

Unit 89: Props Making

Unit code:	L/502/5664
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to develop learners' props making skills, techniques and processes. Learners will gain the necessary skills interpret plans and make props for a production.

● Unit introduction

A prop is identified as an object or article that is held or used by actors in performance; it could be anything from a small hand held prop such as a fob watch, or a large oversized abstract processional object such as a giant puppet. Some props are bought, others are made.

This unit will develop learners' understanding of the techniques, materials and approaches that a prop maker uses to realise a prop. The prop maker's job is varied, as each new production poses new and interesting challenges. The prop maker uses a range of creative and technical skills and draws on an informed understanding of suitable prop-making materials and construction methods to create each new prop. A successful prop maker must have productive problem solving skills and flexibility of approach. The professional prop maker develops a greater knowledge and understanding of materials and construction methods and techniques with each prop made.

Learners will develop effective research skills to inform the creation of the prop. The prop maker will know how to research and resource materials and have a working knowledge of the construction and decoration skills needed to create the prop. On some occasions the prop maker will be required to realise the designer's intentions accurately, working from scale plans, notes and sketches; for other productions the prop maker will be given greater creative freedom and asked to design and make the prop with very little design guidance. On completion of this unit learners will have developed the skills and approaches to be able to create a suitable prop for performance.

Health and safety is integral to the prop making process and the use of the prop in performance; health and safety is therefore integral to this unit.

This unit provides links with a range of other units for learners following both performance and technical pathways and has direct links with *Production Arts Planning*, *Period Props*, *Design for Performance*, *Scenic Construction for the Stage*, *Design Drawing Development* and *Design Materials and Process*.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to use research to inform the design and creation of a prop
- 2 Be able to use prop construction methods and materials
- 3 Be able to interpret design plans when constructing a prop
- 4 Be able to create a prop for performance.

Unit content

1 Be able to use research to inform the design and creation of a prop

Research: context; themes; settings; historical periods; materials to create prop; suppliers; demands of prop in performance

Research sources: eg photographs, museums, antique shops, auctions, journals, newspapers, existing art work, films, video, internet

Research materials: discover suppliers for prop construction and decoration materials

Performance demands: length of run; use of prop; proximity of prop to audience; use of prop in performance

2 Be able to use prop construction methods and materials

Tools: hand held tools; power tools; glue gun

Special techniques: eg ageing, texture, distressing, simulating different finishes

Carving/modelling: eg wood, polystyrene, foam rubber, plastic wood, cardboard, papier maché, cloth maché, wire, Art Roc

Mould preparation: eg plaster, plaster filler, latex, styrene, compound expandable foam

Lamination: paste and paper, plaster, muslin, fibreglass

Frame mechanisms and fixings: eg wood, dowelling, wire mesh, wire, metal, rope, paper rope, cord, string, thread, nylon line, pulleys, springs, knobs, elastic, levers, hooks, loops,

Glues: eg PVA, wood glue, copydex™, epoxy resin, solvents

Paints: eg water based emulsion, poster paints, acrylics, saturated paints eg Rosco, solvent based paints

Painting methods: various types of brushes; spray gun (air, manual); sponge; fag; flick; splatter

Health and safety: use of hand held tools and equipment; materials; finishes

Health and safety for the actor: avoidance of allergic reactions; ease of use; awareness of potential fire hazards of construction materials; Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH)

Purchasing considerations: estimate; costing; record keeping; budget constraints

3 Be able to interpret design plans when constructing a prop

Use design plans: understand scale construction plans and elevations; painting guidance sheets; painting references

Source appropriate materials: use appropriate materials; work within budget; identify and solve mechanical requirements; power requirements

Construction tools: hand held tools; power tools; glue gun

Decoration materials: paint effects; texturing effects; aging

Health and safety: construction methods; the use of the prop in performance

4 Be able to create a prop for performance

Research to inform design: research; identify the requirements of the prop for performance; problem solving; create plans; plan the production process; identify and solve potential problems

Source appropriate materials: selection of appropriate materials; work within budget; mechanical requirements; power requirements; problem solve

Construction tools: hand held tools; power tools; glue gun

Health and safety: construction methods; COSHH; construction materials; applying decorative finishes; safe use in performance; prop storage off stage

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 use research to inform the design and creation of a prop [IE]	M1 use detailed research to inform the design and creation of a prop	D1 use detailed and careful research to successfully inform the design and creation of a prop
P2 use prop construction methods and materials [IE]	M2 use prop construction methods and materials competently	D2 use prop construction methods and materials confidently and effectively
P3 interpret design plans when constructing a prop [CT]	M3 carefully interpret design plans when constructing a prop	D3 accurately interpret all details of design plans when constructing a prop
P4 create a prop for performance. [CT EP]	M4 create a prop that is suitable for use in performance.	D4 create a prop that is wholly appropriate for use in performance.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

Work for this unit will develop learners' understanding of creative approaches to prop design and construction. Learners will use research findings to inform the design and planning of props, taking the given budget, performance requirements and length of run into consideration. Learners will be introduced to a range of prop-making techniques. They will develop and apply prop-designing and planning techniques. They will also apply skills and techniques to design, plan and realise a prop for a performance. The performance can be an actual or theoretical performance. Health and safety is a vital consideration for the prop maker and for the actor using the prop. Learners will be introduced to the health and safety considerations for the period prop maker and the performer. Learners will then be expected to apply effective health and safety considerations throughout the unit.

For learning outcome 1 learners will be introduced to research approaches that a prop designer or maker will use. The first workshops in this unit will introduce learners to primary and secondary research approaches. At this point it would be valuable to have examples of a range of props in performance to inspire and inform learners. Evidence for this criterion may be demonstrated in research portfolios. Learners will reflect on the research process. Tutor observation of learners' research activities and findings will also provide suitable evidence for assessment.

For learning outcome 2 learners should be introduced to some accepted prop-making materials, tools, techniques and construction processes. Learners will take part in workshops to explore and develop their understanding of prop making materials and process. This unit will be taught through practical exercises in which learners apply prop-making techniques in trial models. Health and safety will be reinforced through all of the practical work. Learners will be encouraged to keep a note book in which they describe, explain and evaluate process used.

For learning outcome 3 learners will be introduced to prop design communication methods, this will include prop plans, scale plans, sketches, resource suppliers, research information, colour and painting guidance sheets. Learners will be able to produce and use examples of these information formats. Learners will produce prop design scale plans, sketches, resource suppliers list, painting guidance sheet, and health and safety guidance. Learners will evaluate the design plans etc of their peers and offer feedback.

For learning outcome 4 learners will demonstrate prop-making skills in the creation of a prop. Learners will work from design plans to create and realise a prop for performance. Learners will select and apply appropriate prop making materials, skills and techniques. They will keep an account of the process in a process log Peer evaluation of the appropriateness of the final prop will inform the assessment.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
<p>Introduction to the unit and the structure of the programme, lecturer lead whole class. Assignment introduction.</p> <p>Assignment 1: The Groundwork – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2</p> <p>Learners are introduced to the use of props:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• introduce the use of the prop in performance• the definition of a prop• the requirements of different props. <p>Learners develop research skills that the prop maker will need to be able to research the making, history and context etc of a prop:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• learners are given different types of prop then their research skills are developed as they explore that prop in greater detail working to discover the information that the pop maker will need.
<p>Assignment 2: In Detail – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P4, M4, D4</p> <p>Learners are taught and demonstrate measuring, prop making skills, this is taught through practical workshops in which through demonstration and tutor lead prop creation learners are taught a range of useful and relevant prop making and designing skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• construction methods• construction materials• measuring and scaling from a construction drawing• creating a prop construction drawing• planning the process• health and safety• painting from a painting guidance sheet.
<p>Assignment 3: Propping It Up – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4</p> <p>This is a largely practical activity where learners should be given time and resources to realise a prop that meets the design requirements. Learners are presented with plans and guidance sheets that they must work to interpret:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• learners are taught how to interpret and read a design plan• learners apply the skills that they have learnt in the previous assignment to create a prop that realises the design intentions.
<p>Assignment 4: Transformation – P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4</p> <p>This practical task echoes the activities of the previous assignment but for this task learners have a greater freedom and are required to design the prop using their understanding of materials and methods that they have used.</p> <p>Learners will be given a prop that is different from the one that they created for assignment 3. They will be expected to create plans and to use their knowledge of materials processes and techniques to problem solve and create a suitable prop.</p> <p>Through the use of a note book and practical demonstration learners will demonstrate an understanding and application of correct health and safety practices.</p>

Assessment

Assessment decisions will be informed by learners' ability to demonstrate their understanding and management of the prop design and making process. Learners will be expected to produce evidence of their understanding and application of all stages of the prop design and making process. Evidence can be provided in research portfolios that detail their understanding of prop making skills and materials. Learners will also be required to evidence their experience of all practical workshops and the final prop making process; evidence for this may include notes, scale plans, sketches, diagrams, models, photographs peer and self evaluations and the final completed prop. The importance of health and safety is implicit and must be demonstrated throughout this unit; therefore description of and reflection on health and safety should feature in all work produced for assessment. Good health and safety practice can also be recorded to support assessment sessions by peer observation or witness statements.

To achieve assessment criterion 1 learners will demonstrate productive and focused research skills that explores the prop and its use in performance. Learners will make personal comment on the success of their exploration of the research process and be able to utilise the research findings successfully. Learner accounts will also evidence learners' understanding of the considerations of the use of props in performance. Evidenced for assessment could include a workbook, a journal, a handout, through a viva or a presentation. Tutor observation of learners' research approaches will also inform assessment. Peer observation of the presentation will also inform the assessment.

To achieve assessment criterion 2 learners will demonstrate an understanding of prop making materials and construction processes. Evidence for assessment may comprise an account that demonstrates an understanding of the properties of different prop making materials and describes prop making processes. Learners' accounts may include notes sketches and diagrams and will show some evaluation of their experience of the practical skills learnt in the workshops. Learner reflection will include an understanding of health and safety considerations for the use of different prop making materials and process.

To achieve assessment criterion 3, learners will demonstrate an understanding and command of prop design plans. Learners will demonstrate that they can understand and read plans. Learners will demonstrate that they can produce suitable design planning materials this may be evidenced in scale plans, models, painting guidance sheets and notes. Tutor and Peer observation may be used to reflect on learners' design planning materials. Learner reflection will demonstrate learner understanding of the purpose and use design plans; learner reflection will also demonstrate self evaluation of the skills and techniques that they have used and applied.

To achieve learning outcome 4, learners will evidence their understanding and application of the prop making materials and techniques to create a prop for a production. Learners will demonstrate their ability to analyse the prop requirements and to interpret research findings and design plans. It is important that learners make personal comment on the success of the process this could be evidenced through a workbook or a journal. The primary evidence for assessment will be learners' creation of the final prop and its suitability for performance. Learners' response to the exploration and the use of prop making materials can also be recorded through lecturer's witness statement and peer observation of the practical work. Learners understanding could also be evidenced through structured questioning in the *viva voce*. Learners' application of health and safety could be evidenced through lecturer monitoring, formative interim assessments, observations and learner reflection.

To achieve P1 learners will show that they can plan and follow a simple research programme into the use of props in performance. The research will discover some information that has some relevance to the targeted productions and the prop. Learners will use a limited range of research sources. The research will identify the main style and simple characteristics of the some props and will make some limited observations about how the use of the prop in performance will affect the design and creation of the prop. Pass learners will be able to use the information, describe the research process and be able to utilise some of the research findings.

To achieve M1 learners will show that they can plan and follow a research programme into the use of props in performance. The research will discover some detailed and focused information that has relevance to the targeted productions and the prop. Learners will use a range of research sources. The research will identify in some detail the main style and characteristics of the some props and will make some considered observations about how the use of the prop in performance will affect the design and creation of the prop. Learners will be able to describe the research process confidently and be able to utilise the research findings productively. Learners' work will be in written notes, sketches and photographs that have some accurate detailed information. Annotations on the images will be considered and mostly accurate.

To achieve D1 learners will show that they can plan and follow a focused research programme into the use of props in performance. The research will discover detailed information that is fully analysed, considered and produces wholly relevant information. Learners will use a range of research sources with confidence and imagination. The research will identify in detail the style and characteristics of the some props and will make some well informed and knowledgeable observations about how the use of the prop in performance will affect the design and creation of the prop. Learners will be able to fully describe the research process and be able to utilise the research findings in the intelligently and productively. Learners will communicate their fully detailed and wholly considered understanding in written notes, sketches and photographs. Annotations on the images will be wholly informed and accurate.

To achieve P2 learners will be able to demonstrate a limited understanding of the properties of different prop making materials and to describe prop making processes in outline detail. The pass learner will demonstrate some command of practical prop making skills. Evidence will include simple notes sketches and diagrams with simple annotations that describe the practical skills learnt in the workshops. Learner practical work and reflection will show that they understand health and safety considerations for the use of different prop making materials and process.

To achieve M2 learners will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the properties of different prop making materials and to describe prop making processes in some detail. The merit learner will demonstrate a capable command of practical prop making skills. Learners will explain their understanding in notes, diagrams and sketches that will be detailed in places they will include some relevant images and photographs with some considered and mostly accurate annotations. Learner practical work and reflection will show that they have a detailed understanding of health and safety considerations for the use of different prop making materials and processes.

To achieve D2 learners will be able to demonstrate a fully detailed understanding of the properties of different prop making materials and to describe prop making processes in focused detail. The distinction learner will demonstrate a skilful command of practical prop making skills. Learners will be able to critically analyse their understanding in accurate and detailed written notes, sketches and photographs. Annotations on the images will be full, informed and wholly accurate. Learner practical work and reflection will show that they have a fully detailed understanding of health and safety considerations for the use of different prop making materials and process.

To achieve P3 learners will be able to demonstrate that they can produce and use prop design plans. Learners will be able to understand and read plans with some tutor guidance. Learners will demonstrate that they are able to communicate prop design intentions in simple scale plans, models, painting guidance sheets and notes. In their practical work learners will demonstrate that they have a basic understanding about how to interpret and gather information from prop planning paperwork. Learner reflection will demonstrate an understanding of the purpose and use design plans; learner reflection will also demonstrate some appropriate understanding of the skills and techniques that they have used and applied.

To achieve M3 learners will be able to demonstrate that they can produce and use prop design plans effectively. Learners will be able to understand and read plans with minimal tutor guidance; the merit learner will be able to gather some relevant and accurate information from the prop making plans. Learners will demonstrate that they are able to communicate prop design intentions in scale plans, models, painting guidance sheets and notes that are mostly accurate and detailed in places. In their practical work learners will demonstrate that they have a working understanding of how to interpret and gather information from prop planning paperwork. Learner reflection will demonstrate a detailed understanding of the purpose and use design plans; learner reflection will also demonstrate some considered understanding of the skills and techniques that they have used and applied.

To achieve D3 learners will be able to demonstrate that they can produce and use prop design plans with complete success. Learners will be able to understand and read plans with autonomously; the distinction learner will be able to gather wholly relevant accurate and insightful information from the prop making plans. Learners will demonstrate that they are able to communicate prop design intentions in scale plans, models, painting guidance sheets and notes that are wholly accurate and fully detailed. In their practical work learners will demonstrate that they have a wholly informed understanding of how to interpret and gather information from prop planning paperwork. Learner reflection will demonstrate a fully detailed and creative understanding of the purpose and use design plans; learner reflection will also demonstrate some fully considered understanding of the skills and techniques that they have used and applied.

To achieve P4 learners must be able to show that they can choose and use prop making materials, processes and techniques to create a prop. Learners will be able to construct a prop that will be useable in a production. The final prop will communicate the basics of the designer's intentions and will show a basic understanding of health and safety considerations for the prop maker and for the actor using the prop. The Pass learner will keep a brief record of their experience of the process, this may include, research, plans, notes, diagrams and photographs.

To achieve M4 learners will be able to use selected materials, processes and techniques with some confidence and some level of skill to create a convincing prop that is mostly accurate and can be used in performance without further alteration. The final prop will communicate the important details of the designer's intentions and will demonstrate an informed understanding of health and safety considerations for the prop maker and for the actor using the prop. The Merit learner will keep a record of their experience of the process, this will be detailed in places and may include, relevant research, considered plans, notes, diagrams and photographs.

To achieve D4 learners will be able to use prop making materials, processes and techniques demonstrating skilful and controlled selection and application. The final prop will be wholly convincing and will communicate the full detail of the designer's intentions and will demonstrate a fully informed understanding of the health and safety considerations for the period prop maker and the actor. Evaluations will be fully considered, detailing their experience of the period prop making materials and processes, learner reflection will show a fully justified understanding of how the skills that they have learnt have been applied.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2	The Groundwork	Learners are introduced to the importance of effective research approaches. Learners will work in groups; each group will research and decide the prop demands of a different play. Learners will produce a portfolio which details research and prop suggestions for the play. Learners will present their findings to the rest of the group, they will also produce a handout that details and explains the prop design ideas.	Tutor observation of the research process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the research portfolio the handout the presentation the prop design ideas.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P4, M4, D4	In Detail	This assignment follows on from assignment 1. Learners will select one prop from those detailed in the handout from the previous assignment. Learners will research the prop in detail to discover the information that the prop maker will need to begin to design and plan the prop. Learners will consider the health and safety considerations for the use of the selected props.	Research information and learner and justification. Research. Prop information materials. Health and safety.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4	Propping It Up	<p>This is a wholly practical tutor lead assignment, learners will be introduced to prop making materials and processes, learners will keep an account of their experiences to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • construction methods • construction materials • health and safety. <p>Learners will also be introduced to the prop design and planning materials this will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevant research • scale plans • painting guidance sheets. 	<p>Tutor observation of learner engagement in the assignment.</p> <p>Learners account of the process.</p> <p>Health and safety for the prop maker.</p>
P3, M3, D3 P4, M4, D4	Transformation	<p>Learners will demonstrate the application of the skills learnt in the previous assignments. Learners will design, plan and use materials, skills and techniques to complete a prop for a performance. Learners will demonstrate an understanding of health and safety for the prop in their practical work and their reflective account.</p>	<p>On going interim formative assessment of the prop making process.</p> <p>Peer assessment from the other members of the production team. Summative assessment of the completed prop. Learner reflection on the process and the application of health and safety practices.</p>

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Exploring Design Skills for the Performing Arts	Performing Arts Production Process	Production Arts Planning
	Design for Performance	Scenic Painting
	Crewing for Stage Performance	Scenic Construction for the Stage
	Set Construction	Design Method
		Stage Design for Performance
		Period Props

This unit also has links with the following National Occupational Standards:

Technical Theatre

- CPD1 – Improving your skills
- CPD2a – TP Keeping up to date with technical and production developments in the live arts
- CPD4a – Contributing to technical production work for performance
- HSI – Working safely
- TP2.5a – Contribute to the interpretation of designs for sets or props
- TP2.5c – Ensure accurate interpretation of designs for sets or props
- TP2.5b – Interpreting designs for sets or props
- TP3.4b – Planning props requirements for a production
- TP7.2a – Making and finishing props.

Essential resources

The teaching space will need a dry design space in which learners can develop and plan their prop designs. Learners will also require a workshop space that contains prop construction materials, tools and materials. Learners will benefit from access to a computer and a library to research period details, materials and decorative finishes. The workshop will be suitably equipped in line with health and safety legislation.

Access to reference texts related to techniques and resource images would also be a valuable resource.

Access to examples of good practice that show a range of techniques and materials whether in 2D or 3D would be a valuable resource.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Watching and evaluating performances can inform and support learner research work. This can be achieved through theatre visits or through inviting a touring theatre company to your centre. Centres should work to develop links with any local theatre companies or receiving houses. Some practitioners may be able to come and run prop making workshops.

If possible it would be valuable to arrange a site visit to a Prop house to introduce learners to the range of possibilities. Visiting a TV studio or a backstage tour with a visit to the prop department would also give learners an opportunity to see the professional standard that is achieved by prop makers.

Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the audio-visual industries has a section of their website dedicated to careers, www.skillset.org/careers.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Davies G – *Stage Source Book: Props* (A & C Black, 2004) ISBN 9780713665840

Govier J – *Create Your Own Stage Props* (A & C Black, 1989) ISBN 9780713630374

Hoggett C – *Stage Crafts, Second Edition* (A & C Black, 2000) ISBN 9780713654776

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	using research sources to identify the demands of the prop in performance demonstrate an understanding of prop construction materials and process
Creative thinkers	use materials and techniques to make a prop
Reflective learners	reflecting on the use and development of the prop making materials and processes
Team workers	working as a member of the production team to create a prop
Self-managers	describe and apply health and safety considerations for the period prop maker
Effective participators	working as a member of the production team to create a prop.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Manage information storage to enable efficient retrieval	creating a database of prop hire companies
English	
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	exploring the prop requirements of a play.