



CHECKLIST: CHOOSING A DRAMA SCHOOL

There are all sorts of things we can and should consider when it comes to our actor training. Drama school application can be daunting but, knowing what to look for and even what to ask is key.

Here is a checklist of things to consider as you select schools to approach for training.

Where?

First thing to consider is where the school is. Do you want to remain near your home or are you keen to move to another part of the country, or even abroad? Be aware that studying overseas can be more costly, not only in terms of travel and accommodation but also because overseas students often have higher tuition fees.

There is something to be said for either choice (stay near home or move away) but ultimately, as you will see, it's up to you.

Drama school is an immersive experience, certainly more intense than your average degree course, you will likely be in class most days and, as the course moves forward, many nights.

It is healthy to consider being able to throw yourself into the training as fully as possible and having as little distraction as you can from the outside world.

You may want to consider the area of the world that you want to work in? This may be helped or hindered by the location of your school.

How?

How do the individual schools approach training? Do they stand on a particular approach, ethos or method?

Are they comprehensive i.e do they cover many areas of the craft (think screen acting, classical and musical theatre) or are they specialist and only focus on a particular area of the work?

Do you like what they believe and, are they clear about their idea of actor training or is it difficult to establish from their literature, exactly how they train their actors?

Not all styles are the same and, it is important that you can 'get behind' the methodology that you are being introduced to.

Who?

Who trained there? And this is not about 'have they had anyone famous come through' but, are graduates doing interesting work or, if it's a new school, are graduates being seen by good people?

Have a look at the agents and agencies who have met, interviewed or picked up graduating students in recent years.

Do you like the kind of work that these agents provide or that the graduates are engaged in. Don't be afraid to ask.

You may also find graduates who will chat to you about their time (remember, NOWHERE is perfect).

Also, who is teaching you? You are trusting them with your foundational approach to the craft so do they know what they are talking about? What is their experience in the industry.

What?

What are the school looking for? Are they known for taking a particular 'type' of student?

Is there a clear socio-economic background in recent graduates? It sounds terrible but some schools stand on their commitment to training people from particular backgrounds with less or more opportunity.

Are they known for true diversity or not?

Are they keen on NOT taking young actors but tend to have a more mature cohort?

Do you fit with their regular cohort 'type' (not that this should persuade or dissuade you but it's interesting/useful to know).

Have the school made it clear in any literature that they are interested in a particular personality, skillset, energy or attitude?

Application

What is the application process like? Do they require particular information or a certain amount of references? It is always best to be over prepared than under.

We would say 'best prepared wins!'

Is there a process of elimination that they advertise based on personal statement or audition tape ahead of them actually meeting a prospective student?

You may want to find out how long they need or want to process applications before the first rounds begin – you don't want to miss it!

Goals

Ultimately, your goals and desires are key. Where do you want to be in 5, 10, 15 years in your acting life?

It is well worth considering the kind of work that you would like to do and how the school that you choose (or that chooses you) will impact that.

There are a thousand ways to enter the marketplace and there are thousands of actors who have never trained but gone on to do amazing things so it is not a given that a certain school will mean a certain outcome or, that a certain school/methodology will prohibit you exploring new mediums and avenues but, always worth focusing on where you want to be before applying.

If you desperately want to work in film, going to do a course in community theatre may not fast track your learning.

Instinct

Instinct is hugely important when all is said and done.

How you feel about the look of a school, the vibe you get when you read about it and ESPECIALLY the vibe you get when you walk in are all unbelievably important.

In a way, your 'gut' will tell you when a place is right for you.

As actors we have to develop our ability to trust and run with instincts. From the moment we read a script to the school we choose to accept an invitation to, instinct is rarely wrong.

By all means, weigh up options, even do a pro's and con's list for each possible place of study but if you have a definite gut feeling, it is often best to run with it.

Remember – nowhere is perfect! They are establishment run by fallible human beings who are as subject to difficulty and error like anyone else but an overarching ethos (if correctly in place), like the theme of a play, should align everyone's talents and create a supported and focused training that brings out the best in you.