore and make a decision on what your character wants at any given time. Your character must want this enough to make the audience care about them getting it (see STAKES).

Overarching objective: Each character in a film or story has an over arching objective that remains the same throughout the entire plot. Everything they do within the story is because they are trying to attain this objective. They're usually basic wants: to be safe, to be loved, to be understood. Think about the last movie you saw and see if you can work out what the main character's objective was.

Scene objective: Within each scene you must explore and know your character's objective – what you want in the scene. This scene objective must fit in with your character's overarching objective for the whole story/film. Make sure your objective is about the person or people you are in the scene with. If there is more than one person in the scene with you, decide on who is your 'hot' person – the one you want that thing from most. i.e. if your character is arguing with their sister about not coming into your room then your scene objective may be "To get you out of my room".

WHY DO I WANT WHAT I WANT?

Why your character wants what they want is crucial. If they're chasing a secret hidden jewel, why are they after it? If they get it will they be able to provide for their family forever? Save their country? Escape from the bad guy with its magical powers? Even if your character is simply going into a shop and buying milk, make sure you know why they want the milk.

WHERE AM I?

Where is your story happening? On a spaceship? In your character's backyard? In a busy shop? In a dark, scary forest? All these places will affect how your character responds. Whether your scene is in a public space, a private space, indoors or outdoors it will affect the volume level at which they speak.

WHEN IS THIS HAPPENING?

Is your story set in another era? Did people behave differently then? Did they speak differently? Was there a different set of manners, or posture? Know when your story is set.

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BEING REAL

STOP ACTING - BE REAL!

Aim for reality with your performance. This does not necessarily mean you need to be 'small' with your responses. Think how big and loud you are when arguing with your brother or sister, or cheering on your sports team. We are big and loud in every day life all the time. The only difference with stage and screen is just that our audience is a lot closer to us when we're on screen. So your audience can tell very easily if you are not being truthful. If you are in a very tight shot we can even see what you are THINKING!

When people don't think their audience will understand what they're trying to get across they sometimes indicate. Often we as an audience refer to this as 'bad acting'. An actor may raise their eyebrows too much to try and communicate something to us, or pull a very angry face, or pretend to cry.

If this is 'over the top' or super exaggerated and not how they would do it in real life, then it is called indicating. Trust that in the same way as you communicate your needs, desires thoughts and feelings very well in real life, you can do that on screen too. You really don't need to do much differently. EASY!

So - don't fall into the common trap of doing more than you need to.

Most importantly - RELAX! When we're nervous we can end up doing all sorts of things which may not serve the telling of our story. We may speak faster, leave the frame too quickly or look embarrassed when we're not meant to! Try to focus on the story you're telling and engage your imagination. If you really *understand* what's going on in the scene and *believe* it, the acting will feel easy.

ALWAYS BE THINKING

In real life we never stop thinking, so the same applies when we're acting. Next time you're watching a show or film, notice how often the camera is focussed on the person listening, not the person talking. How you react when another actor is talking to you is just as important as how you act when you're doing the talking.

Acting is like a game of tennis: When you hit the ball over the net, do you then look away and not care what happens to it? No! You follow the ball with your eyes. It's essential that you

watch how the other person hits the ball back so you know which way you'll need to move to return the shot. The same goes with acting! When you say something to someone, you're doing it for a reason. It's vital to know what they say back and how they say it, so you know what impact you've had and how to respond next. If a scene is to be kept fresh and your acting interesting and believable, this focussed 'to and fro' play is essential. What the character is thinking but doesn't actually say out loud is called 'internal monologue.'

MANAGE YOUR NERVES

Even the most experienced actors can get nervous. Nerves can make us speak faster than we normally would, do strange things with our faces and mouths, and make us look uncomfortable when we're acting.

One way to manage nerves is to acknowledge they're there in the first place. Breathe. Remember that what you're doing isn't rocket science – just a little bit of pretending. A very famous Australian actor Bud Tingwell used to say that everyone can

act. That whenever someone opens their door and doesn't want to see the person but smiles and says "Hello! Welcome!" and brings them in – they're acting. We've all done that. Spend some time thinking about how many times you 'act' in your real life and you will probably start to feel a lot more accomplished and relaxed.

Slow down! When we're nervous we can speed up without realising it, so slow down and take your time.

LEARNING LINES

Read your script through several times when you first get it and focus on the story. **Try to resist the urge to start planning HOW you will say your lines.** This is a bit of a trap for actors. Pre planning how you will say a line will prevent you from being fresh and in the moment when you come to do your take. You may have to do that take many times over, so you want to make sure each time it feels new and fresh!

Always focus on the story, the characters and the relationships – not on being an amazing actor. You will be an amazing actor if you are focussed on the story and engaging your imagination in a realistic way.

Remember: an engaged actor is an engaging actor!

SHOOTING OUT OF SEQUENCE

One of the unique demands of acting for the screen is that most of the time the scenes you shoot and the days you shoot them on will be entirely out of sequence. You will be shooting some scenes which come at the end of the film before scenes that come at the start. It can feel very strange and is one of the big differences between stage and screen.

5 MINUTES BEFORE AND AFTER

One way to help with the discombobulated style of shooting is to think about your 5 minutes before and after. Before every scene think about what your character was doing BEFORE the scene starts, and what they will be doing AFTER it ends. This will help your performance to be grounded in a reality.

STAKES & STATUS

STATUS

In every day life as well as in films there is always status at play in any scene. People have a different status depending on their job, or what they are doing.

For example a King has high status and a peasant typically has low status. However, if a peasant was holding a King's beloved object and threatening to drop it into the moat, then the peasant would have higher status for that point in time. If the King's guards raced in and arrested the peasant then the King would be back to high status, the guards would be lower status than the King, and the peasant would be back to the lowest status. Now if one of the guards then took the object they would be of higher status than the King. See how many times status can shift in a scene?

If two people's status is close this can be very funny. Try playing a game where two friends meet and they try to up their status each time they speak, by showing off or putting the other person down. You've probably seen this happen in real life.

Make sure you know your character's status at any given time within a scene.



STAKES - MAKING YOUR AUDIENCE CARE

Stakes are absolutely crucial in any story. If you don't care about what's happening then why would the audience? Know whether your action at any given time is low or high stakes or anywhere in between. For example, if your character is walking along the street towards a friend's house for a casual visit, the stakes are probably pretty low. However if a large dog suddenly

bounds out from behind a fence and starts chasing you, the stakes are suddenly very high and getting to the safety of your friend's house becomes imperative.

Stakes are very important in drama and even more so in comedy.

GENRE

Everyone in the acting industry knows that COMEDY IS HARDER THAN STRAIGHT ACTING. Plenty of people are used to mucking around and getting a laugh from their mates. Getting an audience to laugh who don't already know and love you is a very different matter. So, what's the trick?

Funnily enough it's the SAME AS STRAIGHT ACTING. You must INVEST in the scene. Fully believing, focussing on or caring about what is happening in a scene will lead to great comedy. Think about the squirrel that loves acorns in Ice Age. If that squirrel didn't really care if it didn't get the acorn, then would it be funny? No. You MUST care. THAT's when things get funny. Like straight acting, if you are faking your care or belief, then the audience will see that and we won't find your performance funny. So once again, engaging your imagination is key.

Think about the comedy you have seen and enjoyed. Try to pinpoint exactly what it was that was funny. It can take a lot of practise, so get started early!



Is your film a specific genre? It may be a Western, a romantic comedy, a sci-fi, a thriller, a comedy or a murder mystery. Watch some films from the same genre and study the acting.

TECHNICAL TIPS

CUT

Never finish the scene until you hear CUT. Even if something goes wrong, keep going. The director will decide if they want to stop shooting. Sometimes the best moments come from mistakes – so the actor must never decide to finish the scene because it's not their decision to make. The only exception to this rule is if someone is in danger.

This also means you have to keep performing even after the last words of the scene are delivered. This is called **tagging the scene** and is very important. It usually involves a reaction shot, so give the editor something good to work with. (your 5 minutes before and after' work will help you here).

DON'T LOOK AT THE CAMERA

Unless you're specifically required to (such as if you're playing a news reporter) then you CANNOT look at the camera. Even if an actor's eye glances down the barrel of the camera for a split

second, the take either can't be used, or it has to be cut around in the editing room.

KNOW THE SHOT SIZE YOU'RE IN

There is a lot of physical discipline required for working on set that most people are unaware of. It's important for actors to know what shot size they are working in so you can adjust your performance appropriately. For example, if you're being shot in a Wide Shot or Master then you will have a great range of movement available to you. It's like having an entire theatre stage to move around on. Once you do the same scene later on, like in a Mid Close-up, you'll have less range of movement.

If you move your head around at all in an Extreme Close-up we will miss most of your performance! You can read about shot sizes in HOW TO MAKE IT LOOK AWESOME. When you are in a Close-up (CU) or Extreme Close-up (XCU) we can essentially see every thought that crosses your mind.

So, relax and once again, focus on what's happening in the scene and your character's objective.



WS: WIDE SHOT



MS: MID SHOT



MCU: MID CLOSEUP



CU: CLOSEUP



XCU: EXTREME CLOSEUP

CONTINUITY

Because the same action is shot so many times and from different angles in different shot sizes, it's a crucial part of an actors work that their CONTINUITY is correct. All the different shots at the end of the day are going to be edited into one continuous scene, so imagine the problems if your continuity isn't correct. For example if you are running into a scene to fight a dragon and your sword is in your right hand for all the wide shots, then you go off to wait while the set is switched around and all the lighting is adjusted for the tighter shot, what happens if you forget which hand your sword was in and you then do your tight shots with your sword in your left hand?



Watch any film or TV show and watch how many times the shot switches between shot types. If an actor forgets which leg was crossed over which, it can look crazy in the final edit. Be kind to your editors, and be aware of your continuity. It's a little bit like choreographing a dance.

On a professional set there is a person in charge of continuity and they scribble copious notes of every move you make, so they are able to help you remember if you forget what you did in a scene. Actors love continuity people (their official title in Australia is Script Supervisor). Try and find a friend who is willing to help you with this on set. It's a VERY important job, and who knows – they might end up working on big movies in the future.

SUMMARY

01. Know the story you're telling.
02. Engage your imagination.
03. Use the 5 W's to prepare.
04. Be real.
05. Don't stop acting until you hear CUT!

To find more filmmaking information, resources and helpful links on the MyState Student Film Festival website: mystatefilmfestival.com.au and on our Facebook page: facebook.com/mystatefilmfestival