



## The Slate - "Making a First Impression"

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by Sandra Merrill

At the top of the commercial audition, you'll be asked to slate your name. Those first moments on tape reveal more about you than you may be aware of.

Actors sometimes slate their names and do profiles, as if they're in a police line-up; going through the perfunctory motion, they appear as if they could be doing something better with their time or are just willfully bored. Other actors rush the slate, saying their names too quickly or inaudibly, appearing nervous on camera, they give the impression of preferring to be anywhere but here, oral surgery possibly being a better option. Some actors have the "deer in the headlight" look or come off as stiff and robotic.

The slate should be seen as a way of introducing yourself, the goal being to appear natural and relaxed. To find something that works, try different ways of saying your name. "Hello, my name is Jane Doe" or "How ya' doing, my name is Bill Smith, can equally work. Avoid being too clever or over the top with the slate, as this will more often times backfire and come off as either amateurish or "trying too hard". First and last names are also required when slating. If you see yourself as the next "Madonna" or "Cher" remember you're not that far along in your career to be known on a first name basis.

Ideally, the slate is an opportunity to connect with the viewer and is a snapshot of your personality. Many actors are taught to smile during the slate, which is fine, if that's your natural proclivity. But there are other aspects of personality: intelligence, playfulness, a sense of humor, or a serious or studious nature, which can be incorporated in the slate. Since the slate reflects your level of confidence, be sure to make eye contact with the camera and stay focused. A technique I suggest is thinking of something that amuses you and letting those thoughts play across your eyes while slating and during your profiles. This will keep you from having that "empty look" and make you eminently more interesting to watch.

With regard to slating in character, there are two schools of thought. One says don't slate in character, instead let them see who you are first and then show them what you can do. My feeling is if you know who the character is, then bring a little of that attitude into your slate. There are certain roles: cop, snotty waiter, librarian, drill sergeant, slacker dude, where you could bring physical attributes of the character into the slate. If the role is for the vivacious cheerleader, then a slightly larger than life smile and energy could be used for the slate. In this scenario, you're preparing the viewer to see you as the role. I saw this technique successfully used by actors called in to play "deadpan".

Is so much really riding on the slate? Many directors say they form their opinions in those first opening moments, and if they don't see something they like, they'll fast forward to the next person. This being said, think about how to make a strong first impression.