

Casting Your Film

In general, you should start the casting process at least two months prior to your first shoot day. Keep in mind, you will have to schedule auditions and callbacks and then make offers. We can assist you during this process and help to ensure you have the tools you need to succeed. Sometimes offers aren't successful or your first round of auditions isn't fruitful. Give yourself time to overcome setbacks.

Write a Breakdown

A breakdown is a tool used by casting directors and filmmakers. It tells the actors exactly what you are looking for. When you post your breakdown to different sites, some will have tools that help you compile the information, but all breakdowns should include the following information:

Title: [Title of the film]

Director/ Writer/ Producer: [Names of those collaborators (if known)]

Casting Director: [SVA Casting OR name of your CD (if applicable)]

Union Status: [SAG-AFTRA or Non-union] ([for more info on working with SAG-AFTRA see page 12](#))

Nudity: [If there is any nudity in your project, you must state which roles and what type (for example: topless, full frontal, backside)]

Pay Rate: [If you have no budget to pay actors, put "No Pay: Transportation, Credit, Copy, Meals." Otherwise, list how much the actor(s) will be paid per day. It is customary to include travel and meals and to give the actor a copy of the film or clips of their scenes.]

Locations: [Keep it general like Manhattan, Jersey City, Long Island, etc.]. ([Note: if your location requires that the actors stay overnight, you will be expected to provide lodging unless they have their own comfortable arrangement](#))

Dates: [Be as specific as possible or give a range and number of shoot days. For example October 3rd- 5th, 10th-12th, or Weekends in April]

Description: [Give a short description of your script that names all of the important roles. This should not be a full synopsis.]

For example:

"The Route Less Travelled" tells the story of Cameron and Daniela, siblings who are forced to share a paper route in Brooklyn. Along the way, they face adversity in the form of 8-Track Eddie, a local eccentric, and Damon, a teenage bully.

Role Descriptions: [You will need to write a detailed description for every role.]

For example:

CAMERON: (LEAD) Male, 16 years old, Latino. *A sweet and charismatic kid who loves magic and has a hopeless crush on Chloe, the girl-next-door.*

DANIELA: (LEAD) Female, 12 years old, Latina. *Cameron's little sister who loves to sing and annoy her big brother. She's adventurous and outspoken for her age.*

CHLOE: (SUPPORTING) Trans-Female, 15 years old, Any Ethnicity. *The girl-next-door who is the object of Cameron's affection. She is smart, independent, and free-spirited.*

8-TRACK EDDIE: (SUPPORTING) Any gender, 40s- 50s, Caucasian, thin and wiry frame. *An eccentric neighborhood person who scares the kids at first but turns out to be harmless and helpful.*

*Note: It's important to be sensitive when describing race and ethnicity. In general, stick to the following terms: Caucasian, White, African-American, Black, Latino/a, Asian, Native American. Use Korean, Indian, Pakistani, Italian, etc. to describe someone from that country. To describe Americans of a specific descent, you can use Italian American, Mexican American, or Irish American, for example.

Gender Identities and Body types can also be a difficult to illustrate in a breakdown, however, it is imperative that you include this with each character. [Examples are: Cis-gender Male, Trans Female, Non-binary, etc.] Please let us know if you have questions.

Distribute the breakdown

First, submit your finished breakdown to the Casting Office. We will double check it to confirm it has all the relevant information and then distribute it to our database of actors. Then, if you want to, post your breakdowns on local casting sites. The two best sites are listed below:

- [backstage.com](https://www.backstage.com) – Cost free with promocode SVACAST. Ads placed here will reach a large number of NYC actors and you can even post nationwide or to specific locations.
- [breakdownexpress.com](https://www.breakdownexpress.com)- Cost \$10. This site will allow you to post your breakdown to agencies, and links to actorsaccess.com where actors will see it directly. Student film submissions cost \$10. See their site for costs for other types of projects. Ads placed here will reach the largest number of professional actors and agencies.

Choose Actors for the Auditions

It's very likely that you may receive over 100 submissions for some of roles and just a handful of submissions for others. How do you decide whom to bring in for an audition?

1. Look at the actor's headshot: Is this person the appropriate gender, age, type, and ethnicity for the role? The headshot does not need to be a perfect fit, but the person should be in the range of what you're looking for. People often look different in person and on-camera. Just use the headshot to gage a general sense of what this person looks like.
2. Read actor notes: Often times, actors will send a note with their submissions. The note may include key information pertaining to the actor's availability for audition or shoot dates, so look at these carefully before you proceed.
3. Look at the actor's reel: Many actors will have a reel (a series of video clips) attached to their submissions. This is a great way to see them in action before you call them in. Does the actor fit what you need physically and vocally? Are the roles showcased in the reel similar to the one you're casting? Does the actor seem limited

or versatile? Watch each reel a couple of times to help you decide, and if there is any chance that this could be the right person, call the actor in to audition.

4. Look at the actor's résumé: A résumé shows an actor's experience and skills. Has the actor made a film before? How many? Any you recognize? Who were the directors? Does the actor have theatre and commercial experience? All of these factors will help you determine the level of experience each actor has. Also, look for special skills: if your film requires juggling, yoga, or a foreign language, you will be able to find those skills on the résumé.

The Audition(s)

Now, it's time to choose how many actors to see. We advise having 7-15 actors for each character self-tape first. Not only is it safer during COVID-19, but it is also a great way to narrow down your top 2-4 for each role. Here is a list of things that should be in place:

1. Request self-tapes: This is truly the most efficient way to audition the first batch of talent from your submissions. Both Backstage.com and BreakdownExpress have great self-taping features. Backstage uses its normal interface that you can click through and have talent upload auditions directly onto their original submissions, and BreakdownExpress has a separate, in-app system called EcoCast where you can request tapes as well. *Self-taping should be a necessary step in narrowing down your favorites, and there is more info about how to request self-tapes below.

Self-tape email template:

Hi XXX [Actor name],

We would love to have you self-tape for the role of XXX in the SVA Thesis film, XXX. Here are the details. Let me know if you have any questions.

Role: [name of character]

Due date: [Hard deadline that you need them to upload/send you their self-tape audition]

Notes: [Any important info]

Sides are attached

Thanks!

[Your name and contact]

**make sure you attach the sides [Sides are the selections from the script that an actor reads at an audition.]

2. Call backs: Typically, callbacks are conducted in-person, however, during COVID-19 SVA advises that this is not allowed. Zoom callbacks are perfectly acceptable, as well as a new feature on EcoCast (from BreakdownExpress) which allows you to conduct sessions online.

You can schedule one actor at a time or call them online in pairs. Here is a way to Schedule them.

Scheduling email template:

Hi XXX [Actor name],

We would love to call you back for the role of XXX in the SVA Thesis film, XXX. Here are the details for the callback. Let me know if you have any questions.

Date: [day] [date, year]

Time: XXX am/pm

Location: ONLINE [Insert zoom link that you will be using] [Make sure to leave the room locked so only the host(s) can allow guests inside]

Role: [name of character]

Notes: XXX [Please do not logon before this time/please stay in waiting room until let in/please check your email while in the waiting room. Sides are attached.]

Thanks!

[Your name and contact]

****make sure you attach the sides [Sides are the selections from the script that an actor reads at an audition.]**

3. Offers: After you conduct your callback, you should have the talent you require. Now you need to offer the role(s) to talent! If you need the casting office to help you make decisions, please don't hesitate to ask.

Offer email Example:

Dear XXX,

I'm writing to you to offer you the role of XXX in the SVA Thesis film, XXX. Please see below for all the pertinent details. Please respond by XXX [give a clear deadline, typically 3-5 days] to let me know whether or not you will accept the role.

[TITLE of film]

Director: XXX

Producer: XXX

Shoot dates: [Specific dates]

Rehearsal dates: [Specific dates] REHEARSALS SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED AND MUST BE CONDUCTED in the safest possible way.

Role: XXX

Union Status: [SAG or Non-union]

Locations: XXX

Questions? Please contact: casting@sva.edu for assistance

Pay Rate: XXX + Transportation and Meals will be provided. A copy of the film will be made available to you when the film is completed.

Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions. Thanks! I look forward to working with you.

Best,

[Student Name]

[contact]

*It's important to let your actors know exactly what will be expected of them. Will there be rehearsals? Will they need to provide their own wardrobe? Is the shoot outside of the city? Be upfront with them so you can tackle any issues before your production dates.

Before You Shoot

Rehearsals: Some directors like to have rehearsals. If you wish to schedule rehearsals, let the actors know this when you offer the roles. Schedule rehearsals for relatively short chunks of time; two-hour or three-hour sessions are the max.

Contracts: If your film is non-union. You should have all the actors sign a non-union release form. Standard non- union release forms can be obtained from the Casting Office. If one or more of your actors is a member of SAG-AFTRA, you must file for the SAG-AFTRA student film contract (more details below).

Check In: Keep in touch with your actors in the weeks before shooting. This will help you to gage if there are any complications that might arise. Sometime actors just drop out of a film, but if you stay in touch with them, it will be easier to tell if they are committed.

Referring Actors

When you find good actors through your independent casting search, please refer them to the casting office. Email their headshots and résumés to casting@sva.edu.