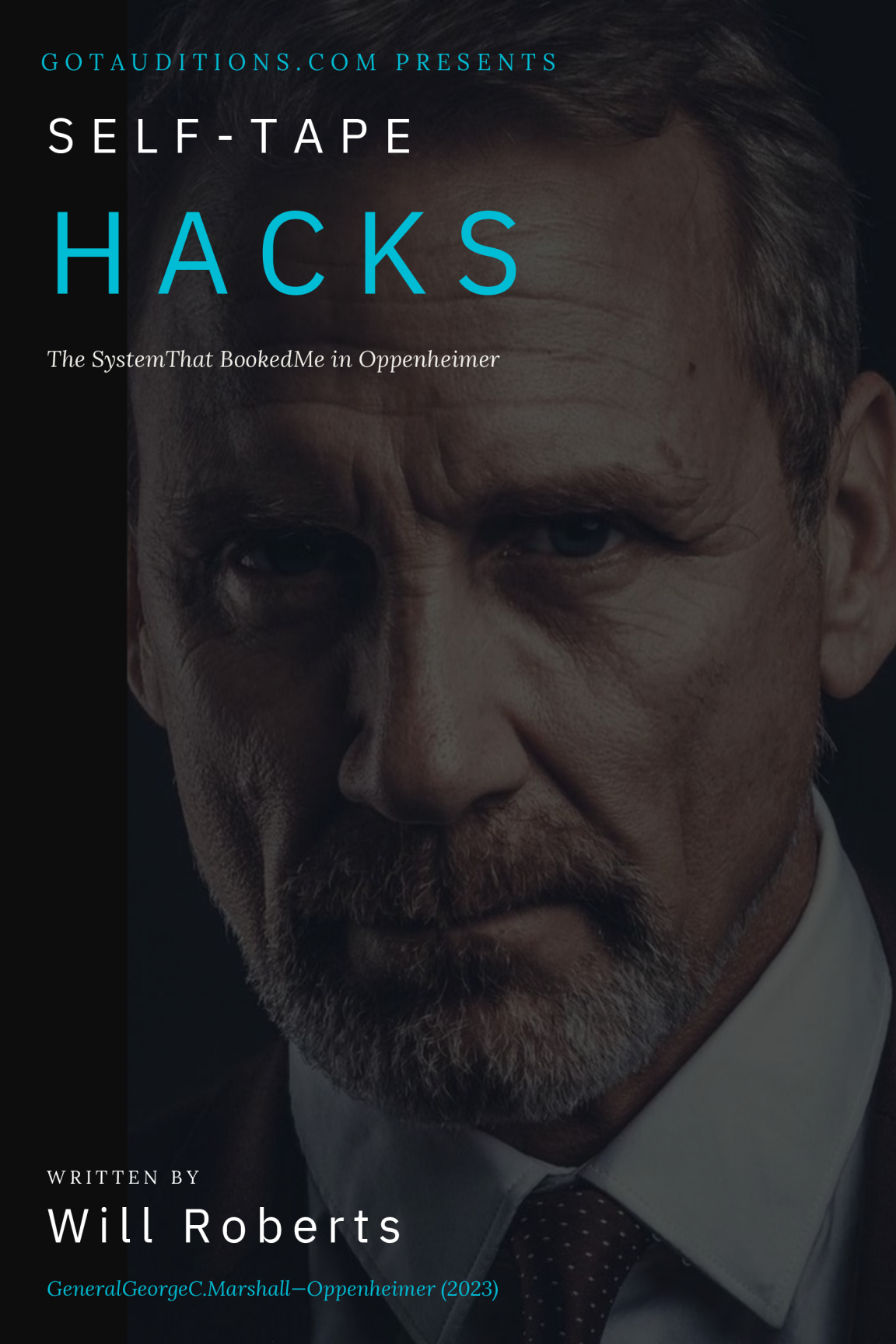




GOTAUDITIONS.COM PRESENTS

SELF-TAPE

HACKS

The System That Booked Me in Oppenheimer

WRITTEN BY

Will Roberts

General George C. Marshall—Oppenheimer (2023)

Self-Tape Hacks

The System That Booked Me in Oppenheimer

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General GeorgeC.Marshall—Oppenheimer (2023)

“In this book, I walk you through the exact self-tape approach that stood out to Christopher Nolan and ultimately earned me the role of General C. Marshall in Oppenheimer.”

— Will Roberts, SAG-AFTRA

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Introduction

A self-tape is a filmed audition recorded outside the casting office — most often at home. Once a rare alternative, it is now the industry standard, with countless actors booking major film, television, and theater roles directly from their tapes.

Casting directors love self-tapes because they save time, expand reach, and allow international auditions. For actors, they offer freedom — you can record multiple takes until you deliver your best work. The challenge is clear: without the right setup and guidance, even great performances can be undermined by poor lighting, weak sound, or flat choices.

“Sometimes it doesn’t need to be perfect — it can be a work in progress, even with the sides in hand. But if I’m hiring directly from the tape, I need to see strong, committed choices. A wrong but bold choice from a strong actor is more valuable than a lukewarm ‘right’ choice.” — Anne Chapman, CSA — Casting Director

This is where GotAuditions.com changes the game.

Built for today’s industry, it gives actors everything they need to master self-taping: real-time script analysis, AI

scene partners, a built-in teleprompter, and professional evaluations of acting, sound, and lighting.

This eBook, Self-Tape Hacks, is a companion to GotAuditions.com. It takes you step-by-step through creating professional-quality auditions, elevating your performance, and using modern tools to give yourself the best chance of booking the role.

Get Started Free. Start your free 7-day trial at GotAuditions.com and experience every tool in this book firsthand.

Preparation

The Audition Comes First

When you have an audition, it should take priority over everything else in your schedule. Treat it as the central event of your day — the moment your focus and energy are directed toward presenting your best work. By approaching every audition with this level of commitment, you give yourself the best chance to stand out and succeed.

Matching the Right Energy

Research is essential. Understand the genre and tone of the project before you hit record. An indie drama may call for a grounded, restrained energy, while a thriller might demand sharper intensity and urgency. Casting directors want to see actors who understand the world of the material and can calibrate their performance to match it.

“Approach it with the passion and enthusiasm of actually being on set and creating the work.” — Heidi Miami Marshall — Casting Director & Acting Coach

That means experimenting. Do one take at the expected energy, then try another with a touch more intensity. By offering options, you give casting directors choices — and demonstrate range.

Think Like a Filmmaker

Preparation isn't only about memorizing lines. It's about vision. Think about framing, tone, and storytelling as if you were already on set. This mindset transforms a simple tape into a piece of film.

“It's more than just good lighting and sound. It's an opportunity to be the creative actor you want to be.” — Heidi Miami Marshall

Do the Deep Work

Strong auditions don't happen by accident. Actors who stand out are those who do the deep work: breaking down the text, running the scene repeatedly, and exploring choices from every angle. Memorization frees you to play, and experimentation sharpens your instincts.

“Learn any material you are sent thoroughly before putting it on tape.” — Richard Evans — Casting Director

The Role of Coaching

Every athlete has a coach — and actors benefit in the

same way. For high-stakes auditions or particularly challenging scenes, working with a coach can sharpen your choices and help you break past blind spots. That's where GotAuditions.com comes in — acting as an instant outside eye, analyzing your script, suggesting bold choices, and giving feedback on acting, sound, and lighting.

Bottom Line. Preparation is the actor's greatest advantage. When you know your material, bring the right energy, and approach each tape as a professional filmmaker would, casting directors trust you.

Directions

Why Directions Matter

Every casting office works differently, and the instructions you receive are not suggestions — they are requirements. Whether it's how to frame the shot, how to slate, or how to label the file, those details are part of your audition. Treat the directions as your first test: if you can't follow them, casting directors may assume you won't follow direction on set.

“Not every casting office is going to ask you for a full-body slate, so always read the directions first. Each office has different specifications based on the type of job.” — Mel Mackie — Casting Director & Acting Coach

Technical Guidelines

Many casting offices specify how to set up the camera, what format to use, and even how to name your file. Your tape doesn't have to be made with expensive equipment — a phone works just fine — but attention to detail makes you look professional.

Submitting on Time

Deadlines matter. A late audition is often as good as no audition at all. Set your own internal deadline a full day before the official one. That buffer ensures you still deliver on time if technical issues arise.

“Be sure to adhere to the sending or upload methods that have been requested and send the finished product as far before the specified deadline as you can.” —

Richard Evans — Casting Director

Reader

Why a Reader Matters

A reader is your off-camera scene partner — the voice that delivers the other lines so you can react, listen, and respond authentically. Casting directors can tell instantly if you're playing against silence. Without a reader, performances risk feeling flat, rushed, or disconnected.

"I'm used to family members reading, but avoid using a tape recorder that's louder than you — it's distracting." — Anne Chapman, CSA

When a Live Reader Is Best

If the audition is especially important — a major role, a first audition with a new casting office, or a callback — secure a live reader if you can. A fellow actor, a friend, or even a coach can elevate your work and catch details you might miss.

GotAuditions.com: The Everyday Solution

Actors don't have just one or two auditions a year — they have dozens. Paying for a reader every single time quickly becomes unrealistic. With AI readers and scene

partners built directly into the platform, you always have a reliable partner to run lines, rehearse, and record your tape .

Bottom Line. Use live readers when the stakes are highest. For the day-to-day rhythm of auditioning, trust GotAuditions.com to be your scene partner, your rehearsal coach, and your safety net.

Takes

Submitting Multiple Takes

Actors often wonder if they should send more than one take. The rule is simple: if the instructions don't allow it, don't. But if there's room for interpretation, two strong and distinctly different takes can work to your advantage — one grounded, one more energetic — giving casting directors real choices.

“If they don't specify how many takes, just send in two takes. That's the best option. Two takes — and have them be the best two takes of whatever version you're doing. The key is staying in concept.” — Robert B. Martin —
Casting Director

Avoid the Trap of Endless Takes

Limit your filming session to about an hour and aim to capture a strong performance in three to five takes. This discipline keeps your work fresh, your reader engaged, and your performance honest.

“Don't get used to doing 15 takes on a scene. You simply won't have time for that on sets. Spend your time in the prep. Do fewer takes.” — Heidi Miami Marshall

Technical Best Practices

- Do test shots and play them back to check picture and sound quality before shooting a real take
- Separate each take with a note of the scene and take number, followed by a second or two of silence
- Your performance will be fresher the fewer takes you do — concentrate and keep going

Choices

Why Choices Matter

At the heart of every memorable audition is the actor's ability to make bold, specific choices. Casting directors consistently emphasize that commitment matters more than perfection. A safe, "correct" read rarely stands out; a strong, inspired choice does.

"Sometimes it doesn't need to be perfect. But if I'm hiring directly from the tape, I need to see strong, committed choices. A wrong but bold choice from a strong actor is more valuable than a lukewarm 'right' choice." — Anne Chapman, CSA

"Make strong, confident choices. If you go a little bit bigger than necessary, it's okay. We can pull you back from that, but at least we know there's something there that can be worked with." — Kim Williams — Casting Director

"Limit your takes. If you're going to do a second take, make sure it includes new, interesting, truthful choices — not just the same thing with a small adjustment." — Erica S. Bream, CSA

The Bottom Line. Strong choices are what set working actors apart. Casting directors aren't looking for perfection — they're looking for commitment.

Camera

Choosing the Right Camera

A camera is the foundation of your self-tape. The good news: you don't need the most expensive gear. What matters most is ease of use, reliable quality, and your comfort operating it. If you already own a current smartphone, it's more than enough.

“You need a camera. An iPhone is fine, as the quality is high enough to give us the footage we need. Make sure the camera is on something stable. Don't put the camera or laptop on your lap.” — Daryl Eisenberg — Casting Director

Core Specs to Look For

- Resolution: At least 1080p (Full HD)
- Audio Input: A jack for an external microphone
- Camera Type: DSLRs have broad lens options; mirrorless cameras are lighter and built for video
- Smartphones: Perfectly valid — shoot horizontally and stabilize with a tripod

Camera Set-Up Basics

- Shoot Landscape: Always film horizontally, never vertically
- Framing: A mid-shot (head and shoulders with space above) is the industry standard
- Eye Level: Place the camera at your eye line to avoid awkward angles
- Frame Rate: Stick to 24 or 25 fps for a natural cinematic look

Tripod

Why a Tripod Matters

The single most important piece of equipment for your self-tape isn't a \$3,000 camera — it's a tripod. A stable frame allows casting directors to focus on your performance instead of distracting shakes or odd angles. "Ensure your camera is on a tripod, table, or other steady surface to avoid shaking and keep it level with your face." — Richard Evans — Casting Director

Choosing a Tripod

Avoid spending less than \$50 — cheap plastic models collapse after a few uses. A sturdy tripod will last you years.

- **Material:** Aluminum or stainless steel are sturdy and affordable
- **Height:** The tripod should extend taller than you
- **Flexibility:** Smooth pan-and-tilt heads allow quick, small adjustments
- **Fittings:** Check compatibility between your tripod and your device

Framing

Shoot Horizontally

Your self-tape should always be filmed horizontally, never vertically. Film and television are horizontal mediums, and your audition should look like it belongs in that world. Vertical videos instantly feel amateurish to casting directors.

Proper Framing

Framing is one of the easiest details to get wrong. “Chest up” means from the middle of your chest to just above the head — your eyes and expressions are the focus. About two inches of space above the head is ideal.

“Framing is huge. On a phone, it should be a close-up — from just above the head down to the tips of the shoulders — so we can see your thoughts and expressions clearly.” — Anne Chapman, CSA

Camera Height & Eyelines

Your camera should be at eye level. For eyelines, place your focus just off to one side of the lens, as though your scene partner were standing next to the camera.

“Always send your eye contact off-screen to the scene partner. Do not look directly into the camera unless you are asked to do this. Position your scene partner as close to the lens as possible — it should feel intimate, but not too direct.” — Heidi Miami Marshall

Lighting

Why Lighting Matters

Lighting is often the biggest stumbling block for actors. A beautifully lit tape instantly looks more professional, while poor lighting can make even a strong performance hard to watch.

“If your lighting is off... you’re making it real easy for us to move on... you’ve got 3–7 seconds to make an impression.” — Mel Mack — Casting Director

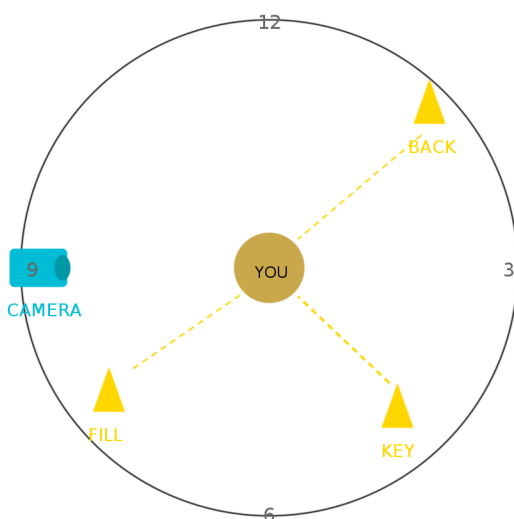
“Make sure you have direct lighting on your face. Avoid shadows under the eyes, and ideally, create a sparkle in them. With two lights, place them at 45-degree angles on either side of the camera. If you add a third, use it to light the back wall and minimize shadows.” — Heidi Miami Marshall

Choosing Lights

- Keep it soft: Softbox lights or LED panels spread light gently — avoid bare bulbs or ring lights that cause shiny spots
- Make it bright enough: A light that’s too dim makes your tape look muddy

- Match the color: All your lights should be the same color temperature
- Stay affordable: A budget-friendly kit with two or three LED panels is more than enough

The 3-Point Lighting Setup



3-POINT LIGHTING

Audio

If a casting director can't hear you clearly, your performance doesn't matter. Think of it this way: if they can't hear you, they can't hire you.

"If I can't hear you, I'm not moved by you." — Heidi Miami Marshall

Choosing Microphones

- Lavalier Mic (Clip-On): Attaches to your clothing — great for smartphones and cameras
- Shotgun Mic (Directional): Mounts on your camera, focuses on your voice, reduces background noise
- Built-In Mics: Can work well in a quiet space, but most actors notice an immediate upgrade with even a simple external mic

"Most cameras have a good built-in microphone for audition purposes. But for excellent sound, a separate mic — either on-camera or a lav — is a great idea." — Heidi Miami Marshall

Before Every Tape. Silence everything — TVs, fans, heaters, phones, even noisy pets. "Quiet on set." Always

run a quick sound check. Your levels should hover around -12dB to -6dB.

Backdrop

Your backdrop is the final piece of a professional self-tape setup. It doesn't need to be elaborate — it just needs to keep the attention on you.

“Try to also have a plain or neutral background behind you, so that you are the main focus.” — Richard Evans — Casting Director

Options for Actors

- Paint a Wall: Use matte paint in gray or blue — avoid white, it washes actors out
- Pop-Up Backdrop: Great for shared spaces, folds away easily
- Paper Rolls or Fabric Stands: Professional but flexible
- Roller Blinds: Quick, clean, easy to roll up when not in use

“Use a simple, flat surface that is one color, ideally cream, white, beige, turquoise-blue, bright-green, or gray. Muted colors are best. Don't use a bright background (no reds, oranges, yellows) as they're distracting.” — Heidi Miami Marshall

“I don’t want to see your pantry, cat, or bed in the frame. If you use a sheet as a backdrop, make sure it’s ironed — wrinkles are distracting.” — Anne Chapman, CSA

Wardrobe & Makeup

Your clothing and appearance should always support your performance, not distract from it. Think of your wardrobe as part of the storytelling — an extension of the character.

“Dress suggestive of the part. This is my bottom line: how would your character dress? Especially when you’re at home, use your wardrobe to make it even more specific.” — Heidi Miami Marshall

“Your wardrobe and backdrop should work with your skin tone, not against it. If your backdrop is washing you out or your shirt color is too similar to your background, it creates a flat, lifeless image on screen.” — Mel Mack — Casting Director & Acting Coach

Makeup: The Natural Look

- Minimal Makeup: Light base to smooth skin tone, a touch of mascara, soft lip color. Avoid heavy eyeliner or stage-style makeup unless the role calls for it.
- For Men (or all genders): The main concern is shine. Powder or blotting paper helps. Style your hair neatly.

Props

“Props can be a tricky area in self-taping. Used well, they add believability and keep your performance grounded in the world of the scene. Used poorly, they distract and pull the viewer out of your acting.” — Heidi Miami

Marshall

When you're at home, really use a prop. If the scene calls for a glass of wine, grab a wine glass with water in it. Be specific in your usage of props, always. Moderation is key — props should serve the scene, not overshadow your performance.

“My rule of thumb is anything you carry with you on a normal day: cellphone, water bottle, coats, scarves, purse. If I want an actor to have a prop, we will provide it.” — Marci Liroff — Casting Director & Producer

Editing & Labeling

Editing is an essential and unavoidable part of the self-taping process. It's not about turning your audition into a short film — it's about presenting your work clearly and professionally.

“Editing is far easier if you shoot a whole scene as one take, rather than picking up mid-take, so if you make a mistake, start again. When you have the best take for each scene, edit them cleanly and put all the scenes onto one file.” — Richard Evans — Casting Director

“Don't do any internal edits of the scene. You're NOT making a short film. Most CDs want the individual files, not one edited file of all takes.” — Heidi Miami Marshall

File Naming

Example File Name.

PROJECTNAME_RoleName_YourName_Scene1Take1

Technical Export Settings

- Always trim the start and end so the tape feels efficient
- Adjust audio levels if you're too quiet or too loud

- Tweak color slightly for balance but avoid heavy grading
- Export at 1080p — keep the file size under 100MB. Drop to 720p if needed.

Slate

To create a slate for a taped audition, start by following casting's instructions exactly. Generally, slate directly into the camera in a medium shot, stating the requested information clearly and confidently in your natural voice.

How to Deliver Your Slate

- **Start in a Medium Close-Up (MCU):** Shot from the shoulders up, speaking directly to camera
- **Provide Requested Information:** Clearly state your name, height, agency (if applicable), and any other requested details
- **Be Confident and Natural:** This is often a casting director's first impression of you
- **Don't Slate in Character (unless instructed):** Use your normal, natural voice
- **Avoid Signs:** Casting directors prefer direct introductions over held-up cards
- **Be Prepared for Variations:** Slating can sometimes be a "tail slate," placed at the very end of the audition

Glossary

Back to One. Returning to your starting mark to begin again.

Backdrop. A plain, neutral background (usually gray, blue, or white) for a distraction-free self-tape.

Blocking. The planned physical movement in a scene, used more in commercials than film auditions.

Breakdown. Can mean a project breakdown (production details) or a character breakdown (name, age range, ethnicity, story details).

Callback. The next round of auditions, bringing you closer to booking the role.

Casting Portals. Online platforms (Actors Access, Casting Networks, EcoCast) where you submit your self-tapes.

Cheat to Camera. Angling your body so your reaction is visible on camera.

Cold Read. An audition where you receive the lines shortly before performing them.

Compression. Reducing your video file size before uploading without losing quality.

Eye Lines. Where you look during the scene — usually at the reader, just off to the side of the lens.

Frame Rate. Frames per second in your video. Most auditions request 24 or 30 fps.

Framing. How much of you the camera captures (shoulders up, chest up, or full body).

Lighting Kit. Portable lights used to keep your face evenly lit and avoid shadows.

Mark. The taped spot where you stand, often marked with an X or T.

Natural Breaks. Places in the script where you can pause naturally, helping avoid a robotic delivery.

Off-Book. Having your lines fully memorized.

Pick-Up. Re-recording just a section of your performance rather than the whole tape.

Reader. The person delivering the other lines in your audition, usually next to the camera.

Room Tone. A few seconds of silence recorded in your space to capture the natural sound. Useful for editing.

Self-Tape. Recording and uploading your own audition — the current industry standard.

Sides. Script pages pulled from the full script for auditioning.

Slate. Looking into the camera and stating your name and height, sometimes with additional info.

Union Status. Indicates whether a project is union or non-union, or whether a performer is a union member.

Upload Specs. The technical requirements (file size, resolution, format) given by casting. Always double-check.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Will Roberts

Will Roberts is a working SAG-AFTRA actor, co-founder of GotAuditions.com, and the driving creative force behind the Post Hollywood ecosystem. He is best known for his role as General George C. Marshall in Christopher Nolan's Oscar-winning film *Oppenheimer* (2023).



As a SAG-AFTRA member himself, Will built every tool on GotAuditions.com with one goal in mind: giving every working actor access to the same professional resources that were once reserved for those at the top of the industry.

This book is his system. The one that worked.

THE PLATFORM BEHIND THIS BOOK

Post Hollywood

You're not lost — you're standing at the turning point of a creative revolution. Post Hollywood is building the infrastructure for the new filmmaking era.

Got Auditions

Prepare. Perform. Promote. Book.

The all-in-one platform for confident, professional self-tapes. Built by a working SAG-AFTRA actor, for working actors.

- AI Script Analysis Coach — smarter, stronger choices with every line
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- AI Headshot Analyzer — instant professional feedback
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