

STUNTS

LETS GET STARTED

What you need to get started as a Stunt Performer





Get started in Stunts Now!

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Introduction

For almost two decades, I've had the privilege of working as both an actor and stunt performer in the entertainment industry, collaborating with some of the biggest names in Hollywood and performing stunts on hit shows and films. Through my experience, I've learned that becoming a stunt performer requires not just talent, but hard work, discipline, and a deep respect for safety. It's an exhilarating career path, but it's also one that demands dedication and continuous learning.

This e-book is designed to guide you through the fundamentals of becoming a stunt performer, offering insights and tips based on my own journey. Whether you're just getting started or you're exploring the stunt industry for the first time, this guide will give you the foundational knowledge you need to know to succeed in this business.



Stunt Coordinator



Stunt Coordinators have an extremely important role in the filmmaking process. They are usually hired by the producer to lead the Stunt Dept. They are responsible for designing, planning, and overseeing all things stunts including hiring stunt performers.

They design or influence the choreography, and the execution of the stunts, making them one of the most influential people on an action set.

They work closely with the director to plan out the action needed and ensure that it aligns with the vision of the film or show. On big productions they usually have a team that works closely with them through this process.

Coordinators have a ton of responsibility with no room for error. Which is why hiring the right stunt performers is crucial for them. They are looking for professional, skilled, trained, coachable, knowledgeable, versatile stunt performers that can without doubt, execute the stunt at hand.

As a new stunt performer, having a reel that showcases your abilities is a must. (check out the Next Level Course on BOMAcademy.com to learn how to put one together.) This industry is called show business for a reason. Showing what you can do will take you further than telling them. A stunt reel is one of the best ways to showcase yourself and be seen by a stunt coordinator. People often get hired off of their stunt reels alone.

Reliability, professionalism, hardworking, positive attitude are traits that coordinators love and will most likely continue to hire over and over again.

Stunt coordinators are the gatekeepers to the world of stunt work, and your professional relationship with them will be one of the most important parts of your career.

Be sure to Network within the stunt community and make sure your stunt reel is on point.

* STUNT REEL: a short video that showcases your skills.

Training

"In the mind of the beginner, there are many possibilities; in the mind of the expert, there are few."

— **Shunryu Suzuki**

I will forever stress how important training is. It is THEE most important thing you could and should do for yourself. Lack of training will compromise your ability to effectively do your job and will stop your career before it even starts. For this segment I will focus on fights but the rules apply for all stunts.

Students often say to me, “ I’ve been training in Martial Arts since I was a kid, I know how to fight.” I tell them, “That’s great, and that background will take you far in this game but the question is, do you know how to fight for camera?” Do you know how to be impactful without making contact?

Fighting for camera is all about angles. Throwing punches, reacting to hits, falling, tackling, kicking etc. is about feeding the camera what it needs to make the fight look real. The right angle will show your punches as connecting. The wrong angle of your swing or the wrong reaction will reveal the miss.

Remember, often you will be doubling an actor and the goal is to make the audience believe that the actor is doing the stunt, not you. So knowing how to perform using the proper angles to keep your face concealed as you kick ass or get your ass kicked is essential. During post, the editor will be able to easily piece together the actors movements with yours making an incredible scene.

THIS is just a small part of what training teaches you. Stunt gyms is where you will enhance your current skills and learn new ones. Training should be never ending for you. As your career grows your training should continue.

Stunt gyms literally train you for set. A good stunt gym will not only train you in fights, falls etc., they will also create different scenarios similar to what you may be hired to do for a film or TV show. Example, simulating a task force unit, bar brawls, gang fights, shoot outs. etc.

For a list of stunt gyms around the world where you can start training now, including stunt driving courses. Go to www.BomAcademy.com

Training is also your key to safety. You can only keep yourself safe when you are well versed and prepared for the stunt at hand. I can’t tell you how many stunt performers I know that were injured while filming a simple stunt. Not a car crash or a high fall but a simple tackle that lands them awkwardly. Performing the action properly, understanding your weight distribution and being camera aware while accurately performing a stunt... takes work.

Being open to learning different specialties and becoming skilled in them will for sure make you a well-rounded stunt performer and open you up to booking more jobs and doubling more actors. But it’s quality over quantity. It will serve you best to be truly skilled at a few things instead of being mediocre at a lot of them.

***Members of Branching Out Media Academy have free access to the resource page which includes my list of stunts gyms around the world where you can start training now. Including driving schools. Join now at www.BomAcademy.com

Finding work

There are several ways to find work as a stunt performer. Stunt gyms, referrals and even a request from an actor but the most popular way is to put yourself where stunt coordinators can find you. That is listing yourself in the Stunt Directories.

Stunt directories are online portals that were created and designed for stunt professionals to list themselves and their skills for work.

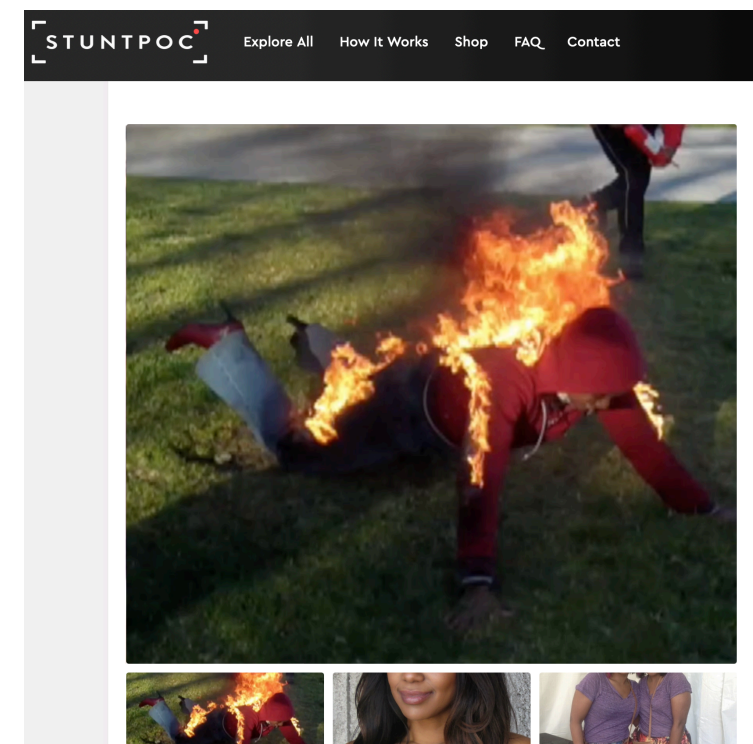
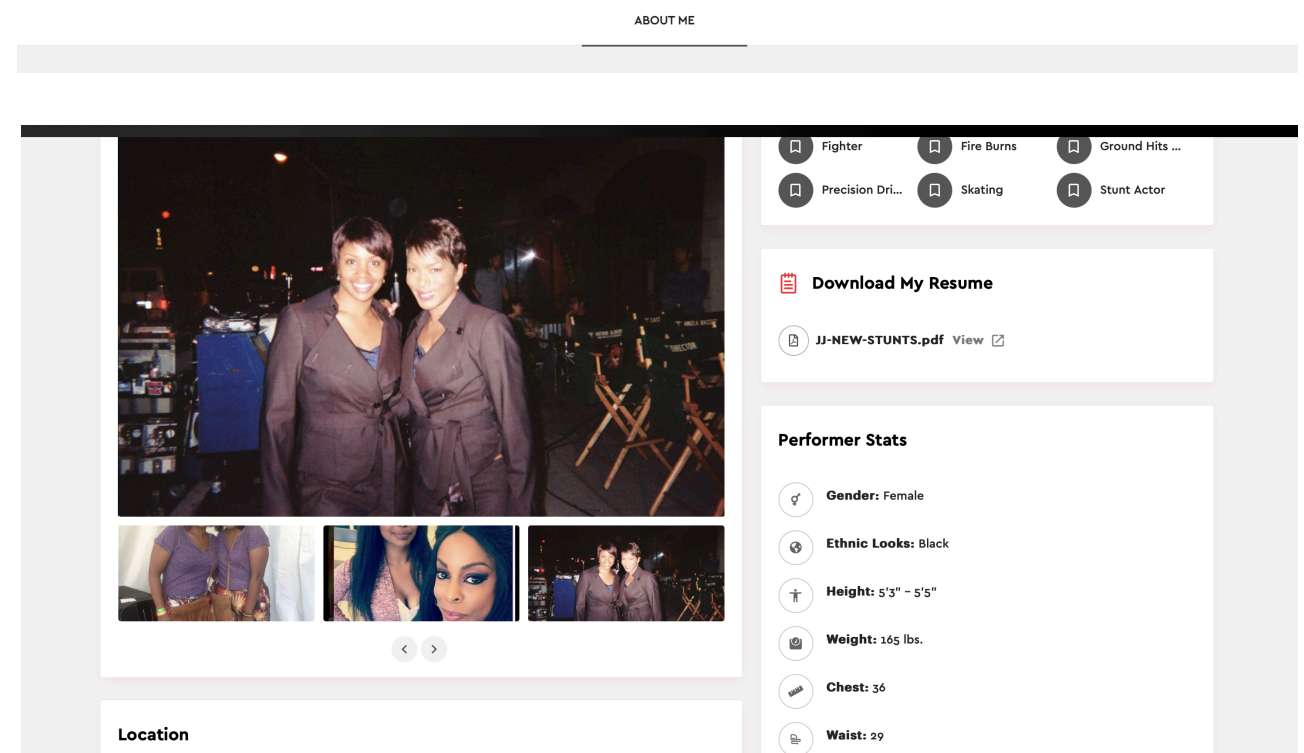
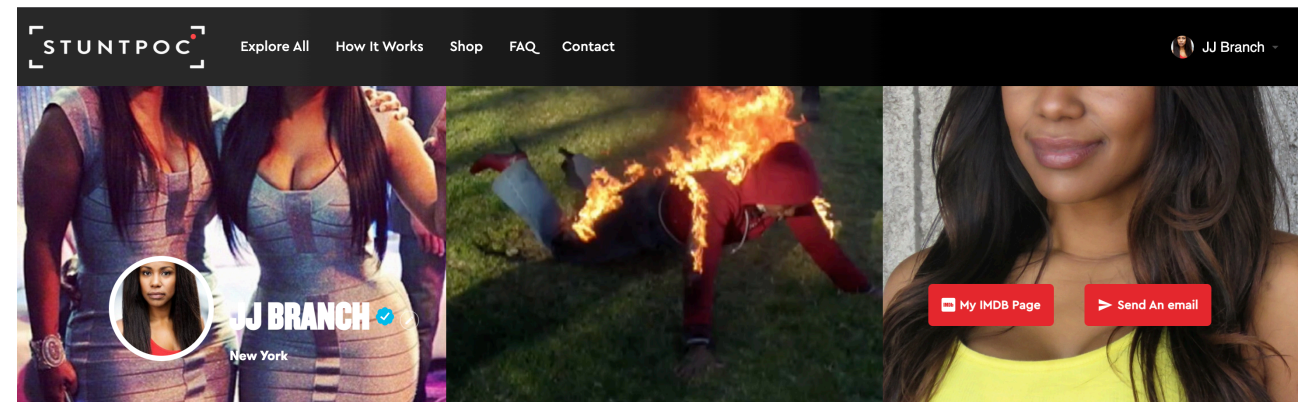
Stunt coordinator often use these portals to find matches for actors that need doubling or to find stunt performers with a particular skill set. I have landed a lot of work from being on these portals and because of this I was able to meet new coordinators and build working relationships with them.

Here is an example of my current StuntPoc.com profile.

Stunt directories profiles are similar to creating a Facebook page. You add your headshots, action photos, stunt reel and resume. Add your best work and captivating photos. Be clear about any special skills you have. Ex. Gymnast, Motorcycles. Notice the screenshot from my fire burn reel. This adds credibility and helps my profile stand out.

For a list of top Stunt Directories go to www.BomAcademy.com

***** If you want to learn how to put a stunt reel together, Go to www.BOMAcademy.com and get “The Next Level Course.”



Screenshots of JJ Branch profile from www.StuntPoc.com

The power of being coachable

"It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows."

— **Epictetus**

One of the most important qualities a stunt performer can have is being coachable. Being open to direction, accepting feedback, adjusting quickly, being open to correction.

While it may seem simple, putting your ego aside, no matter how much you already know can make or break your career.

The stunt coordinator is your boss. He knows the best way to execute the work. He also knows what he wants each stunt person to do and how they should do it. He's not asking for your opinion, he's giving directions. Your job is to fulfill them no matter how different you think it should be done,

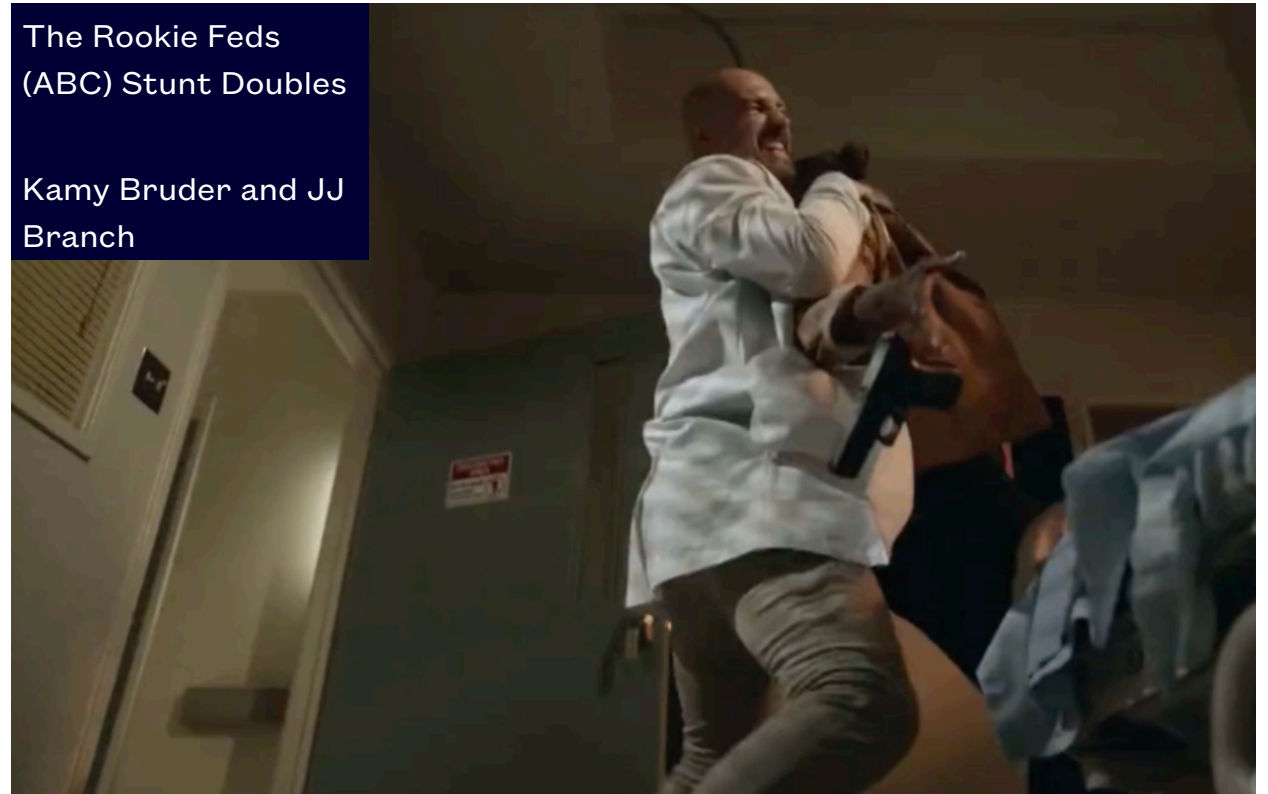
Don't let your eagerness get the best of you and allow you to insert your opinion or advice where it's not welcomed. Also, don't let your ego get in the way of you receiving feedback or re-direction. Be open, do what is asked of you and be willing to adjust. No one likes a know-it-all. That being said, there's absolutely nothing wrong with asking questions. Actually, I strongly advise you to ask all the questions needed for you to have full clarity of what you're being asked to do. Having clarity allows you to keep yourself and other safe as well as perform the stunt with confidence.

My personal rule when I'm on set... stay ready, pay attention, and make sure I'm completely clear before cameras are rolling.

Stills from THE ROOKIE FEDS on ABC

The Rookie Feds
(ABC) Stunt Doubles

Kamy Bruder and JJ
Branch





Your Background Matters

Stunt performers often come from a variety of athletic or movement-based backgrounds. Gymnastics, martial arts, track and field, dance, football etc., having experience in these areas can be a huge advantage.

In stunts, athleticism, choreography and skill play a huge role. For example, dancers and gymnasts are often great in fights and wire work because they have excellent body awareness, timing, and balance and are great with choreography. Football, baseball, track and field are strong, explosive, have good control of their body weight and are great with impact. Of course other athletes fall into these categories as well. The point is that your background can play an important role in your current skills and your ability to learn new ones.

Stunts is not an occupation where you learn on the job. There's no time for that on set and it's not worth the risk to put everyone else in danger. But coming from a background that's sports or movement related, you have the ability to adjust and learn quickly, making you versatile and an asset.

Just know that in stunts, you will definitely challenge yourself. Your body will get bruised, cut and hit. Mentally you will be pushed to new limits and learn exactly what you are capable of... or not capable of. Either way having some sort of history of athleticism is not required but it will definitely make your entry into the stunt world a lot easier.



Communication Is Key

"The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn't said." — Peter Drucker

Stunt work can be dangerous, which is why communication and safety must always come first. This chapter highlights why clear communication on set and an unwavering focus on safety are crucial to a successful career.

The Importance of Communication on Set:

Being a clear and concise communicator is such an important asset in stunts. Imagine being on set filming and you're not sure which direction to throw your punch and hit the actor. Or you run through the wrong door and hit the camera man. Having clarity on what is taking place in the scene and your exact roll in it is key. If there are other stunt performers in the scene that interact with you, you should be aware of their movements too. When "ACTION" is called, what is everyone instructed to do? If you are unclear about any direction that is given to you, it is imperative that you take the moment and ask the coordinator to repeat the direction or clear up any question you have before the scene shoots.

The coordinator will not have a problem because you're not clear but he/she will have a problem if you create one by ruining the scene or hurting someone because you didn't ask what you needed to.

Asking questions applies to all aspects of stunts. If you don't get an email the night before your workday with location and call time, you should email the coordinator and ask.

If you're not sure about your ability to execute a stunt that you're being asked to do, you should communicate that to the coordinator. They would rather be made aware of this than not. They can still use you in the scene but in a different part. If you don't speak up about your ability or lack of and things go wrong, you can best believe that the coordinator will never hire you again.

You will learn that every department on a film set thrives on communication. Those that communicate the best, perform the best.

There's a lot of moving parts on a film set and those parts are moving fast.

I worked on the set of Ride Along 2 with Kevin Hart and Ice Cube. There's a fight scene where Ice Cube was fighting multiple people. He was given the adjustment from the director, to step in a little closer and then punch the stunt performer. The stunt performer, who is an experienced stuntman, was given the adjustment to also step in closer but by the coordinator. Neither of them were aware that the other received the same adjustment. Well, you can figure out that if both Ice Cube and the stuntman were going to step in closer, they would probably be too close. Yep. Ice Cube's punch connected with the stuntman's face and broke his nose. They both did exactly as told but because it wasn't clear communication, things went wrong. Too many chefs will ruin the recipe. Communication needs to land everyone on the same page so that everyone involved is crystal clear on what to do.

Fun fact: Though it was not his fault, Ice Cube was a class act and purchased the stuntman a rare bottle of \$1000 cognac as an apology. The stuntman often boasts how he got his nose broke by a rap legend. :-)

SAG-AFTRA

The SAG-AFTRA Union, Contracts, and Residuals

Joining the SAG-AFTRA union is an important step in building your career as a stunt performer. The union protects your rights, ensures fair pay, and offers benefits like residuals. The union's job is to ensure you are treated fairly and working in safe conditions.

What is SAG-AFTRA, and Why Join?

SAG-AFTRA (Screen Actors Guild - American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) is the union that represents stunt performers, actors, and other entertainment professionals. Being a member of the union gives you access to better pay, working conditions, and protections on set. There are rules that production must abide by when it comes to SAG-AFTRA members or they will be fined. Once you join SAG-AFTRA, your pay will also follow union guidelines, which are higher than non-union rates. You'll be paid based on a daily, three day or a weekly contract.

Contracts and Negotiating Pay:

Union contracts are designed to protect your rights as a performer. These contracts specify your Name, social security, pay rate, info about the production and is essentially an agreement that you will be paid for the work you do during the specific pay period.

Residuals: Ongoing Income from Past Work:

One of the major benefits of being a union member is **residuals**. Residuals are king in this industry. It's what you live off of between jobs and it can provide long-term income.

You will receive residuals when a show or film you worked on is re-aired or distributed. Residuals are sent to the union and the union sends them to you via the mail.

If a project does really well and is re-aired a lot, and continues to be shown over time. You will continue to receive residuals for that work. The amount of the residuals decrease as time goes on but it's still amazing to walk to your mailbox and have a check for work you did 3 years ago. I did stunts on the T.V. show ER doubling Angela Basset and I still receive residuals on it. Even though the show has ended, the old episodes still re-air.

****If you've ever done any work on a set (stunts, background, acting etc.) and you're not sure if your eligible to join the union. You can go this link and find out if your are eligible.

<https://www.sagaftra.org/membership-benefits/sag-aftra-eligibility-checker>



SAG-AFTRA also has a really good credit union that offers great interest rates on all types of loans.

Set Vocabulary

Film sets move at a rapid pace, and when you are given directions, it's important that you fully understand what's being said and what's going on around you.

Here are some key words and phrases that you should be familiar with.

Basecamp This is where everyone reports to work and this is where everyone signs out. You start and end your day here.

Call Sheet This will be emailed to you the night before your workday. It's a full list of everyone that is working. It has loads of information about the coming work day. What scenes will be shot and more. Most importantly, it will have your required time to report to work.

Call Time This is the time that you are required to report to work. You will find this on your call sheet.

Honey Wagon/Trailer This is your private room. This is where you get dressed and leave your belongings. Your Honey Wagon or Trailer is located at Basecamp.

Set This is where the filming is actually taking place. Not to be confused with Basecamp which is where you prepare for the day. Set is where the work actually happens.

Holding This is where you will gather and wait when on set, they designate a space/room for Stunts or Actors. This space/room is called Holding.

P.A. This is a Production Assistant. They help keep set moving. PA's listen to what's happening on set via their walkie talkie's.

2nd AD They are in charge of Basecamp. This is who you check in with and you sign out with at the end of the day.

TERMS

Back To One Start over from the beginning. Return to your starting position.

Half- Speed Perform the stunt at half of the normal action speed.

10-1 This means you're going to use the restroom.

Copy When you are given directions, the response is copy, indicating that you fully understand the directions and will follow through.

Being a stunt performer has been one of the greatest experiences of my life. It can be challenging but don't you dare let that stop you.
You are unique and your place is already etched in the world of stunts, you just need to follow through and own it.
I am here to assist you along the way.

~ JJ Branch

www.BomAcademy.com

Branching Out **Media** Academy

The Next Level Series is a online video course that includes how to create a stunt reel, Stunt Directories and
SAG- Aftra, Stunt Pay and more. www.BomAcademy.com

