Cold Reading Audition Tips

(Adapted from musicaltheatreaudition.com)

At both straight theatre auditions and musical theatre auditions (as well as television and film), it is common to be asked to do a **cold reading**. The cold reading is simply a scene (usually from the show you are auditioning for) that you are asked to read at the audition. Sometimes you are given a chance to look over the scene while you are waiting for your turn to audition, and sometimes it is given to you right in the audition itself. This leads me to the most important tip I can give you. **Be early for the audition, in case the scene(s) are available for you to read in advance.** You don't want to be the person who only got two minutes to read it through, while other people got twenty minutes because they arrived early.

Cold Reading Audition Tip #1: (Taking your Time)

Don't be afraid to take your time. Usually the audition panel will give you a few minutes to look over the scene. Take them. Sometimes, in the fear of wasting time, we don't really take the time to do this right. Read the scene all the way through once, slowly, really thinking about the character you are reading and what is happening in the scene. Spend this time wisely - don't try to memorize. Just get a really good handle on what is happening in the scene.

Cold Reading Audition Tip #2: (Common Sense)

Remember your basic acting technique. Often when faced with new material we forget all that "common sense" stuff like speaking slowly, clearly, and loudly. Even if everything else falls apart, make sure that they can always hear you and see your face (hold your script at chest level). Take your time.

Cold Reading Audition Tip #3: (Memorization?)

Don't feel that you need to memorize the cold reading - the purpose of the cold reading is not to test how quickly you can memorize, but to see what you can bring to a character (using your skills and creativity) on short notice. Instead, look at your next line as the other person finishes speaking, so that you can look up while delivering it and not at the paper.

Don't spend the whole time the other person is speaking to look at your lines, because you also need to show that you are listening/reacting. Use your thumb to keep your place while you are looking up, so that when you look down again for the next line you know where to look.

Cold Reading Audition Tip #4: (Listening/Choices)

Listen carefully to any directions that are given to you. Sometimes the audition panel will introduce the character you are reading to you. Listen carefully to this as there may be some hints as to how they might like it played. But beyond that, don't be too worried about making the wrong artistic decisions. Making no decisions at all about the character you are playing is far worse than making the wrong ones. As long as you make a decision about the character and fully commit to it, the audition panel will notice that you are willing to take risks, and that is always a good thing for an actor to do.

Cold Reading Audition Tip #5: (Playing with Others)

If someone is reading the scene with you, you should interact with them as you would any other actor. Look at them and speak to them.

Cold Reading Audition Tip #6: (Script as a Prop)

While it is perfectly acceptable to have the script with you as you perform your cold reading, there is no reason to draw extra attention to it. It is not a prop - so don't wave it around. Try holding the script in your weak hand - so if you are right-handed, hold it in your left. This will leave your strong hand free for gesturing naturally as you act.

Cold Reading Audition Tip #7: (Training to Cold Read)

Preparation can really make a difference. Read the play you are auditioning for, and ask yourself, "If I were a director, what scenes would I choose for auditions?" You'll be surprised how often you're right! Also, practice reading lines you've never seen before -- it doesn't matter what play they're from. This will increase your ability to act well the first time you read something. The cold reading exercise: Look at the first line, quickly committing it to memory. Then look up and say the line aloud. Gradually you should be able to repeat larger sections of words at a single glance.