

Unit 25: The Practice of Directing for Theatre

Unit code:	J/502/5100
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to prepare for and to conduct rehearsals as a theatre director and allow them the opportunity to apply their directorial skills, processes and techniques.

● Unit introduction

Working as a director is one of the most exciting and responsible roles in the theatre. There is still no 'standard' route into the job. Although there is an increasing range of degree courses dedicated to, or including the skill of, directing, many directors start their careers as actors and develop their interest later on. All actors benefit from an insight into the processes necessary for successful directing and the perspective of a director working with a production team.

This unit will cover what a director actually has to do to ensure that a show arrives successfully on a stage at the agreed time. It deals with the processes involved from the selection and evaluation of a performance text, through the planning and preparation stages (liaising with key members of the production team) to the working with actors – from the casting period, through early rehearsals, to the final technical and dress rehearsal phase, leading to the first night and the run. Work will also explore the practical limitations, or opportunities, of venue, timescale, cast size and budgeting.

Teaching and learning will be mainly grounded in practical activities, placed in a realistic context, working on texts with actors and members of a production team. Through these largely practical activities, learners should become aware of the responsibilities that fall to a director, as well as the sequence of activities necessary to fulfil them.

Assessment will be based on the ability to handle all the processes involved. While much of the evidence can be produced in practical contexts, learners will also be assessed on their production of the necessary paperwork associated with the practice of directing.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to prepare a script for production
- 2 Be able to plan the necessary processes for a production
- 3 Be able to conduct a rehearsal process.

Unit content

1 Be able to prepare a script for production

Prepare a script: selection of an appropriate script; assessing production requirements eg human, financial, technical, setting; assessing production problems and opportunities; dramatic construction eg exposition, climax, anticlimax; character; plot; background research

2 Be able to plan the necessary processes for a production

Production processes: selecting a stage form; producing a design brief; meetings with designers eg set, costume, lighting, sound, props; production conferences; placing of furniture, exits etc; auditions; casting; cutting/adapting the script; constructing a rehearsal schedule; dividing the text into rehearsal sections

3 Be able to conduct a rehearsal process

Rehearsal process: handling a first rehearsal; first reading; team building; warm-ups; text-based and non-text-based activities; games; use of improvisation; character and relationship development; blocking; handling of pace and dramatic shape; developing style; giving notes; briefing designers and technicians; handling technical rehearsals and dress rehearsals; first nights

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 prepare a script for production competently with some support and guidance [IE, CT]	M1 prepare a script for production effectively and confidently with minimum support and guidance	D1 meticulously prepare a script for production, demonstrating insight, well-developed ideas and independence
P2 plan the necessary processes for a production competently [SM]	M2 plan the necessary processes for a production effectively	D2 plan the necessary processes for a production demonstrating clarity, purpose and insight
P3 conduct a rehearsal process with the production team competently. [TW]	M3 conduct a productive rehearsal process with all members of the production team effectively and confidently.	D3 conduct a supportive and creative rehearsal process with all members of the production team.

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 CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

It is likely that most learners will have had some experience of being directed and possibly some experience of self-directing or directing others. It is probable that they will have views about what directing entails. It will be useful to use this knowledge as a starting point, perhaps comparing it with a summary of the view of a professional director (Stephen Unwin, in the introduction to his book *So You Want to Be a Theatre Director?* provides a very useful short, but comprehensive, overview).

Subsequent sessions may usefully involve learners in the process of assessing scripts for production purposes. One-act plays provide manageable exercises as they can often be read and analysed in a single working session. Learners need to assess the casting requirements, the nature of the set indicated in the text, potential problems in the staging and the likely extent of the technical requirements. They will need to learn how to pay particular attention to the stage directions, as they attempt to visualise the production on stage. The implications of different choices of staging, for example single-view, in-the-round, thrust, traverse, may be related to particular texts. Their advantages and disadvantages should be considered both in relation to practical issues such as entrances, set and furniture positions, and to the actor – audience relationship. Later sessions may focus on the dramatic structure of the text, dealing, for example, with the way in which the playwright establishes key information through exposition and exploits it in constructing dramatic climaxes.

As part of the process of preparing a script for production, learners will need to be instructed in the processes in which a director is involved in the pre-rehearsal stages. If, as is likely, it is impractical in the early stages to be involved in 'real' situations, it may be possible to arrange 'mock' production conferences, with learners simulating the necessary roles, including that of director. Learners will need to know how to create a design brief as the basis for discussions with the design team and will benefit from access to real examples. Here, as in other sections of the unit, contact with working directors (and designers) will provide real-life examples of how the processes operate in a professional context. Learners will need to understand the nature of the key roles in the production team, for example production manager, stage manager, designers (set, costume, lights, sound, props), musical director, choreographer and how these roles can vary according to the size of the company and the scale and nature of the production. Simulated exercises may also be very useful in helping learners to understand the constraints presented by personnel, physical, technical and financial considerations. Similarly, mock audition and casting sessions, for which learners have prepared, will be valuable in training them in the processes and protocols involved. Learners will also benefit from exercises in constructing a rehearsal schedule, concentrating on the intentions of each rehearsal session and what may actually be achievable. They will also need to understand the implications for actors (and for the style and pace of the production) of the placing of furniture and props on stage. They will need to be shown ways of annotating a script so that it becomes a useful tool in the rehearsal room. The model of a stage manager's prompt-book may be a good starting-point.

Learners will find it helpful whenever possible to observe actual rehearsal sessions, discussing these subsequently, ideally with the director, possibly with the cast, but also amongst themselves. They will need to become aware of the range of the director's responsibilities. These will include team building and maintenance, creating and implementing warm-up activities and developing rehearsal activities that are both text-based and non-text-based. Improvisation, character exploration, exploring the text, blocking and giving feedback may be explored in working sessions on selected texts, providing learners with an armoury of techniques before they take on sole directorial responsibility for a particular short text. Learners will also need to be shown how to prepare for and conduct an efficient technical rehearsal. They will need to understand what their role is in this rehearsal, and the dress rehearsal, giving appropriate feedback. It is likely that for most learners productions will be on a small scale, but the processes involved will be similar and replicate those of larger-scale productions. Productions should have a minimum cast of two.

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
Introduction to the unit's content, structure and assignments. Initial discussion of role of director and own experiences of being directed.
Discussing and analysing the dramatic qualities of a short play eg action, conflict, resolution, climax, exposition with associated practical activities.
Exploring a range of rehearsal activities, directed at supporting actors and making the text clear eg warm-ups, ice-breakers, improvisation, character exercises.
Working in groups (rotating the role of director) on a selection of scenes/short plays. Conducting associated research. Group discussion of discoveries and reflections so far.
Theoretical and practical work on stage-forms – their advantages and disadvantages eg end-on, proscenium arch, thrust, in-the-round, traverse, promenade. Consideration of set, the size of the acting area, the placing of furniture and entrances/exits and their potential for a director. The roles of director, designer and stage manager working together in the production team.
Assignment 1: Preparation of a Short Script for Production – P1, M1, D1 This should include research and a director's approach to the text. Present the information: <ul style="list-style-type: none">orally to the groupin written form, using appropriate documents (stage plans etc).
Feedback session.
Exploration of working with actors and 'putting the text on its feet'. Practical exploration of audition techniques, approaches to blocking and other elements of stagecraft in a range of stage-forms.
Assignment 2: Practical Directing Exercise – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3 In small groups, with the role of director rotating, each learner will direct a scene or one-act play, creating a director's folder of research, preparation and rehearsal plans. Some of this time, therefore, will be spent in individual research of a specific text and its production requirements, as well as in individual preparation of a production script and the planning of rehearsal activities. Work will be assessed by observation in rehearsals and of the final product and by the quality of the work submitted in the folder.
Feedback session.

Assessment

The evidence for this unit will be provided by both paper-based and practical activities, some of which may generate video/DVD evidence. To fulfil Criterion 1, learners will demonstrate that they are able to prepare a script for production, giving informed reasons for their choices as director. These choices will involve both interpretation and practical planning. Evidence will be collected in a file which will include research notes, notes on the text, for example eg character, relationship, plot, construction, production requirements, for example stage form, set, technical and personal views and reactions to the text(s) under consideration. Sketches, diagrams, floor-plans and other visual materials may also provide evidence of preparation.

For P1, learners will be able to demonstrate that they have a working understanding of the important elements of the play; they will have grasped the differences between the characters, the key points of the plot and the dramatic climaxes. They will be able to present some evidence of basic research which has had an effect on their thinking about the production. They will have some ideas about how they will be able to make the play effective on stage, although these may not be entirely consistent or thought-through. They will have given thought to the script's set requirements, without necessarily having identified all the problems definitively. They are likely to require some support in fulfilling these requirements.

For M1, learners will demonstrate a confident grasp of the essential elements of the play and an awareness of how the play's structure will affect their approach to direction. Their research will clearly have informed some directorial choices. They will have a range of ideas about how to make the play effective on stage and will have identified and considered all the essential set requirements and given thought to possible solutions. They will be able to work independently, but may require occasional support in fulfilling these requirements.

For D1, learners will demonstrate an easy familiarity with all the essential elements of the play and be able to identify clearly how these have been taken into account in their approach to direction. There will be strong links, which they will be able to articulate clearly, between their research and the directorial plans and choices they have made. They will have settled on consistent and clear ideas about how they will make the play effective on stage and will have given detailed thought to all the play's set requirements, proposing equally detailed solutions. They will be able to work almost entirely independently.

Criterion 2 requires learners to capitalise on their previous learning by planning an actual production which they will take into rehearsal with a cast. As well as preparing a script not previously worked on, they will need to undertake the planning of a sequence of rehearsals, detailing the associated rehearsal activities. The director's file will contain evidence of the planning of the production. The file should contain evidence of a design brief, as well as evidence of understanding of the technical requirements of the script. Notes or minutes from any relevant production meetings will also be helpful. Character notes relating to the audition process (whether or not this is actually undertaken), together with plans for the audition itself and a detailed rehearsal schedule, will be essential. Ground plans of the set(s), providing the positions of important features such as entrances/exits, furniture and props, will also provide evidence of appropriate preparation.

For P2, learners will produce workable plans for a production, including a range of rehearsal activities. These may not be progressive or well structured, but will demonstrate some sense of purposeful activity. The script will be broken into manageable rehearsal sections, although these may not have a fully considered rationale. Some consideration will have been given to the effective use of the overall rehearsal time available.

For M2, learners will produce considered and thoughtful plans for a production and will have given thought to an appropriate range of activities. They will be able to demonstrate how overall planning has produced a sequence of rehearsals which will enable the cast and the production to progress and develop. Rehearsal sections will be sensibly chosen with a clear rationale. The use of rehearsal time will have been given clear and careful consideration.

For D2, learners will produce highly organised and carefully considered production plans. A wide range of rehearsal strategies will have a clear rationale and a purposeful and structured approach will be in evidence. Rehearsal sections will be identified with insight and the use of rehearsal time will be carefully thought out to achieve maximum results.

For criterion 3, evidence for the rehearsal process will be provided by practical activities and documentation in the director's file, such as an annotated script and rehearsal preparation notes, including both technical and dress rehearsals. A director's log containing notes made in rehearsals, evaluating their success, recording further discussions with designers, stage managers and technicians may be included. Tutor and peer observations will also be useful, as will video/DVD or photographic evidence of the rehearsal process and the production itself. Additional evidence will be provided by an evaluation of the process and the product.

For P3, learners will demonstrate some ability to handle a cast positively, enabling them to develop through the rehearsal process with a variety of activities. They will provide some evidence that their understanding of the script is being translated into effective activity on stage, in terms of both the acting and the visual effect. They may have difficulty in establishing a reasonable directorial authority and be either too flexible or too inflexible. Cast commitment to the production may appear patchy.

For M3, learners will display some confidence in handling a cast in rehearsal, reacting to the situation and showing flexibility where necessary. Time will generally be used purposefully and there will be a sense of progression. There will be clear evidence that the production planning is being put into effect through the rehearsal process and that progress is being monitored and adjustments made. The rehearsal room will have a positive atmosphere, with a sense of shared purpose.

For D3, learners will display an easy authority, capable of accommodating alternative points of view without compromising. Time will be used fully and positively and activities pursued with insight. It will be evident that the production planning is being put into operation constructively and it will be clear that progress is being made and monitored consistently. There will be a creative atmosphere in the rehearsal room, with a strong sense of joint commitment to the production.

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	Preparation of a Short Script for Production	Following research and preparation for directing a short text, learners will give a presentation to their peers and submit a folder of their work.	Oral presentation. Written documentation.
P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3	Practical Directing Exercise	Adopt the role of director with a group of their peers, rehearsing them for a performance of a text which they have themselves prepared for production.	Observation of rehearsals (these may be recorded on video/DVD). Written documentation.

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 Acting Skills	Acting Skills and Techniques	Principles of Acting
		Applying Acting Styles
		Approaches to Directing Theatre

Essential resources

Learners will need access to adequate rehearsal spaces and to a reasonably well-equipped performance area in which lighting, sound and set elements are available. This will necessitate some technical support. A range of properties and basic costumes will also be necessary. Learners will also need access to a group of actors and a range of scripts from which they may choose extracts or short plays to direct. Access to video/DVD recording equipment is desirable, but not essential.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

An understanding of the structure of the performing arts industry and the place of the director (usually a freelance) within it will help learners to place their work in a vocational context. There may be opportunities for learners to hear talks by practising directors, especially in relation to productions which they have the opportunity to see themselves. Opportunities to observe professional directors at work are rare, except in the context of workshops, but learners may have opportunities to observe directors at work in other contexts, for example within the centre.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Ayckbourn A – *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (Faber, 2002) ISBN 9780571215096

Bloom M – *Thinking Like a Director* (Faber and Faber, 2002) ISBN 9780571214563

Hauser F and Reich R – *Notes on Directing* (Walker and Company, 2008) ISBN 9780802717085

Mitchell K – *The Director's Craft: A Handbook for the Theatre* (Taylor & Francis, 2008)
ISBN 9780415404396

Mitter S and Shevtsova M (editor) – *Fifty Key Theatre Directors* (Routledge, 2005) ISBN 9780415187329

Stafford-Clark M – *Letters to George* (Nick Hern Books, 1997) ISBN 9781854593177

Unwin S – *So You Want to Be a Theatre Director?* (Nick Hern Books, 2004) ISBN 9781854597793

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	preparing scripts for production and conducting their own research
Creative thinkers	preparing scripts for production, planning settings, rehearsal activities etc
Team workers	working with a production team (actors, designers, technicians) to agreed ends
Self-managers	organising rehearsal plans and resources; planning use of rehearsal time.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	engaging in research related to productions, production history and theatrical equipment/sets
Creative thinkers	engaging in discussing and solving potential production problems, posed by hypothetical or actual situations
Reflective learners	considering their own practice and achievement when directing, or reflecting on the practice and achievement of others whom they have observed directing
Team workers	acting in roles under the direction of others
Self-managers	sourcing and providing props etc for productions
Effective participators	working towards and in performances.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Find and select information	
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	researching a production, including performance history of the text/playwright concerned
Mathematics	
Identify the situation or problem and the mathematical methods needed to tackle it	calculating quantities which may be required for sets or costumes (eg paint, wood, cloth)
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	discussing texts, production features etc presenting views/intentions and text preparation for a potential production.