

MUSICAL THEATRE VOICE CLASS

with kahrie galo

Stage Presence

Two crucial foundations:

1. Mindset

Go into an audition or performance as if everyone knows you are an engaging, skilled, and confident performer. Imagining others doubting or criticizing you creates a headspace where you are on the defensive.

2. Being Prepared

Assuming you're not expected to improvise and are not a natural improviser (which is a different skill altogether), one of the best ways to feel confident and have great stage presence is to go in prepared. Set aside time before an audition or performance to not only learn, but also to perfect and polish your material.

Without these two foundations, all other technical elements of stage presence will fall flat.

Other important elements:

1. Start with your face

Before you start singing, stretch out your face! This sounds silly, but gently stretching and massaging your eyebrows, jaw, and cheeks can loosen you up to be more expressive and look more engaging.

Try performing a song with your body relaxed, focusing only on your facial expression. When starting out, don't close your eyes to express emotion—your eyes are the “window to the soul.” Use your eyes to communicate, don't shut everyone out by closing your eyes.

What are eye blocks? We naturally close our eyes in everyday life when we want to keep an emotion in or keep the outside world out. This is a natural and authentic way to express emotion, but when performing, it can easily be overused and disconnect the performer from the audience. It can also be perceived as hesitancy or discomfort.

Eye blocks reference- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/spycatcher/200912/the-body-language-of-the-eyes>

2. Add Physicality

Keep your body open—use your upstage arm to point or make large gestures.

Don't pace- if you feel you should move across the stage in your performance, do it with purpose (covered in more detail in the blocking lesson)

Use your body to help communicate the story you are telling. Think about your lyrics as you are singing and use body language that matches the story you are telling.

3. Create a world others can see and experience

If playing a character:

Research your character thoroughly and imagine how your character would move and think.

If performing as yourself:

Focus on what parts of yourself you want to be seen. Do you want others to see you as classy, eclectic, sassy, etc., or a combination of traits? Lean into who you are with authenticity.

Visualize a world around you:

Think about what your character would be seeing and experiencing. This can be tricky to do without using eye blocks, but gets easier with practice.

Exercise: Pack a bag with given circumstances

“Konstantin Stanislavsky, often called the father of modern acting, created the concept of “given circumstances” within a scene. This includes the conditions surrounding your character, as well as their context within the story—everything from their background to where they live, their job, and their relationship to those around them. This technique involves carefully analyzing the script in order to ask basic questions about a character.

The next step is to literally pack a bag—either by miming or using actual objects—under the conditions you’ve laid out. For example, how would you perform this task as a college freshman who’s late for class, whose professor has warned them that they’ll fail if they miss one more session?”

Exercise explained by Backstage- <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/best-acting-exercises-76697/>

4. Silence and stillness are tools, not the absence of technique

As beginner actors, we often get restless when in front of a crowd and feel the need to always be moving or progressing with new facial expressions or gestures. These often end up being nervous movements not connected to your character, betraying that you are an actor trying to figure out how to not be awkward. Being still may feel awkward while you wait for your cut to start, for your next lyrics, or for the music to end after you finish singing. Allow people to see you being still, especially in ballads (slow, emotional songs), if the character doesn’t call for movement.

5. Hold your audience’s attention past the end of the performance

Allow for a beat to pass before getting out of character after an audition. This WILL feel awkward at first, but it is necessary to round out your performance. Think of it as standing your ground—the stage is still yours. Whatever emotion you ended the audition cut or performance with, hold it for a couple of seconds.