

New Artists Productions, Inc.

Notes for the Cast Reading Through the Script

Even though you are most likely just one character in the play, you need to know the entire story and become familiar with all the parts as well as the playwright's style in order to make intelligent and meaningful decisions about how to create your character.

Reading and Analyzing a Script

It is important to read through the script on your own several times to get a clear idea of what the playwright is trying to communicate. The first read-through gives you the big picture: the story and a sense of who is who. The second and third times, you develop a keen understanding of the play's structure and of how the writer uses language to convey action and feelings. You also start to form strong feelings about how you might approach your role and how your character relates to the others. Your ideas about these relationships will probably change as you read and begin to rehearse.

You want to consider the writer's goals, and whether he or she has introduced a **theme** that revolves around the characters' lives or one that is larger than the play itself: the environment, the importance of family, or the trials of being a teenager, for example. The script may be thought provoking, funny, or sad. Or, all of the above. Then there is **subtext**, the real meaning behind what the character says; getting to the truth behind the words.

Most scripts tell a story with a definite shape, or **arc**. The pieces are as follows:

1. **Setting the scene (context)** – establishes the location and time of the play, where and when the story takes place
2. **The buildup, or conflict**, which is the development of the story and twists and turns of the action.
3. **The climax**, or turning point of the story – often at the midpoint of the play
4. **The resolution**, which is how the conflict is resolved after the climax; how everything works out and finally, comes to a conclusion.

Once you determine the arc of the story, you can begin to work on your character's journey within it.

Marking the Script

You build a role from a combination of what's written in the script, your understanding and interpretation of your character, your reactions to the other characters and events in the story, and the instructions and guidance of the director. The more you know about the script and your role within it, the easier and more rewarding the process will be.

An important part of building a role involves marking your script with detailed notations about the story, setting, and characters – yours in particular – and about the way you'll deliver your lines. Think of it as a kind of diary of your role.

Highlight your own lines in the script in one color and your stage directions in another. The script will contain directions from the writer about the scene and your character's actions as well as the director's instructions, which you'll write in the margins, about entrances, exits, and blocking: 'Get up quickly, throw off your shawl, and run to the window.'

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Write your own observations about your character's motivations, actions, gestures, mannerisms, and tone of voice in pencil since they may very well change as you continue to work on and develop your role.

You want to make this character you are bringing to life as three-dimensional as possible. His or her posture and movements must reflect state of mind as well as the events of a particular scene. Your character's speech patterns are also important. Be sure to indicate different tones of voice: stress, pitch, rhythm, volume, and quality. You may also want to insert marks that indicate where, for example, you take a big breath and pick up or slow down the tempo of your speech.

In addition to moving around and speaking, your character makes and responds to all sorts of sound. There are the verbal sounds we all make that aren't words per se, but carry loads of meaning: sighing, grunting, sniffing, tongue clicking, laughing, throat clearing. And there are the nonverbal sounds that lend atmosphere and indicate mood and state of mind: shuffling papers, tapping feet, snapping or drumming of fingers, slamming door. **Mark down everything!**

How to Memorize Lines

Make sure you grasp the plot and your character's role in the action, what he or she wants and why. The more you understand your character's intentions, the more sense your lines will make and the easier it will be to memorize them. Also, if you happen to forget a line, you'll be able to ad-lib a convincing response. The words will come easily. Don't act, react.

Some actors learn their lines before actual rehearsals begin. Others wait to learn them along with the blocking. If you choose to learn your lines ahead of time, you will be able to concentrate on developing other aspects of your role in rehearsal: how your character walks and gestures, how he or she interacts with others. Once you're in rehearsal with the director and the rest of the cast, you may find that your character needs to evolve in new ways.

There are several ways to memorize your lines:

1. Use a tape recorder. Record every scene that you're in, reading all of the parts aloud. Record your character's lines in a softer voice than those of the other characters. Listen to the scene several times, a little at a time. Recite your lines softly along with the tape. When you feel like you're beginning to remember them, speak in a voice that's louder than your voice on the tape. If you start to forget, say them softly again so that the recording can prompt you.
2. Read through your lines, memorizing them bit-by-bit. Read a line. Read it again. Now, cover it and recite it a few times. Did you get it right? Uncover it to check. Go through the entire scene this way several times. When you feel that you have the scene down, move on to the next one. Maybe you and a partner can work on the script together. Your partner will prompt you by reading the lines that come before your lines, over and over again. Each of these processes will help you to memorize your cue lines as well. **When you say your lines is as important as what you say.**
3. Learn your lines along with your blocking. As discussed above, this will help you by associating your lines with specific movements as you develop your character and respond to

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the other actors. Some actors find this method the easiest because their lines are never isolated from their performance.

In either case, you will want to spend quality time with the script before rehearsals begin so that you are confident of your understanding of the story and the characters.

Becoming the Character

How do you go about 'becoming' this character? Or do you? All approaches to creating and building character involve close observation and imagination. Some actors talk about approaching character work from the 'inside out.' In this instance, you represent the character by tapping into your own emotions and experiences and being attentive to the behavior of others.

Other actors work from the 'outside in;' presenting their characters to the audience. Your movements, gestures, and voice in the **context** of the play are what ultimately shape your character, not just your own emotions or experiences. You'll discover that almost all actors use a bit of both.

Open your script and take a look at one scene in the play – try to determine what is going on with your character right now, and who, if anyone, is also in the scene. Make it your business to know everything about the time and location. It's smart to **do a little background research**. If the play is set in the past, learn about how people lived and what was important to them in that time and place. If it takes place in the present, then tap into your own memories and experiences for background material.

Imagination plays a key role in character development – think of various scenarios that aren't in the play and how your character would behave. Keep at it and your character's particular way of moving, talking, and reacting will develop naturally. Since you have a mental map of the entire play, you will find it easier to get to the essence of the scene and work on creating a multidimensional character. You can even dress the part.

An appropriate, well-chosen item of clothing (a long skirt, a hat, a pair of heavy boots, etc.) can help you get into your character's mindset.

Sense Memory – imagine walking down the street, minding your own business, when suddenly, someone throws a bucket of freezing cold water on you. – Reaction: you shriek, gasp, and sputter. All of your responses are genuine – not a bit of acting occurred. Now, can you recreate that scene onstage, but without the water? Of course you can, your memory of the experience is so clear that you can call up all of your feelings and reactions simply by remembering the incident.

A song, a story, a picture can trigger many past experiences or memories – we relive the moment in total because we remember the incident.