

# Theatre People: Actor

An actor is a performer who portrays a character in a theatre piece. Their role in a piece of theatre can vary depending on any number of factors. There are many different processes and practices, and every actor will develop their own. Based on their skills and interest, an actor might specialize in a type of theatre, such as musicals or the plays of Shakespeare, or have a varied career. They might play one character in a show, or several. Their characters may do a lot of speaking, be mostly movement-based, or anything in between!

In the most general terms, the actor's job is to collaborate with a director, designers, other actors and the playwright (or their words) to present a specific interpretation of a piece of theatre. The job of an actor is to be prepared, be punctual, be respectful all, but of stage management in particular (because they run the show!), and to be ready to try and fail and try again.

## Tasks and activities in a typical day

The actor's day differs depending on where in a production process you happen to be. The second day of rehearsal, for example, usually looks very different than a day during tech week or a show day. But in general, some of an actor's day-to-day activities can include:

- Warming up your voice and body in whatever way you like to
- Looking over the daily schedule, which is typically sent out by stage management, to know what you should be prepared to work on that day
- Looking over the weekly schedule to plan your non-work hours (meal planning, appointments)
- Doing table work with the director - going through the piece scene by scene and understanding the text, character intention and arc of the play
- Reading over the script and getting off-book (memorizing lines)
- Working with the director and other actors to develop the blocking (where and how you move on stage)
- Having costume fittings
- Practicing the scenes in rehearsal to make discoveries and decisions about what will happen onstage, guided by the director
- Participating in technical rehearsals to allow the designers and director to decide on set movements and lighting cues, and the stage manager to practice calling these cues
- Drinking lots of water!

Being an actor also means you may spend time not working in the theatre. A typical actor's day in that situation can include things like:

- Updating your resume
- Submitting for auditions - this usually means sending in your headshot and resume, and occasionally writing a cover letter about who you are and why to cast you
- Prepping and rehearsing for auditions - reading the play, learning the sides, sometimes getting a coaching
- Going on auditions in person, or recording self-tape auditions
- Working at a day job (also called a "survival job," a "joe job," or just "a job!")

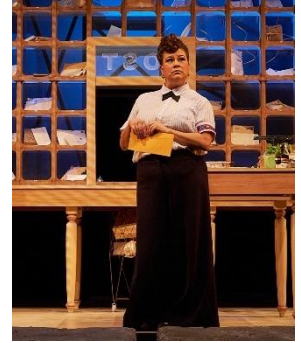


Actors use a wide variety of skills beyond utilizing the tools of voice and body. You might develop these for a specific show or audition, or just in your life – your hobby might end up onstage! In *Hand To God*, Tom Keenan operated a puppet (set/costumes Gillian Gallow, lighting Hugh Conacher). In *Once* Jeremy Walmsley played guitar (set/costume Brian Perchaluk, lighting Louise Guinand). Photos by Dylan Hewlett.

# Theatre People: Actor

## 10 skills that an actor uses:

- Multitasking
- Focus
- Flexibility
- Time Management
- Reading Comprehension
- Interpersonal skills, like collaboration
- Listening
- Motivation
- Self-determination
- Communication



A show may have a large cast of actors (like *The Penelopiad*, where the chorus transformed into many roles), a smaller cast (*Kill Me Now*), or be a solo acting performance (*The Post Mistress*). Photo credits: Chorus, set/costumes by Tamara Kucheran, lighting by Hugh Conacher, photo B. Monk; Cory Wojcick, Andrea del Campo and Myles Taylor, set/costumes Amy Keith, lighting High Conacher, photo Dylan Hewlett; Krystle Pedersen, set Andy Moro, costume Andréanne Dandeneau, lighting Larry Isacoff, photo Hugh Conacher.

## Building Abilities

There are probably lots of things you are already doing, and things you can start to do, that will serve you in a career as an actor. Some are:

- See as much theatre as possible - lots of theatres have student or under-30 ticket deals, or are looking for volunteer ushers
- Read lots of plays, especially out loud!
- Think critically about the performances you see in TV, movies and theatre - what are those actors doing physically and emotionally? What makes their performance effective or not?
- Reach out to local theatre professionals to introduce yourself and talk to them about the industry. Most Artistic Directors have email addresses on their theatre's website - they may not always have time to meet, but it never hurts to reach out.
- Participate in theatre: at your school, professional, independent, or community-based.
  - Professional theatre companies aren't always looking for young people in their season, but some shows have a youth chorus or teen role. Watch websites and social media!
  - Community theatre groups may be open to all ages; some require an audition, and some don't.
  - Many independent companies produce work at the Winnipeg Fringe Festival and look for people to audition – some opportunities are paid, and others are not, so make sure to know what kind of work you are happy to do, and ask questions.



Through rehearsal, actors are discovering how to best tell the story of their characters, but also making sure their movements are consistent and safe. In rehearsal for *Cabaret*, the company runs a large dance number; in rehearsal for *The Heart of Robin Hood*, Izzie Steele and Gabriel Ebert practice a sequence set by their fight choreographer (photo: Cylla von Tiedmann).