

The portfolio

By Steve Nelson



Students at work in the costume shop at the University of Montana.



Design and Production students who have their sights set on A-list theatre schools or scholarship dollars have to audition, too. But their audition is more like show-and-tell. A well-organized, enthusiastic presentation of your résumé and portfolio demonstrates to the college representative what you've done and suggests what you will be capable of doing in the future. Later on, these items will be your calling card to potential employers. For that reason, even if none of the colleges you're applying to require a portfolio with your application, it's very important that you start to document your backstage work as soon as you recognize that you're interested in technical theatre. Here are some guidelines.

The résumé

A résumé is a condensed, one-page listing of vital personal information and work history. Our sample on page 17 follows a standard format: the student's name and contact information are displayed prominently at the top, followed by her career goals (this gives the interviewer a logical place to start the conversation), education, honors, production experience, related work experience, skills, and conferences attended. At the bottom of the sheet, she lists three references—people who have supervised her theatre work and have agreed to speak on her behalf should the interviewer contact them.

In creating your own résumé, heed these three rules:

- Be specific. Describe your experiences in the most precise way possible, and use brand names (ETC Express 24/48 lighting console, AutoCAD drafting software) when listing the equipment you know how to use.
- Be professional. Produce your résumé on a computer, using a readable typeface in a reasonable size. Print the document using the best-quality machine you have access to, on good-quality paper.
- Be honest. Especially for students with limited experience, the temptation to lie or exaggerate can be strong. Resist it.

Morgan Rose Taylor

138 Edwards Street, New Haven, CT 06511 (203) 563-4579

Career goal

Stage manage productions, especially musicals, at the nation's premier regional theatres and on Broadway.

Education

New Haven High School, honor student, graduate 2001.

Theatre classes

Acting, scenery construction at New Haven High School; eight years of tap classes at The Dance Place in Branford.

Special honors

Performing Arts Student of the Year, New Haven High School, 1999; Most Valuable Thespian, 2000.

Production experience

Stage manager	Cinderella	New Haven H.S.	2000
Production assistant	Carousel	Westport Summer Stock	2000
Assistant stage manager	The Tempest	New Haven H.S.	2000
Spotlight operator	Bridal Fashion Show	Hughes Center	1999
Director	Dreamtime (one-act)	New Haven H.S.	1999
Choreographer's assistant	Damn Yankees	Westport Summer Stock	1999
Set run crew	The Mousetrap	New Haven H.S.	1999
Ensemble/wardrobe crew	Into the Woods	New Haven H.S.	1999
Assistant director	Rain (video project)	New Haven H.S.	1999
Dancer/props crew	Brigadoon	Westport Summer Stock	1999

Employment

Teach weekly movement classes to students aged 6-8, at The Dance Place. Worked two summers as day camp counselor, New Haven Recreation Department; will supervise staff of twelve counselors in 2001.

Skills

Stock scenery construction; machine and hand sewing; read music, play piano; tap and jazz dance; type 45 w.p.m.; proficient in Windows95, Microsoft Word, AutoCAD LT; CPR certified.

Conferences attended

International Thespian Festival, 2000; Yankee Thespian Conference, 2000, 1999.

References

Sam Watson	T. J. Ackerman	Amanda Oliver
Drama Instructor	Technical Director	Artistic Director
New Haven H.S.	Westport Summer Stock	The Dance Place
389 York Street	4820 Broken Arrow Road	421 Main Street
New Haven, CT 06511	Westport, CT 06880	Branford, CT 06405
(203) 555-0386	(860) 555-0424	(203) 555-1187

The portfolio

In addition to your résumé you'll want to show college reps some visual documentation of your past work, photographs, sketches, draftings, renderings, and organizational paperwork—all organized and contained in an easily transportable portfolio case.

Much of your portfolio will consist of photographs: of props, costumes, or scenery you've built (the items themselves should be left in storage); of three-dimensional models you've constructed for class projects (again, don't lug these to the interview); and of productions, if you've had the opportunity to design sets, lighting, or costumes. Process photos, taken at key steps in the construction of an item or the painting of a set, illustrate craftsmanship and are good to have. Include only sharp, color-accurate photographs of your best work. High-quality color copies or laser prints may also be used. Mount the pictures neatly on pages in your portfolio case or in a binder, and label each one with the title of the show, the theatre that produced it, and your own role in creating the item or moment pictured.

As for drawings, renderings, and draftings, make selections with a critical eye. Include class projects as well as work you've done on actual productions. If, as often happens in the race to opening night, you didn't have time to do your best rendering or drafting on the originals, it's perfectly okay to redo them. You may also include paintings or drawings that have nothing to do with theatre work, since they can show a lot about your skills and how well you deal with light and shadow, perspective, and color.

Paperwork is another element of the tech portfolio, and for lighting and sound technicians and stage managers, it's the most important. Completed lighting cue sheets, hook-up sheets, and gel sheets, along with a drafted light design, show a familiarity with the level of precision that's needed for successful lighting work. Sound cue sheets and system diagrams provide some evidence of an audio technician's skill. Stage managers can include completed show prompt-books, cast and crew contact sheets, rehearsal schedules, and other samples of organizational and communication expertise. Make sure your paperwork fits standard formats (Broadway Press's *Backstage Forms* is a good resource), and if your original show materials are a mess, copy them over and make them presentable.

The interview

If you work hard putting your résumé and portfolio together, the interview should be easy. The college reps will be looking for clues to your character: your dedication to theatre, your ability to solve problems, your work ethic, your personality. They'll probably interrupt your presentation with lots of questions—and you, too, should do some friendly investigating, about the courses you'll be taking and who will be teaching them, about the school's production and shop facilities, about the opportunities you'll have to design. (See the suggested questions for prospective production and design students in the accompanying article.) Questions like these are a signal to college reps that you take your education seriously and have put some thought into what kind of program you want.