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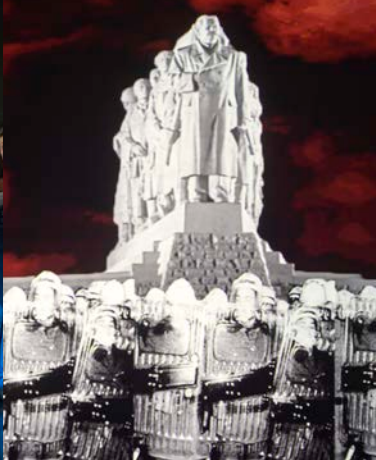
Careers Guide



**Musical Director**



**Scenic Artist**



**Stage Manager**



**Lighting Operator**



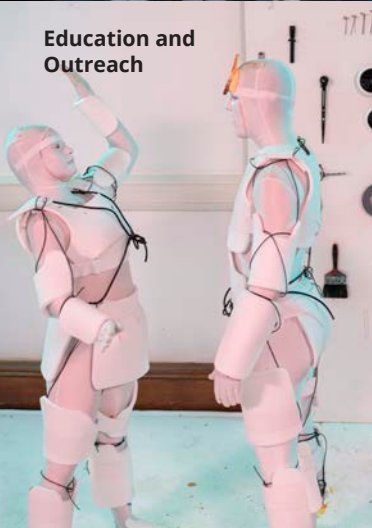
**Theatre Designer**



**Lighting Designer**



**Education and Outreach**



**Stage Manager**



**Set Builder**



**Movement Director**



**Prop Maker**



**Playwright**



**Video/Projection Designer**



**Lighting Designer**



**Sound Engineer/  
Audio Engineer**



**Costume Maker**



**Production Manager**



**Actor**





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# This guide is designed to provide an insight into how theatres operate and the roles that form part of the production and performance process.

The creating of theatre and live performance takes collaboration that requires creativity, commitment and passion. It takes the work of many different specialised teams to complete all the tasks required before the actors can even step foot on stage. The number and range of people who work in a theatre depends upon its size and type, but whatever the scale of the theatre or the production it always takes a team of people to get there.

Many of the skills and knowledge needed in theatre are transferable to many other areas of the creative industries including television, film, radio, music and live events.

## Theatre types

Today, theatres can generally be divided into two types: **producing theatres** or **presenting theatres**, but some do both.

**Producing theatres** have creative teams, which develop new productions from existing or new works. This includes directors, musical directors and choreographers, as well as designers of sets, props, costume, lighting and audiovisual media.

They might be freelance or based at the venue, with additional specialists being brought in as required. Often these theatres will also have craft departments to make or install the design elements chosen for the production.

The performers are usually hired for a specific production, although some venues do continue the tradition of having a venue company contracted for a longer period of time. Some producing theatres you may know are the National Theatre London, Birmingham Repertory

Theatre, Queen's Theatre Hornchurch, Octagon Theatre Bolton, Curve Leicester, The New Wolsey Theatre Ipswich, Live Theatre Newcastle, Leeds Playhouse Theatre and the Young Vic London, to name a few.

**Presenting theatres**, sometimes referred to as 'receiving houses', host visiting companies whose productions have been developed elsewhere and are touring to a number of venues.

They are theatres that will book touring or one-off shows and host them. They will have staff teams that work for the theatre, who will liaise with members of the production companies to put on shows and sell tickets. Some of these theatres include the Lyceum Theatre London, The London Palladium, The Liverpool Empire, Bristol Hippodrome and the Palace Theatre Manchester.

Many theatres now do both, creating and producing new work of their own, or housing touring performances.



# Roles in theatre and performance

## Artistic Director



The role of the artistic director is to ensure the theatre has a clear artistic vision and that all the work done at the theatre is in line with this. They oversee all the decisions made about programming of shows and seasons and they will engage with every department of the theatre to understand how best to support them. The role of the artistic director is to be the name and face of the theatre and support fundraising, artistic and creative decisions and create a strategy for the staff teams to follow. Some artistic directors may also direct productions too.

**Qualities needed:** organised, creative, good clear communication and leadership; an excellent understanding of theatre, audiences and finances.

## Casting Director

The casting director's job is to choose the actors for the roles in a production. Casting directors are used in theatre, television, film and radio and work closely with the producer and director to select the right actors for the roles, to achieve the director's creative vision. They will organise auditions and interviews and liaise with talent agencies who will recommend the performers.

**Qualities needed:** organised, good clear communication, understanding of storytelling, interest in performance, good negotiation skills, with the ability to spot trends and an instinct to recognise talent.



## Director

The director is the creative head of a production. They have a vision of how they wish to tell a story and bring it to life. They will create a concept and work closely with the producer and writer to bring the story to life on stage creatively and in their own artistic style. They will coach the actors through the rehearsal period working on character development and style, and communicate their ideas to other members of the creative team to meet their vision for a piece.

**Qualities needed:** creatively engage with writing, good leadership, great negotiation and interpersonal skills, clear communicator of ideas and instructions and good time management; ability to work well as part of a team.

## Playwright

A playwright is someone who writes the story in the form of a script. They may take an already existing story and adapt it for the stage, or they may create and write an original story. Each writer works in different ways and draws inspiration from many places, whether that is lived real life experience of themselves or others, or completely fictional. Writing is mostly a freelance career, meaning you may work project to project and work alone for the most part. Writers may use different methods to influence their work, such as interviews or residencies in specific communities. Some writers specialise in writing for stage and some for screen, others may be more flexible in the medium they are writing for.

**Qualities needed:** a keen storyteller, an understanding of language and performance, excellent time management skills, the ability to negotiate well, be self-motivated and receive criticism well.



## Producer

A theatre producer is one of the most important roles, as they are responsible for the finances and money attached to putting on a show in a theatre. Many theatre producers work freelance and may work from one project to the next. Producers will organise the technical management and workshops of the theatre to ensure timescales are met for performances to happen. A producer will book the theatre, manage the price and number of tickets for each performance and will oversee the marketing of the show. They will work very closely with the director, creative team and crew to make the artistic decisions and plans become a reality. The main part of the producer's role is to hire and pay everyone who works on a production. They will often have production assistants who will help them with the level of work needed to organise a show.

**Qualities needed:** must be able to manage a number of different tasks at once, ability to manage multiple budgets and raise funds, be incredibly organised and self-motivated, able to inspire and manage a team, understand copyright law and legal contracts.

## Musical Director

The role of the musical director, known as the MD, is to work on the musical aspects of a production. They will work closely with the director to prepare the production for performance, including rehearsing, conducting and hiring the orchestra or band. The responsibilities of the musical director include auditioning singers, scheduling musical rehearsals with the director and stage manager, rehearsing the musical elements of the show, conducting the orchestra and singers and working closely with the sound designer and operator to choose microphones and set sound levels. The MD may have an assistant musical director to support them on the different areas of responsibility during rehearsals and production.

**Qualities needed:** excellent music reading abilities, good keyboard skills and/or the equivalent with another instrument, understanding of singing technique and orchestral scores, a knowledge of music notation software and digital audio workstations, good communication skills, creative flare and able to work well under pressure as part of a large team.

## Orchestra or Band

The orchestra or band in a theatre performance could be as little as two people or up to 30 musicians. Their role is to provide live musical accompaniment to a piece of theatre. This may include working with singers and actors during rehearsals to ensure the score supports them and the story being told. Mostly orchestras or bands will work on opera or musical theatre, but can be used on a number of performance styles. The musicians will usually be hired by the musical director and/or the conductor and will work closely with them throughout the rehearsal process and on the live shows.

**Qualities needed:** excellent musical skills, sight-reading abilities, musical knowledge, timekeeping, ability to work well and perform as part of a team and be responsive to a conductor's direction.



## Choreographer

The choreographer is like the writer and director of dancers. They will design and create the storyline, visuals, moves and formation of a dance or dance sequence. They will teach this to dancers, and work with the director to ensure the structured dance pieces fit with the overall narrative and storytelling of the show. They will have a good knowledge of dance styles throughout history and use this knowledge to inform and influence their choreography. Many choreographers have been highly trained dancers in the past and have an excellent knowledge of the art.

**Qualities needed:** exceptional dance skills, patience, great stamina, creative flare, a keen eye for detail, great musicality and storytelling skills, ability to work as part of a large ensemble and to give direction well.



## Movement Director

The role of the movement director may vary due to the type of performance they are working on. Usually they will work closely with the director and performers during rehearsals to develop a physicality for the characters. They may also specialise in specific areas of theatre, film or television. A relatively new area of movement direction is intimacy coordination. The role of an intimacy coordinator is to choreograph and support actors with intimate scenes, ensuring their physical and emotional safety whilst performing. A movement director is not a dance teacher or choreographer, but they may have those skills. Movement directors will work with actors to help them to physically become their characters and perform physically as another person.

**Qualities needed:** patience, an eye for detail, good researching skills, fantastic interpersonal skills, ability to break down information and teach, good knowledge of storytelling and theatre making, the drive to work inclusively with bodies of all shapes and sizes and a clear communicator.

## Actor

The role of the actor is to tell the story alongside all the other theatrical elements. Actors are the face of theatre, as they are the people that the audience see and connect with. They are responsible for carrying the narrative in the way the writer and director will determine. They will work very closely with the director to bring the story to life, and are hired by the producer and casting director. Actors will adapt their voice and movement to portray the character to the best of their ability. Most actors will have had training at a drama school to learn the skills needed and may well work across theatre, television, film and radio. Acting is an incredibly exciting profession, but can be very demanding work physically and emotionally. Actors are used to telling other people's stories on stage and screen, and having actors that represent a wide variety of communities is incredibly important and something that many theatres and television/film production companies are championing.

**Qualities needed:** acting experience/training, good time management skills, work very well as part of team, takes direction effectively, can engage completely with an audience, good physical and vocal presence, have confidence, energy and creative insight.





## Education and Outreach

Many theatres will have education, outreach or creative learning departments. You may have come into contact with them during your current or past educational experience. The role of this particular department is to engage with a wide variety of people and support them in going to the theatre. For example, this may be inviting school or college groups to attend a performance, or a workshop or a tour of the theatre. They may also work with groups or audiences who have limited access to the arts. They might also run youth theatre programmes, or offer other opportunities for people to participate in theatre and the arts.

**Qualities needed:** a knowledge of theatre and the arts, clear communicator, good organisational skills, an interest in making the theatre accessible, a knowledge of the UK education system and have creative ideas to engage audiences.



## Workshop Facilitator

Part of a theatre's education or outreach department may be to deliver workshops to schools, colleges or community groups. Some shows have a programme of workshops that are delivered to support the production and link to the national curriculum within schools. This is a creative and exciting role, where the facilitator (workshop leader) will run exercises, play games and educate the participants about the show, or the themes presented in the show. This role can be done by a permanent member of the education or outreach department, or a freelance member of staff who works on an ad hoc basis. The role is to encourage creativity from participants and to help them to have a better understanding of the performance or topic.

**Qualities needed:** strong leadership skills, a creative mind, excellent communication skills, a knowledge of the UK education system, an understanding of barriers to the arts and a passion for theatre and storytelling.



## Duty Manager

The role of the duty manager is to help with the operations that it takes to run a theatre. They will liaise with visiting theatre companies and oversee the front of house team, ushers, cleaners and technicians, to ensure that audiences that visit the theatre have a positive experience. The duty manager will also be the person who is responsible for any accidents or incidents that happen in a theatre. Duty managers will work closely with stage managers, box office staff and creative teams to ensure a smooth and enjoyable process for all involved. Their responsibilities include opening and shutting the theatre every day safely and securely, and ensuring the health and safety of all on-site at all times.

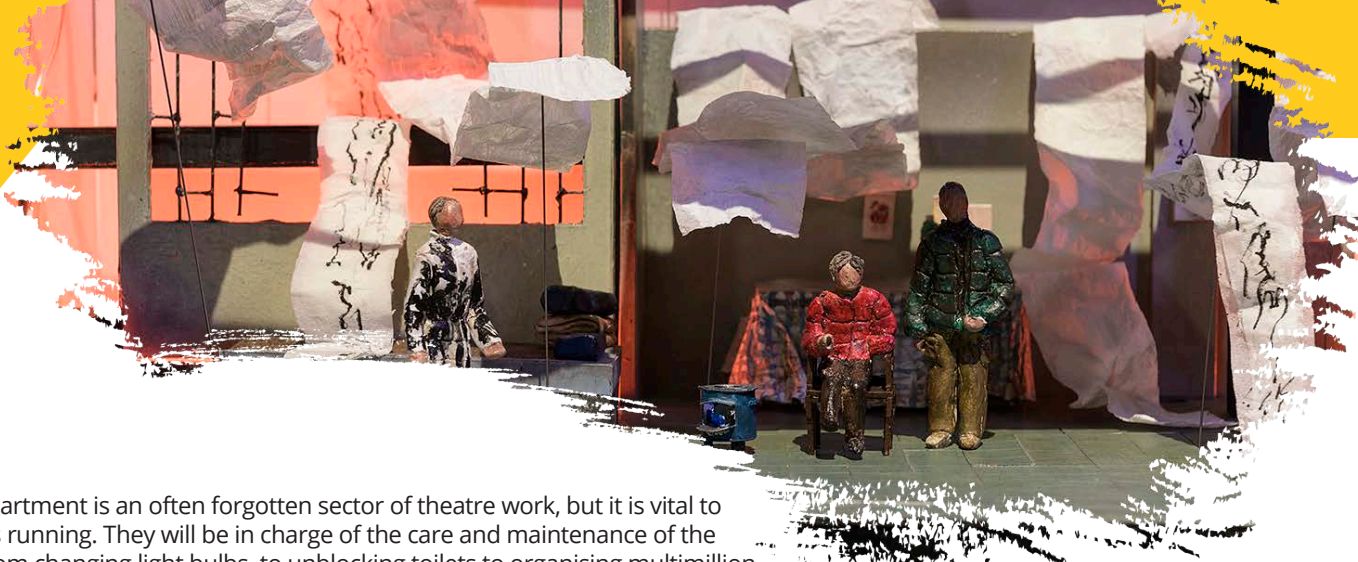
**Qualities needed:** excellent organisation, ability to work well as a part of a team, a multitasker with a knowledge of health and safety laws and procedures.

## Usher

Theatre ushers take tickets and help audience members find their correct seat to make sure everyone is happy and comfortable in the auditorium. Ushers may also sell programmes, merchandise and refreshments. They will help anyone who needs a bit more assistance with finding their seat, the toilets, cloakroom or bar. They are on hand to help audiences with what they need to make their theatre experience most enjoyable. Ushering in theatre is a good way to get into work in theatres initially as it an entry level position, but one of the most important.

**Qualities needed:** good communication and interpersonal skills, customer service skills, flexibility and work well as part of a team.





## Facilities

The facilities department is an often forgotten sector of theatre work, but it is vital to keeping theatres running. They will be in charge of the care and maintenance of the building itself, from changing light bulbs, to unblocking toilets to organising multimillion pound refurbishments in some cases. Whilst they are rarely involved in the actual productions, they will share the same perks of working in a theatre that everyone else has whilst maintaining a more 'regular' working schedule. They are normally in charge of hiring cleaners to help with the upkeep of the building.

**Qualities needed:** good basic knowledge of electrical and plumbing systems (whilst qualifications are not required they are becoming more and more desired), comfortable working at height, ability to handle a significant budget, great communication skills, eye for detail, excellent knowledge of health and safety regulations.

## Box Office Staff

The box office is the front of the house in many theatres, seeing staff, customers and members of the public. The role of the box office is to be the first point of contact for audience members. The place they will buy and pick up tickets and find out more information about the theatre and future performances. Many theatres, usually the bigger ones, may use ticket agencies to sell their tickets online. Theatre box office staff will be responsible for taking bookings and managing these by sending people their tickets or getting them ready for collection. The box office staff will work closely with the producer and marketing teams to ensure the right prices and information are listed. Weekly ticket sales reports will be shared from the box office or ticket agencies with the producer, artistic director and marketing teams to track sales and income for the theatre.

**Qualities needed:** excellent customer service and communication skills, good computer skills and ability to stay calm under pressure.

## Theatre Designer

The theatre designer will work closely with the director and producer to bring their creative vision to life on stage. They will create a concept based on the director's overall vision for the story, based on key themes presented in the script. Depending on the size of the production, the budget will vary giving the designer more freedom to explore the story. Each designer will work in a different way with a creative process that works for them. Designers are most likely to be freelance and work from project to project, and can work across a range of theatre productions and styles. They may create mood boards, then model boxes and pitch this to the director and producer to agree on. Once the designer has created the world the story will take place in, the costume makers, set builders and scenic artists will physically make and build all the components.

**Qualities needed:** creativity, imagination, an understanding of theatre venues, good presenting, technical drawing skills and ability to work to a deadline and be self-motivated.

## Costume Maker

The role of the costume maker is to work from designs to create costumes for actors to wear in a performance on stage or screen. Costumes are needed to help actors bring their character truly to life and differ from fashion garments as they need to be able to be moved in, work under lights and be durable to wear for long periods of time. Costume makers will work closely with the designer to ensure that they fit the brief, with the producer and director to meet their needs and budget and, most importantly, with the actors to ensure they are comfortable and fit for purpose.

**Qualities needed:** excellent sewing and design ideas, organisational skills, budget awareness, the ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines, and good personal communication skills.





## Dresser

Dressers work as part of the stage crew during a production. They are needed to support actors with quick costume changes and ensure that costumes are looked after. They will work closely with the wardrobe supervisor, who is responsible for all matters that involve costumes and the keeping of them. Being a dresser is a good entry level job for anyone interested in getting into theatre wardrobe and costume work. The work is usually paid by the hour and is more flexible as they are only needed during performances.

**Qualities needed:** can take direction well, good communication skills, ability to work as part of a team, has some knowledge of fabrics, can work quickly under pressure and to a tight schedule.

## Set Builder

The set building team do exactly that, they build the set. They may do this in-house at the theatre or off-site in a workshop space. They will use the designer's drawings to create a technical plan of how to build the set and what to build it from. They will source the materials needed to construct the set and may make multiple sets for bigger productions. Set builders are also used in television and film and will make sets that create an environment for the story to be told in. They will work closely with the designer, director and producer to ensure that sets come in on budget and are safe for performers and technicians to use. The set builders will also work very closely with the scenic artists or set painters to deliver a high quality of work in transforming a space.

**Qualities needed:** excellent carpentry and metal work skills, can work to deadlines, understands budgets and buying of materials, knowledge of health and safety regulations and good clear communication skills.



## Prop Maker

The prop maker is a crafts specialist and works with a wide range of materials, techniques and machinery to create props that cannot be bought or sourced by the stage manager. Props are mobile items that can be used by actors in a show. Prop makers aim to replicate real world items, such as food that can be used show after show without going off or breaking. They can be tasked with making anything from vases to soft action props, for example foam swords and mechanical/electrical props.

**Qualities needed:** knowledge of a range of materials, problem solving, designing, planning, technical drawing, health and safety regulations, have foresight and ability to work to a deadline.

## Scenic Artist

Scenic artists or set painters bring the set to life using paint. They will work closely with the designer and the set builders to build the illusion by painting materials, such as fabric backdrops, pieces of set, or props to make them look in keeping with the time period, location and overall design of the show. They will source the right materials to help them achieve the desired effect, keeping in budget set by the producer. Scenic artists work across theatre, film and television and can also work in the events industry creating backdrops for live events. They will usually be freelance and work project to project, but may work as part of a core stage crew team at a larger theatre or production company.

**Qualities needed:** excellent painting and crafts skills, accuracy and an eye for detail, can work to deadlines, understands budgets and buying of materials, and the ability to interpret designs and turn them into reality.





## Lighting Designer

The lighting designer creates atmosphere and mood through the medium of lights. Their job is to ensure that the lights effectively showcase the performance in an artistic way. They will decide which lights to rig and use for specific performances, but usually do not rig or operate them. They will create a rig design that will be taken on by the production lighting electrician to correctly rig and for an operator to manage during a show. Lighting designers can also work across television and film and the live events industry.

**Qualities needed:** excellent technical understanding and experience in lighting, ability to work under pressure and meet tight deadlines, good communicator, creativity and imagination



## Production Lighting Electrician (PLX)

The production lighting electrician, otherwise known as the PLX, works on areas of lighting that are not design. They will be responsible for rigging the lights and focusing them correctly for the production. They will also ensure they are safety tested. The PLX will also be responsible for any haze, and in some productions they may also operate the lights during the performance.

**Qualities needed:** technical knowledge and lighting skills, a good level of physical fitness, time management and organisational skills, the ability to work as part of a team, attention to detail and an understanding of health and safety guidelines, comfortable with working at heights and in low level lighting conditions.



## Video/Projection Designer

As technology has developed, we are seeing more use of video and projection in theatre. The role of the video or projection designer is mainly to integrate elements of recorded image into a live performance on stage for theatre or live music events. They may design, film and edit footage to be layered over live action, or use already existing stock images and video to add another element to the set design. They will work closely with the set and lighting designers and the sound department to bring the vision to life.

**Qualities needed:** creative flare, excellent knowledge of video editing and projection mapping software, an understanding of lighting and sound, good storytelling ability, excellent programming skills and a strong analytical mindset.

## Lighting Operator/Technician

The lighting operator or technician will change the lighting states throughout a production. They may do this by using a computer aided software, such as QLab (Eos, GrandMA), and responding to the cues giving by the deputy stage manager. They will be responsible for setting the levels of the lights during a technical run and rehearsal before the show goes live.

**Qualities needed:** keen eye for detail, ability to remain focused for prolonged periods, great listening skills, fast reactions, ability to problem solve and think creatively.







## Sound Engineer/ Audio Engineer

Sound engineers will work closely with the sound designer to bring their creative ideas to life by installing the technology needed such as speaker systems, microphones and a PA system. The sound engineer or operator will cue the sound effects or soundtracks throughout the show. They will also mix the levels depending on what equipment is used. They will work very closely with the stage manager to receive cues and follow the action happening on the stage. Sound engineers will fit radio mics and test them with the actors, if needed, and will manage the levels and mix them throughout the show. If there is music within the show, they will possibly work very closely with the musical director to ensure the levels for all musicians and vocalists are set correctly.

**Qualities needed:** good attention to detail, work well under pressure, can take initiative when needed, excellent technical knowledge and work well within a team.

## Stage Manager (SM)

The stage manager is responsible for the overall smooth running of a performance. They will work very closely with the director and producer throughout the rehearsal period to organise rehearsal schedules, source any props and furniture needed for the rehearsals. In the lead up to the show they will coordinate costume fittings for the actors and liaise with the cast, crew and creative team to make the process as smooth as possible for all involved.

**Qualities needed:** exceptional organisational skills, works well under pressure, a problem solver, ability to multitask, has negotiation and excellent communication skills, be approachable and flexible, great person management skills as they can be responsible for the needs of dozens of people

## Deputy Stage Manager (DSM)

The deputy stage manager, also known as the DSM, is to support the stage manager and director in rehearsals and during the production. Throughout the rehearsals, the DSM will work with the cast and crew to note cues in the script, for lighting and sound and will then 'call' these cues during a live performance to make sure every person comes in at the correct time. It is a pivotal role in the day-to-day running of a show.

**Qualities needed:** exceptional organisational skills, great concentration, ability to multi-task, keep calm under pressure, good verbal communication, and for musicals and opera a great sense of rhythm is also required.

## Assistant Stage Manager (ASM)

The assistant stage manager, or ASM, is generally in charge of making sure the wings of the stage stay organised throughout the show. They are responsible for ensuring the props are in the right place throughout, so that the actors know where they can pick them up and will often also be in charge of sourcing props during rehearsals. They will often have 'technical' cues, such as helping shift scenery and props during scene changes on the stage. ASMs will also be trained to be able to cover the DSM if they are ill. It is the entry level stage management position, however a lot of ASMs will have worked as show crew before specialising in this role.

**Qualities needed:** great organisational skills, basic DIY skills for fixing props etc., ability to follow instructions closely, good memory, attentiveness and work well under pressure.







## Production Manager

The Production Manager is in charge of coordinating the 'production departments' of a show. This generally includes lighting, sound, wigs and wardrobe, set and props. They will be given a budget by the producer to work from and after costing all the designers' ideas will distribute that budget between departments and oversee all planning and costs. Generally, the highest portion of the budget goes towards the set and so that is the area that can take up most of the production manager's time. Because of this a good number of production managers have worked in the stage department before progressing on.

**Qualities needed:** exceptional management skills, good base knowledge of stage, lighting and sound, ability to balance a spreadsheet, great communication skills, knowledge of computer programmes such as AutoCAD and Excel, ability to distribute tasks, work calmly under pressure, good collaboration and mediation skills, health and safety knowledge is essential.

## Stage Crew

The stage crew will be hired specifically to work on a show (also known as a show-specific job) and will generally not be involved in rehearsals, but will be brought in and introduced during the 'tech' period. They will help the stage management team in moving any large pieces of set around on the stage to achieve scene changes and will also work up in the flies. They are mostly hired by the venue's master carpenter/head of stage and will report to them. It is a good entry level job for those wanting to get into backstage theatre.

**Qualities needed:** ability to follow instructions quickly and precisely, good physical health and strength, attention to detail and basic carpentry knowledge (e.g. how to use a drill or saw).

## Production Assistant

A production assistant deals and negotiates with the creative team, cast and crew, including drawing up all contracts and official paperwork, including child licenses if appropriate. They are the first point of contact for everyone working on a specific production. They help deal with any issues that may arise within the production period (particularly when it comes to planning) and provide support to all involved. The job can even expand outside the physical production and the assistants will work with other departments to push through marketing content, development events and any education work that may be involved with the show.

**Qualities needed:** organisational skills, approachable and friendly, excellent communicator, good knowledge of basic theatre contracts and pay schemes, basic maths skills and good negotiation skills.

## Carpenter

Theatres tend to have a 'stage department' which is not the same as stage management! The people within the department are often referred to as carpenters. They look after the set once it is built on the stage and will also work closely with the set builders to ensure it will fit in the venue and coordinate the 'get in' (actually installing the set in the theatre). The stage department is also in charge of the flies and will have to carefully calculate how to balance the system, so that it is easy to operate and nobody gets injured.

**Qualities needed:** high level woodworking skills, basic knowledge of working with various materials, maths skills, knowledge of how a fly system works, comfortable with working at height, good knowledge of health and safety guidelines.







## Useful links

### The Society Of London Theatre

For more information about working in London theatres  
<https://solt.co.uk/>

### Get Into Theatre

For routes into careers in theatre and training opportunities  
<https://getintotheatre.org/>

### Discover Creative Careers

Careers in other creative industries  
<https://discovercreative.careers/#/>

### UCAS Careers

Wider careers options in the creative industries and which courses can lead you to a chosen career  
<https://www.ucas.com/ucas/after-gcses/find-career-ideas/explore-jobs>

### Michael Grandage Futures

Learn more about support for those working in theatre and their careers  
<https://www.mgcfutures.com/careers/>