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## HOW TO: Do a Casting

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**Y**ou wake up. After politely crying at the foot of your bed for an hour, the cat has moved in for the less diplomatic chin-nudge. "I will cut your throat and watch you bleed," he says in perfect English. You are naked except for your socks and have no reason to doubt him. Last night you dreamed you were being led to the guillotine as an enemy of the Revolution at the height of *la Terreur*. The mob surged, rabid to see your head roll awkwardly on the stained wood. It is cold in your apartment. The food bowl is empty. Then your nightmare suddenly leaps into reality. You booked a couple of Brazilian models for the new *Explore Iceland!* shoot today. How could you get your casting so wrong? Here's what you didn't do.

**Step One:** Casting is like panning for gold. You are probably not the heir to any fortune if your great-grand pappy sifted through a few handfuls of creek mud and called it a day. In that case it's time to get knee-deep, wet, and dirty. Grill your clients. Find out exactly what they want. Ethnicity, gender, age, height, hair color, and general style are all things you need to cover in the initial stages. You don't have to be a master globe maker to know there are not a lot of beautiful dark-skinned women running around Reykjavík, but it is your job to produce what the clients want. A little bit of research and inherited brainpower should do you right.

**Step Two:** Get fiscal. You need to let your clients know how much what they want will cost. This means budget. If they're looking to use the image on billboards and magazine spreads, they'll need to neatly, and with a steady hand, insert a couple of zeroes on that check. Big things cost more than small things.

**Step Three:** Location. Before you secure a casting studio, imagine the desert. Dry, cracked, and choking to death under the heat. Now imagine rainwater from the distant mountains making its way through the peaks, valleys, and grasslands, and ultimately settling in the arid sand. Suddenly, crocodiles, bisons, and herds of all sorts of goofy hooved creatures dying of thirst burst out of nowhere. Life happens. Mayhem ensues. This is exactly what the studio will look like nine seconds after the doors open to hordes of models, so make sure you get the biggest possible space you can find.

**Step Four:** Procure photogenic people. Using the handy and detailed specs you have acquired from the clients, relay the message to model and talent agencies. If you're not looking for the usual 5'11" one-hundred-and-three pound chain-smoking waifs, you should place an ad on casting websites. Mainstream agencies also don't generally carry sword swallowing jugglers or Nordic Vikings, so you may have to do a little research for these special requests.



**Step Five:** Get excited, it's casting day. The Romans employed crucifixion as a means to keep people in line, but you can set the tone early with an even more practical technique: the sign-in sheet. Amidst the chaos, there must be order. After signing in, have everyone fill out a casting sheet, which should coincide numerically with the sign-in sheet. Number eleven will lose her mind if it looks like number fourteen is getting anywhere first. Control the masses.

**Step Six:** Digitize the talent. The generally accepted system is a digital portrait with the casting sheet for reference, a 3/4 shot, and a full-length picture. When the day is over, your brain will be useless: you need to visually reference who you liked, despised, and who simply was not right. It's also good to get pictures relevant to the job. For instance, if your French Revolution nightmare ever proves to be a weird omen and you are casting for a Marie-Antoinette beheading scene, stick their heads in a prop guillotine and tell them, in an upbeat and reassuring tone, that they were born to be executed.

**Step Seven:** Edit your pics. Study them. Stare at them. Ask them questions. Ask them if they think you like them. Lie to them. Looks are obviously crucial, but so are attitude and personality. Often times, clients do not attend castings; therefore decision-making depends on images alone. If someone looks great but deserves to be murdered on principle, they may not be the right choice. Breathe, concentrate, and then choose wisely. Upload the chosen few onto your website and send the link to the clients. Then sit by the phone and wait for them to get back to you. Unless you are recovering from or suffer a genetic predisposition to severe alcoholism, a drink or two may help pass the time.

**Step Eight:** War room it. After receiving the clients' preliminary response and feedback, put everyone on hold. Contact the agencies, or the talents themselves if they don't have representation, and let them know you are considering them for the job. Make certain they know the shoot date to avoid any possible conflicts. Wait again.

**Step Nine:** Book people. Now that the clients have made a final, blessed decision, you may move forward. Call, confirm, book—in that order. Give them everything they need to know. The where-when-how-and-what discussion is customary and appropriate.

**Step Ten:** Kill more trees. Tie up any loose ends and paperwork. If you require release forms of any nature, make sure they are signed in ink before the shoot. The last thing you want is one of your talents questioning the terms when shooting is about to begin. You run a tight ship, and if she goes down, you go down. That has always been the way of the sea.