

**By Stacie Lents**  
**Originally Published by Playscripts, Inc. (playscripts.com)**

## **Monologues, the Real Actor's Nightmare**

Whether you are an actor, a coach, a director, or a teacher, you can probably relate to the sheer panic that is associated with selecting—and preparing—the perfect monologue. Whether it's for college admissions, competitions, or summerstock, every actor needs the time-honored two contrasting monologues in his or her bag of tricks—and it's even better to have three or four. Given how many plays there are out there, this can be a shockingly difficult task, which often feels more like some kind of hazing ritual than simple audition prep.

And *why* are we all doing this in the first place? Aren't plays, by their very definition, intended to be performed *collaboratively*? Assuming we find this Holy Grail, this Audition Miracle, how are we supposed to pull it off without someone to *play off of*?

Before you despair: there are some tools and tips which can make this unenviable task a little easier—and a little more fun (okay, maybe the “fun” part is stretching it):

### **PART I: SELECTION**

#### **The road to success is paved with good casting.**

I can't tell you how often I see an audition that fails to get a callback because the actor picked a monologue written for someone thirty years older. I'd like to think I look young (there's no need for you to tweet about it if you disagree) but I'm not believable as a high school student. Of course, this doesn't mean that seventeen-year-olds can only play seventeen-year-olds, but it's distracting to watch them talking about grown-up children...and it's tough on the actor. How is anyone supposed to relate to having kids older than they are?

In general, “type-casting” has gotten a bad name. When actors hear that term, we often think of being limited or misunderstood—or defined according to one or two physical features. But if you fit what the playwright intended, not just physically, but in terms of essential qualities, then you have a better chance of a great audition. I like to think of it as looking for a shoe which fits me, so my feet don't hurt...if your monologue “fits” you, then you're less likely to be uncomfortable onstage.

#### **As any hair stylist will tell you, a good cut makes all the difference.**

Don't be afraid to cut for time and context. (Keep in mind that at most festivals and audition conferences, time limits are strictly enforced.) For example, there may be lines which don't make sense without seeing the entire play.

You may also need to cut out some of another actor's lines or to pull a chunk of text from one part of a scene and another chunk from later in the scene. Don't be afraid to "create" a monologue from dialogue. Though you want to proceed with caution, I have seen very successful monologues created from short lines of dialogue without the other characters' lines. A good rule of thumb is to be sure that the resulting monologue makes sense! You don't want to end up with "*I think we should get married. A ship? What do you mean a ship? Oh, my goodness! Please don't shoot me!*"

### **Do what you do best, not what you do fine.**

For festivals, conferences, and college auditions, the important thing is to show off who you are. Traditionally, actors interpret "contrasting pieces" as meaning one comedic and one dramatic piece. But unless that is specified, what's essential is that your two pieces are different. So, if you're terrific at comedy and you want to do two funny pieces, consider two very different characters or pieces that are different in style.

Another misconception is that you always HAVE to do a classical piece. Unless it is specifically requested, I suggest that you only do Shakespeare (verse, in particular) if you are very comfortable with it. If you're thinking, "Well, I could PROBABLY pull this off," then it's probably not the monologue for you! Show off your strengths, not your mediocrities.

### **Above all...**

Choose a piece you like. If you like it, that is a good indication that you have connected to it and found meaning in it, which, after all, is the core of good acting.

*Stay tuned for Part II, which will address Monologue Delivery.*

### **A list of Selected Monologues for young actors in Stacie Lents' plays:**

*FIRE EXIT*: All pages; all characters have monologues.

*HENRY'S LAW*: p. 21 (Max), p. 25 (Jason), pp. 28-29 (Annie), pp. 36-37 (Sara).

*LAUGH OUT LOUD (CRY QUIETLY)*: p. 37 (Daniel), p. 56 (Shelly), p. 84 (JoJo).

Stacie Lents has three plays published by Playscripts, one of which, *FIRE EXIT*, just published this week, is made up almost entirely of monologues. Her plays *Laugh Out Loud (cry quietly)* and *Henry's Law* also have monologues for young actors, several of which will be published in Applause's upcoming collection: *In Performance: Contemporary Monologues for Teens*. Stacie's play *College Colors* will open at Crossroads Theatre in February 2016. Stacie is Director of Acting at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

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## **PART II: DELIVERY**

The ritual entrance to the fraternity/sorority of The Theater, known as MONOLOGUE AUDITIONS, has two parts. Once you have *found* the piece (see Part I of this blog), then you have to *rehearse* it. A few tips--

### **No one likes to be yelled at.**

Avoid monologue delivery that is "one-note," for example, monologues in which you are shouting the whole time. You want to be sure that you're finding the levels and "beat changes" (emotional shifts or discoveries) in the piece through your acting choices. Keep in mind that the people you're auditioning for are definitely tired, hungry, extremely hot or extremely cold, and late for something very important. This is not your fault, but it does make the case for a bit of variety.

### **Plays are short; read them.**

Okay, you don't have to read ALL of them. But you do have to read the play your monologue comes from. Even if you find your piece in a monologue book, get and read the whole play. This will give you a leg up in terms of character, circumstance, point of view, relationships. And, inevitably, if you haven't read the play, the director is going to ask you about it! That's just Murphy's Law.

### **Looks can kill, but the eyes are the windows to the soul.**

I strongly advise against looking at the people you're auditioning for while delivering your piece. Choose a point just above the auditors' heads. There's no faster way to kill your concentration than seeing a director eating a sandwich. And the last thing you want is to keep the director from making a note about how you're the next Meryl Streep because she feels obligated to play a scene with you. On the other hand, it's also not a great idea to look at an imaginary scene partner stage left or right of you. Then we can't see your eyes.

### **Friends don't let friends rehearse alone.**

Once your piece feels "ready," it is important to take it for a test drive. Rehearsing alone in your room just isn't the same as rehearsing in front of directors and casting directors. A good way to prepare for audition conditions is to gather a handful of your friends (or enemies) and to ask them to watch your piece. These do not have to be actors! Their job is to give you practice performing in front of others so that you aren't thrown when you walk into your audition.

Keep in mind that too many cooks can spoil the monologue, so you may want to give them guidelines about the kind of critique you're looking for—or even ask them to refrain from offering feedback altogether. Your most important tools as an actor are your own instincts!

Oh! And learn how to pronounce the playwright's name.

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Note: Many playwrights have good monologue material available. Check out publishers' websites, *Backstage*, and *Playbill* for additional lists.