



YOUR POCKET GUIDE TO DE-ROLE

tips for getting out of character
and back to your wonderful self

*A resource of the Arts Wellbeing Collective, promoting
positive mental health and wellbeing in the performing arts*

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

We spend so much time meticulously getting into character – thinking, feeling, speaking, and moving as someone else – how much time and energy do you spend getting out of character?

It can take more than a quick debrief and a post-show high five! Getting out of character properly can help you avoid:

- Poor mental health and wellbeing from ineffective or absent de-role practice
- Character creep and character bleed
- Blurred boundaries between actor and character
- Intrusive thoughts, feelings or behaviours that are not your own

At the time of writing, there are no formal research-based guidelines for getting out of character. The following ideas are drawn from anecdotal evidence and clinical experience.

Hopefully you will find tips and tricks to help you return to your wonderful self!

This guide is a resource of the Arts Wellbeing Collective. The content was created, reviewed and informed by Arts Centre Melbourne, Alicia Gardiner, Simon Gleeson, Matt Heyward, Bert LaBonté, Daijah Porchia, Dr Alison Robb, Patrice Tipoki, and Deone Zanotto.

IN REHEARSALS

- Discuss the importance of using effective de-role processes. Share tips and techniques with each other that may have been successful in the past.
- Agree as a company to spend time at the end of the day getting out of character before you leave the building.
- Add post-rehearsal group exercises - something fun and frivolous - and make a conscious decision to use each other's names.
- Once you hit the theatre, use 'dress down' time as the signal to start the de-role process!



My process for getting out of character can vary - physically I like to 'move it out' – jump, shake and breathe. I will spend time away from others or time with others depending on my needs each day.

And listen to music on headphones! Music that speaks of you or a song you associate with your life and not the character's or the show.

Alicia Gardiner

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PERFORMANCE

- Consciously place the character's props back on the props table.
- Remove the character's costume. Place it consciously on the rack.
- Carefully remove any make-up, wigs, markings etc. worn as the character.
- Physically shake the character off - arms, legs, hands, feet.
- If you have access to a bathroom, have a shower and imagine washing the character off.
- Change into an outfit that is comforting, or expresses your personality, or both.
- Smells can evoke powerful memories - use a particular perfume or deodorant when portraying the character, then rinse it off and use one that represents you.

REINFORCE THE DIFFERENCE

For any post show meet and greet, forum or backstage tour, make sure you are introduced to audience and participants with YOUR name, not the name of your character.

"This is [Name] who plays the role of [Character]."

You could even make mention of the differences between the two:

"You might have noticed everyone in the show is really scared of [Character], but [Name] is actually one of the sweetest people you will ever meet!"

These subtle shifts in language can make a big difference.

NOTICE YOUR THOUGHTS

Sometimes a character isn't a problem until you've been doing it for a while. Notice when your mind supplies you with thoughts or suggestions, or dreams, that are from the character and not you.

- Practice saying to yourself, "Thanks mind, but that's (CHARACTER), that's not me" and then turn your attention back to what you were doing in the present moment.

Over time, the thoughts will come less frequently and you'll be able to identify and deal with them faster.



You want what you do to be honest and truthful - but at the same time, you can't let it ruin you.

When I played Fantine in Les Miserables, I felt lucky because I could actually use the fact that she died as a way of letting her go each night. I had the time to lie there on stage during the confrontation to make peace with her, and leave her on the stage when I walked off.

With Elphaba in Wicked it was as simple as taking off the green make up - it was like taking her off.

Patrice Tipoki

CONNECT WITH...

YOUR SPACES:

Pay attention as you move through different spaces - offstage into the wings, into the dressing room, out stage door.

Engage your senses as you leave the theatre and re-connect to the real world - what can you see, smell, hear, taste and feel? Notice all the differences.

YOUR BODY:

Let go of certain physical character traits that are not like your own.

Dance to your favourite music, do a quick yoga wind down, meditate (search the web for a 'body scan meditation' as a good starting point), or simply sit quietly and take some slow, deep breaths.

YOUR PEOPLE:

Call a loved one and find out the details of their day - a good antidote to the epic arc of performance. Plus, you get to speak to someone who loves you for you.

If you are playing a role that isolates you, make a conscious effort to connect with others.

YOUR THINGS:

Some performers create a 'self-kit' to keep in their dressing room.

A collection of things that remind you who you are outside of work - keepsakes from loved ones, objects that represent your hobbies and interests, and photos of friends, family and pets.

YOU ARE MORE THAN THE SHOW

Sometimes we confuse *what* we do with *who* we are.

There's nothing wrong with being passionate and committed, but the risk is that the show and/or the character starts to become your whole world - WHO you are, not WHAT you're doing.

It's just one part of your rich, complex, layered, awesome identity. Have a think about all the other threads - outside of the show - that make you YOU.

What else do you value outside your current role? Connecting with your values can help orient you to goals beyond this current gig.



I think the thing you need to do to 'step out of character' after a show is a bit of a post-show action plan. You need to give yourself something to look forward to afterwards.

Whether that be a meal, a drink with a friend, a book, a TV series, supper with your lover, a workout - you need a bit of life post show to remind you what this life is all about.

It is NEVER all about the show. Afterwards.

Bert LaBonté

- Often we label ourselves - "I am an actor," "I am [Character]," - reinforcing that feeling that we *are* our work.
 - Keep it in perspective - "I am currently performing in [Show] as [role]." It's just what you're doing right now - not your whole life.
 - Cultivate your other interests - a sketchpad, crossword book, journal, hobby, sport - give yourself mental space outside the show.
 - Allocate 'me time' the same way you allocate time for daily routines such as brushing your teeth. Make self-care a habit, not a bonus.
-



I consider leaving the character part of my job. But leaving the stress and crippling insecurity of being an artist is something else entirely.

The thing that helps me is to have something outside of the theatre that I am truly passionate about. Painting, writing, whatever.

But a verb, not a noun. They're things outside of the theatre to 'do' not just like.

Simon Gleeson

DE-ROLE IN ACTION

Actor and writer Daijah Porchia interviewed the cast of *columbinus*, a hard-hitting play written by Stephen Karam and PJ Paparelli and directed by Jennifer Vellenga.

The play tells the story of the Columbine High School massacre, and contains difficult and heavy content. Daijah shared some effective de-role techniques that were used by the cast and creative team:

- "Car wash" - the cast would make two lines. Each cast member would take a turn going through the middle and getting the bad feelings "scrubbed off". The sillier, the better!
- Cast members would say their name to themselves in the mirror - as many times as they needed to - as a form of grounding, and to re-establish a sense of self.
- The cast would all hug - all together, individually. In a show with so much hate and violence it was important to counter those feelings with something positive. Care. Affection. "These are characters, the things they do and say are not indicative of how I feel for you."

REACH OUT

It's always ok to ask for help. Performing can be a physically exhausting and emotionally draining job, and you're only human!

If you or someone you know is at immediate risk, call 000.

Support Act Wellbeing Helpline 1800 959 500 (24/7)

BeyondBlue 1300 22 4636 (24/7) or visit beyondblue.org.au to chat online (3pm to midnight) or join an online forum

Lifeline 13 11 14 (24/7)

Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 (24/7)

QLife (LGBTQI) 1800 184 527 (3pm to midnight)

Mensline: 1300 789 978 (24/7)

Griefline: 1300 845 745 (12pm to 3am)

DirectLine 1800 888 236

*For more information and further resources, visit
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