



Tower Theatre

**NOTES FOR
STAGE MANAGERS**

April 2026

Depending on when you join the show, your responsibilities will vary. Ideally, you will join the creative team before auditions; if you join after auditions, liaise with the Director about what has already been completed. You should also obtain and read a copy of the script. After, create a props list and a list of sound/lighting effects noted in the script.

AUDITIONS

•	Ask the director if they would like you to be present at auditions and, if so, what role you will take during the process. Often, you'll be able to contribute to casting decisions, but it can vary show by show!
•	After auditions, ensure your director has provided the Theatre Manager (info@towertheatre.org.uk) with the list of cast members and any team members already recruited. They will ensure that these names go on the website.

PRE-REHEARSALS

•	Obtain contact details for all cast and creative team members (telephone and email) and add this information to the contact sheet in your show drive. It is recommended that you create two separate WhatsApp groups, one for the cast and one for the team—so you can update them with production notices.
•	The Theatre Manager will email you a link to your show drive on Google. Inside, you will find various documents, including the show's Production Risk Assessment (PRA). Confirm that you have received this and inform the Theatre Manager if not.
•	Organise the first production meeting with the director, assistant director, Artistic Team rep, Marketing Team rep, Health and Safety rep, stage manager, set designer, lighting designer, sound designer, and costume designer. This should occur approximately 12 weeks before opening. You can ask the Theatre Manager to book a room for this meeting; alternatively, teams can also meet in the bar or on Zoom! This meeting should cover the director's vision, marketing opportunities, and potential artistic/budgetary issues; the set designer should also present the concept design (white model). Finally, the rehearsal risk assessment (Part 1) should also be completed and signed off by the Health and Safety rep; if this isn't finished at the meeting, you must email it to healthandsafety@towertheatre.org.uk before your rehearsals begin.
•	With the director, arrange a suitable time for a first read-through with the cast. Invite the creative team to attend as well.
•	During the first read-through, ensure the director discusses the Code of Conduct with the cast and team. Everyone should sign the Volunteer Agreement acknowledging they have read it; signed copies of the agreement should be sent to the Theatre Manager.
•	The director should create a rehearsal schedule and share it with the Theatre Manager so rehearsal rooms can be booked; confirm that the director has done so and liaise with them about sharing it with the cast and team. Also consult the costume designer about adding costume calls to the schedule if needed.
•	Liaise with your Technical Coordinator to recruit the ASMs you will need. They should give you a list of possible people for you to contact via email and can also advise on the level of experience best suited for the show.
•	Confirm that you know how to open and lock up the theatre. Notes are in the appendix; you can also ask the Theatre Manager to walk you through the procedure.

REHEARSALS

●	It is recommended you arrive 15-20 minutes before the start of each rehearsal to allow you to set up any chairs, props, etc.
●	Double check the location of the rehearsal on the whiteboard outside the Office.
●	Grab any props and set pieces needed for the rehearsal. Where these are stored can vary, but it is recommended that you keep them in a labelled box kept in the Props store in the Smith Studio. (But do be mindful of other rehearsals happening in Smith!)
●	During the rehearsal, mark your script with blocking (entrances, exits, etc.), sound effects, and any other notes that may be useful to you to refer to later. It's best to use pencil for this, as blocking often changes!
●	At the end of the rehearsal, ensure the room is left clear and tidy and that props are returned to where you've stored them.
●	At the end of each rehearsal, complete a rehearsal report and send to the creative team via WhatsApp or email. A template can be found in the Production Pack.
●	Please inform the Theatre Manager if a rehearsal is cancelled so another show can use the room.
●	Liaise with each designer about attending rehearsals; this could be when you first run the show in full, but often, designers prefer to come in earlier.
●	Liaise with your ASM(s) about attending rehearsals; this could be when you first run the show in full, but it depends on the show and the support you feel you need!
●	Organise a second production meeting 4-6 weeks before your opening with the same team members as before. During this meeting, you should discuss the PRA and complete as much of it as possible. Each department should also report on their progress and their respective expenditure.

PROPS

The Tower has a diverse collection of props stored by type. These are stored in seven areas/rooms in the basement; if locked, the code is C175. Each door is labelled with the props stored there.

●	As noted above, create a props list as early as possible and share with the director to confirm all items will be needed.
●	You can source props from the Tower's collection and/or use the show's budget. It is recommended that you speak with your Technical Coordinator or other stage managers before purchasing a prop, as they may have suggestions on another way of sourcing it.
●	Depending on the show, you may need "working" props (i.e., not the exact item but something that will do for rehearsals). Liaise with your director if they require this.
●	Smoking is not permitted onstage. If you have questions about this policy, speak to the Health and Safety rep for more information.
●	If you need to use a gun or any other weapons, consult the Health and Safety rep for more information. Guns are stored in a safe in the office.

HEALTH & SAFETY

●	The set designer and stage manager are responsible for ensuring the set complies with fire and safety regulations. Please consult your set designer to ensure they have upheld these regulations.
●	It is your responsibility to make sure that the cast, team, and other members in your rehearsal room are aware of the emergency exits and evacuation procedures. It is recommended that you review these at the start of each rehearsal.

●	The Marketing Team will ask the director for content warnings. Ensure that these have been provided and are displayed on the website, programme, and on the screens in the bar. Questions about content warnings can be directed to the Theatre Manager.
●	If strobe lighting is to be used, please inform the Theatre Manager so they can create appropriate signs to inform audience members.

GETTING INTO THE THEATRE

●	A week prior to the Get-In, send the Health and Safety form to the cast and creative team; they should confirm receipt by email or WhatsApp. A copy of this can be found in your show drive.
●	During the get-in, the Theatre Manager will give you a set of SM keys for the building. Please ensure you receive these.
●	Liaise with the creative team and director to create a schedule for the get-in. Timings might include unloading the van, building the set, dark time for the lighting designer, and a cue-to-cue. Get-ins traditionally start from 10 am, but this is up to your team.
●	Cast members are expected to help at the get-in. Speak with your director and creative team about allocating appropriate jobs to them.
●	Work with your ASMs to allocate jobs for scene changes during the performance and create a list of scene changes that everyone can consult.
●	Create a sign-in sheet for cast and team members who are present at each performance to sign on arrival in the Dressing Room. They should start signing in following the get-in.
●	Post your fire drill notice with allocated responsibilities next to or near the sign-in sheet.
●	As the stage manager, you are the appointed Fire Officer for your production unless you deem someone otherwise. Ensure the cast and team are aware of the fire drill notice and procedure. You can consult the Health and Safety Officer with any questions.
●	Check that the radios (stored in the SM Room) are working. Their batteries should be charged before every run; instructions for setting them up can be found in the SM Room.
●	During your final dress, it is recommended that you keep to show timings, i.e., start at 7:30 pm as if it were the real thing.
●	Invite the Health and Safety rep to the tech rehearsal. They will watch the run and sign off the PRA. Once it's signed off, ensure that a physical copy of the PRA is included in the red folder in the SM Room.
●	The Marketing Team is responsible for the show programme. Ensure they have been given the most up-to-date list of cast and team name, including those who helped during the get-in.

IN PERFORMANCE

●	If smoke or haze machines are being used, the smoke sensors in the theatre must be disabled. (The heat sensors will remain active). <u>To disable the smoke sensors:</u> At the alarm panels in the front door lobby, turn the key switch to 'HEAT ONLY'. A constant warning sound will be heard. At the main alarm control panel, press 'Silence Buzzer'. The warning will stop and the system is set to detect heat only. <u>Fire alarm:</u> If the fire sensors have been switched to 'Heat only', you must reset to 'Smoke + Heat' at the end of the show. No buzzer sounds and the system is restored. This is essential for the protection of the building and to comply with our insurance cover.
●	Check that all props and set pieces are in place in good time before each performance.
●	Sweep the stage before the house opens each night, and check marks are still in place at the same time.

●	Liaise with the Front of House manager about headsets and timings of the show; they will usually come up to the theatre an hour before the performance.
●	Confirm that the sound and lighting operators are ready and that actors have checked their props before opening the house. Details of SM calls can be found in the appendix.
●	Remind actors that they must not leave the auditorium in costume (e.g., to go to the bar).
●	You may occasionally be required to hold/delay the opening of a show. Details of this procedure can be found in the appendix.
●	At the end of each performance, it is your responsibility to lock up the theatre. You must also let the bar staff know that you are leaving the building; this is to ensure they know that locking up the rest of the building is now their responsibility.

THE STRIKE (GETTING OUT)

●	Create a list of jobs for all cast and crew, including helping with lights, taking props to store, costumes to wardrobe, clearing the fridge, cleaning the SM Room and the dressing room, taking rubbish away, sweeping the stage, etc. All cast members are expected to help with the strike; liaise with your director and creative team about how much time cast can have in the bar before returning to the theatre.
●	Ensure the first two rows of auditorium are covered with druggets, which can be found in the Lower Mezz.
●	Wash props if necessary and ensure they are returned to their proper storage. If not completed on the night, it is your responsibility as the Stage Manager to return them as soon as possible.
●	Please return your Stage Manager's keys to the office as soon as possible.

APPENDIX

Notes on Blocking

"Blocking" is what takes place in the first few rehearsals. The Director instructs the actor where they should walk, stand or sit during each scene of the play and the Stage Manager jots each of these movements down in pencil on the script. It must be in pencil because these moves are likely to change quite a few times as you go along. Some basic signs used for blocking are:

- SL = stage left
- SR = stage right
- CS = centre stage
- US = upstage
- DS = downstage
- ↑ = stands
- ↓ = sits
- → = crosses, goes to
- en = enters
- ex = exits

Stage Manager's Performance Timeline

From 6.30

- Check that all the cast and crew have arrived and signed in on the notice board.
- Allow lights and sound to complete any checks (including a blackout check to make sure all working lights are off). Make sure you have turned off all working lights before you open the house.
- The Front of House Manager will come upstairs an hour before the show to collect two headsets.
- Do a 2-way radio check with FoH Manager and lighting/sound to ensure they are all working. Instructions for switching on and use are on the wall in the SM room.
- Explain to the FoH Manager:
 - How you want the opening of the house and interval to run
 - The time you want the doors to open and that you will let them know when you have called beginners so they can then start FOH calls in the bar.
 - The latecomers' policy for your show. Most shows allow latecomers to be slipped in at any time after the start of the show, some may require them to be held until after a particular point in the play. This will have been decided by the director.
 - If the actors are using the auditorium doors as an entrance/exit and coming through the bar during the show.

Between 7:15 and 7:30

- Confirm that the lighting and sound operators are ready to open the house.
- If any cast members need to be on stage and visible to the audience, they need to take their positions before the house opens, usually 15 minutes before the performance starts. All other actors who are required at the start of the show will take their positions at the beginners' call.
- Let the FOH Manager know that they can open the house. (FoH Managers generally expect to open the house at 7:15 but should be aware they do not open the auditorium to the audience until you give clearance). Ask the FoH Manager to inform you of audience numbers.
- Announce to the cast that the house is open (so that no one wanders onto the set).
- Ensure that your beginners are in position.
- At two minutes, speak to the FoH Manager to check if all the audience is now in the auditorium or if they are waiting for latecomers. The same procedure should be followed for "curtain up" at the end of the interval.
- The FoH Manager will inform you via headset that they've sent the second steward up. When

you receive this information put the sound and lighting operators on standby to start the show.

- Sound or lighting operators usually take their cue to start the show from the steward closing the auditorium door and sitting down, and they will inform you of this via headset. Give the go-ahead to start.

Please also warn the FoH Manager 5 minutes before the interval and end of the show so they can be prepared to open the downstairs doors.

Suggested Calls

7:30 pm show:

- The half 35 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 6.55 pm
- The quarter 20 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 7.10 pm
- The five 10 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 7.20 pm
- Beginners 5 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 7.25 pm

3.00pm show:

- The half 35 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 2.25 pm
- The quarter 20 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 2.40 pm
- The five 10 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 2.50 pm
- Beginners 5 minutes before the start of the show i.e. 2.55 pm

Holding a Show

Occasionally you will need to delay allowing the audience into the auditorium (e.g., because a cast member or operator is late or there is a technical issue on stage). If there is a delay, announce it so that everyone is aware of the situation.

Liaise with the FOH Manager as they will need to keep the audience informed. You may have to open the auditorium even though someone has not arrived as the bar can become uncomfortably full. Check the FOH Manager knows to warn the audience that the show will be starting late.

It is between you and the FoH Manager to decide to hold a show.

Keep the backstage calls as normal but also update the cast on when you expect the show to actually start. You cannot start a show unless all cast and crew are present.

Entering and Exiting the Building

The intruder alarm is set by the last person to leave the building and disarmed by the first person entering the building.

Entering

1. Have the front door key and the current entry code ready.
2. Open the door as usual – you will hear a loud entry tone.
3. Move swiftly to the small cream and grey box, near the swing door at the top of the steps, marked Texecom. It has a bright green LED display.
4. Pull down the flap and enter the code you will have been given by the office. Each button should cause a beep. The alarm should now stop.

Leaving

1. Make sure all windows are shut, the heating/air con is switched off, and all lights are off.
2. Make sure that all external doors are locked – there are 6:
 - a. Door at the top of the fire escape from the auditorium
 - b. Back door of the Smith studio
 - c. Back gate
 - d. Door outside the Peter Novis Library
 - e. The Tuerk (exit to stairwell)

- f. Door near Rehearsal Room 3 (exit to stairwell)
3. The fire exit doors to the street at the bottom of the main staircase must be closed.
4. The internal door to the lobby outside Wardrobe/Tuerk must be closed.
5. Before setting the alarm ensure that you are the last person to leave the building.
6. Go to the Texecom console as above and type in the same code. You should get a message saying, "Do you want to arm system?" at which point you press the "yes" button (bottom left). There will be an exit tone.
7. Leave the building and shut the door. Listen until you hear the exit tone cease after a few seconds.
8. Lock the door with the front door key.
9. Do not leave the building unlocked, especially if the alarm has failed to set. Occasionally you get a message because a door has been left open; it will tell you its number and the location of that detector can be read from the list on the metal box to the left of the console. If, when you have closed the door, the system will still not let you set it, you will have to press "No" to the question above and leave the premises unalarmed.

If the alarm has failed to set, and you have left the building unalarmed, you must notify the Theatre Manager as soon as possible at info@towertheatre.org.uk.

Budgeting

The agreed budget for each show is discussed at the Production Meeting. Budgets are designed so that money is spent wisely and to maximum effect, balancing creativity and reasonable expenditure.

As the stage manager, you are often responsible for collecting Claim forms/expenses receipts from team members. You should collate this information and give it to the Theatre Manager for reimbursement.

The following items cannot be claimed for:

- Scripts
- Haircuts
- Personal travel expenses
- Teas (food, coffee, etc.) other than where required as a prop
- Clothing. Unless Wardrobe has specifically authorised a member of the cast to purchase an item of clothing, the costs are not recoverable. Cast members are expected to supply their own tights, knickers, hairpieces, hairnets, modern accessories, etc.

If in doubt as to whether an item is recoverable, check first with the Theatre Manager.

Fire and Safety

The Council checks the safety of the building and its equipment, not individual productions, and so the responsibility for risk assessments and complying with regulations is solely down to the company. With that in mind, please note:

- All safety hazards should be reported to the Theatre Manager and the Health and Safety rep as soon as possible.
- In case of emergency, there should be clear gangways for any member of the audience, cast, or team to make a rapid escape from wherever they happen to be.
- Do not leave fire doors open or block fire exits or access to fire extinguishers.
- Any potential obstructions backstage should be painted white or marked with white reflective tape. Minimum exit clearances must be maintained; you must not place anything in the fire lane (even temporarily).