

NEURO ACTING™



5 KEYS TO MASTERING THE MONOLOGUE







Workbook for the Neuro Acting Workshop

Learn to choose, prepare, learn, rehearse
and perform a successful monologue
performance.

STEP 1

Choosing the Monologue



-  Choose a monologue that will fit your personality and your type.
-  Preparing a set of monologues? Start off with the monologue that most fits your personality, then go for a contrasting piece (i.e. tempo, personality, serious vs. comic)
-  Consider taking a Myers Briggs personality test. Besides helping you choose the right monologue, it will help you understand the future roles that the industry will want to cast you in.
-  Stay within your age range.
-  Follow your gut when you find a piece that really give you a buzz. It probably represents some stage of your life that you're currently struggling with. Express it!
-  Try to avoid story monologues. If you choose one, decide specifically why in the present moment you are sharing this past event – it must relate to your needs in the present.

STEP 2

Preparing the Monologue



What's your audition scene or piece about?

You will give a better performance if you understand your part in the entire story that's being told. READ THE ENTIRE SCRIPT A FEW TIMES, asking these questions:

- Why is this moment when I'm speaking this monologue important to my character?
- Within this part of the story, what are the most important moments? (i.e. discoveries, changes, disappointments)
- What is the outcome that I want to occur as I talk to this other person?
- How do I want this person to change as the result of this event?
- If I had to isolate this event from the overall story, how would I express it?

Monologue Worksheet

To develop a monologue, it is important to think through the "background" of the person you are playing, and **crucially: your relationship** to the person that you're talking to. Answer the ten questions below, using your imagination to fill in details that you don't know.

1. Who am I? What kind of a person am I?

2. What happened to me immediately before this moment?

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3. Where am I now?

4. What are four objects in my environment that might draw my interest? These are called 'anchoring images'.









5. How do I think about myself in this moment, based on what just happened?

6. Who am I talking to, and what's my attitude toward them at this very moment? What is it in them that I'm really trying to connect with?

7. What is my objective – what I'm trying to get from the other character that will fulfill my needs? (i.e. I have a problem, and I can look into your eyes to see if I've found the solution.)

➤ “ I want you to _____ ,

➤ but you _____ . ”

8. What is my secret? (i.e. what I'm dying to tell, or what I **might** tell or what I'll **never** tell.)

9. What am I afraid of happening during this scene?

10. How am I similar this character in my real life?

Scored script example



Scenes from American Life, by A. R. Gurney

- **EVENT:** I realize that I must accept life on life's terms.
- **CIRCUMSTANCES:** A wealthy, but very generous businessman has just received a Christmas card from an old friend, who's asking for money for their university.
- **OBJECTIVE:** I want to **OUTRAGE** my friend about a lifetime of being used.
- **OBSTACLES:**
 - **External:** His secretary is taking the dictation. Brad is relying on him.
 - **Internal:** He has too much of a conscience. He never stands up for himself.

Action	Text
I conserve my exhausted energy.	MAN: <i>(Dictating.)</i> Dear Brad. <i>(Pause.)</i> Thanks for your Christmas card.
I override your request for money.	<i>(Pause.)</i> I'm very sorry, but this year I don't think I'll cough up another dollar for Yale. I'm distressed that the library was burned but why should I keep Yale up when even its own students persist in dragging her down?
I awaken myself to life's unfairness.	Indeed, why do people like you and me and Snoozer, Brad, have to keep things <i>up</i> all the time? It seems to me I spend most of my time keeping things up. I keep the symphony up. I keep the hospital up. I keep our idiotic local theater up. I keep my garden up because no one else will.
I punish myself for my weakness.	I keep my house up so the children will want to come home someday. I keep the summer house up for grandchildren. I keep up all that furniture mother left us because Sally won't keep it up.
I contain my out of control anger in front of my secretary.	I keep my chin up, I keep my faith up. And I'm sick, sick, SICK of it. I'm getting tired supporting <i>all</i> those things that maybe ought to collapse.
I crush you so that you never ask again.	Sometimes all I think I am is an old jockstrap, holding up the sagging balls of the whole goddamn WORLD!
I cover up my shame at my outburst.	Strike that, Miss Johnson. Obviously. And excuse me.
I organize my thoughts.	<i>(Pause.)</i> Strike out the whole letter, Miss Johnson. <i>(Pause.)</i> Begin again.
I reassure you that I'll behave like an adult.	<i>(With a sigh.)</i> Dear Brad. Enclosed is my annual check for Yale. I wish it could be larger. Sally joins me in sending love to you and Jane. Sincerely. And so forth.

STEP 3

Learning the Monologue



Prep work:

Know what you're saying

First: score the scene so that you know your circumstances, objectives, obstacles and actions. This will help you know **why** you are saying **what** you are saying. Otherwise you're just cramming words into your head, and you risk losing them during the performance.

Let your imagination fly

From the very first time you read the piece, read it like a good novel or screenplay and imagine yourself in the scene as if it were real. This will already start making the reality and the flow of the scene make sense to you – and create ideas of future movements and gestures.

Seeing is believing

I can't stress highly enough the importance of using anchoring images (see page 3) that are in your imaginary environment. Also, you could brainstorm an image for each line – especially if your piece already has imagery or descriptive language within it. Simply associate a specific image or visual with each of your lines and your lines will come to you much faster. Later you can discard these images or choose to keep using them.

Learning tactics:

Slow is the fastest way to learn

Read through the monologue slowly, and just listen to the words. Focus on pausing between each line, really absorbing what's being said.



Sound it out

Write the first sentence on a pad of paper and speak the words out loud as you write – not **after** you write, but as you write the sentence. This way, you are writing, speaking, and in essence, drawing the words into your muscles, both mentally and physically. You are beginning to internalize the words and make them your own.

Easy does it

1. Learn the monologue one sentence at a time or you will overwhelm your mind. So learn the first sentence, then run that sentence and add the second sentence. Then run those two and add the third sentence, etc.
2. An even better way to learn it: learn the last beat first then learn the second to the last beat, and run it into the last. This will create a psychological momentum that draws you from the preceding beat to the last beat. Might seem confusing at first, but you'll learn it faster that way.
3. When the lines start sticking into your head, run the lines with a sheet of paper covering your upcoming lines in the script. It will help you see how your thoughts flow and point out any gaps in your memory.

Get it into the body

-  You can lock the lines more quickly into the mind and body if you “suit the action to the word” (thank you Shakespeare) instead of learning the lines sitting still. Get on your feet, run the lines and let the gestures flow, especially if you’re referring to a remembered object within the piece. But: keep an open mind and don’t get locked into a permanent delivery of a line. Always keep it fresh.
-  Still troubled connecting all the lines together? Run the lines like a dance step: on phrase number one: step your right foot forward. Phrase number two: left foot forward. Repeat. Then increase the speed of the steps as you increase the pace.

Bedroom perfect is not good enough.

‘Bedroom perfect’ means that you could run the lines in a quiet place with no distractions. Not good enough for the actor. You need to know your lines so well that there’s NO WAY you could say anything but these lines – especially for a monologue, which is the most potentially stressful acting situation. You need to know those words so well that you could speed through them without thinking, because in your acting, you must not be searching for your lines; you must be focused on what’s happening with your imaginary scene partner. I tell my students to get a peeler and work their way through a carrot (or some other task that requires your full concentration) while going through the words. Only then will you be able to start acting.

STEP 4

Rehearsing the Monologue





**Prepare before the run through**

Before running it, sit down, close your eyes and remind yourself of all the items from your monologue worksheet, especially your circumstances and your environment.

Think of getting a photo of someone that you might be talking to (preferably someone you don’t know). Imagine that you need something from them, and that you can be hurt deeply by them if you don’t get what you need from them.

1. Get reacquainted with your scene partner.

What matters is not so much *who* you are talking to but *what* you address in your partner at the moment. Have fun dealing with your absent partner – you don’t have to look at them the whole time – do you look at someone the whole time you’re going for a walk with them? For example, take the line: “What am I going to do?” and deal with it different ways.

-  Look at them entirely.
-  Look at them for the line and then look away.
-  Look away and then return to them.
-  Look away entirely.

Special scene partners

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- 🌀 If you're stumped for an idea of whom you're talking to, I always make them 'The One Who Knows What it's Like to be Me'. This person accepts me and is my champion as I get through this tough time.
- 🌀 Soliloquies - where you're supposedly talking to yourself. Consider making them the someone that you're addressing when you're stressed out and you find yourself talking out loud (i.e. "Where are my keys!?). It's perfectly natural and it's normal, and that's what's happening in a soliloquy. Imagine taking your mind from the front of your head and placing it out in front of you and wrestling with it, reasoning with it, pleading with it. Your audience will identify, because we've all had these 'imaginary friends'.

2. Find a similar situation.

- Imagine that you are personally going through the same situation.
- If that's difficult to imagine, think: "*What's this situation **like** from my real life?*"
- If you feel you would never act as the character does in the situation, ask yourself, "*In what situation **would** I act that way?*"
- Talk out loud about it and then switch to the text, keeping the sense that you're making it all up.

The run through

Create a springboard to grab your audience.

1. **Improvise a brief dialogue with an acting partner.** Set up the circumstances in such a way that you are led into the first line of the text without a break; at that point your acting partner stops talking but continues to offer nonverbal feedback. Created by actor John Cazale when he worked with Al Pacino.
2. **Create a springboard event:**
 - 🌀 Pretend to hear something that your imagined partner says.
 - 🌀 Before you speak your first line, say something **silently** to yourself:
 - a one sentence summary of the main point of the monologue
 - improvise a brief dialogue 'preface' to the text: either from yourself or your scene partner.

This gets you started acting before you speak. It helps you connect with your partner and it will bring your thoughts into focus. It will also draw your audience out of their world and into yours.
 - 🌀 React to an imaginary sensory stimulus.
 - 🌀 Do a strong, simple physical activity.
3. **"Now, just talk to them."** (..and don't worry about getting it 'right'.)
4. **Try this exercise if you're really struggling with connecting to your absent partner: *The Alphabet Game*:** Picture a close friend across the room and accept that they are there. "Hear" the friend say "A", respond with "B", then hear "C," and so on. At some point in the middle of the exercise, break into the first line of the monologue. During the monologue the actor keeps picturing the kind of supportive feedback.

Remember:

- 🌀 Don't stare at your scene partner. Make your anchoring images as real as possible and use them. It will make your performance more believable.
- 🌀 Imagine that your scene partner is making it as difficult as possible for you to get what you want from them. Allow yourself to feel the frustration of this. It will bind you to

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them and increase your focus.

- 🌀 Always keep a sense of playfulness and exploration whenever you rehearse.

Insights into Monologues, by Denis O'Hare, Award-winning actor

"It's funny, my big insight into how to do a monologue is that, when someone is speaking a monologue they're not setting up that it's a monologue. They want to say one thing. And then they think that's not enough, so they say the next thing. And then that doesn't completely satisfy the urge, so they say something else. So there are clarifications of what your intention is. When you have a story to tell, you don't know how you're going to tell the story, or how well you're going to tell the story, and how long you're going to tell the story.

"And with a monologue, there's always the implied listener: Who is listening? Are you speaking to the audience? Do you see the person you're speaking to object, and does that sort of energize? Even though it's a monologue, it's still a scene. You're in a relationship with another person or other people—even a phone monologue, you're listening to their breathing or not breathing, the sounds in the background. In a monologue you don't know where you're going, I guess that's my big insight. You don't know how you're going to satisfy your need to speak."

Remembering the Moments, from Jack Poggi, Actor and Monologue Expert

"Being able to stay with the moment is important in monologue work. Even when we are engaged in dialogue there is much in the nature of our business that conspires to make us rush ahead mindlessly. There's the fear of forgetting our lines. There's the fear of boring people. And there's the terror that we will not be very interesting to look at if we stand there naked, so to speak. It's hard enough with scenes, but when we know that we have two minutes before the audition mercifully ends, the temptation to rattle off the whole speech and be done with it can become nearly irresistible. But the life of the speech is in the moments. Although they may be part of a larger whole and not of equal importance, each moment is precious and must be given its due."

STEP 5

Performing the Monologue



Rehearse this checklist in the final rehearsals before the performance of your piece. (Note: don't listen to the Visualization track until the actual performance.) The more you rehearse each of these steps, the more likely you'll have set down the neural pathways that will make your performance confident, relaxed and passionate.

15-minutes before:

- ☐ Listen to the audio track Mental Rehearsal for Monologues that's part of the Neuro Acting course. It will help calm your nerves, focus your mind and improve your performance.

Minutes before:

Celebrate yourself and remind yourself:

- ☐ They want you to do a great job; nobody wants an actor to fail.
- ☐ You are bringing something entirely unique to this audition. Celebrate that.
- ☐ You are an instrument for the writer and director. You don't have to blow them away. You're simply there to give them an option.

Moments before you start, remind yourself:

- ☐ What is the event of the story, what is this piece about?
- ☐ How does my character change during the course of it?
- ☐ What just happened to my character?
- ☐ What's my attitude toward my scene partner at this very moment?

Lift-off:

- ☐ Take a moment to viscerally connect with your scene partner and remind yourself of your Objective.
- ☐ Say to yourself, "I have no idea what I'm about to say, but **you** need to hear this."
- ☐ Look into the eyes of your imaginary scene partner.
- ☐ Play the score and fight for what you need with all your energy and focus.
- ☐ Make contact with your anchoring images.
- ☐ Trust the process and do not control your emotions.

Afterwards

If they give you any side-coaching or feedback, listen carefully and **incorporate those notes into your second performance**. Your future job will depend on it, because they will be watching for how flexible you are in your performing and how well you can take direction.

According to casting director Kelly Valentine Henry:

"I've seen it happen: If an actor gives a wonderful audition and the director gives them notes for the second round – but the actor hasn't listened to those adjustments, the director will not choose that actor, because they'll say, "he can't take direction."

BREAK A LEG!

