

Unit 79: Stage Design for Performance

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| Unit code: | J/600/0188 |
| QCF Level 3: | BTEC National |
| Credit value: | 10 |
| Guided learning hours: | 60 |

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to develop learners' understanding of the role of the set designer for a production. Learners will develop the range of skills required by the stage designer and enacting the designer's role from the initial planning stages to the realisation of set on stage.

● Unit introduction

The stage designer uses a range of skills and approaches. These include research, development and communication of stage design ideas, through constant discussion and negotiation with the director, the management of resources and the management of the production team to realise a stage design for a performance. This unit will develop the skills learners need to understand and fulfil each of these responsibilities.

The set designer will analyse the text and evaluate the opportunities of the performance space to discover the design opportunities and an awareness of the limitations. The set designer will then utilise a range of research sources to inform the development of set design ideas. Learners will develop the skills to enable effective development and communication of set designs.

Each production will have an allocated set construction budget, which is usually smaller than the designer was hoping for. It is imperative that the designer does not overspend; production managers and administrators are very happy when the designer comes in under budget. Learners will develop a working knowledge of set construction costs and develop an ability to work to a real budget.

Once design ideas are agreed the set designer must manage the construction and painting teams to ensure accuracy. The designer uses design construction plans, the 3D-scale model and painting guidance sheets to communicate the design intentions. This unit will enable learners as set designers to communicate and interact successfully with the scenic construction and scenic painting team and be ultimately responsible for the accurate realisation of the set throughout the production process, the get in, fit-up, the technical and dress rehearsals to first performance.

Learners will be expected to promote the application of appropriate health and safety for the set constructors and for performers throughout the process.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to develop set designs
- 2 Be able to present set design ideas
- 3 Be able to manage the set construction process.

Unit content

1 Be able to develop set designs

Research sources: eg exhibitions, galleries, museums, libraries, costume collections, film, video, internet, real-life scenarios

Research context: performance material eg play, dance, musical, variety; design outcome, eg period, genre, style, history, length of run, practical requirements

Working to a design brief: eg director's concept, choreographer's concept, budgetary restraints, venue restraints

Develop designs: eg photographs, sketches, plans, CAD programmes, notes, diagrams, sample construction materials

2 Be able to present set design ideas

Present: eg notes, sketches, 3D scale model boxes, scale ground plans, scale construction drawings, sample paint finishes, sample construction materials, construction methods, budgeting

3 Be able to manage the set construction process

Manage: budget; production meetings; construction team; materials; resource materials; monitor set construction expenditure; negotiate with stage manager, director/choreographer, performers; get in/fit up; technical rehearsals; dress rehearsals

Construction materials: eg timber, scaffolding, canvas, cardboard, paper strip, polystyrene

Health and safety: fireproofing; safe use of set construction materials; safe use of set construction methods for the stage crew; safe application of set decoration finishes; safe application of construction processes; health and safety for the performer

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that learners 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 develop set designs in response to the director's/ choreographer's brief, with support and guidance [CT, EP] | M1 develop set designs which are a thoughtful, considered response to the director's/ choreographer's brief, with minimal support and guidance | D1 work independently and confidently to develop effective thoroughly considered set designs that effectively meet all considerations of the director's/choreographer's brief |
| P2 use 2D sketches and a 3D-scale model box to communicate set design ideas, with support and guidance | M2 use 2D sketches and a 3D-scale model box to communicate and promote the set design ideas, with minimal support and guidance | D2 use 2D sketches and a 3D-scale model box to communicate and convincingly promote every detail of the set design ideas |
| P3 produce set construction documents with simple sketches, scale ground-plan and scaled set construction drawings, with support and guidance | M3 produce set construction documents with informative sketches, accurate and detailed scale ground plans and competent scaled set construction drawings, with minimal support and guidance | D3 communicate all aspects of the set construction process clearly, with the use of fully detailed sketches, accurate scale ground-plans and fully-functional scaled set construction drawings |
| P4 demonstrate the ability to cost, resource, purchase and use some suitable set construction materials with support and guidance [IE] | M4 demonstrate a competent knowledge of how to cost, resource, purchase and use appropriate set construction materials, with minimal support and guidance | D4 demonstrate a fully-informed knowledge of how to cost, resource, purchase and use set construction materials in an innovative and wholly appropriate way. |
| P5 use communication methods to manage the construction team during the set production process, with support and guidance. [TW, SM, EP] | M5 demonstrate good communication skills and initiative to manage the set production team during the production process. | D5 demonstrate excellent communication skills and independence to manage the set construction team throughout the set production process. |

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

This mostly practical unit must focus on the development of learners as a set designer within a production team. It is essential that learners demonstrate full knowledge of the performance material. A reading of the play, an understanding of the nature of the dance style, an appreciation of the format of variety performance, etc should inform the way that learners develop their design ideas.

Initially it will be necessary to deliver the skills that learners will need to develop and communicate set design ideas. Learners will develop research approaches, the ability to develop and produce set design sketches and scale model boxes which can be used to communicate design ideas to the company. Learners should develop their research and design skills through small practical exercises to build confidence and to develop their own individual style.

Budget is an important consideration; learners will develop an understanding of how to buy resourcefully to meet the allocated set design budget. Learners will have to manage a budget to fulfil the relevant criterion for this unit even if the budget is modest, eg use small sums of petty cash.

Learners will need an understanding of the properties and behaviours of possible set design materials to enable confident application of materials in their designs. Finally, learners will need to be aware of approaches and methods which enable the effective communication of the set design requirements and the successful management of the set production team. This will include the director in the development of the set design as well as the stage manager and lighting designer in the communication of the final set design ideas. Most important is the relationship with the set production team in the overseeing of the set production process.

The focus of assessment must be on learners' ability to fulfil the role of set designer, working as a member of a production team to design, plan, communicate, manage and realise the set design.

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 and structure of the programme of learning.

Formal learning part 1 – lectures, discussions and exercises:

- the role of the stage designer
- text analysis
- research strategies
- scale ground plans
- scale construction drawings
- theatre spaces and technical terminology.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment

Formal learning part 2 – lectures, discussions and exercises:

- budgeting
- materials
- construction methods
- managing the production team.

Designing Settings for a Production. Part 1: Liaising with the Director – P1, M1, D1

Learner:

- meets with the director and discusses set concept and requirements
- analyses text
- carries out research
- assesses advantages and limitations of performance space
- generates initial ideas
- discusses ideas with director.

Designing Settings for a Production. Part 2: Presenting Set Design Ideas – P2, M2, D2

Learner:

- produces 2D sketches/storyboard
- constructs 3D scale model box
- presents designs to director and production team.

Designing Settings for a Production. Part 3: Ground Plans and Construction Drawings – P3, M3, D3

Learner:

- produces scale ground plan
- produces scale construction drawings.

Designing Settings for a Production. Part 4: Researching and Costing Materials – P4, M4, D4

Learner:

- researches, costs and purchases materials
- makes database of suppliers
- manages budget.

Designing Settings for a production. Part 5: Managing the Construction Process – P5, M5, D5

Learner:

- supervises construction and painting teams
- supervises fit-up and get-in
- attends technical and dress rehearsals and first performances.

Production meetings.

Theatre visits.

Review unit and assignments.

Feedback from assignment.

Assessment

Initially, to consolidate understanding, formative assessment of small exercises which focus on the introduction and development of research and design skills and approaches may be used.

However, the main assessment focus should be on the assessment of learners' ability to fulfil the role of the set designer for a live performance.

Assessment evidence should include evidence of each stage of the set design and construction process. It is important that final assessment concentrates on the completed artefacts, the effective communication of set design ideas and the management of the production team and resources.

Learning outcome 1, which relates to grading criterion 1, requires learners to demonstrate their ability to liaise with the director/choreographer and use skills to develop a set design for a production. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the appropriateness of the set design that learners produce.

At pass level, learners will produce basic set designs that meet the director's/choreographer's brief. The designs will be unelaborated and although basic must clearly show the artistic intentions of learners. Learners will be expected to receive support from their tutor to achieve this criterion.

At merit level, learners will produce designs that display a creative response to the director's/choreographer's brief. Aesthetic decisions will be considered and will be, on the whole, satisfying. Learners will expect to receive some support from their tutor to achieve this criterion.

At distinction level, learners' designs will be characterised throughout by creative thinking. The designs that learners develop will show that they wholly understand the director's/choreographer's brief and the demands of the production. Learners will work independently and present ideas and solutions with confidence.

Learning outcome 2, which relates to grading criteria 2 and 3, requires learners to demonstrate artistic and technical skills whilst producing a 3D model box, 2D sketches, ground plans and construction drawings. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the level of artistic ability and skill shown by learners.

At pass level, learners' work will be basic. Scale models will be constructed and decorated using simple materials and techniques and the use of scale will not be wholly accurate. The model box, 2D drawings, ground plans and construction drawings will be unsophisticated but will show the artistic intentions of learners. There will be some inaccuracies in the work. Learners will be expected to receive support from the tutor to achieve this criterion.

At merit level, learners' work will be fairly sophisticated. The model box will be constructed thoughtfully using materials and construction skills correctly. The model box will accurately and actively display and endorse the artistic intentions of learners. The model box, 2D drawings, ground plans and construction drawings will be developed competently and will be accurate. Learners will be expected to receive some support from their tutor to achieve this criterion.

At distinction level, learners' work will be sophisticated. The model box will be skilfully constructed using wholly appropriate materials and techniques. The model box will be wholly accurate and will display and endorse every detail of learners' artistic intentions. Learners will produce sophisticated 2D sketches, ground plans and construction drawings which will be wholly accurate. Learners will be expected to work independently to achieve this criterion.

Learning outcome 3, which relates to criteria 4 and 5, requires learners to manage the set construction process. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the level of ability shown by learners to manage the set construction process.

At pass level learners will cost, resource and purchase materials with the help of their tutor. The materials will, for the most part, be unsophisticated and functional. Learners will show limited initiative but will show some understanding of the processes. During the set construction process learners will use basic communication skills to manage the production team during the construction process.

At merit level, learners will confidently and competently demonstrate the ability to cost, resource and purchase appropriate set construction materials. Learners will, for the most part, work independently but will still need occasional advice or support to carry out the work. Whilst carrying out the work for these criteria learners will show initiative and thoughtfulness. Learners will oversee the set construction team for most of the production process and use effective written and verbal communication methods to ensure that the set is accurately constructed within the allocated time period.

At distinction level, learners will cost, resource and purchase set construction materials with confidence. Learners' work will be characterised by creative thinking and activity and learners will come up with ideas and solutions that others might not have thought of. Learners will manage the entire set production process independently.

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 | Part 1: Liaising with the Director | Working as a set designer on a production, learners discuss design ideas with the director and produce workable designs that meet the director's brief. (Working in groups or individually, learners liaise with director and develop design ideas.) | Project portfolio consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • notes relating to meetings with the director • all sketches and drafts • finished set designs. |
| P2, M2, D2 | Part 2: Presenting Set Design Ideas | Working as a set designer on a production, learners present set design ideas in the form of 2D sketches and a 3D model to the director and the production team. (Working in groups or individually learners communicate design ideas.) | Project portfolio consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2D sketches of design ideas • storyboard (if appropriate) of design ideas • 3D model of design ideas. |
| P3, M3, D3 | Part 3: Ground Plans and Construction Drawings | Working as set designer on a production, learners produce set construction drawings and a scale ground plan. (Working in groups or individually learners produce set construction documentation.) | Project portfolio consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • scale ground plan • set construction drawings. |

| Criteria covered | Assignment title | Scenario | Assessment method |
|------------------|---|---|--|
| P4, M4, D4 | Part 4: Researching and Costing Materials | Working as set designer on a production, learners cost, resource and purchase set-construction materials (Working in groups or individually learners cost, resource and purchase materials.) | Project portfolio consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a database of suppliers of construction materials • a budget • a written account describing the appropriateness of the materials selected to construct/decorate the settings. |
| P5, M5, D5 | Part 5: Managing the Construction Process | Working as set designer on a production, learners manage the construction team during the set production process. (Working in groups or individually learners manage the construction team.) | Project portfolio consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written notes relating to the management of the production team • minutes of all meetings with members of the production team. |

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 | Design for Performance | Scenic Construction for the Stage |
| | Set Construction | Scenic Painting |
| | | Stage Model Making |
| | | Stage Costume Making |

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

Technical Theatre

- CPD1 – Improving your skills
- CPD2b – Ensure that you and your team keep up to date with the technical and production areas of the live arts
- TP2.5a – Contribute to the interpretation of designs for sets or props
- TP2.5c – Ensure accurate interpretation of designs for sets or props
- TP4a – Provide design information to enable drawings to be produced.

Essential resources

This unit will require a dry design space to facilitate the design of the set in a model box, a resource base to enable research, a set construction workshop equipped with appropriate set construction tools and equipment. The unit will also require a space for storage of completed scenic elements. It is important that the workshop space meets with current health and safety directives

For this unit learners should have access to an appropriate design studio/workshop. Learners will also require suitable equipment and materials depending on the medium in which they are working. Learners will also need internet access, reference books, etc. CAD facilities would be useful.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Learners should develop links with theatre, film and television studios that have set design/construction departments. Most of the large producing theatre companies such as The Royal Shakespeare Theatre and The National Theatre offer work placements to learners – www.rsc.org.uk and www.nationaltheatre.org.uk. Set designers and builders/painters are usually willing to talk to learners about the processes involved in designing and constructing/painting sets.

Both Skillset, the Sector Skills Council for the audio-visual industries and the BBC have substantial sections of their websites dedicated to careers, including job descriptions – www.skillset.org/careers and www.bbc.co.uk/design/careers

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Blumenthal E and Taymor J – *Julie Taymor: Playing with Fire* (Harry Abrams, 2007) ISBN 9780810930773

Blurton J – *Scenery Draughting and Construction* (A & C Black, 2001) ISBN 9780713656848

Burnett K and Ruthven Hall P (editors) – *Make Space! Design for Theatre and Alternative Spaces, 2nd Edition* (Society of British Theatre Designers, 2002) ISBN 9780952930907

Burnett K and Ruthven Hall P (editors) – *2D > 3D Design for Theatre and Performance* (Society of British Theatre Designers, 2002) ISBN 9780952930921

Burnett K (editor) – *Collaborators: UK Design for Performance 2003-2007* (Society of British Theatre Designers, 2007) ISBN 9780952930945

Carnaby A J— *A Guidebook for Creating Three Dimensional Theatre Arts* (Greenwood Press, 1997) ISBN 9780435070007

Hoggett C – *Stagecrafts, 2nd edition* (A & C Black, 2000) ISBN 9780713654776

Neat D – *Model-Making: Materials and Methods* (Crowood Press 2008) ISBN 9781847970176

Thorne G – *Stage Design: A Practical Guide* (Trafalgar Square, 2000) ISBN 9781861262578

Website

www.theatredesign.org.uk

British Society of Theatre Designers

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 | planning and carrying out research into the suitability and cost of materials for set construction |
| Creative thinkers | generating ideas and exploring possibilities for set designs |
| Team workers | designing and managing the construction team, taking responsibility and showing confidence in themselves and their contribution |
| Self-managers | organising time and resources and prioritising actions when managing the construction team |
| Effective participators | proposing practical ways forward when designing and managing the production team and breaking these down into manageable steps. |

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 | exploring set design problems from different perspectives designing settings and identifying questions to answer and problems to resolve |
| Creative thinkers | connecting their own and others' ideas and experience in inventive ways whilst liaising with the director adapting ideas as circumstances change |
| Reflective learners | reviewing progress and acting on outcomes during the design development process inviting feedback from the director and other members of the production team and dealing positively with praise, setbacks and criticism |
| Team workers | showing fairness and consideration to other members of the construction team providing constructive support and feedback to other members of the construction team |
| Self-managers | working towards goals, showing initiative, commitment and perseverance anticipating, taking and managing risks |
| Effective participators | discussing issues of concern with the director and members of the construction team trying to influence others, negotiating and balancing diverse views to reach workable solutions. |

● 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 | researching set designs researching materials |
| 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 | producing a budget producing a database of suppliers producing work schedules |
| Mathematics | |
| Understand routine and non-routine problems in a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations | using calculation to produce ground plans and construction drawings of settings |
| Identify the situation or problem and the mathematical methods needed to tackle it | using calculation to produce outline budget |
| Select and apply a range of skills to find solutions | |
| Use appropriate checking procedures and evaluate their effectiveness at each stage | |
| Interpret and communicate solutions to practical problems in familiar and unfamiliar routine contexts and situations | |
| Draw conclusions and provide mathematical justifications | |
| English | |
| Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts | presenting costume design ideas to the director, the actors and the set construction team managing the set construction team |
| Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions | reading scripts carrying out research or text analysis |
| Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively | describing the appropriateness of materials used in the set construction process. |