

# KD's "Real-Life" TV Acting Terms

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Compiled by Dari Hayes

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**Action:** The term that is used when you are to begin the scene or copy.

**Actors' Equity Association:** Also known as AEA or Equity. It was founded in 1913 and is the labor union that represents more than 45,000 Actors and Stage Managers in the United States. Equity seeks to advance, promote and foster the art of live theatre as an essential component of our society. Equity negotiates wages and working conditions and provides a wide range of benefits, including health and pension plans, for its members. Actors' Equity is a member of the AFL-CIO, and is affiliated with FIA, an international organization of performing arts unions.

**A.D.:** The Assistant Director in a film or theater production. Sometimes refers to Art Director, but seldom on the set.

**Ad-Lib:** Speech or action that has not been scripted.

**Agent:** An individual whose job is to represent an actor's work to various casting directors, producers, and directors; and set up audition appointments. A big part of their job is negotiating contracts for their clients. Again, agents do not get you jobs, but auditions. The usual commission is 10%. Agents receive their payment as a percentage of the jobs you actually book.

**Alt.:** Alternate. Usually a reference to alternate dialogue or scene.

**Ambient Sound:** Room noise, that is usually recorded by itself at the end of the shooting day to use in editing.

**Angle shot:** A camera angle change within a specific established area.

**Apple Box:** An 8" box used to heighten an actor or prop on a set. (4" = "a half apple", and 2" = "a quarter apple, 1" = a pancake"). If they say "bring it in "New York" it means stand it on end. Bring it in LA means flat (regular). Bring it in Chicago means on it's side.

**Art Director:** Person who conceives and designs the sets.

**Audition:** An audition is where you will go to try out to get a part in a film, television or theater project. Actors read from a script or sides, sing, dance, or do a monologue. The director of casting decides typically who goes on the audition.

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**Automated Dialogue replacement (ADR):** Dubbing in sound during editing that didn't record well during the shoot. Also called "looping".

**Background:** Another term for Extras. Background actors have no speaking lines and are found filling in the background of a scene. There are different pay rates for Background actors in both SAG and AFTRA.

**Banana:** A gently curving path toward or away from your mark.

**Back to one:** Taking it from the top. "One" is the "first position".

**Beat:** A deliberate pause in the flow of dialogue or action. **AND**-a unit of the script, contained within a scene

**Bite and smile:** Slang for eating a product on camera for a commercial.

**Bio:** This is your biography. It is a one paragraph format that is usually used for a press release or printed in a program/playbill.

**Blocking:** The movement that the director gives the actors. The director blocks the play or tells the actors where to move when he is directing.

**Booking:** You got the job! When an actor accepts a booking, it is a legally binding verbal commitment that the actor will show up and perform. Most contracts for commercials, print, voice-overs are not signed until the job is complete, so when you say yes to a booking it is a firm commitment.

**Boom:** The apparatus that holds the mic above the actor.

**Breakdowns:** A character description of all the roles being cast in that particular project; usually listed largest role to smallest.

**Brings:** Another term for clothing you take to a shoot (usually print work uses this term).

**Business:** The act of handling a prop or clothing; usually not the focus of the scene.

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**Buy-out:** This is a one- time payment or flat fee for a project that will not provide residuals. Buy outs are a common agreement in all non union commercial work.

**Callback:** A callback is when they ask back specific people from the first audition to audition again. Try and wear what you wore the first time, and make only solid but slight improvements on your first audition.

**Call Sheet:** A sheet containing the cast and crew call times for a specific days shoot. Everything from production needs to the predicted weather are usually included, along with the phone numbers of everyone.

**Call Time:** This is the time you are required to be on set.

**Camera angle:** The position of the camera relative to the actor(s).

**Camera left & right:** Direction from the cameras point of view.

**Casting Director:** The Casting Director is hired by the producer or director. They work with agents to put the right actors in front of the director and help choose all the actors in movies, television shows, and musicals/plays. They must have a wide knowledge of actors, and be able to match the talent with the role. They also serve as the liaison between directors, actors, and their agents, and they are responsible for negotiating deals with agents and for obtaining contracts for each hired actor. They make suggestions to the producer/director of who to hire.

**Cheat:** To angle the performer or object toward a particular camera.

**Checking The Gate:** The verbal command to check the lens on the camera. If the lens is ok the cast and crew move on to the next scene or shot.

**Close-Up (CU):** A tight shot of the face.

**Cold Reading:** A skill to be practiced and honed. This is reading out loud from a script or side without any rehearsal or study in advance and is generally used in auditions. Still treat it as a performance and familiarize yourself with it as much as time will allow.

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**Commission:** When an agent gets you in for a project and you book the role, that agent is entitled to a percentage of your pay. This is their commission on the project and it is a standard 10% commission. Managers tend to take 15%, and print jobs tend to be a 20% commission with even more off the "back end" of a job. All commissions are tax-deductible to the actor.

**Comp Card:** Also known as Composite Card is used for commercial print and modeling. It is a model or actors postcard with 3-5 photos of the actor or model printed with their stats. These cards are used to market and submit to prospective clients, for auditions and casting calls, but they do not take the place of an actor's headshot. All cards display a headshot and smaller shots that show your versatility and talent.

**Conflict:** If you have a national commercial running for Pepcid AC and you go on an audition for Pepto Bismol, that is a conflict. Advertising Agencies don't want the same face to be the campaign for other competitors' products in that market. Usually your agent will let you know what becomes a conflict and what you can and can't audition for. Ultimately, YOU are in charge of monitoring your conflicts.

**Continuity:** Managing the details between scenes to avoid bloopers. Each actor is in charge of their own continuity.

**Copy:** This is the script for commercials and voice-overs.

**Craft Services:** On set beverages and food provided to the crew and talent on the set.

**Credits:** This is an actor's performing experience that is on your resume.

**Crew:** Basically everyone except the Director, Producer, and Actors.

**Cue:** Actions or words which proceed your actions or words. "Pick up your cues" means come in faster after your given cues.

**Cut:** The director says this to cut the camera and end the take. In editing, changing from one shot to another.

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**Dailies:** Also called rushes. The previous days' scenes, processed overnight and screened after work the next day by the director and crew heads. Actors aren't usually invited to see these.

**Day Player:** This is a performer hired on a daily basis for television, industrial and films.

**Dead Cat:** That large furry thing that sometimes covers the mic. to eliminate wind noise.

**Demo Reel:** This is a sample of your previous work. Your demo reel should display your versatility. When creating your demo, try and keep it short, and show clips of many types of characters you can portray. There are also audio demo reels for voice-overs.

**Director:** Someone who supervises the actors and directs the action in the production of a show or project. They coordinate all aspects of the production and bring their own creative vision.

**Diss.** Dissolve – when one scene blends into the next.

**Dolly:** A four wheeled camera support which can move on the ground or roll on tracks. Also used as a verb.

**Dubbing:** Recording a voice in sync with a film.

**Establishing shot:** Usually a long shot orienting an audience to a new location.

**Executive Producer:** This person is the producer who handles the funding and financials of a project. They can get final say in casting decisions, but typically leave that in the hands of the director.

**Ext.:** Exterior shot.

**Extreme Close-Up (ECU):** Speaks for itself. Use hardly any facial expressions unless directed too. Be mindful of the frame regarding your motion.

**Extra:** (See background) A non-speaking role in a film/commercial. You will be paid less, and perhaps treated like human furniture for a day, but you get a line item on your resume, you are eligible for a possible upgrade, and thus should not complain. You are working.

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**First Refusal:** (See On Hold) Basically, if you consider another job on their shoot date, you must contact the entity that has you on right of first refusal (ROF) first. They, in turn must make a decision to book or release you.

**Foreground:** Anything between the camera and the subject.

**Frame:** The viewing area seen by the camera .

**Give me a level:** Requests from the sound person to have the actor recite their lines the way they will perform, in order to set the levels on his/her equipment. Don't say "testing" or 1,2,3. Read your lines the way you plan too for the shoot.

**Headshot:** This is an 8 x 10 photo, which is needed to submit with your resume to get into an audition or casting call. You need to maintain a current photo. Production personnel depend on photos to choose you for consideration. When you change your look, you need to update your headshot.

**Hero:** Usually the product, but also the main person or object (esp. food) in the shoot.

**Hit your mark:** Placements on the floor, walls, tables, air, etc., upon which an actor is to place himself or areas of his body throughout a scene.

**Industrial:** This is a private, not public, performance by an actor that is often sponsored by companies and corporations. It takes the form of video, film, or live performance and tends to be of an educational nature. Usually training videos.

**Int.:** Interior.

**In the can.:** Finished film project (as in: in the film can).

**Keep it rolling:** The director usually wants all to keep going in lieu of a mistake and to save time "rebooting the shot".

**Keeper:** The director likes the scene and wants to keep it. A good take.

**Lavalier:** Small wireless mic concealed usually in the clothing.

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**Location:** Anywhere the scene is being shot.

**Logo:** Slogan or product name.

**Long shot (LS):** A camera angle shot from some distance.

**Lose:** To remove something from the set or actor; "lose the jacket".

**Make-up call:** The time an actor is to show up for make-up.

**Mark:** Places throughout the scene where the actor is supposed to stand or position parts of his body.

**Marker:** Usually referring to the slate board. Also a verbal cue that the take should be identified on camera.

**Manager:** Similar to agents but they typically assist with career development and advise their clients on business and artistic decisions, as well as assisting in finding an agent. They usually take 15% commission on the jobs you book. If they get you an agent, that agent could then take 10% as well.

**Master shot:** A shot of the entire scene from beginning to end. Other angles (close-ups, two-shots) will be inserted later.

**Matching action:** Doing the same action from the master shot in all subsequent shots of the scene.

**Meal penalty:**

A monetary amount added to the actors or crews salary when a meal doesn't come after a certain number of hours.

**Medium Close-Up (MCU):** Usually the head and chest of the actor. Careful not to use over exaggerated gestures.

**Medium shot (MS):** A shot from about the waist up.

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**MOS:** A scene shot without sound. Credited to German director Eric von Stroheim who would direct his crew to shoot a scene "mit out sound" (ref. The Screenwriter's Bible, David Trottier). It's also sometimes referred to as "Motion on screen".

**Monologue:** This is where a character speaks alone. It is spoken by one person who exposes inner thoughts and provides insights into his or her character. A speech by one actor or performer directly addressing the audience or another character. Used a lot in general auditions for stage casting directors and agents.

**National Commercial:** This is a commercial that is shown nationwide. There are also local commercials to air only in local cities and towns, and regional commercials airing only in specific regions.

**On Camera (OC):** What we see. The visual image.

**On Hold:** (See First Refusal). When a producer likes you for a certain project, you may be placed On Hold. It is a courtesy to let you know of a possible booking for that project and to let you know what dates to "hold" in case it leads to a booking. Reasons for "on hold" vary. Practice not holding your breath.

**Open Call:** This is an audition where anyone who fits the requirements for the project can attend regardless if they have agent representation. Often referred to as "cattle calls".

**Off camera:** Usually refers to sounds or dialogue heard while camera is on another subject.

**Overlap:** An actor starting his lines without waiting for the previous line to finish.

**PA:** The Production Assistant on a particular project who is in charge of many different areas. Usually they will be the point person for the talent on set.

**Pace:** Overall speed of performance.

**Pan:** Horizontal camera move.

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**Per Diem:** Literally means "per day". It is used in agreements as a daily allowance, usually for living expenses while traveling in connection with one's work or being employed at a distance from one's home.

**Pick it up:** Carry out the action more quickly.

**Pick-up:** Starting a scene from a place other than the beginning.

**Pick-up shot(s):** Short scenes that are often shot last, and often to cover up mistakes in other shots.

**Picture Up:** Warning that filming is about to take place. Usually followed by a host of other prep commands.

**Pilot:** A test run of a first episode of a television series idea. A pilot is an idea for a show. Actors are assembled, a pilot is shot and then the process of testing and selling the project begins. Often times many of the actors in the pilot are replaced, if the show is "picked up".

**Post:** Editing that is done after all the shooting.

**P.O.V.** Point of view.

**Principal:** This is a major character in a particular project. They are at a higher pay scale than a day player or extra, and the part tends to be larger and usually have lines.

**Print:** A photo job (eg: catalogues, brochures, magazines). Also refers to a good take of a scene during filming.

**Producer:** This is someone who finds financing for acting projects. Often they supervise the day to day decision making in regards to budget, equipment, location, etc of a play, film, or TV project.

**PSM:** A Production Stage Manager. See also Stage Manager.

**Quick study:** Actor who can quickly learn lines and blocking.

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**Read:** A reference to how a person "comes across" on camera. "That (he) reads dad". Or "That reads angry". Also referring to reading copy. The actor might be asked to give a different "read" to copy.

**Residuals:** These are fees paid to the actor each time a union project is re-aired. Usually pertains, to commercials, voice-overs, TV programs, and Film.

**Sequence of calls:** This is the sequence of commands that are typically given before shooting a scene. Up to 4 people may be heard contributing to the sounding out of the following sequence. Usually the AD initiates the sequence.

**"Picture up" / "Rehearsal up" / "Shooting" / or "Places"**

**"Quiet on the set"** (they are very serious about this)

**"Roll sound"...**(soundman answers) **"speed"** / or **"rolling"**

**"Roll camera"...**(cameraman answers) **"speed"** / or **"rolling"**

**"Marker" / or "Mark" / or "Slate"...**(clapper slaps here)

**"Background"** (if there are extras in the shot; they begin movement)

**"Action"** (all move, and keep going until **"Cut"**)

**Resume:** A list of your acting credits, training, and any other talents you think might be worth mentioning. This is a one-page document, typed out and attached to the back of your headshot. DO NOT lie on your resume.

**Run-through:** Usually a rehearsal at full speed.

**Safety:** Term for another take just in case the one they like has something wrong with it that they didn't see.

**SAG-AFTRA:** The result of the merger of the two Unions (SAG or Screen Actors Guild and AFTRA or The American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) that separately represented all performers working in media. SAG-AFTRA represents approximately 160,000 actors, announcers, broadcast journalists, dancers, DJs, news writers, news editors, program hosts, puppeteers, recording artists, singers, stunt performers, voiceover artists and other media professionals. The Union exists to enhance actors' working conditions, compensation and benefits and to be a powerful, unified voice on behalf of artists' rights.

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**Scale:** This term, short for union scale, refers to the minimum amount which must be paid for a defined job under a union contract. Non-union jobs tend to pay amounts based on union scale but don't include pension and health payments. Scale is established in the union contracts for particular types of jobs, and can be found on all the union websites.

**Scene:** A portion of the script which has been assigned its' own number.

**Screen test:** This is a filmed scene to show an actor's ability for a specific project. It is done far along in the casting process on the actual set and with other actual cast members, usually at the producer's request.

**Session Fee:** This is payment for the amount of time put in on set or in the recording studio for voice-overs, usually calculated in days. Residuals could come later.

**SFX:** Special effects.

**Sides:** Pages or scenes from a script, used in auditions or (if on a film set) those scenes being shot that day. Sides can be anywhere in length from a few lines to a number of pages depending on the part that is being cast. You will usually receive a side from the casting director or agent prior to the audition.

**Slate:** For on camera auditions and voice-over auditions you will be asked to slate. This is simply an introduction of who you are where you state your name, sometimes your agency, and sometimes other things. Make sure to relate directly to camera. Keep it simple and charming and strong.

**Spot:** A commercial is often referred to as a spot.

**Stand by:** Command for actors and crew to prepare for a take.

**Stand in:** Usually a person asked to stand where the actor would stand to help adjust lighting so that the actor can stay out of the hot lights.

**Storyboard:** A sequence of pictures that reflect the action taking place in a scene.

**Strike:** To remove something; especially large objects.

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**Submission:** Submissions are done by agents and by the actor themselves. If a role comes out in the breakdowns that an agent feels you are right for they will submit your headshots and resume for that project to be considered for an audition. You can send your own submission as well when audition notices come out in the trade papers or online. Most submissions are done digitally now.

**Super:** Superimpose – when one image is placed on another, much like a double exposure. (At the end of the commercial, they will very often superimpose the product or logo on the screen with the final picture.

**Taft Hartley:** This term refers to an actor not in the union who becomes a "principal performer" on a union contract. That actor is immediately eligible to join SAG and is covered under the SAG contract with the production company. In California, New York and Illinois and a few other states that actor has 30 days to join the union or cease working on any union productions. Once joining the union, the actor may not work on any non-union production, per the terms of the bylaws.

**Talent:** Refers to the actors.

**Teleprompter:** Also known as an autocue is a display device that prompts the person speaking with an electronic visual text of a script. Using a teleprompter is similar to the practice of using cue cards. The screen is in front of the camera lens and the words on the screen are reflected to the eyes of the speaker using a one way mirror, so it appears as if you are looking directly into the camera.

**Three Shot:** Three people in the shot.

**Tight Close-Up (TCU):** Don't move your head at all.

**Two Shot:** Two people in the shot.

**U/5:** Also known as Under Five. This is a performer hired on a per project basis for television soap operas. A U/5 characterizes someone who has 5 or less speaking lines. If you have more than five lines of dialogue, your pay scale changes and you become known as a day player.

**Upgrade:** This is when an actor's role gets increased on set. There is always a chance of being upgraded. Be aware of union scale so when an upgrade occurs, if you are not represented, you will know what you should be compensated.

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**V.O.C.** Voice on camera.

**Voice-Over (VO):** This is the recording of a narrative to accompany a filmed commercial or TV spot. There are also voice-overs used on the radio known as radio commercials. Voice-overs are also used in the dubbing of foreign films.

**Waiver:** This is when a union gives special consideration to certain cases and allows a production to deviate from standard union contract, so that the production can continue successfully.

**Wrap:** The conclusion of the production. The end. An actor can be wrapped individually. "You're wrapped".

**Wide-Angle Shot (WA):** The shot from a wide angle.

**Wild track (or sound):** Sound recorded on the shoot without any picture which may be used later in post for ambient sounds.