

Directing Actors

It is the director's job to get their vision across to the audience. The characters are the first and most direct means of doing this. So unless the actor in question knows the director so well that they can play the part exactly as the director imagined first time round, there has to be good communication between the two.

Choose who you work with

The casting is an important procedure which will quickly reveal whether or not you can work with a particular actor or not.

Step one

Let the actor read once through the whole script, having a someone else read the other parts. Try to avoid using another auditionee to prompt, as this will undoubtedly lead to a competition which is exhausting and usually results in over acting.

Step two

Give the actor a direction.

eg. "I'd like you to forget whether Harry's listening to you or not. You're saying this to your self more than anyone."

Let them read through once more, noting how well they respond to your request.

Step three

Give them the opposite direction.

eg. "I'd like you to make sure Harry listen to you this time."

This should not change what they say, just how they say it and what they *mean* by it. You are essentially directing the subtext, what they are *thinking*. The true meaning behind the words.

The quality of response the actor had to your direction should give you a very clear idea of whether they work well with you. Perhaps ask them a few questions about them selves before letting them go, just to get a better feel for what type of person they are. This will save time in the long run and may help avoid a battle of the tyrants half way through the production because of conflicting opinions.

Acting Games

Acting games are a great way to get a cast familiar with each other. Going through them before every shoot can take forever, but will pay off big-time when it comes to the finished film.

The Mirror Game

Actors pair up and stand opposite each other. Each pair nominates a leader and a follower. The two must retain eye contact at all times. The leader begins moving slowly (hands, facial expressions, legs, or whatever they want!) and the follower must follow as closely as possible as if they were the reflection of the leader in a mirror. Once they have had a good couple of minutes doing this, they swap roles and do the same again. Starting slowly and beginning to speed up the movements. The game is won when it is impossible for an outsider to tell which actor is the leader. The game helps to relax the actors and will make them more comfortable looking directly at one another. It also helps them react naturally to one other, encouraging improvisation rather than relying on the script. This is also a good time to throw in some directions. As they mimic each other, you can tell them to make their actions slower, sharper, more timid etc.

Head-to-hand

This game is for two actors who play as a couple, they standing face to face as before. This should not be imposed upon any amateur actors as it relies on the actors' ability to immerse themselves within their characters. It starts with the couple holding hands retaining eye contact. Simply to keep the description clear, lets assume the couple consists of a male and a female. The man brings his hands up to his head, the woman's hands follow. He then allows his hands to rest as normal at his sides. She must then move her hands extremely slowly down his sides back down to his hands. As she does so, she must describe (aloud and in character) every tiny detail of what her fingers are feeling. (eg. soft waxy hair, big ears, rough cold neck... everything) Once she reaches his hands again, the opposite process is repeated. Once both have completed their intricate descriptions, they are to hug each other and describe how that makes each of them feel. Once going through this, there will be a subtle change between them which may not be noticeable in the room but has huge power on screen. This is the best de-tensifier when directing a scene involving love or a close physical relationship which would otherwise be awkward.

Don't show them, inspire them!

If you show an actor what to do, they will probably hate you for thinking you're better than them and leave the production. As extreme as that may sound, they are the drama queens of the world remember – that's their job.

Even if you have to spell out what you want them to do, try and make it look like they came up with the idea themselves. This will give them self confidence and improve their performance.

The best thing you can do is ask their character questions which relate to the scene. Put them into a situation which will get them into the right mind set about how they would react in the current scene. This helps the actor become the character. Make them answer to the name of their character. Keep asking them who they are and what they're doing and why. The more they think about these things, the closer to that character they will become.

Something to Remember

The quality of acting in a film is solely down to you, the Director.