



# THE STAGE ONE TALENT SELF-TAPE MASTERCLASS

*The Definitive Guide to Professional Home Auditions*

## Introduction

In the modern entertainment industry, your self-tape is your first impression. It is the "digital key" that opens the door to casting offices in London, Hollywood, and beyond. At **Stage One Talent**, we have seen thousands of tapes. The actors who get booked aren't always the ones with the most expensive equipment—they are the ones who understand how to present their talent without technical distractions.

This guide provides the industry-standard blueprint to ensure your tapes are always "production-ready."

## Part 1: The Technical Foundation

Before you even look at your script, your environment must be set up for success.

### 1. Lighting: Focus on the Eyes

Casting Directors (CDs) need to see your "inner life," which happens in the eyes.

- **The Setup:** Face a large window during daylight hours for soft, natural light. This is the most flattering light source available.
- **The Artificial Option:** If you must film at night, use a "Ring Light" or two "Softbox" lights. Place them at a 45-degree angle to your face to prevent a "flat" look.
- **What to Avoid:** Never have a window or bright light behind you. This creates a "silhouette effect" and makes your facial expressions invisible.

## 2. Audio: Clarity is Non-Negotiable

If they can't hear you, they can't cast you.

- **Control the Room:** Turn off fans, heaters, and buzzing fridges. Close your windows to block out traffic noise.
- **The Acoustic Secret:** If your room sounds "hollow" or echoey, hang blankets or towels behind the camera (out of frame). This absorbs the bounce and makes your voice sound intimate and clear.
- **The Reader:** Your "reader" (the person saying the other lines) should stand slightly behind the camera and speak at 50% volume. They should never be louder than you.

## Part 2: Framing & Composition

How you sit in the frame tells the CD if you understand the "language" of film.

### 3. Landscape Mode Only

Always film horizontally. Vertical videos (Portrait) are for social media. In professional casting, a vertical tape looks like a mistake and shows a lack of industry knowledge.

### 4. The Medium Close-Up

- **The Shot:** Frame yourself from the mid-chest to about two inches above the top of your head.
- **The Positioning:** Ensure you are in the center of the frame. If the scene is highly active, you can give yourself a little more room, but for 90% of scenes, the "Medium Close-Up" is the gold standard.

### 5. The Backdrop

Your background should be "invisible." Use a solid, neutral-colored wall.

- **Recommended Colors:** Light grey, muted blue, or off-white.
- **Avoid:** Messy bedrooms, kitchen cabinets, or busy wallpaper. If you don't have a plain wall, invest in a "pop-up" grey screen.

## Part 3: The Performance Elements

Once the tech is sorted, it's time to act.

### 6. The Eye Line

Never look directly into the camera lens unless the script explicitly commands it.

- **The Strategy:** Place your reader (or a piece of tape) just to the left or right of the camera lens. This creates a natural "3/4 profile" that allows the camera to see into both of your eyes.

### 7. The "Ident" (Identification)

Unless told otherwise, keep your ident at the end of the tape.

- **What to say:** "Hi, I'm [Name], I'm [Height] and I am represented by Stage One Talent."
- **The Slate:** Sometimes you will be asked to show your hands and profiles. Do this naturally and keep it friendly.

## Part 4: Final Delivery & Professionalism

### 8. File Naming & Size

Casting Directors download hundreds of files a day. Help them find yours.

- **Correct Naming:** `FirstName_LastName_Role_Project_StageOne.mp4`
- **File Size:** Use a tool like "Handbrake" to ensure your file is under 100MB. Huge files take too long to download and may be skipped by busy production offices.

## The Stage One Professional Checklist

- Phone is on "Do Not Disturb" mode?
- Camera is at eye level?
- Lighting is in front of me?

- [ ] No distracting jewelry or logos on clothing?
- [ ] The reader is quieter than the actor?
- [ ] File renamed correctly?

- The Stage One Talent: Recommended Self-Tape Equipment List

Navigating the world of camera gear can be overwhelming and expensive. At **Stage One Talent**, we want to make it clear: **You do not need a Hollywood budget to get a Hollywood look.** In fact, many actors on our books book major TV and film roles using nothing more than a smartphone and a few well-placed household items.

However, as your career progresses, investing in "dedicated" gear can save you hours of setup time and ensure consistent quality. Below are our tiered recommendations for every stage of your acting journey.

## Tier 1: The "No-Budget" Starter Kit

*Perfect for those just starting out or for emergency last-minute tapes while traveling.*

If you have a modern smartphone, you already own a 4K cinema camera. The goal here is "Stability and Light."

- **The Camera:** Your smartphone (iPhone 12/Samsung S21 or newer). Always use the **back camera**, as it has higher resolution than the "selfie" camera.
- **The Tripod:** A stack of sturdy books or a shelf at eye level.
  - *Pro Tip:* Use a coffee mug to prop your phone up vertically (but remember to record in landscape!).
- **The Lighting: Window Light.** Stand facing a large window during the day (ideally between 10 AM and 2 PM for the most consistent light).
- **The Backdrop:** A plain, ironed bedsheet (light grey or blue) hung over a curtain pole or taped to a flat wall.
- **The Cost:** £0.

## Tier 2: The "Prosumer" Setup (Recommended)

*For the serious actor who wants a dedicated space in their home that can be set up in 5 minutes.*

- **The Tripod:** A basic **60-inch Lightweight Tripod** with a smartphone mount.
  - *Why:* It allows you to adjust the height perfectly to your eye line, whether you are sitting or standing for a scene.
- **The Lighting:** A **10-inch or 12-inch LED Ring Light**.
  - *Why:* These provide "wrap-around" light that minimizes facial shadows. Look for one with "Dimmable Brightness" and "Color Temperature" controls (Warm vs. Cool).
- **The Audio:** A **Boya BY-M1 Lavalier Microphone** (clip-on).
  - *Why:* Built-in phone mics pick up room echo. A clip-on mic ensures your voice is crisp and intimate, even if the phone is 6 feet away.
- **The Backdrop:** A **Collapsible 5x7ft Pop-up Backdrop** (Grey/Blue).
  - *Why:* These fold away like a sunshade and lean against any wall, instantly hiding your living room or bedroom.
- **Estimated Cost:** £60 – £90.

### **Tier 3: The "Industry Standard" Kit**

*For established actors and those building a permanent "home studio."*

- **The Lighting:** A **Two-Point Softbox Kit**.
  - *Why:* Softboxes provide a much more natural, cinematic light than ring lights. Placing one at 45 degrees as your "Key Light" and one on the other side as a "Fill Light" creates depth and professional "modeling" on the face.
- **The Audio:** A **Rode VideoMic Me-L** (directional shotgun mic).
  - *Why:* It plugs directly into your phone and only picks up sound directly in front of it, effectively "canceling out" noise from neighbors or traffic.
- **The Backdrop:** A **Professional Backdrop Stand** with a seamless paper roll (brand: Savage or Colorama).

- *Why:* This is what professional photographers use. It provides a completely smooth, shadow-free background that makes your self-tape look like a studio screen test.
- **Estimated Cost:** £150 – £250.

## Essential Accessories (The "Actor's Kit Bag")

Regardless of your budget, every **Stage One Talent** actor should have these "bits and bobs" in their kit:

1. **A Bluetooth Remote Shutter:** This allows you to start and stop the recording without walking back and forth to the camera. It helps you stay "in the zone" between takes.
2. **A Power Bank or Long Charging Cable:** 4K video recording drains phone batteries incredibly fast. Never let your phone die mid-take!
3. **Blue Painter's Tape:** Use this to mark your "Eye Line" on the wall and your "Mark" on the floor so you don't drift out of focus.
4. **Microfiber Cloth:** Always wipe your camera lens before filming. Fingerprint smudges are the #1 cause of "blurry" tapes.

### A Note on Brands

At Stage One Talent, we don't have an official partnership with any specific brand. We recommend checking sites like **Amazon**, **Wex Photo Video**, or **Argos** for the best deals. Brands like **Neewer**, **Ulanzi**, and **Joby** offer great reliability for their price point

**Conclusion:** Preparation is the key to confidence. When you know your technical setup is perfect, you are free to be present in the scene. We look forward to seeing your next tape!

**[www.stageonetalent.co.uk](http://www.stageonetalent.co.uk)**