

Introduction Into The Arts:

What Are Performing Arts?

Performing Arts are all about using acting, music, writing, dance and design to entertain and educate people. It's usually considered separate to visual art, which can include things like painting and illustration.

There's everything from live music to theatre, circus to opera, and ballet to stand-up comedy. It takes a huge range of skilled performers, designers, technical specialists and managers to get great ideas from page to stage.

Careers in this area are very popular so competition can be really high for jobs. But with a range of options to explore, you might find that an interest in performing arts leads you to some unexpected jobs.

What performing arts jobs can I do?

Actors, dancers and **musicians** work in TV, film, radio, theatre and all kinds of events. They bring scripts and musical scores to life, representing and interpreting the work of writers to bring feeling, movement and meaning to characters.

Some musicians play more than one instrument at a professional level and dancers can learn a range of styles. Some performers combine music, acting and dance to work in musicals. Many also train and work as **teachers** and **coaches**.

Directors are in charge of everything creative. They interpret scripts, run rehearsals, guide performers and work with designers and stage managers to create the right style for a show and bring out different themes.

Set designers work with directors to create sets for theatre and music shows as well as events. They take inspiration from the text and/or music to design imaginative worlds as well as use their technical knowledge to choose the right materials for the job.

Costume designers use their knowledge of fashion, history and drama to create costumes for film and TV, theatre and live events.

Composers write music. They can produce work for films, theatre, pop songs, adverts and computer games. If they are writing something for a particular project, it might be their job to interpret a story in order to create a mood to go with the action, like with a film score.

Choreographers create movement and even fight routines for all kinds of shows from music videos to ballets.

Putting a set together for a performance involves a huge range of **backstage** construction jobs.

Carpenters, plasterers, welders, riggers – who set up power cables and scaffolding - are all needed to put together a set.

Lighting designers and electricians use their technical knowledge to create different lighting and special effects for live performances.

Sound engineers mix and produce sounds for performances. They work with a script to develop the right sound effects and plot out sound cues.

Stage managers coordinate live productions and plan them inside out to make sure every lighting and sound cue, prop, costume and piece of scenery is set up and in the right place. Some directors start out as stage managers as it's a great way to learn the ins and outs of a show.

Theatre / venue managers run performance venues and look after the financial and admin side of things, including managing **front-of-house** and **box office** staff.

Prop makers create props for performers to use on stage or set. Their work can involve buying the items needed or producing weird and wonderful creations to order.

Agents and talent managers represent performers, which involves finding them work and negotiating their fees as well as promoting them and helping to develop their ideas. This frees up performers to concentrate on their work.

Is a career in the performing arts for me?

If you're creative, good at observing and understanding people's emotions and enjoy performing, you might find a career as a musician, actor or dancer suits you. There is a lot of competition for jobs though and nearly everyone has to go through auditions to get work, so you'll need to be determined and able to handle criticism or rejection.

If you love music and theatre but you're not keen on being centre stage, a technical, teaching, creative or management job behind the scenes could be just as rewarding.

An interest in design and good critical thinking skills – i.e. the ability to interpret writing and art, understand different themes and develop them - is important for all creative roles.

When you're working on a production, the hours can be very long for everyone involved and you'll need to be prepared to work away from home for long periods if you work on a touring show.

How to start a career:

You don't necessarily need formal qualifications to become a performer although competition is fierce and most people choose to go to a drama, music or dance school and pick up a diploma or degree to build their practical skills.

Auditions can be nerve-racking too so remember, it's important to gain experience of these. Don't keep your talents locked up at home, take classes and workshops, get involved in school productions or join an orchestra or amateur dramatics group to get started.

For technical roles, experience is just as important. Getting work experience with school productions or through your local theatre is a great way to start.

GCSE: Explore your creative side with Music, Drama or Art and Design. Remember that you'll still need a 4 or above in English and Maths to get onto courses and to keep your options open, for example if you want to move from performing into teaching.

A-Level: English Literature, Theatre Studies, Art, Dance & Music are all useful subjects for creative types. Business Studies will help you if you are interested in managerial roles and Maths and Sciences are useful if you are more into technical theatre.

Vocational: For backstage, technical, design and stage management roles, you'll normally need at least a level 3 / 4 BTEC or a level 5 HND / diploma in a subject like Performing Arts, Production Arts, Music Technology or Art & design. Some drama schools and universities offer specialist degrees in these subjects too.

Creative intermediate and advanced apprenticeships are available for lots of different backstage roles like wardrobe managers, stage carpenters, lighting technicians, live sound engineers, front of house staff and stage crew.

People with skills in broadcast media or construction may also have lots of skills needed to move into theatre. E.g. an electrician could become a lighting designer.

University: If you are interested in going to university, a degree in English Literature, Music, Languages, Performing Arts, Fashion or even Philosophy can help you to build your knowledge of theatre, culture and help you build your skills to develop ideas creatively.

Extra credit: If you want to work as a performer, it helps to have a few extra skills up your sleeve. If you're an actor who can play an instrument or do a whole range of accents, more opportunities will be available to you.