The Audition Starter Kit

The Foundations of What You Need to Make an Industry Standard Self Tape ~ by Gayla Goehl

A History of Auditioning Prior To Today

Actors and parents drove across Los Angeles, sat in hallways at casting directors' offices with hundreds of other actors and parents and waited for their turn in the room. The casting associate told you everything you would need to do. Piece by piece. Scene by scene. In Pre-Reads, the casting associate would give you suggestions on how to do the scenes. Tempo, pacing, choices. Then the associate would tape your auditions and your slate. About 3 minutes in the room for commercials. About 5 to 10 minutes in the room for theatrical (TV/Film) auditions. Around thirty minutes to an hour in traffic one way. However, all the responsibility for filming, sound, lighting and direction was the responsibility of the casting department.

Now? The casting associate's work is on you and your parents. And the casting associate's office is your home. All the responsibility of camera crew, lighting department and the sound guy. As well as choosing which takes go to the casting department.

So that means you are going to have to do a lot of work. And you are going to have to turn in the best takes you possibly can.

Casting directors are great at spotting talent and seeing potential. They aren't looking for fancy production skills. However, they do need to see both artistic strength and some technical know-how. You will need foundational technical camera skills. Eyelines, lighting, a video that looks good, shows the actor clearly, hears the actor clearly, and is labeled correctly before sending to casting.

Every section is set up as **Good, Better, Best.** They have all gotten actors just like you cast.

Anything marked **MUST DO** has only one right answer.

Gayla Says: Do your absolute best, and let them see YOU.

Gayla Says: You're the actor AND the whole crew now. Wear both hats proudly!

Gayla Says: Make it easy for them to say yes to you.

Gayla Says: Great acting in a clean tape makes a casting director's whole day.

The Actor's Triangle

1. Who You Are. Self reliance and a confidence inside yourself. Be strong in your own beliefs, of who you are as a person, outside of what you do for a living. Connected with your family and friends. Emotionally healthy and grounded. Clear about who you are, who you intend to be, and what a good person you want to be in life.

2. Your Passion. A true interest and curiosity for acting and performance. A real passion that you are excited about learning. As you grow older and become a teen and into college, this curiosity and interest needs to become a real passion, a dedication like an Olympic athlete. A sustainable excitement, so the good moments feel amazing and the slow times or setbacks do not seem impossible to get through. A personal strength.

3. Your Learning. Learn the craft as much as you can. Like a mission to learn every aspect of this industry, artistic and technical. Stay focused in class, work every day on your skills, and stay hyper focused on learning.

In the Center. Keep all your family and friendships grounded in the reality that this is just a job like any other job. A really great job. However, a job.

Know Your Rights

SAG-AFTRA has rules for self-tapes on union TV, film and streaming projects.

- You get **48 hours** to prepare a self-tape, not counting weekends and holidays. **Minors get 72 hours.**
- A first self-tape can be **no more than 8 pages.** Later tapes, no more than 12.
- Casting **cannot require** you to memorize, buy specific equipment, or use paid editing software.
- You can ask for a **live virtual audition (like Zoom) or an in-person audition** instead. When available and times are not filled.
- Questions? SAG-AFTRA Entertainment Contracts: **(323) 549-6828.**

Source: SAG-AFTRA Contract Bulletin, Self-Tapes

If you are not SAG-AFTRA yet, your goal is to be. Use these rules as guardrails for all youth acting. Do not let any casting or production push you to do anything that you are uncomfortable with. Like language. It is alright to PASS on any audition that has language or situations parents and students are not comfortable with.

Your Self Tape Gear

Camera

GOOD: A phone or iPad with a good back camera. Almost any phone or iPad made in the last few years is plenty.

BETTER: A DSLR or mirrorless camera. It looks even better, but it takes more know-how and more time to set up.

BEST: Get professionally coached by me, and I will tape it for you.

Something Steady to Hold Your Camera

GOOD: A table with stacks of books or shoeboxes.

BETTER: A tripod with a phone holder or iPad holder.

BEST: A tripod for a DSLR with pan and tilt.

Backdrop

GOOD: Any plain, clutter-free wall. Or a solid sheet pulled tight. Make sure to iron it, steam it, or use Downy Wrinkle Releaser.

BETTER: A plain wall painted gray, soft blue or cream, or a pop-up backdrop in any shade of gray.

BEST: A pull-up backdrop in gray you can store under a bed or in a closet.

Gayla Says: I put peel-and-stick wallpaper on one wall. It stays up as my everyday studio wall, and when I move, it peels right off!

Little Extras

- A Bluetooth remote to start and stop recording
- Blankets or pillows to soak up echo

Set Up Your Space



Distance From the Wall

GOOD: At least 2 feet off the wall. If you still see a shadow, move your lights a little higher or farther out to the sides.

BETTER: About 3 feet off the wall.

BEST: 4 to 6 feet off the wall, if your room has the space. No shadow, and the background goes a little soft and blurry, which looks very pro.

Blue is a casting favorite. Gray, green and cream work too. Skip stark white, which can wash out darker skin, and black, which can make you look like a floating head.

Light Like a Pro



GOOD: Natural light from a window, in front of you.

BETTER: A ring light at the same height or a little above your eyes.

BEST: LED lights on stands, or softbox lights on stands, one on each side of the camera. A key light at an angle on one side, a little above your eyes. A softer fill light on the other side. A small hair light behind you, up high, so you pop off the background.

Gayla Tip: A white poster board reflecting light back into your face. Or a collapsible photography reflector.

MUST DO

- [ ] Never put a window or a bright lamp behind you
- [ ] Turn off overhead lights that make shadows under your eyes.

If You Wear Glasses

GOOD: Tip your glasses down just a tiny bit on your nose until the glare is gone.

BETTER: Raise your lights higher and move them farther out to the sides, so the glare bounces away from the camera.

BEST: If possible, do not wear your glasses. However, if you need to, anti-glare coating is now available for a small additional cost at almost all eyeglass stores. It's worth the small investment.

Sound Like a Pro



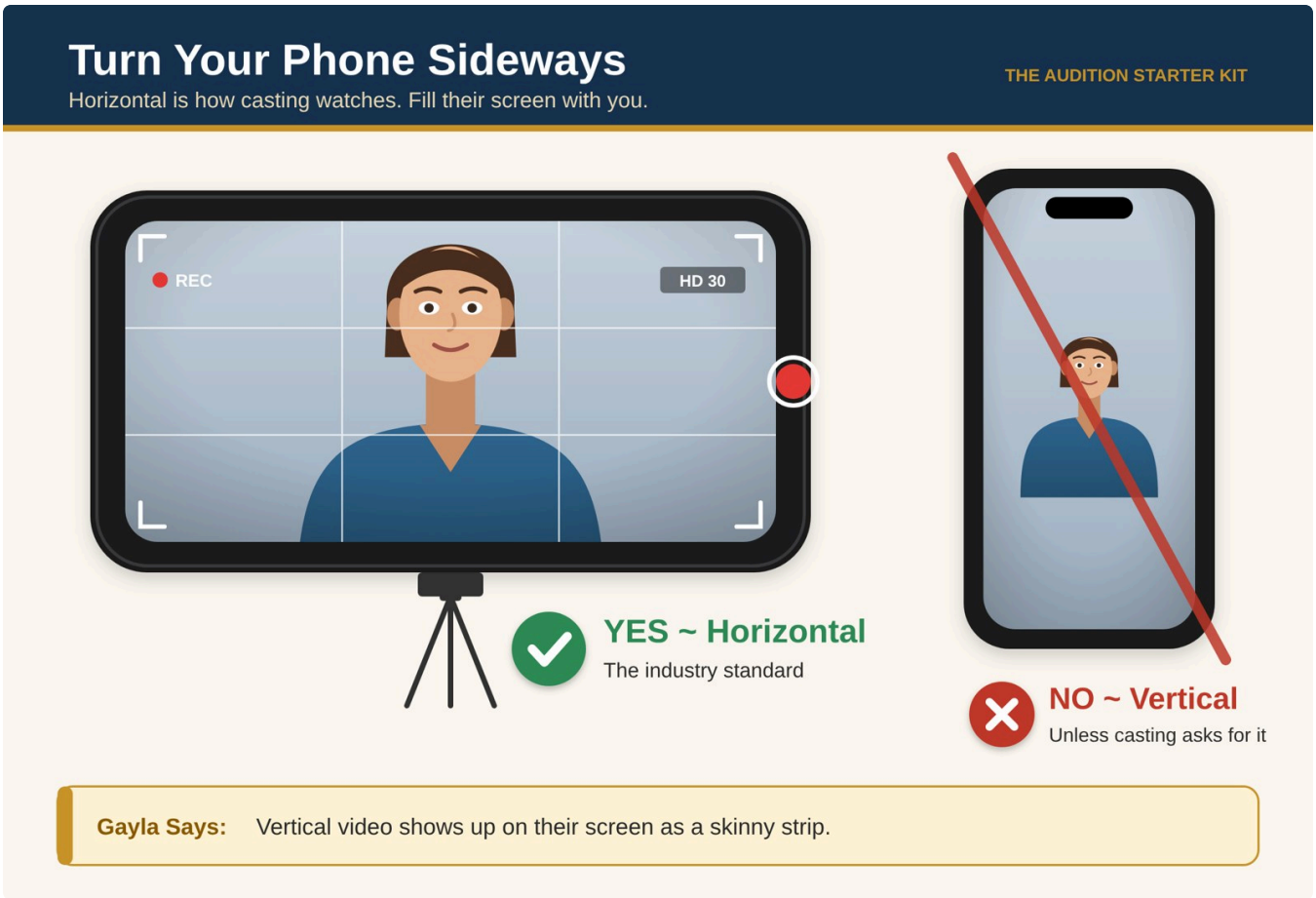
GOOD: The normal room tone where you live. Try not to have a cat's meow or kids laughing in the background. However, if it's a great take, send it. This will not be a deterrent in getting cast. And if it is, then something is wrong with the casting director!!!

BETTER: A quiet room free of fans, HEPA filters and air conditioning noise. Ideally your feet on a rug or carpet. No clothes or jewelry that make noise either. Using your device's normal microphone.

BEST: An external microphone, like a lav (clip-on) mic or a shotgun mic, close to you and out of the shot. It plugs into your phone, iPad or camera.

Gayla Says: Voice over audition? Tape in a closet full of clothes.

Phone Camera Settings



GOOD: Back camera, 1x lens, set anywhere from 720p to 1080p HD at 30 frames per second. If you are by yourself, you can use the front camera to really see your angles.

BETTER: Back camera, 1x lens, 1080p HD at 24 or 30 frames per second. Turn HDR video off. Lock your focus and brightness. On iPhone, tap and hold on your face. On Android, look for focus lock or AE/AF lock.

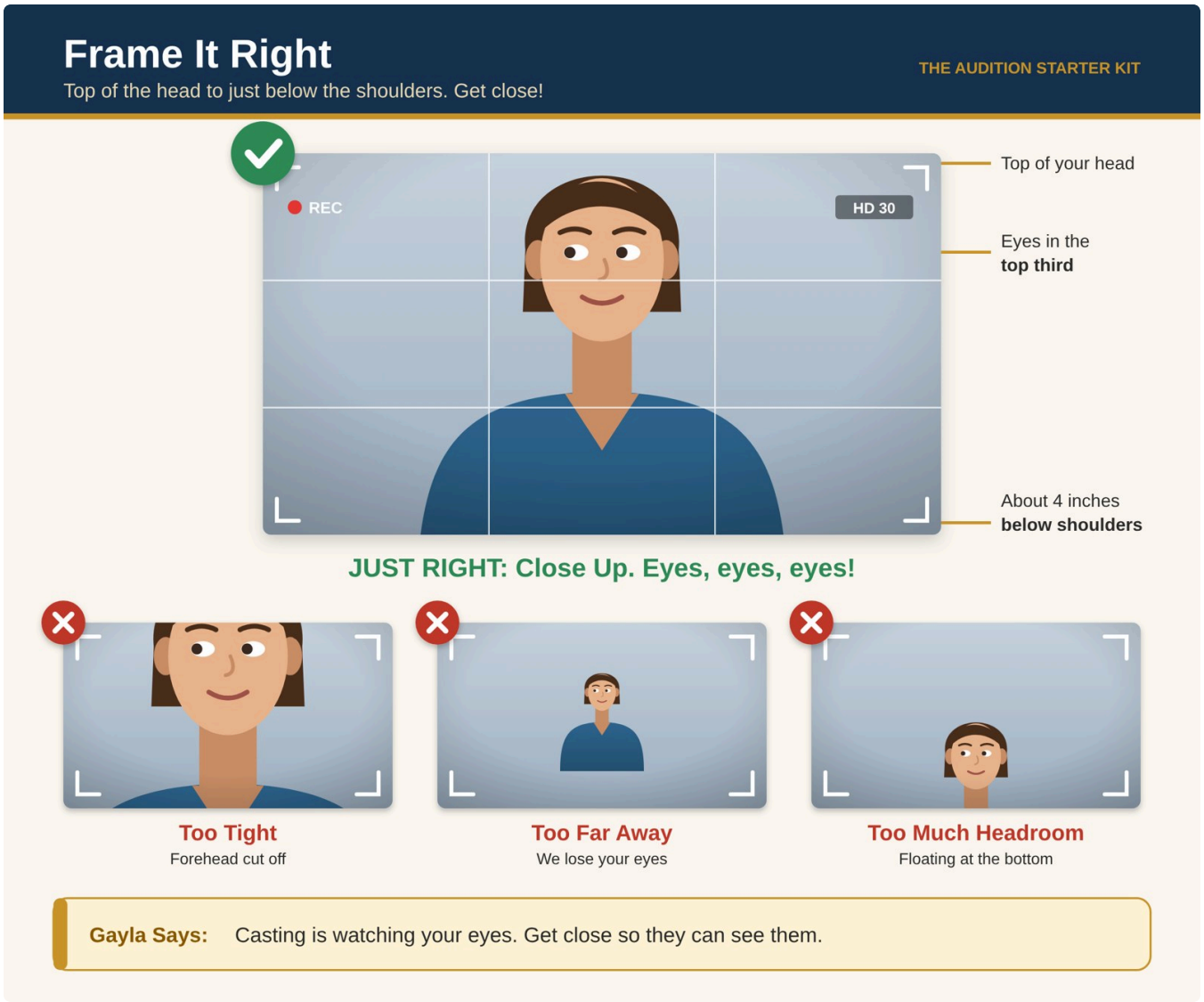
BEST: A free pro camera app, like Blackmagic Camera, or a DSLR or mirrorless camera.

MUST DO

- [ ] **STORAGE SPACE!** Clear room on your phone BEFORE you start.
- [ ] Battery full or plugged in. You can also plug in an external backup battery, or use the kind that magnetically attaches to the back of your phone.
- [ ] Phone horizontal (sideways).
- [ ] 1x lens. No pinch to zoom. Move the camera closer instead.

- [ ] Lens wiped clean.
- [ ] Do Not Disturb on. Skip Airplane Mode, it can turn off your Bluetooth remote or wireless mic.
- [ ] No filters, no beauty mode.

Frame It Right



GOOD: A close up: the very top of the head to four inches below your shoulders.

BETTER: That same close up, with your eyes in the top third of the screen. Focus on your eyes. The eyes are what they are watching, so it's important to be in a close up.

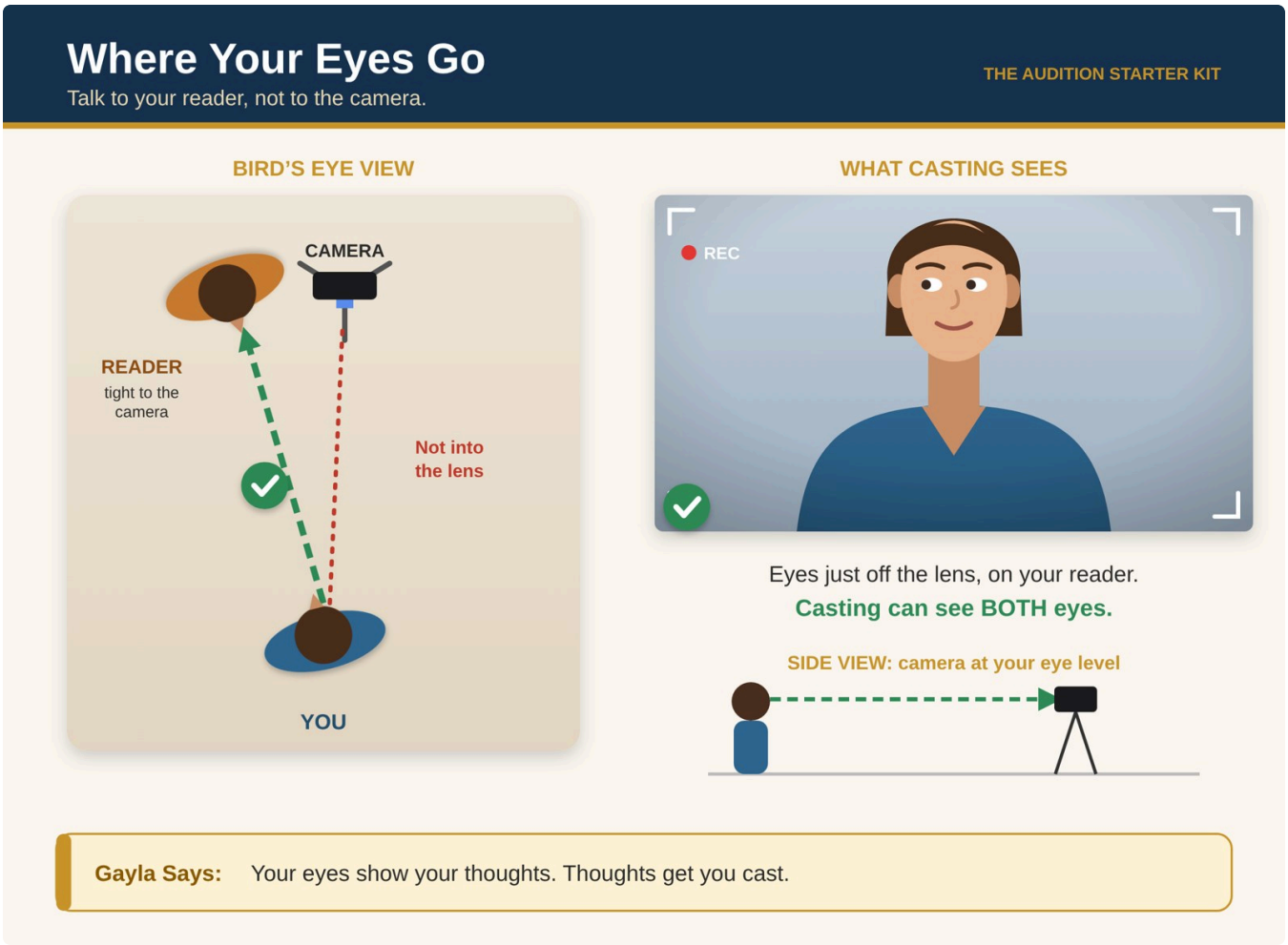
BEST: That close up, plus the slate frame casting asks for. The slate frame is full body sometimes, and can be done horizontally and vertically now.

Gayla's Secret: Most casting directors say chest up. I go closer.

MUST DO

- [ ] Camera at your eye level.
- [ ] Stay inside the frame. Don't walk in or out. Pivot or turn instead.

Where Your Eyes Go



GOOD: Look at your reader, who stands right next to the camera. Your eyes are just off the lens, close enough that casting sees both eyes.

BETTER: Your reader's face is at the same height as the lens and as close to the camera as possible. Pick one side, left or right, and stay there the whole scene.

BEST: Talking to more than one character? Put one on each side of the camera. Reading alone? Put a Post-it note, a piece of painter's tape, or those cute sticky tabs for books next to the lens as your eye spot.

Gayla Says: Have the reader put their hand where the eye-line should be if the person reading makes you laugh or mad.

MUST DO

- [ ] Don't look into the lens during the scene unless casting asks.

Your Reader



GOOD: Anyone who can read the lines clearly, even a friend on a video call, or a reader app.

BETTER: A calm, kind person who reads simply. No big acting, no accents, no stealing the scene.

BEST: A trained actor or a professional self-tape reader.

SUPER BEST: Being professionally coached by Gayla. Coach with Gayla and she can tape you as well!

MUST DO

- [ ] Reader right behind and beside the camera (left or right).
- [ ] Reader speaks softer than you.
- [ ] Reader never shows up on camera.

Your Slate



MUST DO: FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS EXACTLY.

You NEVER say what you are reading for. Every audition will have a specific set of information they want you to say, and the order. You must follow those directions accurately.

It may ask:

- What city you live in. Say the market, like Los Angeles, not the specific, like Santa Monica.
- If you are in SAG-AFTRA
- If you have a work permit
- If you are willing to cut your hair

Answer truthfully.

Personality Slate: If casting asks you to also answer some questions, then do that. Be truthful, and fun and upbeat, or sincere. Be yourself.

What to Wear



GOOD: Solid colors and simple clothes. No logos, no words, no tiny stripes, no busy patterns.

BETTER: Layers! Ideally, layers look great. Jewel tones that stand out from your backdrop.

BEST: A look that suggests the character and makes your eyes pop.

Color Tips: Bright white layered under something looks best. Pure black only if your character would be wearing it.

MUST DO

- [ ] Suggest the character, don't costume it.

- [ ] No noisy jewelry or swishy fabrics.

Gayla Says: They should be noticing your eyes first, not your outfit.

Hair and Makeup

GOOD: Look like your headshot. Clean, neat hair, out of your eyes.

BETTER: Natural makeup and a little powder so you don't shine. Guys too!

BEST: Hair and makeup that suggest the character, while you still look like your headshot.

MUST DO

- [ ] Your eyes must show.

For Kids: Clean face, neat hair, no glitter, no heavy makeup unless the role calls for it.

Your Sides

Casting Rules: SAG-AFTRA rules say casting can't require you to memorize for a self-tape. You're allowed to hold your sides.

The Truth: Everyone wants you to be memorized. It's your choice.

Casting directors never want to see the pages in frame, if possible.

Gayla Tip: Tape them to the sides of your phone.

The Truth Is: It is not fair that you have to be memorized, or are judged unfairly for showing the script papers on the screen. Do your absolute best. Some actors who memorize fast might not be the best actors. Some actors that use the sides and hold them in their hands can act as well as being memorized. The rules have gotten out of hand in Hollywood. And the expectations, especially for youth actors, have literally been stated as rules at SAG-AFTRA, and agents, managers and casting still secretly demand it. It is up to every family to make that decision.

Recording Day

GOOD: Record the video yourself. You are able to cut it in iMovie or CapCut.

BETTER: Make sure that as an actor you really believe you are in the situation of the audition sides. See the ground, the walls, the people, the obstacles. Let your imagination really see who you are about to see or are already talking to, and how you feel about them.

And record a few takes.

BEST: Have a proven acting coach with successful clients coach you through the scene, or a professional production house record you with a professional reader.

MUST DO

- [ ] Don't walk in or out of frame. Pivot or turn instead.
- [ ] Send only your best take, unless casting asks for more.

Edit, Label, and Send

GOOD (MUST): Trim the dead air at the start and end, and nothing else. No music, no titles, no transitions. Watch the whole tape with sound before you send it.

BETTER (MUST): Name the file exactly how casting tells you. Example: Gayla Goehl_S1T1 (meaning Scene 1, Take 1). Upload where they say, like Eco Cast through Actors Access or Casting Networks.

BEST: Send it early. Many agents and managers watch before sending. If it's not good enough they may require you to record more takes. Some casting offices watch tapes as they come in.

MUST DO

- [ ] Follow the upload directions exactly.
- [ ] Send before the deadline.
- [ ] Going through an agent or manager? Follow their directions first.

The Parent Corner

GOOD: Read the casting directions out loud together. Agree on what needs to be done. Tape when your child is fed, rested and happy.

BETTER: Do the Good stuff. Add being a calm, soft reader. Don't act the lines at your child or show them how to say it. No coaching during a take. Let them shine on their own.

BEST: Do the Good and Better stuff. Then let your child make their own choices. Praise the effort, not the outcome. Tell them you are proud of them! Send it, and let it go.

MUST DO (California)

- [ ] Entertainment Work Permit to work.

- [ ] Coogan account for your child's earnings.
- [ ] SAG-AFTRA gives minors 72 hours to prepare a self-tape.

Gayla Says: Your child's self-esteem is worth more than any booking.

The Top 12 Self Tape Mistakes



1. Shaky camera, or the phone held in someone's hand
2. Phone vertical when casting wanted it horizontal
3. A window or bright lamp behind you
4. A reader who's louder than you

5. Looking into the lens during the scene
6. A busy background, or a shirt that matches the wall
7. Pages showing in the frame
8. Saying the role you are auditioning for
9. Not following casting's directions
10. Running out of storage or battery mid-take
11. No sound on your tape, or the wrong scene
12. Missing the deadline

Your Final Checklist

Before You Record

- [ ] Read ALL of casting's directions, twice.
- [ ] **Storage space cleared!**
- [ ] Battery full or plugged in.
- [ ] Phone horizontal, 1x lens, lens wiped clean.
- [ ] Do Not Disturb on.
- [ ] Camera at eye level.
- [ ] Close up: top of the head to four inches below the shoulders.
- [ ] Plain backdrop, a few feet off the wall.
- [ ] Light in front, nothing bright behind.
- [ ] Fans, HEPA filters and AC off.
- [ ] Wardrobe that "suggests" the character.
- [ ] Hair out of the eyes.
- [ ] Reader right behind and beside the camera (left or right), speaking softly.
- [ ] Sides taped to the sides of the phone.
- [ ] Focus and see the world of the scene: the ground, the walls, the people.

While You Record

- [ ] Take 1 to 4 takes of each scene. Watch back.
- [ ] After you tape, do the slate as directed by the casting director. If no slate was asked for, then don't worry. Do not send one.

- [ ] Additional Step, Personality Slate: if casting asks you to also answer some questions, then do that. Be truthful, and fun and upbeat, or sincere. Be yourself.

Before You Send

- [ ] Watched the whole tape with sound on.
- [ ] Dead air trimmed, nothing added.
- [ ] Only your best take, unless casting asked for more.
- [ ] File named exactly how casting asked.
- [ ] Sent early, before the deadline.

Now go and do the best you can do! Go shine! I'm very proud of you!

Like anything, the more times you do this, the better.

Gayla Tip: You could be practicing your scripts from class and tape them with your parents and friends!



For private coaching: GaylaGoehl.com/coaching

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