

Performing in Contemporary Musicals

by David Sisco & Laura Josepher

Guide to Self-Taping

Recording Device

Most people shoot self-tapes on their smartphone. Given the great audio and video quality of today's smartphones, this is completely appropriate (although there are now microphones that can be plugged into a smartphone that may further enhance your self-tape's sound quality). It is important to show at least two thirds of your body in the shot for a musical theatre audition (self-tapes for film and television tend to be shot closer, depending on the material). Remember: your whole body is your instrument so the creative team needs to see how you use it. You can either set the smart phone in a tripod or have someone (with a steady hand) hold it for you if you're planning to move. The latter can be tricky, as it can make your audition more about your space than you. Rehearse your movements and watch it back to see if any of it feels either unspecific or unnecessary.

Location

Previously, we have suggested neutral backgrounds without a lot of kick-knacks. This is because we want the casting professionals to be looking at you, not your 5th grade science trophy. Like anything, this is a balancing act. You don't necessarily have to sing in front of a blank wall, though you can. If you're going to use a more dynamic space, make sure it doesn't overwhelm the work you're presenting. There are even apps that allow you to blur your background so it's less prominent. Also, avoid mirrors or windows so you avoid glare.

Lighting

Your face needs to be well lit so the creative team can see your expressions. If you have a space with some great natural light, like a window, that's ideal. Natural light is usually quite flattering. Many young artists already own ring lights, which can come in handy when shooting a self-tape (though may need to be balanced out with a lamp or other light source, depending on the space). Regardless of your light source, make sure you don't have any shadows on your face. Shooting during the day will help. **Note:** if you wear glasses, make sure you are not reflecting glare from your light source.

Acoustics

Find the quietest space that has a balanced acoustic (not too wet or dry). Make sure your spoken and sung words are clearly understood with a minimum of background noise. If you are using an accompaniment track, make sure to test how close your playback needs to be between you and the recording device for a balanced sound.

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Clothing

Neutral, solid colors work best on screen. Bright colors and small patterns are fine, but avoid stripes. If you're singing a pop/rock song, consider how the style might influence your wardrobe. What you wear should never feel like a costume but it should be a gentle nod to the decade you're emulating.

Slate

Make sure you slate for your self-tape. Your audition video may get separated from your email and you want to make sure the people watching know who you are. Your slate should state your name and the material you are performing. If you're singing a pop/rock song, your slate would go like this: "Hi, my name is _____ and I'll be performing '_____' as sung by _____." If you're singing a contemporary musical theatre song, this is more appropriate: "Hi, my name is _____ and I'll be performing '_____' from the musical _____." (or, "written by _____." if it's a stand-alone song)

If your self-tape includes several different audition cuts or sides, you should slate before each piece. They can, however, all be included in a single video submission, unless other requested. Be sure to read each breakdown carefully and provide the requested information within the desired parameters.

Your Performance

As with any audition, trust your work and let go so you can remain in the moment. Work to bring a sense of discovery to your material that allows you the flexibility to move and express yourself.

Just as you would not stare at the people behind the table, you want to avoid staring directly into the camera. Practice looking an inch left or right from the camera lens. This will make it seem as if you're looking at the camera without peering into the viewer's soul. Your relationship with the camera is incredibly important in this medium. Can you find organic moments to let the viewer in and choose other moments that feel more private?

Note: If you are self-taping at the piano or with a guitar, make sure to not use the instrument as a barrier between you and the viewer. Make sure not to slouch so you can access your breath.

Embracing "Imperfections"

One of the challenges with self-tapes is you have an opportunity to shoot as many takes as you feel are necessary. We have witnessed many clients perform past their bloom because they see only perceived flaws in their work. They lose all objectivity

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after take 10 or 12. When reviewing your self-tapes, ask yourself which version represents your best live audition.

Editing

Once you've chosen the self-tape you will submit, make sure to edit the video. You can use iMovie or a similar application to edit. Be sure to trim the video so we don't see you hitting play at the top, or walking back to the phone to stop recording. If you are able to add graphics, include your name and the project and role(s) you're auditioning for (double check spellings). Finally, be sure to rename your file with your name and the date (e.g. LauraJosepher083021.mov) so your submission doesn't get lost in the casting director's hard drive because it is listed as 101327a.mov.