

Auditing for Excellence

The purpose of **Reel PROs** is to house an elite group of professional actors who are looking to hone their cold-reading skills even beyond what now seems their best results. As many of you know, our reputation for really fine actors precedes us in the industry, and it's because we take very seriously the task of qualifying actors for membership. However, experience has shown us that some actors, while great at their craft, are not necessarily good during auditions, or at least the day of an audition. And a system of auditioning, while as precisely defined as possible, still has to take into account the subjectivity of the auditioners. Some of the same actors who did not pass our **Main Arena** auditions went on to become series regulars, recurring guests, guest stars and featured in high profile films.

Thanks to the success of **RP2** and the method of auditing developed for that group, we found an answer that allowed us to reevaluate the need for the old auditioning process and develop a more fair and just system company-wide. The innovative **Reel PROs** system of continual, ongoing auditing that has emerged has allowed the following major change to occur: **Main Arena** membership is now by invitation only, with actors being identified and invited from the ranks of **RP2** and **Players**. So, only actors who are already members of **RP2** and **Players** can become **Main Arena** actors.

Auditing System

Here's how the continual auditing system works. First, and very important, it is only used in-house. In other words, no guest ever sees our auditing notes of an actor. That is not its purpose or our purpose. The auditing system is used to highlight both the actors who are exceptional in their approach to cold-reading and acting in general, and the actors who do not meet the basic standards of performance, and this is done so that we can see if and where they fit in to our arena structure. Auditors, solicited from the **Main Arena** and thoroughly trained for this job, sit through almost every workshop offered by **Reel PROs**, and critique the actors' work.

In the case of **Main Arena** potential, **RP2** and **Players** actors must receive three auditor referrals before an invitation to join is offered. And in the case of a performance that doesn't meet the established criteria - and this applies to **Main Arena** actors as well as **RP2** and **Players** - when an actor has accrued two flags, the actor will be notified by email and given a list of performance criteria to improve upon. If the actor receives another two flags, for a total of four, they will be notified by email and shown the total list of performance criteria submitted by all auditors. If the actor is a part of **Main Arena**, they will have the opportunity to have their membership transferred to **RP2** or **Players** (depending on age) until they accrue the three auditor referrals required for re-invitation to **Main Arena**. If the actor is a part of **RP2** or **Players**, or if the actor is a **Main Arena** member who chooses not to transfer to **RP2** or **Players**, their **Reel PROs** membership will be terminated, with their prorated membership fee returned to their charge card on file. After six months, the actor is welcome to rejoin RP, with the understanding that they've applied themselves to fixing the problems noted in their flags. (Note: We reserve the right to terminate an actor with fewer than four flags, if it's felt the actor is not properly trained in their craft prior to applying for membership in **Reel PROs**.)

Performance Criteria Used

- Creating Levels to Scene
- Listening & Responding Honestly
- Being Truthful & Believable
- Being in the Moment
- Discovery & Spontaneity
- Having Clear, Committed Intentions
- Making Specific, Interesting Choices
- Creating/Finding the Scene's Dramatic Arc

Creating/Finding Transitions & Variation
Having High Stakes
Showing Relationship to Other Character(s)
Applying Script Analysis/Understanding of Scene & Genre
Exhibiting Appropriate Physicality (no indicating, gesticulating or upstaging)
Utilizing Appropriate Scene Pacing & Rhythms
Demonstrating Appropriate Dramatic/Comedic Timing
Applying Superior Cold-Reading Skills
Avoiding Paraphrasing/Ad-Libbing
Avoiding Being too Theatrical/Over the Top
Ability to Rise Above a Less Talented Scene Partner
Ability to Take Direction
Professionalism
Age-Appropriateness for RP2

The one point we wish to stress is that **Reel PROs'** system of auditing the talent and experience of its members does not necessarily translate into whether or not flagged actors succeed or do not succeed in their careers. It is simply our method of maintaining certain standards of performance within our arenas, so that industry guests will see what they come to see – qualified talent. That's what **Reel PROs** is known for, and that's what we deliver.

AUDITORS' Q & A

To further your understanding of the auditing process, and maybe more importantly how and what the **RP** auditors think about it, a series of questions was asked of them. They answered with an openness and honesty that was quite refreshing.

Do you feel you're being too hard on the actors during the auditing process?

If anything, the desire is to be too lenient, because we know what it takes to get up on that stage. We don't *want* to flag anyone, and we love it when there's no reason to. But if we don't do our job by flagging when it's warranted, there's no way to track if someone was just having a bad day, or if there are consistent problems coming up. For those actors who are maybe just stumbling a bit, hopefully our notes will help them identify areas to work on. If the actor is really having a hard time of it, then they may want to consider getting more training. There's no shame in that. Acting is a craft that takes training, and cold-reading is especially tricky so not everyone gets it right away.

Is auditing fair to our members?

Actually, the only way to be fair to everyone - our members, their scene partners, our guests - is to audit, and for the reasons we do. If an actor is continually not applying even the most fundamental basics of crafted acting and cold-reading skills - script analysis, truthfulness, listening, knowing how to use the script, etc. - then that actor is not only hurting themselves, they're most likely affecting their scene partner, which isn't fair to either of them.

What about actors feeling hurt because they were flagged?

It's totally understandable to be upset at first, especially if it seems contrary to how they think they've been doing, or what they've been told by people who really don't understand the craft of acting. But if an actor has received two or four flags, and all from different people, then there may be something for them to look at. It's totally up to the actor to decide what to do with the notes, but at least we tried.

Any feedback an actor receives from people who've studied the art of acting is a gift. Yes, it may sting a bit to get those flags. But the actors who understand that ours is a craft that constantly needs to be honed will get past the emotionality of it and be able to take a look at how their work is being *perceived*. We as actors may think we're nailing everything we intended to do in a scene, but if no one actually sees those intentions, then that's our problem and we've got some work to do.

Does auditing place the actors under undue pressure?

Everything about professional acting is pressure-related! This is a highly competitive business. The actors

who can handle it have a better chance at succeeding; those who can't may want to think about pursuing another line of work.

We all get nervous sometimes, but if we've studied our craft and are secure in our abilities, we can channel that energy into something positive and rise to the occasion. Unfocused nervousness will undermine our work every time. If nervousness is happening here at RP, it's a good sign that more training is needed, because the little bit of pressure here at RP is peanuts compared to the real world of professional acting.

Pressure can be exactly what's needed to propel an actor to greatness!

The creativity of acting and performing vary so much from actor to actor, but are you auditors expecting everyone to read exactly the same way?

Not at all! It's so exciting to see an actor do something totally unique in a scene, or come up with a fantastic character, or whatever – as long as those choices are based in the contextual reality of the scene.

How an actor performs their craft absolutely varies, but the craft itself doesn't. It's very clear when someone isn't listening or being truthful, or doesn't know how to use the script so they end up ad libbing just to get through it, and messing up their partners cues because of it. The established performance criteria clearly define the specific skills of crafted acting, and that's all we're looking for.

Why are actors flagged even though they've received positive feedback from the guest?

The performance criteria we use have nothing to do with the guest's comments, and everything to do with the understanding, application and execution of craft. If an actor doesn't apply basic acting skills and/or exhibit competent cold-reading skills, than that's a flag. It's not our place to decide if anyone's "castable," only if they're a skilled actor performing at the level required to be a member of RP.

If an actor really wants to know how well they have performed, they should turn to people who've studied their craft and know how to communicate exactly what they observed. That's what we do in the Main Arena all the time, turn to each other to find out what we really did on that stage, so we can fine-tune our work if needed. Hopefully, our RP2 and Players actors will come to understand that that's a big part of what our auditing system is for, and use it to their advantage.

Should flags be disclosed to an actor as they are submitted, as opposed to waiting for two flags before the actor is notified?

What could be worse than being told you had one bad day? Crafted actors know when they weren't at their best and specifically why, so they know how to fix it on their own. But if there's a real problem going on, it takes at least two flags to identify it. Anything less and there isn't enough information to identify the skill, or skills, that are at issue, so that's not constructive feedback.

Are you holding the bar too high for Main Arena referrals?

It's exceptionally high, but it could be even higher. In fact, our continual goal in the Main Arena is to always keep pushing each other to get better and better. Every actor participating in the Main Arena is required to be highly skilled in their craft and consistently perform at the very top of their game. But it's definitely possible to achieve, or we wouldn't have any Main Arena members.

What does it take to get a Main Arena referral?

We're looking for actors who have a clear mastery of their craft, and who then apply that art to a scene in 15 minutes. And we're looking for the ones who go *beyond* that, those who are so truthfully committed, brave and compelling that they actually make us sit on the edge of our seat.

Should entering the Main Arena be an actor's goal?

Being the best, most crafted artist they can be is the only goal an actor should have; Main Arena should not be the goal.

Main Arena can be really exciting and challenging, so it's certainly great to be a part of. But it may not necessarily be the best place for everyone. We've seen actors really stand out in both RP2 and Players. The expectations are so high in MA that you have to be darn near brilliant to stand out like that. And if an actor is having a bad day and isn't up to the same level as the rest of the class, it's very obvious. But that doesn't mean we're not looking very hard to find new members - we *love* getting new MA members!

The best thing about the Main Arena is its community atmosphere and mutual respect. We all really do like and support each other. When someone else is up on stage, we pay attention to the scene. When someone has a great comedic moment, we laugh from our guts. When a scene is done, we applaud the actors and mean it. We dissect our work together after class, because we care more about what we did as artists than if we impressed the guest or not. But that's not because we're "Main Arena." it's because we've actively cultivated that kind of community, and that can happen in any arena!

Actors should be excited to be in any arena here. They're being trained by great guests and getting the opportunity to do good work. And they ought to feel proud, too – they really have to be good to be at RP!