

MUSICAL THEATRE VOICE CLASS

with kakrie galo

Blocking

What is Blocking?

Blocking is the planned, purposeful movement of an actor during a scene or song. This can include entrances, exits, crosses, movements up and down stage, and use of props. Blocking is used to serve the story and may tell us something about the character.

How to Block an Audition Cut

Start with no movement. Use your face and eyes to tell the story until you have a good grasp on your character. When rehearsing in one place, where do you feel like you need to move? Why? Start exploring different movements. Record yourself and get feedback from others. Only move if your character *really would* move with certain lyrics or subtext¹. It is okay to park and bark² if adding movement isn't necessary. Use the guidelines below to help create strong blocking.

Loose Guidelines

Generally, an actor *should never*:

1. Move upstage during an audition. This would mean the actor is either turning their back toward the audience or walking backwards. Both show uncertainty and nervousness. If your character is nervous or uncertain, experiment with other methods to convey this and get feedback. Of course, there are some instances in which this rule can be broken (e.g. startled, scared by a thought, etc.).
2. Pace back and forth. Beginner actors often pace because it feels like a natural way to build intensity and show your character is deliberating (or is just a result of actor nerves), but is usually distracting and takes away from the words the actor is saying/singing. If used at all, do so very sparingly and purposefully, and get feedback before solidifying it into your scene..
3. Fidget with clothing or hair. This is another beginner habit that typically stems from actor nerves. If your character is nervous or awkward, explore how your face and other body language can communicate these emotions and traits.
4. Look at the casting directors or audience during an audition. This can make the audition feel unnatural, forced, and/or awkward.
5. Overblock. Don't add movement to every beat. You should be standing in one place for most of your audition, only moving when your character really needs to. Actors shouldn't move more than three times during the duration of an audition cut.

¹ Subtext: the hidden meaning, true feelings, or unspoken intentions beneath the dialogue a character speaks.

² Park and bark: When a singer stands in one spot ("parks") and sings ("barks") without acting or moving around.

Generally, an actor *should*:

1. Stand with confident, strong posture. You are there to show off what you've been rehearsing. Don't apologize for taking the stage by slouching or closing off your body by crossing your arms or fidgeting with your hands. Take up every second you have on stage with confidence (even if you don't feel confident.)
2. Envision the scene you are acting within. Do the work beforehand to learn what the scene is about. What does your character want? Is someone else in the scene?
3. Use your movement to help your character get something they want. Is your character longing to be a dancer? Use dance-like movement to get your character closer to this goal (actually dancing during a vocal audition isn't typically advised.) Is your character longing for her boyfriend to propose? Take a beat or two to envision her dream ring on her hand. Is your character wanting revenge for a friend for stealing his girlfriend? Use sharp bursts of movement or tension in the body for your character to practice facing that friend. Experiment with subtle vs. bold blocking to get your character closer to his or her goal.
4. End farther downstage than you started (if moving at all). This intuitively makes the audience feel like you've made progress toward your goal.
5. Move when an emotion or motivation is shifting or being introduced. Look for beats where your character shifts focus or undergoes an internal change. You don't necessarily need to add movement, but these are generally where you would add movement if it is called for.
6. Rely more on vocal and facial expression to communicate than movement. As mentioned many other times in this document, actors should only block if it will add something to the scene as opposed to standing still. Don't add movement just to move or because you feel awkward standing still. You should focus most of your acting into your voice and face; that is usually where most of the powerful acting will come from.

What do I do with my hands?

After you've practiced your audition without any hand movement, here are some ways to give your hands a purpose in your audition:

1. Think about real life hands. Think of someone you know who is similar to your character and imagine they are feeling how your character is feeling. What would they do with their hands? Start there.
2. Don't overuse your hands. This can be very distracting.
3. A few *don'ts*:
 - Hands in pockets
 - Fidgeting hands
 - Clasped hands throughout
4. Don't be afraid to take up space with your arms. If your character is in a moment of victory, excitement, or any big emotion, experiment using your full arm span if it would be a natural movement for your character.