

## SMFA Survival Jobs for Creatives

Please see page 298 (the chapter on **Money Management**) and page 344 (the chapter on **Moving to Los Angeles**) in the 4th edition of *Self-Management for Actors: Getting Down to (Show) Business* for more deliciousness about the importance of survival jobs that leave your schedule flexible, your mind healthy, and your spirit free to invite the muse into your art. These are a few of my favorite actor-friendly survival jobs and some of what you might expect, should you attempt to take them on.

**Academic Tutor**—*requirements*: intelligence, academic "book smarts," excellent communication skills, patience, must be good with kids, motivational, organized; *perks*: excellent pay, extremely flexible; *downside*: occasional family drama.

**Actor Services** (headshot retouching, resumé formatting, demo reel editing, designing marketing tools, brand consultations, etc.)—*requirements*: awareness of trends in the industry, design (or editing or marketing or retouching or personal shopping, etc.) skills, excellent communication skills; *perks*: pay can be good if you set your rates right, extremely flexible; *downside*: chasing your payments can be a pain in the butt so be sure to set specs and payment details outlined up front.

**Airline Work**—*requirements*: varies greatly—depends on the specific job within the airline industry; *perks*: pay can be very good, free travel worldwide, ability to get to auditions in other markets and work as a local hire; *downside*: obviously not flexible in the short-notice arena.

**Babysitting**—*requirements*: must be great with kids, organized, responsible, excellent in a crisis, have reliable transportation; *perks*: potentially great pay once you've proven yourself with a family and gotten in a rhythm with them, flexibility in general but not once you've committed to the gig; *downside*: loads of responsibility for someone else's most precious angels.

**Bartending, Food Service**—*requirements*: fit, healthy, charismatic, must be a people person, reliable, friendly; *perks*: can pay very well if you target a great bar or restaurant with consistent customers, flexible due to shift-swapping with co-workers; *downside*: some days are just the pits with bad tips and bad customers and bad attitudes all around, you have to be *on* all the time to make your bank.

**Driver for Hire**—*requirements*: must have a clean driving record, must be insured, must have reliable transportation, excellent communication skills, personable with strangers (some drunk); *perks*: good pay, loads of flexibility, not required to have a cab license thanks to companies like Lyft entering the scene; *downside*: dealing with tipsy people, future of non-permitted cabbies offering rides is iffy.

**Extra Work, Stand-In Work**—*requirements*: patience, reliability, punctuality, attention to detail, ability to follow directions with a smile; *perks*: union work pays great and leads to benefits, nonunion is less consistent, build web of trust while learning an incredible amount of

information for your show bible; *downside*: no flexibility once you're booked for the day, potentially getting branded as *B*-team rather than an actor.

**Fitness Instructor**—*requirements*: fit, certified, motivational, personable, reliable; *perks*: pay can be great and you're working out while you're working, if you're at a gym you can sometimes swap shifts with co-workers, if you're a personal trainer you're setting your own rate and schedule; *downside*: may not have a lot of time to get camera-ready for a last-minute audition after a workout.

**Freelance Writing**—*requirements*: excellent communication skills, flawless grammar and spelling, attention to detail, a clear "voice" as a writer, consistent output; *perks*: varies greatly (10 cents per word is standard for a brand new writer submitting to a major publication, on up to \$5/word for writers with an established fanbase), loads of flexibility; *downside*: takes time to build up a consistent voice and a rabid fanbase (but it's worth it).

**Fulltime Work**—*requirements*: reliability, organization, excellent communication skills; *perks*: potentially great pay, benefits, insurance, ability to create a cushion of savings if you're smart about money management; *downside*: almost zero flexibility for an acting career, "golden handcuffs" are hard to unlock.

**Game Show Contestant**—*requirements*: huge personality, quick wit, smarts; *perks*: fun way to win cash and fabulous prizes while being on TV; *downside*: you're not an "actor" while you're competing and you can't really count on this for steady income.

**Graphic Design**—*requirements*: artistry, expertise with latest software trends, tenacious communication, organization; *perks*: excellent pay, very flexible; *downside*: high-pressure demands from clients, constantly-changing technology.

**Hotel Work**—*requirements*: varies—depends on the specific job within the hospitality industry; *perks*: pay can be very good, flexibility of shifts if you have enough co-workers with whom to swap shifts, can network with some very high-end industry players if you're working in a luxury hotel; *downside*: can get known for your hospitality job and not for your work as an actor among some high-level pros.

**Landlord**—*requirements*: responsibility, must be handy with tools, able to coordinate workmen with residents' schedules, organized; *perks*: usually the "pay" is free or discounted rent in a unit on-site; *downside*: can be demanding and emergency-based which can cut into acting flexibility.

**Market Research**—*requirements*: must have willingness to "fit" whatever demographic they need, must be opinionated about the product without having inside knowledge about it; *perks*: good pay, one-time commitment, over quickly; *downside*: need to gauge what they want during the intake interview in order to be chosen, can't do similar studies for six months to a year.

**Massage Therapist**—*requirements*: organization, certification, your own table and supplies, love for what you do, stamina for standing long hours; *perks*: pay can be great, as you set your rates and get tips if you work through a service, set your own schedule; *downside*: sometimes have to chase your money from clients who cancel last-minute or no-show.

**Messenger Service, Delivery Service**—*requirements*: must have clean driving record, must be insured, must have reliable transportation, excellent communication skills; *perks*: good pay, generally short shifts, get a great lay of the land and all the best parking spots; *downside*: lots of time on the road, potential tickets, potential accidents.

**Mock Jurist**—*requirements*: attention to detail, ability to follow an intense (or boring) court case, reliability, excellent communication skills; *perks*: great pay, you're helping attorneys present more compelling arguments on the part of their clients; *downside*: once you're scheduled, you're booked for the day and there's no time off for auditions.

**Parts Modeling**—*requirements*: flawless skin, gorgeous hair, beautiful parts, perfect proportions; *perks*: excellent pay, extremely flexible; *downside*: meticulous parts upkeep can cut into a normal life.

**Pet-Sitting**—*requirements*: reliable, good with animals, responsible, good in emergency situations; *perks*: decent pay, moderately flexible; *downside*: unpredictability of critters, dealing with poop.

**Production Jobs**—*requirements*: awareness of the biz without pushing your acting self on the situation, organization, communication skills, punctuality, responsibility; *perks*: pay varies, as does flexibility, great way to learn about other parts of the industry and build your web of trust; *downside*: risk getting seen as a non-actor, generally long days with no ability to leave for auditions.

**Rent Out Your Space**—*requirements*: tidy home, minimal clutter, comfortable with strangers being in your space, own your home or have a lease that allows for short-term rentals via companies like Air BNB; *perks*: can be a great source of side income if you're willing to share your living quarters; *downside*: unpredictable unless you live in a place with loads of seasonal tourist traffic due to festivals or conferences.

**Retail**—*requirements*: punctuality, awareness of what's in stock, good with money, personable, patience for customer service issues; *perks*: decent pay, usually a discount on the merchandise at the store, short shifts, generally flexible due to shift-swapping with co-workers; *downside*: many people end up spending most of their paychecks on the cool clothes or goods they can buy at a discount at their store.

**Sales**—*requirements*: charismatic, outgoing personality, good communication skills, organization, reliable transportation; *perks*: excellent pay if you're good at what you do, loads of flexibility

within your day as long as you hit your sales calls; *downside*: tough to shift gears quickly for an audition and leave the sales-y vibe behind.

**Seat-Filler**—*requirements*: punctual, well-groomed, with outfits ranging from upscale casual to very formal, ability to smile and clap on cue; *perks*: good pay to sit in empty seats at award shows or decent pay to fill the audience of infomercials; *downside*: not hugely consistent work but fun.

**Standardized Patient**—*requirements*: attention to detail, acting chops, ability to stick to an outline of medical symptoms while improvising the conversation with the student, reliability; *perks*: great pay, it's acting work, you're helping train the future doctors and police officers on how to gather information; *downside*: once you're scheduled you're booked for the day and there's no time off for auditions.

**Studio Admin** (at a CD workshop facility or an acting studio)—*requirements*: knowledge of the industry and its players, communication skills, organization, great personality; *perks*: fair pay, free workshops and the constant flow of industry pros, building your show bible and web of trust; *downside*: risk being seen as a workshop admin and not an actor, risk bitterness due to seeing other actors get called in.

**Studio Audience**—*requirements*: ability to smile and cheer for hours on end, a healthy back, willingness to live off candy and caffeine; *perks*: decent pay, cool behind-the-scenes look at part of the industry, meet cool people; *downside*: long day, no flexibility within the shift, can be mind-numbingly boring.

**Substitute Teacher**—*requirements*: reliable, must be good with children (and clear a background check in many states), certified, smart; *perks*: pay is generally good, schedule is last-minute so you can decide whether you're free to sub when the call comes in; *downside*: it's a long day and can be really exhausting for an actor who has rehearsal to get to after school.

**Temp Work**—*requirements*: flexibility, available on a moment's notice, must have a professional wardrobe, be organized, have good communication skills, general office skills, good personality; *perks*: good pay; *downside*: only flexible in that you don't have to work daily, but once you're committed for the day you're booked out from acting, you run the risk of being wooed to fulltime work if you're a great temp.

**Third Shift**—*requirements*: ability to be awake while everyone else sleeps and vice-versa, focus, patience; *perks*: potentially very good pay depending on your level of responsibility at your overnight job, leaves your days and evenings free for auditions and classes; *downside*: gotta figure out when to sleep in there somewhere, can't be a zombie at your auditions and shows.

**Traffic School Instructor**—*requirements*: charisma, memorization, administrative abilities, attention to detail, improvisation; *perks*: good pay, performance-related; *downside*: long day, no flexibility within the shift, captive audience not happy to be there.

**Transcriptionist**—*requirements*: fast and accurate typing, attention to detail, good with jargon; *perks*: good pay, extremely flexible; *downside*: lots of last-minute deadlines and pressure.

**Virtual Assistant**—*requirements*: organizational skills, excellent communication, flawless writing ability, attention to detail; *perks*: can be fantastic if your skills are exceptional, loads of flexibility as long as you stay on top of your deadlines; *downside*: if you get a client whose communication skills are lacking you could work on a project for which they don't want to pay, very important to get specs and payment details ironed out up front.

**Web Design**—*requirements*: up-to-the-minute expertise with all the latest coding trends, tenacious communication, graphic design abilities, organization; *perks*: excellent pay, very flexible; *downside*: high-pressure demands from clients, constantly changing trends.

Phew! That's a lot of options, eh? And that's just scratching the surface of the jobs that are most aligned with creatives. The best part of a creative career is the creativity you can apply to the jobs you take to support you in the pursuit of your dreams! Yet so many actors fail to think creatively about this "problem" and simply take "dumb jobs" that end up sucking their soul.

Whatever you do, do *not* stay in a job that crushes your will to live, that bums you out, that leads to bitterness. All that energy will spill over into your auditions and meetings with fellow creatives and it'll brand you as wholly uncastable. Always remember that your "survival job" is meant to feed your dream. Sure, there will be good days and bad days, but if you've found that you've entered into a bad situation—with no sign of getting better—it's time to bail (professionally, of course).

Join us at the *Self-Management for Actors* forums to get support, suggestions, and ninja shares for brilliant ways ninjas are affording the pursuit of their dreams worldwide!