

10 Tips for Audition Excellence

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As children, we're constantly advised to never judge a book by its cover. But as aspiring and professional dancers, we might have to let go of this adage and face reality: First impressions *do* count. So, a dancer should strive to make a spellbinding first impression at every audition.

#1

Exude professionalism the "moment you walk in the door," says Anastasia Miller, director of dance and choreography at Clear Talent Group, a casting agency in NYC. She explains the way you walk into a room can make or break you. A negative attitude is noticed immediately. Even on the elevator up to the studio, being positive and professional is essential: You never know if someone standing next to you is the director—or a future director—so mind your manners at *all* times from the second you enter the building! "The dance world is very small," says Nicole Vallins, associate casting director of Binder Casting. "Everyone knows everyone. If you have a good reputation, you're in good shape."

#2

"Be 'ON' at all times," says Vallins. "People think they don't start their audition until that first count of eight." But that's not true! Vallins, who cast dancers for Broadway's *A Chorus Line*, has seen many well-known professionals "marking, being lazy, not being present and only thinking they're on when it's their group dancing." Apathy can sully an impressive resumé and cast a shadow over your talent.

#3

Get pumped *before* the audition. Vallins says she looks for dancers who are fully devoted. "People have this attitude of going through the motions and auditioning just to audition," she says. "But you have to be committed and willing to give it your all; you have to be invested—it shows!" If you're not into it, how can you expect the panel at the front of the room to be engaged?

#4

Don't stress. Marquis Cunningham, a top 20 finalist from season 4 of "So You Think You Can Dance," says that while auditions can be nerve-racking, "do your best to stay calm." Grady McLeod Bowman, an ensemble member and audition assistant for Broadway's *Billy Elliot*, adds, "It's important to have a sense of humor about yourself. It eases the people who are watching you; they'll become anxious if they see you frustrated."

#5

Always know who you're auditioning for. That means doing your research on the gig and production company and dressing accordingly. "If it's a sexy commercial, then you don't want to show up in Broadway theater stage makeup," Miller explains. She's seen dancers immediately typecast upon arrival because their outfits didn't match the gig. However, Vallins stresses that individuality still factors in. "You shouldn't dress a certain way just because everyone else does," she says. "You should always wear something you feel confident in."

#6

Arrive at least an hour before the sign-in time, *not* the call time. Vallins stresses that being late is not tolerated. "If you're late, you're done." Channel your dancer-discipline and be one of the first dancers at the call. When you're late, the creative team worries that it might foreshadow what's to come in rehearsal and whether you'll be able to follow a schedule or keep others waiting.

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#7

Be (the best version of) *yourself*. Improve your initial charm by heeding the above tips, but don't lose yourself in the process. Aaron Albano, ensemble dancer in Broadway's *Mary Poppins*, says that when dancers try to project what they think the creative team is looking for, "it's the completely wrong way to go." They don't want to see your version of a famous dancer. "They want to see you," he says.

#8

Focus, focus, focus! Get in the zone and stay there. Shake off unrelated thoughts, remain grounded and breathe. Bowman says, "If there's a break, you should be on the side, going over the choreography so they can see how hard you're working." Having been on both sides, he says, "You don't realize how transparent you are when auditioning it in front of a table full of people."

#9

Be mindful of your interactions with other dancers. Miller says this is critical. Creative teams want to know you can work well with others before they risk giving you a chance. Last June, Miller auditioned breakdancers, many of whom were fresh off the street. "To see how friendly they were amongst each other made a great first impression," she says. Their supportive vibe had a major influence on her choices: She ended up signing more dancers than planned! Albano also notes, "Someone you're auditioning *with* one day may be someone you're auditioning *for* the next."

#10

A botched first impression doesn't have to be your last chance. Yes, technically if you audition for something a second time, you're no longer making a first impression. But Vallins acknowledges the perseverance and growth sought after by those in the casting chairs. She has seen people audition for *A Chorus Line* seven to 10 times. "Their first impression may not have been the greatest, but they work on it, come back and give an *amazing* audition," she says. So get going, and make your first impression rock.