Table Read Instructions

Table Reads are a fun and informative way to involve and support writers, actors and voice over actors. They also tend to encourage future participation if the writer allows an audience as those members are inspired to also share their own completed works.

While most people picture a "Table Read" as an in-person gathering, I have participated in quite a few on Zoom and they are quite successful there. By simply pinning those reading the audience gets to experience the work (and inevitable flubs!). The writer can be added to the screen for a discussion after the presentation which could be opened to audience members if the writer agrees.

1. Select a completed play or script to be presented.
    a. The best are ones that have at least gone through one or two edits and are ready for outside interpretation/input.
    b. If possible, the script should have some form of protection which can be as simple as having it registered with the Writers Guild West. Even a "poor man's copyright" where a copy is sent via certified mail and then kept unopened at least at one time was admissible in court cases. I am not sure of the current legalities.
    c. Be sure to allot enough time for the script and all of the written actions/descriptions to be read aloud and then discussed. A good rule of thumb is 2 minutes per page plus 3-4 minutes per reader. You will need more Zoom time if the writer is open to audience discussion as well.
2. Discuss the process with the writer so that they have a really clear understanding of the process and what it can bring to them.
    a. I always encourage discussion at least from the readers and an open discussion with audience members if possible but not all writers will be open to that level of questions/comments. There are no real rules that have to be followed when doing these things other than to support the writer in understanding if their story is communicated well and giving them the opportunity to hear their words spoken by others.
3. Schedule a date and time for the reading to take place. Matching the availability of the writer is the most crucial aspect - everyone else can be replaced.
4. Put out the call for actors/voice actors who would like to read the project on camera. Include the date and time of the presentation to make sure that the readers will be available on that date.

a. You will need a reader for each of the lead characters. The reader does not have to match the character description but having at least some similarity is helpful.

b. You will also need one person whose sole responsibility is to read stage/camera directions and any miscellaneous descriptions. The writer will often volunteer to do this but it should be strongly discouraged. The whole point of this exercise is to allow the writer to really listen to the interpretations and make any notes that might be needed.

c. You can have one reader cover several minor characters for simplicity. Voice over artists are really great choices for child or super character roles as they can change their voices to match more of what the role calls for.

d. It is a super good idea to keep one or two readers on stand-by as schedules do have a tendency to change and having someone ready to step up can really save frustration on the day.

5. If you have more readers volunteer than are required by the project, you may bring in the writer to help choose who should read which characters. Most of the time you will be working with just enough but I have actually been asked to submit a sample read for selection. That is not common at all but it has happened.

6. Make sure that the readers have a full copy of the script at least a few days before the scheduled reading so that they can become familiar with it and prepare it in advance.

a. Some readers will be reading from their screens while others will want to print out a hard copy to work from and make any needed notes on.

b. It is not unheard of to ask readers to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) to protect the writer's work. This should include a provision stating that they will not share the script or its storyline/characters with anyone else by any means.

c. It is not necessary to have a rehearsal or any meetings prior to the actual read. The writer may email any notes regarding character at the time the script is provided to the reader. Any further direction from the writer will work against having what they have written stand on its own.

7. If the writer is willing to have an audience for the Table Read, begin promoting the event.

8. On the day, the readers sign into Zoom about 10-15 minutes prior to the audience being allowed in for any last minute questions or instructions and to make sure that everyone needed is present. This is the time to make last minute changes if they are required, before the audience is present.

a. The writer may want to introduce the piece before the actual read begins. Some will even introduce the readers which is nice but not necessary.

        i.   It will help the audience if the readers use their character names on the Zoom instead of their personal. Those reading multiple roles can either list the roles or use "Misc"

9. After the read is finished the readers should be encouraged to share their thoughts with the writer. What did they like about the piece or their character? Were there things in the story that didn't seem to make sense to them? Is there something that needs more (or less) explanation? Hopefully the writer will also take notes on the discussion.

    a. Some writers will need some preparation for this process and encouragement to understand that the comments they receive will be directly related to what they have written and are in no way personal attacks or criticism. This is especially important with those that have rejection dysphoria (like me).

I think that covers everything - at least everything I can think of today. If anyone has any further questions I am always available to answer them via gwyn@gwynlaree.com