

The portfolio review (and interview materials prep) process

At USITT, we have expanded the name to Portfolio Reviews & Interview Materials Prep (PRIMP), because we know there is much more to share during job interviews besides a portfolio. Your resume and your reputation from past experience are what often get you jobs. You may not be asked for a portfolio at all, or only for your first couple years. This document is to help guide you not only for your PRIMP session at conference, but for any job interview.

The weird thing about a review is that the reviewers don't know exactly what type of job you are applying for, unlike a normal job interview. Introduce yourself (and be yourself), and tell the reviewers what kind of work you're hoping to get, so they know what direction to lead their advice. Be prepared to show two or three items for sure - pick your favorites or the ones that you want help on. Frankly, many do start with a resume as it's one of the primary things employers look at, but there are also opportunities like Resume Doctors on the expo floor to assist with that if you want to focus on other things. Have two or three of your favorite pieces of paperwork or other materials ready that you want to share, and tell us why you picked it. Be proud of your work. Talk about how the work you did supported the production and made a difference. Why was this show better because of you? Have your "elevator speech" ready for each document, not too long, but prepared.

You can also use the time to ask the reviewers how they may have done it differently, but this is mostly about how they can help you shine in a job interview. Also, know that they are there to help you, and any criticism is to be constructive. This is also the opportunity to get more people to know about your work and potentially lead to connections and other jobs, but you've already made the first positive step by signing up for a review. It doesn't hurt to have a business card ready to hand the reviewers, or to follow up with them later. You'll also now have a familiar face as you proceed through the rest of the conference.

Breathe deeply and enjoy this opportunity. Ask questions. This review is for you! Get the most out of it that you can!

Portfolios and Stage Managers

Stage Management portfolios are different from those prepared by a designer or technician, since our "building" of a show is a different animal. Choose things that help tell your story as a stage manager, what kind of productions you've worked on, and what kinds of things you've organized. Paperwork is certainly one of our main portfolio components - pick paperwork you are proud of and then tell the story of how you compiled it, or what its use helped accomplish. Schedules and company-wide documents are functional, but things like scene breakdowns and shift plots may show more of the organization involved.

Items to consider include:

- Your resume – you may want to provide several copies so that reviewers can write directly on it
- Shift plots/run sheets/deck sheets/cue sheets
- Scene breakdowns
- That weird document you've never created for a show before but was very useful for this one
- Blocking pages of the script
- Calling pages of the script
- Daily, weekly, and/or monthly schedules
- A sample cover letter

- Process photos as mentioned below

Items to consider that may require redacting personal or private information:

- Rehearsal or performance reports
- Contact sheets
- Budgets and other “managerial” documents

Things to keep in mind:

- You do NOT need to bring an entire call script/production book with you
- If you have a digital portfolio, have it downloaded on your fully-charged computer or tablet; do not rely on wifi alone or a power supply - more discussion on websites below

Photos

A picture is worth a thousand words. Use imagery to support your documentation and process on the production. It also allows for a great launch point for conversation. Full-stage shots give us more information about the show as a whole rather than a closeup on an actor’s face. One photo might tell the person looking at your portfolio whether it was a heavily technical show, or perhaps a single unit set with a lot of props. The number of people in the photo can also show scope and size. We don’t need twelve production photos of the same show, however. Be judicious about which shots best represent your work on the production and the scope of the project.

Credit each photo with the name of the show, company/organization, your role, and perhaps a one sentence explanation of your duties on the show, or what made it different from other productions. As room allows, it’s great to also list all designers (don’t forget sound or other “unseen” team members, including the director, just as you would hope to be listed on their items). Think outside the box on what other photos might be interesting from a stage management point of view. Take photos of your groundplan tape out, your organized prop table, a rehearsal prop you created on the fly, or your callboard, too, if you’re proud of them, so you have choices later.

Resume

There are many ways to organize a resume, and different employers may prefer different things. Depending on the credits you have and the type of job you are going for, you may choose to organize it by job title, academic vs professional credits, stage management versus other areas, by company/school/theatre if you’ve worked on several shows at the same place, or by genre if you work on multiple types of projects. You might also have a variation of each of these types of resumes to submit depending on the job. Find a resume format that best showcases who you are and what you’ve done and know. It’s recommended you have a running list of every show you’ve ever done (whether in resume format, or just a list for yourself), that you can refer to and tailor credits per job as appropriate.

1. **The top third of the page** - this is what will get looked at most to see if you are appropriate for this particular production. Place your most relatable credits here. If they choose to read the entire resume after that, the rest is golden. Your education information like degree earned/earning therefore could be placed more towards the bottom of the page, leaving your show credits more prominence.
2. **Fonts** - be judicious on the number and size of fonts you use. A special font for your name and headers is fine, but make the bulk of your resume one consistent legible font.
3. **Asterisks and other symbols** - Limit the use of asterisks or other symbols. You may choose to use it for a world premiere or a reading or something, then put a key to what the symbol

means...but don't make the employer search for what each asterisk means. Sometimes it can be much cleaner to simply put (World Premiere) right after the show title, to get the point across.

4. **Dates** - you will get differing opinions about whether to include dates or not. They are most useful if you worked on a show multiple years, or if the company has done the production multiple times, like an annual version of *A Christmas Carol* or an opera like *Carmen*.
5. **Paper** - a majority of resumes are submitted electronically these days. If you print, plain white paper is just fine, but if you go with something else, a slightly heavier weight of paper is nice. Be sure to print the same direction as any embedded watermark. Hold the paper up to a light source to see if you've printed the correct way.
6. **One page or two** - especially if you are new to the career, you should be able to trim your resume to a single page, tailoring it to the job at hand. As you advance, keep a working document that has every credit, and tailor it to the job or genre as needed. If you are applying for an academic job, a curriculum vitae (CV) is more appropriate, listing every credit you've ever had, including awards and publications. Start keeping track of this in your early years and you'll thank yourself later - but don't submit all of it for most stage management jobs.
7. **"Special skills"/Related information** - Be judicious on the term "special skills"...are they really that special? These days knowledge of Microsoft Office products is fairly standard for stage management use, but maybe you know some higher functions within it, or have familiarity with both Office and Google Suites, or the cloud filing systems that go along (Dropbox, SharePoint, Drive). Are the skills really applicable to the job you're applying for? Early in your career you may want to share that you have had work in the production shops, but as your career advances, you'll have a more focused skill set or accomplishments. Think about things like training in first aid, stage combat studies, diversity and inclusion, theatrical firearm safety, etc. Do you know any other languages, including sign language? Can you read music? Quantify that if possible, like if you play a musical instrument. Some like to throw in a good conversation starter, some think of that as a gimmick - you will get a variety of opinions. Your non-theatre work might be something to list here, like experience interfacing with customers or supervising children. Do be prepared to talk about whatever you list.
8. **References** - You will get some opinions on this one (this is why we always aim for pairing you with TWO reviewers), but you might want to include references from the beginning. Some employers could decide that "references available upon request" is just one more step on their part that is too much to go through to hire you. Also, if they know, say, the director you've listed on a given credit, be prepared that they may contact that person rather than the reference you suggested. It's also good to have multiple references available, to once again tailor to the job you are applying for. If you work different genres, have references appropriate to that particular work. References should be able to speak to your recent body of work, and someone who worked with you five years ago may no longer be in that position. Do make sure that you ask your reference if you may use them, and which methods of contact they prefer to have listed. Do NOT list these references publicly on the internet; this is a time "references available on request" is highly recommended or to only list names/titles but not contact information.

Cover letter

Different employers give different weight to cover letters. Some read them first, some check out your resume first to see if you're even a viable candidate. The cover letter can be used to explain

some of your credits, as well as how you might best fit the job. Relate yourself to the job at hand. Help the reader relate the positions noted on your resume to the job you are applying for, especially if the majority of your prior experience is not in stage management. Consider some of the broader ideas associated with stage management: organization, leadership, communication, and time management. Then tie your past positions to these concepts. If you have availability concerns, or preferences for specific shows in a season, you can list those in the cover letter, too. It's also great to tell the employer where you found their posting, so they can see where they are successfully getting candidates. As a tip, try to throw in a detail you know about the theatre that isn't something just regurgitated from the job posting. Show them you took an investment in learning more about their company and why you want to work for them specifically. Be sure to check for any squiggly lines your word processing program used to inform you of a grammatical or spelling error, too. Stage managers are the communicators and detail-oriented people, so let your cover letter reflect this too.

Websites

You should have some sort of digital presence online, but you do not need to do a full website unless you wish to do so. If an employer does a Google search, you don't want your only hit to be photos on your social media of a wild night at the bar. Be judicious about what is publicly viewable, and remember that anyone with a mutual friend may see what you post, especially in public social media platforms and groups. There are also free website options available like LinkedIn or webhosting at places like Wix and Wordpress, if you don't mind their branding. Do not plan for consistent wifi while at a job interview though (or the USITT review); have your materials downloaded, if sharing your site is important to you.

This is for YOU

All of the above are suggestions that can help you focus on the decisions you make, depending on what you are trying to present. You will also have people give you multiple opinions about exactly the same part of your materials. Take everyone's constructive criticism, and present the best you!