

Missouri State

U N I V E R S I T Y

Auditioning for Pre-Professional Acting and Musical Theatre Programs:

A Guidebook for Choosing and Gaining Admission to the
Undergraduate Program That is Right for You



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I. Introduction

Congratulations! By initiating audition research and preparation, you have already taken a big step. As an emerging artist you likely admire the stars of stage and screen- the Denzel Washington's, Anne Hathaway's, and Kristin Chenoweth's of the performance field. These talented individuals create performances that draw audiences into stunning worlds, full of conflict and passion. They stir our imaginations and give us permission to feel deeply. They even inspire us to re-define our own lives. As aspiring performers, you may view their work and in the greatest form of inspired flattery, think, "I want to do that. *I have* to do that." And why shouldn't you? We're often told to "Honor our passion...follow our dreams." It's a wonderful sentiment. What a stale world this would be if people didn't have the courage to dream big dreams and the fortitude to aim for them. It would be a static and sterile place, vacant of all the beauty that comes with creative artistry. That's not a world I want to live in. It's also not the world I want for you.

So, here you are. You are researching acting and/or musical theatre training programs. You already have a dream. You already have passion. Kudos! Don't ever let anyone, including yourself, put limitations on your potential. That said, there is an oppositional reality encased within any dream. In your case, a hard reality is the fact that there are thousands upon thousands of hungry and talented performers out there anticipating performance study past high school, and for an incredibly competitive career field. You may have already heard someone in the industry give the oft provided advice; "If you can do anything else for a career, do it." It's warranted wisdom. In the past few decades, I've seen countless performers audition for entrance into competitive acting and musical theatre training programs around the nation. Some gain entrance. Most do not.

In relation, every college audition season I am reminded of the courage it takes for emerging performers to put themselves on the line and risk failure. As an actor, I understand it's not just a momentary risk being taken. It encompasses years of hope and passion, sweat and tears, rehearsals, and self-evaluation, all culminating in a brief window of opportunity. It is important for you to know that my university colleagues and I eagerly hope for the success of each and every candidate that enters the audition. We know what has been invested. We want every auditionee to knock it out of the park. Some do. Many don't.

As longtime coordinator of a competitive admissions program, I hear a particular question from parents and potential students quite frequently; "So, what does it take to get in?" The verbiage of my response may vary, but it always carries the same message:

"We are not necessarily looking for readiness to enter the profession, but we ARE looking for readiness to train for the profession.

From the Missouri State University BFA in Acting Handbook.

"At Missouri State University, admission to the Acting and Musical Theatre Programs is competitive. However, the audition itself should not be viewed as a competition. Each year we accept approximately 18 students for each program- some of whom have a significant amount of practical experience, and some with incredible raw talent who are just getting started. This does not mean we are looking for immediate readiness for the profession. What we *are* looking for is *readiness to train for the profession!* During your audition experience we encourage you leave your ego at the door, be your unique and beautiful self, be generous to your audition colleagues, and allow the experience to be an enjoyable one."

As an acting teacher and auditor, the notion of “*readiness to train for the profession*” envelops all my conscious and subconscious decision-making regarding a candidate’s admission. This includes:

- Does the candidate have core talent ripe for development?
- Are they invested in learning? Will they be a positive contributor to an ensemble environment?
- Will they succeed in college?
- Do they have the work ethic to grow and thrive in a competitive training program?
- Will they develop an understanding of business and marketing in order to garner work in the years following study?
- Are they ready to make the significant leap into an environment created to prepare them for a very demanding career as a performer?
- Perhaps most importantly, *who is* this individual?

A key challenge that my colleagues and I have is evaluating whether or not a candidate houses that “readiness.” Unfortunately, assessing readiness is often clouded by a candidate’s very own audition choices and preparation. Yes, you read that right. In many cases, a candidate’s audition choices can actually *inhibit* our ability to view whether or not they are ready for pre-professional study. Now, you may be asking yourself, “If I prepare exactly what the application form asks for, how can my audition cloud their ability to view what is necessary for admission?”

To unlock the answer, it helps to consider the differences between an audition that attempts to prove readiness to *enter the profession* versus one that allows the facilitators to view readiness to *train for the profession*.

- Attempting to prove readiness to enter the profession (for the majority of talented young performers who are not actually ready) can lend to a poor audition, full of pretense and false acting. It tends to manufacture acting habits and audition choices that prevent auditors from seeing honesty, potential, and the performer’s true self.
- Allowing the facilitators to view readiness to train means developing an audition that has inherent honesty, is free from clichéd and forced choices, and allows the performers true self (and thus their trainability) to resonate.

In short, the most successful college auditions are the ones that are inherently honest, free from forced choices, and that allow one’s true self to resonate in the room.

Observe the marked difference between those two audition scenarios. As you begin your audition process, I ask you consider how choosing “Allowing the facilitators to view *readiness to train*” may impact your preparation from the onset. How will it impact your view of auditioning? Your material selection? Your acting choices? Your potential callbacks?

With this notion guiding you, I hope that you find elements within this guidebook that empower you in your college research and audition process. Some items within may seem obvious, and others may surprise you. Some may create more questions for which you need to seek answers. That’s okay. No audition guide claiming to be comprehensive can hold much weight. Positive learning creates as many questions as it solves, and the process is unique to each individual. However, it is my sincere desire for this guidebook to help you take control of *your* preparation process in a way that allows *you* and your *readiness to train* to shine through. Correspondingly, I hope it helps you follow your passion in a manner that empowers you with confidence and positive self-esteem.

Remember...the most successful college auditions are the ones that are inherently honest, free from forced choices, and that allow one's true self to resonate in the room.



VIDEO 1: [INTRODUCTION](https://youtu.be/Ph7Vv2KWtOc) with Kurt Heinlein
(youtu.be/Ph7Vv2KWtOc)

II. The Decision to Audition for Pre-Professional Training

Entering pre-professional training indicates that you've made a relevant career choice. Considering study for any career should involve in-depth research and an honest appraisal of that field. This fact is magnified when considering a field like performance, where professional success is a challenge for even the best among us. A very low percentage of post-college performers make enough income performing to financially support themselves, and only a small fraction of those that do translate it into a lifelong career. You already have passion, or you wouldn't have read this far. That's important. However, many performers enter training programs to discover that their passion doesn't always translate from their pre-college experiences and into pre-professional training. The hard discovery illuminates a transitory contrast between the wonderful experiences that you (at this moment) already have, and the outlook and experiences you'll need (from pre-professional training) to be a successful professional.

In the first day of Acting I in the program where I teach, I often ask my students, "So, you decided to pursue a professional performance career. Now, what does that really look like...and how does it impact you today and every day during the next 3-4 years of your training?" My inquiry requires that each student reflect upon the contrast noted above and highlight any gaps between a passion for performing, and why they must also have passion for a *career* in performing. A solid answer requires knowing, with a much precision as possible, what a professional career actually entails.

My hope is that my Acting I students made those considerations before and during their college audition process. My hope for you is that the forthcoming discussion points offer guidance in deciding whether college training in acting and/or musical theatre is the right choice for you.

A. Is Pre-Professional Training the Right Path?

1. High School vs. Pre-Professional Training

High-school and community theatre are the foundation of theatre in the United States. They excite young artists and provide them growth experiences. Those experiences become a keystone in the passion those artists may carry forward into pre-professional training. However, some performers enter pre-professional training from high school and discover it's not what they anticipated. The explanation is simple: there are different goals and experiences present for earning success and happiness in each setting.

In short, the goals of high school and community theatre are generally not inclusive of preparing performers for the profession. In pre-professional study, it is *the defining* goal. As such, individuals sometimes enter pre-professional study from high school and community theatre and discover the need for a re-defined outlook.

The “re-defining” process can make some students feel alienated from the passion and joy they discovered in high school/community theatre. However, other candidates become fueled and motivated by it. Pre-professional programs are training you for career entry, which involves all the artistic and tactical (and sometimes unconsidered) facets of the career. This is a vital consideration for those considering pre-professional training.

2. Love the Craft or Love the Attention?

There is nothing wrong with loving positive attention. It draws many individuals toward performing. It also feels great to hear post-performance compliments! However, love of (or need for) attention is the absolutely **WRONG** reason to pursue pre-professional training. In fact, a performance career can prove devastating for those individuals. The training process and the career involve a whole lot more challenging feedback and hard days than they do post-show praise.

So, why do performers do it? They do it because they *love the craft!* It’s an incredible craft form which can be personally fulfilling while also helping to shape lives and societies. But, if the praise or attention is more important to you than the craft work a performance career is not for you.

That said, if you’ve never been in pre-professional study, how on earth do you know what craft training looks and feels like? The reality is that you may not fully know until you are immersed in it, and that’s okay. But, it is advised that you also do your best to answer the question, “love the craft or love the attention?” as you make decisions about auditioning for colleges (as well as the types of programs you choose to apply to).

3. Financial Stability

If financial stability is important to you, turn back now. There is nothing financially stable for 99% of the performers who pursue it as a career. Can trained performers make a good living? Of course. Do some performers become incredibly wealthy? Yes. However, it’s more rare than common. Additionally, even when a performer *is* making a good sum, it’s often for a short measure of time, after which they may go without income. Income opportunities are unpredictable in performance careers, and no matter how successful you become you may always be looking for your next job (and paycheck).

4. Do You Want a Family Someday?

Some students with exciting potential leave pre-professional study after discovering the career doesn’t align with their personal goals of creating a family. You may be thinking “But there are many performers who have spouses and children.” Certainly, there are, but those performers will testify how particularly challenging it can be. Even if you earn financial stability, you will be faced with a host of challenges related to travel, scheduling, and where you must live, among others. Can it be done? Of course. But it is not for the faint of heart, and sacrifices are often made.

In relation, you may notice that many performers with children started building a family at a later age. There is certainly no singular path, but many do opt to spend their early post-training years focused solely upon career development, waiting until they’ve reached a level of stability and success before bringing marriage or children

into the mix. There are no singular answers here, except that every artist must find the path that is right for them in pursuit of personal happiness. However, these are important elements to weigh as you consider pre-professional training.

5. Schedule Stability

This relates heavily to the discussion above but is important to note in its own right. If you crave stability (or regularity) of schedule, a performance career will be challenging. It is incredibly unpredictable and filled with unforeseeable variants. In fact, many students who graduate from college training programs are *still* shell-shocked by the lack of post-graduation schedule stability. No matter how much one prepares, the reality can feel quite different.

6. Love of the Business

As noted above, you must love the craft. Many aspiring performers neglect to consider that *the business is a key part of that craft*. In fact, without good business skills, the performer may not have much opportunity to employ their artistry. I frequently hear a comment from performers that strikes me as odd; “I’m a good actor but a bad auditioner.” The reality is that you *can’t* be a good professional actor if you are bad at auditioning, as auditioning is part of the artistry and business package — all central components of being a professional actor. If you are pursuing this career and the necessary training, you should enjoy the business hustle and what comes with it. After all, those elements encompass a substantial portion of a professional performer’s time and energy.

7. Capacity for Honest Personal Assessment

A quality that all training candidates must possess is the capacity for honest personal assessment, and the ability to transform it into growth. Performance is one of the rare career fields where you in your totality are fundamental to both the creation and sharing of your art form. As such, assessing personal growth (and challenges) in an honest and healthy manner is absolutely essential. Additionally, ask yourself what you do with the information you receive from a personal assessment. Do the hard realizations crush you? Do you turn them into spin for self-preservation? Do you project your fears and negativity upon others? Or, are you able to embrace them and turn them into a positive direction for growth? It’s recommended that you consider your personal capacity in this light before choosing to audition for training programs.

8. Handling Rejection

Let’s be honest, rejection sucks. It hurts. No one likes it, but it’s not cliché to say that a performer will experience it during college training, and a whole lot of it in their career. It’s shocking how many individuals don’t make this consideration before choosing this path. As a result, there are many unhappy performers out there who draw others into the fold of their misery. Misery indeed loves company.

The performers who will be most successful (and happy) in both training and career are the ones who are able to take rejection, unite it with self-assessment, and turn that into *positive* action. This is hard. Very hard. Especially considering that this path is filled with rejection and will test your long-term integrity as such.

While in pre-professional training, a performer builds self-confidence while also learning that rejection is often more about uncontrollable logistics than it is about them as a person or artist. In short, they develop skills to orient the path ahead while becoming a happy and productive artist. However, it's still not easy, and performer's seeking training should evaluate their relative capacity.

9. Loving Direction

A performer considering pre-professional training must love receiving and growing from direction. It's fundamental, and it applies to both classroom and production environments. Notice that I didn't say *handle* direction, I said *love* it. *Handling* it implies that you tolerate it and try to apply it. *Loving* it means you crave it, hear it, and cherish the opportunity to develop from it. There is a vast difference.

When I was eight, I attended a basketball camp also attended by Michael Jordan. He was about sixteen. He wasn't yet the GOAT we all now know. But, his love of direction was already present. In one vivid memory I recall him on the sideline during timeout absolutely *amped* for direction from his coach. He listened intently, then furiously re-entered the court, eager to put it to action. That drive fueled a really good high-school player to develop into one of the best athletes in history.

10. Fame

Don't enter pre-professional training with fame as a primary goal. It's a recipe for a miserable career. Fame via performance is a by-product of training, hard work, excellence, and consequent success.

11. Creating Your Own Work

Those of us who graduated from actor training in the 90's needed only a rudimentary sense of business skills. An agent did most of the marketing and arranging of auditions. They also handled paperwork and contracts. This allowed many of us focus primarily upon craft approach and its application on the work site.

Things have changed drastically in the new era. Even if you have a great agent, you will be expected to run and market yourself as an aggressively efficient business, which includes self-marketing, social media, and continually *creating work* to promote your artistry. These elements are now a permanent part of the business of performing and should be part of the package for anyone considering pre-professional training.

It may sound like performer's these days are doing more work for the same reward. They are, BUT, they are also gaining a host of positives including much greater control over the arc of their professional development, image, and career as a whole.

12. Supporting Skills

Related to creating your own work, "supporting skills" is an area that has developed in concert with the expansion of media forms. Just a few decades ago, performers were often dissuading from sharing information about certain supporting skills (such as writing, directing, or filmmaking) for fear that casting professionals would take them less-seriously. Along with developments in media and business expectations for the performer has come a rise in the importance (and opportunity) for performers to create and market their own content. While excellence in performance is still most

prominent, of course, there is also much greater acceptance and even expectation for broadened skill sets.

B. What to Expect in Pre-Professional College Training

The focus of this guidebook is to assist you in the process of applying and auditioning for *audition-based programs*. That in itself aims it primarily toward pre-professional training programs such as BFA and/or conservatory programs. However, there are programs of other varieties that while not always considered “pre-professional performer training,” may require an audition. Further along in this guidebook, I share details about the diverse types of undergraduate training programs and what you may expect within. Each program varies in its goals and curricular construct, and *your goal should be to find the right home for you*.

The common thread for *pre-professional performance programs* is for the performer to be industry-ready upon graduation. This means that the performer has demonstrated exceptional work-ethic and significantly developed/demonstrated their skills during training. It means that they have modeled excellence in areas that will contribute to career success. It means that the performer can exit graduation and trust they have the tools to immediately begin a professional career. It means they should not have to pursue additional degree training (like an MFA) in pursuit of success.

It does not mean, however, that the performer will leave and have an easy path, nor does it mean success is assured. It also does not mean artistic training is complete. A smart performer exiting pre-professional training knows that they are ready to enter the field and compete, but that there is still learning and maturation ahead of them. In fact, the desire for continued learning and maturation is what drives many successful performers. This career path is filled with a lifetime of evolving goals and learning opportunities. In this respect, pre-professional training is only a foundation. Now, if you’re wondering why pre-professional training can be vital, try building a house without a foundation.

If you gain entry to pre-professional college training, it means you will be surrounded by performers (perhaps for the first time) who *all* crave career success, and all of which are remarkably talented. You will be in performance classes every day. Your class studio work (and not just production work) will have high expectations placed upon it. The work will be very hard at times. You will spend hours a day outside of class preparing for studio. If you are unprepared there will be consequences. You will have casting disappointments. You will be surrounded by artists ready to work harder, and who in doing so, implicate your own work-ethic. There will be times when you are overcome by extreme doubt, and other times that you feel the pulse of your full potential. There will be many laughs, but also tears. If you’ve chosen the right program, you will be among peers who compete while also lifting each other up and celebrating one another. Your peers will inspire you every day to be better and work harder. In the right program you will be taught by professors with exceptional (and active) Broadway, regional theatre, and film careers whose primary goal is now to lift you toward *your* journey and offer you the gifts that they were given. Pre-professional training is a remarkable journey for the performing artist. It is a foundation that provides for a lifetime.

C. Auditions and Financial Readiness

We often hear about the importance of financial readiness for college, and there are many resources that help students equip themselves in this regard. However, many performers participating in college auditions discover ‘surprise’ costs along the way. The goal of this section is to help you anticipate some of those expenses. Like anything else in life, there is a benefit to

having a nice budget for your audition process. *However, candidates who are armed with information rather than dollars can also successfully audition for choice training programs.* In discussing financial readiness, I will mention several types of college auditions. Note that there is much more detail on these audition formats later in the guidebook.

1. Application Costs

Colleges/universities generally charge an application fee. However, some will waive the fee in certain circumstances (financial need, first generation students, etc.) As you apply, I encourage you to investigate if each institution offers any application fee waivers that apply to you. It's important to do this early. In addition to an institution application fee, some (not all) acting and musical theatre programs will also charge a program audition/application fee. This fee is in addition to the one charged by the institution. If a program you're interested in charges a fee that may prevent you from auditioning, you are encouraged to reach out to the program coordinator (generally found on the department webpage) to see if there are circumstances in which it can be waived.

- Est. \$0.00-\$150.00 per college institution
- Est. \$0.00-75.00 per degree program

2. Unified Audition Costs

Unified Auditions can be a terrific way to be seen by a number of programs in a single audition. Instead of candidates traveling to separate auditions for each college, the colleges gather in a 'unified' format to view candidates. Programs may then hold independent on-site callbacks and interviews as they deem appropriate. Expenses could include a registration fee and travel to the unified audition location.

- Est. fee \$75.00-\$225.00 per unified attended
- Est. travel \$50.00-\$1500.00 per unified attended

3. Digital/Virtual Audition Costs

The Covid pandemic nudged many programs to move toward digital audition formats, and the trend is here to stay. Virtual auditions may be formatted as private auditions hosted by the university or structured within a unified audition with other programs. In either scenario, the costs noted above may still apply, so it's important to research.

Many programs have begun to utilize audition service companies such as *Accept'd*, in which a candidate uploads audition materials into a database, and programs can view them at their leisure. According to the *Accept'd* website, it "Hosts all your digital media in one place. Your digital portfolio will have your headshot, media samples, and resume information saved and ready to be sent out to programs instantly."

Audition service companies will traditionally charge a one-time fee to each candidate. Some performance programs, such as Missouri State University Theatre & Dance, will pay the fee for those auditioning for their specific program. It's another point of investigation where you may be able to lower your costs.

- Est. fee \$0.00-\$50.00

4. Thespian Conferences

If you attend a high school that participates in state or national thespian conferences, know that many college reps attend these events in order to view potential

candidates. Often, this occurs within the context of unified/scholarship auditions hosted by the conference. Costs involved may be a conference registration fee and travel. Check with your high school performing arts facilitator to find out if this is an option for you, and if any costs may be covered by your school.

- Est. \$0.00-\$500.00 per attendee.

5. Campus Visits

If you attend an audition that is not directly on-campus, it's important (if financially feasible) to plan for on-site visits to your choice programs. I will discuss this with much detail later in the guidebook. Depending upon geographic proximity, campus visits can be quite expensive. If your financial situation prevents this, *all is not lost*. Every year, students around the nation choose to attend programs where they have not physically stepped foot. It is possible to get campus tours, program facilities tours, visit classes, and chat with faculty, staff, and students without physically visiting campus. Contact the coordinator of each program to inquire.

- Est. \$0.00-\$1500.00 per institution.

6. Coaches

Professional audition coaches have become a trend for performers seeking college admission and will be discussed in detail later in the guidebook. Coaches can be greatly beneficial for some and not necessary for others. For many, it's simply not a cost-effective consideration. If you can afford to employ a professional coach and choose to do so, that's wonderful. If you cannot, *don't despair*. You have many tools (some that you may not even know about yet) at your disposal. One of the primary reasons this guidebook exists is to share access to those informational tools, free of cost.

- Est. \$0.00-\$3,000

7. Additional Expenses

Additional expenses will pop-up. Additional costs related to your application and audition could include scripts, sheet music, office supplies, clothing, an accompanist, or tech-related items for those auditioning virtually/on camera. Create a solid budget sheet (sample below). Even if your budget is zero, thinking through step-by-step and creating a financial plan will help you prepare for any unexpected elements that may sidetrack your process. Like every aforementioned expense category, there are ways to help mitigate anticipated expenses.

College Audition Estimator



Category	Item	Aud1	Aud2	Aud3	Aud4	Aud5	Aud6	Aud7
Application/ Registration Fees	Institution Application							
	Program Application							
	Live Event Registration Fee							
	Digital Registration Fee							
	Other							
Audition Travel	Airfare							
	Car							
	Gas/Tolls							
	Lodging							
	Food							
	Other							
Campus Visit/ Travel	Airfare							
	Car							
	Gas/Tolls							
	Lodging							
	Food							
	Other							
Coaches/ Support	Audition Coach							
	Acting Coach							
	Accompanist							
	Vocal Coach							
	Choreographer							
	Other							
Supply	Scripts/Music							
	Office Supplies							
	Clothing/Attire							
	Technical Supplies							
	Other							
Line Total								
								Grand Total

D. Your Support Network

While creating this guidebook, I held discussion sessions groups of college students majoring in performance areas. At each session they were asked what they “wish they had known” before and during the college audition process. Virtually every group indicated that I should include content related to variances in family support (or lack thereof). Discussions also indicated that it would be helpful to address several specific circumstances, as noted below. This guidebook is not intended to serve as a counseling resource and the considerations below are not comprehensive. The primary goal is of the content below is to alert you to possible variances in support, acknowledge that others have been (and are) in your shoes, and encourage you to consider how to best navigate *your* specific support situation.

You have no emotional support or assistance.

This is hard, of course. You’re out there feeling alone while approaching a complex dream. I’ve seen candidates who are primary caretakers for younger siblings, ones whose family actively blocks pursuit of their goals, and a host of other difficult situations. If this is you, know that there are others in your shoes. It’s likely you have resources you may not know about. To begin, virtually everything about auditioning can be found online these days. Read this manual and view the supporting media. Also consider, is there a teacher in an unrelated discipline you can approach for support? A guidance counselor? A relative? Sometimes help is in unpredictable places, and all you have to do is ask. Adversity has created some very strong, successful, and talented performers (and human beings.) If this is meant to be your path, there will be a way. There are people out there who care and believe in you. Please take care to make sure any individual you reach out to is a safe one.

Your parent/guardians are morally opposed to an arts career.

Your guardians, perhaps because of religious or social influences, are vehemently opposed to you pursuing a performance career. Every situation is of course unique, but it’s clear to you that your loved ones have an outlook that fundamentally opposes this path. First, understand that this isn’t new. Performers and performing have been viewed as amoral and even dangerous at various times in cultures throughout history (even being banned in distinct periods.) Ironically, it speaks to the power of performance in making cultural impact (no matter how that impact is viewed.) You know your circumstances better than anyone, but disagreements surrounding religion and social morality are *rarely* resolved through yelling or a lack of listening. Since this is your dream, it’s up to you to set the stage for communication, as possible. It doesn’t hurt to be reminded that a performance career can take many paths, including socio-religious directions. Commit to your research and do your best to create a stage for conversation. You can only control your own actions and decisions, not those of others. It will ultimately be up to you to decide what to do with the results that follow.

Your family is supportive of you but disagrees (or is worried) with your choice to pursue a performance career.

This happens a lot. Most often it comes about from differences in perspective. You probably have loved ones who want the best for you. In their eyes that includes financial security, safety, and a well-defined career. In your eyes, performance is your passion, and you believe you can accomplish those goals while pursuing it. In reality you both may be right. And wrong. I often see this conflict while guiding families through campus visits. In my experience, when this conflict happens the candidate may not be realistically looking at the career challenges, and/or the guardian(s) may not understand the craft, career, or the true value of a performance degree. The solution lies in uncovering factual information and in honest communication. You are encouraged to take the emotion out of the conversations. Approach discussions with listening and maturity.

Don't have this conversation in the heat of a moment. Ask your team to sit down with you and discuss it with defined purpose. Have your research prepared to acknowledge legitimate concerns, and how by proper training, you intend to assuage those difficulties. In short, let your team know it's a passion that you've researched and are approaching with maturity. It doesn't hurt your case that performer training has found new benefits in the media age. In addition to being actors, singers, and dancers, many graduates are making significant parallel income through their expertise in media forms, content creation, and in other communication capacities.

Your family supports your choices without question.

This is great, right? They love you. They trust your instincts. They want you to pursue all your dreams. What a great "problem" to have! Ironically, this circumstance can create a scenario where the performer is later broadsided by the hard realities of the career. I've heard actors say things equating to "I wish my parents had made me ask more questions," or "I've always had so much freedom/support, that I didn't look realistically into how hard this actually is." In the beginning of this guide, you read a bit about the challenges present in performer training, and in the career field. If you are supported without question, you are blessed. However, it is also up to you to put in the research to determine whether this is actually a *long-term* path that you want to pursue.

III. Types of Colleges and Universities

Candidates for performance programs sometimes have a limited view of the different types of college and university institutions. Yet, it's vital information if you want to know how the training programs within the institutions operate and define themselves. Below, you'll find some general notions that encompass several college and university "types" as related to their institutional missions. However, *every institution is unique in its own right*, and some flex and operate outside traditional definitions and the assumptions affiliated with their "type" of institution. This means that institution-specific research is extremely important. There are also institutions that fall completely outside of the classifications I discuss below. As such, the following observations should only be a starting point to consider what type of institutional environment you may be best suited for. There are fantastic acting and musical theatre training programs housed within all forms of institutions.

A. Liberal Arts

According to bestcolleges.com, "Ask 10 people to define the term liberal arts, and you'll likely get 10 different answers. Is math a liberal art? What about biology or chemistry? Although the liberal arts definition has evolved over time, nowadays the field comprises four major areas of study: the arts, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences." The website shares several outlooks that can be attributed to liberal arts institutions:

- It is broad field of study; liberal arts comprise the humanities, arts, and sciences.
- A liberal arts degree fosters key skills like critical thinking and communication.
- Liberal arts colleges promote general education and creative problem-solving.

While every liberal arts institution has variances, a takeaway here is that liberal arts institutions embrace a philosophy housing *breadth* of learning. As applied, this will impact general education requirements as well as the manner in which the degree programs within the institution are constructed. In relation, there are liberal arts programs that do offer specialized performer training, and there are others that reject the very notion of specialization.

In short, curricular application of "liberal arts" cannot be narrowly defined or considered. In your research, it is vital to familiarize yourself with an institution's unique and specific definition of

liberal arts and examine how it is applied within performance degree programs, curriculum, and overall student experience. Importantly, consider how it meshes with your personal goals and philosophy for performance training.

B. Research Universities

According to collegeboard.org, research universities are often “Larger and offer more majors and degree options—bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees—than colleges. Most (research) universities contain several smaller colleges, such as colleges of liberal arts, engineering, or health sciences.” Research universities generally place a high expectation upon faculty research and professional activity.

Similar to the variances in liberal arts institutions, each research university will differ in its outlook, application, and how the notion of *research* translates into the undergraduate experience and curriculum. There are research universities housing some of the nations most storied training programs, while others may not provide the best arena for undergraduate acting or musical theatre training. Once again, it is essential to do research that is specific to the philosophy and construct of *each* university and the performance programs within.

C. Conservatories

Simply put, a conservatory specializes in arts training. The goal of a conservatory is pre-professional preparation. However, conservatories also vary widely in educational application. Many conservatories are colleges housed within larger institutions (both liberal arts and research). That means that despite sharing the word “conservatory” in title, each will differ in how it embraces the notion of professional preparation for the performer. For example, some conservatories require students to take general education requirements, while others do not. The term “conservatory” also brings up notions of competitive admission. The reality is that some conservatories have very competitive admission, while others admit a high percentage of applicants. All of these variances will have considerable impact upon the curriculum, population, and training within. Once again, it is vital to commit to research that is specific to each institution and its relationship to your corresponding outlook and goals.

D. A.A. Institutions

Some students opt to first attend an institution that provides a two-year A.A. (Associate's) degree. This should not be looked down upon if it's the right option for you. However, it's important to know that A.A. degrees are not intended to prepare a performer for professional entry. That said, they can provide wonderful educational platforms that lift an individual toward achieving their long-term goals. This may come in the form of providing experiential learning, giving a candidate time to artistically mature, and helping to get general education requirements completed. There are also obvious financial benefits. If you are investigating the A.A. option, examine the curriculum and artistic experiences within as applicable to your long-term training and career goals. Of note, many A.A. institutions also offer reciprocity agreements with 4-year institutions that can ease your overall educational timeline and financial burden.

E. Others

There are many other operational considerations that will help uncover how an institution may define and structure itself. For instance, some institutions hold a specific religious ideology. Others are gender specific. There is also the consideration public vs. private.

The essential task in your research is for you to examine the philosophy and construct of each individual institution, observe how it translates into performer training, and make a determination of what and where aligns best with your needs, resources, and goals.

IV. Types of Degrees

Distinct from types of colleges and universities, there are also varying types of degrees. The “degree type” is what will be displayed on your college records. More importantly, degree type also illuminates the training and curricular structure offered within an area of study. It’s important for candidates to be informed about varying degree types, so that informed audition/application decisions can be made as related to personal goals. Again, *every institution is unique in its own right*, and many flex outside the traditional definitions and the assumptions affiliated with them. That same fact also relates to degree types. Successful performers have emerged from every type of degree program I will note below.

Note: As you investigate degree types and program variances, it will be helpful to let go of a “which is best?” outlook, and re-orient it toward a “which is best for me?” outlook.

A. University-Based Degrees


The National Association of Schools of Theatre separates university-based training into two primary degree areas; liberal arts degrees and professional degrees. NAST notes that “each of these has distinct overall goals and objectives reflected structurally in the curricular time accorded to theatre and to other curricular components.”

1. Liberal Arts Degrees

Liberal Arts degrees focus on “theatre in the context of a *broad* program of general studies.” This includes B.A. Theatre (Bachelor of Arts), B.S. Theatre (Bachelor of Science), and other liberal arts degrees such as the B.M. (Bachelor of Music).

“Baccalaureate (theatre) degrees meeting liberal arts degree standards normally require between 30% and 50% theatre content...regardless of specific options for emphasis offered.” (NAST) In short, a liberal arts degree aims at providing the student a *broad* experience in their chosen field of study. Studying theatre from a broad perspective gives students critical skills in evaluating the art, profession, literature, and history of theatre. Students are also often encouraged to practice theatre in a specific way and some programs allow a student to choose a “track” of theatre practice (e.g. acting, design, playwriting, directing, etc.)

While some students exit liberal arts (BA, BS, BM) programs and immediately enter the professional field, the degree is most often not considered pre-professional training. Many graduates move on to an M.F.A. (Master of Fine Arts) degree or a variety of other career fields. An M.A. (Master of Arts) or a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) are also options. Most BA and BS programs do not require an audition, although some do.

 VIDEO 2: [THE LIBERAL ARTS B.A. or B.S. DEGREE](https://youtu.be/_fgGIJaO5_Q) with Dr. Kyle Thomas
(youtu.be/_fgGIJaO5_Q)

 VIDEO 3: [WHY I CHOSE A B.A. DEGREE](https://youtu.be/8lgFgN5bJfs) Student Testimonial
(youtu.be/8lgFgN5bJfs)

2. Pre-Professional Degrees

Professional (Bachelor of Fine Arts) degrees focus on intensive work in theatre/performance supported by a program in general studies. These are often referred to as “pre-professional” courses of study, and normally offer a minimum of 65%-70% of theatre content coursework. Students graduating from B.F.A. programs most often directly enter the professional industry. The vast majority of these programs require an entrance audition.

3. Conservatory Degrees

Conservatories fall under the umbrella of Professional Degrees. In theory, a conservatory offers a focused direction of study without general education requirements. However, as noted, conservatories can be housed within research universities, liberal arts colleges, or in non-university institutions. This can create wide variances in their individual curricular structures. As such, the word “conservatory” sometimes holds less importance than the structure of its degree programs.



VIDEO 4: [PRE-PROFESSIONAL DEGREES](https://youtu.be/-1pYqW2-iv8) with Kurt Heinlein
(youtu.be/-1pYqW2-iv8)



VIDEO 5: [WHY I CHOSE A B.F.A. DEGREE](https://youtu.be/cn7sTxgP_9M) Student Testimonial
(youtu.be/cn7sTxgP_9M)

B. B.A. or B.F.A.? Which is Better?

Many candidates get hung up on this question, made more complicated by the noted range of training outlooks housed within the variety of liberal arts and pre-professional programs. The quick answer is that neither is “better.” Their educational goals are simply different. Once again, it’s really a question of *which is better for you!* A performer seeking college study needs to heavily consider their own talents, interests, and goals, then weigh them against the outlook and practices of each program and degree type. When developing artists bring this inquiry to me, I often encourage them to:

1. Write a self-assessment of their artistic and social interests, then consider how it will all translate into each degree program/type.
2. Write a 5-year plan with articulated educational and professional goals. Again, consider how those goals translate practically and philosophically into each program type.

C. A Few Common Misperceptions

- “You won’t be well-rounded with a B.F.A.”
- “The B.A./B.S. is an easier degree.”
- “You can’t have a fun college social experience in a B.F.A. program.”
- “You can’t learn to perform in a B.A./B.S.”
- “A B.F.A. won’t prepare you for life outside of acting.”
- “A B.A./B.S. isn’t valued.”
- “In a B.F.A. you won’t be able to pursue other interests like writing or directing.”

D. Non-Degree Granting Programs

If you are uninterested in earning a degree or having a college experience, there are other ways to train as a performer. Professors see many young performers agonize in college because they attended for the wrong reasons. Many of these students don't graduate. Often times, they believed college was the only option for training or they attended in order to please a parent. It's true that a degree in hand can offer some stability in life, but that is rarely a successful motivator for the student who doesn't truly crave it.

In relation, there are many non-degree granting training programs in the U.S. and around the globe. Some grant certificates, some do not. Some are exceptional. Some are not. Individuals seeking this route for performance training are encouraged to *research thoroughly* and utilize many of the same relevant selection measures as those seeking to attend college. A full array of measures is offered later in this guidebook.

V. Professional Audition Coaches

The utilization of college audition coaches has picked up in recent years, inspiring many candidates to wonder whether or not they need one. You hear lots of "facts" about this topic in online audition forums; everything from "You have to have a coach," to "Coaches are a waste of money." Like anything, the truth is more variable and individualized. Some successful candidates swear by the use of audition coaches, and others felt it was less helpful. In short, there is no easy answer to this question. Hiring a coach is an individualized decision that requires consideration of your current audition skills, finances, and support resources.

A qualified coach can help you choose good material, prepare a quality audition, and assist you in locating programs that may be a good fit for you- all incredible benefits. However, those things can also be attained through your own research and hard work, especially if you have a support person (a great drama teacher, etc.) in your life who is knowledgeable about college auditions and pre-professional training.

The short version: A well-chosen and qualified coach can be a wonderful resource, but it is not a universal necessity.

A. Incurring Debt for a Coach

College is expensive. Auditioning for colleges *can* be expensive. However, you are preparing to enter training for an industry in which you may experience financial insecurity for a number of years. Your goal should be to enter and exit college with as little debt as possible. In relation, do not put yourself in early debt in order to secure a college audition coach. If you're like 95% of applicants who don't have money to spend on a coach, don't fret. The consequent work-ethic (and ability to scavenge resources) you develop will serve you very well should you enter pre-professional study.

B. Choosing a Coach

If you choose to employ an audition coach, it's key to remember that it's a business relationship and you're footing the bill. Thoroughly research potential coaches. Investigate their success rates and professional relationships. Importantly, talk to their former clients. You should feel great (and trustful) entering a coaching partnership. If the relationship doesn't feel transparent, if your Jiminy Cricket is talking, go elsewhere. There are *incredible* college coaches who are wonderful people. They would agree with these sentiments. It's also a business adventure, and like in any

business, there are unqualified people and those who will take advantage of you for financial gain.

C. What if You Can't Afford a Coach?

As mentioned, an audition coach is a wonderful luxury, but not a universal necessity. My hope is that this guidebook will even the playing field a bit for candidates who don't have financial advantage. Keep reading. You got this.



VIDEO 6: [STUDENTS ON AUDITION COACHES](https://youtu.be/y350utmb7LM)
(youtu.be/y350utmb7LM)

VI. Assembling Your Support Crew

You are your first and best resource. You have the power to research, choose quality audition materials, prepare a great audition, and apply for programs that may be right for you. Knowledge is power. The crux is expanding the depth of your knowledge and preparation. Of course, it also helps to have support people in your camp. Family, friends, teachers, guidance counselors, coaches, students currently in training, and even church performance leaders may each offer wonderful support.

That said, thousands of auditions go off the rails each year due to poor direction and advice. From recommendations of bad material to directed overacting... you name it. Look, no one purposely gives candidates poor advice. Some bad advice/audition coaching comes from very passionate and well-meaning theatre artists. It's important to recognize that many people who love you simply don't have knowledge of *pre-professional* training or what auditors may be looking for. Imagine a Nascar race where everyone who loves a driver and has a general knowledge of cars works in the pit. It'd be fun to watch happen (from a distance) but I'm doubtful their car would finish the race. Avoid this scenario in several ways:

1. Choose your support team wisely and *be specific* about how you'd like each to help. Know the assets and limitations of each. "Mom, can you specifically help me *research* programs?" "Mr. Smith (drama teacher), can you help me with monologue selection and preparation?"
2. Have those helping you read this guide (or related resources as you see fit.) Talk to them about key preparation points. Those helping you should be best informed on how to do so.
3. Always be gracious to those helping you but remember that this is your audition and your future. Communicate positively but clearly with your support people.

There is no hard line as to who may prove helpful in your process. Again, it's unique to the candidate. A number of people in your life who *may* be positive resources were noted above. That said, it's importantly to briefly highlight two of them:

- **Drama Teachers**

It was mentioned earlier that high school and community theatre are a foundation of performing arts in our country. Unsurprisingly, some drama teachers and community practitioners are exceptionally situated to help you in your process. However, others may be less so. It comes down to whether or not they have accurate knowledge of *pre-professional* training and what auditors are looking for in your

application/audition. If you're not sure about your teacher's experience as such, ask them to review this guide with you then solidify your working goals as a team.

- **Students Currently Enrolled in Training Programs**

This may be the most underutilized resource some candidates have available. Students currently enrolled in performance programs are living your goals and hearing/experiencing every day what acting teachers are aiming for. They've also been where you are and successfully navigated forward. If this is a possible resource for you, consider it. It is recommended you utilize a student enrolled in a program that reflects your own goals. This resource may be free if you have an admitted friend, or it could cost you a fee. If you don't have any personal contacts in programs maybe a friend does, or you can reach out to a training program coordinator to see if they have a qualified student who may be willing to work with you.

VII. Does Extensive Performance Experience Matter?

Yes, and no. If you are auditioning for **musical theatre** programs, the strength of your core skills in singing, dance, and acting all matter of course. For most candidates, those skills develop through talent, extensive training, *and* production experience. Now, this is where research can help you. Some programs are invested in developing true "triple threats," meaning that without demonstrated experience and expertise in all 3 areas, you're not likely to get in. Other MT programs have a more flexible outlook and may admit a student that holds exceptional promise as an actor/singer, but modest potential as dancer. Talent/trainability as a singer and actor is non-negotiable. As such, many strong musical theatre candidates have a large body of experience. I've seen candidates for undergraduate admission with Broadway credits. However, there are also candidates with limited experience, but who offer such exciting potential that they successfully gain admission.

If you are auditioning for **acting** programs, performance experience *may* mean less. Unlike dance and/or singing, some budding actors have not had extensive training or experiences before attending college. In contrast, others have had extensive experience, but they've learned actor habits that are counter to the type of honesty-based training that one receives in college. In this light, acting teachers working at the undergraduate level have become very adept at viewing *potential*. There are candidates with NO acting experience admitted into choice programs, selected solely upon the strength of their trainability. However, without exception, those individuals have constructed an audition that displays inherent honesty and trainability, thus allowing auditors to see their true potential.

So, does extensive performance experience matter? Yes. And No. And it depends.

VIII. Program Research: Where to Apply?

Goals of this guidebook include helping you to identify the training path that will best serve you, and to empower you with tools to attain your goals. An important part of the equation is deciding where to apply. This may be one of the most complicated steps of the pre-college audition process. There are many training programs, a multitude of factors to research, financial and geographic implications, and many other items to consider. Complicating things is the fact that some programs are hungry for enrollment because higher enrollment means increased tuition income. As such, some programs will offer an exciting pitch, but it may be devoid of the information that tells whether it's right for *you*. In the following pages you will be offered a host of items to consider in your application decision process, with the hope that they help you

identify what institutions may be *your* best bet. This section is dedicated primarily to research you can conduct from home. Later in the guidebook we will discuss things to investigate during on-site auditions and campus visits.

A. Defining “Best”

There are many perceptions surrounding the “best” programs for undergraduate performer training. Some perceptions are accurate, while others don’t hold much water. There is absolutely something to be celebrated about a program that has a long history of excellence and graduate success. However, there are also storied programs that may not be what they used to be, or that may not currently be providing a positive educational experience and/or healthy environment for their students. Candidates are encouraged to do thorough research about potential programs, aiming beyond the “name” and at what is *currently* happening behind the doors of its performance studio’s.

Ask yourself what “best” means when it comes to performer training? It makes me think about the NBA GOAT argument, which often positions Michael Jordan and LeBron James against one another in ranking the “greatest of all time.” It’s fun to ponder, but the fact is, neither can claim the title. Both, as well as many other NBA veterans, were/are exceptional at what they do, on their terms, with their unique skill sets, and in the era in which they played. While one can compare stats and championships, the truth is that there are many variations of how excellence displays itself. In short, defining “best” is determined only by an individual’s chosen parameters for excellence. In this light, you are again encouraged to let go of the idea that some training programs are “best” and re-orient the inquiry toward “what quality programs may be best for you.”

That said, there are identifiable measures that illuminate a program’s quality of training and dedication to producing successful graduates. Your job is to:

1. Consider what measures/qualities are most important to you.
2. Research and identify the programs you wish to audition for.
3. Work toward gaining entry to the ones that will best suit you, your growth, financial circumstances, well-being, and goals.

B. What’s in a Name?

Juliet makes a smart inquiry in *Romeo and Juliet*. “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.”

There are several relevant points we can pull from Juliet’s statement. First is the unsaid notion that “name” *does* actually matter. If it didn’t, Juliet would not be making the observation. Second, that name does not always define the experience within. Third, that name should not define singularly our choices, especially if it doesn’t encompass what we feel is best for our happiness and future.

Here is the lowdown. Storied programs have developed a name because they have been successful in the long-term. That’s valuable information. Whether or not a program currently houses that historic reputation for training, it is hard to argue that “name” programs never fail to offer graduates benefit by recognition from industry professionals and a strong network of working alumni. For example, I was fortunate to receive M.F.A. at an institution with a well-earned place as a leading “name” program in the United States. Having it on my resume has opened doors. It has garnered me auditions, agent interviews, and contributed to the development

of relationships with incredibly successful fellow alumni. Those alumni, like myself, are fortunate to have been provided training that supports the reputation/name. Here is what the name did *not do* for me. It did not ever book me a job. It did not ever sway a director to hire me over an actor who gave a better audition. In itself, it never once garnered me employment. In short, a “name” may open some doors for you, but it no longer matters once you enter the audition room. At that point, name dissolves in importance, being overtaken by the quality of training, talent, and preparation.

So, ultimately how much does “name” matter when identifying programs that are right for you? Somewhat...in the respect that it *may* indicate quality and alumni connections. It may also help open some doors. *However, “name” should never be a factor that overrides attending a program that will be more beneficial to your development as an artist. Nor should it be a factor that puts you into significant debt before entering the career field.*

There are wonderful programs that may not get the attention of others, many of which are graduating incredible artists. One of them may be the right fit for you.

C. The Department Also Houses an M.F.A.

A performance program/department that houses both undergraduate (B.F.A.) and graduate (M.F.A.) pre-professional performance degrees is taking on a lot of responsibility. It takes considerable resources, faculty, and production opportunities to fruitfully serve both populations. Some do it incredibly well, and even offer students benefits from the relationship between undergraduate and graduate populations. In others, despite good intentions, the focus upon undergraduate training may fall second to the graduate population (especially when limited resources impact how time, money, and production energy is spent.) Each program is distinct. If you investigate a program that offers pre-professional training at both levels, be sure to research its dedication to undergraduate training, as well as the presence of growth opportunities that are *specific* to the undergraduate population.

D. The Department Houses a B.F.A. Alongside a B.A. or B.S.

Institutions that house both B.F.A. and B.A./B.S. degrees should possess distinct missions for each that are made clear to potential students. Again, a B.F.A. is a pre-professional degree, while a B.A./B.S. is more widely considered a liberal arts approach that encompasses greater experiential breadth. (A reminder that some B.A. or B.S. programs offer wonderful training for performers.) Attending an institution where both are present (B.A. and B.F.A) *and* have a healthy relationship can be wonderful. However, when a B.F.A. is present, the B.A./B.S. degree can sometimes become a holding tank for the B.F.A., leading to unhappy students and an unhealthy dynamic between programs. In general, candidates are encouraged to never use a B.A./B.S. as a temporary stop toward B.F.A. goals. If a B.A. or B.S. supports your goals, jump! If a B.F.A. does (and you are admitted) go for it! But, don't put yourself in the circumstance where you are in one seat wishing you were in the seat of the person next to you. That's a terrible place from which to explore your passion. If you are investigating programs that contain both, be sure to diligently inquire about the health of each and the relationship between the two.

E. Resources

What defines resources? Resources are the totality of the support system for a program. Program resources include but are not limited to studio spaces, rehearsal room availability, ample qualified faculty, technological support, administrative support, structured alumni networking, curriculum development, production budget, affiliate professional opportunities, and much more. A candidate should investigate what level of resources are dedicated to the education of performance students. It's important to note that some programs have beautiful facilities, but the *totality* of their support

resources may be poor. Other programs have facilities that appear dated but in totality offer incredible resource support systems. The message here is to dig deeper than the cover of the book to see the totality of resources enclosed within. The cover is just a starting point.

An oft overlooked resource consideration is the manner and depth in which *institutional administration* supports the mission of the degree training programs. The President. The Vice-President. The Provost. This matters, and it is also harder to uncover this information as a candidate. Administrative support is important in that it provides financial resources and contributes to the culture of how arts are tiered as a campus priority. Administrations can be great supporters, hands-off observers, or be a hindrance to the positive workings of performance programs. Later in this guide you will be provided some related items to inquire about during interviews or on-campus visits.

F. Faculty Activity

Faculty activity refers to the past and current professional work of the teaching staff. If you are seeking entrance to a pre-professional training program, it means that you will be learning about the industry while training to become a strong performer. As such, the depth and strength of faculty work matters. Did/do the faculty work professionally at a high level? Did/do they work in the mediums you're aiming for? Are they working members of affiliate working unions such as AEA and SAG-AFTRA? Do faculty currently have representation (an agent or manager) in the professional arena? What is the strength of their own degrees/training?

Additionally, you're pursuing training for an industry that is constantly evolving. The industry is vastly different than what it was 10 years ago. It's different than what it was just 10 weeks ago. As an educator, it's easy to get stuck in what was taught and experienced "back in the day." Historical perspective is important, but it also takes time, commitment, and current professional work for a teacher to keep abreast of industry changes. In a pre-professional program, it's important that those teaching are currently active and have a pulse on the present and future iterations of change in the industry and craft form. Also, the professional relationships of your teachers are your soon-to-be professional relationships.

G. Unions, EMC, and Professional Affiliations

Unions were briefly mentioned in relation to faculty activity. While being a union member doesn't guarantee that an individual is a quality performer, it is still of note. It's near impossible to make a good salary, much less a career, as a non-union performer. As such, a teacher being union affiliated *and* professionally successful is a strong indicator that they are quality performer *and* can help you learn how to navigate the industry. Performer unions include AEA (Actors Equity Association), SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Actors), and AGVA (American Guild of Variety Artists).

Also consider union affiliations at the program level. Does the program have a union summer-stock or professional affiliation with a union theatre? Does it have a film department or resources that produce SAG-AFTRA works? While not all-defining, a yes to these questions indicates a firm level of program commitment as well as the presence of opportunities that could become foundational for your career.

Institutions that have an on-site AEA theatre or a relationship with an external AEA house may also offer Equity Membership Candidacy (EMC). This means that you may be able to work toward professional union affiliation while enrolled as a student. Think of being an EMC candidate as being a "pre-member" of Actor's Equity. This is a benefit in several ways:

- While performing as an EMC in an affiliate production, you will be building relationships with union professionals.
- Being EMC qualifies you for earlier entry to union open calls before non-union members (but after full union members).
- Having an EMC program requires commitment from the institution. It is a good indicator that they are committed to the success of their students.
- After garnering a determined number of EMC weeks, candidates are eligible to join Actor's Equity.

In addition to performer unions, there are many other professional (non-union) affiliations to look for that may indicate commitment to training excellence. A sample are below:

Performer Unions

- AEA (Actor's Equity Association, houses EMC Program)
- SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild-Assoc. of Tel. and Radio Artists)
- AGVA (American Guild of Variety Artists)
- AGMA (American Guild of Musical Artists)

Sample Related Professional Affiliations

- USA (United Stunt Association)
- SAFD (Society of American Fight Directors)
- FDC (Fight Directors Canada)
- ATHE (Association for Theatre in Higher Education)
- VASTA (Voice and Speech Trainers Association)
- NDTA (National Dance Teachers of America)
- ATME (Association of Theatre Movement Educators)
- SSCD (Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers)
- IDC (Intimacy Directors and Choreographers.)
- AMSAT (American Society for the Alexander Technique)
- CSA (Casting Society of America)

H. Curricular Considerations

Curriculum refers to the classes you will take at the institution during the tenure of your study. As a candidate, you should take a good hard look at each program's degree tracking, which tells you the trajectory of classes during full degree residence. It's often available on the website. If not, be sure to request it from a program representative. A good pre-professional curriculum:

- Is dynamic and constantly evolving in relation to craft and industry trends.
- Allows you to be in performance class every semester of your tenure.
- Provides the opportunity to work on your craft every day of the week.
- Allows you develop career business skills parallel to craft development.
- Provides the opportunity to grow in areas that support your individualized skill sets.

1. Program Relationships: Acting, Musical Theatre and Dance

Earlier in the guidebook I mentioned institutions that house both a B.F.A. and a B.A., or a B.F.A. and an M.F.A. Another formula to examine is whether the institution houses B.F.A.'s in both Acting and Musical Theatre. This is not an inherent problem. In fact, if the programs have a positive relationship, it can be a tremendous benefit. However, thoroughly examine the relationship between the two programs in relation

to your strengths and interests. Do the programs have a positive and cohesive relationship? How does their relationship play into casting policies and opportunities? How does the relationship play out in the curriculum? Will you be in class with students from the other program, or will you be isolated from them? As a musical theatre student, will you still have access to Shakespeare, film, and combat? Can MT students perform in dramas? As an acting student, can you take a range of dance classes? Do you have access to private vocal study? Can you perform in musicals if you have the vocal skills?

A reminder that performance training should support your unique skill sets, as the craft and career is highly individualized. The relationship of the programs within should support you in this outlook. The very same considerations are true if a B.F.A. in Dance is present.

2. Can Students Carry a Minor?

Some BFA pre-professional programs allow students to carry a minor. Others do not. If it's of importance to you, investigate. The ones that don't allow a minor aren't trying to be difficult. They know the intensity and expectations of the major program and want to keep students focused and successful. If an institution does allow you to carry a minor, it's important to recognize that the minor will happen *on-top* of a very intense and challenging major program. It may mean a few very busy semesters or some summer classes. Given the discussion earlier about performing artists now being expected to have broader skill sets, it's something to consider in your choice of a program, of a minor, or in how you decide to utilize elective credits.

3. Private Vocal Study

Musical theatre students should be in private study throughout their college tenure. The construct of vocal training in musical theatre programs varies considerably. Some have instructors housed in a separate music department. In others, they are contained within the theatre department. In some it's a combination of the two. This in itself doesn't inform you about the quality of training, but it does necessitate that you look at the expertise of the faculty and consider its application to your goals as a musical theatre artist. Given industry trending toward rock and belt musicals, it is advisable to keep an eye out for programs that have a dedicated voice faculty member who specializes in contemporary styles.

Acting students interested in vocal study, be sure to investigate availability. Institutions need to prioritize voice resources for students in their vocal music and musical theatre programs, so availability of vocal study for acting students may depend upon resources. Can you take private vocal study? Does audition class cover vocal auditions? Is there a singing for the actor class? There are many incredible actor/singers in the industry who chose to study within an acting program. For them, it was essential to have access to vocal study. If you have the skill set, it's essential for you too. This is information that may be present in your web research, or you may need to inquire during an interview or campus visit.

4. Acting On-Camera

A few hard facts. The number of professional theatre performance contracts has been on a downward trend. Producing costs have caused some theatres to close their doors, while others lessen expenses by choosing shows with smaller casts. Some theatres

have relinquished union affiliation, and many others are struggling to pay Equity wages. In short, the number of professional actor contracts is decreasing, and it appears the trend will continue for the foreseeable future. It's also possible, given societal changes, that some audience preferences are moving away from traditional live theatre and toward digital mediums. It's hard to hear, but history tells us that performance mediums and preferences change over time. In short, this all means it's harder than ever to make a living as a stage performer.

Now, some good news. Media forms that utilize performers have spread exponentially. Turning on the tv or computer gives the consumer/audience member thousands of options for watchable content. Much of that content requires performers, which means jobs. Also, filming content has gotten much easier as digital resources have become more accessible. This means that a greater number of films are being generated. This *also* means more jobs. All of this adds up to a simple fact; the industry is in the midst of an unprecedented shift. Theatre performance jobs are on the decline, while those in on-camera applications are increasing. Put it together and it means that on-camera training is a non-negotiable for performers wanting to make a lifelong living. As such, it's more important than ever for pre-professional performance students to have access to on-camera training.

Musical theatre performers, you may be wondering how this applies to you. Look at film, television, and commercials, and other media forms- you'll see a wide host of musical theatre performers. Those individuals know first-hand that to sustain a life-long career, it's a limiting choice to box oneself into one genre.

The other part of this big equation is that auditions are also trending toward digital formats, and it's here to stay. All emerging performers must have the knowledge to navigate camera technology and to perform in front of the lens.

5. Auditions Class

Auditioning is an essential skill that requires excellent performer preparation *and* an understanding of business mechanics. As such, it's difficult to imagine a pre-professional training environment without an auditioning class. However, all auditioning classes are not the same. We just referenced the shift to digital in auditioning trends, as well as the importance of having professionally active teachers. Those two elements merge in auditioning classes. For an auditioning class to be most beneficial, it needs to be taught by a teacher who is aware of and practicing current industry trends (which again, are always shifting.) It needs to embrace current casting formats and databases. It needs to include audition material in line with contemporary production. It should also provide students the knowledge to engage on-camera and/or virtual auditions.

So, how does a candidate investigate the content of a program's audition class(es)?

- Ask to view a syllabus. As an acting professor, I hold respect for candidates who ask to view syllabi. It tells me they are focused and determined and in control of their own outcome.
- Ask about audition class content during your interview or on-campus visit.
- Inquire from students who are currently in the program.

6. Curricular Career Preparation

Career preparation is essential. Some programs that do a wonderful job of teaching the craft of performance may still not adequately prepare the student with knowledge of related business logistics. It's possible that other programs do a great job of presenting business information, but falter in the craft-training department. Ideally, a pre-professional program will offer both, hand in hand. Great performer training is *inclusive* of the totality of career prep skills. It's your job as a candidate to investigate. Is career prep mentioned in their program description? Are there clues in the curricular tracking sheet? Does the curriculum exemplify the program description, or are there holes? Are alumni active in industry centers soon after graduation?

Career preparation is another item where it's important to inquire during the interview/audition or campus visit. Ask questions. For example. "Can you tell me a bit about the outlook on career preparation, and how that's present in the curriculum?" "Can you tell me about the activities of a few of your alums that have graduated within the last two years?" \

7. Voice-Overs

Voice-overs (VO) have long been considered an area of performance specialty. However, in recent years they encompass a corner of the performance industry that has become less niche' and a lot more vital. VO has grown exponentially of late, including commercials, digital books, films, dubbing, motion capture, and much more. The growth is (once again) a result of the development of media forms and related content. Voice-overs have become an important skill for both singing and non-singing performers. Some programs have excellent access to voice-over training. Others aren't quite there yet, as the historic value of voice-over training as 'niche' may have placed it on the back burner when balancing curricular resources.

If a program has a voice-over class in their curriculum, it's a huge plus. If not, investigate whether they offer it as an independent study or special topics class. Are they working toward a permanent class? Are there qualified faculty? Is VO content integrated into other classes in the curriculum? Are there alumni working successfully in voice-overs? Is there a voice-over studio accessible to students?

8. Electives

Electives are essentially a block of credit hours that you and your advisor can determine what to do with. Your personal interests as a performer will impact how you choose electives. In this light, it's important to research what number of elective hours are required, and what classes are approved to fulfill them. For example, if you are a musical theatre student who has a vested interest in learning sign-language, is that a possibility? Electives can range from additional performance classes to music, writing, foreign languages, film, personal training, business, rock-climbing, to wine-tasting and much more. Examine what electives are available to you.

Also, investigate *how* are you allowed to utilize your elective hours. Programs may place qualifiers on what courses can be applied as electives. For example, the curriculum requirements may say, "10 elective hours, 5 must be taken outside the department," or "12 elective hours, 10 must be taken inside the department." This is essential information because your interests, your unique qualities, and how you

develop them are what will help you succeed in your career. If you are an actor and believe equine training will be an asset, that matters when viewing your elective opportunities. If you are a musical theatre student interested in working in on-screen musicals, you need to examine how elective opportunities will support that goal. Fortunately, this is a pretty easy thing to investigate. Look for language about electives in the curricular requirements, then investigate elective offerings in the to see how they meet your interests. Take care to look at prerequisites of electives for those you're interested in. A performer hoping to take business electives won't be served to find out that the classes they want are closed to students outside the business department.

9. Class Capacity

Class capacity (cap) is the maximum number of students allowed in a class. In a *performance* class, less is usually better. It's an easy equation. You will get more focused attention training in an Acting class with 14 students than you will in one with 24.

Most pre-professional programs limit the number of students they admit each year, informed by how they can support student development while keeping class caps at an optimum. This means that hundreds upon hundreds of candidates aren't admitted, and all those tuition dollars go elsewhere. So, it's expensive for a college to maintain a performance program with low class caps. As such, departments often get administrative pressure to increase enrollment numbers and class caps. It's the unfortunate reality of an institution trying to balance affordability and quality.

In relation, it's your job as a candidate is to investigate the caps within a program's *performance* classes, as they will significantly impact opportunity and learning. Class caps can often be found on the description for a given class. If not, inquire about this information from program facilitators.

10. NAST, NASM, NASD

NAST stands for National Association of Schools of Theatre, NASM for National Association of Schools of Music, and NASD for National Association of Schools of Dance. These are accreditation-based affiliations that help maintain quality of curriculum and experience within university-based theatre, musical theatre, dance, and music programs. All three provide specific accreditation guidelines. In order to be accredited, an institution has to meet and maintain requirements that contribute to the quality of student experience. These include faculty qualifications, curricular structure, class offerings, class caps, production opportunities, and much more. If an institution fails to meet the requirements, they risk losing accreditation. It takes work, resources, and commitment to student experience for an institution to maintain accreditation.

In short, NAST, NASM, and/or NASD accreditation gives you some reassurance about a given program. It does not mean that program is perfect or that it is the right fit for you, but it is one important viewing point. There are excellent programs that are not accredited, but if a program is not accredited, it's fair to inquire as to why.

11. Dance Styles

Like other performing art forms, dance is constantly evolving. Institutions treat that evolution differently in their curricular offerings. As a dance-invested candidate, it's important to examine the content of the dance curriculum and the expertise of the faculty in relation to your own training needs.

Musical theatre students need to be in dance class throughout their college tenure. The construct of dance training in musical theatre programs can vary considerably. Some have instructors housed in a separate dance department. In others, they are contained within the theatre/musical theatre department. In some it's a combination of the two. This in itself doesn't inform you about the quality of training, but it does necessitate that you look at the expertise of the faculty and consider its application to your goals as a musical theatre artist.

Given the evolution of dance styles beyond the historic core of ballet, modern, tap, and jazz, it is advisable to keep an eye out for programs that dedicate attention to contemporary developments and the fusion of styles. Like voice and acting, dance faculty activity/expertise should mirror the curricular offerings. For example, if a program claims to have strengths in commercial dance, consider whether or not the faculty hold relevant experience and parallel union memberships/affiliations.

Acting students interested in dance study, be sure to investigate what is available to you. Institutions often need to prioritize dance resources for students in their dance and musical theatre programs, so availability of a range of dance for acting students may be resource contingent. Can acting students take dance classes? Is there a limit regarding how far you can go in the dance curriculum? Can you audition for dance concerts? There are hundreds of incredible dancers in the industry who chose to study within acting programs. For them, it was vital to have access to dance classes. If you have the skill set, it's essential for you too. This is information that may be present in your web research, or you may need to inquire during an interview or campus visit.

12. Performance Training Methodology

Some programs adhere to specific training methodologies. For example, one may teach only a Stanford Meisner approach to acting. The proposed benefit of this is that you are getting consistent training and your teachers are likely well-qualified in that outlook.

The downside to an approach-specific program is that not every approach is best for every actor. I'm personally of the mindset that an actor needs to have access to a diverse but well-taught body of approaches, so that they can develop an informed but individualized craft approach. However, others hold a different outlook with positive results. As a candidate it's important for you to investigate this aspect of the curriculum and make decisions about what is *best for you*. This is information that may be on the website, or that you may need to inquire about during an interview or campus visit.

13. Musical Theatre and Actor Training

A musical theatre candidate needs to consider, "What is the strength of actor training for musical theatre students?" Some candidates arrive to musical theatre from dance or music. As an acting teacher of first year musical theatre students, I sometimes

have gifted MT students who are in an acting class for the very first time. These students quickly realize that good acting is a core of their tri-fold discipline and a non-negotiable for success. The days of referring to certain musicals as “singer shows” is vanishing. The expectation is that the excellent vocals or dance will be present alongside excellent acting. For a musical theatre performer, their disciplines (acting, singing, dance) are intertwined, inseparable, and each contributes to the excellence of the others.

As a musical theatre candidate, it’s important that you pursue a program with excellent actor training. Look deeply at the qualifications of faculty. Look at acting class caps. Consider whether or not musical theatre students are learning acting in class alongside acting students. Are the musical theatre students able to take Shakespeare and on-camera classes? Are musical theatre graduates also working in stage drama and/or film and television if they choose? Most importantly, can a musical theatre student choose to be in an acting performance class every semester of residence?

14. Individualized Teaching

Individualized teaching is teaching inspired by the that notion that all learners garner information differently. In performer training, it means that teachers put significant attention into helping every student set *individual* goals and work through corresponding challenges. From the teacher perspective, individualized teaching actually starts as we are recruiting and auditioning students. The more we get to know a candidate, the better we can identify whether it’s an ideal educational fit. If the student is admitted, an individualized process encompasses the entirety of their curricular training.

As a candidate, the focus upon individualized teaching is an important but difficult to uncover factor to investigate. Low class caps are an important item to note, but there are other signifiers. Do the program representatives offer a personalized interest in you? Do they immediately create an environment for you that supports give-and-take conversation, and in which you feel comfortable asking questions? Will faculty take time for a phone call with you? Were you made to feel important at the audition or interview? Were you thanked for your interest in their program? These are all signs that the program likely views its students as individual artists rather than numbers and dollars. Also, be sure to inquire about this should you have an opportunity to chat with current program students.

I. Admission Rates and Class Size

Admission rate refers to the percentage of students that are admitted following the application/audition process. There are certainly benefits to being in a highly selective program with low admission rates. Competitive admission *may* indicate smaller class sizes and individualized teaching. Perhaps the most substantial benefit is knowing that you will be surrounded by other students who are talented, driven, and will challenge you to become your best. Graduates from competitive admission programs are also likely to be a working force in the industry. However, admission rate is not an all-defining factor. There are programs with moderate or less competitive admission rates that provide an extraordinary education for their students. As you view admission rates, it’s best view them within the totality of other considerations, including cost. It’s important, but it’s just one piece of the puzzle. This delivers us back to the notion that it’s not just about the idea of “best,” it’s about what is best for you.

Sample Admission Rates of Pre-Professional Programs:

- Most Competitive- Admits 2% or less (5 or less of every 250 of applicants)
- Very Competitive- Admits 2%-5% (6-12 of every 250 applicants)
- Competitive- Admits 5%-10% (13-25 of every 250 applicants)
- Moderately Competitive-Admits 10%-20% (26-50 of every 250 applicants)
- Less Competitive- Admits 20%-50% (51-125 of every 250 applicants)
- Non-Competitive- Admits all applicants.

The size of an incoming class can sometimes be a better indicator (than admission rates) of experience within. Does a program admit 16 students per class? 20? 24? Importantly, does the program believe in and get behind every admit, hoping to see them through successfully to graduation?

J. Juries/Assessments and Cuts

Juries (sometimes referred to as assessments) are an important part of the development process in pre-professional training. While the structure of juries may differ from place to place, the goal is the same; to view and assess the work of students, then to provide critical feedback for growth. Juries can be incredibly stressful, but also rewarding. They generally provide an opportunity for a student to sit in a room with faculty and address their growth and goals in an individualized format.

Virtually every candidate I talk with about program entry asks about “cuts.” Rightfully so. Simply put, cuts are when a program removes (cuts) students who, by provided measures, aren’t making the growth deemed necessary for successful career entry. Depending upon the major and measures in place, cuts can be made because of concerns about acting, voice (MT), dance (MT), academics, or lack of development in career skills, among other measures. Cuts are often made in relation to juries/assessments. Sometimes cuts are made in year one. Sometimes year two. Sometimes it’s per case/as needed. As a candidate investigating programs, juries and cut processes are something to investigate and weigh. In general, programs fall into one of three categories relating to cuts.

1. Mandatory Cut Programs

These are programs that admit more students than they are able to graduate, knowing they will make a defined number of cuts. For example, a program may admit 24 students, knowing that that class size will be closer to 14 when junior year arrives. Ever seen *Making the Team*, about the Dallas Cowboy Cheerleaders? The cut process allows them to put what they believe is the best squad on the field for opening day.

2. Non-Mandatory Cut Programs

These are programs that employ cuts, but don’t have *mandated* cuts. It means they admit a number that they aim to graduate but utilize cuts to remove students who aren’t progressing according to measures.

3. Non-Cut Programs

These are programs that do not make cuts. Students who leave the program do so by their own volition, or because of academic failure.

K. Alumni Success and Relationships

The success of a program’s alumni may speak volumes about the training and experience within. As such, it’s an important part of your research. However, chatter about alums can bit

disorienting. Often, programs offer dialogue about historically successful alumni. We're talking about the alumni who have become household names or garnered significant award nominations. This is wonderful information, and it certainly speaks to the historical strength of a program. However, it may not tell the whole story about the current situation and recent alumni achievements. Here are questions to consider in your research about program alumni:

1. What are recent graduates doing?

What's occurring with the graduates from the last 1-5 years? Are they busy building career foundations? Are they booking early career work? Have they garnered union affiliations? Are they working union jobs? What percentage of alumni in that 1-5 year range are regularly getting professional auditions?

As you observe the activity of recent graduates, keep in mind that it takes time for a performer to build a foundation. If some alumni are booking significant projects (Broadway, union feature films, etc.) that's a great sign! However, it's also informative to uncover what approximate percentage of alumni are actively working, living in industry centers, and building the steps toward long-term success.

2. Where are recent graduates moving?

Are recent alumni moving to industry centers, or are they staying closer to home? This should pertain to your own goals. For example, if you hope to move to NYC, it will be of help if the program has a large number of graduates in that market. The same consideration applies to *any* potential industry center. While there is no judgement upon performers who opt to live and work closer to home outside of a major industry hub (performers should live where they are happy) it's a positive sign if graduates are moving to areas supported by the availability of professional work.

It is, however, important to note that the geo-spacing of the industry is changing (even more notably for film and television). More performers than ever are successfully working in mid-sized markets like Atlanta or New Orleans. Again, the key observation for you is whether or not recent graduates are moving to where the work supports their career goals, and how that may align with your own.

3. Are recent graduates garnering representation?

"Representation" refers to a performer being represented by management and/or an agent. This is a potential rabbit hole to discuss, but the short version is that agents and managers are part of building a lifelong, sustainable career. Yes, performers can work without them, but to get the auditions that lead to significant career-sustaining work, agents and/or managers are a necessary part of the performer landscape.

In this light, it's helpful to know (approximately) what percentage of recent graduates have working representation. It's not usually an easy task for an emerging artist to gain legitimate representation, so it's a good sign if a program has a high rate of recent alumni who have done so.

4. Are alumni accomplishments visible?

It's challenging to *comprehensively* track the success of alumni, notably because they are auditioning and booking and working on new projects every day. However, it's important for a candidate to have a firm sense of the work that graduates are engaged in, and at what level. Some of this information may be available on a department

website. You may uncover more by talking to faculty and current students. In addition, ask about alumni you can *currently view at work*. That may include alumni who are currently on tv, in recent films, or performers in regional or Broadway theatre. Additionally, you can ask a program representative to point you to alumni represented on IMDB (Internet Movie Database, www.imdb.com) and IBDB (Internet Broadway Database, www.ibdb.com).

5. Alumni Relationships

Alumni relationships can offer so much to an emerging professional. Programs that have a working and welcoming body of alumni offer a distinct advantage. Program alumni will someday be colleagues. They may be the ones to help you with logistics such as getting an apartment or a great flexible job. Alumni are also the ones who may introduce a graduate to their first agent, or to the casting director of a first big audition. They may even be the ones to hire a graduate for their first tour or film. As a candidate, it's important to get a real sense of the relationship the program has with working alumni. Importantly, are alumni and recent graduates warmly corresponding and working on projects together?

6. Alumni Workshops and Structured Networking

Also of consequence is the work a program puts in to help develop those relationships. Does the program provide alumni-driven workshops for current students (on-campus, virtually, or during trips to an industry center?) Does the institution hold alumni events in industry centers and encourage networking between recent and less-recent graduates? When possible, does the program encourage students to view the current work of alumni? If the program holds an industry showcase, is it well attended by industry alumni? Are events or workshops held surrounding the showcase, where students and alumni can inter-mingle? A program invested in building bridges for its students will work to provide ample alumni workshops and structured networking.

L. Showcases

Showcases are events where soon-to-be graduates have the opportunity to perform before an audience of industry professionals and working alumni. Showcases often occur in industry centers, though digital sharing is evolving the traditional construct of showcases events. A good showcase can be a vital bridge between pre-professional training and a successful career. Many pre-professional programs offer showcases. However, not all showcases are made of the same quality ingredients, nor do they all have the same goals. Here are some important items to consider as investigating showcases:

1. Are you able to view the showcase?

Showcases occur year-round, but many happen in spring parallel to college admission season. Is the showcase available for you to view online (via streaming or recording) or perhaps in-person if geographically accessible?

2. Are the showcase performances of good quality?

Showcase performers are emerging graduates. The work you view should display readiness to enter the industry.

3. Does the showcase represent an understanding of the market/industry in which it is targeting?

Musical theatre showcases will differ from acting showcases. Acting showcases in NYC may be even feel different than acting showcases in Los Angeles. This is as it should be, as the showcases performed in those cities are aimed at the market within. In relation, does the musical theatre showcase exemplify an understanding of current musical theatre trends? Does the acting showcase in Los Angeles illustrate knowledge of the on-camera demands of that market? Story after story could be told of showcases where audience members were left to guess whether performers had a grasp of the work in that particular industry center. A good showcase will be created with goals surrounding its target market.

4. Does the showcase highlight individual performers?

Does an audience member leave the showcase having a clear idea of who each *individual* is as a performer? Does the showcase- from material selection to direction to performance- allow the nuances of each individual to shine, or does it let the ‘brand’ of its program supersede the individuality of those within?

5. Is the showcase well attended? Does it Garner Industry Meeting?

Is the showcase viewed by a number of agents, managers, casting directors, and other industry professionals? An impressive performance that isn’t well-attended is not likely to serve the goals of the performers. Does the showcase garner its performers a positive number of meeting invites with agents and managers? Approximately what percentage?

M. Cost of Attendance

As discussed earlier, the ideal educational scenario is one where you graduate without debt. If not attainable, your goal should be to exit graduation with as little debt as possible. Debt has killed many careers before they’ve had a chance to launch. In this light, it’s important to do everything in your control to become financially sound. It doesn’t matter if you get into the program of your dreams, going into severe debt for a performance degree is not conducive to long-term success.

The good news. There is a multitude of aid and scholarship resources out there, as well as affordable programs that offer excellent training. This is another point that current students wanted to be sure made it into this guidebook. *“There are affordable programs that offer excellent training.”* When considering cost of attendance, tuition is only one variable. Other costs include university fees, class and program fees, technology fees, room and board, transportation, books, and so forth. It may be tempting to quickly accept an offer for admission when a 35K a year university offers you a 25K scholarship, but you may later discover that other costs make the total cost less than ideal.

The best and only way to get a true program vs. program economic comparison is to evaluate all expenses after you’ve been provided total cost breakdowns (after all tuition, fees, scholarships, and aid is input). This is sometimes referred to as your “financial package.” Some institutions take longer than others to process this information, so be patient, but also be confident to inquire along the way. Varying institutions approach this process differently. For example, one may put a scholarship quickly on the table for you, with little or no aid following it up. Others may not put that adrenaline inducing quick offer on the table, but you discover later in the process your total aid package is outstanding. Again, be patient until you can add up all the factors. A few related things:

1. FAFSA

Be sure to fill out your Federal Student Aid Application (FAFSA) by the due date. This is important, even if you don't expect to be provided federal assistance. Many institutions require it for you to be considered for university-based scholarships. studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa

2. University Aid/Scholarships

Investigate and adhere to due dates for university-based scholarship applications. This application and deadline may be distinct from the FAFSA. Visit the institution's financial aid website for information, and never be shy about dropping a phone call when clarity is needed.

3. Program Aid/Scholarships

Should you be accepted, investigate and adhere to any due dates for program-based scholarships. Many programs have scholarships at the department level and discretionary funds for those in need. Contact the department head or degree area coordinator to inquire. If you are in need, be an ambassador for yourself.

4. Following Up

If something seems to be taking longer than it should (an aid letter, for instance) follow up. Never assume that something is in process until you have physical evidence of it.

5. Organization and Tracking

Keep track of all aid/scholarship related items and emails. Create a digital folder. Document all aid-related phone calls by date, content, and the name of the person you spoke to.

College Cost Estimator



Category	Item	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3
Institution Fees	Tuition			
	Housing			
	Meal Plan			
	Program Fee			
	Security Fees			
	Technology Fee			
	Student Activities Fee			
	Health Center Fee			
	Recreation Center/Gym Fee			
	Other			
Transportation	Car			
	Car Insurance			
	Gas			
	Maintenance			
	Airfare			
	Other			
Housing/Food	Housing/Rent			
	Meal Plan/ Food			
	Meals Out			
	Other			
Other	Books			
	Tech Supply			
	Phone			
	Training Attire			
	Office Supply			
	Subscriptions			
	Entertainment			
	Other			
Financial Aid	Federal Aid			
	University Aid			
	Department Aid			
	Private Aid			
	Other			
Total				

N. Geography and Training

Candidates often ask questions about the importance (or lack thereof) of training in an industry center like New York or Los Angeles. “Is it best to train in an industry center?” “Does the additional expense overshadow any benefits?” “Is it best to train outside of an industry center so the distractions are lessened?” “Does it even matter where training occurs?” There is a wide range of opinions about the answers to such questions, stemming from the fact that there is just not one correct outlook. Once again, the candidate must consider individual goals and resources. The points of investigation offered in this guidebook should be of help in this regard. The *first* matter of business is locating and gaining admission to a program where you will learn and thrive as a pre-professional artist while being offered a strong foundation for career entry. Remember, the only “best” is what is ‘best for you.’”

Below are a few questions related to geographic location that may help you decide what is best for you. You’ll likely find that some are more important to you than others:

- What is the tuition cost?
- How much are monthly living expenses?
- What distance would you like to be from home?
- Will the distance from home incur additional financial strain?
- Can you graduate with no/minimal debt?
- Can you view ample professional work while training?
- Can you perform professionally while enrolled?
- Is there a vibrant community arts scene?
- Does the program host many guest artist workshops?
- Are the faculty strongly connected to industry centers?
- Are graduates living/working in industry centers?
- Is it in a safe location?
- Is there a vibrant campus life?
- Is there social and racial diversity?
- Is the performance showcase connected to an industry center?
- Does the training suit your growth needs?
- Does the program suit your career goals?
- Will you have access to a vehicle? Can you have it on campus?
- Is there access to outdoor activities such as hiking and camping?
- Will you be happy living there for 4 years?

You may find that your answers point you to a program in New York, Cleveland, or to the middle of Iowa. There are fantastic training opportunities in diverse geographic locations around the nation (and globe).

O. Affiliate Professional Theatre/Film/Dance

Affiliate professional relationships can be very advantageous for a program and the students within. Many programs house professional performance companies, and/or have working relationships with theatre, dance, or film production companies outside of the institution. This means that there may be corresponding student opportunities beyond the boundaries of the classroom and departmental productions. Some programs formalize these relationships; students may be utilized as interns, apprentices, or in a structured casting pool for professional productions. Other programs have less formalized relationships where students may be called upon as needed. In many cases, both scenarios exist simultaneously. These types of affiliate relationships offer students vital artistic experience, resume’ building credits, content for reels,

and/or credits toward union membership. In many cases, it can also shorten the time it takes “getting to work” post-graduation.

Candidates are highly encouraged to investigate this aspect of potential programs. Ask what *formalized* relationships the program has with professional companies. Are those companies’ union, as applicable? How is the relationship structured for the benefit of students? What *informal* relationships are present, and in what capacity are students utilized?

P. Guest Artists/Teachers

It is critical for training programs host guest/workshop artists. No matter how professionally active full-time faculty may be, the reality is that the greatest portion of faculty time/energy goes into teaching and working on-campus. As such, students should have access to additional voices, notably those who are engaged in the industry with 100% of their career energy. Unfortunately, when resources are limited, guest artist budgets are often among the first to go. As a candidate, it’s important for you to know that a potential program has a history of hosting guests, and the intent to continue to do so. Additionally, it’s helpful for a program to host early and mid-level career guests as well as famous faces. While it’s exciting to meet famous performers, it’s often more beneficial to students to work with guests who are still in the process of successfully building a career foundation.

Q. Production/Performance Opportunities

One question candidate’s frequently ask is “How many mainstage productions do you do a year?”

In this regard, it’s important to know that in pre-professional training, class/studio comes first and foremost. All of your major-specific coursework is gearing toward you becoming a strong professional performer. As such, your performance classes should all provide considerable challenges. Classes will necessitate more time, focus, and artistic attention than you may be accustomed to. Production opportunities are considered an important extension of the classroom, but not a substitute for it. This is the very reason that many pre-professional programs don’t allow students to perform onstage during their first semester or year of study. The practice allows students the time to focus on studio work, adapt to college and pre-professional study, and to take risks in their craft without the oft-hindering obligation of public presentation. In the big picture, many programs also report that early “non-performance” rules contribute to student retention and overall success.

In addition, though it is essential to know the number of mainstage productions, it’s also important to open your lens wider than ‘mainstage.’ In a pre-professional program mainstage productions become just one part of the big experience equation. There will also be faculty directed black box productions, touring productions, dance concerts, films, vocal concerts, operas, and affiliate professional productions. There may also be faculty-led new works festivals, improvisation performances, or social theatre groups. In addition, there will probably be a number of student-produced productions and performance organizations. In short, while mainstage opportunities are crucial, don’t place them in greater measure than coursework and the breadth of other faculty-led opportunities. A better inquiry may be, “What breadth of opportunity is there to perform under the direction of faculty or professional guest artists?”

Below are some items to research that may help inform you as such:

- How many faculty-directed productions occur in an academic year?
- How many of those are considered mainstage?
- Is there a studio or black box series?

- Is there a one-act or new works festival?
- Are there dance concerts? Can you be considered for casting?
- Are there operas? Can you be considered for casting?
- Is there a social theatre group?
- Is there an improvisation group?
- Are there faculty-led touring groups?
- Is there an affiliate professional theatre? In what capacity are students cast?
- Is there a performance intern program for the affiliate theatre?
- What's the percentage of musicals to dramas, and how does that reflect the major population?
- What are the casting policies for musicals or dramas in relation to major?
- Is there a process of seniority in casting?
- Is the department casting philosophy available for perusal?
- What is the process of season production selection?
- Does the selected season reflect the student/major population?
- Does the season reflect a knowledge of current and forthcoming trends?
- Does the season provide diverse representation, authenticity, and reflect the population of the world at large?
- Are there faculty-directed film opportunities? Student-directed?
- Are student groups present that also produce productions? In what capacity?

R. Program Handbook

The presence of a program handbook/guidebook is an excellent (but not conclusive) indicator that a program is well-organized and student-centered. Program handbooks can also be a wealth of information for the candidate considering attendance. They often contain information about admission, curriculum, faculty, performance opportunities, casting policies, juries, and policies related to student expectation and experience. Handbooks aim to provide structure and clarity to the students within. If there is not a handbook, inquire as to why. Where then are the program policies posted? Where do students turn where they need clarity about rules and expectations? If there is a handbook, is it available on the website for optimum access? Is the handbook updated regularly and truly utilized in program operations, or is it a document left among the cobwebs?

Here is a sample of information candidates may be able to glean from a handbook:

- Program Description
- Faculty
- Admission Process
- Retention Criteria
- Juries/Assessments
- Program Dismissal (cuts)
- Audition Policies
- Casting Policies
- Rehearsal Policies
- Classroom Policies
- Outside Performance Rules
- Advising and Coursework
- Showcases
- Scholarships
- Affiliate Professional Relationships

S. Production Design

As you research potential programs, be sure to investigate the quality of production designs. Performers often overlook this important aspect of the research process. Production designs can illuminate the type of resources a department puts into the work, as well as the level of professionalism present. Be sure to check out designs for any productions that may be relevant to your training: mainstage, studio series, touring, black box, dance concerts, and film productions, among others. Images can often be found on the department website or on the personal webpages of faculty and student designers. When possible, nothing beats viewing a production in person.

T. Transfer Options

If you are a student transferring from another college institution, it is important to do your due diligence when it comes to research. Students who have transferred often find themselves in the unideal spot of discovering that some classes didn't transfer, and they have additional general education requirements to take. Some have discovered late in the game that they need to commit to an additional year of training for degree completion. This is entirely preventable! Inform yourself in the following ways:

1. Transfer Audit

At the institutional level, there is a process of 'auditing' what you've previously taken. The new college applies completed coursework where applicable into their institutional curriculum. Be sure your transfer audit is completed *before* you make the decision to attend. You don't want any late curricular surprises.

2. Transfer Equivalency Guide

Most institutions will have something akin to a 'transfer equivalency guide.' This is a resource (often published on the website) that informs you exactly what will transfer and how. Take the time to work through your transcript, course by course. This is a means to know how items may transfer well before the audit is completed by the institution. This can be completed even before you apply, saving you both time and money.

3. Department/Program Audit

Most institutions give to freedom to specific departments/programs to see how *major* requirements will transfer. This process can seem a little vague, depending upon the institution. This is usually undertaken after a student has been admitted, which puts a little time pressure on the process. Do not wait until you have committed to attending to have your program/degree classes audited. As soon as you get an admit letter, contact the department office and ask who can help you with the *program* audit. Be diligent, so that the process can be completed before the "let us know by" date. Don't be surprised if you discover a program doesn't count all of your performance credits toward their major core curriculum. Be sure to ask how those classes may count as electives.

4. Three-Year Transfer Tracks

Although many programs require a full four years of residence, some offer shortened tracks designed specifically for transfer students. The three-year track means that the curricular content is condensed in a way that transfer students can complete the degree without having to incur unnecessary expense and time. If you are a transfer, this may be an excellent option for you.

5. Two-Year Transfer Tracks

These are like the three-year tracks but offer an even shorter span for degree completion. The upside is that it requires only two additional years of college and cost. The downside is that you then have a limited time span to train and mature before entering the profession. This option may be more ideal for the transfer performer who feels they need less time to hone their craft and be industry ready.

U. Website

The department/program website is right at your fingertips. It's an excellent way to get a sense of who a program is and if their operations support their words relating to excellence. Professional performers have the responsibility of "being their own CEO." They have to be the ambassadors for their own craft and career. An attractive, accessible, and informative website may be an indicator that a program is demonstrating to its students how to be strong CEO's. Here are just a few things to look for:

- Is the website well-structured? Is the path of information logical and intuitive?
- Is the site visually stimulating?
- Is the program/department philosophy stated clearly on the site?
- Does the site provide you needed information, or are there informational holes?
- Does the site do a thorough job of defining its degree offerings?
- Does the site allow access to curriculum information?
- Does the site provide access to program handbooks and guidelines?
- Does the site do a thorough job of informing you about the faculty?
- Does the site host or have links to their professional showcases?
- Does the site have production images? Do they have a professional appeal?
- Does the site offer a production history/timeline?
- Is there information/links to affiliate professional companies?
- Does the site make it easy for you to investigate the curriculum?
- Does the site, on the whole, feel like it's a professional representation of the CEO you aim to be?

V. Second Year Entrance Programs

Pre-professional programs may vary in their audition/admission approach. There are generally three models:

1. Programs that audition/admit students prior to university residence.
2. Programs that audition/admit students for sophomore year entry, following one year of university residency.
3. Programs that do both.

There are excellent programs that employ each of the models. However, it's important for the candidate to know what they're signing up for. It's no longer a surprise to hear of a student attending a university without knowing they can't be admitted to the relevant performance degree tracks until year two. The story often proceeds to tell of said student being unsuccessful in gaining admission, and then must investigate transfer options. As such, inform yourself in the following ways:

- Know what admission model a program follows.
- Inquire about the training philosophy guiding that model.
- Consider that model alongside your own talents, goals, and resources, then plan and make individual decisions accordingly.

W. Acting or Musical Theatre?

Many candidates don't know whether to audition for musical theatre, acting, or both. Others may have prematurely squeezed themselves into one box, based upon their passion and experiences from high school.

For example, many college auditionees aim to be musical theatre performers. Unfortunately, a sizable percentage of those candidates simply do not house the vocal potential that would align them for pre-professional musical theatre study. However, some of those candidates may possess the core honesty that makes them ripe for acting study, or perhaps the skills to be nurtured into a wonderful commercial dance career.

Personally, I'm fortunate to teach in a program with a communicative relationship across disciplines. During the audition process, if we see a candidate audition for a program whose skill set is much better aligned with a different major, we will have that conversation with them. Candidates may not have the opportunity for this discussion at other college auditions.

So, how as a candidate do you proceed? Without having been in a pre-professional setting, how do you honestly self-assess to know where your professional potential lies? Do you audition for musical theatre? Acting? Dance? Musical theatre and acting? Musical theatre and dance? Acting and dance? Vocal music?

Here's something to consider. You are just beginning your professional development as an artist. It's important to acknowledge that your passion and experiences may be pointing you in a specific direction, but never close other doors that may provide opportunity. As you stand before one of those *other* doors, someone inside may see incredible potential in you and encourage you come in. In short, it could be in your best interest to put yourself in front of multiple doorways.



VIDEO 7: [WHY ACTING?](https://youtu.be/c7TCMdNSiSc) Student Testimonial
(youtu.be/c7TCMdNSiSc)



VIDEO 8: [WHY MUSICAL THEATRE?](https://youtu.be/qlv2hzu6t0U) Student Testimonial
(youtu.be/qlv2hzu6t0U)

IX. Preparing to Apply

A. Finalizing Your Application List

First, another reminder that the college application process is distinct from pre-professional (B.F.A.) program applications and auditions. That said, at this point you've done your homework and are ready to submit applications. Your research and resources may have helped you narrow your choices, but not completely. Here are a few questions that may help you continue to refine your audition list.

- How many programs does your budget allow you to audition for?
- How many programs does your availability allow you to audition for?
- Given your resources and research, what programs rise to the top?
- Are there any programs that are still on your list only because of reputation, and not because your research says they're a good fit for you?
- What is your gut telling you?

In discussion groups, several current pre-professional students mentioned the use of tier charts in helping them decide where to apply- and suggested that candidates may also find benefit. For example, a candidate may have interest in seven programs that they feel would be a good fit; four of which are absolute favorites that they place in tier 1, and three that they do like but are less certain of, they place in tier 2. Regardless of how you refine *your* process, or how many applications you plan to submit, you'll want to be purposeful and well-organized throughout this process.

B. The ol' "Backup" Plan

Many candidates (and their support network) wonder if a backup plan is needed. After all, what happens if you don't get accepted to any program you'd like to attend?

First, it's important to enter the application/audition process knowing that there will be learning and evolution on your part. You'll learn something at every stage to take to the next, and then carry the totality of your college audition experiences well beyond the immediate process. You may exit audition season successful in your goals. You may exit heading a surprising direction. It's also possible that you exit without gaining admission. If you don't gain admission, a self-assessment will be necessary. This is covered in more detail later.

Now, regarding the ol' back-up plan. The performance-world loves a good risk-taking story. You heard of 'that actor' who moved to New York with \$200.00, and right when they were down to their last .50 cents, they miraculously booked a lead in a new Broadway musical? It's a great story, because everyone loves an underdog. However, the reality behind these types of stories generally involves a lot of undiscussed actor preparation, dedication over time, and a support system that provides some secondary reassurance. The same applies to your process of auditioning for pre-professional training! As you consider how this applies to you and your goals, you are encouraged to consider:

- Getting rid of the word "backup." Rename it your "action plan."
- Having an *action plan* does not have to distract from your primary goal. To use the "eggs in one basket" metaphor- it's actually quite easy to fill a basket with eggs *and* carry additional ones in your pockets, but only if you plan ahead.
- Your action plan should be unique to your experiences and interests. It may involve taking a gap year and re-auditioning, or perhaps pursuing a different but related passion. There are many paths. This is your story to write and no one else's.
- Having an action (contingency) plan does not mean you aren't invested. It just might mean the contrary.

X. The Program Application Process

A. Application

1. The Letter of Intent

A letter of intent is required as part of the application package for some programs. Before you write a letter of intent it's important to consider its purpose. Institutions have little time to get to know candidates in the actual audition, so a letter can be of significant help in this regard. As such, a letter needs to offer a real sense of who you are. A few things that may help:

- a. **Structure.** Begin with an outline.

- b. **Who are you?** Provide an honest sense of who you are. Your passion. Your challenges? What led you here?
- c. **Goals.** Provide a picture of your training and career goals.
- d. **How achieve?** Discuss why you believe you will be successful in a pre-professional training environment.
- e. **Why there?** Discuss how the institution to which you are applying will be beneficial in relation to the items above. This is your opportunity to demonstrate that you've done research specific to the institution.

Importantly, remember that the letter is *your* letter. It should be as specific to you and your voice as your audition is. It should illuminate the fact that you are ready, entirely as you are, to enter a pre-professional environment. Also, never use a generic address in your letter. Content within should relate specifically to the institution you are sending it to, and any direct references to the program speak to your research. These points also apply if you are asked to create a video speaking to your intent, as opposed to a written letter.

2. Letters of Recommendation

Some programs require letters of recommendation. The people you ask to write recommendations should know you well. Letter writers can be teachers, coaches, directors, church leaders, or anyone that can speak to your positive qualities. While each letter writer doesn't need to specifically address your potential as a performer (the auditors evaluate that), it *is* important that they reference qualities that will help you succeed in a college program. You should provide all your letter writers with:

- a. Information about each program they are writing a letter for.
- b. A copy of your letter of intent.
- c. Your resume.
- d. Four weeks to complete the letter.



3. The Resume

A performance resume is different than a traditional business resume. While it's likely you'll be sending it digitally (and not on the back of a headshot), keep the content to one page. Every performer is unique, and as such, each resume will vary in content and presentation. Create and structure your resume to illuminate your strengths and experiences! Beware the overuse of varying fonts, sizes, and italics. Your resume should be streamlined and presented in a way that makes it visually easy for auditors to find information. Also, don't lie on your resume. Ethics given, there is also no need, as auditors will meet you where your experiences lay.

Sample Resume

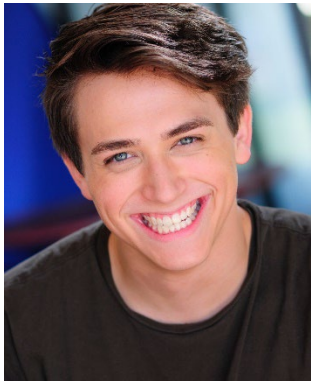
Billy Budd		
billybud@gmail.com		
555-555-1212		
Hgt: 6'0"		Voice: Tenor
Eyes: Brown		Range: c3-c5
Hair: Blue		
Professional		
Annie	Ensemble	Flat Rock Playhouse
Camp Rock	Shane Gray	Flat Rock Playhouse
High School		
The Crucible	Parris	Beltsville High School
Hamlet	Laertes	Beltsville High School
Spring Dance Concert 22	Dancer	Beltsville High Dance
Jail House Rock	Ensemble	Beltsville High School
Lysistrata	Ensemble	Beltsville High School
Spring Dance 19	Dancer	Beltsville High Dance
Community Theatre		
Death of a Salesman	Biff	Beltsville Players
My Fair Lady	Freddie	Beltsville Players
Carnival	Ensemble	Featured Dancer
Film		
Patriot Lane	Extra	Universal
Release	Ted	BHS Student Film
Additional Training		
Stage Combat	Millie Johnson (1 yr.)	
Dance	Jazz (5 yrs.), Tap (3 yrs.)	
Singing	Private Voice (4 yrs.)	
Prof. Workshops	Auditioning (Bill Smith), Shakespeare (Tina Packer), Hip Hop (Stacie Mardel)	
Special Skills		
Technical Theatre	Scene Painting, Carpentry, Props, Publicity	
Athletics	Swimming (varsity), Baseball (rec)	
Additional	Juggling, Horses (western)	
Education		
High School	Beltsville High School	

4. The Headshot

Your headshot is an important part of your program application. It will become a visual reference point for auditors in getting to know you and your materials. Some candidates employ professional headshot photographers to take headshots, which is wonderful if you have the resources. Most undergraduate college auditors are also fine with a non-professional image taken by someone who is proficient with a camera, provided that it is of good quality and looks like you when you enter the audition. Do not use a selfie, an image of you in costume, or one that you've cropped friends out of. Some guidelines for headshots:

- Should be in color.
- Should be framed chest up (unless otherwise indicated).
- Should allow auditors to see your personality.
- Should have good clarity and resolution.
- Should follow all specific specs provided to you!
- Should look like you when you arrive at the audition!

Sample Professional Headshot
Photographer Jeffrey Nicholson



Sample Amateur Headshot



5. The Application Form

It's likely you'll have to fill out an application form for each program that you are auditioning for. It is *vital* that you fill out the application thoroughly and correctly. All contact information should be up to date and legible. This may also be the time to update the old bieberfan007@jmail.com e-mail address that you've been using. No hate to the Beliebers but opt for a more professional variant. Make sure the contact information matches that on your resume. *Any contact information you provide on the application should be checked on a regular basis, including email and voice mail.*

6. Submitting Digital Materials

Later in this guidebook you'll find specifics about digital auditions. The first rule of submitting digital materials is to always follow provided submission guidelines and specs for each program! Read instructions carefully. Programs may see hundreds or thousands of applications, and the instructions provided are important for their optimum viewing and storing of materials. Sending digital materials in the wrong manner or the wrong format may cause them to be overlooked or discarded. (For example, if a program states it wants your headshot as a jpeg/jpg, make sure you don't send it in a different format.)

Next, properly label ALL digital files. You want the auditors to be able to easily find and locate your correct file! Unless the program gives you specific labeling instructions, label each file with your last name, first name, and content. For example:

- A headshot should be labeled: Budd Billy Headshot
- A resume should be labeled: Budd Billy Resume
- A letter of intent should be labeled: Budd Billy Letter of Intent

7. Submitting a Hard Application Packet

Hard applications are fading into the past, as programs move to digital formats. However, there may be an occasion to send a hard copy of your application packet. Once again, carefully follow all provided instructions. You want your materials to be well-presented and easily accessible. Unless instructions direct you otherwise, organize your materials as such.

- Page 1: Signed letter of intent
- Page 2: Headshot
- Page 3: Resume (or stapled to the back of your headshot)
- Page 4: Program Application
- Page 5: Letters of Rec. (unless sent directly from sources)
- Paperclip all materials together
- Place materials in a plain folder clearly labeled with your name

B. Online Forums

In discussions with current program students, the topic of online college audition forums came up quite a bit. Online forums can be a source of helpful data, but also of information that is counter-productive or destructive in nature. If you choose to join an online audition forum, please consider the following points, all recommended by students who are currently in college training:

- The input of those posting may or may not be based in fact.
- Don't judge yourself based on others. If someone posts that they got into their top school but you've gotten no offers yet, it doesn't mean much. Your path is your path, and it will show itself in due course. Be happy for them and move onward. Someone else's path does not speak to your value as a person or artist.
- Remember, you never know who may be in the forum. Anything you post is available for public consumption.
- The right program for *you* may be one that isn't being discussed in the forum.
- Never be lulled into a negative headspace. It will not serve you, your mental health, nor contribute to your success.
- If you find your mental health or outlook is being negatively impacted by participating in an online forum, leave the group.



VIDEO 9: [ONLINE FORUMS](https://youtu.be/cyL2zB72djo) Student Testimonial
(youtu.be/cyL2zB72djo)

XI. Campus Visits

In a time when candidates are auditioning digitally for institutions all around the nation (and globe), many are taking a leap and entering programs without having physically visited. It's easier than ever to get a sense of a program through virtual tours, class visits, discussions, and chats with students- all of which a program invested in you should make available. However, as proponents of live performance, we also know that virtual visits can't substitute for being physically in a place and getting a first-hand feel of the environment and the people within. As such, whenever budget and time allows, campus/program visits are highly encouraged.

A. Why Are Campus Visits Important?

University performance students often express how important campus visits were in their final decision-making process. Some report visiting a "second-tier" school, then discovering that it was their absolute best fit. Others describe visiting their top-choice program and being let-down or concerned about the environment or training they encountered. In short, a campus visit may prove to be the definitive part of your college audition and selection process.

An invested program will work to help candidates arrange campus visits, often collaborating with the college visitor center to do so. Some important parts of your campus visit can be:

- Viewing the town/region
- Campus tour
- Campus rec center
- Dorms
- Health/wellness center
- Facilities tour (of your intended major area)
- Chats with students (in your intended major)
- Class visits (in your intended major)
- Chats with faculty (in your intended major)
- Viewing a production or rehearsal

B. What to Observe During Your Visit

Before a campus visit, a candidate has already performed quite a bit of research. The visit is the time to put related judgements to the test. For example, do the classes illuminate adherence to stated class caps? Does the classroom environment support a stated mission surrounding individualized teaching? Are resources as stated on the website? A whole lot of stimuli and information comes at you during a campus visit. In addition to the research areas discussed, below are some items to take note of during your trip to campus.

1. Facilities and Resources

In addition to a campus tour, be sure to request a tour of major program facilities. This should include theatres, acting studios, dance studio's, music studios, seated classroom spaces, computer lab(s), design spaces, film/camera studios, and a voice-over studio if applicable.

2. Tone and Passion

This may be the most important part of your visit. Listen for the tone and passion of the people teaching and enrolled in the program. Are the faculty inviting, open, and invigorating? Are the students welcoming, passionate, and positive? Are they excited

to have you visit? Importantly, spend some time with students without faculty present. Ask them about the training and the environment. Ask them what they love and don't love about the place. Ask them what surprised them about the training.

3. Transparency

More than ever before, institutions are competing for student enrollment. As such, detecting transparency on campus/program visits is very important. If the visit feels more like a sales pitch than a give and take experience, that may be a warning sign. *Every* program has challenges and corresponding goals, and the good ones will be transparent in sharing them. As such, ask a faculty member *what goals the program has for continued growth and excellence*. A program that is teaching individuals to be honest artists will lead by example. Trust your gut.

4. Diversity and Inclusion

The industry and training programs alike are experiencing a long-needed reckoning for the historic lack of attention to diversity and inclusion in the performing arts. Feel empowered to ask relevant questions during your visit. Program's that are moving in the right direction will have no problem sharing challenges they've had, nor any corresponding goals they're working toward. As always, look beyond the talking points for evidence of tangible action.

5. Class Visits

Class visits are an essential part of your campus visit. Be sure to attend a class, if not several, within your intended major area. The classroom climate and work ethic can be a good indicator of how the program operates as a whole. Things to look for may include:

- Were you introduced and warmly welcomed?
- Did the students arrive on time?
- Were the students focused and ready to work?
- Did the teacher create a professional learning environment?
- Was the class free of distractions and side chatter?
- Were the students being aptly challenged?
- Were the students invested in the work?
- Is this an environment you would be excited to study in?

6. Production/Rehearsal Visits

Always ask if you can view a production or faculty-directed rehearsal. You'll learn a lot about the program and department. Consider the previous bullet points about class visits. In addition:

- Are you impressed by the professionalism/level of work?
- Are the performers being challenged as artists?
- Is the material well selected for the development of the performers?
- Are you excited by the potential of being in a production there?

7. Campus Environment

Candidates on campus visits often pay attention to the environment in their intended program, but sometimes neglect considering the environment of the campus as a whole. The campus could be your home for the next four years, so it should be a

place where you'll be happy. While it's not easy to get a full sense of environment in a brief visit, some things you can look for are:

- Does the campus appeal to your emotional aesthetic/your gut?
- Do you feel welcome in the environment?
- Is your tour guide legitimately enthusiastic about the institution?
- Does the campus have good recreation resources and an active student government?
- If important to you, do campus athletics create a sense of community? If not athletics, what does?
- Is the campus community excited about the arts? Ask!
- Is your guide *informed* about the arts degree programs?
- If important to you, is there an active Greek life on campus?
- Is the campus safe?
- Can you picture yourself on the campus for four years?

8. Program Relationships (Acting, MT, Dance, Music)

In section VIII there was discussion about the importance in investigating the relationships between performance programs. Unfortunately, some performance students don't discover until after being in residence that inter-program relationships may not best support their personal growth. A campus visit is an opportunity to move beyond external impressions and ask questions that really illuminate the structure and tone of those relationships. Be sure to inquire from current students as well as faculty. Pay particular attention to the relationships that will have a significant impact upon your particular interests and hopes for experiences.

Again, performer training should support your unique skill sets, as the craft and career is highly individualized. The relationship of the performance programs should support you in this outlook.

9. Regional and Community Opportunities

Training programs take various stances on students performing outside the institution. Some have a firm rule against it. Some allow it with certain qualifiers, such as having to audition on-campus first or waiting until a certain time in program tenure. Some freely allow it, without any qualifiers.

It's important to know that places with rules against it, or who allow it with qualifiers, are not doing it to limit your experiences. In contrast, those guidelines have been created to provide you the best training experience. In making those regulations, faculty heavily consider the content of their curriculum, its demands, and the trajectory of the students within. In short, rules about performing off-campus are not necessarily a negative. However, a campus visit is a great time to inquire about the *intent* of the guidelines in place.

10. On-Camera and Voice-Over Studio(s)

Earlier, there was discussion about the changing industry and the importance of on-camera and voice-over training. This is true for both acting and musical theatre candidates. An on-campus visit is a fantastic opportunity to view on-camera and/or voice-over spaces and resources. As you visit, be sure to inquire about the use of these as directly related to performance students. In many institutions the on-camera

or VO spaces are dedicated to the film/media programs and performance students have minimal to no access. So, does your intended program have its own studios and resources? If not, do the performance students have ample access to resources housed in a film or media department?

11. Casting Philosophy and/or Policies

If a program has a thorough handbook, it's likely you can find information on casting philosophy and/or policies (which is a good sign). When that information is not available, it can lead to some unproductive speculation about what informs production opportunities for students. If you are able to uncover this information in your research, the campus visit is the time to get a sense of how that philosophy or casting rules are actualized in practice. If you do not uncover a casting philosophy in your research, use your time on-campus to thoroughly inquire. A program casting philosophy may read something like this:

The BFA Acting and BFA Musical Theatre degrees are pre-professional training programs. The goal is to fruitfully prepare every student for the professional rigors of the industry. In relation, our casting philosophy is trifold, encompassing the dynamic of individual development/opportunity, promoting excellence in production, and embodying a "real-world" sense of industry competition. In short, our casting outlook aims to:

1. Provide developmental opportunities for each individual.
2. Contribute to excellence in production and the maintenance of professional values.
3. Provide students with a competitive real-world casting model.

Following auditions, all production directors meet to thoroughly discuss these dynamics in relation to the forthcoming production season. Student actors should be comforted that faculty directors make every attempt to equitably incorporate these principles.

(Missouri State University, BFA Acting Handbook)

12. Speaking to Current Students!

Your campus visit should allow you time to speak to current students in your intended program. There is simply no better way to get a full sense of training and environment than from those experiencing it first-hand. Aim for an opportunity to speak to students without faculty or staff present. Is there an opportunity to have a few students give you a facilities tour? Maybe grab coffee or lunch? If your time on campus doesn't allow for it, ask about being put in touch with students with whom you can connect with via phone or video chat.

13. Program Relationship with Administration

As discussed, the relationship between a degree program and college administration is an important, but often overlooked, point of investigation. Because it's hard to get this information through pre-visit research, your trip to campus is the ideal time to dig in. Ask questions during your all-campus tour as well as during your time with students.

- Is upper administrative supportive of the program?

- Does upper administration view productions?
- Does upper administration attend showcases? Alumni events?
- Does upper administration view the arts as a vital entity on campus and beyond?

14. Impact of Selective Admission

While on campus, investigate how your research on selective admissions/admission rate pans out in practice. Does it impact the program culture and social environment? Are the students disciplined and focused? How does that focus display itself inside the classroom? Are the students talented and moving toward professional entry? How is that evidenced in rehearsal or production? Remember, there are good institutions under all umbrellas of selectivity. Being on-campus is a great time to view the manner in which admissions selectivity can impact a program, and how that may relate to *your* goals and training needs.

15. Questions About Campus Life

Be sure to inquire about campus life as relevant to your own interests. Some candidates approach college looking for excellent training and a broad college experience that includes sports, recreational activities, Greek life, and student activities. And yes, excellent training can come hand-in-hand with a diverse college experience. However, other candidates are focused solely on training and academic success, having little interest in additional college activities. *Where do your interests fall?*

Identify what your interests are in this regard and inquire as such during your campus visit. As applicable, be sure to ask current program students what activities they are involved in outside of the degree area.

16. Town and Region

Depending upon your interests, the town and region in which the institution is located can play a part in your pre-professional training. During your campus visit, put aside time to explore the area and get a fuller picture. As noted in the earlier, consider how the area aligns with your goals and interest. It will be your home for four years.

17. Wellness

A campus visit is the perfect opportunity to measure how your research on wellness-related items is actualized. There are two general levels on which to make observations: campus-wide wellness, and program wellness.

a. Campus Wellness:

Visit the campus health center. Inquire from students whether the facility aptly supports the total body of students, faculty, and staff. Is there a pharmacy on campus? Inquire about mental health and wellness resources. Are there counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists on the college medical staff? What is the wait-time for an appointment?

b. Department/Program Wellness:

Individual health and wellness have historically been too often overlooked by training programs. In many cases, program outlooks and training were counter to it. The irony in that failure is that a successful performance career utilizes the entirety of the individual including mind, body, and emotional make-up. As such, while you are on campus, investigate the

commitment to health and well-being. A few things you may want to look for:

- Are health and wellness mentioned in any of the program publications?
- Are health and wellness mentioned in syllabi?
- In its professional preparation outlook, is the program dedicated to individualized training and “branding,” as opposed to dated casting ideals and “typing?”
- Are wellness classes available to students, either as core curriculum or as electives?
- Does the department have wellness resources, such as structured relationships with nutritionists and trainers, among others?
- Are any of the faculty qualified or certified as wellness professionals?
- Does the department sponsor any workshops or speakers related to health and wellness?
- Is the environment one of support or judgement?

18. Minor

There was earlier discussion on minoring and the importance of researching whether that was an option, if applicable to your interests. The campus visit is when you can see what minoring really ‘feels’ like. Sometimes what looks good on paper can be a different story when actualized. If applicable, speak with a student or two who are minoring and get their feedback.

- Do major and minor advisors work cohesively when advising students?
- Can a minor truly be realized or is it almost impossible to attain without extending time in college?
- In general, are area faculty supportive of carrying minors?
- If minoring in another performance category, is there a positive relationship between the two areas?
- Will a minor require summer classes? How many?

19. Red Flags

Sometimes we have a pre-conceived idea of a place built up in our minds. Perhaps we’ve even put that place on a pedestal- so much so, sometimes, that when we finally have the opportunity to experience it first-hand, we want so badly to confirm our notions that we ignore red flags that come our way. Current performance students were asked what red flags they encountered during their audition/campus visit process. In contrast, they were also asked for positive indicators they experienced.

Here is a sample of the **red flags** they experienced:

- A faculty member talked poorly about another program/university.
- A faculty member talked poorly about their own program in comparison to another.
- The current students were standoffish and snobby.
- Students talked poorly of other people in the program.
- They had one lone faculty member view my audition.

- A faculty member was not able to describe what they love about said program with *authenticity*.
- The campus tour guide didn't know about the theatre program.
- They did not thoroughly answer my questions about the program.
- They didn't pay attention while I was auditioning.
- Production rehearsal was chaotic.
- None of their faculty worked at a high level in the theatre or film industry.
- The callback process ran several hours behind.
- Told me I wouldn't get into the program because "they only take 5 women."
- Claimed everything about their program is perfect and weren't transparent about areas for growth. (Knowing where a program needs attention is helpful information, and if a faculty member says you "everything is perfect" that's a red flag. If they don't even talk transparently, it may not provide a "safe" environment.
- The only successful alumni they shared information about graduated 20 years ago.

And here is a sample of **positive indicators** experienced by the same group of students:

- A teacher took plenty of time to talk to me after class.
- The students were welcoming and friendly; were people I wanted to take classes with!
- Open communication between me and the program coordinator. If there was a change in plans or admission timeline, getting notified about it immediately.
- They had many different dates/time options for auditions.
- The opportunity to meet with faculty directly in my major/minor.
- The faculty made me feel like my education is a priority.
- Taking the time to hear about my learning disability, and about how we could work to turn my challenges into assets as a professional actor.
- Seeing positivity between program students as they interacted.
- They ushered me towards talking with current students (on a one-on-one basis).
- Production rehearsal had a professional environment.
- They talked openly about their goals for growth in diversity.
- The faculty expressed excitement about my work/potential.
- The faculty was passionate about their work and involved at a high level in the professional world, while still teaching.
- I have a speech issue, and a faculty member took lots of time to chat with me about it and the resources available to me in the program and on campus.
- The faculty and students were honest, real, and transparent.
- The majority of their alumni are getting work.
- People, people, people.

20. Trusting Your Gut

Trust your gut. As Jiminy Cricket liked to say...

*Give a little whistle!
Give a little whistle!
And always let your conscience be your guide."*

*Life beats down and crushes our souls
and theatre reminds us that we have one.
At least the type of theatre that I'm interested in;
that is, theatre that moves an audience.
You have the opportunity to literally impact the lives of people
if you work on material that has integrity...
Being an actor is a religious calling because you've been given the ability,
the gift to inspire humanity.*

— Sanford Meisner

PROGRAM RESEARCH CHECKLIST

Note: This checklist is not intended to be comprehensive, nor is it meant to suggest that every program should house all the noted elements. It's provided to serve as a general guide for research as relevant to personal goals and interest.

Campus and Regional Resources

- Is there good administrative support for arts programs?
- Is there a positive campus environment?
- Are there good campus fitness facilities and resources?
- Is there a sufficient health center (with related medical resources)?
- Are there sufficient mental health resources?
- Is there a productive regional/local theatre community?
- Is there a productive regional/local film community?
- Are there opportunities for off-campus recreation?
- Is there good on-campus safety?
- Is there good off-campus safety?
- Does the region suit my personal interests?

Program Resources

- Are there sufficient performance spaces and facilities?
- Are there sufficient smart classroom spaces?
- Are there good additional support/facilities?
- Is there an active film department?
- Is there an on-camera studio?
- Is there a voice-over studio?
- Are there sufficient dance and movement spaces?
- Are there sufficient acting studios?
- Are there sufficient student rehearsal spaces?

Faculty Activity

- Are the faculty active industry professionals?
- Are the faculty union affiliated?
- Are faculty members of/active within professional organizations?
- Do the faculty possess related professional certifications?
- Are the faculty passionate and vibrant?
- Are the faculty student-centered?
- Are students excited to speak about the faculty?

Program Dynamics

- Does the department outlook and philosophy meet your own?
- Does the program house the methodological outlook you desire?
- Does it have an affiliate AEA professional theatre?
- Is there an internship and/or EMC program?
- Is the program accredited (NAST, NASM, NASD)?
- Does the program have relationships with professional organizations?
- Are there positive relationships between internal performance programs?
- Any concerns about the program also housing an MFA?
- Does the program vibrate with passion and positivity?
- Have program representatives been transparent during your communications?
- Have program representatives taken a real interest in you?

- _____ Is there an environment and practices that promote diversity and inclusion?
- _____ Is there a positive and exciting classroom environment?
- _____ Do admission rates/policies suggest you'll be among students with fortitude?
- _____ Is there a handbook for your major area of interest?
- _____ Are the productions of good pre-professional quality?
- _____ Is the department website dynamic, clear and easily navigated?
- _____ Does the 'vibe' of the program excite you?
- _____ Does the program house a positive outlook on health and wellness?
- _____ Does the program hold a progressive outlook on branding and industry policies?
- _____ Do current students speak positively about the program and faculty?
- _____ Do current students spend their summers productively?

Curricular

- _____ Can a student minor if desired?
- _____ Is study-away allowed and feasible?
- _____ Is vocal (singing) study available to acting students?
- _____ Can students be in a different acting class *every* semester of residence?
- _____ Does the curriculum house style specific acting classes? (Shakespeare, etc.)
- _____ Can musical theatre students enroll in the acting style classes?
- _____ Are there on-camera acting classes?
- _____ Is there a voice-over class?
- _____ Can musical theatre students take on-camera and/or voice-over classes?
- _____ Does the curriculum house advanced voice and movement classes?
- _____ Is there a singing for the actor class?
- _____ Is there an auditions/career class?
- _____ Are there low caps for acting classes?
- _____ Is there an ample and exciting body of electives?
- _____ Are there contemporary/commercial dance styles offered?
- _____ Can acting students take dance classes?
- _____ Is there strong acting training for musical theatre students?
- _____ Is there a three-year track for transfer students? (as applicable)
- _____ Are there regular juries/assessment that provide feedback for growth?
- _____ Are there cut policies? Are they transparent and humane?

Alumni and Outreach

- _____ Are active connections maintained in industry centers?
- _____ Are high-level professional guest artists/alumni regularly brought to campus?
- _____ How successful are the department alumni?
- _____ Are a high percentage of alumni are working in the field?
- _____ Are the most recent alumni (last 2 years) engaged in exciting projects?
- _____ Are recent graduates moving to industry centers?
- _____ Are recent graduates garnering representation?
- _____ Are alumni accomplishments visible?
- _____ Is there structured/sponsored networking between students and alumni?

Opportunities and Casting

- _____ Are there ample opportunities for performance experience?
- _____ Are casting policies posted and clear?
- _____ Are students allowed to audition for off-campus projects?
- _____ Can students be cast in department productions not in their major discipline?
- _____ Are there opportunities to perform in student films?

- _____ Are there touring performance groups?
- _____ Are there student produced productions?

Showcase

- _____ Is a showcase held yearly in an industry center?
- _____ Is there a digital sharing component to the showcase?
- _____ Are the showcase performances of good quality?
- _____ Does the showcase demonstrate an understanding of the market/industry?
- _____ Does the showcase highlight the individual performers?
- _____ Are showcase participants garnering industry meetings?
- _____ Is the showcase well attended?
- _____ Is the showcase supported by administration?
- _____ Do showcase performers have professional websites, reels, and demos, as applicable?

Cost

- _____ Is the tuition in the range of affordability?
- _____ Will housing (on or off campus) cause excessive financial burden?
- _____ Will other costs of living add additional financial burden?
- _____ Is there ample aid and scholarships?
- _____ Is it possible to graduate with minimal debt?

Other

- _____ Is your gut telling you something?

Notes:

XII. Audition Material

Selecting material is one of the most important components of constructing an effective audition. It is also something a candidate has 100% control over. Nevertheless, many candidates select material that is ineffective in supporting their audition goals. Remember, your audition should aim for demonstrating readiness to *train* for the profession. Your material should be effective in helping auditors to see *who you are* and view a corresponding foundation of *honesty* in your performance.

Exercise: The Beginning

Step One: Close your eyes. Imagine you are outside the audition door. The lobby is filled with super talented people, and you know you must go in there and *prove* that you're worthy. You must *prove* that you're an incredible performer who displays uncanny of breadth character and depth of emotional range. All within your allotted time. You must *show* the auditors that you are better than the others in that lobby. Prove it! Now open your eyes. Did you feel stressed? Tense?

That is NOT how you want to enter an audition.

Step Two: Close your eyes. Discard any thoughts remaining from *Step One*. Breathe. Imagine you are outside the audition door. You have nothing to be concerned about because you are well prepared and very connected to your material. You are fully at ease. You just must go into the audition, be yourself, meet some supportive people, and live honestly and simply within the work. Now open your eyes. Feel the difference? Did you feel more relaxed? More confident?

That IS how you want to enter the audition room.

A. The Material Selection Process

Achieving *Step Two* from the exercise above begins with your choice of audition material. Let's begin with some common **mistakes** made in selecting audition material (both spoken and sung).

1. Choosing material to show emotional extremes.
2. Choosing material for shock value (language and sexualization).
3. Material that is outside of your believable age range/age-related experiences.
4. Material requiring dialects (that aren't your own).
5. Material requiring inauthentic broad characterizations.
6. Material that is overly familiar or a current hit.
7. Material you have no emotional connection to.
8. Material made popular by an iconic artist.
9. Choosing style/classical material when it has not been requested by auditors.
10. Material from anthologies.
11. Choosing material that is poorly written or contains writing cliché's.
12. Choosing material that doesn't support your strengths.
13. Choosing a song with limited acting potential.
14. Choosing material where the character is speaking to a deceased person.
15. Selecting material late in the process.

Every one of those missteps in choosing material can inhibit honest acting and prevent auditors from seeing your potential. You may have been rewarded for some of these in the past but remember you're now seeking entry into professional training and the goals are different. Now, let's turn those missteps around.

1. ~~Choosing material to show emotional extremes.~~ Simplify. Choose material that allows you to live in the work in an emotionally honest way and within the short time construct of a monologue or song. Take your focus away from demonstrating broad emotional range and lend it to emotional honesty.
= **Simplicity and emotional honesty**
2. ~~Choosing material for shock value (language and sexualization).~~ Shock value material reads as false and desperate, neither of which you want to be. Cursing or sexualization for the sake of shock will never work in your favor. That's not to say that auditors will have any concern with explicit language or content that is supported by a good script, feels appropriate to who you are, and chosen because you have an emotional connection to it.
= **Shock value has no value**
3. ~~Material outside of your believable range of age-related experiences.~~ Simply put, don't play old age. If you are 17, your honest age range for material may be 15-21. Furthermore, avoid material that presents conflicts or content far outside of your experiential range. For example, as a teenager, don't choose material that references having several children or a divorce.
= **Your believable age range**
4. ~~Material requiring dialects (that aren't your own).~~ Dialects are another distraction from honest acting. Avoid audition material that requires them, and don't "put on a dialect" for material that doesn't.
= **Use your own voice**
5. ~~Material requiring inauthentic broad characterizations.~~ Similar to dialects, broad characterizations distract from the presence of honesty. You are a unique and colorful individual, and it will show by choosing material that feels authentic to you.
= **Authenticity**
6. ~~Material that is overly familiar or a current hit.~~ Hyper-popular pieces will inevitably be performed at college auditions. A lot. Don't invite auditors to compare you with the five other performers they saw perform it that morning.
= **Avoid the overly popular**
7. ~~Material you have no emotional connection to.~~ Without fail, material that an artist has an emotional connection will serve them better at an audition.
= **Personal connection to the material**
8. ~~Material made popular by an iconic artist.~~ Why invite a comparison to Lady Gaga or Frank Sinatra? Auditors want to experience *you* living honestly in a given circumstance. Reminding them of "Frank" or "Gaga" will hinder that.
= **Avoid the icons**
9. ~~Choosing style/classical material when it has not been requested by auditors.~~ If classical/style material has been requested by auditors, use these guidelines to select material that is right for you. If it hasn't been requested, think hard before committing to it. Without extensive training in the genre, a style piece can point an actor toward indicating rather than acting honestly. Think hard about whether that unrequested style piece will actually compliment your strengths.
= **To style or not to style?**

10. ~~Material from anthologies.~~ Many candidates don't know where to find material (we'll get to that) so they turn to drama and song anthologies. Material from anthologies often contributes to other noted missteps. With proper planning, it's likely you have access to better material.
= **Avoid anthologies**
11. ~~Choosing material that is poorly written or contain writing clichés.~~ The aim of audition material is to support the performer living believably in given circumstances. In short, the writer, lyricist, and the composer should all disappear. Material containing cliché's, writer tricks, or cutesy content makes auditors think about the material instead of your honest presence.
= **Good writing matters**
12. ~~Choosing material that doesn't support your strengths.~~ There is no other you. Your 'youness' is your strength and your golden ticket. Choose material that supports this outlook. Choose material that you can perform confidently and honestly. Singers, always choose songs within your range and vocal abilities.
= **Support your unique strengths**
13. ~~Choosing songs with limited acting content.~~ Singers, auditors will of course be listening to your vocal qualities in relation to trainability. However, demonstration of vocal skills should never overpower good acting within your song. Choose vocal material that gives you circumstances to believe in. A conflict. A want. Something that gives the character a reason to sing, rather than just speak. Good acting, without exception, lends to a better vocal performance.
= **Choose good acting songs**
14. ~~Choosing material where the character is speaking to a deceased person.~~ It's advisable to choose material in which the character is pursuing a want from another living character, even if that want involves self-reflection.
= **Have a strong character want**
15. ~~Selecting material late in the process.~~ Do not wait to select your material! It should be one of the first steps in your process. Start as early as you can. Leave time to work the material, put it away for some time, then come back to it, then repeat. You want to enter your audition confident in your material, in your preparation, and ready to let go and live honestly. Side note: If you're running lines in the lobby before an audition, you aren't prepared.
= **Select material early**

All fifteen of these considerations are geared to moving your audition away from false indicating, and toward performing confidently and honestly in defined dramatic circumstances.

B. Other Considerations for Material Selection

1. Time Constraints

Sometimes (especially at unified auditions) you will be given time constraints for your audition. In some circumstances you'll be cut off if you exceed the specific allotted time. There is one big rule of thumb regarding time and material selection;

you never want to be onstage at an audition worried about time. It will interfere with your ability to be present with ease and honesty. A couple of helpful hints:

- When choosing dramatic material, remember that performing it will take more time than reading it. Acting is inclusive of listening and behaving without words. A monologue that takes two minutes to read may be a three-minute monologue when well-acted.
- Select material that takes *less* than the allotted time. For example, if you are given two minutes to perform a monologue, choose one that only takes 90-100 seconds when well-acted. This will alleviate concerns about time during your audition. The same applies to vocal material.
- When choosing material, consider the totality of your audition, then rehearse as such (more on this later). If you are provided three minutes to do a monologue and 16 bars, construct your material selection to alleviate any concern for going over the time limit. Again, your performance in rehearsal should take less time than what is allowed. *Time should never be in your head onstage.*
- Good material selection and proper preparation alleviates all concerns regarding time constraints.

2. Dramatic Structure and Arc

The most fundamental job of a performer is to perform in a manner that invites the audience into their journey. As such, it is often heard that it's important to have audition material that "goes somewhere." This is a point where candidates can get carried away. An arc, or "going somewhere," refers to the fact that the character is in the midst of a conflict, and as a result there is an emotional journey. The arc that is achievable in 16 bars of music or a monologue is vastly different than that of a full-length work. Simplify. While thinking about dramatic arc, qualify it by the amount of time auditors honestly live with the character in the audition. Importantly, don't underestimate the emotional journey that is already present in a character living in moment of personal conflict.

3. Memory Monologues and Songs

Candidates are often told to stay away from "memory monologues and songs" for fear that they don't "go anywhere," or are void of "character want." I disagree with this recommendation, though I understand why it may be made to novice actors. I would argue that the moments when characters recall and share memories are some of the most need-driven in performance. It comes down to *good acting*. If a candidate performs a "memory piece" that is driven by character want, it can be extremely beneficial in illuminating potential for training. However, performance of a "memory piece" that is void of character want will also be void of emotional activity (and not serve the auditionee). A few thoughts:

- Don't shy away from memory or recall pieces where the character is actively fighting for a want.
- Good acting is everything.
- Avoid doing multiple memory/recall pieces within your audition.

4. What Does Contrasting Mean?

Audition instructions often refer to "contrasting" pieces. Do not interpret this as meaning that you need to present two broadly different character types (for all the

reasons noted above in missteps). “Contrasting” generally refers to the “feel” or “emotional tone” of the works that you choose. For instance, if one piece involves a character in a challenging emotional moment, a contrasting work may possess lighter or even humorous circumstances. That said, be sure to follow any specific instructions (if provided) as related to an institution’s definition of “contrasting.”

5. What Does Contemporary Mean?

Ask ten people to define “contemporary” and you’ll get ten different answers. As such, this is can be a confusing term for audition candidates. Does contemporary refer to material written in the past ten years? The last twenty? The last fifty? The best way to approach this quandary is to consider how the material *FEELS*. Does the material make us feel like we’re transported back several decades, or does it feel like it was said today? Aim for the latter. Most material that feels “contemporary” was written recently, but there is no hard date range stamp to put on it. Ask yourself, does it *feel* current? Does the dialogue *feel* fresh and relevant? Does the conflict *feel* contemporary?

6. Can a Monologue Be Cut?

Yes, audition monologues may be cut. However, it is important to retain the character objective and intent as provided by the author. Cutting does not give permission for changing. An auditionee should never alter the words or dialogue provided by an author. This includes cursing. If expletives are present in the work, they are part of the authors intent and should not be eliminated.

7. Song Cuttings

When cutting a song, it’s important to consider the aforementioned discussions on arc and the presentation of personal strengths. Find and employ the cutting that best illuminates you, your vocal skills, and your capacity for honest acting. Later in the guide you’ll find particulars about marking music and presenting it to the accompanist.

8. Writing Your Own Work

Many candidates ask if they can write their own monologue. It’s important to know that many auditors will balk at this idea. I understand their perspective. Most candidates are not developed as dramatic writers. Also, auditors also want to see the work a candidate did in reading, interpreting a full work, and making related character choices. That said, the artistic world is changing, and more and more performers are writing and performing their own work. If a candidate is a good dramatic writer, and they perform a self-written piece balanced by another from a traditional source, it *can* provide insight into their potential development as an artist. I’ve seen self-written monologues that inspired incredible auditions. However, many self-written works simply do not serve the auditionee.

If you do choose to write a monologue, understand that you’re taking a concerted risk. Also be sure that one of your other selections is from a full-length work that you’ve read, and which utilizes relevant acting choices. On occasion, an auditionee will enter an audition and perform a song they have written. The exact same considerations apply.

9. Material from Film and Television

Candidates often ask if they can perform work from a screenplay. This is also something that some auditors will balk at, often because the related auditions they see can become imitations of what the candidate has seen on the screen. However, once again, our artistic climate is changing. As such, it is much more universally acceptable to audition with a work written for the screen, big or small. A couple of thoughts for those who choose to use material from a screenplay:

- Avoid currently popular works.
- Never choose a piece from something present in your visual memory.
- Avoid works performed by iconic actors.
- When possible, read the entire screenplay and develop the character accordingly.
- If you perform a work from a screenplay, it is recommended that another selection be from a stage play.

10. Selecting Material/Music for Musical Theatre Dance Auditions

Dance auditions for musical theatre are evolving. Just a brief time ago it was unprecedented for a program to admit a student they hadn't seen in a *live* dance call. With the development of digital sharing, many programs are now making admission decisions based upon digital submissions. This may put responsibility upon the candidate to provide their own music and choreography. Importantly, it can provide the candidate with an opportunity to prepare in a way that highlights their strengths.

- *Read and follow* digital audition instructions very carefully. They will often provide specifics regarding what styles to prepare, technical specifics they want to see within, and information about music selection (if applicable).
- If you are provided the freedom to select material, utilize your research about the program (and the dance training within) to inform your process.

11. Where to Find Material

College acting and musical theatre majors were asked what resources they used to find their successful audition pieces. Here are some of their responses:

- *New Play Exchange*: newplayexchange.org.
- Email a professor at the institution and request a student mentor.
- Read as many contemporary plays as you can find.
- Watch live plays—as many as you can.
- Go to high school thespian conferences and watch monologue performances.
- Review monologues you may have done for thespian conferences
- Get a *Script'd* account and peruse lesser-known plays: www.scriptd.com
- Look online for indie film and television scripts. There are many free websites.
- Go on YouTube and search for your favorite performers and composers. There are always concerts or new works being uploaded.
- YouTube is your best friend.
- Look at plays that have won awards in different play festivals and sift through until you find some age-appropriate material.
- Ask people who just recently graduated if they know of any good monologues!
- Check with the director at your high school or community theatre.

- Some great monologues are from duet scenes cut to create a killer monologue.
- Review plays you've worked on before in scene study.
- Review reels and self-tapes on YouTube and on actor websites.
- It's often said to shy away from popular songs, but if you know for a fact that you can sing the song and sell it like crazy, go for it!
- Go to *New Musical Theatre* if you need help finding songs that fit your vocal range. This website has a plethora of songs to choose that happen to be from lesser-known musicals: www.newmusicaltheatre.com
- Run song ideas by a director who knows your voice! Sometimes the song you want to sing isn't the song you need to sing!
- Look in young adult novels that have first-person content.
- Check out monologue books from the library. Read them to see which authors are writing material that suits you, then find their plays and read them.

C. Type vs. Brand

Young performers frequently ask questions about “typing.” Thankfully, notions and practices involving “type” and “typing” are being eliminated from quality training programs. Training institutions and industry casting professionals are experiencing a long-overdue reckoning, forcing us to examine how the teaching and practice of typing have contributed to discriminatory casting practices and physical/mental health issues in performers.

Terminology and practices will continue to evolve, but “typing” is currently (and rightfully) being replaced by the notion of “branding.” You may be wondering what the difference is between the two. Simply put, the difference involves where power is placed in relation to making determinants about a performer’s castability. Practices involving “typing” typically infer how you are viewed from the outside, and thus cast by others. This can lead to an over-simplification of the performer, remove the performer's control over their own image and self, and lend to stereotyping. There’s simply not a place for it in our industry anymore. In short, with “typing” the determinants about the performer are often made by an external source.

“Branding” is a term rooted in business and marketing that aims to put the power of “image and self” back into the hands of the individual performer. Brand involves much more than physical appearance. It encompasses energy, talent, aura, and every piece of an individual that makes up who they are as a performer. Importantly, the performer and no one else gets to make decisions about their brand (unless of course, the performer seeks consult.) Importantly, *your brand IS you*. You are the only you there is, so your brand is already present and unique from all others.

All this said, here is the lowdown on branding as related to auditioning for undergraduate training programs. *Don't worry about it!* From material selection, to choosing audition attire, to the audition interview, just be your honest self. Let your unique qualities and talent do the speaking.

Now, some folks will argue with me here. In their arguments, they will introduce ugly realities about casting and the “real world.” In some respect, they will be right. There are many ugly and discriminatory casting practices present in the industry (including training programs.) In retort, I would propose a few points to consider:

1. By continuing to examine these issues in the same historic manner and language, we’re contributing to the status quo, and remain part of the problem.

2. Again, the auditionee needs to display readiness to train for the profession, not readiness to enter the profession. While in a quality training program, the performer will *then* learn to healthily consider how their talents and brand may contribute to a marketing and business outlook.

Performers, in your preparation and on audition day, just be your best self. “Be your own brand of beautiful.” When it comes to branding, I’ll again quote Scarface:

“Don’t worry about it!”

XIII. Acting Rehearsals: Monologues & Songs

Some candidates become so consumed by the college application process, that preparing a quality performance is left to the last minute. That’s a little like a football candidate saying, “I’ll hold off on being ready until a recruiter comes to a game.” In that case, they won’t be ready. Readiness involves advanced preparation at all levels, so when the player steps on the field they don’t *have* to worry about the quality of play. They can live simply from moment to moment and be fully available to respond to the challenges thrown at them on the field. It’s the same for performers. Don’t forget the primary goals of your college audition; to let auditors see who you are, and to let them envision trainability in relation to your craft. As such, it is essential that you are well-prepared and possess a core sense of honesty in your performance.

While the goals of this document do not primarily involve serving as an acting “how to” guide, below are some step-by-step exercises that may contribute to the development of a well-acted audition- one that allows auditors to see your full potential! The exercises that follow apply to both monologue and song preparation.

A. Acting Rehearsals Stage One: Listening

At its core, acting and musical theatre performance is listening and honest responding. As such, it is essential that the auditionee (be they an actor, singer, dancer, or all three) is emotionally available and *listening* with all their entirety. Ironically, many budding performers pick up audition pieces and start “acting” before they even know who their character is listening to, or why. As a result, the performance becomes fabricated and false, void of the honesty that auditors hope to see. In this light, some candidates diminish their chances from their very first step. As such, it’s vital you *start your monologue and song process by listening and receiving*, instead of “acting.” Here are a few steps to help start your listening process.

Listening Exercise Step #1

If applicable, locate and read the entire works that your monologues and songs are from. Do not internally act while you read. Listen and receive.

Listening Exercise Step #2

Rewrite your chosen pieces by hand (both monologues and songs) without any punctuation. Instead of writing in sentence form, on each “line” write only the next single thought, discovery, or image from the text. This is meant to more closely mirror the way we think and behave as humans: we hear, then feel, then have a need to respond, then search for words, then we speak. As an example, let’s break down the following line from *Melancholy Play* by Sarah Ruhl.

As published:

“It’s this feeling that you want to love strangers, that you want to kiss the man at the post office, or the woman at the dry cleaners—you want to wrap your arms around life, life itself, but you

can't and this feeling wells up in you, and there is nowhere to put this great happiness—and you're floating.”

As rewritten per exercise, led by each new thought, discovery, or image:

*“It’s
this feeling
that you want
to love
strangers
that you want to
kiss the man
at the post office
or
the woman
at the dry cleaners
you want to
wrap your arms around life
life itself
but you can’t
and this
feeling
wells up in you
and
there is nowhere to put this
great happiness
and you’re
floating.”*

There are a thousand different ways this could have been re-written, depending upon actor instinct. What’s important is that, during the course of the exercise, it moved away from being text as read and toward honest dialogue that is informed by thoughts, discoveries, and images. A wonderful playwright like Sarah Ruhl offers dialogue that feels easily discovered and spoken. As such, your first job here is to move *inside* of it and begin your process as a listener.

Now, perform the same exercise with all your chosen pieces.

Listening Exercise Step #3

Grab a partner and, without “acting” or “emoting,” simply say the dialogue from your monologue or song to them just as you re-wrote it, thought by thought. The goal is listening, not acting. Each new thought or word spoken should be inspired by your partner, and by the want to find the best way to share with them. Resist any urge to “act” or go at a pre-conceived pace. Again, your goal is listening to your partner (even though they are not speaking) and discovering the reciprocal need to speak.

Now, complete *Step #3* for all your pieces.

Listening Exercise Step #4

Repeat *Step #3* but ask your partner to call you out when they sense you “acting” at them—essentially when they don’t believe you. When they catch you “acting” have them say “I don’t believe you,” after which you must go all the way back to the beginning of the piece and start

over. This may take time. That's okay. One benefit of this exercise is that you are forced to slow down, minimize emotional pre-conceptions, and really start discovering why the character says what they do. A side benefit is that many actors find this process eliminates later need for formal "memorizing."

Now complete *Step #4* for all your pieces.

Be sure to complete Steps #1 through #4 with all your pieces, songs included.



VIDEO 10: [BEGIN WITH LISTENING](https://youtu.be/0RfChFEUTGk) Exercise
(youtu.be/0RfChFEUTGk)

B. Acting Rehearsals Stage Two: Time and Place

In completing *Stage One*, you'll begin to feel an emotional connection to your partner and the work. Your next job in the rehearsal process is to *start building a character foundation* without losing the quality of listening you've been working on. *Stage Two* involves determining the time and locale (environment) in which your scene takes place. This is vital on so many levels. First, time and place are wildly important in impacting how we respond emotionally to a given circumstance. Second, time and place heavily determine how we live physically and vocally in those circumstances. Keep working with a partner for now!

Time/Place Exercise Step #1

1. With your partner, act the following line:

"God, I hate you. I've hated you since I found out what happened that summer."

2. Now, incorporate the following choices about time and place, and act it again:

— Time: 2019. 11:15 p.m. After the football game.

— Place: Stadium parking lot. They are several cars away.

"God, I hate you. I've hated you since I found out what happened that summer."

3. Now, try these different choices and act it again.

— Time: 2022. Morning, right after church.

— Place: In a crowded Starbucks. They are sitting in a booth across from you.

"God, I hate you. I've hated you since I found out what happened that summer."

Feel different? It's possible you're already noting the power of making strong choices about time and place. You may have also noticed how those choices inform intent, communication, and physical behavior.

Your *Stage Two* goal is to now turn this potential toward your own songs or monologues. Proceed to *Step #2* below:

Time/Place Exercise Step #2

1. Sit in a chair in the center of the room/stage with your partner directly across from you. Close your eyes.
2. Open all your senses.

3. Open your imagination.
4. Keeping your eyes closed throughout (and staying in your chair) respond verbally, from a character perspective, to any questions from your partner about time and place. Before you answer, you are tasked to first see and emotionally feel what you describe.
5. Have your partner ask questions that guide you through the discovery of environment. Their questions can build upon your responses, thus requiring more specificity as the exercise develops. Their line of questions should help discovery of the following:
 - Specific physical construct of the immediate space.
 - Physical construct of anything within view.
 - Any people within listening range.
 - Any people out of listening range.
 - Sounds, both near and far.
 - The emotional energy of the space.
 - Temperature, humidity, and air flow.
 - Smell

See the video below for an active example. Perform this exercise with all your pieces, then notate your discoveries on the character form provided at the end of this section. You can always change and strengthen your choices throughout your rehearsal process.



VIDEO 11: [TIME AND PLACE](https://youtu.be/qyMr0Q23L2M) Exercise
(youtu.be/qyMr0Q23L2M)

Frequently Asked Questions About Environment

- **Why is the first character question about environment (time and place)?**
We begin actor choice-making with time and place because, as noted, environment informs *all* of our behavior. How can we begin to put a work “on its feet” without first knowing time and place? Often, when an auditionee is locked in their body (or not knowing what to do with their body in the room) they have not made strong choices about character environment.
- **Can an actor change the time and place (as written) for an audition?**
Candidates are encouraged to first read the work (if available) and give due attention to the environment the author has provided. However, for audition purposes, candidates can “flesh out” and re-orient the time and place as they choose.
- **What is a positive character choice?**
A positive choice is one that contributes to dramatic conflict and emotional complexity. A negative choice will negate dramatic conflict and simplify emotional complexity. Aim for positive choices. More below.
- **Is it better to choose a private space or a public space for character environment?**

Often, I'll call back a candidate and change their environment from private to public. As an auditor, my goal may be to remove preconceived choices and have them make a stronger and more intimate connection to the other character. A candidate's ability to adjust is often a telling sign about their core sense of honesty and potential for training. However, the right answer to this question is the one that best serves you and your work. Make the choice that most positively contributes to character conflict, emotional complexity, and honesty in performance.

C. Acting Rehearsals Stage Three: Relationship

With *Stage Two* (environment) under your belt, the next step (*Stage Three*) in your rehearsal process is to examine the givens and make strong choices about character relationships. Remember, strong (positive) choices are ones that increase the conflict or emotional complexity of the scene. Perform the relationship exercises below for each of your pieces (songs included).

Relationship Exercise Step #1

Make a list of all characters relevant to the piece. This should include:

- The character to whom you are speaking.
- Any characters that are mentioned in the piece.
- Any characters that are not mentioned but inform the piece.

Relationship Exercise Step #2

Using your list from *Step #1*, make informed choices about your social relationships with each of the other characters. Start with the character to whom you are speaking. For example, is the character you are speaking to a sibling? If so, what does *sibling* mean? Are they a teacher? If so, what does that term mean socially? What social and inter-personal behaviors come with that social label you've arrived at?

Complete this for every character that you noted in *Step #1*. Notate your choices on the character sheet provided.

Relationship Exercise Step #3

Using your character list from *Step #1*, make informed choices about your emotional relationships with each of the other characters. How do you *feel* about them? *Really* feel. Feelings often supersede words. As such, what do you feel for them that supersedes words? For example, if you love them, what does that *feel* like? For, example; if you decided in *Step #2* that you are talking to your sister (social relationship), your job in *Step #3* is determining how you feel (emotional relationship) about your sister.

I often tell my students that they need to feel *beyond* words, where words are no longer enough to explain feeling. This capacity is rooted in relationship. Complete *Step #3* for every character you noted in *Step #1*, and for each of your pieces. Notate your choices.

Relationship Exercise Step #4

Create a timeline of 10 definitive moments in the relationship history between you and the character you're speaking to. Consider how each of those moments informs the depth and complexity of your emotional relationship.



VIDEO 12: [RELATIONSHIP](https://youtu.be/eAiRrVShmAQ) Exercise
(youtu.be/eAiRrVShmAQ)

D. Acting Rehearsals Stage Four: Character Want

By clearly establishing environment and relationship(s) you've started building a solid character foundation. The next vital step is determining character want. Want is the reason your character is speaking. Importantly, want is the reason your character must speak and take action immediately! The most effective audition choices involving want are the ones that are *directly in response to the other character* and determined by an emotional need that must be immediately attended to.

Want = what you want, right now, from the character you are speaking to.

Like relationship, want should ultimately move beyond describable logistics and move inside what the character *feels for the other character*. It's the difference in dramatic need between:

1. Romeo looking at Juliet on the balcony and wanting to be in a relationship with her.
2. Romeo watching Juliet, feeling a depth of love that can't be explained, and needing to embrace her at that moment- so much so that he will literally die for the chance to do so.

Now, choose and apply strong wants to each of your audition pieces (monologues and songs). Notate your choices. A positive want *should always translate to dramatic action and immediacy*.



VIDEO 13: [WANT](https://youtu.be/tf8ByEjb9L0) Exercise
(youtu.be/tf8ByEjb9L0)

E. A Note About Negative vs. Positive Choices

Dramatic scenarios present a conflict. As noted, it's the actor's job to engage that conflict by making positive character choices, as opposed to negative ones. So, what exactly is the difference between negative and positive choices?

A **NEGATIVE** choice will:

- Decrease want.
- Simplify or weaken relationship need.
- Decrease emotional complexity and conflict.
- Decrease dramatic conflict and action.

A **POSITIVE** choice will:

- Increase want.
- Strengthen relationship need.
- Increase emotional complexity and conflict.
- Increase dramatic conflict and action.

Negative vs. Positive Choices: An Example

An actor is playing John. John is in a relationship with Kelly. John just discovered that Kelly dated John's best friend Travis a year ago, but never told him. Kelly is holding John's shoes so that John won't leave the apartment. John says:

"You are a liar. I'm done. Just give me my shoes so I can go!"

NEGATIVE Actor Choices May Be:

- Relationship: John hates Kelly for hurting him.
- Want: John wants his shoes so he can leave.

These choices are negative because they negatively impact the emotional complexity and weaken the dramatic conflict. John can grab his shoes and leave. Scene over.

POSITIVE Actor Choices May Be:

- Relationship: John is deeply in love with Kelly. Beyond words, in love.
- Want: John wants Kelly to convince him to stay, make him feel that he's the only one she's ever loved. He needs Kelly and needs to hear that she loves him—so much so that he will risk leaving to get it.

See the difference? By making positive choices, the relationship is strengthened, there is more emotional complexity, and a much stronger dramatic conflict. The scene has now just begun. Like John, characters often say the very opposite of what they actually want.

F. Acting Rehearsals Stage Five: The Moment Before

Having a strong moment before each of your pieces will strengthen the clarity and honesty of all and can make a monumental positive impact on your audition as a whole. As such, it is an imperative part of the actor's rehearsal and character development process.

The Moment Before Exercise Step #1: Two Minutes

For each of your audition pieces, create and document the characters journey for the two minutes before the dialogue begins. If givens are not provided by the script, fill in the blanks with your own strong choices. Then, translate all of the logistical considerations of those two minutes into how they relate to what the character *feels* at the top of the scene. Was your character running up the stairs? Banging on the door? Reading a note? What discoveries were made in those two minutes? How do those two minutes increase conflict and emotional immediacy when the scene begins?

The Moment Before Exercise Step #2: The Immediate Moment

When it comes to auditioning, having a strong *immediate* moment before is imperative. It is the tool that bridges the actor from the world of the audition to the world of the character. When performing multiple works, it's also the bridge from one character world to another. The immediate moment before is *the very moment before your character speaks or sings*. It's the moment of discovery that makes your character NEED to speak or sing.

Everything in this moment should draw you toward *listening* to the other character, and into your emotional connection with them. Make a strong and positive choice that commands the need to speak/sing. In terms of time, this may only be a few seconds in the character's world, but for the performer those seconds are the imaginative and emotional entry into that world.

Now, take approximately 30 seconds before your character speaks and integrate the moment before into your previous choices.

1. Embrace and feel the environment.
2. Embrace and feel the relationship.
3. Hear/see what the other character says/does.
4. FEEL how it makes you feel.
5. Want to respond.
6. Find the words to respond.
7. Respond.

As you rehearse and firm up your ability to step into character world, trim that 30 seconds down and into the approximate 2-3 seconds you'll take at the audition before you begin your piece. Complete *Stage Five* for all of your pieces.

A performance begins during the character moment before, not when an actor starts speaking.



VIDEO 14: [THE MOMENT BEFORE](https://youtu.be/HIFb_fUAhcg) Exercise
(youtu.be/HIFb_fUAhcg)

G. Acting Rehearsals Stage Six: “You Don’t Matter”

A quality of great performers involves the ability to get out of their own head, out of their own way, and to place all their focus and emotional investment into the givens and the character they are speaking to. It sounds simple, but monologue and song auditions can complicate this by a) physically removing your acting partner, and b) creating a high-stress scenario that increases inhibiting self-awareness. Successful auditions are the ones where the performers eliminate these challenges and live honestly in the character circumstances. *Stage Six* is designed to help you let go of self-awareness, called “You Don’t Matter.”

Stage Six Exercise

1. Using a partner, rehearse the entry and introduction for your audition. After your introduction and just before your *Immediate Moment Before*, look at your partner, breathe, open yourself up, and say to yourself:

“It’s all about them. I don’t even matter.”

2. Then, drop into your moment before, *FEEL*, and begin your first piece.

This is a beautifully simple and effective exercise for getting out your own way (and head) at an audition. Sometimes I will stop a stressed/self-aware candidate mid-audition and have them perform this exercise, then re-start. It consistently helps the actor stop self-evaluating and step more honestly into the character’s emotional world.

Do this every time you rehearse and perform your audition. Personally, after 30+ years of acting, it still helps me get out of my own way.



VIDEO 15: [YOU DON'T MATTER](https://youtu.be/1tLh2IMJG0o) Exercise
(youtu.be/1tLh2IMJG0o)

H. Acting Rehearsals Stage Seven: The Illusion of the First Time

Allow yourself a good measure of rehearsals to work through all six of the aforementioned stages. In doing so, you can create a sturdy foundation for an honest audition performance. Then, not to be forgotten, remember that *good acting always provides the audience with the illusion that the action and dialogue are taking place for the very first time*. It's the illusion of the first time that invites audiences (including auditors) to take the rest of the emotional journey with the actor and want to discover what happens next in the character's world.

There is an anecdote about a Broadway musical production in the late 80's/early 90's. The cast of the show had gone largely unchanged for several years. The actors knew the musical inside and out, they knew their characters, and they were offering predictably dependable performances every evening and matinee. However, the director happened to visit the production and found it largely vacant of sincere feelings, and notably, absent of the illusion of the first time. As such, the entire ensemble was fired, and the artistic team re-cast the show with actors who approached the script, characters, and music with fresh and eager eyes.

So, what happened? As told, the original ensemble had become so familiar and comfortable with all performative components, that they had lost the most essential one- the illusion of the first time! As such, the performances had stopped "inviting" audiences to take the emotional journey with them. The performances had become predictable and emotionally stale.

This anecdote applies fruitfully to college auditions. Auditors see it quite frequently; an audition where the rehearsal homework was done, and the performer is proficient. And yet, it's missing that important ingredient-*the illusion of the first time*- that welcomes the audience into the emotional journey. In short, the illusion of the first time separates exceptional performances from average ones.

Illusion of the First Time Exercise

Once the entirety of your audition is in a good and consistent shape, periodically perform the following exercise to keep things feeling fresh and creating the illusion that the character content is being experienced "for the first time."

Using a partner:

1. Just before your *immediate moment before*, look at your partner, breathe, open yourself up, and say to yourself:


"It's all about them. I don't even matter."
2. Then, tell yourself to forget everything you know about what is ahead in the piece including discoveries, dialogue, and outcome. Forget all of it. Blank slate.
3. Then, drop into your moment before and *feel*. Feeling and want should be all you're left with. Then begin your piece.

Perform *Stage Seven* with every one of your audition pieces (monologues and songs). Performers often give due diligence to illusion of the first time in monologues and scenes but leave songs out of the work equation. Ironically, songs are sometimes the most important in this light, as rhythm and melody can lull the performer into a predictable state that lacks honest listening, discovery, and the consequent illusion of the first time.

 VIDEO 16: [THE ILLUSION OF THE FIRST TIME](https://youtu.be/kktHHolpLJw) Exercise
(youtu.be/kktHHolpLJw)

I. Acting the Song

The exercises within *Stages One* through *Seven* can and should all be completed in relation to audition songs. It is essential for auditors to witness listening, honesty and discovery in song performances when considering a candidate for musical theatre admission. View this video link for additional advice in this regard.

 VIDEO 17: [TIPS FOR ACTING THE SONG](https://youtu.be/irpOU37ToDk) with Robert Westenberg
(youtu.be/irpOU37ToDk)

“All great achievements require time.”
— *Maya Angelou*

ACTING CHARACTER TOOL CHART FOR AUDITIONS

Guiding Principles

1. Listening
2. Positive Choices
3. Moment to Moment Discovery
4. Illusion of the First Time

Time*	
Place*	
Relationship(s)*	
Want*	
Moment Before**	

*Sanford Meisner

**Michael Shurtleff

XIV. Rehearsals Continued

A. Constructing Your Audition

Candidates often ask, “Does it matter what order I perform my pieces in?” “Song first? Monologue? Dramatic? Comedic?” When it comes down to it, auditors don’t care what order your pieces are performed in. It’s an individualized decision, made by you and informed by your skills and process. A few things you may want to consider as you make these determinations:

- Consider leading with your strongest piece. It’s said that auditors often make decisions within the first 20 seconds of an audition. There is truth in this, as first impressions are important. Consider what piece will best introduce your skills and let you begin with a sense of confidence in self.
- What is the arc your pieces when all united as a full audition? Does this inform what order you may want to perform them?
- Does the emotional nature of your pieces inform placement? For instance, if you have an emotionally invested dramatic piece, will it serve you to begin with it, or to place it later in your audition?

B. The Slate

Your “slate” is the introduction of you and your pieces. First, be sure to follow any instructions provided about slating. Different auditions may have different protocols. As an introduction, your slate needs to be authentically you. It’s a simple thing. Don’t overthink it. It’s great to be friendly when you introduce yourself, but don’t put on a persona that isn’t your own. Remember, auditors are trying to get a feel for who you are, honestly and authentically. Do not use your slate to describe the given circumstances of the works you are performing. In general, your introduction (slate) needs to only contain:

1. A greeting.
2. Your name.
3. The pieces you are performing and the authors/songwriters.

Your slate (as authentically you) is also wonderful opportunity to get a feel for the room/space before you drop into your performance. Here is a sample slate:

“Hi! How are you today? I’m Jonna Fletcher. I’ll be performing a monologue from *Melancholy Play* by Sarah Ruhl, followed by a song from *The Last Five Years*, by Jason Robert Brown.”

Note: Sometimes at individual program auditions candidates will choose to split up their slate and introduce each piece just before they perform it. This is also fine. It’s *your* audition to construct as you see fit.



VIDEO 18: [THE SLATE](https://youtu.be/Kme2uMjoG9Q)
(youtu.be/Kme2uMjoG9Q)

C. “Point of Focus”

“Point of focus” is something that many candidates misconstrue. Performers of songs and monologues are frequently told to be sure to keep their imaginary partner in one spot. This is meant as good advice. If a performer believing in their circumstances, their partner will be there in front of them, not moving about. This does *not* mean the performer should stare directly at a

singular spot (“point of focus”) for the full length of the piece. That is both odd and unnatural. Performing is a mirror of human behavior. As we communicate with someone in front of us, we do make eye contact, but we also gaze elsewhere to reference the environment, other people, and when we are calling upon internal thoughts or memories.

- Discard the terminology “point of focus,” and replace it with “placing and seeing the other character.”
- Place the other character in front of you so auditors can see your face.
- Keep the other character in one place, but feel free to gaze away as you reference environment, other people, or trying to find words or recall memories, etc.
- Change where you place the other character for each one of your audition pieces, while still keeping yourself open to auditors. This helps to clarify that each work is occurring in different imaginary circumstances.
- Don’t place your other character directly in front of the auditors. Do you really want to see them staring at you while you’re performing?
- Your partner is imaginary. Never use an auditor as an acting partner unless requested to do so.



VIDEO 19: [POINT OF FOCUS](https://youtu.be/cTIG6mU_JcU)
(youtu.be/cTIG6mU_JcU)

D. Blocking

Candidates sometimes hear “be sure to block your pieces” or to “use the whole stage.” Both thoughts can lead to false audition performances. In reality, environment and good acting solves all blocking-related concerns. Any blocking in your pieces should be discovered organically, and never distract from the illusion that your characters are experiencing their respective moments for the first time. Some helpful thoughts:

- Don’t put a piece on its feet until you’ve fully determined environment.
- In rehearsal, follow your physical impulses as related to the environment and the other character. If your impulses lead you to an honest physical moment, keep it, but it needs to come from that honest impulse every time you perform it.
- Strengthening character want, in relation to environment, will lead to the discovery of honest physicality.
- Your physicality does not need to cover the expanse of the stage, only the world in which the character is living.
- Sometimes particular songs do call for more physical structure. Any structured physicality or choreography needs to lend to the illusion that the character is experiencing the moment (and all discoveries within) for the first time as related to the style of the work.

E. Using a Chair

Can you use a chair? Yes. Absolutely. If a chair is provided you may use it as called for by the characters environment. However, it’s not a good idea to sit for the entirety of your audition. Remember, auditors want to see you and get to know who you are. Don’t use a chair to hide your own vulnerability or fears. In short, use a chair as you see fit, but don’t let it become a crutch.

Do not ever talk or sing to an empty chair. It serves no positive purpose and becomes a barrier to anyone in the audience wanting to believe in the world you’ve created onstage.

F. Calling “Scene”

Never announce “scene” at the end of your pieces, nor the end of your audition as a whole. Take a moment before to move from one character world to the other. If the transition is clear to you, it will be clear to auditors. At the end of your last piece, absorb a beat to let the scene resonate, then turn to your auditors and offer a sincere “thank you.”

G. Memorization

It’s almost guaranteed that by following the acting rehearsal process above, less formal “memorizing” will be necessary. If you do need to work on memorization, use a partner! Remember that acting is listening and responding. Memorizing solo can be counterproductive for a budding performer working toward a core of honesty.

H. The Dreaded Mirror

Never ever rehearse your audition in front of a mirror. Earlier, we discussed making your partner the most important element on stage. We examined key acting concepts such as active listening and honest responding. We’ve examined the importance of making strong choices about relationship, want, and the moment before. All of these components (and acting/musical theatre-training as a whole) are geared toward you losing inhibiting self-awareness while performing. Using a mirror is counterproductive and damaging to the development of an honest audition. It’s okay to utilize a mirror as directed when working on critical voice/breath or dance technique with an instructor, but never use one to work on your performances, audition or otherwise.

I. Practicing Starting Over

Rehearsal is the foundation of what will happen in your audition. Our brains and body will rely on what they’ve learned. As such, it’s important to consider how you may proceed should you make a mistake such as forgetting lines, mixing up lyrics, etc.

- During rehearsals, do your best to work through minor mistakes without stopping. Stopping too much can train your brain to stop in a moment of adversity. Teach your brain to work through challenges without dropping out of character.
- If a mistake is made that prevents you from continuing, simply state “I’d like to re-start” and begin the piece again from the top. It happens, even for the well-prepared. There is no need to panic or apologize profusely. Simply stay focused and begin again. Use your rehearsal process to practice as such.

J. Timing Your Audition

If your pieces were well selected and cut, there will be no concerns related to time constraints. Nevertheless, have a partner time the entirety of your audition. Do this during the rehearsal process, not at the last minute. If you find it’s running long, do not adjust by going faster in your monologue(s). Remember, a performer should never be onstage thinking about time. Simply revisit your pieces and see what content can be trimmed.

K. Vocal Rehearsals with Tracks and/or Accompanists

First, *be sure to follow all accompaniment guidelines provided by the institution.* As noted, college audition formats vary from live in-person auditions, to live virtual auditions, to recorded auditions (more specifics on recorded auditions later). The audition format may impact whether you will use a live accompanist or a recorded track. In some cases, you may need to utilize both. For example, an institution may require you to submit a recorded pre-screen before being invited for a live audition.

- Recorded Auditions: If guidelines don't provide accompaniment specifications, you may utilize a recorded track *or* a live pianist.
- Live Virtual Auditions: If guidelines don't provide accompaniment specifications, you may utilize a recorded track *or* a live pianist.
- In-Person Auditions: Be prepared to work with a live pianist. There are some exceptions to this, such as auditions held at conferences or callbacks at unified auditions. Again, be sure to carefully read the guidelines provided to you.

Because you want your rehearsals to mirror the actual audition, it is essential that you *thoroughly* rehearse with the mode of accompaniment you will be utilizing. Many candidates are thrown for a loop at auditions, having prepared in a format that differs from the one used at the actual audition. As discussed, planning and preparation are the keys to a successful college audition.

L. Preparing Materials for the Accompanist

When a live accompanist is utilized, always have your sheet music organized in a fashion that makes their job easier. An accompanist has a big responsibility at auditions, even without having to navigate sheet music that isn't properly arranged or marked. Proper organization of sheet music is considered professional respect and helps prevent errors that may impact your audition. Never wait until the last minute to prepare your sheet music. Organization of music should be attended to during your rehearsal process. A few thoughts:

- All sheet music should be acquired with respect to copyright. Purchase sheet music from an online retailer, buy vocal selections or anthologies, or use library resources (libraries pay for their resources, thereby honoring copyright). Acquiring music from an online "free PDF" site or from friends does not respect copyright. The \$6-\$10 that you pay online per song is supporting musical theatre composers and lyricists so they can continue to write the next great song and musical.
- If you purchase vocal selection books or anthologies, be aware that songbooks don't stay open for the accompanist. Make photocopies of the content you'll be singing. Making photocopies of music you own, or printing sheet music you purchase online, is appropriate and is not illegal. This is standard industry practice.
- Be sure you have purchased sheet music that includes a vocal line plus a full piano accompaniment. Do not bring lead sheets, chord charts, guitar tab, or single-lined vocal parts (libretto pages) to an audition because they do not include a piano accompaniment.
- Music should always be photocopied or printed two-sided.
- If you cannot photocopy or print two-sided, use sheet protectors to make double-sided pages.
- There are no rules requiring the use of sheet protectors, and there are no rules prohibiting sheet protectors. This is a common myth. If you choose to use sheet protectors, be sure they are non-glare. If you can print or photocopy double-sided pages, sheet protectors are not needed.
- Copy/organize your music as to eliminate as many page turns as possible. For example, if your song cut is only two pages, your pages should be side-by-side, facing each other in the three-ring binder, thus eliminating the need for a page turn. If your cut uses four pages of music, page one will be a single-sided page, placed on the left. Pages two and three should be a double-sided page that will be turned. Page four should be a single sided page on the right. This creates a need for only one page turn.
- Make sure the photocopied music is visually complete by checking all margins. View it as a picture and compare to the original. Is anything cut off or missing?

- Place your sheet music in a sturdy three-ring binder that lays flat on the piano. Avoid using flimsy, soft plastic report-cover style binders. Do not hand the accompanist a pile of loose pages. Use of a three-ring binder is the industry standard.
- Arrange your music in the order you plan to sing.
- *Clearly* mark start and stop points, as well as any internal cuts to your selections.
- Mark any important and unusual indications for the accompanist (“I’m going to slow down to a full stop here” or “I’ll pause for a long breath here”) but do not over-mark your music.
- Make decisions about how you want to begin your audition cut. If you want to utilize an introduction, know precisely how much of an intro you want the pianist to play. If you want just your starting pitch, do you want one note or a series of starting notes? If you start before the pianist, have you decided where you want the pianist to join you? How easy will it be for a pianist to catch/find you?
- Mark the end/stop of your cut and be aware of when you plan to stop singing as well as where you want the pianist to stop playing.
- If your audition material is contained within in a binder of multiple audition songs (your “audition binder”) be sure the audition music for the day is located in the front.
- Be sure you know what the notated piano part actually sounds like. Ask a pianist to rehearse with you. The day of the audition should not be the first day you rehearse with the sheet music you have selected.

M. Communicating with the Accompanist

It’s important to rehearse how you will *communicate* with an accompanist. Positive communication is an indicator of collegiality and professionalism, and auditors will take notice. Good communication also helps prevent unforeseen errors during the audition. Additionally, consider that the accompanist may have an important voice in the admissions process. Here are some suggestions for communicating with an accompanist at an audition:

- A warm hello is always appreciated. Genuine kindness matters.
- Respect the pianist’s personal space.
- Be sure your binder is clean. No gross smudges or food remains.
- When offering instructions, position yourself next to the pianist but not with your back to auditors.
- Keep your instructions clear and brief. For example:
 - “I’m starting here” (explain how you want to start – starting pitch, or intro)
 - “I’m ending here” (be sure to mark where you want the piano to stop playing, not just where you stop singing)
 - “Please make note of this moment” (if you have pauses or stops or tempo changes that are not already indicated in the music)
 - “My tempo is” (demonstrate tempo)
- If giving tempo instructions, sing a portion of the song or tap on your thigh or chest. Do not snap at your accompanist.
- When your audition is complete, collect your binder and thank the accompanist.

Incorporating accompanist interaction into your rehearsal regimen will help you avoid nerve related communication errors that can happen at auditions.



VIDEO 20: [COMMUNICATING WITH THE ACCOMPANIST](https://youtu.be/rhE_9i5fSic) with Heather Luellen
(youtu.be/rhE_9i5fSic)

N. “Non-Dancers” Preparing for a Live Dance Audition

This is a good time for a reminder that varying programs may place different levels of emphasis on dance skills needed at entry. Some programs aim at developing true triple threats, while others may admit a number of strong actor/singers who they believe can develop into movers. Regardless, dance skills will be evaluated for admission consideration into a musical theatre program.

Remember that many non-dancers have had incredible careers in professional musical theatre. But you still want to prepare for the dance audition to the best of your ability. Non-dancers do have some tools to employ during the rehearsal process to assist in best preparing.

If possible, take a dance class now. In-person class is always the best bet, but if resources are preventative, choose a free online option. If you’re only a few months from auditioning, the style of dance you take may not matter a lot. A few months of dance class won’t turn you quickly into a proficient technical dancer, but it will get you moving more confidently- and doing so on a regular basis. In just a few weeks of class you can develop confidence that will help you move through a dance audition with less self-awareness and more freedom. More freedom means that your personality will resonate more loudly (than a lack of training.) If possible, have a friend or dance teacher lead you through a mock audition (or participate in one shared online). Your goal is to enter your dance audition as physically free as possible by preparing within the time limitations you have.

O. Preparing for an Interview

Many programs will hold an “interview” with each candidate being considered for entry. This may be structured as a formal part of the process, or as an informal discussion that occurs in the context of the audition. In either case, there are set steps you can take to prepare.

1. Adjust Your Mindset

The word “interview” is inaccurate and can lead to a negative mindset where the candidate feels an imbalance in communicative power. The bottom line is that an “interview” is simply a discussion between you and auditors, both of which are mutually trying to discover if it’s a good fit for training. A discussion deserves two-way communication, and a candidate should feel confident and empowered as such.

2. Research

During the discussion, you may be asked about your interest in the program. For example, you may hear, “There are many programs, what drew you to us?” This is an opportunity to share what discoveries in your research excite you about the program. It is also an occasion to illuminate that you’re a performer who sets goals and who has a great work ethic.

3. Prepare Questions

Earlier in this guidebook you were provided a host of questions you may want addressed. The interview is your opportunity to inquire about one or two that you need more information about. Make sure your questions have sincere intent. Asking questions just for the sake of questions always reads as such. Also, be aware of not overstaying your welcome by asking questions that you could have easily found an answer to outside of the discussion.

4. Be Yourself

As in every other part of your audition, be yourself. Be confident. Your individuality is your absolute best asset. No facades or pretense that you have more experience than you do. Be open, present, enjoy the moment, and let your full self-resonate.

P. Creating an Audition Warm-up

Creating a warm-up is an important part of your audition rehearsal process. Build a warm-up into your rehearsal routine, so when auditions arrive, it's already an effective component of an audition day. Warm-ups can and should vary from performer to performer. Here are a few elements to think about while choosing/building your own pre-audition warm-up.

A Good Warm-Up

- Readies your body for the work to be done. Importantly, it does so in a way that removes negative physical self-awareness.
- Readies your voice for the work to be done, in a way that removes negative vocal self-awareness.
- Removes negative mental/cognitive self-awareness.
- Allows the performer to become a listening vessel, ready to hear and respond.
- Allows the performer to walk into the audition relaxed, confident, and fully present.

A Poor Warm-Up

- Creates negative physical or vocal awareness.
- Creates negative mental/cognitive self-awareness.
- Facilitates forced emotion and “acting” rather than honest listening and responding.
- Hinders the performer from walking into the audition relaxed, confident, and fully present.

Q. Audition Attire

You may be wondering why attire is being discussed in the rehearsal section. Just like a production, you don't want opening night to be a dress rehearsal. Choosing attire during the rehearsal process gives you time to rehearse in it and see if makes you feel comfortable and confident. A few considerations about attire for your acting/vocal auditions:

- There are no hard and fast rules about attire. You should look like *you* on a good day. Don't dress in clothes you wouldn't normally wear, but it's also important that you show that you care about the audition. Be your beautiful self!
- In line with being yourself, you'll find information out there that encourages the wearing of “skirts/dresses for women,” “slacks for men,” etc. Hogwash! You be you. A forward oriented program (which is where you want to be) should be moving past social constraints as displayed in audition attire.
- Wear colors and clothes you feel confident in.
- It's generally recommended to stay away from clothes that could be a distraction. There is truth in this, but again, be true to yourself.
- If you know what type of space you'll be auditioning in, it helps to rehearse your audition in a similar space while having a trusted team member provide feedback. The clothes you wear with a viewer on the same floor level as you may read differently if you end up six feet above the auditors on a proscenium stage.

- If you have a callback on a different day, wear the same audition clothes. For instance, if you wore a red sweater for your video submission, wear it again if you receive a callback. Auditors see a lot of candidates, and visual familiarity can go a long way.
- Attire required for dance auditions has more specificity and may vary between institutions. As such, follow all attire guidelines put forth by the institution.

R. Putting it Together: Mock Auditions

I frequently tell performance students that repetition builds confidence, and confidence is the foundation for artistic freedom.”

This thought is never more true than as applicable to audition preparation. As noted, a key goal in your preparation is to allow you to enter the audition without negative self-awareness that prevents you from being fully present in your performance. Preparation is the solution. The earlier you put the pieces together for your audition, the better. A couple of thoughts to help you in this respect.

1. Build/rehearse your audition step by step, like the way it’s been presented to you in this guidebook. That way you can focus on developing one component at a time.
2. Give yourself time to explore choices in your acting and singing.
3. Set a specific goal for each rehearsal, building upon the growth you made in the last.
4. Once you have unified all the components into a complete audition, rehearse it as such. Practice *everything* from your warm-up and entry into the space to your exit from the audition.
5. Ideally, give yourself calendar time to rehearse your audition, then put it away for a while. When you come back to it again you may discover a fresh outlook and corresponding confidence.

XV. Mental Health

Nothing is more important than your personal well-being. If you’re a current high school student it means that you’re also working on completing your senior year, which comes with a load of stressors. If you’re transferring from another college, that’s no light task either. Both are significant life changes with multi-layered challenges. On top of all that, you’re auditioning for colleges- a taxing venture, both mentally and physically!

No matter how talented or well-prepared a candidate may be, some are surprised by the amount of emotional stress they encounter during the process. Think about it. Every step of the process is oriented toward “being accepted,” which means every step is also inhabited by the possibility of “not being accepted.” It’s riddled by thoughts involving self-measure, like “I hope I’m good enough,” “I hope I don’t fail,” “That person got in, but I haven’t heard yet,” and “What if I blow my audition?” This is, of course, a window into the career of a performer, but unlike professionals you haven’t yet had the benefit of college training to solidify confidence in yourself as related to craft. It’s simply a lot to handle. In this light, it is extremely important that you take care of your emotional and physical well-being. Here are some ideas that may help:

- Get outside daily. Even a short 15-minute daily dose of vitamin A helps combat stress and depression.
- Eat well. Yes, it’s a busy time and it’s easy to be lulled into quick unhealthy meals. However, it’s important that you prioritize eating regularly and healthily.
- Exercise! There is nothing better than exercise to fight stress, anxiety, and depression. You don’t have to be a gym rat. You can approach exercise your way and with your

interests in mind. For some it may indeed mean four days a week in the gym, but for others it can be as simple as going for a good walk twice a week. If you're worried about holding yourself accountable, get a buddy to commit with you. Hold each other accountable.

- Sleep. Keep the phone out of your hand while in bed, turn off the mental stressors from the day (and the day to come) and allow yourself to rest at night.
- Make time for activities that are unrelated to auditions. It could be reading, playing a sport, going dancing, or watching a sibling's games, but provide yourself mental mini vacations from the stress of audition season.
- Drink plenty of water. The power of hydration is underestimated.
- Be an ambassador for positivity. You will hear a *lot* of complaining and grumbling during this process (and senior year in general). Don't participate in the negativity. Hold yourself accountable for keeping a positive outlook and encourage others to do the same.
- Limit social media time. There is a lot of chaos out there in the world, and social media tells us about it every minute of every day. It's also bombards us with unrealistic expectations for perfection. There is enough on your plate without being emotionally bombarded by media content.
- Beware the audition chat rooms. As discussed earlier, don't let audition discussions in chat rooms (or elsewhere) pull you into a negative head space. If you sense it happening, shut it off and turn to something positive.
- Love the journey! As stressful the audition process can be, it is a privilege to have the opportunity to chase a dream. Love every minute of it. Even the hard ones. Regardless of the outcome, you will emerge having grown as an artist and a person. That's something to celebrate!
- Acknowledge your badassery. Every moment, someone let's fear stop them from taking a passion inspired risk. It takes strength and badassery to put yourself out there, take a risk, and accept the outcome. In many ways, you've already won.



VIDEO 21: [MENTAL HEALTH TIPS](https://youtu.be/VhjIV7g9ryw) with Lisa Brescia
(youtu.be/VhjIV7g9ryw)

XVI. Audition Day

Auditions for different programs can vary considerably in both structure and atmosphere. Regardless, by committing to proper preparation, your audition day(s) can be a wonderful experience(s). We've spent the first thirteen sections of this guidebook offering ways to help you research and prepare. Now it's time for discussion on exactly what the audition day(s) may have in store.

A. The In-Person Audition

1. Pre-Audition

Pre-audition includes the day before and the morning of your audition, including any travel that may be necessary.

- Try to plan travel to as to minimize rushing and chaos.
- Allow yourself a good night's sleep and a relaxed audition morning.
- Eat a good breakfast.
- Hydrate.

- Avoid caffeine.
- Arrive at your audition 30 minutes early.

2. Check-In

At an in-person audition, you'll likely have a check-in. They'll confirm your arrival, and perhaps assign you an audition number (if you are participating in a dance audition.) As noted, always be yourself. Your audition starts the moment you arrive, so be warm, kind, and generous to others. Feel empowered to ask any questions you may have.

If you have time after your check-in, socialize. You will be surrounded by individuals with like interests from all around the nation. Be mindful not to interrupt your work nor theirs, but when appropriate, make some new friends. Socializing can help you relax and let go of nervous energy.

3. Tours and Chats

At on-campus auditions, programs will sometimes offer campus tours, facilities tours, or opportunities to chat with students or faculty. Take advantage of these! They are great opportunities to ask questions and get a fuller sense of the training environment within.

4. Warm-up

Based upon your preparation, your warm-up-is ready to go! Stick to the program. Get yourself out of your head and in a state where you are fully present and responsive.

Note: Don't run lines out of context. If you're ready, your lines are too. You learned your lines in the context of imaginary circumstances. And running them without may cause you to forget one, which may then result in a downward spiral of nerves and fear. That is NOT what you want before your go into your audition. If you did your prep. You know your lines. Trust.

5. Improvisation and/or Group Warm-Up

At on-campus auditions, you may be led through a group improvisation exercise or warm-up. This is not an opportunity to grab attention! Obvious attention seeking behavior reads as desperate and sends bad signals about how a candidate may behave in the classroom. If you are present, engaged, and generous, it will be noted.

6. Entrance and Introduction

You've sufficiently rehearsed your entrance and introduction, as well your communication with the accompanist (if applicable). You've done your work, now trust it! Another reminder to be your beautiful self. No forced energy or audition persona's, please!

7. Moment Before

You've rehearsed your audition material to include a strong moment before, but it's important to also discuss it in the context of the audition day as a whole. There are many well-prepared candidates who still let nerves spill past the introduction and into their first performance. It's seen all the time; self-awareness rears its head is and as a performer doesn't become truly present in their imaginary circumstances until

halfway through the audition. You want to avoid this scenario and be present from your first acting moment, which occurs *before you speak/sing*. Simplify, and specify the transition from introduction to performing as “the moment before.”

- After your introduction, let your mind ease into the imaginary circumstances.
- Consider and feel the character environment.
- Look at your imaginary partner. *See* them.
- Allow yourself to *feel* what the character feel for them, and to *want* what the character wants.
- Hear your imaginary partner say the line that you respond to (your cue).
Really *hear* them and then *feel the need to respond before you speak or sing*.

A reminder that this entire process can occur if you’ve properly rehearsed, in a very short moment. It boils down to providing your character the emotional need to speak (or sing.) This can’t be overstated- a strong moment before has made or broken thousands of auditions. It’s a built-in opportunity to get out of your own head, put nerves aside, and honestly enter the world of the character.

8. Monologue(s)

A reminder that you can arrange your audition pieces in the order that your desire. You’ve done the acting work on your monologue(s). Trust. Live and respond honestly in your given circumstances and avoid any nerve-driven urge to emotionally push.

9. Song (s)

Remember the importance of appropriately marking music, communicating clearly with your accompanist, and providing an accurate tempo. From there, trust the work you’ve done. You should not be thinking about your voice while singing. *Good acting solves many vocal issues*. If your songs are well-acted, your voice will shine to its full capacity.

10. Vocalizing

Singers, you may be asked to perform some scales or do a pitch exercise with the accompanist. Breathe, set your nerves aside, and *really* listen to the accompaniment. If need be, feel free to ask the accompanist if you can restart.

11. Mistakes and Starting Over

Mistakes happen in auditions all the time. All. The. Time. If not driven by a lack of preparation, it’s not a big deal. Seeing a candidate positively handle momentary adversity is actually a wonderful indicator that they’ll do the same in the studio. Sometimes mistakes provide an opportunity for the best parts of us to shine through.

You practiced starting over during your rehearsals. Remember, if something happens that you can act through (like a forgotten line), keep moving and don’t draw attention to it. If a mistake happens that prevents you from continuing, do not panic. Simply state that you’d like to begin again. There is no reason to be overly apologetic. Things happen. The auditors are on your side.

A Note: Candidates will often ask to begin again, but then offer no positive change to their audition on the second attempt. If there is an error that requires you to start over,

be sure to take a *moment before*, truly adjust, and drop more solidly into the material. Never waste a second chance.

12. Direction

Receiving direction on your monologue or song can be an indicator that an auditor sees potential in you! As such, receiving and implementing direction is a wildly important (and often neglected) part of a successful audition. There are a few reasons candidates may not successfully adjust to direction; nerves may be preventing them from truly receiving/hearing it, or their acting choices are so pre-conceived and patterned that even direction can't break them away from it.

Hearing and employing direction are huge indicators of trainability! In this light, if you are given direction:

- *Hear and receive* the direction. If you realize the direction just went out the other ear, acknowledge it, and ask for it to be repeated.
- If you need any clarification, *just ask!*
- Take a moment to *internalize and implement* the direction before restarting.
- Direction is not correction, it's an *opportunity!*

13. Interview

The "interview" may be structured as a formal part of the process, or as an informal discussion that occurs before or after your audition. Visit "*Preparing for an Interview*" which offers several thoughts for consideration.

14. The Music Theory Test

Some musical theatre programs will ask you to take a music theory test. In most cases, the test acts as a placement measure (for college theory class) should you be admitted. Music theory test results will rarely, if ever, prevent a candidate from being admitted.

15. The Dance Call

First, be sure to follow all program instructions regarding attire and footwear. If given a number to wear, it should be clearly visible. In-person musical theatre auditions tend to unite candidates from all skill levels. Auditors understand this. Regardless of your skill level, you want to present *yourself* in the best possible light.

Here are thoughts from a few professionals as shared on www.theatrenerds.com.

- "The most important thing to bring into a room is you. One-of-a-kind, beautiful, flawed you. Directors, choreographers, and music directors want to see individuals with points of views- dancers with an awareness of who they are and access to all of that beautiful uniqueness. Steps can be refined and drilled during rehearsals, but presence, passion, creativity and personality cannot be taught." — Nili Bassman
- "I think the most important thing in a dance audition is to know your strengths and use them to your advantage. I used to spend so much time getting intimidated by the guys who were the most flexible or the ones who could do the most turns, but at the end of the day, there is only one you." — Correy West

- “Invest in some nice dancewear. If you look good and feel good in your clothes, you will exude confidence. We spot that immediately. Tell a story with the combo. Even if the choreographer hasn’t given a lot of direction, don’t be passive in your performance. Make a specific choice and commit to it.” — Justin Boccito



VIDEO 22: [DANCE AUDITION TIPS](https://youtu.be/VYBYRHJxojk) with Andrew Palermo
(youtu.be/VYBYRHJxojk)

16. Callbacks

Callbacks at in-person auditions are different from place to place. Some have them, and some don’t. Some institutions will have a group callback with improvisation exercises, while others will have solo callbacks. At solo callbacks, a candidate may be asked to perform their selection(s) again, receive additional direction, asked for additional material, or have an interview discussion, etc.

Every point of discussion presented about auditioning also applies to callbacks. A callback is received because potential is seen, and auditors want to have another (or deeper) look. They want a more thorough sense of the performer, and to further investigate trainability. If you have a callback, stay engaged, open, and focused on your craft. A callback is not the time to “switch it up” unless directed specifically to do so.

17. A Few Final Considerations for In-Person Auditions

- Never forget that the auditors are on your side. They want you to succeed.
- Always be your true self.
- Remember, auditioning to follow your dreams is a privilege.
- Don’t forget, you’re auditioning them too!
- Be an ambassador for positivity.
- Hydrate. Carry a water bottle.
- Have Fun! What value is any of it if you don’t have fun doing it? Enjoy the day and allow yourself to be fully present so you can take in the experience!



VIDEO 23: [SAMPLE IN-PERSON AUDITION](https://youtu.be/n5xsWFWtuVc)
(youtu.be/n5xsWFWtuVc)

B. Live Virtual Auditions

If you have skipped the sections on *Rehearsal* or *In Person Auditions* and come right here- go back and read those first! Virtual auditions have become a norm in the college audition process. In structure, they are a live audition, but the candidate and the auditors communicate virtually. Virtual auditions offer candidates significant positives, as well as a few challenges.

Positives:

- Allow candidates to audition for a greater number of programs.
- Decrease audition costs by eliminating extensive travel.
- Help eliminate potential calendar conflicts that come with travel.
- Candidate auditions from the comfort of home, studio, or school.

Challenges:

- The candidate doesn't get to visit campus on audition day.
- There is a possibility of technical difficulties.
- The candidate must arrange their own accompaniment (if applicable).
- The candidate has more responsibility in arranging technical elements.
- The candidate may need to create a digital dance audition (if applicable).

Having the ability to audition for more programs without incurring additional cost can open many possibilities. Candidates utilizing virtual auditions report auditioning for 8-12 (or more) schools, where previously it was more common to limit auditions to 3-4 programs. Put simply, it means that candidates may have more opportunity to find (and be admitted to) a program that best suits them. Virtual audition formats are now commonly utilized at both unified auditions and at singular institutions.

It is important to recognize that all the elements discussed in the *In-Person Audition's* section still apply to virtual formats- because virtual auditions are still LIVE! From preparation to performance, the virtual auditionee needs to be just as vigilant (as in-person auditions) in order to bring their best! However, there are some additional elements to consider:

1. Planning

The host program (or unified audition sponsor) may provide logistical and/or technical specifics that are unique to the virtual format. It is essential to plan, implement, and practice with those specifics in mind. It is not necessary to spend hundreds of dollars on drops, lighting, or sound equipment. An efficient and successful virtual audition can be achieved at little to no expense.

2. Space

It is important to find a good space from which to audition. Candidates have been known to audition virtually from basements, performance classrooms, bedrooms, dance studios, church spaces, and more. A good space will provide:

- Privacy to perform.
- No environmental (visual or audible) distractions.
- Enough room to audition freely.

3. Background

You want the auditors to be able to focus solely on you and your performance. Watching a virtual performance where posters or desk items are visible can distract the viewers eye away from the performer and toward the environment. A neutral background or backdrop is ideal. If choosing a neutral wall, be sure it doesn't make the space too live for sound. If choosing a neutral backdrop, you don't have to spend money for a high-end drop. Large curtains, or any large neutral cloth drop can suffice. Eliminate wrinkles with a good ironing or steaming. Background should be:

- Free of environmental distractions.
- Neutral space or backdrop.

4. Camera/Visual Quality

It's important that you have good visual quality for your virtual audition. A wired video camera is wonderful, but not necessary. Most good smartphones will offer acceptable quality. A high-resolution webcam will also work- just be sure to give it a trial run to check the visual quality. A few related thoughts:

- Can use a quality video camera, smartphone, or webcam.
- **Do not act or sing to the camera.** The camera is your auditor. Place your imaginary partner just to the left or right of the camera.
- Consider **how you want to be framed** during your audition (how much of you is on camera). Framing may vary according to what you're auditioning for and the pieces you've chosen. You may also consider framing yourself differently for each piece. For example, you could allow your framing to be wider for a comedic song than it for an intimate monologue.
- Before beginning, you may **ask the auditors** if they would like you to adjust your framing.
- **Be sure you can't see/watch your own audition.** This is a recipe for an audition full of negative self-awareness.
- Always **use a tripod** for a smart phone or camera.
- **Keep the camera at about your eyeline.** Having a camera below your eyeline will distort perspective and make you seem like a giant. This mistake happens a lot with virtual auditions using a webcam. Having a camera too far above eyeline can also distort perspective, tending to shrink you.

5. Sound

The sound quality of your audition is *very* important, but that doesn't mean you need an expensive setup. Sound should be clear, full, and free of white noise and environmental distractions. Good sound quality can be achieved from the internal mic of a quality camera, smartphone, or webcam. Many candidates do opt to use an external microphone, which can considerably enhance sound quality. Also, if your space is too live (often the result of many hard wall/ceiling surfaces) you may want to soften it by hanging some soft goods around the space.

- Avoid "hollow" sound quality, often the result of poor sound equipment.
- Avoid an overly live sound environment. If necessary, soften the space with soft goods.
- Avoid environmental sound distractions such as traffic, dogs, etc.
- Use a quality sound device. A quality camera, phone, or webcam mic often does the trick. If not, you can opt for an external mic, which generally provides a superior sound experience.
- If using an external mic, check ideal placement during rehearsals.

6. Lighting

Lighting is also an important virtual audition component and can be achieved at little to no cost. The goal is to provide balanced lighting for your audition, so auditors aren't struggling to see you. Balanced lighting will eliminate facial shadows that

inhibit viewing discovery in your performance. There are many *easy* options for achieving balanced lighting, including:

- A ring light with some support light from the environment (perhaps an overhead or some natural light.)
- Basic four-point lighting. This means that you have a light source above you, one to your right, one to your left, and one in front of you. This can be achieved very simply with an overhead light and a few table lamps.
- Three-point lighting is often sufficient- one overhead, one on your front left side, and one on you front right side.
- A space with good natural light. Keep natural light sources to the front and sides (not behind you.) Good natural light can supplement and ease the setup of three or four-point lighting. Sometimes good natural light and an overhead are enough.
- No fluorescent overhead lighting.

Your job is to consider your space, your resources, and experiment with the above you create your own version of a balanced light setup. Variables are different in every environment. *Keep it simple!*

7. Technical Rehearsal

It is *extremely important* to have a technical rehearsal for your virtual audition(s). It will allow you to adjust environmental and technical components—avoiding the potential distraction of having to do so at your audition. If you harken back to audition goals, you’ll be reminded that you want to control any variables that prevent you from being free, honest, and emotionally available while auditioning.

Use the *Guidelines for Virtual and Video Auditions* (below) as a checklist during your technical rehearsal(s).



VIDEO 24: [SAMPLE LIVE VIRTUAL AUDITION](https://youtu.be/bfukBJfBgSQ)
(youtu.be/bfukBJfBgSQ)

C. Video Auditions (and Video Pre-Screens)

If you skipped the sections on *Rehearsal*, *In Person Auditions*, or *Virtual Auditions* and come right here- go back and read those first! The elements discussed in the *In-Person* and *Virtual Auditions* sections also apply to video auditions.

A pre-screen video audition is one where the host program asks applicants to first submit a video audition. The video auditions are utilized to determine who the program would like to invite to audition in a virtual or in-person format. Candidates sometimes get grumpy about pre-screens, but in reality, they can save both time and money. In a video audition, the submission allows candidates to be considered for entrance without a follow-up live or virtual audition. In both cases, the submitted video materials are a vital part of the admission process and should be attended to as such.

1. Planning

Follow the protocols for *Live Virtual Auditions*.

2. Space

Follow the protocols for *Live Virtual Auditions*.

3. Background

Follow the protocols for *Live Virtual Auditions*.

4. Camera/Visual Quality

Follow the protocols for *Live Virtual Auditions*, except it is recommended that you use a video camera or smart phone to record your audition (not a webcam).

5. Sound

Follow the protocols for *Live Virtual Auditions*, except it is recommended that you use a video camera, smart phone, or external mic to record your audition (not webcam audio).

6. Lighting

Follow the protocols for *Live Virtual Auditions*.

7. Technical Rehearsal

Follow the protocols for *Live Virtual Auditions*. Use the *Guidelines for Virtual and Video Auditions* (below) as a checklist during your technical rehearsal(s).

8. Slate

Follow program guidelines when deciding whether or not to slate. Slates are less commonly used for on-camera auditions (because your name and pieces are already on the file label), but some colleges still like them because they provide an opportunity to view the candidate before they perform. If you are not provided information regarding the slate, make an informed decision about what is best in relation to the given video format.

9. Recording the Audition

It's best to utilize someone else to help you record your audition, if possible. It eliminates another level of self-awareness and lets you focus on performing. The requested submission format for your audition may determine if you record all the pieces at once (like a live audition), or whether you record them one at a time as separate files.

10. Submission Directions

It is VITAL that you prepare and submit video/digital material according to instructions. In most auditions, you will be asked to provide each of your pieces as a separate file. This allows auditors to jump from one to the other with ease, and it saves them time when looking specifically for one element of your audition. In some cases, you may be asked to submit the entirety of your audition as one file.


Instructions to adhere to may include:

- File Bundling—is each component of your audition a separate file, or is the whole performance bundled into one?
- File Type
- File Size

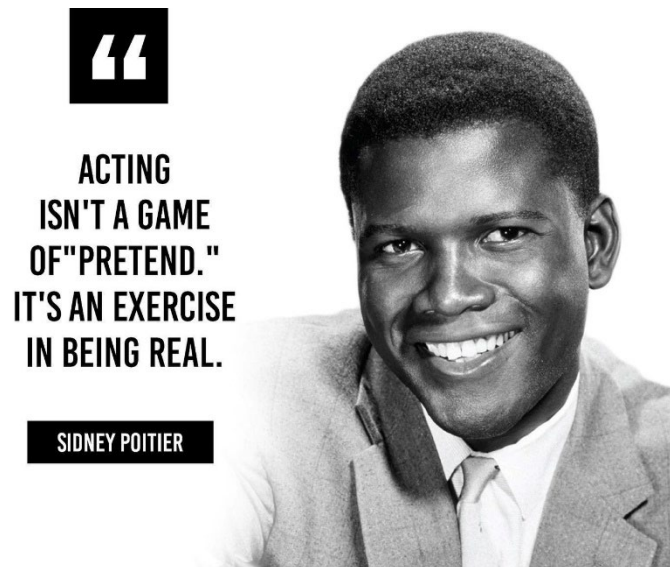
- File Labeling—label your files according to instructions. If no instructions are provided, it's recommended you label all digital files with your last name, first name, and content. For example:

Long Rebecca Monologue One
Long Rebecca Song
Long Rebecca Dance
Long Rebecca Full Audition

You never want your materials to get lost in the mix because of poor labeling. Auditors see hundred to thousands of candidates. Make it easier for them to identify your materials.

 VIDEO 25: [TECH TIPS FOR YOUR ON-CAMERA AUDITION](https://youtu.be/eG-Z7QBU1bs) with Michael Reiser
(youtu.be/eG-Z7QBU1bs)

 VIDEO 26: [SAMPLE VIDEO AUDITION](https://youtu.be/UIBg9FPcjxA)
(youtu.be/UIBg9FPcjxA)



Guidelines for Virtual Auditions and Video Submissions

Guiding Measures	
1.	Who are you?
2.	Is there core truth in your performance?
3.	Are your skills ripe for pre-professional training?

Goal: Allowing the auditors to evaluate the above measures without distraction.	
Network Connections (virtual auditions)	Are all connections functioning as desired?
Sound Quality	Is the sound quality good and full? Is it free of white noise and intrusive environmental sounds, allowing the auditor to focus on your performance?
Light Balance	Is the lighting balanced? Does the viewer have full visual access to you, allowing them to focus on your performance?
Neutral Background	Is your background neutral, allowing the viewer to focus upon you without environmental distractions?
Quality of File (video)	Does file quality allow the viewer to view your work without being distracted by graininess or fisheye distortion?
Slate (as requested)	Is a slate requested? If so, is your slate friendly, allowing the viewer a sense of who you are when not inside of character? Did you thank the viewer at the end of your audition?
Reader Placement	If using a reader, are they slightly off camera, thus allowing the viewer full visual access you without you directly addressing the camera?
Point of Focus	If not using a reader, is your point of focus where the reader would be?
Technical Instructions	Are you following ALL instructions regarding your slate, framing, file type /size, the chosen medium for sharing content, and file labeling?

XVII. Post-Audition

A. Waiting and Communication

There is a lot of information out there about audition preparation and protocols, but much less about the post-audition period. Ironically, it's a crucial period of the process, and treating at such can have a positive impact on admission consideration.

1. Following Up

First, send a personalized thank you to the auditors. It can be an e-mail or a postal delivered thank you card. A quick thank you lets auditors know you are positive, professional, and appreciative of their time. It also puts your name in front of them again, which is always a good thing.

2. Patience and Diligence

The post-audition period can seem like an eternity. Be patient, but also never fail to be an ambassador for yourself. A couple of things:

- Check related email and voicemail accounts at least twice daily. Auditors could tell many stories about emails or voicemails that went to candidates, with no response. It makes one wonder how many talented candidates lose out on admission opportunities each year because of neglected email or voice mails?
- Respond to all correspondences. An email from an auditor such as, "Thank you for your patience, we are still working on the admission process" may seem like a response is not warranted. Respond anyway. A simple, "Thank you for keeping me updated. I'm still very invested in your program" is important. It lets auditors know that you are professional, responsive, and truly invested. Those elements may separate you from others if it comes down to the line.
- Feel free to inquire about your status, as necessary. If you need an update on your status because of aid issues or admission to other programs, ask! Auditors want and need to know where things stand for you. Mind you, this does not mean you should send an email to auditors out of general curiosity regarding admit status. It may be that auditors have no updates to provide you, but it harms no one for you to ask.

3. The Wait List

Being placed on a wait list is a significant accomplishment. It can feel frustrating, but don't let that negate the positives. The bottom line is that the auditors see something special in you, and you are in consideration for admission! If you are on a wait list, communicate professionally and accordingly as noted above, reminding them of your continued interest in the program.

DO NOT try to figure out why you are on a wait list, especially if you know others who have been admitted. Every program has a different admissions process, and you have no idea what it involves on the inside. Being on a wait list does not mean you are lesser than anyone else.

While on the wait list, continue to plan accordingly for admission. Make sure your university and financial aid application materials are complete. Plan a campus visit. Communicate with students currently enrolled.

While there is never a guarantee of moving from “wait list” status to “admitted,” candidates would be surprised just how many admitted candidates were first placed on wait or standby lists. It’s said that three actors were offered the role of Jack in *Titanic* and two to were offered the role of Rose before they were offered to Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet. Now it’s hard to envision anyone else in those roles.

4. Don’t Surmise

It deserves to be re-stated. You can’t know the internal process for admission, so don’t try to guess. It’s a rabbit hole of time and mental energy poorly spent.

5. Changes in Interest

If you decide to accept admission elsewhere, notify the program(s) you’ve chosen not to attend. Do not ghost. A simple notification may read, “I’m very thankful for your time and attention, but I have decided to pursue my training elsewhere. I wish you all the best in the forthcoming year.”

In addition to being courteous, remember that the faculty in the program you’re choosing not to attend are working professionals. Your paths may cross again. Every positive communication is a piece of your professional foundation.

6. Mental Health...Again

Mental health can hit some real obstacles during the waiting period. As noted earlier, every step of the process is oriented toward “being accepted,” which means every step is also inhabited by the possibility of “not being accepted.” It’s common for candidates to wrestle with self-esteem and retention of a positive outlook at this point. You are encouraged to revisit section XV. In addition, here are a few thoughts/reminders of elements that may be helpful during the waiting period.

- *Stay* an ambassador for positivity.
- Celebrate others. If others get accepted while you are waiting, celebrate them. You have no idea what wonderful things are in store for *you*. Also, supportive artists tend to travel together during the long journey.
- Continue to limit social media time.
- Re-direct intrusive thoughts. It’s said that the human brain can’t navigate processing two thoughts at the same time. Feelings yes, but thoughts no. If your brain is being led by an intrusive thought, honor the concern, then replace it with one that moves you in a healthier direction.
- Continue to beware the audition chat rooms/forums.
- Remind yourself to love the whole journey.
- Continue to acknowledge your badassery. If a friend were in your shoes, you’d celebrate them.
- Remember that nothing in this process is a measure of you as a person. This is SO hard for us artists because (as taught) we put ourselves into all of our work. However, never forget that we are much more complex than a few

minutes in an audition. Whatever the outcome may be, the good things and unique talents present in in you will help forge the right path.

XVIII. Decision-Making

Whether or not you garner acceptance to a school of your choice, you deserve a sincere congratulations. In both circumstances, it's likely you have some important decisions ahead of you!

A. You Got In

Congratulations for receiving one or more offers of admission! You may be left with an easy choice to make, or you could be entering the most complicated part of your auditioning journey. Here are some items to guide you in the process:

1. First Response

If you have an offer for admission in hand, immediately confirm that you *received* the offer. Confirming is helpful to the program and can also establish a good line of communication. This does NOT mean you need to immediately accept the offer. A confirmation could read something like:

“Thank you very much! I am honored and excited to receive an offer for admission. Though I’m not yet prepared to make a final decision, I’m working toward it and will keep in good communication as things develop.”

If you have additional questions, your first response is an opportunity to inquire, or to set-up an appointment to have a more thorough discussion.

2. Post-Admit Discussions

If you are still in the process of decision-making after receiving an admit letter, it is recommended that you arrange a phone call/virtual conversation with the program administrator/coordinator. It's an opportunity to dig deep and ask any remaining questions you may have, and to alleviate (or confirm) any uncertainty. If a program administrator is accessible, excited to speak with you, and takes a real interest in *you* during the call- that may inform your decisions. If the opposite occurs, that could be informative as well. It's also a suitable time to ask what they see in relation to your training and trajectory. The checklist provided earlier in the guidebook can provide you some structure for questions and dialogue.

3. Campus Visits

If you haven't yet visited campus, you're encouraged to do so if possible. The window between your admission notification and the “let us know by” date can shrink quickly, so it's recommended you contact the program administrator sooner rather than later to establish a visit.

4. “Let Us Know” Deadlines

When you get an admit letter, it is likely that it will have a “let us know by” date within. This is the date by which the program must have an answer from you regarding your decision to attend. Mark it firmly on your calendar and be sure to provide a firm response by the deadline. In most cases, students who do not respond by the date will have their offer rescinded. If you are prepared to *accept* the offer, do

so as soon as possible (don't wait until the noted date). The sooner you confirm your status, the sooner you can get the ball rolling on attendance logistics.

5. Needing More Time to Decide

Sometimes candidates aren't prepared to accept an offer by the time a "let us know" date has arrived. Don't ignore the date, as it won't go away, and you'll lose your offer for admission. If you find yourself in this situation, reach out *before* the noted date to let them know your circumstances, and request an extension. Auditors understand you may have several decisions to make and may be willing to work with you. However, there is no guarantee an extension can be offered. Extension requests should be an exception, rather than a common occurrence. Do not ask for an extension if you are not *truly* considering attendance. Getting an extension means the program is delaying their own timeline, as well as the timeline of any candidates who are waitlisted.

6. The Unexpected Admit

Some candidates find themselves with surprise admissions. As the result of a unified audition, they may receive an offer for a program or even a course of study that was previously off their radar. Investigate these opportunities, as appropriate, within the context of your interests. A hidden gem may be discovered. Many beautiful journeys begin at the head of an unforeseen path.

7. Declining an Offer

I hope it's become clear that good communication during this process is everything. As such, it's shocking to hear how many candidates ignore offers for admission. Candidates should provide a response to ALL offers, including those they are declining. There are several reasons for you to adhere to this:

- Common courtesy. When someone offers you an opportunity, it means that they believe in you. Anyone who believes in you is deserving of a response.
- It helps other candidates. If you don't respond, it means the program will have to wait until the "let us know" date before offering your spot to another candidate. That will delay another candidate's process, and their opportunities for scholarships.
- It's worth saying one more time. You are building relationships that will impact your career.

8. Revisiting Financial Considerations

In the *Cost of Attendance* section, you were provided articulated measures. Utilize them. Remember, the ideal situation is one where you graduate without debt. If that is unattainable, your goal should be to exit graduation with as little debt as possible. A reminder that debt has killed many careers before they've had a chance to launch.

"It's very important to do everything in your control to become financially sound. It starts during your training program selection process. It doesn't matter if you get into the program of your dreams, going into severe debt for a performance degree is not conducive to long-term success."

9. Receiving Multiple Offers

What a wonderful predicament. Throughout the course of this handbook, you've been provided many measures by which to research programs and pinpoint which may be best for you. Pull those measure back out! Compare notes and checklists side by side. Compare overall costs. Compare environments and geographic factors. Lay it all out! Importantly, let your comparisons first be led by facts and measurable indicators—not feelings.

As noted, also schedule on-campus visits and/or a conversation with the program administrator. Often times a grueling fact-based decision is alleviated by good ol' human to human conversation.

After, and only after, all your facts and measures are before you, consider that the final answer is sometimes less definable. That is the time to turn to your good friend, Jiminy Cricket.

“Give a little whistle! Give a little whistle!”

B. You Didn't Get In

It hurts when you're not accepted, and it's okay to honor those feelings. However, after you've given yourself some time, it's important to avoid letting the disappointing part of the audition experience define you, your outlook, or your productivity. There is a very long road ahead of you, and you're still in control of how you travel it.

1. Listen to the Cues

The audition experience provides candidates cues about their potential as an acting or musical theatre performer. Sometimes the cues are overt, and sometimes they are subtle. It's important to listen to them and consider them. I recently chatted with a group of students that were *not* admitted during the audition process. They offered a few cues that they felt could be important for you to pay attention to.

Some encouraging cues *could* include:

- Being wait listed.
- Having auditors offer direction at the audition.
- Getting positive feedback about your *performance* at the audition.

Some cues that *may* offer more pointed self-assessment:

- Getting no callbacks.
- Getting no waitlists.
- Auditors not providing direction at auditions.

A cue that may feel confusing:

- Auditors talking to you about admission to alternate programs at the university (such as music or dance). This is actually a wonderful compliment. It's likely that, although they don't feel confident in your potential for the program in which you auditioned, they DO see potential in you for an alternate program. Importantly, they took the time to discuss it with you. They see something in you. Consider the input.

None of these are definitive measures of you or your potential. They are simply considerations offered by former candidates to help you consider how to move forward. Earlier in this guidebook it was mentioned that a career in performance demands the potential for honest self-assessment. This is a moment to put that to task. Self-assess. Listen to the cues. They may not provide you with a definitive long-term answer, and perhaps not the answer you're hoping for- but they may help aim you toward the next steps in your journey.

Garth Brooks sings a song referencing how some of life's greatest gifts come in the form of unanswered prayers. This may be a time of disappointment, but with self-assessment and consequent action, it can turn into a wonderful gift. As you assess and add up the cues, allow yourself to honestly address the three questions below.

The answers may help define your next step.

- a. Was I unsuccessful at gaining admission because, though I do have innate skills, I wasn't artistically ready?
- b. Was I unsuccessful at gaining admission because, though I have innate skills, I wasn't well-prepared?
- c. Was I unsuccessful because I may not possess the innate skills needed to succeed as a *professional*, and life is pointing me in a different direction?

2. Sample Paths Forward

The students who provided the points of assessment consideration also offered information about the different paths they (and others) took after not gaining admission. Here are *their* current journeys.

- Attended college as an undecided major with plans to re-audition.
- Took a gap year before re-auditioning.
- Attended a non-university based (non-degree granting) training program.
- Attended college as a theatre major in a program that has 2nd year BFA audition/admission.
- Attended college as a B.A. student in theatre.
- Attended college as a design and technology theatre student.
- Attended college as a theatre education major.
- Attended college as a B.A. in a different arts major (music, dance, film).
- Attended college as a B.F.A in a different arts major (music, dance, film).
- Chose a non-arts related major in college.
- Entered volunteer service abroad.
- Chose to attend trade school.
- Chose to attend seminary.

This list is not meant to provide comprehensive options. The point to be garnered here is that not gaining admission shouldn't be viewed as the end of the journey, because it is actually the beginning of a new one.

3. Requesting Feedback

First, never ask for feedback *at* an audition. It's simply not the time or venue. As for following up later with a feedback request- in most cases it's also not advised. Auditors see many auditions throughout the year (in addition to teaching and their

own professional work) so it's not a realistic expectation for them to provide feedback to candidates. It doesn't mean they don't care, just that responding to audition feedback requests could be another full-time job in itself.

The exception to this rule *may* be when a candidate has a relationship with an auditor. For example, perhaps the auditor has taught the candidate in another forum such as a summer training program or a non-major college class. If you ask, don't be offended if you find that the auditor has a no feedback policy. It's not personal.

4. Thank You Letters

Unless you were poorly treated during the audition process, consider sending a thank you in reply to a non-admit letter. It speaks volumes of you to thank someone for their time and consideration, *especially* in a moment of disappointment. Remember, you are always creating relationships that may reconvene further down the road.

5. The B.A. or B.S. Route?

You may wonder if you should you consider attending a non-audition program that is not pre-professional in focus? B.A.? B.S.? Many candidates are faced with this question. They weren't admitted to a pre-professional (B.F.A) performance program, but they love the art form as a whole. Should they enter a non-audition B.A. or B.S. program?

I'll first offer a personal note. I am a graduate of a B.A. liberal arts theatre program, and *then* went on to study at a graduate conservatory. A B.A. was perfect for me. It allowed me to explore/develop my interests in performance and beyond, and provided a safe arena to take artistic risks. Like many others, the (non-audition entrance) B.A. provided opportunities to discover where my passion really lay, and the artistic foundation I needed to prepare for a graduate program in acting. That was my path, and there was never doubt that it was the right and necessary one. Interestingly, every acting teacher on the faculty where I teach, all of which are incredible professionals, pursued a B.A. before they attended a graduate performance program. So, what should *you* do? It's a question that you need to address for yourself, but here are a few thoughts that may help:

- Remember, there are B.A. and B.S. programs that offer wonderful performance experiences. The difference from a B.F.A. is in curricular construct and philosophy. Revisit *Types of Programs* from earlier in this guidebook.
- A reminder that many B.A. or B.S. programs engage the notion of liberal arts differently. Some have performance tracks within majors, while others philosophically and curricular disagree with the notion of specializing. Is there a fit that is right for you?
- Will you thrive and be happy in a B.A. or B.S. program? Do you believe in the philosophy and curricular outlook?
- Are your interests, talents, and cues from audition season telling you that you have other supporting skill sets that will develop and thrive in a B.A. or B.S. program?

6. Moving Forward: An Analogy

I was recently leading a high school workshop alongside the coordinator of the B.A. program at Missouri State, Dr. Kyle A. Thomas. We both possess a sincere belief in the liberal arts. As such, we found ourselves using similar analogies to discuss paths ahead that may not involve a pre-professional performance degree. I'm going to reassemble an analogy that came up:

For every Steph Curry or Sue Bird, there are four other players on the basketball court, and in different positions. There are also coaches, administration, and a support staff of thousands, all of which contribute significantly to the game. The arts are much the same. There are many ways to be a vital participant. Experiences and education sometimes help us discover that the position we originally imagined ourselves playing (or which stirred our passion) may be different than the one that ultimately illuminates our skill sets, maximizes our contribution, and makes us happy in the long term.

C. Onward and Upward



VIDEO 27: [ONWARD AND UPWARD](https://youtu.be/XwbQ4L7dzPE)
(youtu.be/XwbQ4L7dzPE)



Professional Contributor Biographies

Kurt Gerard Heinlein

Kurt is a Professor of Acting at Missouri State University, where he serves as Coordinator of BFA Acting and the Acting on Camera Certificate program. He is a working member of AEA and SAG-AFTRA. He has worked extensively since completing his MFA in Acting from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music (CCM), with union performance credits that include NYC, national tours, regional theatre, daytime drama, film, voice-overs, and numerous national television spots. His stunt performance, combat, and stunt coordination work are seen in feature films, daytime drama, commercials, and in professional and educational theatres around the nation. Kurt received a Ph.D. in theatre from Louisiana State University. A lifelong environmental activist, he's earned several awards for his work in Green Theatre. He has published *Green Theatre* (book), *Evangeline Drowning* (play), and a host of journal articles. His recent film directing project, *Between the Creag and the Sky*, won accolades at LA Intl. Film Fest, LA Film Awards, Indy Shorts at Cannes, Environmental Film Festival, KC Film Fest, Grand River Film Fest, and the Festival of Media Arts (BEA), among others. Kurt is a recipient of the Missouri State University Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence and of a Governors Service Award. He is a certified mountain guide and rock-climbing instructor. Most importantly, he is a dedicated husband and father to two children.

Lisa Brescia

On Broadway, Lisa has starred as Heidi Hansen in *Dear Evan Hansen*, Donna Sheridan in *Mamma Mia!*, Elphaba in *Wicked*, Cleo in Twyla Tharp's *The Times They Are A-Changin'*, Amneris in *Aida*, and Marion Halcolombe in *The Woman in White*. Additional New York credits include the role of Helena in *All's Well That Ends Well* at the Public Theater's Shakespeare Lab and Claire in Roundabout's *Ordinary Days*. Regional credits include Tatiana Racon in the world premiere of Ken Ludwig's *A Comedy of Tenors* (McCarter/Cleveland Play House), Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, Gertrude in *Hamlet* (Notre Dame Shakespeare), Ivy in *August: Osage County* (Theatre Raleigh), Anna in *Sister Play* (The Magic Theatre), Betty Blake in *The Will Rogers Follies* (Pioneer Theatre), Victoria in *Victor Victoria* (Ogunquit Playhouse), Sally in *Cabaret* (PlayMakers), Kennedy Center's *Broadway: Three Generations – Side Show* (Violet), Chicago's *Wicked* (Elphaba), *Into the Woods* (Witch – PlayMakers), *The Unauthorized Autobiography of Samantha Brown* (Mom – Orange County PAC), *Evita* (Eva), *The Last 5 Years* (Cathy), *A Little Night Music* (Petra – Goodspeed), and *Brigadoon* (Meg – Goodspeed). Lisa is currently an Associate Professor of Acting at Stephens College Conservatory for the Performing Arts. Training: MFA in Classical Acting from the Academy for Classical Acting at George Washington University.

Heather Chittenden-Luellen

Heather is Music Director/Accompanist for the BFA Musical Theater program and the Department of Theatre & Dance at Missouri State University. She has served as Music Director for over 60 MSU mainstage productions at Missouri State. Heather is also the Associate Artistic Director & Music Director for Tent Theatre and just celebrated her 28th season with the company. She serves as Music Director for the Musical Theatre (New York) Senior Showcase held each spring. In addition to her teaching duties, she also serves as alumni liaison for the department, providing a central contact for MSU alumni working all over the world. Heather's other credits include Music Director for Broadway Unlocked's #Giveback Concert 2018 & 2019 (New York), Kyle Dean Massey's solo cabaret at Feinstein's at the Nikko (San Francisco); *Actor, Lawyer, Indian Chief*, a musical by Craig Carnelia and David H. Bell, workshopped at the National

Alliance for Musical Theatre Festival of New Musicals (NYC) and premiered at Goodspeed Musicals (Connecticut); pianist/music director for many productions in local community theatres; local-hire keyboardist for national tours of *White Christmas*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Titanic*.

Andrew Palermo

Andrew is a director, choreographer and creator of new works for the stage. Credits include *Allegiance* (Broadway, Longacre Theatre and The Old Globe), *Nickel Mines*, (Co-author, The Duke on 42nd St/NYMF), *The Other Josh Cohen* (Papermill and Soho Playhouse), *Kristin Chenoweth/Carnegie Hall*, *The Frank Loesser Songbook/New York Philharmonic* (Lincoln Center), *The Mikado* (Carnegie Hall), *Ace* (The Old Globe, Cincinnati Playhouse, Repertory Theater of St. Louis), *Miss Julie* (Geffen Playhouse), *Lyrics and Lyricists* (92nd St. Y), *Bright Lights*, *Big City* (Prince Music Theater), *Vices* (Theatre Aspen), *The Aluminum Show* (international tour), *For The Record/Paul Thomas Anderson* (Rockwell, LA), *125th Teachers College Gala* (The Apollo Theatre), *Aida* (Music Theater Wichita), *Man of La Mancha* (Sacramento Music Circus), *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (University of Cincinnati/CCM), *Hair* and *The Wild Party* (Wichita State), *She Loves Me* (Westminster Choir College), *Spring Awakening*, *Sweet Smell of Success*, *Parade* and *Nickel Mines* (UCI).

Andrew has choreographed industrials for Toyota, episodes of Comedy Central's *Stella*, promos for Tracey Ullman's *State of the Union* and commercials for Showtime Network and G-Shock watches. Along with childhood friend Taye Diggs, Andrew is the Co-Founding Artistic Director of dre.dance, a contemporary dance company. With performances around New York City and North America, dre.dance has received multiple commissions, residencies, grants and rave reviews for its powerful and compelling works. One such work, *beyond.words*, which focuses on the autism spectrum, has led Palermo to be a leader in the field of movement therapy. These unique classes, entitled Creatively Able, have been taught around the country, both for children with special needs and their caregivers. Palermo is an in-demand collaborator in the fields of medicine and computer technology regarding the integration of the arts and special needs issues.

Andrew is also the Founding Artistic Director of *The SpringSpace: A Broadband Theatre Lab*. Co-Founded with Executive Director and Broadway Producer Elliot Masie, *The SpringSpace* provides artistic teams with a focused and fully supported global opportunity to create and hone new work. Located at MASIE Productions LAB in Saratoga Springs, NY, *The SpringSpace* leverages cutting edge technology that digitally brings together creators from around the world. Past life performing highlights include original Broadway companies of *Wicked* and *Annie Get Your Gun* ('Tommy Keeler', Bernadette Peters revival), as well as *How To Succeed...* (Matthew Broderick revival), national/international tours of *West Side Story*, Michael John LaChiusa's *Little Fish* (2nd Stage), numerous regional and concert productions.

Michael Reiser

Michael is a SAG-AFTRA member based in Los Angeles, CA. Recent credits include *We Have A Ghost* (Netflix), *Milk Snake* and *The Interview*. Michael is Co-Owner and Head Editor at JB Selftaped Auditions in Los Angeles, CA. He has a BFA in Acting from Missouri State University. In his spare time Michael loves to surf and go to the movies.

Dr. Kyle A. Thomas

Dr. Thomas is Assistant Professor of Theatre and Coordinator of the BA/BS Theatre Program at Missouri State University. Kyle holds a bachelor's degree in Musical Theatre and received his Ph.D. in Theatre from the University of Illinois, where he was awarded departmental distinction for his work in dramaturgy and directing. He received a Mellon Foundation grant for his direction of *The Play about the Antichrist* and further directing credits include productions across Beijing,

Chicago, and New York City. Amongst his many acting credits, Kyle has particularly enjoyed originating roles in *Kissing* (New Theatre, Miami) and *St. Louis Stories* (.ZACK, St. Louis and La Petite Theatre, New Orleans) as well as on-camera roles include the SAG short film, *Red Horse*, the music video *Grand Bargain* by the Poster Children, and as Jay Roberts in the LA Hollyshorts selection, *The Karaoke Singer*. Kyle is also the Chief Editor of the international journal, *ROMARD: Research on Medieval and Renaissance Drama* and hosts The Teaching Drama Podcast. catch him as The Theatre History Professor on YouTube or on Twitter: @kyle_a_thomas.

Robert Westenberg

After a lengthy performing career that included work on Broadway and Off-Broadway, in regional theatres, national tours, television and film, Mr. Westenberg is now concentrating on teaching, directing and playwriting. He is perhaps best remembered for his roles in the original Broadway casts of *Into the Woods* as the Wolf and Prince, for which he received a Tony nomination and Drama Desk Award, *Secret Garden* as Neville Craven, and *Sunday in the Park with George*, where he replaced Mandy Patinkin in the title role. He also performed the role of Javert in the Broadway production of *Les Miserables*. Other Broadway credits include leading roles in *1776*, *Company*, *Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Zorba*, for which he received a Theatre World Award. While known for his work in musical theatre, he has also appeared in numerous plays and classical works in theatres around the country. His national tour credits include *Zorba*, *Funny Girl*, and *The Full Monty*. His film and television credits are *The Ice Storm*, *Before and After*, *The Stars Fell on Henrietta*, *Mr. and Mrs. Bridge*, *Swift Justice*, *Central Park West*, and *Law and Order: SVU*. He has sung at Carnegie Hall in *The Gay Divorcee* and can be heard on several original cast albums. Mr. Westenberg is married to Kim Crosby and is the proud father of their three children. He is a graduate of the American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco and completed his degree studies at the National Theatre Conservatory in Denver. After serving as chair of the theatre department at Drury University for several years, he is now the coordinator of the BFA Musical Theatre program at Missouri State University.

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