

# ARDENT RESOURCES

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## Actors on Acting Work

Produced by Ardent Theatre Company from interviews with actors Rachel Summers, Corey Montague-Sholay, Sophie Ward, Sophie Cartman and Aiden Gillet



## ABOUT

**ARDENT RESOURCES** is a collection of workshop notes, interviews, guidance and tips about working in Theatre. It is not intended as comprehensive advice or formal educational resource on which reliance should be placed; rather it collates various insights from people working in the industry that you can choose to incorporate into your own toolkit. Nothing should be taken as a representation or warranty as the correctness or fitness for purpose of any of the content.

Any links shared are for information only and are not endorsed by, connected to or representative of Ardent Theatre Company. We can't guarantee that any of the advice given will lead to future opportunities in the arts; but we do hope it provides resources to help build your own career strategy.

## CONTRIBUTORS

The following is an edited collation of interviews with the following actors about working in the profession:

Rachel Summers (RS)  
Corey Montague-Sholay (CMS)  
Sophie Ward (SW)  
Sophie Cartman (SC)  
Aiden Gillet (AG)

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## JARGON EXPLAINED

**Sides** Refers to the pages or extracts from a script an actor is given to learn for an audition.

**Tonal** Suggests the tone, feel or mood of a piece or a character.

## HOW DO YOU FIND ACTING WORK

**RS:** My agent actually finds me acting work. The castings I usually get are via him. He'll send me a casting breakdown for something that he's seen on Spotlight, which is a casting website that I use, or he uses as well, and he'll send me the details and a casting breakdown.

**CMS:** Most of it comes through auditioning, so I get that through my agent, and so an audition will either be in person, or it will be a self-tape. If it's a self-tape, then they'll send over sides (see Jargon Explained). Sometimes they'll send over character descriptions. They might send an episode and they might send tonal things (see Jargon Explained), so sometimes a suggestion of a film to watch, or it might just be like a little mini montage clip of different things that sort of fit into that world.

**SC:** My agent has set it up on Spotlight that I cannot submit myself for something or nudge them, so I'd have to email them if I've noticed something, but my agent are pretty much on the ball, so they usually apply for everything that's gone on to Spotlight that I'm suitable for.

**AG:** I have got pretty much every job through an agent. I can't think of a single job I've got through writing to anyone or phoning someone up. Not one. That's sad to admit. It's true though.

**SW:** I started work as a kid. I was going to a local theatre group after school. Any experience like that, it's great. If it's drama at school, if you've got a good drama department at school or even a bad one, you can make it better. And when you've finished your education and you're part of a theatre group or something connected with your local theatre or any kind of drama group, then make sure you write down every production you do, even if it's just you and your friends putting on something - doesn't have to be a professional production - but just the sort of parts you've played. Make a list of them. Write a simple CV. Get a headshot. None of us can afford professional headshots usually, especially when we're starting out, but now we've got good cameras and friends I'm sure who can help us out taking a photo.

**CMS:** Occasionally I get work by people that I've worked with before inviting me back to stuff or having a new project which they think I might be right for.

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## QUICK TIPS

- Agents play a key role in finding work
- Work is mainly advertised via Spotlight and The Mandy Network
- Many auditions are done by sending in self-tapes
- Create a CV. If you don't have many professional credits, include roles you may have played in college or in a local theatre group
- You will need a headshot when applying for work. Most people have access to a high-quality phone camera to take your own headshots when starting out
- Do your research and keep up to date with industry news

**SW:** Invite people along to productions that you're in. There is Spotlight and Equity who will help you to find out what the local networks are, local casting directors, local agents. It's worth writing to as many people as you can. Contacts used to be the way that people coming out of drama school used to look up for good casting directors. Find out the casting directors that you like or cast shows you like. Look at the agents who represent actors that you like. It's always worth writing and try and get as much experience as possible.

**SC:** If I didn't have an agent, and obviously there have been times when I haven't had an agent, I would use The Mandy Network and look on websites like Variety or Deadline. Or Greenlit, those kinds of websites, they let you know what's in preproduction. Or you can look on IMDb, that's a good place.

**SW:** One of the big things that they do for you at drama school is at the end of your three-year course, they do a big professional showcase and agents and casting directors used to come to that. Of course, now everything's different. So, a lot of things are done on self-tape and people sending things in, so it's always worth writing and sending in information about yourself and chasing things up and getting people to come and see you as much as possible.

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## HOW IMPORTANT IS NETWORKING AND HOW DO YOU DO IT?

**CMS:** There is an importance to it. I think that a lot of it can happen organically as you're working. As you're working, you're meeting new people and you're building those bonds. So, for me, as someone who isn't great at maybe going to a networking event or something like that, that's how I built my connections.

**SC:** You, as an actor, you are a business, so you have to sell yourself. I think the best way is to talk to people and put yourself out there and go to events. Even if you go and see a friend's theatre show, maybe stay afterwards, talk to the actors, maybe have a word with the director, put yourself out there and say who you are.

**AG:** I think networking is great if you're good at it. I wouldn't bother if you're not. I think the most successful careers involve a good deal of networking. But you've got to be good at it and it's got to come or seem to come naturally.

**SW:** The idea of networking to me, it sounds like something that it has to do with social life, and I was never very good at that. I was never very good at bigging myself up or talking the talk or all those sorts of things. There's nothing wrong with it, there's no reason why people shouldn't do it. Obviously, if nobody knows about you, how are they going to give you a job? I always thought it was just about going up for something and if you were lucky enough to get in the room, or now lucky enough to have somebody watch your tape, then that would just be on the benefit of that [casting/audition] whether or not you got the job.

**CMS:** When you work with someone, you have a positive experience, you kind of carry their name forward, so sometimes I've been able to inadvertently network by the fact that someone contacted me and I've been a recommendation from someone that I've done a job with, and I've done that vice versa. For me, I think that's a way of networking while still keeping it very much within the world of the job and feeling slightly less awkward.

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## QUICK TIPS

- Watch shows that friends are in; it gives you chance to talk to other actors and even the director
- Networking is not just about meeting people; it's also about letting people know what you're doing, applying for work, building contacts
- Keep in touch with people you meet and work with; they may well recommend you to others
- The benefit from networking isn't always immediate; sometimes it might be a couple of years before a contact leads to an opportunity
- Take part in workshops; it's a good way to meet other actors, writers and directors

**SW:** Networking can be about the things that I was talking about how to get a job in the first place, about writing to people, inviting people to see things and making sure that other people know what you're doing and where they can see it or the kind of things that you're interested in, that you're going up for, that you're training to do.

**SC:** I think it's really good to put yourself out there, let people know what you're doing. Also, if you're in a show, for example, afterwards, that's a perfect situation to be networking so you should be talking to other actors and people that come and see them, talk to them. It is a massive community, but at the same time it's quite small. So, if you're putting yourself out there, you will get something back eventually. It might not happen immediately in a couple of months, but a couple of years down the line. Especially if you work with someone once, then stay in touch with them because you never know what they could be making or doing, and they might ask you to work with them.

**RS:** I usually network through Spotlight. They have workshops for actors to either meet other actors or just get further information about the creative industry. Sometimes you also get a chance to meet casting directors as well, which is a great way for them to see you. They tend to remember you if they like you and I think you can get a good rapport with directors and writers through networking as well. They have workshops for writers and directors to iron out bits of their work or develop further stories. And it's an opportunity for actors to go to their sessions to act out those kinds of stories for the writers or the directors. But also, you get to work with various writers and directors, which is great for an actor as well.

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## HOW DO YOU KEEP GOING BETWEEN JOBS?

**SW:** That covers a lot, doesn't it? Because it's not just about money, because there's that side of things, there's how are you going to support yourself? That's very practical and an important thing. But it's also the psychological challenges of being out of work or waiting for work and how you deal with that. I think, most actors find this one of the hardest things because you feel like you're not an actor when you're not working. It's fine for a little bit, but after a while you think, well, when was my last job? Am I even still an actor, especially when you're doing another job that's paying the bills.

**SC:** Flexible work is really helpful. Personally, what I've done over the last 10-11 years is do box office work or front of house work in theatres. Theatres are a great place to work because you're in the environment where you want to be. You might be getting some information about shows that are coming up. Also, especially if you're doing front of house work, it's only evening work, so you have your days free to go to auditions and things like that. Most people that work in those kinds of venues are usually in the creative fields, like they're directors, actors, singers, musical theatre artists. So, you're able to swap shifts with people, so it's quite a flexible place to work.

**RS:** In between jobs I save money. I think that's really important if you can do it, try and say whatever you can, even if it's like £20 at the end of the month. Just keep on doing that and saving, but then also if you can try and find flexible part time work. I know it's not easy, but there's things like bar work, call centre work, things like that.

**SC:** I've got into working as a teaching assistant in primary schools, or you could do it in secondary schools, and I work through an agency, so it's like a recruitment agency but for teaching and they place you in a particular school. You can either do day-to-day work where they ring you up on the morning of that day... but that way is a little bit less secure because you might only have like one shift that week or one day that week.



## QUICK TIPS

- Think about finding flexible work such as café, restaurant, bar, box office, call centre, teaching assistant work. It will ensure you have some money coming in and flexible enough to fit around auditions
- Save money in between acting work, even it's only a little per month
- Hone and practice your skills and practice with your peers
- Feed your creativity by visiting galleries, watching films etc.
- Do things that remind yourself you are an actor; allow yourself to think of yourself as an actor, however long it's been since your last job

**SC (cont):** So, I usually tend to ask for long term or at least one term of a school year, and that way when you do need to go to audition the advantage of working through a teaching agency is that they can send cover for you. Now, when you're employed directly by a school there's no one to cover you and you're kind of contracted to be there working five days a week.

**CMS:** I'm a fan of auditioning. It's a great way to stay sharp on your skills. I think there's a lot of fun of dipping in and out of characters for a moment that feels quite cool. I would say the main thing about it is it reminds you that you're an actor. So, the way that I keep going is I do things that remind me that I'm an actor. You can't create more auditions than what you're getting for the most part, but there's nothing stopping you from doing a vocal warm up or doing singing exercises or working on your accents or working on fight skills or just working on your physicality and your fitness in general. Or even consuming things like choosing to go to a gallery because there's something interesting about it. Choosing to watch a new film every day, choosing to watch shorts, choosing to pursue a director that you really, really like and find out what other projects they have and then engaging with them.

**SW:** I don't think you ever have to change your mindset that you're an actor. However long it has been since you've been working or however long you've been doing another job for, it's really important that you hold that in yourself and allow yourself to think of yourself as an actor, because that's what you want to do. That's what you feel you really are. Acting is one of the hardest creative industries, I think, for this because it's not something you can do very easily without being asked to do it.

**CMS:** Just to do something daily that reminds you that you are an actor because I think it can be very easy to forget. And if you've been out of work for a while, and maybe if you're not auditioning that much, you can lose focus and I think I've been super thankful that I've had people around me who have been smart enough to help me stay on track by doing things every day that remind me that I'm an actor, that we're actors together and that is the thing that we've decided to do.



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## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO A YOUNG ACTOR JUST STARTING OUT?

**SC:** It depends on the stage. I wouldn't say you necessarily have to go to drama school; everyone comes from different backgrounds and money is an issue for a lot of people, but you don't necessarily need to do a long three-year course if you want to get into doing professional acting. There are so many classes and short-term weekly courses that you can do nowadays. But training is imperative. You have to do the training. You can't just think, oh, I'm just going to go into being an actor; so, do your research. Know what you want out of your career.

**AG:** It's a lovely profession when you're young and carefree and financially haven't got any responsibilities, but tougher later on if you take on board financial responsibilities. But it's, you know, it's a great profession and I can't imagine I could have lived as rewarding a professional life in any other sphere. I suspect you've got to have a kind of actor's temperament, and if you have then you just gotta get on with it, however tough it is financially and in other ways.

**SC:** If you want to get an agent I would try and get some work first. Specifically, it could be unpaid work, like if you do a lot of fringe theatre, you can get an agent to come and see you, and then hopefully you can sign with them and then they can start getting you more work. Get on Spotlight because most agents won't take you unless you're on Spotlight now. I would definitely just try and do a lot of work. A lot of short film. The best way to do short film is student films. The schools like NFTS (National Film and Television School), they post a lot of jobs on The Mandy Network or on Spotlight.

**SW:** Partly, it's going to be finding ways of staying in touch with the industry. So, going to see plays, reading books, having friends who are also creative, who are also in the industry and maybe putting a theatre group together if you've not got the opportunity to do that through a professional group or another local group that's already established. Learning, trying to be as positive as possible, it's not always easy. Obviously, if you want to be an actor you can't sit down and play your guitar like a guitarist can, and you can't paint a painting like a painter can. Your job is audience related.



**SC:** Hone your craft, so read lots of plays, watch lots of TV shows, have a monologue in mind, a Shakespeare monologue, a modern monologue. Know what your strengths are. Know what your weaknesses are, and you can work on those. Be open to feedback. Ask for constructive criticism. When you go to an audition, you know, if you do get any feedback, take it on board. And I know most of the time you won't get feedback, but ask if there's an option to, ask. Rejection is rife in this industry, so really, really, really, really do not let it get to your head or heart, because otherwise you won't be able to continue. Like anything, the more you do it, the more you get used to it. So obviously, after so many years being rejected for different jobs, especially jobs that I really, really wanted, it is always a kick in the stomach. But the more you get kicked in the stomach, the more you're able to handle it. But you have to have a thick skin in this industry.

**CMS:** I would say surround yourself with people that bring out the best in you and who align to your level of aspiration. I don't think I'd be half the actor I was if I wasn't surrounded by the people who were all super driven and we all believed in each other and we were all fans of each other and we would all want each other to excel and I think for me as a young actor, that's what really helped me develop my skills. We would go and do monologues for each other. If we had auditions for stuff, we would show the monologues to each other first, and then we would go and do them, so we were pushing each other further and further. The energy that it made between us was one of being incredibly driven and pushing each other, giving each other a boost, being like no, I think that you could do more here, or you could do this here. Surround yourself with people who have that same energy and I think you'll really grow so quickly and in such a really rich way as an actor and you're building an acting community around you.

**AG:** You do need to work with people and the best acting is with people, not performance acting as if the other people around you don't exist, I believe that anyway. Although some critics might not, and some of our Dames and Knights have flourished thoroughly well, very well without observing that rule, but you do need to work with people. If only to have a happier life, really, and if you're going to work in the theatre, sometimes you do a job for two and a half years. So, try and get on.

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## QUICK TIPS

- Training is imperative, whether that's at college, drama school or taking part in short courses and workshops
- Build as much experience as you can. This might mean taking low or unpaid work. Also, get experience from short films and student films
- Keep in touch with the industry by seeing work, reading plays and building a supportive peer group around
- Invite agents and casting directors to anything you're in
- Once you've had an audition, thank the director and/or casting director for seeing you

**CMS:** If you're someone who is like super chilled and super laid back, and that's how you do your best work, then surround yourself with people who bring out that side of you. People who relax you, people who aren't going at lightning pace, but understand that things take time. It'll be different what that group is for each individual actor, but I think finding and getting those people around you really is a great thing. I don't think acting is in isolation and I just think that the best way to become better is to surround yourself by people who you think are better than you. Who you really actually admire. I would say that, all of my friends I'm fans of theirs, and that's a really, really great thing because you kind of have to be inspired by each other.

**SC:** Spend your free time when you can emailing agents, putting yourself out there, get a CV together, and if you don't have any credits you can just put your training details down. Another good way is Twitter. I would recommend following all the UK casting directors, as many big TV directors. If there's a show that you love, say like *Peaky Blinders* or *EastEnders*, look at the credits. See who the director is or the producer. Find them on Twitter if they are on Twitter and then just send them a little private message or just tweet them say, Hi, I see that you're gonna have this show into production, can you tell me who the casting director is. No one is trying to withhold information from anyone. If the production details are out there, then they're happy to share it with you, and obviously the casting director is the best person that you need to speak with.

On a side note, you don't necessarily need to contact the main casting director. I definitely recommend finding out who all the associates and the assistants to those particular casting directors. Most casting director email and address, phone number details are on the [CDG.co.uk](http://CDG.co.uk) website and that is basically a directory of all the casting directors in the UK. You have to be bold; you have to be open, send your messages to those casting directors, let people know who you are. But always have a reason - this is my new showreel, this is my new headshot, we've not met before, this is some work that I've done. Always be contacting. When it's the same casting director, don't do it every week; be mindful about it again, maybe once every four months or once every six months, but keep putting yourself out there. I'd also recommend once you've had an audition with the casting director or director, no harm in sending them an email or tweeting them if they're on Twitter or Instagram, just saying thanks for bringing me in, thanks for inviting me in for an audition. Just keep yourself in their minds.

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## QUICK TIPS

- Be kind and courteous. You need to get along with people, not just for the sake of maintaining professional relationships, but for your own wellbeing
- Keep putting yourself out there, writing to people, following directors and casting directors, updating what you're up to audition and performance wise
- Try to get some TV or film work; it can help build your profile quicker than theatre.
- Look after yourself physically, mentally and emotionally.
- Remember, rejection is part of the business and not personal

**AG:** I've very rarely taken a job on that I didn't want to do. A couple of times I've been bullied into it by an agent when I was younger, and I've regretted it. You've got to try and do things because you feel you should do them. Sometimes you have to do a job because of the money. I did a job in the West End for two and a half years that I should never have done, but I had to do it financially. It was too rewarding, and I think I knew why I was doing it, but it went against every one of my instincts. Try not to do too much theatre if you get offered TV and film because endless theatre makes your profile slower and slower and lower and lower and lower. You tend to be going down a long tunnel of ignominy and being ignored by people. You need the odd moment of TV.

**RS:** For a young actor, I would say look after yourself physically and mentally and emotionally. Physically because again, you are the product that you're promoting, you're putting out there. But also, mentally as well, I think mental health is very important. It can be quite difficult being an actor. You need a lot of energy, you need a lot of determination, a lot of optimism and sometimes if you get a lot of rejection as well in the industry, it can kind of play on your confidence. So, I think if you keep on the positive mental attitude. Meditate, do yoga, whatever makes you feel good about yourself. I think it's really good to do, so just take care of you as a person.

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## LINKS

### Organisations:

Spotlight	<a href="http://www.spotlight.com">www.spotlight.com</a>
Spotlight Contacts	<a href="http://www.spotlight.com/contacts">www.spotlight.com/contacts</a>
Equity	<a href="http://www.equity.org.uk">www.equity.org.uk</a>
The Mandy Network	<a href="http://www.mandy.com">www.mandy.com</a>
Casting Directors Guild	<a href="http://www.thecdg.co.uk">www.thecdg.co.uk</a>

### Industry news:

The Stage	<a href="http://www.thestage.co.uk">www.thestage.co.uk</a>
Variety	<a href="http://www.variety.com">www.variety.com</a>
Deadline	<a href="http://www.deadline.com">www.deadline.com</a>
Greenlit	<a href="http://www.greenlit.com">www.greenlit.com</a>
IMDb	<a href="http://www.imdb.com">www.imdb.com</a>

### Teaching Agencies:

There are multiple ones and each one will offer different terms for payment and expectations (e.g. DBS check being paid for). These links are for your reference and are not endorsed by Ardent in any way.

Career Teachers	<a href="http://www.careerteachers.co.uk">www.careerteachers.co.uk</a>
Prospero Teaching	<a href="http://www.prosperoteaching.com">www.prosperoteaching.com</a>
Sugarman Education	<a href="http://www.sugarmaneducation.co.uk">www.sugarmaneducation.co.uk</a>

### Other useful Ardent Resources:

[www.ardenttheatre.co.uk/agents](http://www.ardenttheatre.co.uk/agents)  
[www.ardenttheatre.co.uk/self-taping](http://www.ardenttheatre.co.uk/self-taping)  
[www.ardenttheatre.co.uk/theatre-auditions](http://www.ardenttheatre.co.uk/theatre-auditions)

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