

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Breaking Into Acting

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Find and work with
representation

Discover how to audition
to get the role you want

Know where to
find parts

Larry Garrison

President, SilverCreek Entertainment
New York Times bestselling author,
producer/actor

Wallace Wang

Bestselling author and stand-up comedian



Breaking Into Acting

2nd edition

by Larry Garrison and Wallace Wang

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Breaking Into Acting For Dummies® 2nd edition

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Introduction

Acting can be one of the most glamorous, exciting, lucrative, and totally unpredictable careers in the world. While other people trudge off to routine jobs pushing paperwork, sitting in office cubicles, or fighting each other just for an office with a window in it, actors may be performing on stage one day, appearing in a film or television show the next, and flying around the country (and the world) the following day all the while getting paid to pretend to be somebody else. If acting sounds like the type of work you'd like to do, then this book can help you pursue your dreams.

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, the acting world's *modus operandi* has changed drastically. We address these changes throughout the book. Some of these changes may be permanent, whereas others may revert back to the original way. You may choose what works best for you.

No matter how much (or how little) acting experience you may have, you can start pursuing an acting career right now — no matter where you happen to live — and this book shows you how.

About This Book

Although acting may seem exotic and enticing, it can also be terrifying and frustrating as well — but only if you don't know what you're doing. Naturally, this book can't guarantee that you'll succeed as an actor, but by following the information in this book, you can increase your chances of success immensely whether you're a beginning actor or someone who already has plenty of experience performing on stage or in front of the camera but may need help in pushing your acting career up to the next level of success.

Specifically, this book can help you break into the world of show business that includes acting in movies, television, stage plays, and the Internet. You'll discover what casting directors look for, figure out how to prepare yourself for those all-important auditions, and find out how to take control of your acting career so you can succeed as quickly as possible.

Acting is more than just about talent; it's a business, as well. By showing you the business of acting, this book gives you information that many actors either overlook or simply don't know where to find. Written in plain English with plenty of information that both novice and experienced actors can use, this updated edition of *Breaking Into Acting For Dummies* can be your guide and reference for succeeding as an actor.

In this new edition, we've added or revised the following:

- » The new way of auditioning from home
- » How to use the breakdowns for current casting of acting roles
- » Where you can find acting opportunities on the Internet
- » The best ways to promote yourself online
- » How diversity has changed the business

We also strive to be inclusive to all genders. Hence, in some chapters, we use the he/him, in some chapters she/her, and in some chapters they/them.

Foolish Assumptions

We assume a few things about you. For starters, you have an open mind and believe in yourself. Also, we assume that you're

- » Mentally stable and know why you want to go into acting. (If you want to go into acting for money or attention, you really need a book like "Greed For Dummies," or "Getting the Attention the World Owes You For Dummies" instead.)
- » Ready to jump into areas of life that may be completely new and unfamiliar to you.
- » Willing to explore, to take risks, and to trust that you have the ability to do whatever you want to do — if you really want to do it.
- » Willing to learn the business of acting.
- » Able to handle rejection.

Icons Used in This Book

To help you remember the important points of each chapter, this book marks certain paragraphs with helpful icons. Some icons highlight useful information; others offer shortcuts to help you break into acting more quickly and easily; and other icons wave a red flag in your face to warn you about some of the possible dangers that could sabotage your acting career.



TIP

Tip icons highlight useful information that can save you time or money in helping you pursue your dream of acting.



REMEMBER

This icon highlights useful ideas or information that you may not want to forget. This icon also spotlights important acting-related terms that you're likely to hear when hanging around other show business people. By flipping through this book and looking for all the Remember icons, you can quickly read the most important information in each chapter.



WARNING

Watch out! This icon flags certain traps or pitfalls that can slow down, delay, or actually hurt your fledgling acting career.

Where to Go from Here

If you're serious (or just plain curious) about acting as a career and you have no experience whatsoever, start with Chapter 1 to grasp the basics of the wonderfully wacky world of show business that you're about to join.

If you have some acting experience, you may want to skim through Parts 1 and 2 and jump right into deciding how to market yourself or into exploring the different types of acting jobs you could start investigating.

Of course, not everyone may want to pursue acting full-time, so for readers who are considering acting just part-time or as a hobby, look at Chapter 24. That chapter reveals the abundance of opportunity available to anyone who sees acting as just a really cool hobby that allows them to express themselves in public without getting arrested.

Consider this book as a gentle guide that you can browse through, skim, and even ignore as you want. Just remember to keep your sense of humor and enjoy your life right now, no matter what your dreams may lead you toward — and you'll always be happy no matter what amount of success you may ultimately achieve.

The purpose of acting (or any career) isn't just to make money. The purpose is to enjoy yourself and experience your dream. Armed with the information in this book, you can have fun as you break into the exciting and unpredictable world of acting.

For more handy information, check out the Cheat Sheet at www.dummies.com; just search for “Breaking into Acting Cheat Sheet” for advice you can refer to again and again.

1

Figuring Out the Business of Acting

IN THIS PART . . .

Understand show business is a *business*, which is the first rule in show business if you want to succeed.

Recognize the needs and desires of the people who control the money in the world of film, television, and theater so you can better grasp what your role is as an actor.

Figure out how to market yourself on a professional level.

Follow the casting calls that are appropriate for your type.

- » Succeeding in show business
- » Comprehending how show business works
- » Preparing yourself for an acting career

Chapter **1**

Staying on Top of the Changes in Show Business

Nearly everyone fantasizes at one time or another about being a star. Who wouldn't love to see their name on a big-screen marquee or experience the thrill of bowing before an audience that's giving a standing ovation just for you?

For many people, the idea of becoming a star in show business will always remain just a dream. This chapter serves as your starting point to guide you; perhaps you can be one of those few who turn their dreams of acting into reality.

Understanding the two sides of show business is important. On one hand, you have the "show," which means learning how to act and includes the glamour and fame that comes from being a star. On the other hand, you have the "business," which includes the money and the negotiations that make a profit for everyone involved. The business side also means treating acting as a business, so you can get paid to act. If you remember nothing else from this book, at least remember this: *Acting is a business*. The more you treat acting like a business, the more likely you'll be to succeed.

Here, you get a quick peek at what you need to succeed as an actor, whether you live in London, Los Angeles, or Lima, Ohio. You can see how actors market themselves by using a head shot, a resume, their representation, and the Internet, and how persistence and determination are the real secrets that can help you break into show business faster than you may think. If you ever thought that you could be an actor, you can. And this chapter gives you a brief introduction to that wonderful world of show business.

Understanding the World of Acting

If you want to succeed in show business as an actor, you need to learn how to act. But you also need to be familiar with the business side of show business.

Every year, thousands of hopefuls flock to Los Angeles and New York. And every year, thousands of these same hopefuls wind up disappearing into obscurity. The reasons are simple. Many aspiring actors embark on their career without knowing how show business works. So before you quit your job, pack up your bags, and move to Hollywood or Broadway to become tomorrow's next big star, take a sneak-peek behind the production curtain in Chapter 2. Then take a look at Chapter 3, which introduces you to the movers and shakers of show business who can open doors for you.

What You Need to Succeed

If the thought of spending years studying acting, working in bit roles, and getting paid sporadically (if at all) depresses you, maybe acting isn't for you. On the other hand, if you truly enjoy acting for the sake of acting, the previously mentioned obstacles will be nothing more than minor nuisances on your way to success — whatever form that success may ultimately take.

Every successful actor has to have two skills:

- » A certain amount (but not necessarily a lot) of acting talent, which usually comes from a combination of natural ability and constant training.
- » Knowing how to market yourself as a product is essential.

As an actor, you're a salesperson, and the product that you're selling is you. In order to sell yourself to the people in position to pay for your product (you as an

actor), you need a head shot (so people know what you look like), a resume (so people know what experience and skills you have), and the necessary talent to wow a casting director when you audition for a role.

An attention-grabbing head shot

Talent and determination can increase the odds that you'll succeed in show business, but until people know who you are, you're just another face in the crowd. Because you can't possibly introduce yourself to everyone who may be able to advance your career, you have to use a head shot instead.



REMEMBER

A *head shot* is a photograph that acts as your calling card by displaying your face for others to see when you can't be present physically. Your head shot should capture your best physical features in order to make casting directors and agents say to themselves, "I've got to meet this person!"



TIP

Have multiple head shots that look like you and represent your comedic (smiling) and theatrical side (serious). Some actors portray different characters that they're likely to be cast in their head shots. For instance, if you're going to play a gang member, have a picture showing that different side of you. Not every casting director or producer will have a wild imagination to cast you in certain roles.

Because head shots can be such a crucial promotional tool, you absolutely must have the best head shot possible, which means finding the best photographer and developing a specific image for your head shot to project. In Chapter 4, you can find out how to choose a photographer, what to wear during your photography session, and how to look your absolute best, so that your head shot highlights your unique personality.

A five-star acting resume

While your head shot projects your physical characteristics, a resume lists the acting experience and unique skills behind your attractive face. After seeing an actor's head shot, casting directors often study an actor's resume to see whether that actor has the ability to perform in a particular role.

A good acting resume answers any questions a casting director may have about an actor's ability to play a certain role and supplies enough evidence to convince a casting director to choose you. The resume is then secondary to the actual audition. Chapter 5 discusses ways to create an award-winning resume, whether you're a complete novice, a seasoned veteran, or someone in-between. (Psst, Chapter 5 also shows you what to put on your resume and what to leave off to increase your chances of making a great first impression.) By knowing how to

create and present your acting experience and skills in the best light possible, you can use your resume to help you land roles again and again.

Polished talent

Everyone has some talent for acting (think of the last time you called in to work and pretended to be sick so that you could take the day off). Even if you have astounding natural acting talent, you should still want lessons or coaching to nurture and further develop that talent (see Chapter 6 for more information on improving your acting skills with training). Here are some of the different ways to polish your acting talent:

- » Majoring in drama in school
- » Attending an acting class or workshop
- » Working with an acting coach
- » Learning on the job
- » Finding out how to film a professional audition tape

If you're serious about becoming an actor and you're already in school, you can't get any better training than performing in your high school or college drama department. Not only does such exposure give you an idea how much fun (and how much of a pain in the neck) acting can be, but it can also teach you all the technical details necessary to put on a play, ranging from creating backdrops and building sets to sewing costumes and marketing the show.

If you've already graduated or just want to jump right into the world of acting as soon as possible, you can choose from plenty of acting workshops, classes, and coaches available for varying prices. Once again, some acting teachers have better reputations than others, and some charge outrageous amounts of money while others are more reasonable. Chapter 6 gives you tips on how to pick a workshop or acting coach that's right for you.



REMEMBER

The best way to develop your acting skills is to keep looking for acting roles wherever you can find them, whether they're lead roles in small plays or bit roles in larger productions. The Internet now plays a major role in giving you the ability to see what producers and casting directors are looking for in upcoming projects. The more experience and knowledge you can gain by acting in a real role and watching others perform, the more you'll discover about the world of acting that no class or coach can ever duplicate. A famous acting coach, Lee Strasberg, taught me (Larry) to go out and study individuals in my environment that I may replicate in future roles.

Taking Your First Steps in Show Business

How did big stars like Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks, Gabrielle Union, Al Pacino, Octavia Spencer, Ben Affleck, Denzel Washington, Julia Roberts, and Angelina Jolie break into show business? They all started as beginners. So as an aspiring actor, you too can follow in the footsteps of the most successful actors in the world if you figure out what to do first and how to get started. Who knows? Within a few years, people may be clamoring for *your* autograph. The following sections help you get started.

Marketing yourself

Some people just happen to be in the right place at the right time when some Hollywood or Broadway producer spots them and suddenly decides to turn them into a star. Then again, some people win a million bucks in the lottery, too, so you don't want to base your future on blind luck.

Unless you happen to become an overnight success (ignoring the fact that most overnight successes actually take ten years or more to happen), you'll find that succeeding in acting requires persistence, dedication, and perseverance.

Perseverance means overcoming every obstacle that threatens to get in your way and blazing your own trail to success. Because you can never rely on blind luck or fate to bring you success, you have to actively hunt out success yourself. Chapter 7 lists different ways that you can promote yourself in the world of show business and jump-start your career right now — wherever you happen to be.

David Grannis, Associate Professor, Director, Film, and Television at California Lutheran University said, "Undergraduate college and university acting students who study the Meisner technique, method acting, the history of theater, and set building also need to learn about the business of acting, which is essential if you want to work as an actor in the constantly evolving industry of film, television, and theater."

Finding your first ally: An agent

Although you certainly can work as an actor for years without an agent by joining different online sites and submitting your resume, head shot, and stats, an agent can be more crucial in finding obscure roles that you may never hear about otherwise. We reference the different Internet sites in Chapter 7. An agent can also introduce you to casting directors who may be looking for someone just like you (if they only knew where to find you) and handle the business end of your acting,

such as making sure that you get paid on time and making sure that you get paid as much as possible for your work.

Because an agent can help your acting career enormously, Chapter 8 explains how to find an agent who may have relationships that you can benefit from. The agent can also negotiate big contracts and be there for your protection.

Showcasing your talent: Auditioning

The process of looking for an agent can teach you negotiating and cold-calling skills. Auditioning can teach you how to think and react quickly in unfamiliar environments and situations.

Because an audition (like a first date) can be your first (and sometimes only) chance to showcase yourself, Chapter 9 explains how to maximize your chance of creating the best impression possible during every audition you attend. Chapter 9 includes tips for what types of clothes to wear, how to prepare for any audition, how to behave during an audition, and what to expect during an audition. We also address how some of these various preparations will work with self-recorded auditioning at home.

Discovering the Many Ways to Make Money as an Actor

Starring in the next Broadway hit, Hollywood blockbuster, or Netflix series can make you rich beyond your wildest dreams, but what many actors don't know is that you can make money as an actor in a variety of other ways as well, some of which can make you equally wealthy and famous, too. Here they are

- » **Film and TV:** Although you may not automatically star in the next box office smash or have your own sitcom, you don't want to overlook the traditional acting routes of film and television. Chapter 12 explains the feature film and television market, so you can use your knowledge to break into these highly lucrative markets right away.
- » **Commercials:** Appearing in a commercial can be another great way to get exposure, gain valuable acting experience, and possibly make a lot of money at the same time through the magic of residuals (also known as royalties), which is money actors receive every time their commercials appear on national television.

Many famous actors, including John Travolta, got started in television commercials, which ultimately led him to television and, finally, feature films. See Chapter 13 for more information on breaking into the commercial acting market. We discuss how commercials have changed in regard to unions and residuals and how to break in to this world.

- » **Theater:** Don't forget this time-honored tradition! Chapter 14 explains this prestigious acting market and what you can expect when performing in a play.
- » **Voice-over acting:** Watch any Saturday morning cartoon, animated feature film, or animated TV show (such as *The Simpsons*), and you'll soon realize that many actors can make a great living just by acting with their voices alone. Best of all, voice-over acting relies strictly on talent and not on looks, which means that actors of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities can find a wealth of opportunities open to them — no matter what their age or appearance may be. Go to Chapter 15 for more on the hidden but lucrative world of voice-over acting.
- » **Extra acting:** Although being an extra won't necessarily make you rich and famous, Chapter 16 shows you how to use extra acting to help yourself break into show business from the inside. After you start working as an extra, you can peek behind the scenes to see how film and television acting works. You can also make invaluable contacts with directors and other actors who may be able to help you pursue your dreams of acting.
- » **Roles for children:** In case you have children, you may want to get them into show business as well. Peek at Chapter 17 to see what types of acting opportunities may be available for your son, daughter, nephew, or niece. With a little bit of luck, your child may be able to earn their own money by appearing in commercials, films, TV shows, commercials, or theater.

Managing Money (A Little or a Lot)

As a beginning actor, you have to figure out how to juggle acting, earn a living, and handle your money all at the same time. To help you keep your money (and avoid losing it on show business scams that promise you success but only take your money and run), make sure to read Chapter 18. Con artists prey on actors, so this chapter can expose the more common con games and help you avoid wasting time and money on these scams.

Until you start earning a steady income from your acting career, you'll most likely need a day job to provide you with a reliable source of income. Chapter 19 explains different types of jobs suitable for actors who may need to take off for an audition

in the middle of the day. This chapter also provides tips for looking for a job that provides the most flexibility and income, so you can focus your efforts on becoming a working actor.



REMEMBER

Acting is a completely unpredictable business. One moment you're flooded with work, and the next few months (or years) may bring you no work at all. That's why many aspiring actors pursue a second career. Not only does this choice provide a solid financial foundation so that they can live halfway decently, but it also gives them enough financial security so that a single rejection isn't emotionally or financially devastating. If you're too busy worrying about paying your rent this month, you probably won't have enough energy to focus on becoming a better actor.

Chapter 20 offers tips for managing your money wisely, from saving and investing your hard-earned cash to living frugally on a budget. We also give you some tips on ways to live cheaply (or even rent-free).

Knowing What to Expect from an Acting Career

At the very least, acting can expose you to interesting people, situations, and environments that you might never see otherwise. You'll figure out how to face and conquer your fears of speaking before an audience, how to use your body and voice to present yourself to others, how to develop a thick skin to handle the inevitable criticisms that you'll receive from less than adoring fans, and how to develop social and negotiating skills when searching for work and working with your fellow actors.

Oh, and by the way, you may make a little money on the side from acting as well.



REMEMBER

If your purpose for acting is to get rich, you should probably start a business, work for a Fortune 500 company or become a lawyer instead. Many different paths to riches are much more reliable than acting. If your purpose for acting is to get noticed, you don't need to be onstage or in front of a camera. Go into acting because you want to become an actor. Any other reason for becoming an actor is ultimately pointless and self-defeating.

No matter what your age, your occupation, or your appearance, you can break into acting at anytime from anywhere. It all boils down to desire, drive, and persistence. Combine those traits with the information in this book, and you can discover how to blaze your own trail to success in the wonderfully wacky, weird, and slightly surreal world of acting.