

5 TIPS FOR APPLYING TO AN ARTS SCHOOL

If you're planning to major in a visual or performing art in college, the application process can be dually daunting for you. Not only do you have to ensure that your classroom performance in high school is strong enough to be admitted academically, you also have to display your commitment to your craft – and that can be nerve-wracking for anyone, no matter how much you've practiced. But with a few helpful tips, you can be ready to make your debut on the collegiate stage (or in the gallery or on screen, depending on your art form). Get ready to show us your best!

1. Preparation is Key

Whether you are applying for music, theatre, dance, film or studio art, be sure to perform, shoot or create as much as possible prior to audition or portfolio day. Always read the school websites carefully to find out what they are looking for. Be prepared!

Music

Performing in summer programs, community productions, master classes, in private lessons, for your friends and parents, etc., will boost your skills and your confidence. The more you perform, the less nervous you will be at audition time! Research the school's audition requirements ahead of time and start working on your audition piece as soon as possible – don't wait until the last minute.

Theatre

When choosing your audition monologues, help the audition committee get to know you. Try to choose a character fairly close to you in age from a play about which you passionately care. Although you want to show your range, going too broad can be a trap – the committee may not learn enough about you by seeing you portray an 80-year-old woman and a serial killer. Come to the audition ready to play. Stay open and available to anything thrown at you – welcome the challenges!

Dance

Prepare a solo that presents your unique qualities, technical abilities and expressive range in the best possible light. Get input from your teachers/coaches in choosing the style and content of your solo and in bringing the solo to a high level of performance. Come to the audition thinking of it as a learning opportunity, just as you do when you go to a technique class. Listen carefully to the directions you are given during the audition and don't be afraid to ask questions. The most important thing is for you to let the unique dancer in you shine through!

Film

Watch everything you can get your hands on: TV, movies, web episodes, documentaries, experimental pieces; silent or sound, independent or mainstream, from the U.S. and all over the world. Write, write, write: Never stop coming up with ideas for characters and situations. Nothing happens in moviemaking if there isn't something written first. Look at the news for story ideas; listen to your friends and family; go out and explore the world so you can draw from your own experiences.

Portfolios

For portfolio reviews, whether for studio art (any medium) or film and video, start building your portfolio as soon as you can. Curate it – show only your best work, not everything you've ever done. Take advantage of college portfolio reviews where you can talk with the faculty, get one-on-one advice and a clearer idea of what that college is looking for. Many colleges want to see a range of topics and mediums, and some like to see series; they want to see your artistic spark and vision. Be sure to check out portfolio requirements at the colleges you want to apply to before you send in your oeuvre.

2. Be Application Savvy

Applying to performing or visual arts schools can be challenging. Each school may require a different repertoire or number of pieces/mediums in a portfolio, and many schools have an intricate set of deadlines between the university admission application and the audition/portfolio deadlines. Take time to read all of the fine print, take notes and keep the information about your different schools organized. Mistakes can be costly: If the audition requires three pieces and you bring two, you probably will not be considered for admission. If something isn't clear or you want more information, call or email the college's admission counselor.

3. Ask Questions - Lots of Questions

Is the school the right fit for you? Arm yourself with info. How often do students perform, double major, have internships, gallery shows, film fests, opportunities for community engagement? In addition to training in the arts, what kind of entrepreneurship training is available to students? Does the school help you learn how to market yourself, create your own arts venture, build an audience? Is there space for you to put your gear in the school, or do you have to haul everything everywhere? How much access do students have to the faculty? You get the idea.

Dig around on social media, school websites, and newspaper and magazine articles for more perspectives. Get your high school counselor's opinion; ask ensemble/theatre/dance directors and art and film instructors. When you zero in on which schools you really, really want, go visit the colleges and see for yourself. Talk to current students, get a tour, sit in on a class. Pick up the vibe. Do you feel a connection with the school?

Pro Tip:

Have at least one internship during your college career.

Internships are an important gateway to life after college and your career. You want to study in a city that affords you the opportunity to make industry connections and gain valuable experience before you graduate. Check out the arts scene in the town where the college is located – Dallas is home to the country's largest urban arts district! Ask college representatives about the availability of internships and find out if your future professors are well-connected to the industry.

Active student organizations are great indicators of a robust arts program. Get involved, stay involved!

4. Take Advantage of Resources Colleges Offer

If you ask a few weeks in advance, many colleges can arrange for you to sit in on a class, attend ensemble rehearsals, do free portfolio reviews or even see performances by students and faculty, chamber ensembles or large ensembles. Oftentimes, colleges also bring in high-profile guest speakers and allow the public to attend. Colleges are brimming with activity in your field – check it out, get involved and enjoy some events!

5. More Than Talent

Sure, you may be the best violinist/muralist/filmmaker/modern dancer/actor in your town. But don't assume that talent alone will get you in to the colleges to which you apply. Remember that college admission is competitive and that you are applying with other aces and top dogs from around the world. To increase your chances of admission, keep your grades and activity levels up. Be the one who shines. And when you fill out your application, let them know what differentiates you from all the other applicants.

Now is your time to get started and go for it. Good luck!

Get more helpful hints from the admission pros at [smu.edu/5tips](https://www.smu.edu/5tips).

