

Dramat Audition Guidelines for Care & Respect

Last Updated: 17 February 2021

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Auditioning is an exceptionally vulnerable time for actors and especially for those new to theater, who are more likely FGLI and/or BIPOC. The Dramat's top priority is to ensure all auditionees feel comfortable, respected, and cared for throughout the audition process. Setting this as *your* first priority is a win-win: not only will it create a fun and exciting experience for those involved, but it will also help you attract and retain a motivated and talented cast that can bring your vision to life. The guidelines below illustrate a thorough, but not exhaustive, list of best practices in creating the welcoming, respectful, and (as close as we can get to) anti-racist environment that the Dramat expects all of its shows to follow. However, we ask that you keep these principles in mind in all areas of your creative and production process.

A reminder: pre-casting is not permitted for Dramat shows. Furthermore, members of the production team at the time of audition who might traditionally be involved in creating audition materials, running auditions, or the casting process (Director, Stage Manager, Music Director, Choreographer, and their assistants) may not audition for (or be cast in) the show. However, auditionees who are not cast are welcome to join the team in any capacity afterwards.

Audition Packet:

- [Audition packets](#) should outline the audition process and relevant information from the show. This could include:
 - Show title, playwright, and description
 - Character list and descriptions
 - Audition dates/times and how to sign up
 - Workshop dates/times and how to sign up
 - Pre-selected or recommended audition materials and/or how to access them
 - Components of the audition, what the team is expecting from auditionees
 - Will there be a dance audition? Singing audition? Can actors expect to sing first or act first?
 - Audition/casting timeline
 - When will callbacks be announced and held? When will the show be cast?
 - Relevant production members' contact information
 - Relevant Executive Board members' contact information
 - Dramat Accessibility Statement (discussed below)
 - All requisite content warnings for each respective character including:
 - Intimacy
 - Stage combat
 - Racialized language
 - Instances of discrimination, etc.

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- When copy and pasting character descriptions from another source (or even if self-written), review them for stereotypes or other insensitive descriptions especially as they relate to characters' identities.
- Make a statement that all roles are open to all races/ethnicities unless otherwise noted in an individual character description. **For legal reasons, you must phrase this as “this character has xyz identity” and not “this role is open to people of xyz identity.”**
- If you are asking auditionees to find any monologues or songs or other material on their own (particularly if you include language such as “in the style of the show”), you must also provide your own selections to remove this barrier for first-time theatermakers.

Audition Forms:

- If a show is requiring auditionees to prepare musical selections from a pre-approved list, you must include MIDI recordings (in MP3 format) of the separate vocal lines and accompaniment as well as a link to a cast or other non-synthesized recording of the cut. This is to help auditionees who do not read sheet music learn their music.
- On the audition form, shows must be careful to not make auditionees feel intimidated or that their lack of experience, as manifested in their responses to the form, will count against them. We've provided the template we'd like you to use [here](#). Features to draw your attention to:
 - Provide a short space for people to share prior experience, but making clear that things like dance groups, singing, speech & debate, or other forms of expression count!
 - If you're asking for a voice part (bass/tenor/alto etc), be sure to have an option for “I don't know” or “who knows” or “you tell me!”
 - Asking for pronouns!
 - Asking what gender(s) the auditionee is comfortable portraying
 - Name pronunciation!

Workshops:

- The Dramat requires all shows to hold audition workshops before the first audition, conducted by members of the production team in collaboration with the Special Events Coordinator.
- These workshops should be an open time when potential auditionees may come in for help with the audition. Think of it like office hours with the team where auditionees can:
 - Learn more about the process
 - Get help selecting a monologue, song cut, or other audition materials
 - Find out what the team is looking for

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- The goal of these workshops is to help every auditionee prepare their best audition possible and feel unintimidated by the show. It is not a time to vet, precast, or “cull” your pool of auditionees.
- See the [Audition Workshop Guidelines](#) for more information.

Tabling:

- “Tabling” an audition is exactly what it sounds like. Often called the audition monitor, a member of the casting team (or a board member, if requested in advance to the [Prod Off](#)) sits at a table and welcomes actors who come to audition for your production.
 - After a quick hello, the monitor should first ensure that the actor is in the right place at the right time. (“Are you here to audition for *No Exit*? Oh wonderful, and what time was your audition scheduled for? Perfect!”)
 - Given that many productions have several students tabling, it is imperative that the monitor check the actor in to prevent any missed auditionees and make reaching out to no-shows a more efficient process. Send a text to your producer to let them know the next actor has arrived.
 - The monitor should then ask the actor which roles they are auditioning for and provide them with any necessary materials, such as sides (selections from the script used for an audition).
 - Next, provide the actor with a pen and an *Audition Form*. Once they’ve completed their form, shoot the producer another text that they’re ready.
 - In general, you are the first friendly face the auditionee will see: be NICE, be warm, be encouraging. Answer any questions they have about the process or the audition, make conversation with them! Explain how the audition process will work, and **do not assume the actor knows anything about the show or audition norms**. Audition jitters are overwhelming, so be there for them if they need!
- The Executive & Associate board can table for you, or members of your team (ASMs, APs, etc), or a mix of both. **If you wish to use board members, give the Production Officer a heads up several days in advance so they can arrange it for you.**
- The tabling and waiting area must be far enough from the audition door so that nothing is audible — for Crown Down auditions, have people wait upstairs.

Accessibility:

- Given the nature of the Dramat’s rehearsal spaces and their inherent inaccessibility, it is crucial that the Production team provide alternatives for students whose access needs are not being met. **On the Yale College Arts page, you must make it known that students can contact**

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the production team with any concerns regarding accessibility. For example, at the bottom of a YCA posting, your team should include:

- Our audition room spaces on 305 Crown Street are only accessible via two flights of stairs with no railing. If you feel you will not have access to the space, or have other access needs, please do not hesitate to let us know at ex1@yaledramat.org, and we will accommodate you in a space that will fit your needs. All students, regardless of ability, should have the opportunity to be involved in theater, and the Dramat is committed to accommodating any and all needs to make that happen.
- For shorter promotional messaging (such as on GroupMe's and Facebook groups), the following can be used:
 - The Dramat is committed to accommodating any and all access needs; please do not hesitate to contact us at ms2@yaledramat.org with any questions or concerns.
- For virtual productions: it is imperative that all auditions have closed captioning enabled. Yale has ZOOM's accessibility package, you have the capabilities to enable architecture necessary for students with disabilities. In regards to specific accessibility matters, the production team should make it known that the team can make accommodations for student's needs, for example:
 - **If your participation in our Zoom auditions is reliant upon hard of hearing or visually impaired architecture, please do not hesitate to let us know at froshow@yaledramat.org and we will tailor to you as best we can on a need to need basis. All students, regardless of ability, should have the opportunity to be involved in theater, and the Dramat is committed to accommodating any and all needs from the community.**
- If any characters in your production are neurodivergent, go out of your way to find community members who are as well! There is a fine line between engaging diverse community members and tokenizing them, and it is one that we must continue to walk carefully.
- For visually impaired students, ensure that your printed sides have large text fonts!

Director Guidelines in the Audition Room:

- The director of a show serves as the artistic vision for the project, therefore it is all the more important that this member of the production team emphasize accessibility throughout the casting process.
- The following is an excerpt from the *Board Representation in Audition Guidelines*, but is heavily applicable to the work of the director, as this is mostly under their purview:
 - "Trained actors will start an audition by introducing themselves, sharing their music (if applicable), slating, taking a few steps back, finding their mark, and beginning a memorized monologue. Remember that these practices are not an indication of an actor's ability or talent, but are simply formalities to hasten auditions and bring out excess nerves. Not doing this is

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simply an indication of a lack of training, nothing more. Do not penalize actors who seem all over the place, flustered, disorganized, or nervous. Auditioning is nerve wracking, and the butterflies in a performer's stomach will only cease with experience. The team should be guiding the auditionee; Don't assume they know what they are meant to do."

- The director should ask the auditionee what characters they are interested in auditioning for, identifying the scene or monologue they will be performing and give them any context that will be important for the scene. Do not assume they have read the play or know what is happening in this scene, and don't expect them to ask you, as they may be embarrassed to ask. Fill in with any information you think is vital to the performance. Then, let them know that they can start when they're ready, and if you prefer, remind them not to look at the casting team in the eyes.
- Other things to have them keep in mind include: to not bury themselves in the text, to open themselves up physically, and to just go for it and trust their instincts. Your actor might trip up on their words, mess up, freeze. Give them the option to start over if they would like. For some new actors, they might have trouble with the flow of the words and might get stuck in the diction or pacing. They might rush and go too fast or too slow. Work with them, tell them to slow down, pick up the energy, or even, let them read the monologue one sentence at a time. It is up to you to adapt; you never know what a single note can bring forward in a performance. Remember, do not rush your auditions—prioritize having a meaningful audition then to rush a nervous auditionee for the sake of keeping on schedule."
- Another excerpt from the *Board Representation in Auditions Guidelines* document:
 - "The key moments come after the first reading when the director offers notes. This is a prime opportunity to see if the actor takes direction well, if they are teachable. Notice if they're listening, if they are keen on taking the director's thoughts into account. Oftentimes, this is also a great opportunity to eliminate trained and experienced actors who may give a good performance but do not take direction well or aren't open to collaboration."

Dramat Board Representation in Auditions:

- The Outreach Coordinator, Policy Director or Vice President will advise auditions for all six Dramat shows.
- While we hope that all our production teams will prioritize comfort and kindness in their audition rooms, the Board representatives are there to be a friendly face behind the table. The goal of the Board member in the audition room is to make sure every auditionee walks away feeling welcomed and rooted for. They are there to bring a positive, calm and collected energy, and hopefully, to transfer some of that to the auditionee.
- It is the Executive Board member's job to escort every auditionee back up the stairs of Crown Down and fetch the next one.
- During the audition, the Executive Board member is there to gauge the potential of the prospective actors. There is no manual to finding raw talent, but the first (and most important)

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step is eliminating the implicit biases that falsely claim to indicate talent. They are not looking for polished and trained performances; find teachability, room to grow.

Callbacks:

- Ensure that your team has a good distribution of representation in your callback lists in order to keep yourself prepared for a representative casting tree. When in doubt, call back more people, not less.
- It is your team's responsibility to ensure that callbacks for BIPOC or other underrepresented groups are not tokenizing or just to round out diversity statistics. That means they get equal time in readings, including for lead roles if they're being considered. You need to be aware not to group people by demographics repeatedly for scenes, or to constantly swap people of the same demographic group in the same role.
- **The Dramat prohibits production teams from asking actors to perform potentially traumatic material (including depictions of discrimination, violence, and intimacy) during auditions & callbacks.** Each show must submit their sides ahead of time to the Production Officer to ensure pieces maintain a safe working environment for all auditionees. Audition sides should be submitted two weeks in advance of the first audition, and callback sides should be submitted up to 2 days in advance of the first callback.

Post-Offer:

- After you have made the casting call, include in your welcome email a list of the production team members the actors will be in frequent contact with, including: Stage managers/ASMs, Directors/AD, Producer, Choreographers/Assistants, Intimacy/Fight Coordinators, and Costume Designers.
- Remember, supporting your actors doesn't end when your auditions wrap up! Approach your rehearsal process with the same amount of thoughtfulness and care; constantly ask yourself how you can make your rehearsal and production spaces productive, fun, and accessible.