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**BACK TO NEWS MENU**



### **PREPARE TO TRAIN**

The first term at drama school or on a university drama degree is an exciting time in a young theatre maker's life, but many may also feel apprehensive of what's in store. Here we ask the experts how to prepare for those all-important first weeks.

The best starting point, the experts agree, is to keep an open mind about what you're going into. Jane Harrison, Interim Dean and Head of Acting at Arts Ed, acknowledges that although many students may have studied acting to a high level in the past it's vital they "accept that they're going to what may be a new way of working and not feel that the way they did it before was right. There is no right or wrong in actor training so the best thing is to come completely open-minded."

A willingness to embrace new ideas is particularly important in terms of a student's interactions with others on the course; a positive atmosphere is crucial, says Harrison "As the weeks go along they have to be entirely positive and supportive of other students. It's really important never to criticize another student in class unless it's staff directed."

This is as true for students on university theatre degrees as it for those on vocational training programmes. Dr Nadine Holdsworth is Chair of the Department of Theatre Studies at the University of Warwick; she describes how getting the new students "working with each other in a creative way" is as important as "imparting new knowledges" in the early stages of theatre and performance courses.

As far as the actual classes are concerned it clearly makes sense for students to familiarise themselves with the topics they'll be studying in the first term. Dr Holdsworth is keen to stress that students shouldn't get too worried about this aspect before starting their courses. "We're not expecting them to come with a full understanding but just to show that they're starting to engage with some of the terminology and some of the ideas that they're going to come up against."

An obvious tip that holds for both drama schools and university drama courses is for students to expose themselves to as much theatre as possible. Niamh Dowling is Head of the School of Theatre at Manchester Metropolitan University. At MMU students are asked "to see as many plays as they can, to read what they can." Harrison echoes this sentiment, explaining that "they're doing all this so they have a really good knowledge of their subject and feel more confident."

Where drama schools and university theatre degrees differ however is in the level of physical preparation required for the start of term. Harrison advises that students "should make every effort to keep fit because a lot of the classes really take it out of them in a way that they're not used to. If they smoke they should quit smoking because they'll be doing so much voice work or singing." The same is true at MMU, but Dowling is quick to warn against excessive physical preparation. "Working out to the point when the muscle has become bound is of no value. It's restricting if anything. But to be fit in the body is very helpful."

So get to the gym, do a little reading, keep an open mind and be easy on yourself and fellow students. You've got three years ahead of you and now's the time to make the best possible start.

- Jo Caird

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