



National Association of Schools of Dance

PREPARING TO ENTER A SCHOOL, COLLEGE, OR UNIVERSITY AS A DANCE MAJOR: AN ADVISORY FROM NASD

Acceptance to a professional studio school or an undergraduate program in dance is based on many considerations. These vary widely among institutions. For example, some have stringent audition requirements prior to admission while others have open admission policies followed by thorough examinations at some point in the program to determine whether the student may continue. For specific application requisites, contact [NASD institutions directly](#). The suggestions below indicate how you can best prepare during the high school years, not what you must achieve to apply or be accepted. The advice provided describes two things: first, an ideal set of knowledge and skills goals for college-level applicants; second, competencies needed by dancers as they practice the various aspects of the profession in college, professional studio schools, and beyond. In brief, you should learn as much as you can as early as you can.

Take responsibility for your own development.

Each dancer brings a unique set of talents, aspirations, and abilities to the dance profession. Although you are in school and probably taking class, it is important to take increasing responsibility for developing your particular abilities toward your specific goals. Begin by obtaining the admission requirements of schools you may wish to attend the earlier, the better. Ultimately, you are responsible for choices about how you use your time to prepare for your future. For most dancers, that future involves dance at the center supported by many other capabilities.

Practice, practice, practice.

Whatever you do or intend to do in dance, try to practice it as much as possible. This applies not only to your technique, but also to other types of work in dance. For example, if you are interested in teaching, you should try to observe and gain teaching experiences under appropriate supervision. If you are interested in dance scholarship or criticism, you should practice writing and speaking on dance topics. If choreography appeals, seek instruction. No level of knowledge or skill that you can attain will be too high.

Perform alone and with others.

Performance ability is essential for all dance professionals. You should be a competent performer in at least one dance area whether or not you intend to have a performance career. Ensemble experiences of all kinds should be sought. Work in large and small ensembles develop different kinds of dance skills. Fine ensemble work comes primarily through

practice.

Master the basics.

Be sure that you know the basic terminology, the fundamental gestures, and the major types of dance.

Develop your musical understanding.

Take every opportunity to study in music. Try to acquire the ability to read and follow musical notation and an introductory understanding of the musical works that accompany dance.

Learn to care for yourself.

Your body and mind are your instruments. It is critical to take extremely good care of both. Learn about nutrition and exercise, how to prevent injury, and how to maintain healthy habits that will promote long-term health and fitness. Work closely with your physician, your parents, and your dance teachers.

See as much dance as you can.

You need to be familiar with far more dance than that which you perform. Try to see as much dance from as many historical periods and cultural sources as possible. Ask your teachers to recommend a list for you that covers the various repertoires. Try to make sure that you have seen major works of all types in the particular area of dance that interests you. Seek more to learn the breadth and depth of the repertory than to enjoy what is already familiar.

Learn how dance works.

Take opportunities to learn the basics of choreographic structure, including such areas as form, composition, and improvisation. Like so many other things in dance, this knowledge is developed throughout a lifetime. Those who are able to get started early have an advantage. Work with your dance teachers, take classes at your local college or professional studio school, or otherwise explore opportunities to gain initial acquaintance with this material.

Become a fluent, effective English speaker and writer.

As a dancer, you will communicate in movement, but you will also rely heavily on your ability to communicate in words. Everything from rehearsals to teaching, to writing grant proposals, to negotiating, to promoting your professional interests relies on fluent English skills. Focus attention on learning to speak and write effectively.

Get a comprehensive high school education.

The dance profession is big, but it is also part of a larger whole. Dance both influences and is influenced by the humanities, mathematics, the sciences, the social sciences, and the other arts—architecture, film, literature, music theatre, and the visual arts. For entrance into college-level study, you are encouraged to gain a basic overview of ancient and modern history, the basic thought processes and procedures of math and science, and familiarity with works in as many of the other arts disciplines as possible. Most professionals who work with

dance comprehensively develop a particular sensibility about the connections among dance, history, and the other arts. Understanding the basics of math and the sciences support future work in dance technologies. Social studies are related to understanding the context for various dance endeavors.

Think of everything you study as helping you become a better dancer.

As we have already said, the best dance professionals continue to learn throughout their lives. They are always studying and thinking, always connecting what they know about dance with their knowledge of other fields. Since you never know the direction your career will take, it is wise to spend your high school years gaining the basic ability to understand and work in a variety of fields beyond dance. Keep dance at the center of your efforts, but accept and enjoy the challenge of gaining the kind of knowledge and skills in other areas that will support both formal studies at the advanced level and your dance career beyond.

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