



Self-tape best practice guidelines

February 2022

Prepared by members of MEAA/Equity Australia, in consultation with Performer Representatives and Casting Directors

Preamble

Following a number of distressed calls asking for intervention, MEAA Equity conducted a member survey to gauge the impact of self-taping during Covid restrictions and lockdown, and to determine what the preferred process might be from a performer's perspective. The following guidelines have been drafted to not only address issues raised in the member survey but also to address the mental health needs of actors in relation to self-taping.

It is noted that the self-tape scenario has ballooned during lockdown and that all parties have entered into unregulated self-taping conditions without the chance for consultation to create parameters that work for everyone. It is important to note that no one is considered at fault here. The way in which the process has developed, however, has caused significant problems (as well as some benefits) for performers, for whom the survey was prepared.

The survey attracted 470 member responses.

Respondents pointed out the increasing demands of self-tapes and decreasing turnaround times, plus the expectation that actors will have the time, space, equipment and capability to film, direct, edit and act all within a short time frame, and then navigate the varying demands of internet submission. Many registered a significant increase in hours/workload relating to self-tapes in contrast to in-studio testing. Whereas historically the prime concern for artists was the "work" on the audition itself, now disproportionate time is spent on the act of just getting the self-tape done. Often the artistic element is the last consideration.

A large number of respondents appeared overwhelmed by the cost, technology, time constraints, the necessity to find a reader, and filming demands (for example, complex camera movements). There was a concern that those with better technology and space would submit better looking self-tapes.

It was observed that the ability to call for a wide number of submissions may also impact the capability of Casting Directors, Performer Representatives, producers and directors to actually view the increased number of tests.

Following consultation with Casting Directors in the process of negotiating these guidelines, it became evident that CD's overwhelmingly had no requirement for complex camera angles or strong production values. An audition filmed on a smart phone is sufficient: a truthful story being told always wins out over a technically perfect tape. CD's also stated that they applauded the ability to see more auditions via self-tests, and that they were committed to viewing each test that was submitted.

Many performer comments were also in favour of self-tapes. These comments came from people in outlying areas, people with families, people with jobs they had to work around, and people who were confident at editing and judging their own work. Performers were excited at getting the chance to test for roles they would never have had the chance to test for previously due to geography, work or timeframes. They were pleased to be able to view their takes and select those they thought best. These performers also found that once the initial outlay on equipment had been spent, they were financially better off, with travel, parking, babysitting or loss of work costs being factored in.

The following document was first drafted from the findings of the MEAA member survey by a committee of MEAA performer members. Performer Representatives and Casting Directors were then consulted in turn, and the document amended accordingly. The purpose of the suggested guidelines is to standardise the self-tape process in terms of technology, time commitments and self-test expectations, whilst allowing for the best performance possible: a win-win situation for all parties.

1. Turn around times

Casting Briefs need to provide:

For TVCs Casting Directors will aim for a **48 hour minimum turnaround**, excluding weekends and public holidays, from issue of first scheduled media release.

Performer Representatives will aim to submit briefs to actors as soon as possible after receiving them.

Actors and Performer Representatives will accept/decline audition offers as soon as possible after receiving them, so as not to disadvantage other actors who may be called if offer is declined.

For TV, Film and Streaming Services - Casting Directors will aim toward:

- For tests of 3 pages or less: a minimum 3 working-day turnaround;
- For scripts of 4-6 pages: a minimum 4 working-day turnaround;
- For tests of 7 pages or more a minimum 5 working-day turnaround;
- And for serial TV: a minimum 3 working-day turnaround

Weekends and public holidays are excluded. (i.e. if a brief for a TVC is given to an actor on a Friday afternoon, it will be submitted no earlier than the following Tuesday afternoon. In this example, if the Monday is a public holiday, the submission day would be Wednesday.)

In circumstances where it is not possible to comply with these provisions, it is up to all parties to work together to find a possible compromise. CDs are encouraged to provide more time whenever possible.

2. Theatre self-tapes

Where possible, outside of extreme circumstances such as lockdown, in-person auditions should be prioritised for theatre. However we acknowledge that more actors are given an opportunity to audition with self-tapes, and in some cases self-tapes may be more suitable to an actor. Therefore both in-person and self-tape options should be available to all. Casting Directors should however acknowledge that theatre self-tape auditions, especially musical theatre (with the complexities of musical arrangements and dance calls) are not ideal for actors.

- Where a self-tape audition process is being utilized by the performer for a non-musical theatre audition, a 5 day minimum turnaround is required excluding weekends and public holidays.
- No more than two scenes should be requested.
- Theatre self-tape submissions should where possible be mid-shot rather than close-up.

3. Standard shot size and instructions

In acknowledgement of the often limited resources and space available to performers, shot size requirements for self-tapes will be restricted to mid-shots or close-ups.

There will be no requirements to zoom in or out during a scene and no requests for large or complicated movements or techniques such as panning or slow motion.

Casting briefs will provide clear and specific instructions for self-tapes, provided either in writing or via a recorded video, available to all auditionees.

Where an actor is having difficulty providing a self-tape, actor and/or representative should liaise with the Casting Director to find a solution which may include a Zoom or an in-room audition.

Call-backs, if not able to be done in-studio, will be conducted via Zoom and paid for at the current MEAA rate.

Performers should be able to audition with 'script in hand' if this is in line with their individual process.

4. Audition Responses

It is important that Casting Directors and theatre companies understand how important it is for a performer's mental health to know the outcome of their audition. Casting Directors and theatre companies will continue to investigate and instigate a method of informing performers (and their representatives) about the outcome of their audition, positive or negative, as soon as outcomes are known.

5. Scripts/Sides

As stated in Section 3, actors may test with the script in hand if they wish to.

Where possible and appropriate within the production, actors will be sent the full script of the production they are auditioning for.

6. Readers

It is acknowledged by all parties that a non-actor may be used as a reader in a self-test. If an actor is struggling to find a suitable reader, they can communicate this to their representative and Casting Director and all endeavours will be made to assist.

For call-backs, when on Zoom or otherwise, a reader should be provided by the Casting Director.

7. Submission of Self-Tapes

Actors will not be expected to pay to submit their self-tapes. Whichever submission platform is used will be free and easily accessible to the actor when the actor is the person submitting.

It is understood by all parties that these provisions will not always prove practical due to the fluid nature of our business. In circumstances where the recommendations set out are challenging to implement, the Casting Director involved is urged to make this clear to performers and their representatives, and to keep the lines of communication open.

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