



## Tips for Creating a Winning Arts Audition or Portfolio



## Interlochen staff and faculty share insights that will help you get into a competitive arts camp or arts high school.

You're a gifted young artist. You want to dance, paint, or write for hours every day, and you've decided that a prestigious arts camp or arts academy is the best place for you to do that. With this dream in mind, you're excitedly filling out the program application. The first part of the application is no problem—name, address, contact information, program choice, and so on. But when you get to the second part, you hit a block. The admissions staff wants you to submit a portfolio of your best creative writing, or a video of you performing a monologue. All of a sudden, the anxiety sets in. *What if I don't get in?*

Almost every nationally-recognized arts camp or academy has a competitive application process. While this isn't a surprise to most students, a number of them still struggle over the performance-based section. Fears of not being good enough and discomfort in front of the camera hold them back from what could be an amazing arts education experience.

If you find yourself in this situation, don't worry. Many common holdbacks actually stem from a misunderstanding of what the audition or portfolio really is: an honest expression of your potential as an artist. We spoke with staff and faculty at Interlochen Arts Academy and Interlochen Arts Camp to get their best tips on overcoming perfectionism, developing confidence, and showcasing your artistic gifts.



## 5 TIPS FOR CREATING A WINNING ARTS AUDITION OR PORTFOLIO

1. Show off what matters to you
2. Be prepared
3. Don't worry about perfection
4. Focus on making something beautiful
5. Just finish it

# 1 show off what matters to you



Your audition or portfolio is a chance to show off what matters to you. There are a few ways to do that, and one way is to showcase a variety of talents. Sometimes, variety is already built into the requirements: for example, Interlochen Arts Academy’s creative writing major asks you to include at least two different genres selected from a list that includes poetry, playwriting, personal essays, and more. Some program requirements, though, give you the flexibility to show off an even greater variety of talents. Make sure to use that opportunity to your advantage.

Mindy Zacher Ronayne, Director of Visual Arts at Interlochen Center for the Arts, says she loves to see students display the full range of their gifts.

“If you’ve taken a ceramics class, or maybe you’ve done some photography because you got a camera for your birthday, and you have a whole spattering of different kinds of pieces, I love to see all of that,” she says. “It shows us that you are passionate about what you do, about art, and about exploring different things.”

This kind of versatility often indicates that you’ll be a great fit at an arts institution, where instructors value flexible thinking and a broad variety of interests in their students.

In addition, students should also think of the audition and portfolio as a chance to showcase their unique passions.

**“Whether that’s in the monologue you’re presenting or in your visual art portfolio, show us things that are what you like to produce and what you like to do.”**

**SARAH JANE CRIMMINS, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF ADMISSION**

“We want to see your personality and individual style,” says Sarah Jane Crimmins, Associate Director of Admission. “Whether that’s in the monologue you’re presenting or in your visual art portfolio, show us things that are what you like to produce and what you like to do. Don’t choose a piece just because you think it’s what should be submitted—we want to see what you actually enjoy doing.”

Think of the audition as the perfect place to share the things you care about most. Love Anglo-Saxon poetry or bedroom pop? Have a favorite movie director or era of fashion design? Now’s the time to make that front and center.

“The core of what we’re doing is that it should be fun,” says Michael Mittelstaedt, Director of Film & New Media. “There should be an excitement to this. We’re super interested in geeking out about whatever your favorite film is, or aspirations you may have to make movies or tell stories in a certain genre.”

Showing off your gifts, style, and interests will all make for a compelling audition or portfolio—because it’s truly unique to you.





## 2 Be prepared

You can psych yourself up as much as you like, but at the end of the day, there's no substitute for good preparation. Start early, take your time, and give it your best effort. That way, you'll perform better in your auditions, and your portfolio will be a more accurate representation of your skills.

"Being prepared is the best way to be confident," says William Church, Director of Theatre. "Follow the guidelines, memorize the piece, and read the play for yourself. Then, when you're acting it, you can really enter the world of the play as opposed to thinking, 'Will they like me?' The imaginative world of your monologue or song needs to be more interesting to you than the fact that you're auditioning."

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**WILLIAM CHURCH, DIRECTOR OF THEATRE**

One way to be more efficient with your preparation time is to choose a selection of music or dialogue that you've already prepared.

"Play a piece that you've already polished or are close to having polished," says Crimmins. "Don't stress about learning a new piece and then feel nervous that it's not perfect."

Every bit of preparation you're able to put into your application materials will help make your talents shine. That way, you can be confident that you've done your best.



# 3 Don't worry about perfection

Do you struggle with perfectionism? Some students get hung up on performing their art forms perfectly, or formatting their submissions as professionally as possible. These efforts come from a good place—the desire for excellence—but if trying to be perfect stops you from submitting your application, it isn't helping you. Done is better than perfect.

Frequently, Interlochen faculty are willing to be flexible on the formatting of application materials. For programs that require an intro video, there's no pressure to craft a cinema-quality masterpiece (although you can if you want!).

"You can take pictures of your sketchbooks with your phone; you can shoot your intro video walking around your backyard with your phone. It doesn't have to be perfectly polished," says Clyde Sheets, Director of Interdisciplinary Arts.

You don't even need to have the perfect setting for your audition video. Many times, a quiet area in your home will work just fine.

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"If you want to, you can record your pieces in your dance studio, but you definitely don't have to," says Joseph Morrissey, Director of Dance. "We have students who clear furniture out of rooms in their houses or go out to their garages and record their auditions out there. At the end of the day, our faculty just want to know where you're at as a dancer."

In addition, you shouldn't be overly concerned with a perfect performance. Especially with music, a single mistake isn't going to ruin your chance of acceptance. An imperfect performance can still showcase your skills effectively.

"We are looking for potential rather than perfection," says Crimmings. "Even if it's not the most perfect take, that's okay. Sometimes it's actually the best way to showcase what you can do. Our faculty might say, 'Oh, that student recovered from that mistake in such a great way. There's potential there, and I can see them thriving at Camp or Academy.'"



# 4 Focus on making something beautiful



When you practice your art form, do you do it only so that people will like it? Does a musician only play for applause, or a writer only write for good reviews? A real artist knows that art isn't just about pleasing others. It's about taking part in something bigger than yourself.

When you work on your application, remember that you're taking time to create something beautiful. You don't stop being an artist just because your work is also intended to impress an admissions team. Taking the pressure off of yourself in this way can help you perform better.

Sydney Davis, Interlochen Online instructor of clarinet, is also an alumna who studied at Interlochen Arts Academy. She speaks from experience when she says this principle is especially true for musicians.

"Focus on playing musically and on making the person listening to it feel something," she advises. "We all miss notes, we all mess up rhythms, and we all forget things in our memory. Focusing on making some kind of art tends to be really helpful."





## 5 Just finish it

Preparing well, showcasing a variety of skills, and focusing on the creative process can help you build an audition or portfolio that gets you into the arts program of your dreams. The process doesn't have to be a source of fear; in fact, it can be an amazing learning experience that prepares you for a future in the arts.

"To enter into these careers, you have to spend your whole life auditioning. In some ways, auditioning is more the job than what happens when you actually get the job," says Church. "You develop those muscles by doing it over and over again. And in this case, you're being watched by educators who are safe and positive and encouraging."

The faculty and staff of your desired arts program aren't trying to "catch you" messing up. They are rooting for you and want to see you succeed.

"What really helped me was realizing that the person listening to me, the person making judgments about my playing, wanted me to do well," says Davis. "They wanted to see the person in front of them succeed."

At the end of the day, the most important thing is to just submit your application, and celebrate the fact that you've done your best.

**"All these audition tips are only helpful if you actually finish it," Davis adds. "I tell prospective students that if you don't try, you'll never know. So you may as well just try."**