

12 Steps to Prepare your Monologue

Step 1

Make sure you can meet all the requirements regarding monologue selection. You must select a specific monologue from the August Wilson Century Cycle Compendium. Monologues must be performed as edited in the compendium and performances must last between 1-3 minutes.

Step 2

Once you've selected your monologue, familiarize yourself with the entire play. Unless you know where your character is coming from before the monologue and where they are going afterward, you're likely to miss layers of meaning. In a great monologue, the subtext is as important as the text. Summaries and analyses can be helpful if the play is difficult because of archaic language or complex themes, but use them in addition to, not in place of, the complete original work.

Step 3

Before attempting to memorize your monologue write down several adjectives describing your character as s/he is at the beginning of the monologue. Is s/he proud or humble? Wise or ignorant? Naive or jaded? Weak or strong? Sincere or treacherous? Don't limit yourself to these terms; be as descriptive as you can.

Step 4

It's important to clearly identify who your character is speaking to. Write a brief description of their relationship. (How do they feel about each other? Who has the power in the relationship?) Even if the character is alone on stage at this point in the actual play, put someone in the scene for them to talk to. If it is an internal monologue, externalize it. Imagine them arguing with their conscience or their id as if it were another person.

Step 5

Write down the objective of the monologue. What is your character's goal? Is s/he trying to convince someone of something or to stir another person to action? Sometimes a character's motives can change in the middle of a monologue as s/he comes to a realization about themselves or someone else, but what specifically does s/he want to begin with? If you cannot identify one powerful motivation to start with, you may have chosen the wrong monologue.

Step 6

Find the "beats" in the monologue. A beat is a dramatic shift in emotion, intention, or power. A character may begin a speech by insulting someone, and end up confessing undying love. This represents a change of emotion (hate to love), intention (insulting to wooing), and power (domination to submission). Your performance of the monologue should convey all these changes, which may or may not happen simultaneously. Write down what the beats are and mark on your monologue the specific point or points at which changes occur.

Step 7

Write down several adjectives describing your character as s/he is at the end of the monologue. Is it different than the list you made in Step 4? If so, make special note of the differences, as these suggest that your character develops in the course of the monologue. If the list is exactly the same, look at the monologue again to try and find points where the character deviates at least momentarily from one or more of these adjectives: for example, the proud man humbles himself before reasserting his pride.

Step 8

Memorize the words. You will not be able to perform a monologue effectively if you are searching for words. One technique is to record yourself reading the monologue and play it back repeatedly, saying the words along with or slightly ahead of the recording. Also try writing out the monologue in longhand and then make sure your written version matches the printed text word for word. Many people find that focusing on one section of the monologue at a time helps them memorize it more quickly. Start by breaking the monologue down into chunks, either using natural breaking points like paragraphs or simply dividing it into even sections. Focus all of your attention on the first chunk until you have it committed to memory. Then move on to the next one, adding it to the first one after you have both memorized. Repeat this process for the entire monologue until you can repeat the entire piece from memory. Learning a monologue by reading is the go-to method. This is great for visual learners; but unfortunately, not everyone is a visual learner. Many people learn far better by hearing, moving, or using their senses in any combination of ways. If you know what works best for you, take advantage of that knowledge to study the monologue in a way that fits your learning style. Some people even find that physically acting out each word or phrase with their body helps them learn the material. Give any of these methods a try – or better yet, try all of them. The more ways your brain can receive the same message, the better.

Understand the content. Don't think of the monologue as just words on a page – think of it as the story being told. When you have context for what's being said, it's easier for your brain to fill in the right gaps with the right words when

memorizing. For example, look at these two sentences:

Cold the behind house the night barked in dog the

The dog behind the house barked in the cold night

They're the same words, but which is easier to remember? Most likely, it's the sentence that arranges the words so that they mean something to you. This may be an oversimplified example, but the same principle applies. When you understand the meaning within the monologue and behind the words, each sentence and phrase will fall into place more easily.

Step 9

After you have memorized the monologue word for word, rehearse it until delivering it seems as natural as talking to a friend (or enemy).

Step 10

Adjust your levels. Sometimes a monologue calls for a moment of overwhelming anger or overwhelming grief, and those can be quite powerful if done well, but no audition panel wants to be subjected to 3 minutes of screaming or crying. Know what moments to keep small and what moments, if any, must be played big. Sometimes a tightly controlled emotion seething just beneath the surface is much more powerful. The goal is to move your audience not for the audience to watch you be emotional.

Step 11

It's okay to incorporate a limited amount of movement in the monologue. Standing in one place with your hands at your side is boring, but a constant whirlwind of activity is distracting and can be unintentionally comical. Every movement, whether crossing the stage or making a small gesture, should have a real motivation in terms of character. Nothing should be random or added just for effect.

Step 12

Remember you are not alone. That character you identified in Step 4 is with you. Talk to them. Establish eye contact with them. Look away from time to time. (Chances are you would never stare into someone's eyes for 3 minutes.) Know where s/he is at all times. Let them move around when it is natural for them to do so. (But keep in mind that the judges are more interested in seeing your face than the top or back of your head.)

Step 13

Perform the monologue for someone whose opinion you trust. Don't ask them if they liked the monologue or not. Ask them if they can describe the character, motivation, relationship, and goals. If any of these weren't clear to them, or if any part of your performance seems artificial or contrived, go back and try again. The goal is to convey all of those things in a way that seems natural and organic.

FINALLY

TELL THE STORY!