

HOW TO START YOUR PRODUCTION

For **new** Student Theatre Groups

So, you've got your company together and affiliated with Union House Theatre... But now what?

There is lots to do to start preparing for a production. We know it can be overwhelming, but it's also exciting! And Union House Theatre (or UHT for short) is here to help every step of the way.

In the beginning

- ▶ Come and talk to UHT's Artistic Director about your ideas!
- ▶ Think about what sort of work you want to create.
 - ▶ Do you want to put on an existing play or create something new?
- ▶ Do you have a suitable venue? See the UHT webpage for more info about available venues and the allocation process.
- ▶ When in Semester should you do it?
- ▶ Have you secured copyright? Do you need permissions for music? (We'll take you through what that all means!)
- ▶ Are you eligible for funding from the University of Melbourne Theatre Board? See their website for types of funding available .
- ▶ Do you need a mentor?
- ▶ Who should be in your creative team?



It's now time to lock in a venue and gather your team

- ▶ Get in touch with UHT's Artistic Director about a venue for your production.
- ▶ Once you have secured a venue and dates, it's a great time to start assembling your team.
- ▶ Often, you're able to start with just a few key members of your team. For example Director, Producer, Musical Director, Movement Director or Choreographer. Once you've got a key group together, the other roles can come next. Work out for yourself who is most central to developing the initial idea. If you don't know you can ask UHT for advice.



Your team

Further info about these roles can be found on our website: umsu.unimelb.edu.au/theatre
There are many different roles including:

Producer

Director

Movement Director

Musical Director

Playwright/Composer

Choreographer

Marketing/Publicity Manager

Set Designer

Costume Designer

Lighting Designer

Sound Designer

AV (Projection) Designer

Set/Props Maker

Actors, Performers or Dancers

Production Manager

Stage Manager

Stage Crew

LX Operator

Sound Operator

AV Operator

FOH team

The timeline

There are so many ways to get your show together and commence your creative and planning processes. It's not a one-size fits-all approach. For example, devising work takes a different pathway to a musical. But the following will give you a basic guideline.

Sometimes a Director drives the process, other times a Producer takes the lead — roles can also sometimes double up. Either way someone needs to be in charge, and it can be helpful to chart the following milestones. Working backwards it'll look something like this:



10-12 weeks out

- ▶ Director and producer start to discuss the vision for the work – consulting key creatives as required.
- ▶ A great time to be arranging performer/musician audition call outs. This can be done many ways — through your own networks, other theatre groups, and generally most successfully through UHT's weekly e-news FollowSpot and socials.
- ▶ Start to create and produce any marketing collateral i.e. flyers, posters, socials thumbnails etc.
- ▶ Schedule some regular meetings with your key team, and keep recruiting/calling out for creative and tech roles not yet filled.
- ▶ Consider a rehearsal schedule.

9 weeks out

- ▶ Make sure that you have booked a space for rehearsals and that your performers have a schedule stating where and what times rehearsals will be. See the UHT webpage for room booking details.
- ▶ Distribute scripts and scores, or have your ideas together if you're devising a work.
- ▶ Let your cast know what they will need for rehearsals, so they can come prepared.
- ▶ Distribute cast and crew contact lists (something your stage manager can support with).
- ▶ Set up a time for weekly production meetings among your key creative and production team members.

8 weeks out

- ▶ A good time to lock in all your creative and technical personnel/design team. The design team are in the middle column in the 'Your Team' infobox above.
- ▶ Start discussing the artistic vision with the production and design team: What will the set look like? What type of lighting will be needed? What are the timelines for activities to commence and be completed? i.e. set construction, scheduling the bump-in activities.
- ▶ Rehearsal will likely have started by now.
- ▶ You can always contact the production office at UHT to talk to the team about how to achieve these things.

7 weeks out

- ▶ Marketing deadline to have all your collateral for distribution and be arranging your ticketing systems — see the 'Marketing Timeline' info on page 6.
- ▶ Come in and see the **UHT production staff** about getting floor plans of the theatre, equipment lists and other helpful information production@union.unimelb.edu.au

6 weeks out

- ▶ UHT's Production Coordinator will have contacted you to commence the Production Meeting process with the creative and technical teams. These meetings provide resources, support, and guidance to ensure that your production sparkles. The Production Coordinator can help ensure that things run smoothly, and you are ready to open on opening night! These meetings will continue fortnightly until you bump in.
- ▶ By now you should have an idea of what the set will be.
- ▶ At this first meeting, the Production Coordinator will talk through creating a show Risk Assessment, Production Schedule, and making sure everything's moving in the right direction.

5 weeks out

- ▶ It's time to start talking to UHT's Stage Carpenter to firm up set concepts and access to the workshop. Do you need to build anything or are you just painting some flats? For some big musicals this will need to happen earlier, for smaller stage sets you may be able to wait until the Week 4 production meeting.
- ▶ If you haven't already considered it, now would be a good time to decide if you are going to caption your production. Transposing the script can be a time-consuming task.

4 weeks out

- ▶ You're rehearsing several times a week.
- ▶ This is when UHT's Production Coordinator will set up a full production meeting with your creative team and the UHT production staff.
- ▶ Set plans should be ready. Lighting and sound questions will be covered from the creative and technical team. The first draft production schedule and risk assessment will be discussed. The Production Coordinator will also need to finalise your venue access times. UHT's Production staff are there to help you, don't be shy.
- ▶ Double check equipment stock with UHT Head Technician. Some equipment is shared between venues.
- ▶ Book time in the workshop with Stage Carpenter if you haven't done this yet!

3 weeks out

- ▶ Any hires of external equipment should be finalised and confirmed with the hire company. Small changes are easy to deal with if you already have an agreement in place.
- ▶ If you need help working out if there are extra items to hire, come into the office for a chat with the production staff - they may even be able to get you a discount.
- ▶ Make sure you've secured your technical operators for the performances

2 weeks out

- ▶ UHT will have their final production meeting with you to ensure everyone is still having fun and that you are all ready to go. Most things should be locked in place and you'll discuss your Bump In plans.
- ▶ This is your last chance to fill those positions that haven't been filled yet. Callouts for ushers, followspot operators and radio mic technicians can be put into FollowSpot.
- ▶ The set should be finalised and construction will be under way. So many deadlines are looming. Lighting design, sound design, projection... All these will need to be finalised by the end of this week.
- ▶ You will have finalised your production schedule and distributed to ALL cast and crew.

Everything's coming to a head and you're running towards the finish line – the bump-in to the venue.

1 weeks out

- ▶ Last chance to get your final adjustments to design plans in - set, lighting, sound and projection.
- ▶ You will be running through / stumbling through the full performance in rehearsals...and you will be feeling half excited and half terrified — that's completely normal!
- ▶ You will have assembled your front of house team and finalised your program .
- ▶ Remember, UHT is always here to support you.

Week 0

More commonly known as Production Week.

Like this whole timeline, things will vary from show to show, but as a general rule of thumb your production week in the venue will look something like this:

- ▶ Sunday: Bump in (bring in and assemble your Set).
- ▶ Monday: Technical Work (focus lights, set up the band if you're having one).
- ▶ Tuesday: Plotting and Technical Rehearsals.
- ▶ Wednesday: Dress Rehearsal.
- ▶ Thursday: Performance.
- ▶ Friday: Performance.
- ▶ Saturday: Performances x 2 and bump out.

Finally...

After your show is over, but before the sound of the applause has faded, you should do some final housekeeping:

- ▶ Tidy up and finalise all your documentation — if you ever want to do the show again, you'll be glad you did!
- ▶ Save all your electronic info somewhere secure so that future theatre group members can access. Make sure you have also saved a backup.
- ▶ Do the same with your physical paperwork (otherwise known as archiving).
- ▶ Don't forget to celebrate your achievements (party time), but not until all the work is over — bump out first!
- ▶ Look out for UHT's Debrief and Stats survey in your inbox in the weeks following your production and make sure to fill them in so we can keep building and improving the support we offer.



Example Marketing Timeline

8-7 weeks out

- ▶ Make a simple marketing plan.
- ▶ Get in touch with UHT's Marketing and Development Officer for help with promotion.
- ▶ Decide on your image.

6-5 weeks out

- ▶ Write your promotional/marketing text, which essentially comprises the show details and description.
- ▶ Confirm your access provisions (e.g. if you are having an Auslan interpreted show) and include this in the marketing.
- ▶ Decide your target audiences (hint: start with friends and family).

4 weeks out

- ▶ Start working on personalised publicity that is effective.
- ▶ Organise giveaways.
- ▶ Start collecting cast and crew biographies, images, a blurb and any other info you might want in the show program.
- ▶ Organise someone to take photos of rehearsals, including the final dress rehearsal.



3-2 weeks out

- ▶ Your Facebook event is live and you're promoting ticket sales.
- ▶ Start ramping up the social media posts.
- ▶ Send out invitations to any VIPs (is there anyone that has gone above and beyond? Offer them free tickets).
- ▶ Organise complimentary tickets for reviewers and awards committee members through UHT.
- ▶ Encourage cast and crew to promote the show and provide them with a promo pack.

1 week out

- ▶ Save your best promo for now (e.g. a video teaser).
- ▶ Finalise the show program (can be digital/printed).

Show week

- ▶ Post a selection of the dress rehearsal images before opening night.
- ▶ Ongoing social media updates with a promo pack.

Afterwards

- ▶ Share the review.