

Deciding What's Right for You

How to Think About, and Apply For, College Theatre and Musical Theatre Programs

RESEARCH ALL KINDS OF PROGRAMS—THEY ARE ALL DIFFERENT!

Ask yourself the following questions:

What kind of education do I want? What kind of curriculum do I want?
What is the balance I want between academics and the arts?
What do I want in a school?
What if I want to double major? Can I minor?
What am I most interested in learning at this time?
Where do I think my future interests lie? Don't limit yourself. Do I want to perform or am I interested in other areas of the business—writing, producing, directing, design, administration?
If so, can I do that at your school?

Ask the school the following questions:

What is the school looking for in its applicants? Polished professionals or works in progress? What is its educational philosophy? Is the curriculum flexible or very structured? BFA or BA?

How large are the classes, especially those that are performance related? What is the atmosphere in the classes—professional, creative, competitive or non-competitive, focused, academic, pre-professional? Is it a “cut” program and if so what does that mean? What is the retention rate?

Historically how many MT and Acting applications did to school receive and how many student accepted into each class? Some BFA programs are very small—is that right for you? What is the gender balance? How diverse is the student body?

What are the opportunities at the college/university apart from the theatre program? Is there a student theatre scene? How many student theater/improv/music opportunities? How many student run opportunities are typical each year? Do majors interact with students in other majors?

Can the students study abroad for a semester? Can they double major? If so will this delay graduation beyond 4 years? Are the students allowed to work professionally?

What is the relationship between students and faculty? How accessible are faculty for meetings outside of class? Does the faculty work professionally away from school and, if so, how does that benefit the students or does it mean “name” faculty don't teach?

How many faculty-directed, departmental plays and musicals are presented each year? Are there limits on non-majors participating in plays and musicals? What are examples of past productions?

Does the school/department promote new works? Do they encourage/produce student created works?

Do musical theatre students participate in plays and visa versa? What about films, dance concerts, operas and or/recitals? What is the relationship between the music, dance and theatre department? Do graduate students perform or direct and how does that increase or decrease undergraduate opportunities?

How often does the school bring in professional artists to work with or speak with students? Do graduates return to interact with students?

Are the students taught about the field as a profession and how to make a living if they choose to pursue a career in the arts? (agents, casting, audition techniques, business aspect)? Where are the graduates working and what do they say about their experience at the school? What is the opinion of current students, especially seniors?

Does the school help with the transition to a professional career, such as a senior showcase, internships, other career guidance? How is the department regarded by people in the profession, including casting directors, agents, directors, conductors?

Explore the school's official website. What's required? What courses are offered?

Use caution with unofficial/anonymous internet sources. Instead, seek personal connections. Speak with graduates and current students.

Try to visit schools, **but realize that is not always possible**. Find other ways to gather information. Talk to your teachers or professionals in the business for recommendations. MANY GOOD CHOICES EXIST!

PREPARE—don't wait until the last minute!

Start learning your craft. Get involved at school. Audition for school and community productions. If possible take classes or workshops in dance, voice, acting. Develop music reading skills.

What are the school's academic standards, test requirements, recommended curriculum? Work to meet them. Audition based programs have academic standards too.

Become a theatre fan. See as many stage productions as you can. Watch films and videos of a wide range of styles and from different decades. Listen to recordings. Become an active and engaged listener and viewer.

In your classes and rehearsals, observe actively. Learn from others even when it's not your turn up in front of the class or on stage.

Read plays. Listen to musicals. Start thinking about plays you love, then look for monologues appropriate to your age. Start practicing songs that fit your voice and range and personality. Even if you do not want to attend a school that requires auditions, it good to have material at the ready for when you get to school!

Find pleasure in the learning process.

APPLY AND AUDITION

Make a detailed calendar! Know all the deadlines for the process. NOTE: many performing arts programs have different, **earlier**, deadlines than the college or university.

What is a "Pre-Screen"? Some, but certainly not all, programs require a "pre-screen" video of some combination of monologues, songs, dance and personal statements. Based on academic acceptance and the pre-screen, those programs will offer certain applicants auditions.

**Each school that has pre-screens has different requirements, different deadlines and different modes of submission.

Many programs require auditions but DO NOT require a pre-screen. Audition requirements vary by school.

Many programs **do not** have any auditions but base admission on your application.

You still have to do the regular academic application for theater and MT programs—they still look at your GPA, test scores, curriculum.

What essays or personal statements will you need to prepare? Many programs want more than the Common App essay—check each school's website. Hint: many ask why you want to study theatre or musical theatre, particularly at their institution.

BA and BFA programs often want resumes—prepare 2 types:

1. A school resume with all experience—academics, service, work, extracurriculars.
2. A one-page theatre resume

You are auditioning for a school not a role. Share your work, use your imagination. Schools are looking for potential, not a finished product. That said, **prepare!**

Look carefully at the pre-screen and audition requirements for each school so that you can "re-use" audition songs and monologues.

Tips:

For monologues consider context, taste and appropriateness. Prepare. Don't wing it.

An audition is like a business interview—dress appropriately.

Know and prepare your music. Find the right key—don't sing too high or too low.

Be prepared to introduce the piece: know the playwright, composer, lyricist. Read the play.

If you are preparing a pre-screen video for songs, find a skilled accompanist and make sure the piano is in tune. Make clear copies of the music, marked for your accompanist.

Mistakes happen. You may want to re-do submissions, your video or sound may be off, or you may decide to change your material, so don't leave things till the last minute!

Don't compare yourself to others. You cannot move forward if you are always looking sideways!