A working guide to the River City scene

THE BRISBANE ACTOR'S COMPASS

Eleven bearings for building an acting career in Brisbane — training, representation, first sets, professional standards, and the headshot that gets you in the room.

The bearings

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WHY "COMPASS"

A map tells you where things are. A compass keeps you moving when the map runs out.

Written by Paul Sargaison, who comes from a long line of Broadway and Hollywood performers and has photographed working actors for more than twenty years.

Directory details current as of July 2026 — always confirm programs, coaches and agencies directly.

01

Welcome to the scene

The Brisbane advantage

THE RIVER CITY — A TIGHT-KNIT SCENE WHERE SHOWING UP IS CURRENCY

Listen — I've been pounding the pavement in the River City for decades, and while some folks look south to Sydney or Melbourne with envy, they're missing the gold right here in SEQ. Brisbane isn't a "smaller market". It's a tight-knit, fiercely supportive community where you aren't just a number in a database. In this town, visibility and being an active participant are your greatest currencies. Whether you're catching a show at the Powerhouse or sweating it out in a workshop in the Valley, people notice when you show up.

To thrive in Brisvegas you have to be more than talented. You have to be the professional presence everyone wants on their set — and this guide is about exactly how you become that person, from training to representation to the headshot that gets you in the room.

STAGE WHISPER

Visibility and being an active participant are your greatest currencies.

02

Identifying your path

Know your lane, know your type

Every actor's journey in this city looks a little different. Finding your lane early helps you target the right training and the right network.

The Drama School Hopeful. You're aiming for the elite institutions — WAAPA, NIDA, or our local powerhouses. Your focus is the classics, voice work, and the grueling discipline required to secure one of those few golden tickets.

The Independent Shifter. You're a creator, not just a performer. You're building the scene from the ground up through indie theatre and self-produced works, valuing versatility and the communal spirit of the Brisbane stage.

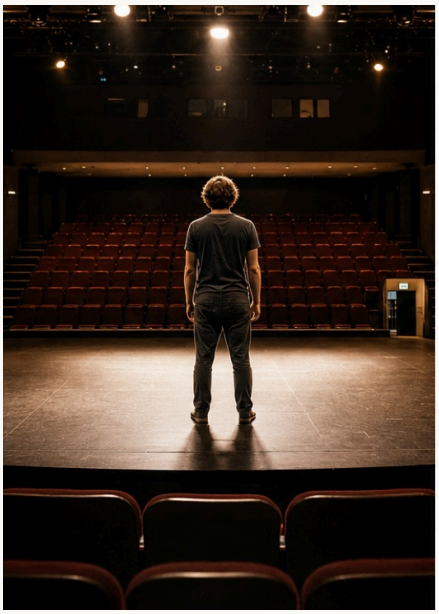
The On-Camera Specialist. Your eyes are on the screen. You're mastering the technical truth the camera demands, focusing on the business of the industry and becoming a master of the self-tape.

And whichever path you take, do the same homework on yourself: **know your type.** Understand the archetypes you naturally read as — the young professional, the tradie, the detective, the best friend — because casting thinks in types before it thinks in names. Target your archetypes in your headshots, your reel and your CV, and the right rooms start opening. This applies to everything else in this guide.

STAGE WHISPER

Casting thinks in types before it thinks in names.

Three lanes, one rule: whichever you choose, target your archetypes in every material you put in front of the industry.



THREE LANES — DRAMA SCHOOL · INDEPENDENT STAGE · ON-CAMERA

03

Before you approach anyone

The essential actor's toolkit

If you're going to make it in this town, your toolkit has to be bulletproof. Before you even think about approaching an agent, make sure these calling cards are up to professional standard.

Headshots

They must be current. I see too many actors in denial of aging, holding onto shots from five years ago. If you don't look like your photo when you walk into the room, you've lost the job before you've said a word. And remember what your headshot is competing with: casting professionals flip through hundreds — sometimes thousands — of faces per role. The ones they stop on have something alive in the eyes. That's not luck; it's direction and craft in the session (more on this in the next chapter).

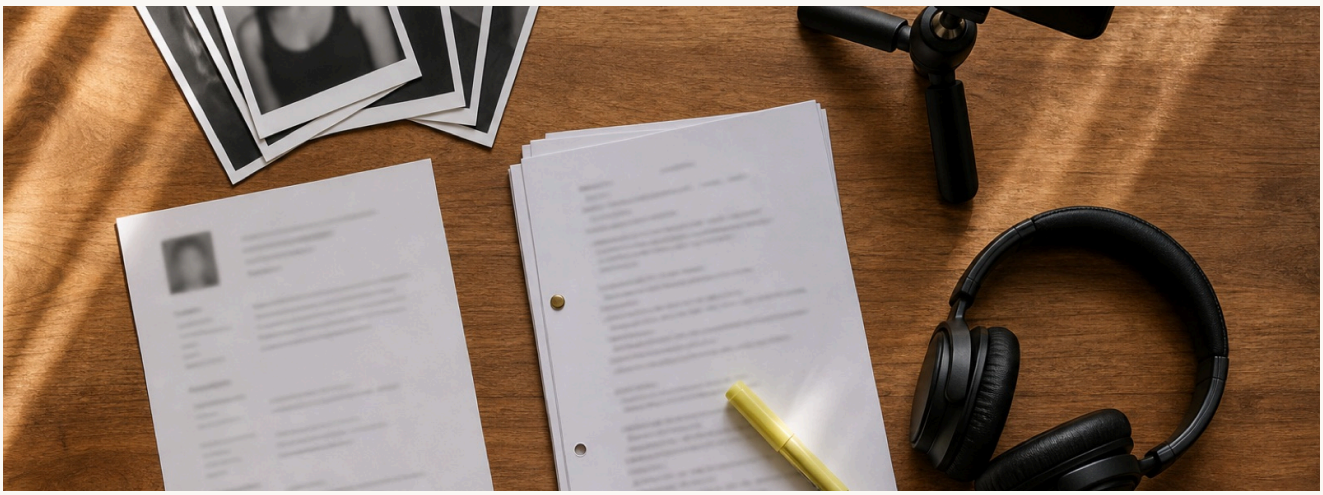
CV and showreel

These are your primary marketing materials. Your reel should show your best, most professional-looking work — and chase up your footage from every project as soon as it's finished, keeping copies in more than one place. No reel yet? A high-quality collection of self-tapes does the job while you build one.

STAGE WHISPER

If you don't look like your photo when you walk into the room, you've lost the job before you've said a word.

Your calling cards: current headshot, tidy CV, honest reel, reliable self-tape setup. Everything else in this guide assumes these exist.



THE KIT, LAID FLAT — HEADSHOTS, CV, SELF-TAPE RIG, MARKED-UP SIDES

Self-tapes

In the modern market, filming a professional audition from home is non-negotiable. If your lighting or sound is rubbish, your performance won't even be watched. A few field-tested rules:

- Build a simple, repeatable setup: eye-level camera, clean sound, plain background.
- If you're starting from nothing, record a two-to-three-minute introduction tape — who you are, why you love the craft, and anything that makes you castable ("I ride horses, speak French, do impersonations").
- For audition tapes, limit yourself to about three takes of a scene and keep it spontaneous. Actors book film, television and theatre work off honest, simple tapes all the time.
- When budget allows, a professionally shot self-tape or showreel scene raises the calls you get for castings and meet-and-greets.

STAGE WHISPER

Three takes, then stop. Spontaneous beats polished.

Eye-level camera. Clean sound. Plain background. Repeatable in ten minutes — because the brief always lands the night before it's due.

THE TEN-MINUTE RIG — EYE-LEVEL PHONE, ONE SOFT LIGHT, A READER AND HONEST TAKES

NEXT BEARING — OUR CHAPTER OF EXPERTISE

Our chapter of expertise

04 The casting-ready headshot: how to prepare

This is the part of the journey we live every day at Brisbane Headshots, so here is exactly what we tell working actors before a session.

For most actors, the goal is one beautiful headshot

Let's clear something up before the fancy stuff: whether you're brand new to the industry or twenty years in, the workhorse of your career is a single, natural, honest headshot — the picture that looks like you on your best day, and still looks like you when you walk into the room. That's what casting wants to see first, it's what your agent submits everywhere, and it's what the majority of actors who walk through our door are here for. Get this one frame right and everything else in this guide gets easier. Keep it simple: your face doing the talking, something alive in the eyes, nothing in the frame competing with you.

For established actors chasing specific roles: archetype sessions

Once you're working and you know the parts you're going for — stage or screen — there's a second level: targeted looks built around a particular role or type. This is where you imagine yourself portraying the part and we build the image to match — the corporate villain, the detective, the best mate. Decide the one or two types you're genuinely castable for, share a mood board or a few inspiring images with your photographer a few days before the shoot, and if you're represented, ask your agent whether they have specific requirements. A good studio will plan the session around that brief rather than pointing a camera and hoping.

STAGE WHISPER

One frame does the heavy lifting: you, on your best day, and still recognisably you in the room.

Bearing 04 is the craft we've practised since 1998 — so this chapter runs deeper than the rest. Take it with you into whichever studio you choose.

Clothing that serves your face

For simple, natural headshots: solid colours, no loud patterns. Dark neutrals — black, navy, charcoal, dark green — work for most people; if you're fair, lighter tones like light grey, tan or soft green can sit better. Here's a trick worth the price of this guide: if you have coloured eyes, wear a top in a similar colour and watch your eyes come alive in the frame. Avoid white on a white background, black on black, and anything that will date the image — your headshot needs to work for the next few years.

Hair, skin and grooming

Arrive with your hair how you'd wear it to a casting. Skin prep matters more than most actors think — hydrate in the days before, skip anything experimental the week of the shoot, and don't panic about a blemish on the day (that's what professional retouching is for; razor burn and the odd cold sore disappear in post).

Hair and makeup, in-house — for the women of the industry

The actresses, musicians and singers who come through our studio very often book hair and makeup before the shoot, and it's one of the things we're known for. It happens in the salon on the same floor as the studio, and it's a collaboration, not a conveyor belt: a proper consultation first, then your look built with care by professionally trained makeup artists and hairdressers with years of industry experience — including decades of preparing performers specifically for the camera. You walk into the studio already camera-ready, which changes how the whole session feels — and how the first frames look. (It's a service designed around our female clients; for the men, the grooming guidance above has you covered, and we handle shine control in the studio.)

STAGE WHISPER

Coloured eyes? Wear a top in a similar colour and watch your eyes come alive in the frame.

Props and talents

If your special skills are part of your castability, bring the evidence: the instrument, the boxing gloves, the chef's whites. One strong archetype image with a prop can open a lane a plain headshot never will.

What a professional session should feel like

You should be coached, not abandoned — angles, posing, expression, with images reviewed together as you go. You should never feel rushed through a production line. And you should leave with a clear next step: at our studio that's a same-day or next-morning shortlist of the best frames from each look, so you and your agent can choose while the session is still fresh.

STAGE WHISPER

Coached, not abandoned – that's what a session should feel like.

The nerves are normal. A good studio knows what to do with them.

The prep-week checklist

☐	**7 days out**	Your look decided (plus archetypes and mood board, if you're role-targeting); agency requirements checked; outfits tried on, cleaned and ironed.
☐	**3 days out**	Haircut if you're a fresh-cut person (a week earlier if you're not); confirm session details; sort props.
☐	**Night before**	Hydrate, sleep, lay everything out; no new skincare.
☐	**Morning of**	Shave if clean-shaven is your look; hair as you'd wear it to a casting; arrive with time to breathe. The nerves are normal — a good studio knows what to do with them.

05

Higher education

University and TAFE pathways

South East Queensland is home to some of the best formal training in the country. The local landscape, as it stands:

QUT

The Bachelor of Creative Arts (Acting) is the heavy hitter, consistently producing high-calibre graduates who transition directly to the national stage and screen.

Griffith University

The Bachelor of Acting is an intensive program with a focus on deep craft, carrying the legacy of industry veterans like casting director Peter Rasmussen.

TAFE Queensland / University of Canberra South Bank

A partnership offering the Bachelor of Creative Industries (Acting and Performance), designed to build a sustainable, industry-ready career.

UniSC Sunshine Coast / Moreton Bay

The Bachelor of Creative Industries focuses on the creative mindset, helping actors build a diverse portfolio for the modern, multi-hyphenate sector.

University of Southern Queensland Toowoomba

A unique split program: the Acting major for flexible, entrepreneurial performers, or the Theatre Making major if your heart lies in creating and directing new dramatic works.

Programs evolve — always confirm current offerings with the institution before you apply.

MORNING MOVEMENT WORK

STAGE WHISPER

Five programs within cooee of Brisbane – confirm the current offering before you apply.

Mastering the craft

06 The Brisbane coach and studio directory

Acting is a muscle; if you aren't training, you're atrophying. Brisbane has high-calibre specialists that would be the envy of any major city.

INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS FOCUS

On Set Coaching — Kristy Sexton

World-class, with a Masters from the Royal Shakespeare Company, a focus on the business of acting, and SAG-AFTRA-approved intimacy coordination credentials. If you want the trade secrets of actually booking the room, start here.

METHOD AND CRAFT SPECIALISTS

Gareth Harris

Over 30 years of experience and UK-based training; the go-to for drama school prep. Uta Hagen and Meisner with rigorous script analysis and stagecraft. Expect tough love — he's a mentor who cares about the person under the craft.

Peter Rasmussen

A working casting director who brings the casting-room perspective to his classes, specialising in Uta Hagen and Chubbuck techniques.

The Factory Acting Studio — Christopher Sommers

A hub for craft and discipline; a community staple where beginners and pros sharpen their authenticity.

SPECIALISED TRAINING

Creating Artists — Joel Pierce

Acting blended with a psychology Ph.D.; his “12 concepts” help actors reach a peak-performance zone and live spontaneously in the moment.

Physical and community

Zen Zen Zo leads for physical theatre (The Dojo); Brisbane Arts Theatre offers some of the most affordable adult classes in town.

Improv and sketch

Big Fork Theatre is the home of long-form improv and sketch writing, from foundations to advanced study.

CLASS IN PROGRESS

STAGE WHISPER

Acting is a muscle; if you aren't training, you're atrophying.

Names checked as of July 2026. Coaches move, studios evolve — confirm directly.

07

Finding representation

— and working WITH your agent

Getting an agent is a marathon, not a sprint. These agencies are the established names in the SEQ market:

AED Management	Kubler Auckland Management
Agency 888	Max Talent Management
BMEG Agency	Natalie Hall Management
Creme Management	Sass Management
Ego Management	Tantrum Management
Howell Management	Who Artists
ID Entertainment	Williams Management

Don't go in blind. Use IMDbPro to research an agency's client list. If they already have three people who look just like you, move on to an agency where you fill a gap in the roster.

And once you're signed, understand what representation is — and isn't. An agent is someone in your corner, not someone doing the work for you. Stay proactive: keep researching upcoming productions, keep your materials current, and stay in regular, friendly contact. If you hear about a project, don't assume your agent already knows — casting professionals often use different agencies for different projects, and your agent can only throw your hat in the ring for productions they know about. The hungrier talent wins by staying in the hearts and minds of their agent.

THE PORTFOLIO REVIEW

STAGE WHISPER

If they already have three people who look just like you, move on.

Fourteen established SEQ names — current as of July 2026.

08

Cutting your teeth

The student film strategy

TONIGHT'S CREW IS TOMORROW'S HIRING DESK

Student films are your first on-set education and your first network — the film students you help today are the directors and producers hiring in five years. Get in touch with student productions, universities and film schools and offer your services; work with them once and they'll likely ask you back, and it builds your showreel. But play it smart:

- **Where to find them:** Facebook groups (search "Brisbane Auditions"), Mandy, and StarNow.
- **The double-digits rule:** don't do more than ten student films. Past that, industry pros read you as a perpetual amateur rather than a rising professional.
- **The 12-month wait:** here's the insider truth — expect to wait up to a full year for your footage. Post-production takes time. Keep a friendly line open with the producer, but don't hold your breath; chase politely and keep copies of everything you receive.
- **Safety and red flags:** never pay to play. Check that catering (or at least snacks) is provided, and confirm travel costs for remote locations before you commit.

STAGE WHISPER

Never pay to play.

Ten films, then graduate yourself — the industry reads the count.

09

Auditioning and on-set etiquette

The professional standard

In a town this size, your reputation will get you more jobs than your headshot ever will. The non-negotiables:

1 **The off-book rule**

Know your lines so well they're part of your history — backwards, forwards and sideways. If you're still thinking about the words, you can't take direction.

2 **The audition mindset**

Don't walk in over-focused. Acting is recreating life in a moment through feeling and doing — keep perspective, chat if they want to chat, stay centred, and remember you're not there to show off the script. You're there to show what's valuable about you in the part. Analyse the script beforehand: look for clues, decode who this person is that you're bringing to life.

3 **Respect the hierarchy**

The 2nd AD is your first point of contact for everything from paperwork to bathroom breaks. The 1st AD is running the schedule — don't clog them up with small questions. The Director is the only person you take acting notes from.

4 **The survival kit**

Phone charger, plenty of snacks, and a book. Sets are famous for hurry-up-and-wait, and the actor who stays patient and prepared through a four-hour delay is a hero to the crew.

5 **Be outrageously over-prepared**

Inexperienced directors and crew errors happen. Your job is to be the rock of professionalism in the room.

HURRY UP AND WAIT

STAGE WHISPER

Your reputation will get you more jobs than your headshot ever will.

10

The long game

Mind, money, momentum

DAWN ON THE RIVER — WHERE §1 BEGAN AT DUSK

There's an intrinsic see-saw in this industry: you want to express and create, and self-doubt creeps in right behind. Mental health is as important as physical health, and the two are inextricably woven — build in whatever brings you back to balance, whether that's yoga, a run along the river, or switching off entirely for a day. Decompress, reset, and keep some fun in it.

Sort your finances early. Look at income that buys you time — flexible or passive earnings that let you spend as many hours as possible on the career itself. An actor who can afford to say yes to a week-long shoot is an actor who gets cast in week-long shoots.

Study the industry like a professional: know its structure, join the groups, set alerts for terms like “upcoming productions in Australia”, and treat yourself as the product — your customers are casting directors and agents, so know what they're looking for.

And plan. A focused plan makes you dramatically more likely to build the career you actually want; if you fail to plan, you plan to fail. Set small goals, review them, keep moving. Success in this city is about consistency — like the gym, you can't expect results showing up once a month. Word travels fast in a small community, and reliable, generous professionals get rehired. In a scene this size, being the professional presence in the room is the best way to get noticed.

STAGE WHISPER

An actor who can afford to say yes to a week-long shoot is an actor who gets cast in week-long shoots.

Mind, money, momentum — the three accounts you keep in credit while the phone isn't ringing.

11

A parting word

From Paul

I come from a family of actors. I've personally seen the euphoric career highs — landing a lead in a big production — and the failed audition you knew you nailed, and everything in between. What stayed with me, and what shaped my own career behind the camera, was watching that unwavering passion and the ability to rise to the occasion. Not letting a refusal keep you down is perhaps where the greatness and magic truly happens for actors.

This guide is a map, not the territory — wherever you are in the journey, from first extras work to a working actor refreshing the toolkit, I hope it gives you ideas, direction and a bit of fuel. I wish you every success following your dream.

When you're ready for the headshot that gets you in the room, that's our craft: an all-inclusive session at our New Farm studio — hair and makeup in-house, coaching throughout, your shortlist delivered same-day or next morning. Since 1998, with 170+ five-star Google reviews from people who walked in nervous and walked out with a photo they love.

Book your actor session →

Brisbane Headshots

Unit 1, 98 Merthyr Road, New Farm QLD 4005

07 3254 1789 · brisbaneheadshots.com.au/services/actor-headshots

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PAUL SARGAISON — BRISBANE HEADSHOTS

STAGE WHISPER

Not letting a refusal keep you down is where the magic happens.