SOFTWARE & TECH

One Minute Monologues From Musicals

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Introduction: The Power of a Minute in Musical Theatre

In the high-stakes world of musical theatre auditions, few tools are as essential—yet as deceptively challenging—as the one-minute monologue. While the average musical features soaring songs and intricate dance numbers, a monologue gives an actor a rare, unfiltered window to showcase their emotional range, vocal subtext, and raw talent without a single note of music. A well-chosen **one-minute monologue from a musical** can be the golden ticket to landing a callback or even a role. But why the one-minute format? In today's fast-paced casting rooms, directors often have hundreds of actors to see. A minute is just enough time to establish a character, tell a mini-story, and leave a lasting impression—provided the piece is expertly selected and performed.

This article explores the art and craft of finding, cutting, and performing the perfect one-minute monologue from a musical. We'll discuss why these short pieces are the backbone of many auditions, examine some of the best examples from classic and contemporary shows, and offer practical tips to make every second count. Whether you're a seasoned professional or a student stepping into an audition room for the first time, mastering the one-minute monologue from a musical is a skill that will serve you for your entire career.

Why One Minute? The Audition Reality

Audition panels are notorious for time constraints. A director may see fifty actors in a single morning, leaving only sixty to ninety seconds per performer for their spoken piece (the song is usually timed separately). This is why the **one-minute monologue from a musical**has become a standard requirement. It forces actors to be concise, deliberate, and effective. Every line must serve a purpose—character development, plot progression, or emotional impact. There is no room for meandering exposition or self-indulgent pauses. The challenge is to create a complete arc: a beginning, a middle, and an end, all within a breath.

Another reason musical monologues are preferred over straight plays is that they demand a heightened sense of rhythm and language. Musical dialogue often has a lyrical quality, even when not sung. It requires an actor to find the "music" in the words—the crescendos, the rests, the emotional key changes. This aligns perfectly with the musical theatre audition format, where you may be asked to go directly from a spoken monologue to a song. The transition should feel seamless, as if your spoken words were the natural prelude to a melody.

Finding the Perfect One-Minute Musical Monologue

Selecting the right piece is half the battle. You need a monologue that fits your age, type, and vocal style, but also one that can be delivered in sixty seconds without losing context. Here are key criteria to consider:

- Self-contained story: The monologue should make sense to someone who has never seen the show. Avoid pieces that rely heavily on prior plot knowledge or that begin mid-sentence in a larger scene.

- Character age and type: Your monologue should be age-appropriate and believable for your physical and emotional range. A 20-year-old actor should avoid playing an embittered 50-year-old parent, unless they can absolutely nail the maturity.
- Emotional variety: A minute may seem short, but the best monologues still offer some shift—from anger to regret, from joy to sorrow. A flat line reading will lose the panel's interest quickly.
- Cutting ability: Few monologues are exactly one minute as written. You will likely need to trim. Choose a piece that can be cut cleanly, removing side conversations or redundant lines without destroying the narrative arc.
- No singing required: Though it comes from a musical, your monologue should be entirely spoken. The panel wants to hear your acting, not your vocal chops, during this portion.

Contemporary vs. Classic: Which Era Works Best?

There's a healthy debate among casting directors about whether to use a classic Golden Age monologue (Rodgers & Hammerstein, Lerner & Loewe) or a contemporary one (Sondheim, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Jason Robert Brown). The answer depends on the production. For a revival of a classic show, a period-appropriate monologue might be smart. But for an open call, a contemporary piece often feels more relatable and shows your ability to handle modern language rhythms. That said, a well-performed monologue from *Carousel* can be just as powerful as one from *Hamilton*. The key is matching the tone of the show you're auditioning for. Most actors keep at least three one-minute monologues from musicals in their arsenal: one comedic, one dramatic, and one "classic."

Top Musicals for One-Minute Monologues

Certain musicals are monologue goldmines. Their scripts contain short, impactful speeches that can be lifted and performed with minimal context. Below are some recommended shows and specific monologue excerpts (abridged to fit one minute) that actors frequently use.

1. "Hamilton" – Lin-Manuel Miranda

Few shows have produced as many audition-ready monologues as *Hamilton*. The rapid-fire, contemporary language and deep emotional stakes make for compelling one-minute pieces. Consider Burr's "Wait For It" speech (the spoken intro before the song) or King George's "You'll Be Back" dialogue. Another excellent choice is Angelica's monologue about love and legacy in "Satisfied." These excerpts can easily be trimmed to a minute while retaining their intensity.

2. "Next to Normal" – Tom Kitt and Brian Yorkey

This Pulitzer Prize-winning rock musical is a rich source of dramatic monologues. Diana's speeches about her bipolar disorder and her family's reactions are raw, honest, and powerful. A one-minute cut from her "I Am the One" monologue (the spoken section) can showcase vulnerability and a moment of realization. Similarly, Dan's late monologue about his wife's condition offers a male perspective on grief and exhaustion.

3. "The Last Five Years" – Jason Robert Brown

Although primarily sung, the show contains several spoken passages—especially in Jamie's first monologue (opening scene) where he describes his first date with Cathy. It's charming, hopeful, and builds beautifully. With a careful cut, it becomes a perfect one-minute audition piece for a young romantic lead. For a more dramatic option, Cathy's monologue in "The Next Ten Minutes" about her failed marriage provides a poignant end.

4. "Les Misérables" – Boublil and Schönberg

The classic. Jean Valjean's "Javert, you have my parole" speech (from the confrontation) is a powerful dramatic monologue with intense moral conflict. It can be reduced to the core argument: Valjean asking Javert to acknowledge his transformation. Similarly, Éponine's "A Little Fall of Rain" spoken section (though often sung) can be delivered as a poignant whisper. These monologues require strong emotional commitment but are

extremely rewarding.

5. "A Chorus Line" – Marvin Hamlisch and Edward Kleban

Each character in this groundbreaking show has a short confessional monologue before their song. Paul's monologue about his family and his identity is perhaps the most famous—it's raw, honest, and builds to a powerful climax. Cutting it to one minute is challenging but doable. Zach's dialogue about the audition process also works as a control-piece for a director-type role.

6. "Sweeney Todd" – Stephen Sondheim

Sondheim's language is dense and poetic. Mrs. Lovett's monologue about her dreams of a seaside life (from "By the Sea") can be spoken with a comedic or dark edge. For a more serious piece, Judge Turpin's self-flagellation speech is intense and rare—it shows a villain's internal torment. These require precise language handling but impress panels with your material choices.

How to Cut a Monologue to One Minute

Rarely will you find a monologue that is exactly sixty seconds long. You'll need to edit. This is a skill every actor must develop. Here's a step-by-step approach:

1. Read the full script. Understand the character's journey and context of the monologue.
2. Identify the core emotional beat. What is the character's main objective in this speech? That beat must remain intact.
3. Remove redundancies. Musical monologues often repeat a theme. Keep the best example and cut the rest.
4. Cut other characters' responses. If the monologue is part of a dialogue, remove the other character's lines but weave the sense of their presence into your pauses.
5. Trim adverbs and adjectives. Sondheim's text is dense; you can sometimes cut a descriptor without losing meaning.
6. Time yourself. Read aloud with a stopwatch. Adjust by adding or removing lines. Aim for 55–60 seconds to allow for pacing.
7. Check the arc. Your cut version should still have a clear beginning, middle, and end. It shouldn't sound like a fragment.

Always note: never cut a line that is essential to the story. If you remove a key piece of information that makes the monologue incomprehensible, you've failed. Test your cut on a friend who has never seen the show—if they understand the emotional core, you've succeeded.

Performing Your Monologue: Tips for Maximum Impact

You've selected and cut your **one-minute monologue from a musical**. Now it's time to perform. Here are actionable tips to make your minute memorable:

- Strong objective: Every character wants something. Define what your character wants from the person they're speaking to (even if that person isn't present). Play that objective with intensity.
- Physicality matters: Use your body to tell the story. Musical theatre characters often have larger-than-life movements, but within a monologue, subtlety can be powerful. A single hand gesture or a change in posture can reveal a character's shift.
- Find the rhythm: Musical dialogue has a musicality. Pay attention to the beat, the pauses, the crescendos. Treat the words like a score—with dynamics and tempo changes.
- Use your breath: A one-minute monologue is short, but don't rush. Breathe naturally. Use pauses to let the audience (or panel) absorb the emotional weight. A well-placed silence can be more revealing than a barrage of words.

• Connect to the song that follows: Even though you're not singing, imagine you're building a bridge to a potential song. The emotional state you end the monologue with should seamlessly lead into a musical number.

• Eye line: Choose a focal point for your monologue. Avoid wandering eyes. Every look should have purpose—whether you're staring at an imaginary partner, a mirror, or the audience.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

Even experienced actors stumble when performing a short monologue. Here are pitfalls to watch out for:

• Overacting: In a one-minute piece, less is often more. Big emotional acting can seem forced. Trust the words to do the work.

• Rushing: Nerves make you speed up. Practice with a metronome if needed. A minute is plenty of time to deliver 8–12 lines with impact.

• No context for the panel: Never assume they know the show. Provide a brief "slate" (your name and the show) but don't explain the plot. Let the monologue speak for itself.

• Poor cutting: A cut that leaves the monologue unfinished or jumps around makes you look unprepared. Ensure it feels like a complete thought.

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