

# Stage Manager's Handbook

## Info

The purpose of this handbook is to give a breakdown of your responsibilities as a stage manager, along with some useful resources to aid you along your way. Even if you've been a stage manager before, we advise you to **READ THIS HANDBOOK IN FULL**. There are always things that can be missed as well as new tips and tricks to learn.

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## General

During the run of the show, as stage manager, you're in charge of cast, assistant stage managers (ASMs), operator, and chaperones. The Green Room, stage and backstage are all your domain and you and your team need to make sure that everything runs smoothly.

Most importantly, you're responsible for ensuring the theatre and workshop areas are risk-free and that risk control measures are carried out (in both the general risk assessment and the specific show risk assessment if there is one). The General Technical Manager and/or Building Manager can provide further guidance.

## Contacts

You should have a contact list with names and phone numbers, and possibly emails, of all people involved with the actual performance of the show, along with some external to it.

- Director, Assistant Director / PA
- Theatre Committee rep
- Musical Director / Choreographer (where applicable)
- Lighting/sound Operator
- All adult cast members
- All band members (where applicable)
- Parents or guardians and chaperones of any children or cast members who require safeguarding. (See Safeguarding)
- Building Manager

- General Technical Manager
- Safeguarding Officer.

## Safeguarding

Safeguarding applies to all children/young adults and vulnerable adults, and is everyone's responsibility.

Safeguarding applies from the first audition, through every rehearsal, run-up week, the performances and then finally ends when you hand-over to the next production's stage manager. The director of the show should have already organised safeguarding measures to be put in place for auditions, rehearsals and the show itself, however, as you will be in charge on show nights, it's essential that you understand all aspects of the SLT Safeguarding Policy.

- All cast, crew and chaperones must have read and signed a document to confirm that they have read the SLT Safeguarding Policy.
- There must be an adequate number of chaperones for the number of people that require safeguarding.
- There must be segregated dressing rooms (where applicable) for people that require safeguarding. Discuss this with the Building Manager for help with room booking

If at any point you feel that the Safeguarding Policy is not being followed, or that for any reason a person that requires safeguarding may be put in risk, it is your responsibility to stop the activity, be it audition, rehearsal or performance. A lack of chaperones for example means that SLT cannot legally continue any activity involving children or vulnerable adults.

Useful links:

- Safeguarding Officer (currently Gerri McAndrew, Trustee, with Lorna Felix as deputy so [gerri@southlondontheatre.co.uk](mailto:gerri@southlondontheatre.co.uk), [lorna@southlondontheatre.co.uk](mailto:lorna@southlondontheatre.co.uk))
- [SLT Safeguarding Policy](#)

## Health & Safety

It's a show. There'll be a lot of people running about, changing costumes, building sets and so on. We aim for zero incidents by actively engaging in good health and safety practices to minimise risks. One way of doing this is to ensure there are clear processes in place to manage any recognised risks, and to manage incidents if they do occur. Please talk to the GTM for guidance.

- [SLT Health & Safety Policy](#)
- [SLT Manual Handling Policy](#)

There's a list of current first-aiders with the first aid box in the foyer. There should be one in the building at all times, but as with anything, use your common sense. If the accident or incident is serious such as someone being unresponsive, with severe blood loss or suspected broken bones, chest pain, signs of stroke or anaphylaxis, **dial 999**. There's a First Aid Kit including eye wash kits backstage on the shelves next to the sink. The full First Aid Kit and AED (defibrillator) are in the foyer next to the fire alarm panel, along with a poster showing our address.

The SLT Accident Book lives inside the First Aid Kit in the Foyer. All accidents or incidents must be logged with as much detail as possible. Any risks that caused the incident must be immediately removed and areas made safe.

### **Potential accident checklist (not comprehensive - there will be more than this!)**

- Get In / Run-Up Week / Get Out
  - Set construction / deconstruction
  - Moving the seats (people **MUST** wear protective overshoes)
  - Just being on set for the first time. Entrances and exits.
- During the show (On-stage and backstage)
  - Actors walk into a piece of set, or trip on a prop
  - Actors get disorientated walking off-stage (with bright lights) into darkened backstage and bump into something or trip
  - Actors break glass on stage
  - Actors slip on water
  - Actors injure themselves during a fight scene (fight/physical struggle scenes should be rehearsed during the warm-up every time they're due to occur)
- Auditorium
  - Designated walkways/stairways to seats should be clearly marked - use white gaffer tape to edge steps . Cut off access /short-cuts through other routes using cubes if needed.. Check for places where audience members could fall down or hit their head. (General Technical Manager or building manager will also check this in advance of show)
  - Audience members may faint in hot atmospheres
  - Tripping/slipping hazards when entering the auditorium and accessing seats, especially if they walk across/by the set on entry.
  - Seating railings and steps must be securely fixed (nuts/bolts tightened)

The GTM will help you with this process - you're not alone!

## **Fire Safety**

Should the fire alarm go off you must ensure that your cast and crew, and audience if applicable, exit the building in an orderly fashion. Liaise with the Front of House volunteers who will direct audience members out. All the fire exits are on the ground floor of the building (See Appendix Fire Exit Map)

- During Rehearsals
  - Use the nearest stairs to get to the ground floor and the nearest fire exit
  - Wheelchair users can be left in the safe refuge spaces where the Fire Brigade can locate them and help them out of the building. Ensure you notify the Fire Brigade of the location of any such people as priority.
  - If you or your cast are physically able to use them, evacuation chairs are available on the first floor (kit room) and in the basement (accessible toilet).
  - **DO NOT USE THE LIFT (the lift will automatically return to the ground floor with doors open when the alarm sounds).**
- During a show
  - The auditorium has 3 fire exits. At least two must be accessible, regardless of set-design or seating layout.

- The primary fire exit route is the main doors from the foyer.
- Every show has 2 Front of House members in the audience who are responsible for guiding the audience out should the fire alarm sound. You may need to help them if the primary fire exit is blocked and the audience needs to exit via the workshop.
- You are responsible to make sure that the entire cast and crew are safely out of the building. This is where your sign-in sheet comes in handy. (templates available in the pouch on the white doors)
- There are several fire extinguishers about the building including backstage and in the technical gallery. They should NEVER be moved from their stations (although sometimes re-positioning the station is necessary), and they MUST NEVER be blocked or used to prop open doors. You should familiarise yourself with their locations and uses.

Finally, SLT has a zero tolerance policy for naked flames. **STRICTLY NO FIRE ON STAGE**

This includes all types of cigarettes, candles etc. If you have a strong artistic reason to use naked flames, make your case directly to the Building Manager who may grant permission in rare circumstances.

## Opening and closing the theatre

You may be the first in the building for a rehearsal or performance, even having to deactivate the intruder alarm. Everyone should sign in on the front desk as they enter the building, and sign out when they leave. When leaving the building on a rehearsal night, if you are the person closing up, you will need to do a walk around (known as the sweep) to check that the building is completely empty. Unless you are a very experienced member, you must complete the lockup training before doing this on your own. There is a laminate at the back of the sign-in sheet showing the route you should take. While walking round you must ensure:

- The building is actually empty
- All windows are closed completely
- No equipment on that could cause a fire (e.g. hair straighteners, heaters)
- All fire extinguishers are in the correct place
- All lights in the auditorium and backstage are switched off - including lights in the rig
- All lights in the bar are switched off
- All lights in the foyer are switched off
- All three doors on the tech gallery are closed properly
- The new stairwell door to the bar (at the very bottom) is closed properly

The laminate includes a comprehensive list of things you should check.

Several doors have sensors that won't allow you to set the alarm if they're left propped open, so close all doors as you tour the building. You don't need to worry about lights around the building, they are on auto timed sensors and will switch themselves off (except the Bar, Foyer, Wardrobe track lights, top floor office kitchen & bathroom).

If you're having trouble with the alarm contact the WhatsApp group of experienced people who are trained in locking up. As a last resort you should call the Building Manager (personal number on the alarm panel, along with reset instructions if needed).

## SLT Youth Theatre Saturdays

SLT Youth Theatre has the run of the building during the day on a Saturday (10am - 5pm). This includes the use of the theatre itself.

Please note that you will not be able to access the building during these times unless you have made a prior arrangement with the youth team ([training@southlondontheatre.co.uk](mailto:training@southlondontheatre.co.uk)). Your team must clear the auditorium and stage area so it's safe for the classes. (Some youth theatre students are as young as six years old!)

This includes:

- All tools put away
- All ladders away backstage
- All the seating to be left safely in place
- All excess materials stored backstage
- Store props and costumes backstage
- Move furniture to allow as much space as possible
- Sweep/hoover the stage to ensure no loose screws etc that could cause injuries
- Ensure any rugs/carpets are securely taped down or rolled away (no trip hazards)

## ASMs

ASMs are there to assist you before, during and after a show to make the performance as slick as possible. Though it's preferable for actors to do scene changes, this isn't always possible and the stage management team is responsible for prepping the set at the end of the show so it's ready to go for the following night.

The number of ASMs you have depends on the complexity of the show, and in a worst case scenario they should be able to take over your duties as Stage Manager should you need to step away from a show. Sometimes it's possible to use actors in minor roles to act as ASMs.

## SM Kit

This is what constitutes the most basic items of your backstage kit. Most of these items can be found backstage - if you don't know where they are please ask.

- Torch
- Gaffer tape
- Pen / Pencil / Sharpie
- First Aid Kit
- Scissors
- Superglue / needle & thread / safety pins
- SCRIPT!

## Rehearsals & Run-up week

You're in charge of the show during the performance nights, but you should try to attend several rehearsals, even from the very beginning if the show is complex. You and your crew should be there for every run-up rehearsal to set up and rehearse the show along with the cast.

## Scene Changes

Many of our shows have very simple scene changes, but for any required, consider these points, as audiences don't want to sit in the dark for 30 seconds during a scene change..

- How easily and smoothly can you run the scene change?
- Do you need more ASMs because the change involves lots of props and furniture?
- If there are large pieces moving on and off stage, where do you store them backstage?
- Make sure actors aren't in the way (such as waiting for their entrance)
- Make sure there's adequate light for the scene change
- Could the actors help with moving props/furniture?
- Could the scene change be part of the performance?

## Costume

In the best scenario, actors will have all their costumes in the Green Room and will be responsible for their own changes, but sometimes there need to be quick changes backstage so you may need a costume rail backstage, as well as people able to assist the actors in getting changed.

Some shows have special effects (SFX) that may result in the costumes needing cleaning each night. Check with a member of the Wardrobe team for the best way to clean and dry each garment for the show. SLT has a washing machine and tumble dryer in the 2nd floor accessible toilet next to Wardrobe.

## Props

When accessing the props stores:

- Keep gangways clear at all times
- Stow large items safely (anyone failing to do this will be personally liable if someone has an accident and is injured)
- List your props with a column reminding you where the props need to be returned

Props should either be on set, on an actor's person or on a props table backstage. The props table should be covered in lining paper and have a specific area for each prop,

outlined in tape, and labelled which prop sits there. Some props are too big for the table, but should still have a designated place. Impress upon the actors and crew that a prop should be returned to the props table once used, so it doesn't go walkabout

There are some special cases with regards to props that you should always consider:

- Glass / breakables

Where possible, avoid real glass on stage. It breaks and can be a hazard.

There should be a broken glass box/bucket backstage that all breakages should go into.

- Cigarettes - use the electric ones in props

- Food and drink

- Wash your hands - follow good food hygiene procedures
- Make sure that everything is fresh and fully cooked through where required. Use the kitchen on the 3rd floor (please be as quiet as possible due to counsellor / osteopath clients)
- Dispose of leftovers properly.
- Wash up dishes thoroughly.
- Give the set a vacuum after the performance to remove crumbs and prevent attracting mice. There is a fridge in the foyer (or top kitchen) that can be used for food storage, just make sure you label that the food is for the show.
- Dispose of any leftovers at the end of the run.

- Personal props - if an actor has designated certain items as "personal props", such as spectacles, jewellery etc, then they are responsible for them.

## SFX

Special effects sometimes also fall under the stage management remit. You may need to deal with stage blood, gun-shots, smoke and much more. Again, work these into your plan.

- Blood

- Stage blood can take a lot of cleaning on people and props. Avoid cochineal dye when creating fake blood as it can be difficult to clean.

- Smoke machine

- Check and test the smoke machine. Remember that it gets very hot, so have a good location for it backstage. Check that there is adequate ventilation to get rid of the smoke, and be sure to disable the fire alarm sensors before use (don't forget to turn it back on as soon as possible). The GTM can provide training for this.

- Gun shots.

- See Weapons below

- Warnings

- Inform box office if you're using smoke during the performance, or cigarettes. Audiences need to be aware, also of loud noises and flashing lights

## Weapons

**Weapons should be stored in a locked cupboard at all times.** They should only be brought out for use during rehearsals or the show itself. Liaise with the Props team on all weapons.

- Blunt weapons
  - Always check that they are in good working order; no loose handles, retractable blade works etc
  - **Guns are to be kept locked in the gun safe in the main props store**, even if they are replicas.
  - Some occasions require a gun-shot to sound; the simplest way is to have a SFX. Cap guns must not be used. Confetti canons must be fully risk assessed.

## Get-In

The show get-in and previous show get-out happens on the Sunday a week before the show goes up and starts at 12 noon (or earlier if the previous show has a simple get-out). As stage manager, you're automatically part of the team. The General Technical Manager will usually be there or will appoint an expert member of the set build team to guide and assist during a get-in, but you need to be aware of things to check.

- Seating
  - Our seating is completely configurable and we aim for at least 75 seats per show. There should only be a maximum run of 13 seats in a row before there is a gap.
- Steps and access
  - The steps up our seating deck should always be in a straight line for safe access.
  - Make sure step edges are marked with white gaffer tape for visibility
  - Provide space for a wheelchair user and companion if advised by box office
  - Some audience members cannot climb our steps very easily, so we should always have seats on floor level.
- Guard rails
  - Should be attached to the ends of rows above ground level, and / or in front of seating, to avoid audience members falling
- Backstage setup
  - Keep fire exits clear. No props, costume or scenery should be blocking exits.
  - Fire extinguishers must be in their correct locations and easily accessible.
  - Work out the best location for Props, Costume, Scenery, SFX stations at get-in
  - Have some seating backstage for the cast to rest between scenes.
- Green Room
  - Make sure the actors keep it clean and tidy, cover up any food left there and use the valuables lockers provided for wallets and phones.
  - Ensure the fire escape routes through the wings, workshop and yard are clear.



## Run-up Week

During this week you'll be able to refine and rehearse all you've planned for.

- Consider call times for actors and how they get to stage from the Green Room (usually down the new staircase, past the tech gallery and into the airlock)
- We don't want the actors to be seen by the audience before the show goes up.
- Make sure actors know they must not wander round the building in costume at any time when an audience is in
- Generally everyone should be in the building and getting ready at least an hour before curtain up.
- Call (arrival) time in run-up week is generally 7pm

There's no set structure for run-up week, but a recommended order of events is:

- Sunday (from noon) - Seating layout and set construction. Try to encourage the director to NOT have a rehearsal at the end of the day.
- Monday - Technical. Rigging, light plotting, sound & projector tests, set construction, etc.
- Tuesday - Tech rehearsal. Top and tail scenes. Practice scene changes.
- Wednesday and Thursday - Rehearsals on set
- Friday - Rehearsal (if absolutely necessary - it's best to give the cast a night off and then Saturday for a good rest)
- Sunday (from noon) - Full rehearsal. Tweaks to lights and sound. (Possible 2nd rehearsal if absolutely necessary)
- Monday - Dress rehearsal.

(Production photos should be taken on either Sunday or Monday - the Director is responsible for arranging this, but you should make sure that the set / costume / props are in their final state for photos.)

From the dress rehearsal onwards, you're in charge of the show. The director should be sitting back and basking in their glory and not give acting notes after dress rehearsal (except for general encouragement or reminders)

## Performance Week

### Pre-Show

- Opening up the auditorium
  - Once in the auditorium switch the worker lights on and check that the seats are all clear and accessible.
  - Check the set is ready for the opening scene (when possible set this up the night before)
- Fire exits & evacuation procedure
  - All cast and crew should know where the fire exits are and the fire evacuation procedure.
  - Check all fire exits are clear
  - Check all fire extinguishers are in place and accessible.

- Sign-in sheet
  - Make sure everyone signs in on the sign-in sheet for all cast and crew, not the building register. (Template on the back of the scene dock white door)
- Props / Costumes / SFX
  - Check that everything is set and ready for the show. Make sure actors have returned non-personal props
- Mobile phones backstage
  - Ensure all cast and crew have set them to silent. You might prefer to ban cast mobile phones to avoid distractions
- Cast warm up
  - Where possible, run this as close to curtain up as possible. It shouldn't go beyond 10 minutes to curtain up if warming up in the space
  - Fight calls must be done before every show, after a warm up. The actors should be in full costume and all sounds/lights should be used. Even simple punches need to be rehearsed before every show, in show conditions.
- Operator
  - The operator should try to test run the technical side of the show each night.
  - You should be able to communicate with the operator to start the show, etc. There are a set of portable radios (cans) that can be used for this. They live on the tech gallery and need charging each night.
- Front of House
  - Our FOH staff change nightly. You should know where to seat them in the auditorium and you will need to show them the best route through the set to the fire exit in case the audience needs to take this route.

## Pre-Show Schedule

Again, there's no set structure for this, but recommendations are:

- 1 hour before show
  - Open up and auditorium check
  - Fire exit and extinguisher check
  - FOH walk round
- 45 minutes
  - Operator tech test run
  - Props, costume, SFX checks
  - Switch off the fire alarm in the appropriate zone if you're using haze/smoke
- 30 minutes
  - Cast call "This is your 30 minute call"
  - Warm-ups / Fight calls
- 10 minutes (depending on audience size)
  - Cast call "Beginners please" - get them backstage
  - Notify FOH to open auditorium and call up audience members in the bar
  -

- 2 minutes
  - Final checks in bar and toilets for audience (should be done by FOH)  
Check in with operator
  - Check cast beginners and crew are backstage and ready
- 0 minutes
  - Start the show - you might delay this slightly if there are known latecomers or transport issues; use your discretion, but it's advisable to limit the delay to 5 minutes or less

## During Show

### Announcement

A pre-recorded announcement should be made by the director (or delegated) in advance of the show to ask the audience to switch off mobile phones and not take photos, whether there's an interval, and if re-admission is possible if an audience member leaves the auditorium. It's good practice to also remind audiences that the bar will be open after the show. (With family shows, we should allow readmission as long as it's safe - liaise with front of house). The basic announcement is:

*"Good evening everyone and welcome to tonight's performance of [SHOW NAME]. Please take a moment to switch off your mobile phones and please be aware that there is to be no photography or filming of the performance. Thank you, and enjoy the show."*

Please avoid using gendered terminology - 'ladies and gentlemen' can be replaced with 'everyone'. (SLT WELCOMES EVERYONE, and the announcement helps promote this ethos.)

### Latecomers

Latecomers are allowed in only if they can be seated without unduly disrupting the show or other audience members. Getting them in generally falls to FOH, but with some auditorium layouts you may need to help. It's always at the director's discretion as to whether latecomers will be allowed and it may be that there are good times for them to get to their seats (such as at the end of the first scene). Be prepared to assist where necessary.

### Interval

If the show has an interval, we may need to encourage the audience to completely exit the auditorium if you have a complex set change or simply want to maintain the element of surprise. Avoid this if possible as it's not a popular move!

An interval is usually 15-20 minutes. You will also need to let FOH know when the auditorium is open again, usually 5 minutes before the start of the second half. Actors should get a "Beginners" call before the audience is let back in. Even if they don't appear in the second half, actors must not go to the bar to meet friends or family, and should be in costume to take bows.

## Post Show

FOH will make sure that the audience has left the auditorium completely and clear any leftover glasses or programmes in the auditorium; you will be able to reset the space for the next performance. Encourage actors to meet friends and family in the bar rather than the foyer - FoH volunteers can't go home until the foyer is clear

## Closing down the auditorium

A lot of this is common sense and repetitive, but:

- Operator
  - Check with the operator the everything is switched off correctly
    - Show lights and rig
    - Computer
    - Sound system and amps
    - Projector(s)
    - Tech Gallery doors shut fully (the building alarms can't be set otherwise)
- Fire Exits and Extinguishers
  - Check exits are clear and extinguishers are accessible.
  - Close the white scene dock doors - these are fire doors.
  - Make sure the back door to the yard is double locked and the gate shut properly
- Set / Props/ Costumes / SFX
  - All are ready for the next show
  - Props are back where they should be
  - Costumes in correct place
  - Costumes washed where appropriate. You may have to hang them out after the cycle has finished.
  - Smoke machine switched off, **fire alarm switched back on**
  - Weapons locked back in the Props store.
- Lights
  - All auditorium lights and backstage lights switched off.

## Get-Out

The get-out happens on the Sunday morning at 10am after the final Saturday night show. It must **NOT** happen on the Saturday night as cast and crew are only interested in getting down to the bar for a bit of a party, though by all means do any backstage tidying up during and immediately after the show..

All cast and crew (including operator) are expected to attend the get-out. It's a good way of putting a show to bed and for all to bond. Usually everyone heads out for Sunday lunch somewhere afterwards as a last hurrah.

- Green Room.
  - The cast should vacuum, clean and tidy the Green Room and empty bins.
  - Remove any personal belongings
  - Return costumes to a rail in wardrobe and help you to put props away properly
- Backstage.
  - Must be empty of all props and costumes. **Props must go back to their original place tidily, return loaned items to their owners, take costumes back to Wardrobe**
  - Clean and swept, with bins emptied and the backstage loo cleaned
  - Fire exits and extinguishers clear and accessible
- Tech Gallery
  - The Operator is responsible for tidying the Tech Gallery and clearing rubbish.
  - Marked up script should be returned to the director, or possibly to script library, or just thrown away.
- Rubbish
  - All rubbish should be put in respective bins and clean bin liners put in

Bulky waste (such as large set items, wood etc must be dealt with as per GTM's guidance - please do not just leave it in the yard. Arrange for trips to charity shops, recycling centres etc where appropriate. The show is not over until the last item has found its permanent resting place!

## Handover

You should be there at the end of the get-out at 12 noon to hand over to the stage manager of the next show. The General Technical Manager or deputy is usually there to officially say that a get-out is complete and that the cast and crew are free to leave. If they are not, then you will need to confer with the next stage manager that they are happy with the state of the auditorium and backstage before everyone can leave.

It's also nice if your cast and crew help the next show to set out their seats, especially if yours is a larger cast.

## Have a great show!

Fire/muster point

