

NEXTGEN: HNC ACTING AND PERFORMANCE



META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

Practitioners' reflections and advice on incorporating meta-skills.

NEXTGEN: HNC ACTING AND PERFORMANCE — META-SKILLS IN PRACTICE

We asked subject-specialist writers with experience of delivering meta-skills in NextGen: HN Qualifications to write a 'Meta-skills in practice' guide, giving us a sense of how they approach the integration of meta-skills within course delivery. In this way, practitioners could share insights, practical advice, and examples to course teams coming new to NextGen and meta-skills.

David, a lecturer in Acting and Performance, explained in their words how the course team at their college contextualise, integrate, and assess engagement with meta-skills within NextGen: HNC Acting and Performance.

TOP TIPS

- **Treat meta-skills the way we treat vocal anatomy** — repeat, repeat, repeat!
- **See the challenge not so much as developing meta-skills but as acknowledging when we are.** Tutor buy-in is the only way to establish learner buy-in. If we make developing meta-skills an afterthought, learners will too.
- **Speak to your learners when you can.** As aspiring actors, they love to talk and get feedback! You'll get far more useful reflection from an open discussion with learners than you will from a generic essay.
- **Introduce meta-skills as early as possible.** This way, they're easier to integrate. Likewise, the earlier you can give learners food for thought (e.g. questions), the earlier they'll start reflecting.
- **Share your resources with your staff team,** including learner reflections and profiles, even if that's in a shared folder or via Teams. Meta-skills are integrated throughout the course, so our approach has to be too.
- **Find ways to make reflections second-nature,** such as always ending an exercise with them, or sharing with positive feedback or places for development — both from the learners and their peers.

META-SKILLS IN ACTING AND PERFORMANCE

Give us a general introduction to meta-skills within the context of your subject area.

Actor training aligns itself easily with meta-skills. We depend on collaboration, intellectual and emotional understanding, and creativity on a daily basis. Even when our learners are working independently, be that learning lines or creating characters, we are challenging their self-management skills.

Practically speaking, the challenge for this sector isn't implementing meta-skills, which have always underpinned our practice, but signposting them to learners in ways they can quantify and observe. This is vital because our learners will be dependent on these core skills to get a job.

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No director is hiring an actor bereft of creativity; no stage manager will tolerate a performer who cannot manage their time. Our learners are entering an arts sector that is oversubscribed, underfunded and in constant flux. For them to succeed, they must prove that they are adaptable, resilient, and skilled — and they must be able to understand and articulate this. Likewise, learners who intend to progress into higher education will need to showcase higher-level critical thinking and initiative if they are to deal with the demands of academia.

META-SKILLS CATEGORIES IN CONTEXT

Explain the three meta-skills categories as they relate to your subject.

SELF-MANAGEMENT

Learners should consider this in any activity where they are expected to develop their professionalism as artists, independent of a lecturer's overview. Examples might include rehearsal room etiquette, learning lines, notating blocking, crafting character sheets, completing exercises, and reflecting on their personal development as performers.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Learners should consider this in any activity where the focus is person-centred or group-based. Examples might include creating movement pieces; following direction; vocal and physical embodiment; leading and participating in workshops and classes; and any work on understanding and developing character, including conveying feeling and truth on stage.

INNOVATION

Learners should consider this in any activity where they are being asked to flex their creativity, either of their own making or building upon the work of others. Examples might include interesting warm-up plans, creating improvisations; creative responses to established practitioners, building on feedback and classmates' ideas, and devising original characters.

INTRODUCING AND UNDERSTANDING META-SKILLS

How do you help learners to buy in to meta-skills and understand their relevance?

Learners' first impressions can often be muted. The issue is context — if their

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assumption is 'we do all of this anyway', they are likely to dismiss the concept of meta-skills as superfluous. It's a good idea to introduce it early as a whole class, picking out the ways practice and theory overlap. Overview posters on noticeboards help

solidify the language (for learners and staff!) and then the trick is repetition.

In the same way we drill learners on projection and stagecraft, we can start embedding the language into the ongoing feedback we give them. 'Yes, you adapted your voice to suit that speech'; 'That's an interesting character choice — can you make sense of that for

me?'. For tutors, it might take a little time to recalibrate, but if you incorporate it early into a learner's experience, it'll become as second nature as 'engage your core'.

DEVELOPING META-SKILLS

Tell us about your experiences, hindsight, and future plans. Where do meta-skills fit most naturally in your course delivery.

We help learners develop meta-skills formatively through exercises and discussions in every class, but it's also possible to take a three-pronged approach with the mandatory units, using:

- Performance Skills: Acting, Voice and Movement as a place for experiment and discovery
- Performance Skills: Application as a place to develop skills
- Industry and Audition Skills for planning, goal-setting and forward thinking

Performance Skills: Acting, Voice and Movement (AVM) runs year-long. We make it clear to learners that this unit is foundational. They understand it's a place for them to try things, potentially fail at them, and grow. This makes them more open to how they implement their meta-skills, and they're more willing to take risks in that discovery process.

“...a place for them to try things [...] they're more willing to take risks...”

The breadth of content helps us see all meta-skills on display:

- group projects push social intelligence
- acting techniques challenge innovation
- the pace of work tackles self-management

Within a few weeks you can find opportunities to highlight all elements to learners.

Performance Skills: Application gives learners plenty of scope to refine those skills. If you cover devised performance in term one, simultaneously with AVM, you can focus on innovation and social intelligence, whilst helping learners work well with one another.

By term two, learners move into production, where they can build on the meta-skills they developed in the previous term — particularly feeling and sense-making. Larger classes can give you a chance to highlight self-management.

We wrap up both units involving application with a one-to-one discussion with learners,

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...encourage learners to keep a
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progress, celebrations and struggles

using targeted questions. If you give the learners the questions early, it gives them a chance to continuously 'look' for answers in the rehearsal room. It could be useful to encourage

learners to keep a 'scrapbook', whether analogue or digital, where they track progress, celebrations and struggles.

Importantly, we don't see this as a logbook — it shouldn't be a requirement for learners, need a specific word-count, or be graded by staff. We do want to acknowledge that terms are long and stories involving very real development of meta-skills can fall through the cracks. Some centres may want to utilise this scrapbook in lieu of the SQA log, or pick up elements from both (for example, the goal setting via a log and the scrapbook as a means for reflection). There is flexibility here.

GENERATING ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

We've produced guidance around the assessment of meta-skills. There's quite a lot of flexibility around assessment evidence. Can you give us a sense of what you've been doing in this space?

Assessing meta-skills can, truthfully, feel a little strange. Timid learners who become vocal leaders have a clear journey. But what about those learners who come with already-developed skills?

One way to mitigate this gap is to assess how all learners engage with meta-skills,

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...it's about engagement and
progress, not achievement

rather than on their meta-skills 'accomplishments'. Articulating a specific marginal change in curiosity ('I'm reading more of their plays because their work resonates with

me') arguably holds more weight than making big strides but not being able to express them ('Yeah, I did good, I guess').

Meta-skills are developed across every unit, and lecturers continuously formatively assess them. We primarily assess meta-skills, however, through a combination of the meta-skills log (taken at the beginning, middle and end of the year) and three specific conversations at the end of Application 1, Application 2 and Acting, Voice and Movement.

The log helps learners set a baseline of their meta-skills, establish and track their goals, and aids their reflections. The conversations help us dig deeper into specific growths.

ENCOURAGING CONSTRUCTIVE REFLECTION

It might be helpful to consider shared questions between each discussion, and then targeted questions that highlight the core areas of the unit. For example, you can explore how learners developed creative ideas in a devised unit, and then focus on self-

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management skills in production. We've found that more specific questions get clearer responses — for example, 'With specific examples, talk me through what strengths you

brought to the rehearsal room'. We include questions that acknowledge limitations, and show how learners can continue to develop their meta-skills in education and beyond. We record those chats as voice notes, which sets up the space as an 'informal interview'.

We also lay out some ground rules:

- the chat is about them, not their peers
- it's not a feedback session on the unit and teaching
- they are free to make and bring notes or their 'scrapbook' to reflect answers

We give them the questions in advance — for example, 'With specific examples, talk me through what strengths you brought to the rehearsal' — it shouldn't feel like a test. The trickiest part is holding the space and gently prompting with new questions or summaries of what they're saying. We wrap the chat up with an assessment of how we

felt they did in that unit and their current passing grade, which we find helps integrate meta-skills into their studies rather than as an 'add-on'.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED RESOURCES AND APPROACHES

- Meta-skills mindmapped to course
- Posters
- One-to-one discussions
- Reflective group chats and class exercises
- Learner 'scrapbooks'
- Meta-skills log