



THEATRE ROLES

Who does what in a theatre production? Who’s job is it to make the schedule, or look after the props, or say the lines, or turn on the lights?

Because theatre productions and scales vary so widely, sometimes roles can be combined or encompass slightly different tasks and responsibilities from one production to the next. However, the descriptions below of some of the key roles in a theatre production can help as a guide to what’s involved in each job. This is by no means an exhaustive list!

What’s always important is figuring out who’s role it is to do what at the start of the production process, and clearly communicating responsibilities to make sure everyone’s on the same page.

This resource was created with information borrowed and adapted from the [AACT](#) and [Berklee](#).

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Actor

The actor is the one who's on stage talking the talk and walking the walk. They'll go to rehearsals and, under the guidance of the Director and Creative Team, learn the lines, blocking and choreography, and any singing parts to their role, and perform them each night of the season.

Artistic Director

The Artistic Director is not always directly involved in the production, but can be an important part of the structure of some theatre companies. They are responsible for conceiving, developing, and implementing the creative vision and focus of a theatre company.

Some of their specific duties may include:

- Hiring and supervising creative and/or production staff of a production (such as the director and production manager)
- Develop, implement, and evaluate programs for the year
- Acts as spokesperson for the company's artistic vision and purpose
- Seeks and develops creative partnerships with other organisations
- Direct one of the shows during the company's season

A/V (Projection) Designer

Not a role that is necessary on every show, the A/V (Audio/Visual) or Projection Designer will create any projection or video elements for the show and implement them in the design. If a show requires video content or camera feeds, they will decide on what type of equipment to be used and where it needs to be located, such as deciding on projector type, location, and what surface to project onto. Like all designers, the AV Designer will work closely with the director to implement the creative vision for the work. They will also work closely with the set designer, as often projection is used to enhance or add to a set, and especially with a lighting designer to ensure that projection and other light-emitting video sources do not interfere with the lighting design, and vice versa.

Choreographer

The choreographer designs and directs the dance or stylised movement in a musical or play, working closely with the director and musical director. They work with the actors/performers to interpret and develop creative ideas into movement and have them come to life.

As part of the production team, the Choreographer must work closely with the musical director, costume designer, set designer, lighting designer, and others to make sure that all the movement on stage is compatible with musical cues, costuming, set, lighting, etc.

Some of their specific duties include:

- Create original choreography, teach and notate dance steps and formations, teach techniques, conduct physical warmups and conditioning workshops with performers
- Work collaboratively with the Director and Designers to fulfil the vision or concept of the production
- Work with the Director and Musical Director to integrate choreography into the production
- Assist the Director, Musical Director, and Stage Manager in the creation of the rehearsal schedule
- Attend scheduled rehearsals

- Attend production meetings

Costume Designer

The costume designer creates the look of each character by designing clothes and accessories the actors will wear during the performance. Depending on their style and complexity, costumes may be made, bought, revamped from existing stock, or hired.

The shapes, colours, and textures that a designer chooses make an immediate and powerful visual statement to the audience. Creative collaboration among the costume designer, director, set designer, and lighting designer ensures that the costumes are smoothly integrated into the production as a whole. The costume designer may also need to collaborate with other departments, such as the sound department, to ensure microphones can be fitted within the planned outfits, etc.

Some of their specific duties may include:

- Make and source costumes for all cast in the production
- Develop a costume 'track' for actors who have costume changes, figuring out the logistics of where costumes are changed, when, and how, during the show
- Take responsibility for, or work closely with, the hair and makeup designer to integrate the look with costuming
- Conduct wardrobe maintenance during the season
- Work with the director and creative team to integrate the costuming with the overall creative vision
- Attend rehearsals as required
- Attend production meetings

Director

The director is central to the staging of the production as the one who sets the overarching creative vision for the work. The director has the challenging task of bringing together the many complex pieces of a production – the script, actors, set, costuming, lighting, sound and music – into a unified whole.

The director's work is often based on a detailed study and analysis of the script to be produced. Many careful readings of the script help the director develop an individual vision of the playwright's intentions, which will form the core of their interpretation. This sense of "what the play is really about" will shape a director's thinking about every other aspect of the production.

Some of their duties may include:

- Interpret the script and develop a creative vision
- Cast the production
- Work with the stage manager to develop the rehearsal schedule
- Run the rehearsal room and conduct rehearsals, guiding the actors in their process
- Holding creative meanings with the designers to set the overall creative vision and guide their work as required
- Work closely with the production manager to ensure logistical boxes and deadlines are being ticked
- Attend all production meetings
- Attend and advise during plotting sessions

Dramaturg

A Dramaturg's main role on a production is to assist the director to realise the creative vision of the play by providing contextual information. They will extensively research the historical context of the play and provide advice and guidance to the director and creative team to ensure the creative decisions made are in line with the historical facts. Historical research can also extend to thematic and contextual research and understanding. It is the dramaturg's job to know as much as possible about the play at hand, including its themes, language, period, history, music, and even past stagings, and to hold the current production to a high standard of historical and textual accuracy.

Front of House (FOH) Manager

The Front of House Manager is responsible for managing the public-facing aspect of staging a show each night – getting the audience into the auditorium! They will be responsible for organising and coordinating ushers for performances, working with the Producer and Marketing team/s to ensure ticketing systems are operational and efficient, setting up the box office and front of house area for show nights and organising pre- and post- show functions and galas, including catering and drinks service if relevant. They will work closely with the Production Manager to ensure foyers are ready to go in line with production schedules, and communicate show clearance to the Stage Manager each night to begin the show.

The Front of House Manager is ultimately responsible for audience experience, and this includes understanding what to do with an audience in the case of an emergency such as a show stop or building evacuation.

Lighting Designer

The Lighting Designer is responsible for making sure the performance is seen! They work closely with the director and set designer to create the lighting plan, including what lights will be positioned where in the rig and what colours will be used. They decide on where lighting cues occur and how the lights will shift throughout the course of the show.

At its most basic, stage lighting functions to make the actors and their environs visible to the audience. But it is also useful to:

- Evoke the appropriate mood
- Indicate time of day and location
- Shift the audience's attention by emphasising one stage area or another
- Reinforce the style of a production
- Make objects on stage appear flat or give them depth

The Lighting Designer begins by reading the script and noting the type of light it calls for in each scene. Designer and director share their ideas about how light could be used to enhance the production concept at their first meeting. Early meetings with the set designer are also important because the set and lighting designers must collaborate on how to achieve the desired *look* for the play. The plan for the set may influence the placement and direction of the necessary lighting instruments, so flagging any potential problems in this area as early as possible is important.

Lighting designers attend rehearsals to get a feel for the lighting cues and to plan how to light the actors as they move from place to place on stage. When the blocking is set, the lighting designer can work out what lighting fixtures will be used and where each one will be located.

Musical Director

Generally a role specific to musicals and operas, the Musical Director is responsible for working with the Director to prepare a theatre production for public performance, including advising on casting, rehearsing the vocalists and orchestra through the rehearsals period, and conducting the orchestra during performances. They will work with the score of a show in the same manner that the director works with the script, interpreting it and rehearsing it with the musicians and singers of the production. They may also act as the repetiteur in rehearsals.

It is essential that the production's director and musical director have a close and collaborative working relationship. They will work closely especially in organising and conducting rehearsals, deciding which cast members need to be present, and what is to be accomplished at each rehearsal.

The Musical Director will work closely with the sound designer/engineer to ensure appropriate sound reinforcement is supplied for the performers and orchestra, communicating the needs of each.

Typical responsibilities may include:

- Auditioning the singers and making casting recommendations to the director
- Scheduling music rehearsals in collaboration with the director, choreographer, and stage manager
- Helping cast members learn their music
- Leading musical rehearsals for principals, chorus, and orchestra
- Conducting
- In consultation with the producer and director, selecting a rehearsal pianist (repetiteur) and orchestra members
- Working with the sound designer/engineer on sound reinforcement methods
- Attending production meetings and rehearsals

Production Manager

The Production Manager is ultimately responsible for ensuring that all aspects of the production are completed on time, to budget, and according with the director's and designers' wishes. They oversee the planning and management of the entire production process and are an essential role on any production. Often the production manager will need to challenge the creative team and make compromises based on what is achievable with the resources available, so it is important that this role is not shared with that of director or some other creative head.

The Production Manager is responsible for essential tasks like securing and confirming venue hours, booking rehearsal spaces, recruiting required crew, creating and overseeing schedules, doing Risk Assessments, organising and chairing production meetings, and coordinating logistics of all departments. They may be involved in securing rights to works in conjunction with the Producer, and recruiting the creative team in consultation with the Director and Producer.

The Production Manager needs to have a close working relationship with all members of the production team and also with the venue's management staff. They will be the key liaison between these people, and also any external contractors or hire providers.

In collaboration with the Producer, who will allocate funding for the production, the Production Manager will create a production budget and ensure that each department has the resources they need to fulfil their requirements.

During production week, the Production Manager is responsible for ensuring that all tasks are being completed to schedule, or modifying the schedule as necessary and keeping everyone up to date on those modifications. They will continually watch to identify hazardous processes and manage any incidents or decisions as they occur.

Producer

The role of the Producer and that of the Production Manager are often very close and the lines between them can be blurred. Sometimes they're even the same person! Broadly speaking, whilst the Production Manager is responsible for the logistical management of the production, the Producer is responsible for administrative management. That means tasks like:

- Allocating funding for the production
- Sourcing new funding opportunities, such as sponsorships and fundraiser
- Organising the rights for the work
- Booking the performance venue
- Recruiting the Director, Production Manager, or other production team members
- Leading the marketing and promotional team
- Facilitating call outs to cast and crew
- Organising archival filming of a production
- Managing contracts and agreements
- Liaising with external stakeholders
- Organising reviewers and complementary tickets
- Pitching the show to other organisations or venues for restaging or touring
- Implementing codes of conduct, policies, and procedures
- Writing funding applications

The Producer is one of the first people on the project and is responsible for building the rest of the team around themselves.

Set Designer

All the scenery, furniture and props the audience sees at a production of a play make up the set design. The set designer's job is to design these physical surroundings in which the action will take place. A theatre set should:

- Suggest the style and tone of the whole production
- Create mood and atmosphere
- Give clues as to the specific time and place of the action
- Offer creative possibilities for the movement and grouping of the actors

The set designer may need to consider how set items move on and off stage if changes are required, where things are stored when offstage, and - in consultation with the director and stage manager - who moves them.

The set designer will normally read the script many times, both to get a feel for the ideas and themes within the script, and to list its specific requirements for scenery, furnishings, and props. The time of day, location, season, historical period, and any set changes called for in the script are noted.

Once they have come up with the idea of the set design, the set designer will develop sketches, a floor plan, and sometimes a physical 3D model, or a 3D render using software, of the set design. These aid other departments, such as the lighting designer, and even the cast, to visualise the design and plan around it.

Once the design stage is complete, the set designer then needs to make sure the set is constructed and installed in the theatre correctly. They may build the set themselves, or work with a set construction team who can build it to their specifications.

Sound Designer

The sound designer plans and creates all the sound effects used in the play, including sourcing or composing music to support the work. This may include literal sound effects to demonstrate things happening (such as a gunshot), or abstract sounds and music to support the emotional tone of a scene.

Sound designers begin their work by studying the script, gathering as much information as they can about any sound or music it calls for. As in all other aspects of design, an early meeting with the director and the design team is essential to get a clear understand of the production concept.

Some directors will already have very clear ideas about what the sound effects and/or music should sound like, while others may provide the sound designer more creative license to sit in on rehearsals and develop the sound of the play themselves.

Once the sound effects and/or music have been created, the sound designer is then responsible for implementing a playback system for the show. This includes loading them into a cueing program such as Qlab and setting volume levels, and also deciding on what sorts of speakers should be used and where (for example, creating a surround-sound system). The sound designer can work with a sound engineer to achieve this.

The sound designer may also be responsible for organising the sound reinforcement for the show, if necessary, such as what microphones to use to amplify actors' voices, or how to amplify any instruments in use.

Sound and music in the theatre can:

- Motivate actions onstage and indicate events taking place offstage
- Establish the time of day, season, and weather
- Locate the action in a specific place
- Create mood and changes in mood
- Stimulate audience expectations of what is to come

- Provide information about the characters
- Build transitions between scenes
- Offer shortcuts that rapidly advance the plot or recall past events

Stage Manager

Stage Managers typically provide practical and organisational support to the director, actors, designers, stage crew, and technicians throughout the production process. They are also the director's representative during performances, making sure that the production runs smoothly.

The stage manager is especially important to the director in rehearsals. Here the director and stage manager work side by side, with the stage manager recording the director's decisions about blocking and notes for the actors, keeping track of logistical and scheduling details, and communicating what goes on in rehearsals to the rest of the team. This enables the director to concentrate their full attention on directing.

Stage managers have several key responsibilities and tasks to perform in each phase of a production, including:

- Scheduling and running rehearsals
- Communicating the director's wishes to designers
- Coordinating the work of the stage crew
- Calling cues and cast entrances during performances
- Overseeing the entire show each time it is performed

In conjunction with the director, the stage manager determines the scheduling of all rehearsals and makes sure everyone involved is notified of rehearsal times, meetings, costume/wig fittings and coaching sessions. During the rehearsal phase, stage managers also:

- Mark out the dimensions of the set on the floor of the rehearsal room
- Make sure rehearsal props and furnishings are available for the cast
- Attend all rehearsals
- Notify the rest of the production team of changes made in the rehearsal

Once in the theatre, the stage manager will run the technical rehearsals of the play, moving through each of the cue points provided to them by the designers to ensure all the production elements are coming together smoothly and that everyone knows what needs to happen when.