

# Book That Job eZine

## Why Doesn't Anybody Talk About the Importance of Line Memorization?

Line memorization in terms of acting technique does not get a lot of play. Thinking about the myriad of acting books that I have read, I cannot recall it ever having been mentioned. Maybe that's because everybody figures you just have to memorize the lines in order to do scripted work—plain and simple...get 'er done.

But behind the scenes I hear a slightly different story as a coach. Many actors are actually greatly challenged by memorizing lines and would love to find better and easier ways to make that part of the job more efficient—and at the very least, more effective.

I have always been in awe by the handful of actors with photographic memories. They exist, I have seen them in action and if you are one of them (LUCKY!), please feel free to send this article along to someone in your life and enjoy the rest of your day.

I am regrettably not that person and very likely could win an award for worst line memorizer on the planet. Several years ago I was in rehearsals for a show and had a major epiphany about the importance of line learning—and I mean an indelibly glued-to-the-soul kind of learning. As I rehearsed at home going back and forth between the text of my scene and improvisation, I became so acutely aware that my improved version of the scene was utterly free and alive, while the text—which I had *already* memorized!—was unnaturally stilted and felt stuck and awful.

As I examined the differences between these two methods of working, the crux seem to hinge on the lines themselves and where they were coming from inside my mind. When I was improvising, they were springing from all levels of consciousness, but I realized that when I was working with the text I was actually *reading* those so-called “already memorized lines” from inside my mind. I hadn't really *learned* my lines at all!

I decided I would spend as many hours as it would take that day to learn my lines for that scene as if they were rooted in my mind on an unconscious level. I spent about seven hours working on five pages of text; when I entered the rehearsal room the next day I was an entirely different actor. The lines were so deeply embedded inside of me that in every moment of the scene I experienced having full access to the fruits of all of my acting training. It was utterly amazing! I felt fully alive on stage in a whole new way, 100% present and available to the moment.

Here is the transformative line memorization technique I discovered during those seven hours:

Let's say you are working on the role of Sorel from Noel Coward's *Hay Fever* and have the following text:

SOREL: I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon.

SIMON: And I wish you confine your girlish infatuations to London, and not force them on your defenseless family.

SOREL: I shall keep him out of your way as much as possible.

1. You'd begin by taking the first half of your line above "I wish you'd confine your biting irony" and repeat it out loud keeping your voice low and to yourself. You would say the line several times without any emphasis or deeper connection to the line, in sort of a monotone. You may even take the line up and down the notes of a short scale. (I.e. choose a pitch and say the line, take the next note up and say the line again, and so on rather than actually singing the line on several notes of the scale all at once.)
2. Once you feel like "I wish you'd confine your biting irony" has begun to take root as muscle memory—which also begins to create a myelin memory path in your brain—take the second half of the line overlapping a few words in the middle to create a connection to the first half of the line. Thus you would work on "biting irony to your caricatures, Simon." using the same process as in the first step above.
3. As soon the second half of the line has been learned as well as the first half, take the whole line together using the same process as in step #1. By this time, however, the whole line is nearly all memorized.
4. Next, connect "I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon." to Simon's following line by saying your line and then slowly reading and taking in Simon's line. You might do this several times to establish a strong connection between the two lines.
5. Then you are ready to go on to your next line starting the process all over.
6. After learning perhaps a page of text, test yourself to see how well you actually know the lines. Choosing a beginning point, cover up all the lines with another sheet of paper. Going down the page, notice if there is a glitch in your memory or if the lines come smoothly and easily. If you do experience a glitch, spend a little more time with that line really getting it down.

I find that working this process in 45 minute increments is best for my memory. I will learn lines for 45 minutes and then take another 45 minutes to do some other sort of work and then back to line learning. And I have also found that the work that I do on one day doesn't fully integrate until the next day.

Clearly, this is a time-consuming technique. But I find it's quite doable while cleaning my apartment, on the subway and even walking down the street.

I am well aware that for some of you reading this it is way overkill—so take what you like and leave the rest. But, for others, it very well may be an answer to prayer.

#### About This eZine

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