

Unit 59: Assistant Stage Management (ASM)

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| Unit code: | Y/502/5604 |
| QCF Level 3: | BTEC National |
| Credit value: | 10 |
| Guided learning hours: | 60 |

● Aim and purpose

This unit aims to develop learners' knowledge of the role and responsibilities of the ASM in the theatre and events industry, and provide opportunities to work as an ASM in a production team during a performance or event.

● Unit introduction

Assistant Stage Managers are the junior members of the stage management team. They support the Stage Manager (SM) and Deputy Stage Manager (DSM) throughout the production process. They could be setting up rehearsal spaces, finding or making props and furniture, dressing the set and re-setting the stage after each performance; in fact almost anything that ensures the smooth running of a performance. Very often they will be multi-skilled, taking on the roles of joiners, prop-makers, painters or walk-on actors. They will deputise for the DSM, occasionally being 'on-the-book'.

The ASM role is not always the most glamorous of jobs but ASMs gain important experience from having to cover a multitude of jobs, but and roles. Although constantly under pressure from everyone else in the production and performance team, the role gives an essential grounding in technical knowledge and understanding.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know the role and the skills needed to function as an assistant stage manager
- 2 Be able to work as an ASM within a production team
- 3 Be able to operate in an ASM role during a performance or event
- 4 Be able to observe safe working practices.

Unit content

1 Know the role and the skills needed to function as an assistant stage manager

General: role and function of the ASM in a range of organisations and contexts

Skills: marking out; use of basic tools and materials; simple construction methods for props/scenery; simple painting methods for props/scenery; running and handling different types of scenery; flats, rostra; identification of different types of stage equipment eg stage weight, brace, legs; operating stage equipment eg hoist, curtain track, smoke machine; basic tools eg saw, hammer, screwdriver, pliers, spanners; construction methods eg lap joints, halving joints, screwing, gluing, use of connecting plates, simple fasteners

2 Be able to work as an ASM within a production team

Teamwork: working as part of a team; listening and responding to others/supervision/instructions; flexibility; communication; give and take

Pre-production: interpretation of plans, diagrams and/or instructions; properties and scenic requirements of the show; constructing/acquiring/painting props and scenery; identification of own role within the production team; use and application of skills identified above

Production: get-in; fit-up; tech run; cut to cue rehearsal; dress rehearsal; recording and responding to instructions; organising scenery/props in running order; strike/get-out

Pre-show: setting up pre-set scenery/props; checking scenery/props; carrying out minor repairs

3 Be able to operate in an ASM role during a performance or event

Operations: operate as part of backstage crew/flying crew/follow-spot operator and/or special effects operator eg interpret cue sheets, work from cue lights, use of talk-back, verbal cues, visual cues, follow-on cues; working under pressure; creative problem solving; flexible working; adapting roles; being a 'gopher'

4 Be able to observe safe working practices

Safe procedures: for handling and lifting heavy/awkward items; communicating and coordinating with others; working at heights; use of toxic materials eg glues, paints; recognising potential hazards; electrical isolation; securing cables/flooring; keeping fire exits and gangways clear

Tools, materials and equipment: access equipment; hand and power tools; electrical equipment eg smoke machines; correct handling and storage of props especially food and drinks, cigarettes, swords, guns; location and use of fire extinguishers on stage; safety curtain

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 describe the role and the skills of an ASM [IE, CT, RL] | M1 explain the role and skills of the ASM making reference to two performing arts organisations with varied contexts | D1 analyse the role and skills of an ASM with supporting evidence from three different types of performing arts organisations |
| P2 carry out the functions and apply the skills of an ASM during the production process [IE, CT, RL, TW, SM, EP] | M2 carry out the functions and apply the skills of an ASM during the production process using some initiative in solving problems that arise | D2 carry out the functions and apply the skills of an ASM during the production process responding independently to problems that arise |
| P3 operate competently in an ASM role during a performance or event [IE, CT, RL, TW, SM, EP] | M3 operate effectively in an ASM role during a performance or event responding to problems and pressure | D3 operate independently and highly effectively in an ASM role during a performance or event responding effectively to problems and pressure |
| P4 observe safe working practices under supervision. [TW, SM, EP] | M4 observe safe working practices with minimum supervision. | D4 operate and manage safe working practices independently. |

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

Initially, learners will need to be taught how to use the tools and facilities available within the centre for set and prop construction.

During pre-production, learners are required to take part in:

- the construction, painting and/or acquisition of scenery
- the construction, painting and/or acquisition of properties.

For set construction and painting, learners should at least be familiar with three different items of equipment, be able to make basic joints using appropriate methods and apply paint correctly.

For prop construction and painting, learners should at least be familiar with papier-maché techniques and use of appropriate paints and glues.

Learners are required to construct and paint at least one item of scenery and one prop. The scenery need be no more complex than a hardboard cut-out and the prop no more complex than a handwritten letter.

During production and performance, learners are required to undertake two of the following roles:

- operating/managing/organising props
- setting/striking scenery
- follow-spot operator
- special effects operator.

Learners are required to make and/or find a minimum of three props and respond to a minimum of three cues in setting/striking scenery, operating a follow spot and/or operating special effects.

The evidence for each learner constructing/painting/acquiring scenery will be apparent in the artefacts themselves but assessors must be satisfied that learners have followed the plans/diagrams/instructions to which they relate. A working log/notebook will be useful for recording the process.

Learners have to carry out ASM duties in at least **two** performances. This need only be a small-scale performance, such as a workshop presentation to the rest of the group. Within a larger-scale performance, the operational roles could be shared between learners. For example, a learner could be ASM props for Act 1 and follow-spot operator for Act 2.

Evidence for this unit will need documenting by tutors and could include self-evaluation and peer-evaluation reports. Evidence may also be generated via a video recording of a performance.

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 unit and rationale. |
| General stage management in a production: <ul style="list-style-type: none">the role of stage management in rehearsals: the stage management structure from production manager to ASM. Typical working day including the process of the read through, understanding how to extract prop and set information from a text, props lists, going out to get props (beg, steal, borrow!) Accountability: looking after props, receipts for borrows and hires, where to get replacements, etcdifferent types of organisations and the how the role differsadministration procedures: petty cash, receipts, invoices and managing money, contact sheets, signing in/out, minutes of meetings, notice board communications; discipline; knowing who to contact if late for work; personal scheduling and schedules; commitment to work ethicmarking out a rehearsal space; PVC tape, working from planstools and facilities: appropriate and safe usage. |
| Geography of the stage: <ul style="list-style-type: none">up stage and down stage (historical reasons why)abbreviations and their meaning: centre stage CS, stage left SL, etcuse of geography to give meaning: 'Go up stage left and'. |
| ASM skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none">load in, fit up, break down and get out: manual handling procedures, working as a team, looking after self and each other; preparation of the space for working; cleaning up, removing hazards (nails and screws etc); placing of set pieces during get in, care of set and equipment, listening to instructionsappropriate tools for construction, work clothing; PPE, gloves, hard hat steel toe cap boots, etc; verbal communication during operations, eg 'Heads up' 'watch your back' '1.2.3.Lift!' etcsetting up prop tables; white paper on tables, drawing around props, checking for missing items, storage when not in use or touringPerformance-setting and re-setting: replacing props ready for use, keeping tidy backstage, backstage management discipline; keeping quiet, moving with care and consideration of the performance; replacing and storage of consumables; preset and post set duties; communication with the team. |
| Pre-production tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">interpreting plans: scale plans 1:50, 1:100, 1:25; converting from plans to the floor; effective and efficient use of PVC/gaffer tape, use of chalk lines or string to get a straight linemaking props, painting props and set (basics including handling of substances – COSHH), work area management; use of newspapers or floor cloths for protection, PPE for own protection, ventilation and working alone policiesattending and working in rehearsals, working with performers, director. Assignment 1: Understand the Role of an ASM – P1, M1, D1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Research roles of an ASM in a local theatre/job advert. |

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Working in a team:

- roles of others: understanding other roles and responsibilities, relating to others, respect for and communicating with others
- communication – verbal/paper/electronic/telephone, manners, attitudes, point of the communication, following through on the action required
- negotiation skills; understanding of others point of view, presenting own perspective, agreeing a compromise.

Production tasks:

- hoists, winches, curtain tracks, stage braces and weights: safe and appropriate use of lifting equipment in a theatre, hemp houses, counterweight systems, use of a hauling line. LOLER regulations
- smoke machines and how/when to use them; communication systems (CANS) Language protocols, authority (DSM in charge etc) 'silence on CANS' taking cues from DSM, cue lights red, green – taking and giving cue light cues
- front of house announcements (use of basic PA systems), appropriate wording and phrasing, understanding of impact and clarity of voice
- basic lighting operations (follow spot operator); use of a follow-spot, techniques such as flagging, picking up, dropping, taking cues.

Maintenance skills:

- basic construction skills – building a set as part of the fit up team, fastening sets together: cleat and line, screws, clamps
- use of tools – hammer/screwdriver/saw/pliers/staple gun/knife and battery powered drills

Practical application – assessments, work experience, assisting on shows

Assignments 2 and 3 – Working as an ASM (Pre-production and Production) – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4

- attachment to a production from rehearsal to performance
- creation of associated paperwork in support of role
- logbook – a record of meetings and activities carried out
- evaluation of role in performance.

Health and safety (spread over the relevant subject areas and included in assignments):

- manual handling
- COSHH
- PUWER
- LOLER.

Health and safety courses and certification should be linked with the course. Additional certification would be beneficial to learners for future placements and work experience as well as actual jobs.

Assessment feedback and evaluation tutorials.

Assessment

This unit is almost entirely practical in nature apart from the initial research into ASM roles and responsibilities. Learners will need to work as part of a production team on practically-based tasks.

Criterion 1 is about describing the roles and responsibilities of an ASM in a live event context. To achieve P1 learners will provide details of the responsibilities making some reference to an organisation by providing the job description, working hours and typical salary. The skills required should be listed (see unit content).

To achieve M1, learners would explain the responsibilities with an understanding of why the skills are required and how they are used in production, making reference to two different types of organisation such as a resident theatre company and a touring theatre company.

To achieve D1, learners will analyse the ASM roles in three different organisations. These could be a large-scale theatre, a medium-scale touring Company and a small-scale TIE type Company where the roles are substantially different, looking at disadvantages and advantages to all three roles.

Criterion 2 is about carrying out the role of ASM during the production process.

To achieve a pass, learners will carry out at least two functions (see unit content) and display skills relevant to the role. Learners will receive guidance and support most of the time and will not be confident working on their own. Some team working will be evident. At least one piece of set and one prop will be created or found. One production will be worked on.

To achieve a merit, learners will feel confident carrying out at least three tasks with some support and guidance displaying skills such as communication, listening, team working (see unit content) with some ease and flexibility. Timekeeping and discipline are not an issue.

To achieve a distinction, learners will carry out all relevant tasks taken on for at least 3 productions with ease and confidence working autonomously most of the time. They will have a confident and professional manner with good discipline (timekeeping, attitude, ability to take instruction).

Criterion 3 relates to carrying out the roles of ASM in production or performance.

To achieve a pass, learners will carry out the role of ASM in a small production with at least two scene changes, with two set pieces/props in each change. Learners will be supervised and guided most of the time and may make a number of mistakes but these will not stop the production.

To achieve a merit, learners will operate as an ASM in two productions with at least four scene changes with two items of set or props to change. They will be supervised by a Stage Manager but will need only some guidance, making only a few mistakes which do not hinder the production significantly. Some autonomy will be observed where decisions are made by learners. An example might be an actor leaves something behind which they should have taken, the ASM realises and removes the item in time without prompt from the SM.

To achieve a distinction, learners will operate as an ASM in three productions, ideally of varying sizes. The work will be at a standard akin to professional in that all duties are carried out in time and on time with little or no error. Working to instruction is not an issue and working with an eye for detail is evident. There will be an ability to problem solve independently and with confidence.

Criterion 4 is about observing safe working practices.

To pass, learners must observe safe working practices imposed upon them under supervision of the stage manager or tutor. They will make mistakes or forget occasionally but not with malice or attitude.

A desire to get it right is evident with many questions being asked. However, when told to do something, they do it.

To achieve a merit, learners will observe safe working practices with very little supervision. They will take note of signage and look at the notice board for update of information. They will lift safely, taking note of any training provided. Learners will not be expected to create any documentation, simply follow the rules.

To get a distinction, learners will operate safe working codes of practice without any supervision or prompting. They will update health and safety information as and when necessary and may work with the stage manager to update or revise working practices.

The production of signage may come to the ASM.

Video evidence may be used to record the activities with supporting evidence from tutor observation sheets. Logbooks may be used to support reflective learning prior to further assessment opportunities.

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 | Understand the Role of an ASM | Research tasks into roles and responsibilities and potential job opportunities. | Group or solo presentation, essay, question and answer, practical demonstration. |
| P2, M2, D2 P3, M3, D3 P4, M4, D4 | Working as an ASM (Pre-production and Production) | Carry out a role in an event during the pre-production or lead up to the performance. Carry out a role in an event during the performance. | Logbook notation of the process by the learner, observation by the tutor, peer assessment. Written or verbal evaluation by the learner, observation by the tutor, peer assessment. |

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 |
|---------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | Set Construction | Scenic Construction for the Stage |
| | Crewing for Stage Performance | Stage Management (SM) |

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

Technical Theatre

- G11b – Developing and maintaining work relationships
- TP21b – Support the running and crewing of an ongoing production
- HS3a – Leading a team selecting and using safe systems for working at height
- TP5.1 – Sourcing costumes, materials and equipment
- TP5.3 – Sourcing lighting and special effects equipment and consumables
- TP5.4 – Sourcing props, materials and equipment
- TP5.5 – Sourcing materials and equipment for sets
- TP10b – Support the rehearsal process
- TP14.1b – Coordinate the getting in, fitting up and getting out.

Essential resources

An assistant stage manager will need access to production, administrative and workshop facilities as well as tools and materials for set and prop making. AV recording equipment will be required for assessment evidence gathering.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Links with a local venue for visits and work placement would be beneficial to learners. Inviting visiting professionals to deliver knowledge and skills is encouraged.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Bond D – *Stage Management: A Gentle Art* (Theatre Arts Books, 1998) ISBN 9780878300679

Fredman R and Reade I – *Essential Guide to Making Theatre* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1996)
ISBN 9780340655146

Pallin G – *Stage Management: The Essential Handbook* (Nick Hern Books, 1999) ISBN 9781854597342

Palmer S – *Essential Guide to Stage Management, Lighting and Sound* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2000)
ISBN 9780340721131

Reid F – *Designing for the Theatre* (A&C Black, 1996) ISBN 9780713643985

Reid F – *The Staging Handbook* (A&C Black, 2001) ISBN 9780713658293

Journals

Sightline (ABTT subscription)

The Stage newspaper

Websites

www.abtt.co.uk

The Association of British Theatre Technicians

www.stagemanagementassociation.co.uk

Supports and represents stage management in the UK

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 | carrying out research into roles and responsibilities of an ASM |
| Creative thinkers | gathering props with a limited budget |
| Reflective learners | preparing the evaluation of the ASM in production skills assignment |
| Team workers | working towards and during a production |
| Self-managers | carrying out the relevant tasks unaided |
| Effective participators | carrying out the role of ASM. |

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 | asking questions about subject content |
| Creative thinkers | converting basic knowledge and applying it contextually |
| Reflective learners | referring to previous sessions and/or experience and improving on the knowledge |
| Team workers | working in groups to gather knowledge/make lists/build props and set |
| Self-managers | creating prop lists from a script |
| Effective participators | actively taking part in discussions/meetings. |

● Functional Skills – Level 2

| Skill | When learners are ... |
|--|--|
| ICT – Use ICT systems | |
| Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs | list making for props requirement |
| ICT – Find and select information | |
| researching the internet for appropriate materials, props and their availability and costs | |
| Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose | creating small budgets using spreadsheets. researching roles and responsibilities and presenting the results presenting telephone numbers for actors and technical staff |
| ICT – Develop, present and communicate information | |
| Enter, develop and format information independently to suit its meaning and purpose including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • text and tables • images • numbers • records | presenting results of research |
| Select and use ICT to communicate and exchange information safely, responsibly and effectively including storage of messages and contact lists | sending messages via email storing of personnel contact details |
| Mathematics | |
| Understand routine and non-routine problems in a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations | managing small budgets |
| Identify the situation or problem and the mathematical methods needed to tackle it | working within a given budget head measuring of set materials/converting from plans |
| Select and apply a range of skills to find solutions | |
| Interpret and communicate solutions to practical problems in familiar and unfamiliar routine contexts and situations | adjusting of measurements (set construction) to fit the requirement |
| Draw conclusions and provide mathematical justifications | making a piece of set using a scale drawing |

| Skill | When learners are ... |
|---|---|
| English | |
| Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts | communicating in production meetings/classroom sessions |
| Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions | reading scripts to gather props and set requirements |
| Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively | using entries in a logbook to record process and result in a working context. |