

Entertainers and Performers, Sports and Related Occupations

Actors, Producers, and Directors

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Significant Points

- Actors endure long periods of unemployment, intense competition for roles, and frequent rejections in auditions.
- Formal training through a university or acting conservatory is typical; however, many actors, producers, and directors find work based on experience and talent alone.
- Because earnings for actors are erratic, many supplement their incomes by holding jobs in other fields.

Nature of the Work

Actors, producers, and directors express ideas and create images in theater, film, radio, television, and other performing arts media. They interpret a writer's script to entertain, inform, or instruct an audience. Although the most famous actors, producers, and directors work in film, network television, or theater in New York or Los Angeles, far more work in local or regional television studios, theaters, or film production companies engaged in advertising, public relations, or independent, small-scale movie productions.

Actors perform in stage, radio, television, video, or motion picture productions. They also work in cabarets, nightclubs, theme parks, and commercials, and in "industrial" films produced for training and educational purposes. Most actors struggle to find steady work; only a few ever achieve recognition as stars. Some well-known, experienced performers may be cast in supporting roles. Others work as "extras," with no lines to deliver, or make brief, cameo appearances speaking only one or two lines. Some actors also teach in high school or university drama departments, acting conservatories, or public programs.

Producers are entrepreneurs, overseeing the business and financial decisions of a production. They select scripts and approve

development of script ideas, arrange financing, and determine the size and cost of stage, radio, television, video, or motion picture productions. Producers hire directors, principal cast members, and key production staff members. They also negotiate contracts with artistic and design personnel in accordance with collective bargaining agreements and guarantee payment of salaries, rent, and other expenses. Producers coordinate the activities of writers, directors, managers, and agents to ensure that each project stays on schedule and within budget.

Directors are responsible for the creative decisions of a production. They interpret scripts, express concepts to set and costume designers, audition and select cast members, conduct rehearsals, and direct the work of cast and crew. Directors approve the design elements of a production, including sets, costumes, choreography, and music.

Working Conditions

Actors, producers, and directors work under constant pressure. To succeed, they need patience and commitment to their craft. Actors strive to deliver flawless performances, often while working in undesirable and unpleasant conditions. Producers and directors experience stress from the need to adhere to budgets, union work rules, and production schedules; organize rehearsals; and meet with designers, financial backers, and production executives.

Acting assignments typically are short term—ranging from 1 day to a few months—which means that there often are long periods of unemployment between jobs. The uncertain nature of the work results in unpredictable earnings and intense competition for even the lowest paid jobs. Often, actors, producers, and directors must hold other jobs to sustain a living.

When performing, actors typically work long, irregular hours. For example, stage actors may perform one show at night while rehearsing another during the day. They also might travel with a show when it tours the country. Movie actors may work on location, sometimes under adverse weather conditions, and may spend considerable time in their trailers or dressing rooms waiting to perform their scenes. Actors who perform in television often appear on camera with little preparation time because scripts tend to be revised frequently or written moments before taping.

Evening and weekend work is a regular part of a stage actor's life. On weekends, more than one performance may be held per day. Actors and directors working on movies or television programs, especially those who shoot on location, may work in the early morning or late evening hours to do nighttime filming or to tape scenes inside public facilities outside of normal business hours.

Actors should be in good physical condition and have the necessary stamina and coordination to move about theater stages and large movie and television studio lots. They also need to maneuver about complex technical sets while staying in character and projecting their voices audibly. Actors must be fit to endure heat from stage or studio lights and the weight of heavy costumes. Producers and directors should anticipate such hazards and ensure the safety of actors by conducting extra rehearsals on the set so that actors can learn the layout of set pieces and props, allowing time for warmups and stretching exercises to guard against physical and vocal injuries, and providing adequate breaks to prevent heat exhaustion and dehydration.



Actors may perform for television, film, or stage productions.

Employment

In 2000, actors, producers, and directors held about 158,000 jobs, primarily in motion pictures, theater, television, and radio. Because many others were between jobs, the total number of actors, producers, and directors available for work was higher. Employment in the theater is cyclical—higher in the fall and spring seasons—and concentrated in New York and other major cities with large commercial houses for musicals and touring productions. Also, many cities support established professional regional theaters that operate on a seasonal or year-round basis.

In summer, stock companies in suburban and resort areas also provide employment opportunities. Actors, producers, and directors may find work on cruise lines and in theme parks. Many smaller non-profit professional companies, such as repertory companies, dinner theaters, and theaters affiliated with drama schools, acting conservatories, and universities provide employment opportunities for local amateur talent and professional entertainers. Auditions typically are held in New York for many productions across the country and for shows that go on the road.

Employment in motion pictures and films for television is centered in New York and in Hollywood. However, small studios are located throughout the country. Many films are shot on location and may employ local professional and nonprofessional actors. In television, opportunities are concentrated in the network centers of New York and Los Angeles, but cable television services and local television stations around the country also employ many actors, producers, and directors.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Persons who become actors, producers, and directors follow many paths. Employers generally look for people with the creative instincts, innate talent, and intellectual capacity to perform. Actors should possess a passion for performing and enjoy entertaining others. Most aspiring actors participate in high school and college plays, work in college radio stations, or perform with local community theater groups. Local and regional theater experience and work in summer stock, on cruise lines, or in theme parks help many young actors hone their skills and earn qualifying credits towards membership in one of the actors' unions. Union membership and work experience in smaller communities may lead to work in larger cities, notably New York or Los Angeles. In television and film, actors and directors typically start in smaller television markets or with independent movie production companies, then work their way up to larger media markets and major studio productions. Intense competition, however, ensures that only a few actors reach star billing.

Formal dramatic training, either through an acting conservatory or a university program, generally is necessary; however, some people successfully enter the field without it. Most people studying for a bachelor's degree take courses in radio and television broadcasting, communications, film, theater, drama, or dramatic literature. Many continue their academic training and receive a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree. Advanced curriculums may include courses in stage speech and movement, directing, playwriting, and design, as well as intensive acting workshops.

Actors at all experience levels may pursue workshop training through acting conservatories or by being mentored by a drama coach. Actors also research roles so that they can grasp concepts quickly during rehearsals and understand the story's setting and background. Sometimes actors learn a foreign language or train with a dialect coach to develop an accent to make their characters more realistic.

Actors need talent, creative ability, and training that will enable them to portray different characters. Because competition for parts

is fierce, versatility and a wide range of related performance skills, such as singing, dancing, skating, juggling, and miming are especially useful in lifting actors above the average and getting them noticed by producers and directors. Actors must have poise, stage presence, the capability to affect an audience, and the ability to follow direction. Modeling experience also may be helpful. Physical appearance often is a deciding factor in being selected for particular roles.

Many professional actors rely on agents or managers to find work, negotiate contracts, and plan their careers. Agents generally earn a percentage of the pay specified in an actor's contract. Other actors rely solely on attending open auditions for parts. Trade publications list the time, date, and location of these auditions.

To become a movie extra, one must usually be listed by a casting agency, such as Central Casting, a no-fee agency that supplies extras to the major movie studios in Hollywood. Applicants are accepted only when the number of persons of a particular type on the list—for example, athletic young women, old men, or small children—falls below the foreseeable need. In recent years, only a very small proportion of applicants has succeeded in being listed.

There are no specific training requirements for producers. They come from many different backgrounds. Talent, experience, and business acumen are very important determinants of success for producers. Actors, writers, film editors, and business managers commonly enter the field. Also, many people who start out as actors move into directing, while some directors might try their hand at acting. Producers often start in a theatrical management office, working for a press agent, managing director, or business manager. Some start in a performing arts union or service organization. Others work behind the scenes with successful directors, serve on boards of directors, or promote their own projects. No formal training exists for producers; however, a growing number of colleges and universities now offer degree programs in arts management and managing nonprofits.

As the reputations and box-office draw of actors, producers, and directors grow, they might work on bigger budget productions, on network or syndicated broadcasts, or in more prestigious theaters. Actors may advance to lead roles and receive star billing. A few actors move into acting-related jobs, such as drama coaches or directors of stage, television, radio, or motion picture productions. Some teach drama privately or in colleges and universities.

Job Outlook

Employment of actors, producers, and directors is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations through 2010. Although a growing number of people will aspire to enter these professions, many will leave the field early because the work, when it is available, is hard, the hours are long, and the pay is low. Despite faster-than-average employment growth, competition for jobs will be stiff, in part because of the large number of highly trained and talented actors auditioning for roles. Only performers with the most stamina and talent will regularly find employment.

Expanding cable and satellite television operations, increasing production and distribution of major studio and independent films, and continued growth and development of interactive media, such as direct-for-web movies and videos, should increase demand for actors, producers, and directors. A strong Broadway and Off-Broadway community and vibrant regional theater network are expected to offer many job opportunities.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of actors were \$25,920 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,950 and \$59,769. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$12,700, and the highest 10 percent earned

more than \$93,620. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of actors were as follows:

Motion picture production and services	\$54,440
Producers, orchestras, and entertainers	28,310
Miscellaneous amusement and recreation services	13,500

Minimum salaries, hours of work, and other conditions of employment are covered in collective bargaining agreements between show producers and the unions representing workers. Actors' Equity Association (Equity) represents stage actors; Screen Actors Guild (SAG) covers actors in motion pictures, including television, commercials, and films; and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) represents television and radio studio performers. While these unions generally determine minimum salaries, any actor or director may negotiate for a salary higher than the minimum.

On July 1, 2001, the members of SAG and AFTRA negotiated a new joint contract covering all unionized employment. Under the contract, motion picture and television actors with speaking parts earned a minimum daily rate of \$636 or \$2,206 for a 5-day week. Actors also receive contributions to their health and pension plans and additional compensation for reruns and foreign telecasts of the productions in which they appear.

According to Equity, the minimum weekly salary for actors in Broadway productions as of June 25, 2001 was \$1,252. Actors in Off-Broadway theaters received minimums ranging from \$440 to \$551 a week as of October 30, 2000, depending on the seating capacity of the theater. Regional theaters that operate under an Equity agreement pay actors \$500 to \$728 per week. For touring productions, actors receive an additional \$106 per day for living expenses (\$112 per day in larger, higher-cost cities). According to Equity, fewer than 15 percent of its dues-paying members actually worked during any given week during 2000. Median earnings for those able to find employment in 2000 were less than \$10,000.

Some well-known actors—stars—earn well above the minimum; their salaries are many times the figures cited, creating the false impression that all actors are highly paid. For example, of the nearly 100,000 SAG members, only about 50 might be considered stars. The average income that SAG members earn from acting, less than \$5,000 a year, is low because employment is erratic. Therefore, most actors must supplement their incomes by holding jobs in other fields.

Many actors who work more than a set number of weeks per year are covered by a union health, welfare, and pension fund, which includes hospitalization insurance and to which employers contribute. Under some employment conditions, Equity and AFTRA members receive paid vacations and sick leave.

Median annual earnings of producers and directors were \$41,030 in 2000. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,000 and \$60,330. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$21,050, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$87,770. Median annual earnings in the industries employing the largest numbers of producers and directors were as follows:

Motion picture production and services	\$50,280
Producers, orchestras, and entertainers	38,820
Radio and television broadcasting	34,630

Many stage directors belong to the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers (SSDC), and film and television directors belong to the Directors Guild of America (DAG). Earnings of stage directors vary greatly. According to the SSDC, summer theaters offer compensation, including “royalties” (based on the number of performances), usually ranging from \$2,500 to \$8,000 for a 3- to 4-

week run. Directing a production at a dinner theater usually will pay less than directing one at a summer theater, but has more potential for income from royalties. Regional theaters may hire directors for longer periods, increasing compensation accordingly. The highest paid directors work on Broadway and commonly earn \$50,000 per show. However, they also receive payment in the form of royalties—a negotiated percentage of gross box office receipts—that can exceed their contract fee for long-running box office successes.

Producers seldom get a set fee; instead, they get a percentage of a show's earnings or ticket sales.

Related Occupations

People who work in performing arts occupations that may require acting skills include announcers; dancers and choreographers; and musicians, singers, and related workers. Others working in theater-related occupations are hairdressers, hairstylists, and cosmetologists; fashion designers; set and exhibit designers; sound engineering technicians; and writers and authors.

Sources of Additional Information

For general information about theater arts and a list of accredited college-level programs, contact:

► National Association of Schools of Theater, 11250 Roger Bacon Dr., Suite 21, Reston, VA 20190. Internet:

<http://www.arts-accredit.org/nast/default.htm>

For general information on actors, producers, and directors, contact:

► Actors Equity Association, 165 West 46th St., New York, NY 10036. Internet: <http://www.actorsequity.org>

► Screen Actors Guild, 5757 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90036-3600. Internet: <http://www.sag.org>

► American Federation of Television and Radio Artists—Screen Actors Guild, 4340 East-West Hwy., Suite 204, Bethesda, MD 20814-4411. Internet: <http://www.aftra.org> or <http://www.sag.org>

Athletes, Coaches, Umpires, and Related Workers

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Significant Points

- Work hours are often irregular; travel may be extensive.
- Very few athletes, coaches, umpires and related workers make it to professional rank; career-ending injuries are a constant danger for athletes.
- Job opportunities for coaches, sports instructors, and sports officials will be best in high school and other amateur sports.

Nature of the Work

We are a nation of sports fans—and sports players. Interest in watching sports continues to grow, resulting in expanding leagues, completely new leagues, and more and larger venues in which to witness amateur and professional competitions. Recreational participation in sports is at an all-time high as the general population seeks the benefits of sport and exercise for its positive effect on overall health and well being. Some of those who participate in amateur sports dream of becoming paid professional athletes, coaches, or sports officials, but very few beat the long odds and have the opportunity to make a living from professional athletics. Those who do find