

MEMORIZING LINES

Tips for Student Actors

By Kevin Stone

- Maybe you're one of those actors who can look at a script once and have your lines memorized. More likely, memorization is a little harder. Or maybe you'd say "seriously challenging." For some of us, memorizing a script can be like trying to pin a medal on a shadow.
- But it can be done. We all learn in different ways, and it's okay that some actors have an easier time of memorizing than others. One thing is certain: the lines must be learned! Getting your lines "close enough" and then making up the rest is not really an option and is sure to give your director fits. Fortunately, there are many methods of memorization. Here are some tips for helping cement those lines in your mind:



Highlight your lines

As you rehearse, script in hand, your eye will easily be drawn to the highlights, preventing you from getting lost on the page. This helps smooth out rehearsals and lets you concentrate more on how to say each line than on where on the page your line is. (Check with your director and make sure you have permission to write in your script before doing this!)



Memorize small portions at a time

If you have a large part, don't let the number of lines daunt you. Break up the script into small, manageable sections and tackle them one at a time. It's the principle of divide and conquer, and it's definitely helpful in memorization.

Review what you've already memorized

As you begin memorizing the next section of lines, make sure you go back and review what you've already committed to memory. Once you have your lines down, they need a little maintenance to keep them "stored," accessible, and ready to go in your mind.



Say your lines aloud

When you see your lines and hear them, it's like you double the number of times you're reviewing them. Just looking at your lines is only using visual learning, but lots of people are auditory learners. No matter what type of learning style you have, hearing your lines helps you memorize them faster. Plus, when you say your lines aloud, you get additional practice on delivery. If your voice needs a break, mouth the lines silently instead.



Write out your lines

As you write your lines on paper, you involve yet another part of your brain in the memorization process. Many people involved in theatre are kinesthetic learners. That is, they learn best by doing and involving their muscles. So looking at your lines and saying them out loud while you write them greatly increases the number of ways your mind is processing and learning them.

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Get a friend to help you

Hand your friend the script so she can read your cues while you respond with your lines. Your friend can give you valuable feedback and correct you if you happen to misquote something.



Use your camera phone

Video yourself saying your lines. Play back the video often, and try to recite your lines along with yourself. Again, this uses different learning styles—you're seeing the lines being delivered, you're hearing them, and you're using your facial muscles to learn them.

Tackle problem lines creatively

Identify a line that gives you difficulty—it usually stands out easily—and spend extra time on it. Write out the troublesome line on an index card and tape it somewhere you'll see it often—your locker door or bathroom mirror or computer monitor. Or laminate it and hang it in the shower. Challenge yourself to review the line every time a plane flies overhead or you stop at a red light. Set a time, such as 4:44, when you stop everything else and work on that line.



Do something else while you recite

Review your lines while doing an unrelated activity: walk the dog, throw a Frisbee, wash the dishes, chop some wood—anything. This will help make your lines second nature to you. It will also help you avoid falling into a rut in how you deliver your lines.



Set your lines to music

If you're musically inclined, make up a song using your lines as lyrics. Then sing to your heart's content. Once again, this approach increases the number of ways to "input" your lines into your mind.

Sleep on it!

Review your lines just before you turn out the lights and go to sleep at night. The last thing on your mind before you sleep will be your lines. Studies show that this is a great way to improve recall. No one's exactly sure why it works, but it does! For extra benefit, review the lines again as soon as you wake up.

The important thing is to use a variety of methods to find what works best for you, and then do that... a lot. The better you know your lines, the more confident you will be onstage, and the better your interaction with the other actors. When you have your lines down pat, you can concentrate on acting and not constantly worry about what you're supposed to say next.

As an extra bonus, you'll have better insight into your strongest learning style, which will help you in all your school work! Then, by applying this knowledge and studying more efficiently in your other classes, you'll free up more time to work on memorizing your lines! Because above all, learning your lines takes time, and the bigger your role, the more time you need to be willing to dedicate to it.