



Department of Theatre

Preparing to Enter College

How should I best prepare to enter a theatre school, college or university as a theatre major?

Acceptance to a professional studio school or an undergraduate program in theatre is based on many considerations. These vary widely among institutions. For example, some have stringent audition or portfolio requirements before admission while others have open admission policies followed by thorough examinations at some point in the program to determine whether the student may continue. For specific application requirements, contact the institution directly. The suggestions below indicate how you can best prepare during the high school years, not what you must achieve to apply or be accepted. The advice provided describes two things: first, an ideal set of knowledge and skills goals for college-level applicants; second, competencies needed by theatre professionals as they practice the various aspects of the profession. In brief, you should learn as much as you can as early as you can.

Balance your efforts. Intellectual and artistic curiosity are essential to successful work in the theatrical professions. A breadth of knowledge and skills is critical. If you show achievement and promise in academics as well as theatre, institutions will want to admit you and you will be better prepared for theatre study and work.

Take responsibility for your own development. Each individual committed to the field of theatre brings a unique set of talents, aspirations and abilities to the profession. Although you are in school and probably studying or participating in theatre, it is important to take increasing responsibility for developing your particular abilities toward your specific goals. Begin by obtaining the admission requirements of schools you may wish to attend--the earlier, the better. Ultimately, you are responsible for choices about how you use your time to prepare for your future.

Become a fluent, effective English speaker and writer. As a theatre professional, you will rely heavily on your ability to communicate in words. Everything from rehearsals to teaching, to writing grant proposals, to negotiating, to promoting your professional interests relies on fluent English skills. Focus attention on learning to speak and write effectively.

Get a comprehensive high school education. The theatre profession is big, but it is also part of a larger whole. Theatre both influences and is influenced by the humanities, mathematics, the sciences, the social sciences and the other arts--architecture, dance, film, literature, music and the visual arts. For entrance into college-level study, you are encouraged to gain a basic overview of ancient and modern history, the basic thought processes and procedures of math and science, and familiarity with works in as many of the other arts disciplines as possible. Most professionals who work with theatre comprehensively develop a particular sensibility about the connections among theatre, history, psychology and the other arts. Work on understanding the basics of math and the sciences support future work in theatre technologies. Social studies are related to understanding the context for various theatre endeavors.

Learn how theatre works. Take opportunities to learn the basics of dramatic structure, including how the various elements of theatre work together. Like so many other things in theatre, this knowledge is developed throughout a lifetime. Those who are able to get started early have an advantage. Work with your drama teachers, take classes at your local college or professional studio school or otherwise explore opportunities to gain initial acquaintance with this material.

Master the basics. Be sure that you know the basic terminology, the major types of theatrical work and have read a number of important plays.

See as much theatre as you can. You need to be familiar with far more theatre than that in which you participate. Try to see as much theatre from as many historical periods, cultural sources and media as possible. Ask your teachers to recommend a list for you that cover the various repertoires. Try to make sure that you have seen major works of all types in the particular area of theatre that interests you. Seek more to learn the breadth and depth of the repertory than to enjoy what is already familiar. Extend your vision of what the theatre is by seeing as much professional theatre as possible, if not in your region, then in other parts of the country while you may be traveling for vacations, field trips, etc. Being familiar with the writing in national publications, such as the Sunday New York Times, will also help you extend your knowledge of the theatre. Ask your teacher to suggest publications that are suitable to your interests.

Develop your understanding of the arts. Take every opportunity to learn about dance, film/video, music, and the visual arts. Some fields of theatre require knowledge and skills in music, dance, computing, or art and design.

Practice, practice, practice. Whatever you do or intend to do in theatre, try to practice it as much as possible. This applies not only to performance areas such as acting and design/tech, but also to other types of work in theatre. For example, if you are interested in teaching or directing, you should try to observe and gain experiences under appropriate supervision. If you are interested in playwriting, theatre scholarship, or criticism, you should practice writing and speaking on theatre topics. No level of knowledge or skill that you can attain will be too high.

Learn to care for yourself. Your body and mind are your instruments. It is critical to take extremely good care of both. Learn about nutrition and exercise, how to manage stress, how to prevent injury, and how to maintain healthy habits that will promote long-term health and fitness. Work closely with your physician, your parents, and your theatre teachers.

Think of everything you study as helping you become better in theatre. As we have already said, the best theatre professionals continue to learn throughout their lives. They are always studying and thinking, always connecting what they know about theatre with their knowledge of other fields. Since you never know the direction your career will take, it is wise to spend your high school years gaining the basic ability to understand and work in a variety of fields beyond theatre. Keep theatre at the center of your efforts, but accept and enjoy the challenge of gaining the kind of knowledge and skills in other areas that will support both formal studies at the advanced level and your theatre career beyond.