

Thanks to a change in the youngARTS application process, emerging artists from all across the nation are now able to demonstrate their talents in a completely new way.

by Nathan Welton

TIPS FOR TECHNICAL SUBMISSIONS



For a second year now, the youngARTS awards program is requiring videotaped submissions from many artists. Musicians previously applied with an audiotape, for example, but now judges want to see them perform.

The trick to getting a professional quality application—for Cinematic Arts, Dance, Music or even Visual Arts—lies in the hands of the person making it.

| The Basics | “First things first,” says Kirk Simon, an Academy Award-nominated documentary producer and member of NFAA’s Board of Trustees.

“What I would say to any arts student is that you have to visualize your submission,” he says. “You have to think about what you’re submitting.”

Simon also suggests that students reach out into their network of friends, family and teachers for help.

| Collecting Gear | After students have figured out what they want to showcase and have spent some time enlisting friends and family to help, they need to collect gear. For photographers and visual artists, that can be as easy as finding an inexpensive point-and-shoot digital camera and, ideally, a tripod. Because visual

art is static, it is easier to photograph than dance and music—and can therefore be done successfully with less up-to-date equipment.

For musicians, dancers and theater students, Simon suggests that students use their networking skills to find someone with a camera they can borrow.

Two of the most important things to look for are manual audio control and a microphone jack. Many video cameras use an automatic audio system that boosts quiet noises and reduces loud noises. This is great for everyday uses, but it could be problematic for nuanced acting or musical performances. In a worst-case scenario, it may make quiet sections—dramatic pauses, for example, or soft strumming—unintentionally loud. Nevertheless, there are tricks to minimize this drawback: the best is to use an external microphone and ensure your room is quiet.

Aside from the better sound quality, off-camera mics can be placed far enough away from the camera so that they will not pick up the faint noises of the camera's tape mechanism.

"Don't expect it to be perfect the first time," he says. "Where the mic is placed is obviously different if you're a trombone player or a spoken word artist, and people have to figure that out."

Since the judges do not want to see panning and zooming, students can use a relatively inexpensive tripod for their filming.

For more information on the youngARTS program and how you can get involved, visit www.nfaa.org.

For videotaped applications to NFAA's youngARTS program, Kirk Simon, an Academy Award-nominated documentary producer and member of NFAA's Board of Trustees, says one of the biggest choices to make is location.

He advises students to sit in their chosen spot and listen quietly for a minute or two to hear all the background noise that exists: road noise, footsteps in the hallway, televisions, heating or cooling fans and refrigerators. All those noises will be on the tape, so if they exist, students should find another room or figure out a way to make them silent.

"If you are using the on-camera mic, the quieter the room, the better off you are," Simon says. "Probably half the sound is the room tone, so if you have a very loud air conditioner, the gain will

rise to make sure the air conditioner gets on the soundtrack when you're not talking."

But if you turn everything off, you should be in good shape.

As in photographed applications, plain backgrounds work best. Also, students should be cognizant of what they are wearing. Simon suggests darker, monochrome tops, which will show off skin tones better. Stripes and patterns can be distracting, and can sometimes cause a jiggling video "noise" called "moray." White is overpowering and will often draw the viewer's eyes away from the performer.

| On to the Next Step | Once the videotaping is complete, students need to transfer it to VHS or DVD. Since

almost all of today's cameras are digital, they will probably be run through a post-production editing program. Simon says such programs can remove background noise, add bass if necessary and do some basic color correction. He also suggests that students burn to DVD instead of VHS to keep production quality as high as possible.

Typical home computers these days come with a simple editing suite that allows students to burn DVDs that will play in most every DVD player. They can export the file as a stand-alone movie file on either MACs or PCs, such as a Quicktime movie, and then burn it to DVD in a disc burning application such as Roxio Toast. In all cases, it is important that applicants test their disc on a variety of DVD players to ensure it works properly.

CALLING ALL PHOTOGRAPHERS AND VISUAL ARTISTS...

Photography and visual art students who wish to apply to NFAA's youngARTS program probably have it the easiest, since they do not have to contend with the added element of audio.

Patty Carroll, an adjunct professor of photography at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and member of NFAA's Board of Trustees, says the best way to photograph visual art is to do it in even, flat light—which is best found outside on a cloudy day. Shooting in such conditions avoids harsh shadows that might fall across the piece, and it also guarantees that the light source is of a consistent color. Shooting indoors might throw off the hue of the piece if lights of different color temperatures, such as tungsten and halogen bulbs, light it. If shooting indoors is necessary, students should place their work somewhere with lots of diffused light and little to no direct light.

Paintings, sculpture and other visual art works should be hung on a wall, and the glass should be removed from the frames. Keeping the glass in will virtually guarantee an unwanted reflection. Other pieces of visual art should be placed on a plain, light-colored background. Black and other dark backdrops can be problematic because they sometimes prevent the viewer from seeing any three-dimensionality to the work. Artists who have created small sculptures might consider making a do-it-yourself light tent out of tissue paper and cardboard boxes. Googling "DIY light tent" will yield many hits with instructions for macro photo studios costing about \$10.

Also, photographing artwork requires a fair amount of working space. Students should avoid using wide-angle lenses because they can cause a circular distortion and warping around the side of the frame. Ideally they should have the lens set in the middle of its zoom range. If they are photographing a painting or work that is normally framed, they should place the camera at exactly the same height as the middle of the piece. Pointing the lens upwards or downwards will cause the image to be distorted, creating a wider bottom width and a narrower top width. Students also should pay attention to horizontal and vertical lines so their pieces do not appear to be hanging sideways.

The majority of digital cameras produced in the last few years have enough resolution for the application process, but students should make sure they are actually using all the megapixels a camera has to offer. Six or more megapixels is best, but even five can suffice. Sometimes, cameras have various size and detail settings, so it is best to use the largest possible file size (there is typically a small, medium and large file size).

Also, students should use the fine mode, which uses less compression on the final image. What that means is fewer images will fit on a flash card, but the images will retain their details.

Another important setting students should pay attention to is the film speed, or ISO setting. It's best to use ISO 200 or below to minimize digital noise. This will create a better image, but will require a slower shutter speed and may necessitate the use of a tripod.

Carroll advises students to read the camera manuals and familiarize themselves with how to use manual white balance, which will most accurately record colors. Daylight, for example, is bluer than tungsten, but cameras can compensate for the color differences. The auto white balance feature of today's digital cameras is quite good, but using manual white balance is even more accurate. Essentially, students need to take a photograph of something gray or white—a sheet of paper would do—set their camera to manual white balance and select the photograph of the paper as an example of a true white.

Last, Carroll says it is absolutely critical that students turn off their flashes. Leaving them on is a sure way to get glare, reflections and harsh shadows.