



Group leaders good practice guide:

What makes a good performance for AYDF 2027?

This guide is here to support you when creating dance work with young people for **Applause Youth Dance Festival**.

Your work will be seen by families and members of the general public, so it's important to think about what audiences will experience when watching your work. We want you to present your work the way you intended to so we wanted to offer some guidance for your creation and rehearsal process.

These recommendations are here to help you create exciting, thoughtful and original work, while keeping young people safe and supported throughout the creative process.

The Applause team receives many applications each year from all over the Midlands. As this platform continues to progress, we encourage choreography that challenges dancers and choreographers to disrupt, be bold and stay curious to truly stand out.

We encourage all youth dance leaders to read this guide and come back to it throughout your creative process.



Movement

Make sure the movement is suitable for the **age, experience and ability of the dancers.**

Safety should always come first. You don't need to include difficult tricks or movements just to make the work look impressive.

Think about:

- How the movement represents the young people
- Whether everyone has the opportunity to show their skills
- How different dancers are represented
- Whether everyone is being given fair and equal opportunities to contribute

Your ideas

You don't need to have a particular theme for your piece.

What is important is that you have thought about **what you want the audience to experience** and why you have made the creative choices you have.

Your work could be inspired by:

- A dance style or genre
- Music
- Art
- An idea or story
- Something the young people are interested in
- A combination of different influences



Choreography and Young People's Ideas

Young people should be active participants in creating the work.

Where possible, give dancers opportunities to contribute ideas and make creative decisions.

You could use:

- Choreographic tasks
- Creative games
- Improvisation
- Movement exploration
- Group discussions
- Individual or small-group tasks

There is no one right way to create youth dance work.

Professional choreography can also be a useful source of inspiration. You could watch live or recorded performances together and discuss what you notice.

However, **your final work must be original**. It should not directly copy or plagiarise existing professional choreography.

It can also be helpful to invite someone who is not involved in the project to watch a rehearsal and give you some feedback.

Don't be afraid to make changes as your work develops.



Staging and Presentation

Think about how your dancers will appear on stage or on screen.

Try to make sure that:

- Everyone has an opportunity to contribute
- The skills of the whole group are visible
- Entrances and exits are clear
- Dancers are well spaced
- You use different formations and groupings where appropriate

You might explore solos, duets, small groups and larger ensemble sections to create variety and visual interest.

Always think about how your staging supports the ideas and movement in your piece.

Music and Sound

Think about how your music or sound supports the movement and ideas in your piece.

Consider:

- The pace and energy of the music
- How the music changes between sections
- Whether transitions between pieces of music feel smooth
- What messages or associations the music might have for an audience

For example, does the music have strong associations with a TV programme, advert or popular culture that could affect how the audience understands your work?



Costumes

Choose costumes that:

- Are suitable for the age of the young people
- Are appropriate for family audiences, including children
- Are safe and comfortable to perform in
- Support the ideas of your piece

Think about whether there is a reason for different costumes for different dancers. Consider how your choices represent young people and whether everyone is being presented fairly and equally.

Before your performance date

Make sure everyone rehearses in their costumes before the performance or filming.

Check that costumes:

- Are safe comfortable to move in
- Fit properly
- Don't restrict movement
- Won't become a distraction for the dancer or audience

Props

Props can be a great way to support your ideas and add to the performance but think carefully about why you are using them and how they will be used.

Consider:

- Does the prop add something to the performance or help communicate your ideas?
- Is it suitable for the age and ability of the dancers?
- Can everyone use them safely?
- Do they create any risks for the dancers or audience?
- Can the dancers carry, move or put away the prop safely during the performance?
- Will the prop affect the dancers' movement or make it difficult to see them?



Please tell us about your props

If you plan to use props, **you must tell us about them during the application process.** Please include details of what you plan to use and how the props will be used in your piece.

This is important so we can make sure they are suitable for the performance space and can be safely accommodated.

Please keep props **small and manageable.**

We have **very limited storage space at the venue**, so we cannot accommodate large props, backdrops, additional staging or lots of equipment.

Furniture, soft furnishings, fabrics need to meet UK fire regulations – please ask about this.

Before your performance

Make sure props are tested during rehearsals, so dancers know how to use them safely and confidently.

Props should be:

- Safe and suitable for performance
- In good condition
- Appropriate for family audiences
- Secure and stable where needed
- Easy to bring on and off stage

Avoid props that could be a hazard this includes anything sharp, fragile, heavy or could cause injury.

If you are unsure whether a prop is suitable, please speak to the Fabric team before the performance.



Projection and Video

If you're using projection or video, think about why it is needed and what it adds to the performance.

Ask yourself:

- Does it support the ideas of the piece?
- Does it add to the performance or distract from it?
- Does it become more important than the dancers?
- Will it work effectively on a large stage?

Top Tips

Keep young people at the centre

Give young people opportunities to contribute, make decisions and take ownership of the work.

Think like an audience member

Ask yourself: **What will the audience see, hear and experience?**

Make every choice count

Think about how your music, movement, costumes, staging and other creative choices connect to the ideas in your piece.

Feedback is a good thing

You may receive feedback during the creative process. See this as an opportunity to develop and strengthen your work.

Challenge yourselves

Consider getting an outside eye to watch rehearsals to provide feedback.



THINGS TO AVOID

To make sure work is suitable for public audiences, the following must not be included:

Movement

- Movement that is inappropriate for young people
- Movement that presents different genders unfairly, unless this is clearly relevant to the story or meaning of the work

Choreography

- Directly copying professional choreography from live performances, films or videos
- Plagiarism of existing work

Music

- Music with explicit language or swearing
- Music containing 'bleeping' over swear words
- Music that includes mature/adult references
- Music that promotes violence
- Music that is misogynistic, derogatory or demeaning towards others

Costumes

- Revealing costumes
- Costumes that promotes adultification of young people

Projection and Video

- Images that are unsuitable for family audiences
- Images that could cause offence
- Extended periods of flashing images or strobe effects

We encourage work to be creative and can take influence from existing work however, youth dance work should be original.



What happens after the application is submitted?

Work is assessed by an independent selection panel, and feedback will be available, whether or not the work is selected to progress, if you request it.

Selection and suitability

All work will be considered against the above guidance.

If you're unsure about something in your piece, please ask us. We'd much rather have a conversation early on and help you find a solution.

Technical information

If you are selected to perform, you will need to provide:

- A copy of your music
- Your technical and lighting requirements
- Costume information, it can help to add a photograph or drawing
- Any projection or video you plan to use

You must make sure this information is submitted by the deadline.

If we don't receive the required information on time, your group may not be able to perform at the live event.

The selection panel can give feedback to every group that performs at Applause Youth Dance Festival, whether or not the work is selected to progress to the U.Dance National Festival.