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AN APPLICANT'S GUIDE TO AUDITIONING AND INTERVIEWING AT DANCE AND DRAMA SCHOOLS

*If you've got the talent and you want
the training, here's what to do next ...*

If you've got the talent and you want the training, here's what to do next ...

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introduction



The purpose of this book

This book aims to guide you through the process of applying to a vocational dance or drama school. People applying to vocational schools usually do so because they wish to pursue a career in dance performance or teaching, acting, stage management or technical theatre. This book has been commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills, which funds much of the dance and drama training described here.

The information in this book is gathered from vocational schools and interviews with teachers, choreographers, stage managers, established performers, and directors, professional actors, dancers as well as students already attending a dance or drama school.

What is a dance or drama school?

Dance or drama schools offer vocational education and training in dance and drama. 'Vocational' means that the training you will receive is designed to prepare you for the dance and drama professions as, for example, a dancer, dance teacher, actor, stage manager or theatre technician. The term 'school' is commonly used in relation to these institutions although most are not secondary schools and some are higher education institutions (like a university). The training described in this book is for students who have completed full-time compulsory education. Many dance schools take students from the age of 16, drama schools only take students from the age of 18. Most courses will lead to a nationally recognised qualification including certificates, diplomas and degrees.

The **Useful Contacts** section at the end of this book (p35) provides information on finding out about different schools and courses. The Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET), the National Council for Drama Training (NCDT), the Conference of Drama Schools (CDS), the Connexions service, learndirect and UCAS all provide information about schools and courses. CDET and NCDT have produced a guide to vocational training in dance and drama (see **Useful Reading** on p33).

Choosing a course

Choosing the right course is crucially important. Most of the courses take three years, which is a substantial commitment and needs careful thought. Some training is quite highly specialised so you might be making a decision that will affect your career choices. The performing arts industry is highly competitive, with some courses offering a place to only one person out of every 50 applicants. You should not consider pursuing a career in this field unless you have the stamina and determination that will be demanded of you.

To help you reach a decision, you should

- obtain a range of prospectuses for different schools and courses and read them properly (see **Useful Contacts** (p35) for web links or lists produced by organisations such as CDET and NCDT)
- find out what experience and qualifications you may need
- go and see showcases and/or performances put on by the schools (ask to go on the school's mailing list, check websites or go to Spotlight's online performance calendar at www.spotlightcd.com)
- talk to students at different schools and ask them about their experiences of the course and also the audition process
- take advantage of short courses (usually often held during Summer or Easter holidays) offered by the school or evening/weekend classes
- attend open days offered by different schools
- start researching early, usually a year before the course will start



“The best possible advice I could give to anyone starting out is – have a back up plan. Unless you are extremely lucky you will spend a good chunk of your time ‘resting’. Coriolanus said ‘There is a world elsewhere’. He’s right! You need to make sure that the part of your life outside of your career in the arts is as stable as possible. Find an alternative career to fill in the gaps, train if necessary and endeavour to use your new found skills as little as possible!”

Paul Cameron. Actor (trained LAMDA, 1989 - 92)

Application. Audition. Acceptance.

Once you have decided on favourite courses, you need to apply to the schools. Section Three (p9) of this book offers some tips on writing an application.

If you get through the application stage, you will usually be invited to an audition or interview. Section Four (p11) will guide you through the audition/interview process, with general information and specific guidance for different types of training (dance, acting, musical theatre, stage management and technical theatre).

Finally, if you are offered a place, Section Five (p29) will explain to you what to do next. It also suggests what to do if you are not offered a place.

Some things to think about

- **Paying for the training**
Vocational dance and drama training is expensive to deliver. However, there are various schemes and funding opportunities available. It is **essential** that when you research courses, you also check out the funding available as different schools and courses have different funding options. Dance and drama schools span both the public and private sectors. Most higher education institutions (especially in drama) are funded by the government and you may need to apply to some of these through the central admissions service run for universities (UCAS). The Dance and Drama Awards fund a number of places at schools in the private sector. This is a scholarship scheme funded by the Department for Education and Skills. Both CDET and NCDT have produced information on funding and leaflets are available on the Dance and Drama Awards and maintenance, or loans for higher education students. **Get them and read them** (see **Useful Reading** p33 for a list of publications and **Useful Contacts** for addresses/websites p35).

- **The cost of living as a student**

As well as the cost of training, you need to be aware of the cost of living away from home and the financial assistance available to you (this may be through grants or loans). It can cost approximately £7,000 per year to live in London. Your training will be intensive and require full-time attendance. This will affect your ability to hold down a part-time job. If you need to fundraise to cover costs, it will take time and effort. Be realistic and build this into your application timescale. Both NCDT and CDET produce information leaflets on likely sources of help (see Useful Contacts p35).

- **Keeping your options open**

It is good to be determined and know what you want. However, you should think about alternatives. You might not get offered a place at any school or you might not be given a Dance and Drama Award. You should think about other courses (either at a college or university not necessarily vocational training ones). You should also make sure that you don't leave it too late to apply elsewhere, or through another appropriate application procedure, such as UCAS for universities. Check with your chosen school. For example, did you know that you could apply to both dance and drama schools **and** university dance and drama departments?

- **Preparing for the future**

You've probably been told that dancing or acting is not a 'secure' profession. However, the skills you will learn can easily be adapted and applied to many other kinds of employment, for example; teaching, personnel, sales, arts administration, youth work, or/and jobs that require creativity such as concept design, event management, to name but a few. Many professional performers use their skills in these areas to support themselves at the same time as working 'in the business'. The more skills you have the more versatile and employable you are, and the better able to sustain yourself whilst waiting for work.

Disability & Access

I felt...that making a career as a performer was not really an option. Until I embarked upon my Arts Council Traineeship with CandoCo, I believed that I would have to work in administration rather than as a performer.

Physically disabled dancer. Report into opportunities for disabled performers by ADAinc. DfES, July 2003.



Disabled performers

Many people working in the Performing Arts recognise the essential contribution those with other abilities make to dance and drama. Disabled performers often bring to the stage a different view of the world, a view that enriches the experience of performance for all artists and audiences.

Most vocational schools are in the process of developing an active admissions policy to ensure disabled performers receive training that is suited both to their individual talents and the needs of the industry. Nevertheless, not all schools (nor performance venues) currently have access provision that will enable all disabled artists to make full use of their resources. All are moving towards it, however, and there will be an even more significant increase in opportunity over the next few years as legislation increasing access becomes active (especially the SENDA – Special Educational Needs and Disability Act – amendment to the Disability Discrimination Act).

If you have an impairment or health condition and have decided upon the school(s) to which you want to apply, be sure to contact the admissions office to discuss your needs before you fill in an application form – if the school is currently unable to meet your requirements it will save you time and effort.

If you telephone the school, ask to speak to someone responsible for access. Prepare your questions in advance and make sure you cover all issues that will affect the quality of your training if you pass the audition. If you are unsure as to what you might need or how to describe your access requirements, talk it through with someone else first – perhaps a disabled performer or company, CDET, NCDT or SKILL. If a school is unable to address your needs now ask when it will be able to do so – you may consider applying for a future intake if you have set your heart on one particular school which is currently developing its approach and upgrading its facilities. It is best not to withhold information about your needs as this makes it difficult for schools to offer accurate guidance as to the accessibility of their programmes; it can also make it harder for them to review and develop their current facilities.

When talking to a school, ask particularly if there are any off-site aspects of the course which may be more challenging – do public performances take place in venues with good access and resources? Are visits to theatres an integral part of the course and is access to them considered? Are there any compulsory on-the-road tours? – Is accessible transport available? Is there a designated member of staff to address the special needs of disabled students?

If you intend training at a school away from home it is also important to discuss any access needs you might have in relation to domestic accommodation. Clearly it is essential that these and any transportation requirements are considered well in advance – the school may well be in a position to advise.

Your vocational training is a crucial element of your professional development. Know your rights, be clear about your needs and make sure you are in the best position to make the most of it.

Making an Application

“Really read the prospectus to make sure the school is best suited to what you want.”

Stephanie Eletob, student at Central School of Ballet



When and how should I apply?

The course prospectus will provide information about the school, the course and when and how to apply. You should:

- make sure you meet the entry requirements (this might be in terms of age or qualifications)
- follow the instructions provided by the school (eg, don't send a CV instead of an application form)
- make sure you have completed the application and it will reach the school by the deadline. This is especially important if you are applying to a school offering Dance and Drama Award places as a different deadline for scholarships may apply
- make sure you state if you wish to be considered for a Dance and Drama Award or any other type of scholarship the school may offer.

Auditions take place throughout the year but it is best to apply once you feel confident with your audition/interview material as soon in the academic year as you can. The prospectus will give you the deadline for applications.

How many applications should I make?

You might not be giving yourself a fair chance if you apply for only one course. You should draw up a list of your favourite schools in order of preference and apply to each of them. Even if you decide that a course is not right for you on the day, at least you will have gained valuable audition experience. Do remember, though, that you will need to pay a fee for each audition (see below) and you will have to pay to get to and from the audition and (if necessary) overnight accommodation.

What should I say in my application?

You will usually need to fill out an application form, giving your education details, experience in the field in which you wish to train and other related experiences and skills. You may also be asked for a brief medical history and a personal statement saying why you wish to train at the school. If you have any disability or access needs, it is your responsibility to include details. This is to assist the school in making any additional arrangements for audition or interview. You may be asked to provide a photograph. If so, choose a sensible full-face shot or follow the school's guidance about the kind of picture needed.

The personal statement is very important and you should spend time preparing it. You should include:

- why you want to work in your chosen field
- your ambitions
- your prior experience
- your other interests
- why you like the course

Don't be tempted to exaggerate or invent what you have done before. If the school knows that you have limited experience they will take this into consideration. The course tutors are expert at spotting potential and suitability for training. They are not looking for a finished product. Ask someone experienced to look at your application (a parent/guardian, teacher, careers adviser etc), as they may be able to guide you in the right direction.

- make sure that you use acceptable grammar and correct spelling

What happens after I've applied?

The school will inform you if your application for audition/interview has been successful. If so, you will be invited to attend on a stated day and provided with information on the procedures. You will probably have to pay an audition fee. If the school is part of the Dance and Drama Award scheme, this should be no more than £30 per school. If the school does not offer Dance and Drama Awards, you may pay from nothing up to usually no more than £30. Bear in mind that you will need to build in travel and accommodation costs into your budget for each audition.

What happens if my application is turned down?

If you have been unsuccessful in your application, it may be worth asking the school for feedback. There are many dance and drama schools and you may be successful elsewhere. You should be formulating a back-up plan, in case you do not receive any invitations to audition or interview. Discuss this matter with your careers adviser.

The Audition or Interview

“The audition process is a cornerstone of the performance industry and it’s important for students to get used to this right from the start. Going to an audition should be a learning process for any student – a chance to find out about the school and what it can offer. However, schools are in the business of training people to work in the industry. Candidates aren’t expected to present a ‘finished product’ but they should show a professional attitude and do their best in a secure but challenging environment.”

Stuart Hopps, Choreographer

Why do schools hold auditions and interviews?

For dance and drama courses, applications are a starting point in deciding which students will be offered places. All dance and drama schools have their own audition/interview procedures and these will reflect the ethos of the school and the focus of the training. This section is divided into five parts: firstly some general tips, then four sections outlining what you can expect from auditions and interviews in dance (including teaching), acting, musical theatre and stage management and technical theatre. The section finishes with a chart summarising the things a school may ask you to do.

Some general advice

The night before your audition or interview

You will be more at ease at your audition/interview if you have relaxed the evening before. It is important to stay calm so try not to worry too much. Do have a final rehearsal or spend some time thinking about what you will have to do, but don’t over-rehearse or do too much exercise. Eat a healthy meal in the evening allowing plenty of time for your food to digest before you go to bed. A relaxing hot bath and an early night might help you focus on performing well and staying alert during your audition.

What should I wear?

For acting auditions it is advisable to wear something neutral that will suit both your classical and modern speeches and will be comfortable for movement classes. Check the information sent to you by the school to see if you are required to bring particular clothes. For example dance applicants are likely to need ballet or jazz shoes, tights and a leotard. Wear things that you are used to wearing so you know you will be comfortable.

What should I take to the audition?

Again read through the information sent to you by the school.

- if you have prepared a speech, bring the play with you for reference whilst you are waiting to be seen
- bring something to read, or a personal stereo as you may have to wait around for long periods
- being cold will make you tense, so bring some extra clothes to put on whilst you are waiting around
- bring something to eat and drink, especially if you are likely to be there all day
- bring some loose change for drinks machines and buses or taxis

Getting there

Leave yourself plenty of time to travel to your audition/interview and find the school, especially if you haven’t visited it beforehand. It is better to arrive early to check out the area, look around the school, have some time to warm-up and have a snack than to arrive late and flustered. Make sure you have a map (some schools will send you one) or ask the school for directions.

If you have access to the internet, check out www.streetmap.co.uk or www.multimap.co.uk. You may need to get a taxi to the school, telephone SCOOT (0800 192 192) for a list of local taxi firms.

If the school is a long way from your home you may have to stay overnight, travelling down the night before your audition or interview. If so make sure you plan ahead and make arrangements. The school should be able to provide information on accommodation. Alternatively you can call the Youth Hostel Association (YHA) on 08708 708 808 or, visit their website www.yha.org.uk or visit www.backpackers.co.uk for information on hostels and B&Bs.



“If you show yourself to be calm and well prepared you will be noticed. Be at ease with those who are on the panel”

Michael Cox, student at Academy of Live and Recorded Arts

What happens on the day?

Upon arrival you will register and meet the other people auditioning/interviewing that day. Schools often ask current students to show applicants around; this offers a good chance to ask questions about the course, finding accommodation, social life etc.

Try to relax and enjoy yourself. Schools are looking for people who work well together in a group, who are imaginative and open, and show the potential to be trained as an actor/dancer/stage manager/dance teacher. Remember, they are not looking for perfection.

Some schools will audition everyone for the entire day and others will periodically reduce numbers throughout the day. This can be a tough process, but it is important to keep things in perspective – you may be more successful next time. Everyone working in dance and drama has to learn to accept criticism and rejection.

How to relax

You may have your own way of relaxing, but here are some tips:

- avoid rushing and give yourself plenty of time to do everything
- find a quiet place where you can let your mind be still, close your eyes and think positively
- breathe deeply and calmly. Take long slow deep breaths releasing when you breathe out. Don't suck air in or push it out, allow it to flow freely. Deep breathing will fill your body with the oxygen it needs to be energised and relaxed
- if you feel very tense, take a moment to lie down on your back with your eyes closed. Go through each part of your body from your head to your feet, contracting the muscles with each inhalation and then releasing them on the exhalation. This will encourage the muscles to relax.

What and when should I eat?

The British Nutrition Foundation does not recommend eating heavy meals before exercise, so leave approximately 2 hours between eating a meal and your audition. That said, it's better to eat something rather than nothing, especially if you have an early start. Eat small amounts regularly and take a light, packed lunch with you if your audition lasts all day.

Some suggestions:

- fresh fruit (bananas are particularly good for giving an extra boost of energy)
- raw vegetables such as carrots and celery
- cereal bars
- carbohydrates, such as pasta, wholemeal bread, rice and other grains, will give you energy

Make sure you maintain your fluids by drinking lots of water or diluted fruit juice. Be aware that sports drinks may only give you a temporary boost of energy, so do not rely only on them for your energy for the day. Consuming fresh healthy food is the best way to maintain energy levels. Take a small bottle of water with you into the classes or audition as you may find nerves dry out your mouth.

Dance UK and the British Nutrition Foundation produce some really useful advice on eating for health and performance (see **Useful Contacts** p35 for details).

Useful tips

Be yourself. If you are relaxed, you will be better able to demonstrate your potential at your audition. If you feel comfortable have a chat with the other candidates. This may help you feel more at ease. Enthusiasm, energy and confidence will help you, provided it isn't forced.

- Do practice your audition pieces with a friend or teacher
- Do warm-up gently before your audition
- Do make sure you know your pieces well (because there will be distractions)
- Do enjoy yourself
- Do keep positive – think positive thoughts: imagine yourself at the school
- Do remember that the panel members are concentrating very hard and that this can make them seem disapproving

- Don't compare yourself with others
- Don't allow yourself to be intimidated by other candidates
- Don't overstretch or force your voice or body, do the same as you usually do, no more
- Don't try to second-guess the panel, it's pointless and frustrating
- Don't oversell yourself
- Don't dwell on mistakes
- Don't concern yourself with what the panel members are writing down

What to expect at a **DANCE** audition and interview



Professional dance training can be divided into four main types of dance: ballet, contemporary, jazz and musical theatre. Schools tend to specialise in one of these areas. However, schools usually aim to train versatile dancers who will find employment, so the curriculum will cover different dance styles and supporting studies. Several courses incorporate teaching skills and there are specialist dance programmes to qualify as a dance teacher. See also the section about Musical Theatre auditions on p23.

What do I need to prepare?

Usually you will be asked to present a dance solo. Schools will tell you their requirements. Making a solo can be an interesting and enjoyable process. You may choose to use a picture, some writing or music as the stimulus for your choreography. Ask a friend or teacher, to give you some feedback. Record any music you use onto a tape at the beginning of side 'A', cued for the beginning of the solo and take a back-up copy too in case of accidents with the tape machine.

Ballet

Your audition will include ballet classes and pointe work. You may be asked to prepare a solo and also to do classes and workshops in other styles and techniques eg contemporary or improvisation. Ballet dancers have an extremely rigorous training which can begin at eleven, or younger, and entry onto courses is strictly limited to those who show a realistic chance of achieving the required levels of technique and artistry.

Contemporary

For contemporary courses your audition will include a contemporary class and a ballet barre or class. Your audition may also include an improvisation workshop. You may be required to present a short solo, usually no more than three minutes long, preferably choreographed by you. Think carefully about your choreographic impetus and process. You should also consider your reasons for choosing the music you use, or for choosing not to use music. You may be asked about all of these things in your audition.

Jazz

There are many different styles of jazz that are taught across the schools and in the profession. For jazz courses you will be required to take a jazz technique class. You may also be asked to take a ballet class. Jazz can be the kind of dance that you see on music videos and on television as well as the dance you see in some musicals. It can be high energy and urban like street dance, or formal and traditional with its roots in ballet (for example the Alvin Ailey Company or Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers). If asked to perform a solo, make sure that you chose a style of jazz familiar to you and use appropriate music.

Dance Teaching

Auditions for teacher training courses will include a dance technique class. You may also be asked to perform a short dance piece of your own composition, lasting about one minute and to teach a short section of your dance, or another sequence to other candidates. If so, make a piece that expresses something about you and that will be enjoyable for others to learn. You may find it helpful to practice how you will describe the movements and the intention of the piece. You may want to practice teaching your sequence to some friends. Think about what qualitative words you use, which body parts you will refer to and what corrections you may need to give. Be clear about what you want to communicate as you may be asked questions by the people you are teaching.

What do I need to prepare?

Some tips:

- before performing **dance solos** take some time to warm up and prepare yourself (Dance UK produces a guide to warming up and cooling down – **Useful Contacts** p35)
- if you get a chance, walk through your solo in the space to get a feeling of it in your body. Map out the directions and spacing
- this is an opportunity to show how you perform, so take time to connect with the audience and project yourself throughout your solo, filling each movement with energy and intention



“If you don’t believe in yourself, neither will anyone else. True confidence isn’t about being cocky or arrogant, it’s about getting up there and having a go, giving it everything, knowing that you’ve done the best you can, and being happy with that.”

Elinor Baker, student at Laban Centre London

- if you make a mistake, just carry on
- make sure you keep breathing deeply whilst you are dancing!
- if you forget your solo stay calm and say you would like to start again. Take a moment to centre yourself and mentally go through your dance material before starting again
- take your time and try to enjoy it
- pause for a moment at the end so the panel know you have finished

Overall a school is looking for a balance of physical, artistic, creative and performance potential and an ability to engage with and understand dance. This may also include your own choreographic process. You are not expected to be a genius choreographer at this stage! It is looking for your ability to think about dance as well as your potential to be a dancer.

What should I do leading up to the audition?

Much of the advice about preparing to apply for acting courses is useful here (see p19). Easter, summer or other short courses can give you a feel for a school and a chance for staff to see you work in a relaxed environment. Talk to students currently attending your chosen school about their experiences of auditioning and of the subsequent training.

Your audition might involve an unfamiliar dance form. To prepare for this, take some beginner or open classes before the audition. Your local dance agency will have information about classes in your area (CDET can provide you with details of your local dance agency. See **Useful Contacts p35**). It might be useful to show your audition pieces to someone experienced who may be able to offer you some feedback.

What happens at the interview?

Most schools interview candidates but will follow different procedures. Some interview all candidates, others only interview those who have successfully completed another part of the audition. The interview is an opportunity for the audition panel and you to find out more about each other. Answer any questions honestly and with confidence. It is worth thinking about some of the questions you may be asked.

- What is your previous experience?
- What performances have you seen? Which ones did you like and why?
- What are your aspirations? (ie what do you want to do after training?)
- What do you hope to get out of the course?
- What do you have to offer to the school? (eg energy, enthusiasm, commitment)

Should I ask questions in my interview?

You may be invited to ask some questions in your interview. This is your chance to find out more about the course and the school. Discussing things you’d like to know with someone else beforehand might help clarify your questions. Make a note of these questions so you don’t worry about forgetting things you would like to ask. You may wish to know more about performance opportunities, course content, accommodation, funding and so on.

Recalls

You may be asked to attend an additional audition, known as a recall. This may be on another day or on the same day. Keep the rest of the day free and don’t over commit yourself.



What to expect at an **ACTING** audition and interview



What do I need to prepare?

You will usually be expected to prepare two or three speeches and sometimes a song to present to the audition panel. Speeches should usually be between two and three minutes long (check each school's Audition/Interview Guidelines/Requirements for details) and you will often be asked to present contrasting classical and modern pieces. Make sure you get someone else to time your speeches (at your normal performance speed) and try and make any cuts before you have learnt it off by heart.

How do I choose my speeches?

Schools may provide a list of texts from which to choose, others may provide a list of speeches to be avoided (usually because they are done so often). Try to be imaginative. It is probably best to avoid books of audition speeches, as everyone will be looking at them for ideas. Do not limit yourself. If you can't find a piece you like then you could take a scene from a play and cut out the other characters' lines - with a little rewriting you can make a complete speech. Unless you are a very confident writer, it is not advisable to write your own speech and schools will usually require candidates to perform a published text. It's not a good idea to play characters that are vastly outside your playing range or to attempt an accent or dialect that is not your own, unless you are very confident.

The speech should make sense on its own without the need for introduction or explanation. Make sure that you read all of the play, not just the excerpt - you may be asked questions by the panel. Most importantly, learn the speeches thoroughly. You may be offered direction at the audition that is totally different from what you have prepared, so you will need to be confident with your lines.

How should I perform my speeches?

The following are some useful dos and don'ts:

- do try to visualise your character's environment, as you are performing without props
- do imagine what the character is thinking and feeling to bring meaning to the lines
- do stay calm if you forget your lines: nerves are understandable in an audition situation. Take a moment to collect yourself and say you would like to start again
- do make sure the panel know when you have finished, you may choose to be still for a moment before relaxing into your normal self.
- don't apologise about your work as it will detract from your performance
- don't address your speech to the audition panel directly, unless you are asked specifically to do so. If the speech is directed at another character, then do your best to visualise that person and imaginatively place them somewhere specific in the room; the best place is downstage and slightly to the side of the panel
- don't rush
- don't bow!

Amongst other things, the panel is looking for your understanding of the text and character. They are also looking for your ability to connect with the text and to respond to directive input.



“Choose pieces with humour and which have a journey. Three minutes of relentless ranting or swearing does not hold an audience enthralled.”

Rachel Bavidge. Actor. Trained at Webber Douglas



If you are asked to prepare a song then you should spend as much time on it as your speeches. For musical theatre courses this is an important part of the audition, but even for acting courses the strength of your musical performance may tip the balance when the panel are making final decisions. For guidance on preparing and performing songs see **How should I perform my solos?** in the **Musical Theatre** section (p23). Where possible, show your speeches to your drama teacher or youth theatre leader and ask for feedback, but remember, there is a danger in having too many directors. You may find that there is an evening or weekend course offered locally which focuses on audition technique (contact NCDT for details – **Useful Contacts** p35).

What happens at the interview?

Most schools interview candidates. There will be a different procedure at each school; some interview all candidates, others only those who have successfully completed another part of the audition. The interview is an opportunity for the audition panel to find out more about you and for you to ask questions too. It is worth thinking about some of the typical questions you may be asked:

- why do you want to act?
- what sort of actor do you want to be?
- what are your ambitions?
- what play or film have you seen recently that impressed you and why?
- who is your favourite actor and why?
- are you applying to any other drama schools?

It is important to think about questions that you may want to ask the panel as well.

You may be asked back to attend an extra audition day, known as a recall. This may be in the afternoon of your initial audition or on another day. Some schools ask applicants to attend a weekend course. Recalls allow schools to spend more time assessing your ability in a smaller group and you will probably be asked to perform your speeches again.



What to expect at a **MUSICAL THEATRE** audition and interview

“Don’t be frightened. Go to the front. Don’t hide. You are a performer, so show them what you can do! Most importantly enjoy yourself. Just relax, smile and you will do fine.”

Michael Warren, second year student, Central School of Ballet.

If you’re hoping to work in musicals such as *Chicago* or *Les Miserables* in the West End you should consider a musical theatre course. These are available at both dance and drama schools. These courses train students to act, dance and sing and you should show an aptitude or potential in all three areas. Different approaches to this type of training may reflect whether a school is a drama or a dance school. You may wish to apply for musical theatre courses at both dance and drama schools to see which type you prefer and to which you are more suited.

Read through both the **ACTING** (p19) and **DANCE** (p15) sections of this leaflet for guidance on preparing for your audition. Below is some guidance on preparing specifically for auditions in musical theatre.

What do I need to prepare for my audition?

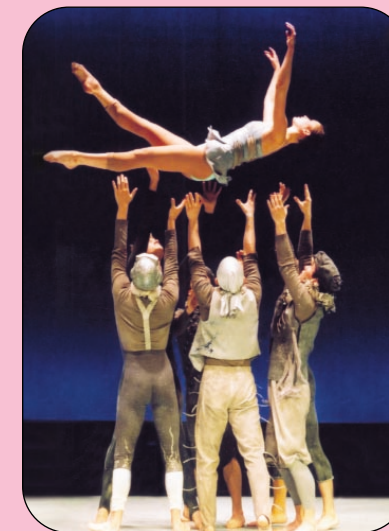
You will be asked to demonstrate your aptitude and potential in acting, dancing and singing. At interview you should be prepared to talk about why you want to train in musical theatre as opposed to acting or dance and about your experience of taking part in or seeing musical theatre. (see **What happens at the interview?** on p17 and p21).

- **Speeches:** these should be between two and three minutes long and you may be asked to present contrasting classical and modern pieces.
- **Dance:** Musical Theatre auditions at dance schools may ask you to prepare a short solo in your choice of dance discipline, or a number of solos in different forms such as jazz, ballet and tap. You will also be asked to participate in a class or workshop.
- **Songs:** you may need to bring sheet music for your songs, which should be in the right key and taped together if it is not in a book. A school may ask you to present one song from a musical and a second song of any style to contrast with the first. Check how many bars they normally like to hear, as if the song goes on too long they may stop you before you have got to the best part in terms of your performance.

How should I perform my song?

Choose songs in a style and key that are compatible with your voice and that you enjoy singing. The accompanist may play the music at a different tempo than you are used to, so be prepared for this. If possible, hum a few bars to him or her beforehand, to help to establish your usual tempo. You may find that not all auditions provide a group vocal warm-up, so take some time on your own to warm-up your voice gently before doing any singing. If you think there may not be time to warm-up your voice during the day it may be advisable to do this in the morning before you arrive at your audition. Be confident and listen to the words of your song as you are singing them. Try to connect with the feeling of the song.

For other guidance on performing solos, see the relevant sections on p13, 14 and p18.



What to expect at a **STAGE MANAGEMENT and TECHNICAL THEATRE** interview



What can I expect?

Most schools select by interview, although you may be asked to present examples of your work to support your application. This may include: sketches, models, photographs, prompt books, costume designs, lighting and sound plans and set designs. You should start to put together a portfolio of your work before applying for courses. Seek advice from a teacher on how to present it. At the interview you need to be able to show commitment and a genuine enthusiasm for your chosen career path. The interview may last all day and include group exercises and discussions. Some courses will ask you to prepare an exercise in advance. You may be offered an opportunity to watch a performance at the school so that you can see the work of current students.

What qualities do I need?

Staging a live performance or working in film and television requires an ability to cope with the stress and tension associated with the creative process. It is a great strength if you can stay calm in a crisis, adapt quickly to change, and work consistently over long periods of time. The interview panel will not expect to see a fully developed professional at interview. They are interested in assessing potential. They will be looking for commitment, stamina, and an ability to collaborate with others. Very often the selection process will be designed to find those who can concentrate, problem solve, and provide leadership in a crisis. Personal qualities are as important as technical ability, when seeking a place in the industry.

Are all courses the same?

All schools provide a thorough grounding in all technical areas involved in production such as: electrics and lighting design, sound, wardrobe, scenic construction, scenic painting, prop making and stage management. Most of them offer experience in technical drawing, music score reading, and an introduction to theatre history, research techniques, budgeting, television production and scenic design. There is usually an opportunity to work with professional designers and directors amongst a wide variety of practitioners. Alongside instruction and study there is the possibility of work placement to a theatre, television production company, or other related professional organisation.

If you find you enjoy one of these areas of working more than others, then you can choose to specialise. Schools vary a little in the selection of options available or in the emphasis they place on one area as opposed to another. Reading the relevant prospectus can help you decide which school to apply to, or what courses to select. Aside from seeking further additional advice from teachers, it is often sensible to talk to those with professional experience.

How can I build up experience for my portfolio?

- get involved with as many productions as possible at school, college or with your local theatre group
- try to get a work experience placement at your local theatre
- take photographs of some of the production work you get involved in and keep copies of prompt scripts you might have used
- draw up designs and plans for imaginary productions of plays which interest you

Remember that there are a wide variety of places where those with stage management experience/technical skills are employed. Aside from working in the theatre or in film and television, they provide the lighting and sound production support for concerts. They can be found setting up equipment and organising crews to provide technical services for theme parks, trade fairs, exhibitions, international trade shows and exhibitions. Taking an interest in these areas of activity by reading articles in newspapers, talking to people and watching them work will not only assist your performance at interviews, but will also contribute to your enjoyment of the course.

“Getting involved in Amateur Dramatics groups and going to local theatres to pick up some voluntary casual work doing anything you can – dresser, stage hand, stage electrics, Assistant Stage Manager – really prepares you for answering any questions you may be asked in interview. Nothing is better than first hand experience.”

Gideon Feldman, freelance Stage Manager and Production Manager
(trained at Guildhall School of Music and Drama).

The structure of the day

Summary Chart

This is for guidance only.

Audition schedules will vary from school to school.

*Acting	Ballet	Contemporary Dance
Registration	Registration	Registration
Welcome	Welcome	Welcome
Physical warm-up	Ballet class	Contemporary class
Vocal warm-up	Movement workshop	Ballet barre/class
Speeches	*Interview	Improvisation
Group work	**Physio	Solo
Sight reading		Interview
Screen test		**Physio
Interview		
Movement workshop		
Improvisation		

*A number of acting courses will simply interview you and ask to see your speeches at your first round audition. They will then use a schedule similar to the one above for final recall auditions.

Dance Teaching	Musical Theatre	Stage Management / Technical Theatre
Registration	Registration	Registration
Welcome	Welcome	Interview
Class	Group work	Portfolio
Creative workshop	Speeches	Workshop
Interview	Singing solos	Performance observation
Demonstration of teaching	Dance solos	Group discussion
**Physio	Sight reading	
	Ballet class	
	Jazz class	
	Interview	
	**Physio	

**Physio – examination of physique by a physiotherapist to see if your body is healthy and fit for intensive training.

What happens after the Audition or Interview ?

“Don’t put too much pressure on yourself. It’s not the end of the world if you don’t get in this year. You don’t only have one chance. If you take a year out, you should aim to save money, which will make life a lot easier when you do go to drama school.”

Michael Cox, student at Academy of Live and Recorded Arts

How will I know if I’ve got in?

Some schools will inform you of the outcome on the day of your audition. You may receive feedback from the school. The feedback is provided at the school’s discretion and the school should have a statement of its policy. Otherwise, the school will usually contact you by post to inform you of the outcome.

What should I do if I am offered a place?

You should be told by the school how and when you should decide whether or not to accept the offer of a place. Usually, you will be required to state in writing that you wish to accept the place and some schools charge a deposit or registration fee at this point (see **I’ve been asked to pay a deposit** p31 below). If the school offers Dance and Drama Awards, you need to check the policy on allocating Awards. Some schools will hold special Awards auditions, others offer Award places throughout the year. Make sure you know each school’s policy.

CDET and the Conference of Drama Schools operate ‘clearing’ systems for dance and drama respectively. This is to ensure that students do not hold several Award places after examination results are published (the middle of August). It will help you if your auditions are at a similar time so you are not holding onto a place for months whilst waiting for an audition elsewhere.

What if I don’t get offered a place?

Thousands of people apply to Dance and Drama schools each year and only a small number are offered places. If you are not offered a place there may be a number of reasons, it doesn’t necessarily reflect badly on your ability. Schools are often looking to form a cohesive group. They may feel that you are talented but not right for that particular course, or they may think you are too young for the course. Drama school training requires a maturity that many 17 or 18 year olds have not yet achieved. It is worth thinking about this very carefully. The physical, mental and emotional demands of training are considerable. It may be beneficial to take a year out to gain some other experiences, save some money and then reapply the following year. Owing to the large number of applicants it is not always easy for schools to give detailed feedback on individual auditions, however it may be worth enquiring if it is in your interest to reapply.

Schools offering Dance and Drama Award (DaDA) places will allow you to appeal against a decision not to offer you a place. Candidates applying to other non-DaDA vocational schools should check the school’s regulations. Your appeal will only be considered on the grounds of procedure (ie how the audition is conducted) not on the artistic judgments of the panel. Schools reserve the right to offer or decline places (and Awards) based on written and justifiable criteria. If your appeal is upheld, then you may be offered the right to have the original audition discounted and an opportunity to audition again. It is unlikely that any appeal will result in an automatic place at the school, or an Award.

If you are refused a place for this year, and decide to reapply, use the year to focus and develop your skills in time for the next round of auditions. Get involved with as much performance as you can, and continue to research the schools. Don’t let a rejection put you off. There are many examples of performers who were initially refused entrance to schools and who have gone on to have very successful careers.

What if I continually get no offers?

If you are unsuccessful in all your applications and have any doubts about carrying on you should think carefully about your career path. There are many opportunities to study dance and theatre in a different context to vocational training both in Higher and in Further Education. Visit the UCAS website www.ucas.com or www.hotcourses.com for information on courses. You could also consult a careers adviser to find out what options are available.



“You audition a school as much as it auditions you. This frame of mind definitely helped me to keep calm and confident on the day, and this was advice that enabled me to find a suitable course. I consequently turned down a very prestigious school for a college where all my interests were catered for and therefore, a place where I could be myself and flourish.”

Theo Clinkard (trained at Elmhurst and Rambert) currently dancing with Random Dance Company

What if I'm not sure about the course?

It is very flattering to be offered a place at a school, but if you are unsure if the course is right for you then think carefully before you accept. Remember that you are being invited to spend the next two or three years training there. Don't just take the first offer that comes along. If you don't feel entirely comfortable with the course it may be worth waiting another year, or applying elsewhere. It is worth checking about deferring your place at a school as some will expect you to go through the whole audition process again with no guarantee of being re-offered a place.

I've been asked to pay a deposit

If you accept a place you may be asked to pay a registration fee or deposit of up to £500 to secure your place. Registration fees are usually offset against course fees once you enrol but will not be refunded to candidates who do not take up their place.

Students receiving a Dance and Drama Award (DaDA) will have registration fees reimbursed at the school they attend. If you can only accept the place if you receive an Award you should inform the school.

If you are having problems raising the funds to pay registration fees (especially if you have not been informed about DaDA allocations) you can contact the school or seek advice from CDET or NCDT (see **Useful Contacts** p35).

Entry onto some courses may be reliant on examination results (eg 'A' levels) in which case you won't be expected to pay registration fees until you have received your results or are offered an unconditional place by the school.

What should I do before the course starts?

There are several things you should try to do before your course starts:

- arrange suitable accommodation
- make applications for funding where appropriate
- purchase necessary equipment and books
- take regular exercise. It is important to start your course fit and healthy, you will be working long, intense hours so you need to build up stamina, even for stage management training where you will spend a lot of time on your feet
- continue to take your regular classes (especially important for dancers)
- see as much live performance as you can
- most schools will send you a reading list, now is a good time to get started

There will be many pressures once you have achieved your place and started your course. Be aware that the school has offered it to you because it believes you have the potential to succeed in your chosen career. The first couple of terms can be the most difficult and it is worth reminding yourself of the hard work you have already put into getting on the course.

Useful reading



Actor's Guide to Auditions and Interviews

Margo Annett, A&C Black, London, 2001, Second Edition

An Actor's Guide to Getting Work

Simon Dunmore, A&C Black 2001, Third Edition

The Actor's Handbook

(ed) Alastair Cording, Bloomsbury, London, 1998.

Dance and Drama Awards

published by the Department for Education and Skills. (See **Useful Contacts** p35 for details.)

The Dancer's Survival Guide

(ed) Scilla Dyke, Dance UK, London, 1999.

Dance Teaching Essentials

Dance UK London, 2002.

Financial support for higher education students

published annually by the Department for Education and Skills.
(See **Useful Contacts** p35 for details.)

First Steps Towards An Acting Career

Nigel Rideout, A&C Black, London, 1995.

Getting into Music, Drama and Dance

Emma Caprez, Trotman & Co, Richmond, Surrey, 1998.

High Kicks – The Essential Guide to Working as a Dancer

Donna Ross, A&C Black, London, 1999.

Making an Entrance

Adam Benjamin, Taylor & Francis Books Ltd, London, 2001.

The Official Guide to Vocational Courses for Drama and Technical Theatre 2004

Conference of Drama Schools, published annually. (See **Useful Contacts** p35 for details.)

Performing Arts Courses

UCAS and Trotman Publications

(UCAS details for courses in dance, drama, music and performing arts.
Updated annually.)

A Practical Guide to Vocational Training in Dance and Drama

CDET and NCDT. Available upon request from CDET and NCDT
(See **Useful Contacts** p35 for details.)

Your Body Your Risk

(ed) Scilla Dyke, Dance UK, London, 2001.

Many of the organisations listed in **Useful Contacts** also produce information sheets that may be helpful to you.

Specialist bookshops

French's Theatre Bookshop specialises in drama and technical theatre books and offers a mail order service.

52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR

t 020 7255 4300

www.samueelfrench-london.co.uk

Dance Books also offers a mail order service.

Dance Books Ltd, The Old Bakery, 4 Lenten Street, Alton, Hampshire GU34 1HG

t 01420 86138

www.dancebooks.co.uk

National Theatre Bookshop

South Bank, London SE1 9PX

t 020 7452 3456

e bookshop@nationaltheatre.org.uk

www.nationaltheatre.org.uk

Useful contacts



Organisations

British Nutrition Foundation for general information on nutrition and healthy eating send a stamped addressed envelope to:
British Nutrition Foundation, High Holborn House, 52-54 High Holborn, London, WC1V 6RQ
t 020 7404 6504
www.nutrition.org.uk

Career Development Loans available to students aged 18+. To obtain an information pack call 0800 585 505 (freephone) or visit www.lifelonglearning.co.uk

Conference of Drama Schools publishes annually The Official UK Guide to Drama Training. For a copy send a C5 sae with a 44p stamp to CDS PO Box 34252 London NW5 1XJ.
t 020 7692 0032
e enquiries@cds.drama.ac.uk
www.drama.ac.uk

Connexions provides all teenagers with the help and support they need to prepare for the transition to work.
t 0114 259 1104
www.connexions.gov.uk

Council for Dance Education and Training (CDET) accredits dance courses, provides advice and information on training and funding. Stamped addressed envelope required.
Toynbee Hall, 28 Commercial Street, London E1 6LS
t 020 7247 4030
f 020 7247 3404
e info@cdet.org.uk
www.cdet.org.uk

Answers for Dancers (General Enquiries)
t 0901 88 000 14 (calls cost 25p per minute)

Dance UK has a wide range of useful information sheets and publications aimed at professional dancers and dance students.
Battersea Arts Centre, Lavender Hill, London SW11 5TF
t 020 7228 4990
f 020 7223 0074
e info@danceuk.org
www.danceuk.org

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) have a team responsible for the Dance and Drama Awards.
Young People Learner Support and Dance & Drama Team, DfES, Moorfoot, Sheffield, S1 4PQ
t 0114 259 3612
For a copy of the Dance and Drama Awards booklet phone 08456 022 260 or visit the website
www.dfes.gov.uk/dancedrama

Other **DfES** contacts for higher education students:
www.dfes.gov.uk/studentssupport
t 0870 000 2288
Information line for publications 0800 731 9133

Equity - union representing actors, performers and stage managers working in the performing arts
Guild House, Upper St. Martin's Lane, London WC2H 9EG
t 020 7379 6000
f 020 7379 7001
www.equity.org.uk

Educational Grants Advisory Service for advice about sources of funding.
501-505 Kingsland Road, Dalston, London E8 4AU
t 020 7249 6636



Foundation for Community Dance: the industry lead body for community dance, can provide advice, information and publications about community dance.

Cathedral Chambers, 2 Peacock Lane, Leicester LE1 5PX

t 0116 251 0516

f 0116 251 0517

e info@communitydance.org.uk
www.communitydance.org.uk

Learndirect a free helpline and website, giving impartial information about arts and entertainment learning.

t 0800 093 0444

www.learndirect.co.uk

National Council for Drama Training (NCDT) accredits drama courses and provides advice and information on training and funding.

1-7 Woburn Walk, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0JJ

t 020 7387 3650

f 020 7387 3860

e info@ncdt.co.uk
www.ncdt.co.uk

SKILL National Bureau for Students with Disabilities, Head Office, Chapter House, 18 - 20 Crucifix Lane, London SE1 3JW

t/minicom: 020 7450 0620

f 020 7450 0650

e info@skill.org.uk

Information service: 0800 328 5050

UCAS (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service for the UK):

provides information on courses.

Rosehill, New Barn Lane, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire, GL52 3LZ

t 01242 227 788

minicom 01424 544 942

e enq@ucas.ac.uk
www.ucas.com

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