

Self-Taping: An Introduction

07/02/2025

1. The Advert / Casting Breakdown

- Read carefully.
- Highlight key points.
- Consider your suitability for the position.
- Ascertain the 'flavour' of what is wanted.
- Casting breakdown or job advert comes from Spotlight/other source / an agent.

2. What do I need to film my self-tape at home?

You'll need:

- A video camera
- A computer with an internet connection
- A light source

- Choosing a video camera

Nothing fancy is needed, but choose a recognisable brand, such as Canon, Sony, Apple etc. You could also use a DSLR if you have one.

The format needs to be MP4 ideally.

- Filming on a phone

To get the best sound, sit as close to the phone as possible and be sure to film in landscape, not portrait!

You can send the clip to the casting director via the WeTransfer app on iPhone and via the Vimeo app on Android.

3. Setting up the room

Ensure that background noise is kept to a minimum and that the camera is at your eye-level. Your light source should be in front of you and not in the shot – don't sit with a window behind you as it can put you in shadow.

Location

Next, you need to find somewhere to film.

Firstly, think about the background noise and the acoustic properties of the room. Stand in the room and listen to the noises around you that you may not usually notice. Turn off fridges, air conditioners, extractor fans and close windows to avoid getting any noise from outside. If the room is quite echoey, it may be an idea to hang some sheets on the walls or bring furniture into the room to help deaden the sound. Coat racks with coats on them are a great way of deadening the sound in a room as they can break up the sound waves as they bounce off the walls.

Background

Try to find a plain background to film against – we find that grey works best and you could use a bedsheet hung on the wall if you don't want to paint your walls.

Make sure that it's not too busy as this can be distracting from your performance. Avoid hard colours as this can affect the camera and make you look unwell. We recommend a grey background. This can be very flattering for a wide range of skin tones. If you haven't got anywhere in your house with a suitable backdrop, you can use a bed sheet, gaffer taped to the wall, or even better. You can buy yourself a grey bed sheet. Just make sure it's a flat sheet and not a fitted one.

Lighting

To light yourself properly use natural light if you can, to get the best results but you can also use soft practical lights in your house. Soft lighting is the best choice for a taped audition, and you should choose from a large source which casts soft, diffused shadows. Hard light from a small light source would cast a sharp shadow and it literally won't show you in your best light.

Don't sit directly in front of a window as this will most likely be overexposed and you may be silhouetted in the video. A window in front of your face and behind the camera can be good as it will illuminate your face, which

is most important to see. Daylight, especially in the UK, can be very unpredictable, however, as it keeps on changing, in which case you can buy some additional lights or use lights around your home.

When you are lighting yourself, you need to think about the type of light used. You have hard lights and soft lights. Hard lights are from small sources and can cast hard shadows on a performer's face. Soft lights are from large diffuse sources and as a result, the shadows are softer. Soft lighting is ideal for self-tapes as it helps hide skin imperfections and is much more flattering. Lights around your house with a lampshade on them will be good to use as a stand in for a soft light.

When setting the lights up, make sure that they're not too high or too low to avoid causing awkward shadows on your face.

4. Before you start filming

- Read any instructions that you may have been sent, thoroughly and check if you need to [film an ident for your self-tape](#).
- Research.
- Learn your lines / arranged prompts that you can refer to, but that cannot be seen on the camera.
- Get a friend or fellow actor to read in the other lines if necessary.

4a. Material Preparation

- Know what you are going to say
- Arrange necessary prompts
- Read the scene, rehearse it, and make sure that you understand fully what you're doing. If you're planning to be off book and not read from the script, you need to learn the lines before you start filming.

5. Props and costume

Make sure your clothing is appropriate for the character although it's not necessary to rent a costume. Only use props that are essential to the performance.

6. Filming your self-tape

When filming your self-tape, consider the following:

- **Eye Line:** Your eye line should be close to the camera as they want to see both sides of your face: Set up the camera so that it is eye level. If it is too low or too high, it may not be particularly flattering. You can place the camera on a stack of books or even invest in a cheap tripod. If you're shooting on a phone, you can get phone tripods that work just as well. Your eyeline should be close to the camera and under most circumstances, it should not be directly down the lens. You need to frame up in a mid close-up which is shoulders to the top of your head.
- **Landscape:** It's important when shooting on a phone that you do not shoot in portrait and that you shoot in landscape otherwise this may happen when a casting director watches it and you don't want that.
- **Lighting:** Make sure that the lights are set so that your face is illuminated.
- **Microphone:** If you have an external microphone, place it close to you, you could even invest in a second cheap tripod to put the microphone on.
- **Placement:** Try not to sit too close to the camera as the fish eye affect to the lens when it is wide could make your face look slightly distorted. Sit or stand depending on what feels comfortable/appropriate for the scene. Don't go too far from the camera (unless you have an external microphone).
- **Framing:** A mid-close shot unless requested otherwise (mid-close shot means seeing from your chest to the top of your head).

- **Reader:** If you're using a reader, make sure they aren't too loud. Once you're comfortable with the scene, position the reader to the side of the camera. If you are using the microphone onboard the camera, you may need to place them a bit further back from the camera so they're not too loud on the tape. Also make sure that they're not over-delivering. This is your self-tape, not theirs.

Don't do too many takes – If you can't get it in three takes, take some time to pause and then then try again!

When you start self-taping, it's important at this point not to overthink it. Do it three times and watch it back. If you haven't got it in three takes, take some time off, have a cup of tea and do it again. If you keep on doing it, you'll do loads and loads of takes and you'll become stressed, which will be apparent when the clip is watched. Your reader also will probably get really annoyed.

7. Sending your self-tape

Converting the video file

Quicktime is useful for converting the file to a universal standard.

If you wish to edit the clip before exporting it, use MPEG Streamclip (free to download). You'll just need to select 'in' and 'out' points ('I' and 'O' on a keyboard) and then export it as MP4 using Apple TV settings.

Sending it to the casting director

- Label the clips with your name first, then add the project title and scene. – title cards. Next you need to name the file. Because the casting director may receive a lot of tapes for the project that they're casting, it's important to name it with your name first and then with the role and then the scene and then with the project as this can help the casting director organise the clips. Once you've named the file, you can send it off. We would recommend not sending the casting director more than one take of each scene unless they have requested it. If you do send them more than one take, make sure that they're sufficiently different.
- Don't send too many takes, unless requested. If you send more than one take, make sure they're sufficiently different.

Once you're happy with your tape, you need to send the footage to the casting director. It's important to send it to them in a format that they can watch. As I mentioned earlier, MP4 is the most commonly watched video format in the world at this time so if you convert your video into an MP4 file, they will most likely be able to see it.

If you open the file, then go to edit, then trim. It will bring up these grab handle things that will enable you to trim the beginning and the end of the clip, then export it in the same way that I have just mentioned. But if you are especially technical, you can edit the footage. On both Mac and PC, there's a fantastic piece of software called DaVinci Resolve. The Lite version is free to use and can be downloaded from Blackmagicdesign, who is the company that makes it. It has professional editing features that rival its expensive counterparts.

You can send it via www.wetransfer.com or a downloadable Vimeo private link. We have more information about [editing and sharing your self-tape](#) with casting directors if you need more help.

This is free and very easy to use. Go to www.wetransfer.com and follow the instructions on screen. If you are using a phone, you can download the wetransfer app, which works just as well on Android and iOS. Alternatively, you can sign up for a free Vimeo account onto which you can upload your video. You would however need to make sure that the file is downloadable so that the casting director can use the footage. Also it's wise to make it password protected as the script that you are reading from is most likely copy protected.

Also as with anything, practise makes perfect. If you've got all the equipment, you can use it to practise self-taping, and also more importantly, practising your camera technique so when you do get that big self-tape in, you'll be completely prepared, confident, and it won't be stressful.