Actors interpret a writer’s script to entertain or inform an audience.

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<td><strong>2012 Median Pay</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Entry-Level Education</strong></td>
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**What Actors Do**

Actors express ideas and portray characters in theater, film, television, and other performing arts media. They also work at theme parks or other live events. They interpret a writer’s script to entertain or inform an audience.

**Work Environment**

Most actors work under pressure and are often under the stress of having to find their next job.

**How to Become an Actor**

Many actors enhance their skills through formal dramatic education, and long-term training is common.

**Pay**

The median hourly wage for actors was $20.26 in May 2012.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of actors is projected to grow 4 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations.

**Similar Occupations**

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of actors with similar occupations.

**More Information, Including Links to O*NET**

Learn more about actors by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.
What Actors Do

Actors express ideas and portray characters in theater, film, television, and other performing arts media. They also work at theme parks or other live events. They interpret a writer’s script to entertain or inform an audience.

Duties

Actors typically do the following:

- Read scripts and meet with agents and other professionals before accepting a role
- Audition in front of directors and producers
- Research their character's personal traits and circumstances to portray them more authentically to an audience
- Memorize their lines
- Rehearse their lines and performance, including movement on stage or in front of the camera, with other actors
- Discuss their role with the director and other actors to improve the overall performance of the show
- Perform the role, following the director’s directions

Most actors struggle to find steady work, and few achieve recognition as stars. Some work as “extras”—actors who appear on screen with no lines to deliver. Some do voiceover or narration work for animated features, audiobooks, or other electronic media.

In some stage or film productions, actors sing, dance, or play a musical instrument. For some roles, an actor must learn a new skill, such as horseback riding or stage fighting.

Most actors have long periods of unemployment between roles and often hold other jobs to make a living. Some actors teach acting classes as a second job.

Work Environment
Actors held about 79,800 jobs in 2012. Most work under pressure and are often under the stress of having to find their next job. Work assignments are usually short, ranging from 1 day to a few months, and actors often hold another job to make a living.

While working on location for a movie or television show and sometimes in a studio, actors may perform in unpleasant conditions, such as in bad weather or while wearing an uncomfortable costume.

**Work Schedules**

Work hours for actors are long and irregular. Evening, weekend, and holiday work is common. Few actors work full time, and many have variable schedules. Those who work in theater may travel with a touring show across the country. Film and television actors may also travel to work on location.

**How to Become an Actor**
Many actors enhance their skills through formal dramatic education, and long-term training is common.

**Education**

Many actors enhance their skills through formal dramatic education. Many who specialize in theater have bachelor’s degrees, although a degree is not required.

Although some people succeed in acting without getting a formal education, most actors acquire some formal preparation through an acting conservatory or a university drama or theater arts program. Students can take college classes in drama or filmmaking to prepare for a career as an actor. Classes in dance or music may help as well.

Actors who do not have a college degree may take acting or film classes to learn their craft. Community colleges, acting conservatories, and private film schools typically offer these classes. Many theater companies also have education programs. A bachelor’s degree in theater is becoming more common among stage actors.

**Important Qualities**

*Creativity.* Actors interpret their characters’ feelings and motives in order to portray the characters in the most compelling way.

*Memorization skills.* Actors memorize many lines before filming begins or a show opens. Television actors often appear on camera with little time to memorize scripts, and scripts frequently may be revised or written moments before filming.

*Persistence.* Actors may audition for many roles before getting a job. They must be able to accept rejection and keep going.

*Physical stamina.* Actors should be in good enough physical condition to endure heat from stage or studio lights and the weight of heavy costumes. They may work long hours, including acting in more than one performance a day, and they must do so without getting overly tired.

*Reading skills.* When looking for a new role, actors read many scripts and must be able to interpret how a writer has described their character.

*Speaking skills.* Actors—particularly stage actors—must be able to say their lines clearly, project their voice, and pronounce words so that audiences understand them.

In addition to these qualities, actors usually must be physically coordinated to perform predetermined, sometimes complex movements with other actors to complete a scene.

**Training**

It takes many years of practice to develop the skills needed to be successful as an actor, and actors never truly finish training. They work to improve their acting skills throughout their career. Many actors continue to train through workshops or mentoring by a drama coach.

Every role is different, and an actor may need to learn something new for each one. For example, a role may require learning how to sing or dance, or an actor may have to learn to speak with an accent or to play a musical instrument or sport.

Many aspiring actors participate in high school, college, and local community plays. In television and film, actors usually start out in smaller roles or independent movies and work their way up to bigger productions.

**Advancement**

As an actor’s reputation grows, he or she may work on bigger projects or in more prestigious venues. Some actors become producers and directors.

**Pay**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actors</th>
<th>Median hourly wages, May 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>$20.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The median hourly wage for actors was $20.26 in May 2012. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $8.92, and the top 10 percent earned more than $90.00 in May 2012.

Work hours for actors are long and irregular. Evening, weekend, and holiday work is common. Few actors work full time, and many have variable schedules. Those who work in theater may travel with a touring show across the country. Actors in movies may also travel to work on location.

**Union Membership**

Compared with workers in all occupations, actors had a higher percentage of workers who belonged to a union in 2012. Many film and television actors join Screen Actors Guild/American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG/AFTRA), whereas many stage actors join the Actors’ Equity Association. Union membership can help actors receive bigger parts for more money, although dues can be expensive for actors who are beginning their careers.

**Job Outlook**

Employment of actors is projected to grow 4 percent from 2012 to 2022, slower than the average for all occupations. Job growth in the motion picture industry will stem from continued strong demand for new movies and television shows. However, employment is not expected to keep pace with that demand.

Production companies are experimenting with new content delivery methods, such as video on demand and online television, which may lead to more work for actors in the future. However, these delivery methods are still in their early stages, and it remains to be seen how successful they will be.

Actors who work in performing arts companies are expected to see slower job growth than those in film. Many small and medium-size theaters have difficulty getting funding. As a result, the number of performances is expected to decline. Large theaters, with their more
Actors face intense competition for jobs. Most roles, no matter how minor, have many actors auditioning for them. For stage roles, actors with a bachelor's degree in theater may have a better chance than those without one.

### Employment projections data for Actors, 2012-22

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actors</td>
<td>27-2011</td>
<td>79,800</td>
<td>83,000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of actors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>JOB DUTIES</th>
<th>ENTRY-LEVEL EDUCATION</th>
<th>2012 MEDIAN PAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Announcers</td>
<td>Announcers present music, news, and sports and may provide commentary or interview guests about these topics or other important events. Some act as masters of ceremonies (emcees) or disc jockeys (DJs) at weddings, parties, or clubs.</td>
<td>See How to Become One</td>
<td>$27,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancers and Choreographers</td>
<td>Dancers and choreographers express ideas and stories, using dance. There are many types of dance such as ballet, tango, modern dance, tap, and jazz.</td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>The annual wage is not available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film and Video Editors and Camera Operators</td>
<td>Film and video editors and camera operators manipulate images that entertain or inform an audience.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$46,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multimedia Artists and Animators</td>
<td>Multimedia artists and animators create animation and visual effects for television, movies, video games, and other forms of media.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$61,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musicians and Singers</td>
<td>Musicians and singers play instruments or sing for live audiences and in recording studios.</td>
<td>High school diploma or equivalent</td>
<td>The annual wage is not available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Producers and Directors</td>
<td>Producers and directors create motion pictures, television shows, live theater, and other performing arts productions. They interpret a writer's script to entertain or inform an audience.</td>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>$71,350</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Contacts for More Information

For more information about actors, visit

[Actors' Equity Association](http://www.blr.org/oh/entertainment-and-sports/print/actors.htm)