

Performing Arts High Schools: Preparing Your Audition/Arts Portfolio

New York City students with an interest in the arts have an array of high school choices dedicated to cultivating artistic talent. To gain admission to these schools, in addition to demonstrating your academic aptitude, you must also exhibit strong artistic skills in the form of an audition and/or portfolio.

How to Prepare for a Visual Arts Audition

When applying to a Visual Arts program, you may be asked to demonstrate your skill and commitment in up to four ways: Through an interview, in a writing component such as an essay, by completing new artwork upon request or through a portfolio of your work.

1 The Interview

Schools may include interviews in their admissions process. While questions and procedures vary from school to school, remember:

- Poise and appearance count
- Attitude is important; show respect to teachers and other students
- Convey your commitment to the visual arts
- Listen closely and try to provide answers that directly address the questions you were asked.

Questions might include:

- Why did you choose to audition for this school?
- How did you decide what to include in your portfolio?
- Which art museums or galleries have you visited lately?
- In the future, how do you plan to use the art education you receive here?

The interview will most likely be in the form of a conversation. You may be asked about your background, experience, knowledge and interest in the visual arts.

2 The Writing Component

Some schools require students to write an essay or answer a series of questions about why they want to attend that particular school. You may also be asked to compare two works of art. Schools will be looking at the content of your writing as well as the level of literacy. As in any piece of writing you would submit for examination, the writing component of your audition should:

- Be well organized
- Demonstrate correct sentence structure, spelling, punctuation and paragraphing
- Address the questions

As with the interview, the writing component is intended as a way for you to convey your commitment to the study of visual arts and your interest in attending the school.

3 Creating New Artwork Upon Request

Many schools will ask you to complete one or two pieces of art “on the spot.” The most common art activities are drawing a figure from observation and drawing an inanimate object from observation, though you may also be asked to draw an object from memory. Work is usually done on 8.5” x 11” paper. Bring a drawing pencil and eraser with you.

Examiners will be looking for imaginative and creative approaches to the assignment within the parameters given at the audition.

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How to Prepare for a Visual Arts Audition (continued)

4 The Portfolio The visual arts portfolio is a critical part of the audition process for 8th grade students applying audition or screened art programs. A well thought-out portfolio shows your strengths and potential for high school-level work. It is an opportunity to display your best efforts. Individual schools may vary slightly in their requirements. Check the school's website for complete information. The following guidelines will help you assemble a competitive portfolio.

Presentation You can protect your work and make a good impression by using a sturdy, high-quality portfolio case. A neat and attractive presentation is extremely important. It tells the reviewing committee that you have taken care of your work and that you are proud of it.

Your pieces should be:

- Clean, undamaged, and in good shape
- Unframed
- Labeled on the reverse side with:
 - ✓ Your name
 - ✓ School name
 - ✓ Title
 - ✓ Date of work
 - ✓ Either "Under Supervision" or "Without Supervision"

Number and Type of Artwork This varies from school to school, with some schools requesting six works and others requesting anywhere from 10-20. Some schools request *only* 2-dimensional work and some allow you to include photographs of 3-dimensional work. When submitting slides of 3-dimensional work, place labeled slides in presentation sleeves.

Content As you assemble your portfolio, carefully select the works that you feel represent your best efforts. ("Less is more" is an excellent guideline!) Consider the following:

- Select current artwork (work completed in 7th or 8th grade)
- Some schools enjoy looking at sketchbooks and preliminary drawings
- Do not include work done in the style of a famous artist or copies (including work copied from photographs)
- Most of the work should be done from observation but you may include some work done from imagination or memory
- Cartooning should be limited to a minimum or not included at all
- The selections should demonstrate your understanding of composition and the principles of design:
 - Unity
 - Balance
 - Repetition
 - Variety
 - Emphasis
 - Proportion
 - Rhythm
 - Figure-Ground Relationship
 - Scale
- You may select works that are thematic to show an in-depth investigation of an idea **OR** you may include a variety of subjects to show a breadth of interests
- You may wish to prepare pieces using a variety of media (such as drawing, painting, printmaking, media technology, etc.) to demonstrate your skill with different tools, materials, and techniques.
- Review the specific portfolio requirements for the schools to which you wish to apply in the High School Directory

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How to Prepare for a Drama/Theater Audition

Requirements Different schools have different audition requirements – check your High School Directory for requirements of specific schools. In general, students may be required to do any of the following:

- *Recite two prepared monologues.* The two monologues should differ in style, for example one comic and one dramatic, and meet the following requirements:
 - All monologues should be published. Original student writing or internet monologue material is not appropriate.
 - All monologues should be 1-2 minutes in length.
 - Monologue characters should be age-appropriate.
 - Generally, classical theater or verse such as Shakespeare is discouraged unless the student can reveal real facility with complex language.
- *Participate in theater games or improvisations* in order for auditioners to judge students' ability to collaborate in a group and to be spontaneously creative.
- *Verbally answer questions* about reasons for wanting to be in a theater program in general and at that school in particular. Auditioners will want to know that students are committed to this particular school and the demands of a theater program.
- *Sing a musical selection from a Broadway show* (for students applying to musical theater programs only). Check with individual schools about their musical theater audition requirements.

Note: Schools may call students back to present their monologues a second time. Typically, no additional preparation would be required for a “call back” audition.

Monologue Criteria The specific criteria by which students are evaluated vary among schools. However, auditioners may look for the following features:

- Dramatic Understanding
- Characterization
- Diction
- Clarity of Communication
- No Costume or Prop Pieces

Preparing a Monologue Audition monologues are available from a variety of print and published sources. Please consider the following recommendations:

- You may select either an independent monologue or a monologue taken directly from a play and edited for your purposes. If you select a monologue from a play, please be aware of the entire play from which the monologue is taken. You should read the play and be familiar with the character you are portraying.
- Listed below are some published monologue books to consider. These books are readily available online or at the Drama Bookshop, 250 W 40th St., New York, NY 10018 (212) 944-0595. The Performing Arts Library at Lincoln Center is also a good resource for monologue books.
 - *Audition Monologues for Student Actors: Selections from Contemporary Plays* by Roger Ellis
 - *Red Licorice: Monologues for Young People* by Carole Tippit
 - *Monologues for Young Actors* by Lorraine Cohen
 - *100 Great Monologues: A Versatile Collection of Monologs, Duologs and Triloggs for Student Actors* by Rebecca Young
 - *Multiplicity: A Collection of Monologues for Student Performance* by R. James Scott & Bianca Cowan
- Students should be coached on the presentation of the monologue for the above criteria. If you have an in-school theater teacher, ask for assistance with your preparation. An English teacher may also be able to help.
- At the audition, students should be prepared to announce their name, monologue selection and the playwright. For example: “My name is _____. I will be performing one of Anne’s monologues from *The Diary of Anne Frank* by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett.”

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How to Prepare for a Music Audition

Selecting and Practicing Your Audition Repertoire

- Determine repertoire well in advance of the audition
- Select music that is specifically written for solo instrument or voice (not music for which your instrument or vocal part provides the harmony for other instruments or voices)
- Select music that highlights your strengths. A difficult selection played or sung well can show off your skills. However, an easier selection played or sung with strong musicality and good intonation can be equally impressive
- Remember that slow, lyrical pieces are often difficult to play or sing well. When practicing, prepare slow, expressive parts as carefully as you would up-tempo, technically challenging ones
- Use a tuner and a metronome during the early stages of your practice to help with pitch and rhythm.
- Practice sight-reading every day
- Singers should prepare at least two pieces in contrasting styles from memory. If possible, choose one song in a foreign language. Select music from current or past theater productions, American and world folk traditions, or art song collections. Please note that many schools prohibit R&B, Rock and Rap selections for the audition
- Instrumentalists should know required scales from memory. However, it is acceptable to use sheet music when playing your prepared audition selections
- Isolate and practice your weak areas. Spend time building your capacity so that all sections of the piece are performed with equal competency
- Practice performing your audition repertoire in front of an audience. Ask them to critique your performance and overall presentation

Instrumental Audition

- Prepare at least one piece that can be played through to the end. If possible, prepare a second selection in contrasting style or tempo. However, you may not be asked to play a second piece
- Be prepared to sight read a short musical passage (4-8 measures)
- Be prepared to play at least one scale

Vocal Audition

- Prepare at least two pieces in contrasting styles from memory
- Be prepared to echo pitches and rhythms provided by the auditioner
- Be prepared to sight sing a short musical passage (4-8 measures)
- Be prepared to vocalize (arpeggios, leaps, runs, etc.) to demonstrate your vocal range and placement

Resources for Selecting your Repertoire

- Ask your music teacher for help when selecting your repertoire
- New York State School Music Association Manual, Edition 28. A professional resource for teachers and conductors, this book contains graded lists of repertoire for all voice types and instruments. It is available in some libraries or may be purchased from www.nyssma.org at a cost of \$47-55
- You may be able to purchase sheet music for your repertoire at the following stores:
 - Colony Music Store
 - Guitar Center Stores
 - Catalano Music (Long Island)
 - Sam Ash Music Stores
 - Music Time (online)
 - JW Pepper Music (online)

Audition Advice

Keep going even if you make a mistake. Do not get flustered. The auditioner is most interested in gauging your potential.

If the auditioner asks you to make a change in the way you played or sang a passage, it doesn't mean you played or sang it incorrectly. The auditioner may want to see how easily you can receive feedback or make a correction.

First impressions are very important: Make an effort to dress as nicely as you can. Athletic wear is discouraged.

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How to Prepare for a Dance Audition

Requirements Different schools have different audition requirements – Check your High School Directory for requirements of specific schools. In general, students may be required to do any of the following:

- *Participate in a dance class.* Dance classes usually involve a combination of ballet and modern dance techniques, though some schools may require separate classes for each style. Some schools may also require students to participate in other forms of dance in the class, such as jazz or improvisation.
- *Perform a solo dance.*
 - The solo should show off the student’s best dance and performance abilities.
 - Students should prepare a solo piece of original choreography, although some schools may allow performances choreographed by someone other than the student.
 - The solo may be in a style other than ballet or modern dance (such as Jazz, African, or Indian Classical dance) if that has been the student’s primary training.
 - Schools may require the solo dance to be anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes in length.
 - In some schools, all students have a chance to perform their solo pieces. In other schools, only students who are called back after the technique class will perform their solo pieces.
- *Complete a written audition.* Some schools require students either to write an essay about why they want to attend the school or to take an exam to determine the extent of their dance knowledge.

Dance Criteria The specific way students are evaluated varies among schools. However, keep in mind the following criteria:

- Poise and appearance, as shown through neatness and attentiveness
- Attitude: Appropriate classroom behavior, showing respect to teachers and peers, a sense of commitment to dance, and a desire to learn
- Technical Ability: Demonstrated achievement in dance technique and the ability to pick up new movement information, take verbal and demonstrated corrections, and revise one’s work on the spot
- Body Alignment: Knowledge of basic anatomical relationships
- Musicality and Rhythm
- Creativity, as shown in improvisation and the student’s solo choreography
- Performance Skills: The ability to communicate with an audience
- General Understanding of Dance, as demonstrated in movement and/or in verbal or written form

Attire Students should come dressed in appropriate dance clothes for ballet and modern dance work: Footless tights, leotard, and soft ballet slippers (no pointe shoes unless specifically requested). Other recommendations:

- Wear solid colors – no fancy appliqués or patterns.
- Do not wear midriff-baring outfits.
- Do not wear baggy shirts or baggy pants.
- Hair should be neatly pulled off the face in a bun or pony tail if long or neatly combed if short. This applies to girls and boys alike.

Remember to Bring to Your Audition

- Your Audition Ticket
- Your dance clothes and shoes
- A pen/pencil
- The tape or CD for your solo
- A light snack