Audition Monologues - Library Guide

Monologues, no matter how we may feel about them, are a necessary part of the actor’s life. Finding suitable monologue material that fits you and shows off your skills and abilities in a positive light is a constant task. Even once you’ve found pieces suitable for your repertoire, you may find that auditions for different kinds of parts demand different kinds of audition material, or that your type has shifted as you’ve aged, grown a beard, changed your hair, etc. Actors must always be on the hunt for audition material that will help them get the job.

General Guidelines:

1. **Stay away from material that is overdone.** Casting and industry people are only human. Why wouldn’t they tune out once they hear the first line of a piece for the hundredth time? It’s hard enough to get the part, why run the risk of giving them even the slightest reason not to listen? See the attached Monologue No-No List for material to avoid.

2. **No matter what, do NOT do a “story monologue”.** This is the single biggest trap that actors fall into with audition material. They pick a monologue where the actor is telling a story or speaking about past events. While this may be an enticing chunk that jumped out of the text, it is doing you a disservice in audition. It is very difficult to activate this kind of text and make it fuel your need in the present moment. It’s not enough to tell a story, there must also be a very strong and compelling reason as to why the character is telling the story. No matter how much you may like it, a story monologue won’t serve you effectively in audition.

3. **Less is more.** Ninety seconds is a good general length for an audition piece and it’s true that the auditor frequently learns all they need to within the first few moments of you opening your mouth. Don’t pick a five-minute piece with all the good stuff at the end. Instead pick a short, manageable piece that offers you a chance to show your range and leaves them wanting more.

4. **Context is key.** Monologues within the script of a play fit nicely into place and have the benefit of context. The audience knows who and what you’re talking about because they’re seeing the entire play and hearing the entire story. But oftentimes when taken out of the play, the monologue loses its context and can confuse the listener. Make sure that your monologue is understandable when standing on its own.

5. **Pick material that fits your type.** Auditioning is not the time to explore your range or show the performance extremes that you’re capable of. Instead, choose a piece that falls squarely into your wheelhouse, the kind of material that you can consistently knock out of the ballpark.
6. **Look for active text where the character is trying to achieve a goal.** Try something I call the “finger test”. Stand up, and read the monologue out loud while using your pointer finger to jab the air in front of you. Imagine yourself trying to make a point or change the listener in some way. Can you begin to feel the need behind the words, or the point that the character is trying to make? Does the text feel active to you *in your body*? If not, put it down. If so, you’ve got something to work with!

7. **Look for monologues with a journey.** The most effective audition monologues are those in which the character undergoes a change of some kind. Perhaps they come to a realization, finally stand up for themselves or declare their love for someone else. When evaluating a potential monologue, ask yourself if the character is in a different emotional place by the end of it.

8. **Avoid monologues that call for a stage dialect.** Unless you are specifically auditioning for a dialect play, and have been instructed to prepare and audition with one, do not use a monologue with a dialect. Part of the goal of the audition is to allow the auditor to hear your own natural voice, without affectation.

9. **Avoid profanity.** In some cases, excessive profanity will turn off auditors who have no wish to listen to you swear. Use your own judgement, depending on who you’re auditioning for, and make adjustments if necessary.

10. **Avoid offensive material.** Avoid material that is overly sexual or offensive in nature. This too, can alienate the auditors and scuttle your efforts.

11. **Don’t use props.** Skip the monologues that call for a lot of complicated props. What’s more important is seeing and hearing you and watching you, as the character, pursue a goal or objective using the text.

12. **Don’t use a monologue from a musical.** While some musicals do yield good monologues, those few monologues are overdone. Dig deeper to find unique material that will serve you.

13. **Be careful of using Google and avoid amateur scripts.** Material published on the Internet via blog or personal website is frequently amateurish and of a very low quality. Bad writing will not serve your audition. When looking for scripts, stick to high-quality published material that is written by professional, trained and qualified playwrights. Use Google to assist your search but don’t use it to find monologue websites that offer “free monologues”, as such sites are frequently collections of poorly written material.

14. **Finding monologues is difficult only if you wait until the last minute.** Even once you’ve built a book you’re never finished. Your search for good monologue material should be an ongoing effort and important aspect of your professional preparation. Continue to collect new material as you grow as an artist and a human.
   a. Start a folder on your computer called “Monologues” and begin collecting any material you come across that might even remotely work for you. Consider plays you’ve read for class, plays you’ve read for fun, things your friends or classmates have recommended, things you’ve seen on TV or film, things you’ve seen on the
internet, material from novels or short stories, things you’ve heard or seen other actors do, etc. Allow the folder to grow in size over the course of years. In the future, it will be much easier to refer to your folder of collected materials, specially curated by you, for you, rather than showing up at the library or bookstore feeling completely overwhelmed.

15. If you need help ask, but ask early. No one is going to save you the night before a big audition. Even if you manage to pull it off, you’ll give a lousy audition.

Where to Find Monologues:

1. **Read plays.** It sounds so simple, but too many actors do not read enough plays. Get into the habit of reading a play a week and I guarantee that you will find useable material with regularity.

2. **Do not use books of monologues.** The monologues in those books will be overdone. The best use for these books is to find plays, characters or playwrights that you may wish to further investigate. For example, perusing a book of audition monologues for young women may give you some titles and information that greatly pares down and focuses your search.

3. **One acts and short plays by established playwrights are often rich sources of unused material.** If you find a playwright that you absolutely love but don’t want to work on their most famous play, dig a little deeper and see if you can find something else they wrote, perhaps earlier in their career.

4. **Instead of looking for monologues, look for actors.** Do some research and find actors who are similar to you in type and who play the kinds of roles that also fall into your own wheelhouse. Once you have a few names, do some research and see what they’ve been in. Your search may reveal some new titles to consider. Even if the actor is older than you, find out what they played when they were your age.

5. **Stop scanning plays for big chunks of text.** That’s how everyone else looks for monologues. Those chunks are more likely to be overdone. Instead, once you’ve found a play with a character that fits your type, look for exciting dialogue that features this character. If you can find a good scene with a clear sense of objective driving the character, start editing out the other character’s lines and see if you can create a cohesive monologue. With some minimal editing, you may discover that your dialogue is actually a monologue.