

CV ADVICE FOR PERFORMING ARTS

The St Andrews performing arts community offers many opportunities and experiences that are very valuable to emphasise on your CV and in job applications. Below are messages from alumni now working in the industry that outline what experiences employers are likely to be interested in from your time in St Andrews theatre, and how to make yourself stand out as a candidate.

1. From Ben - Specialised in professional theatre and dance, and theatre studies.

Think about the specific skills you've gained from student theatre and how they might fit into **wider career categories**, e.g.:

- Event management (highlight experience in producing, directing, venue management, lighting and sound, ticketing, budgeting)
- Communications and marketing (highlight experience in poster design, social media, photography and design)
- People management / HR/personnel/team building (highlight experience in directing, producing)
- Analysis (highlight experience in directing, dramaturgy, acting, design, theatre criticism in student journalism)
- Finance (highlight experience in producing, especially budgeting and fundraising)
- Artistic practice (highlight experience in writing, acting, directing, design)
- Training/education /research (highlight experience in leading workshops or writing retreats, career advice sessions)

Another angle can be the '**soft skills**' gained via arts practice, which you may be asked to provide evidence for in your cover letter or at an interview:

- Planning and organising (such as serving on committees like Mermaids, applying for funding from Mermaids or the university, corporate sponsorship, rehearsal planning - even something as simple as booking rooms at the union can be presented here)
- Problem-solving and using initiative (emphasise all self-directed/unsupervised roles, from writing to production to directing to design)
- Decision-making/time management (discuss responsibilities of ensuring deadlines are met, prioritising and planning a project, advising team [cast] members on their commitment - relevant as both cast and crew)
- Leadership (Mermaids committee, core production team)
- Teamworking (cast, crew, committee)

- Database management and analysis (production, especially budgets, auditions, and ticketing systems)

I would advise against simply listing your credits in a Spotlight format unless you have had some professional work - it's a common trick but tends to be dismissed by people within the industry as CV padding. Much better is to cluster them into single paragraph categories (acting; design; etc.), while also highlighting any particularly important areas, such as **shows at the Fringe** (surprisingly important on a CV) or **leadership roles** such as producer, conductor, musical director, writer, or director.

When applying for creative industry jobs, it's always worth remembering that the arts are an **'iceberg career'** - the visible people are the cast and sometimes top-level production team, recognised by you and the public as representing the performing arts, but underneath them are many more people, maybe 90% of the industry: outreach and education, facilitators, front-of-house, cleaners, costume, health-and-safety officers, HR, marketing, building supervisors, LX and sound, archivists, catering staff, etc. Every 'visible' job, like an onstage role, will receive hundreds of applications, but FOH or workshop facilitator jobs might get only a handful of applications - yet all those applicants also started out, just like you, in youth theatre and student drama. It's a classic way into the industry to start in an associated position, like bar staff at a theatre or an usher, then work your way up - Simon Callow began his career as an usher at the Old Vic, then in Box Office at the National, while auditioning constantly. Jenny Mollica, CEO of the English National Opera, was at St Andrews in the early 2000s with me, and started working in London after graduation in education/outreach roles before progressing to management. Don't focus on acting as your only route to a job - almost everyone starts in other roles, which are just as vital to the success of theatre. You can't open the doors until the cleaners have finished!

The other piece of advice I always give is to **see as much work as you possibly can**. The number of times I've seen an interviewee stumble when asked, 'What's the last piece of theatre you saw?' is remarkable - the best interviewees are the ones who can say 'oh, I saw an interesting show last night!' and then talk about it. Why not offer to review shows for the student newspaper or the many free Fringe publications that pop up in Edinburgh in August (you might not get paid, but the tickets are free); work as an usher, possibly the best way to see a show grow and develop over time; take advantage of any free or reduced-price offers; ask to watch dress rehearsals at larger theatres (just say, 'I'm a drama student and wondered if I could watch the dress as part of my study?' - it often works). The more you see, the more you'll figure out what you like, what works and what you can borrow/steal for your next performance.

2. From Laura - Experience as TV Production Assistant and Runner

From a TV/Production perspective, anything that shows the ability to **balance multiple workloads** is really strong. Pointing out that you worked on a show in addition to studies shows a good work ethic, dedication and passion which is appealing in my experience. In TV it's also really helpful to have experience in more practical roles (stage management/producer) because most entry-level positions are really logistics-heavy. If you can talk about the experience of managing/scheduling a large cast, that can transfer well into crowd/floor funning as well as production assistant roles. I also reference theatre on my CV to talk about a **passion for storytelling** and add depth and personality to show my motivations for wanting to be in the industry. If people see what kind of career you're aiming for, they're more likely to invest in you as a newcomer.

Additionally, I was told in some of my training that the most valuable thing on my CV (besides a **driving license**) was **part-time work**. Hospitality/retail experience is really appreciated in TV; most runner gigs are basically hospitality jobs at first, so highlighting part-time hospitality experience shows good people skills and an ability to handle long hours. In terms of general advice – make sure you're signed up for mailing lists for Screenskills, ScreenNETS and BECTU. It's a real word-of-mouth industry, but if you get a place on a traineeship that's absolutely the most direct way to build a career in TV/film.

3. From Kailee - Experience in Event Management

Under the Education section of my CV, I listed my top three university achievements. One is an overview of my achievements on Mermaids committee, and because CV advisors often tell you to quantify your achievements in numbers if you can, mine looks like this:

- Across one academic year, oversaw 22 student productions, organised a week-long drama festival, and hosted a fundraising ball for 2500 people in St Andrews, working with a budget of £80,000.

CV advisors will also tell you not to downplay your involvement. For example, I obviously did not plan Christmas Ball on my own or even lead the subcommittee, but the entire committee worked hard to finalise plans, sell tickets, monitor resale, distribute wristbands, set up, work the event, and tear down afterwards, so I said 'hosted' rather than 'helped plan' or something that would sound less impressive.

In my cover letters, I go into more detail about my Mermaids involvement and list skills I learned or demonstrated and tasks I completed that are relevant to the job I want. Some of the skills I have included are **administrative skills, the ability to work in a fast-paced environment, the ability to work with a variety of individuals** (students, university and venue staff, and a wide variety of ages and personalities), **organisational skills, interpersonal skills, budgeting skills, lateral thinking, adaptability, leadership, positivity, problem-solving, foresight, confidence, ability to work independently and as a team, project management/planning skills, multitasking, and prioritising.** Here is what I wrote about my involvement as production coordinator for my current job:

I also have experience performing administrative tasks in a fast-paced environment as the productions coordinator of the University of St Andrews performing arts fund in 2021-22. In this role, I demonstrated strong organisational and interpersonal skills, acting as executive producer for 22 productions, including 6 that performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and liaising with university and venue staff to ensure that each ran smoothly and to a high standard. I was also responsible for scheduling meetings and events, collating business expenses, ordering and receiving deliveries, and making travel and accommodation arrangements when events took place outside of St Andrews. Additionally, I organised and ran a week-long drama festival and, along with a dedicated committee, a fundraising ball for 2500 people. From this experience, I learned how to think creatively on my feet with a positive and flexible attitude, not only solving problems but anticipating them and finding ways to avoid them entirely. I also gained the confidence to plan and carry out projects independently, multitasking and prioritising tasks as needed.

For marketing jobs, I also include my involvement as Publicity Coordinator on Barron subcomm, and for events jobs, I include my involvement as Barron Librarian. Here is what I wrote about my involvement on subcomm for my current job:

The following year, I volunteered in a newly-created librarian role at the Barron Theatre, curating an online database of plays for the St Andrews community to read and perform. This role also involved administrative and events tasks, such as maintaining and facilitating the use of the space, performing key-holding duties, and planning and hosting community events related to the performing arts (for example, a theatre-themed pub quiz and a staged play reading). In this role I further bolstered my organisational, interpersonal, and event management skills.

I always call Mermaids 'the University of St Andrews performing arts fund' because this sounds clearer and more impressive to those with less knowledge of St Andrews.

Mermaids has also provided some excellent answers to job interview questions such as "How do you respond to stress / pressure / working to a tight deadline?" and "Tell me about a challenge you faced and how you solved the problem" or "Tell me about a time when you had to take initiative" - Do not underestimate the life skills Mermaids provides you with.