



A Director's Ultimate Guide to a Successful Tech Week

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Tech Week

It's the most rewarding part of production, but we know as well as you do that it's definitely not the easiest.

There's a reason its sobriquet, "Hell Week," is used interchangeably. There seems to be a never-ending list of things to do, and a bottomless pit of things to worry about. As a director, producer, actor, crew member or techie, it's hard to keep your palms from getting sweaty just thinking about it.

Whether you're a veteran or a newbie, every tech week will feel like your first- it is, after all, your first, for this production. This pivotal week can truly be a theatremaker's nightmare, without the right tools. Luckily for you, we've put together an all-in-one guide to everything you need to coordinate a successful tech week.





Plan Ahead Like, Way Ahead



The truth is, tech week starts the moment you select a script. The best way to plan is to work backwards. Heading into the final week, your show should be blocked, choreographed, and memorized – and this requires a steady schedule all the way up until tech week. When coordinating your rehearsals, asking yourself questions ahead of time can help you be prepared:

- What kind of lighting, music and set pieces will be in this scene?
- How can I block my actors in a way that the spotlight can follow them?
- Will an entrance from upstage be a visible cue from the booth?



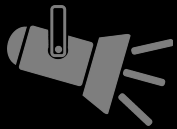
We know directors can wear many different hats.

Even if your sound, set, or lighting designer is you, you might forget what you wanted! So, be as specific as possible in the moment at rehearsal; then you won't have to rack your brain later when there's way more to be thinking about. Here are three key things to think about as you head into Tech Week:



Sound Design

Assemble a list of sound cues and musical effects as early as possible, preferably before tech week hits, so your sound designer (whether that's you or someone else) has time to create the sound and tracks with plenty of spare time.



Lighting Design

If you can arrive with detailed ideas for the ambience of each scene, you'll be way more relaxed during tech week. Know the longevity of each cue, the timing of when it comes in or fades out. Think: do you want it to fade or to cut? Is a full black out the move?



Set Design

Do you want a module set? Do you need certain pieces to come off stage, and if so, would wheels be best? Even if you don't know exactly what you want yet, making notes during rehearsal of shifts in mood, blocking, etc. can be super helpful when you're designing set.

Pro Tips

Sound and Lighting

1

Be specific! If you just ask for car noises, that won't give enough information. Is it a car on a gravel road or a smooth highway? Is there a honk or a beep? How old is the car? Is there a screeching halt?

2

Get to know your sound and lighting equipment early on in the production process. Knowing what kind of tools are available to you will really help you utilize them!

3

Even if you're the sound and lighting crew, meet your deadlines like you *have* a sound and lighting crew. Try not to wait until the last minute just because you're relying on yourself.



2

Preparing Your Cast and Crew

There's a lot to remember during tech week, and we're not just talking about lines! Whether your cast and crew are veterans to tech week, or participating for their first time, there's a lot that goes into it. We've put together an easy resource to help make sure no task takes the back burner!



Check This

Consider passing this handy checklist out to your cast and crew, or posting it somewhere where they can all see it (like in the dressing room!)

BEFORE THE SHOW

- ☐ Have you checked in with your director or delegated stage manager?
- ☐ Have you checked the prop table to confirm all your props are in their place?
- ☐ Have you visited the sound and lighting crew for a mic check?
- ☐ Have you warmed up with both vocal exercises AND a full body stretch?
- ☐ Have you hydrated and fed yourself?
- ☐ Have you turned your phone, computer, watches, etc. on silent/off?
- ☐ Have you cleaned your space backstage, unplugged any hair appliances, and picked up the space? Don't forget to cap the drinks!

DURING INTERMISSION

- ☐ Have you made sure any costume changes for Act Two are ready to go?
- ☐ If you turned any personal devices on, have you turned them back off?
- ☐ Have you grabbed a few sips of water or a few bites of food?
- ☐ Have you checked to make sure your stage makeup is still intact?
- ☐ Have you checked to make sure your mic is still connected and has enough power?

AFTER THE SHOW

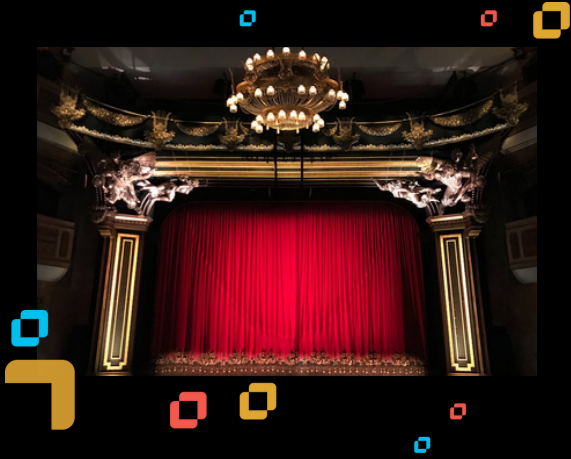
- ☐ Have you returned all your costumes to the costume rack?
- ☐ Have you returned any props you used to the prop table?
- ☐ Have you tidied your backstage space so it's clean for tomorrow?

3

Creating and Communicating the Schedule



Types of Rehearsals



Dry Tech

The purpose of the dry tech is to run through the shows without any actors, just the production and crew teams, to take a look at set pieces, lighting, and sound. In dry tech, it's vital to discuss the intensity, timing, and placement of the various cues, and make sure what you're imagining in your head reflects well on stage.



Dress Rehearsal

At this point in your tech week, any technical problems should be squared away and it becomes time to shift your focus to the hair, makeup and costumes. Have your actors get to rehearsal with ample time to get ready, and use the time they're getting ready to make sure everything on your end is ready.



Run Through

Running the show, beginning to end, no stopping. Have your actors, crew and production treat this like the real deal. As a director, this means it's time to let go, and cross your fingers. Rather than yelling, "Cut!", make notes to discuss with the cast and crew after the run. (Be sure to check out our tips for "Run Notes" later on!)



Pro Tip

During tech week, it's important to make sure your show is blocked, choreographed, and that you have it down like the back of your hand in time for tech week. Minor adjustments are okay, but the point of tech week is to make sure everything technical is functioning cohesively with your show. Think lights, wardrobe, sound, props, etc.



Your Notes

Go through any of your relevant notes. Keep them concise, if you can. These notes shouldn't just point out what went wrong, but rather, they should also mention everything you liked!

Crew Notes

Have your backstage crew read any notes they have about problems they had throughout the show that everyone can help with (ie, too much talking backstage, or sitting in the wings when they're not in cue.)

Cast Notes

Allow your cast to ask questions. Discuss as a group solutions to any problems or mishaps they may have noticed. Some things might occur out of your radar that are important!

KEEP IN MIND...

The benefits of positive reinforcement are especially true in acting- from leading roles to background actors! A little praise will not make most actors arrogant, rather, it'll encourage them to keep performing at their best.



Lights, Camera... Action?

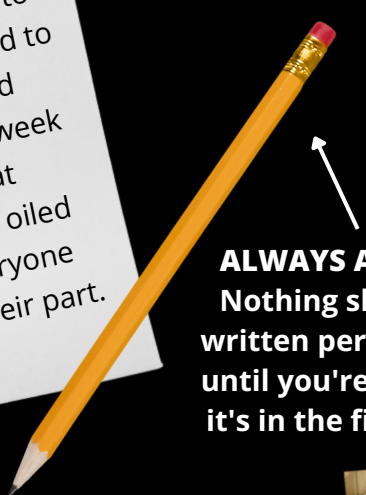
You've scheduled your week, it's the night before the run, and you have everything in check. Or so you think- until the moment the next day where you realize, you forgot that one thing! Well, now you don't need to stress. Whether you want to tackle the whole list yourself, or delegate different tasks to different members of your crew, we've got a comprehensive list of all you need to make sure everything's ready.






Pro-Tip:

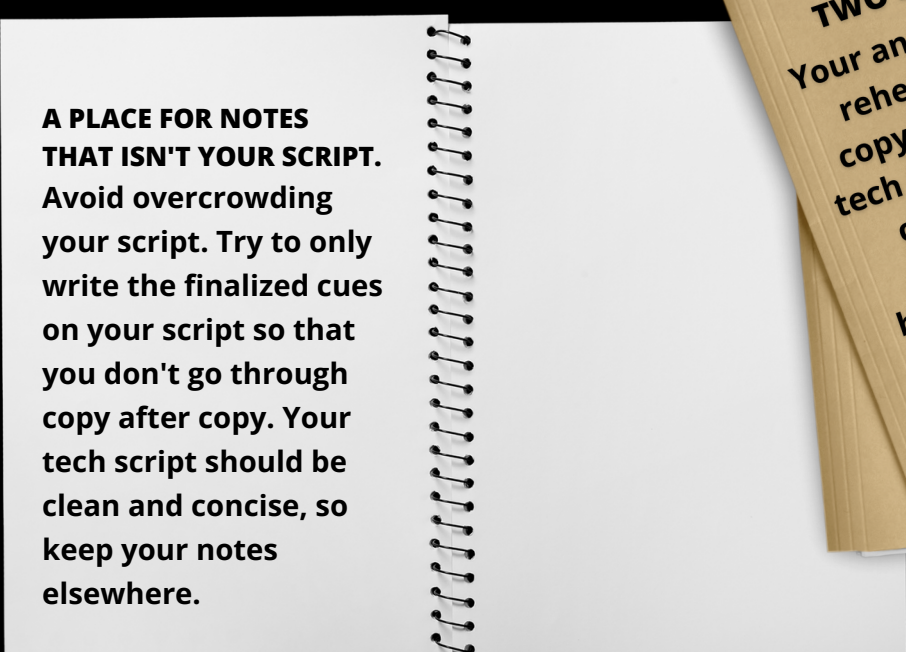
It's important to remind everyone to only do the tasks that are delegated to them. In most cases, above and beyond is appreciated, but tech week is omitted. It's important that everything functions like a well oiled machine, and that means everyone must do their part- and only their part.



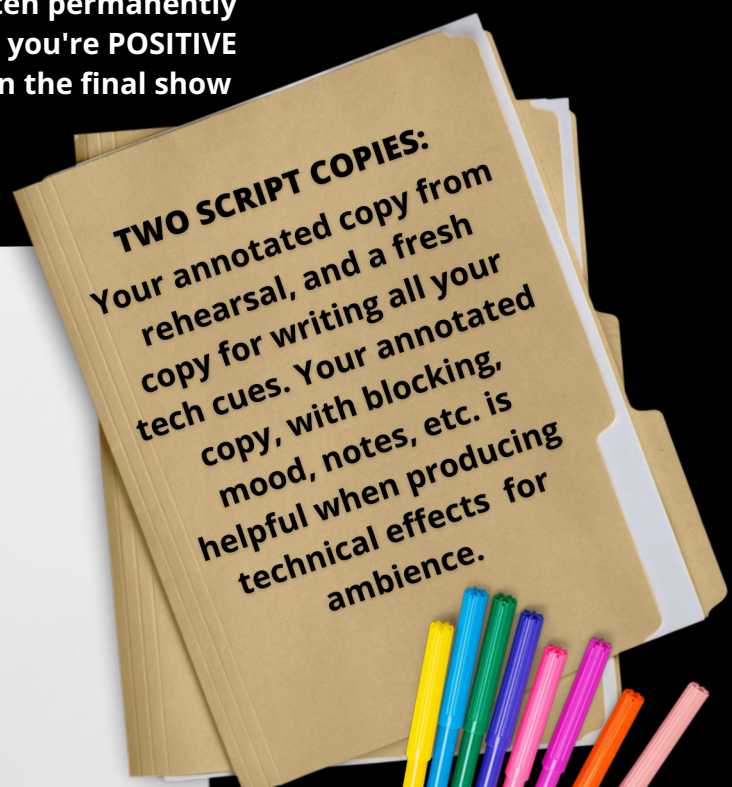
ALWAYS A PENCIL
Nothing should be written permanently until you're **POSITIVE** it's in the final show




HEADSET, WALKIE, ETC:
A way to communicate to the sound, lighting, and backstage crews




A PLACE FOR NOTES THAT ISN'T YOUR SCRIPT.
Avoid overcrowding your script. Try to only write the finalized cues on your script so that you don't go through copy after copy. Your tech script should be clean and concise, so keep your notes elsewhere.



TWO SCRIPT COPIES:
Your annotated copy from rehearsal, and a fresh copy for writing all your tech cues. Your annotated copy, with blocking, mood, notes, etc. is helpful when producing technical effects for ambience.



COLORED PENS, HIGHLIGHTERS, ETC.
There's a lot of different kind of cues- color coding helps keep things organized



We get it- sometimes a caffeine boost is necessary- just try to keep it as far away from your script as possible.

The Director's Desk

When you start the show from the top, make sure you have everything you need

The Ultimate Tech Run Checklist



Make a prop table.

We suggest using a white folding table, and having your SM tape out space for each prop, writing with Sharpie where each prop goes.



Create an ultimate prop checklist.

We suggest doing this weeks in advance once the show is fully blocked.



Check all props that require batteries.

Make sure all props have new batteries and check that there is no corrosion or other factors that could cause a malfunction.



Have food props?

See if you can find fake food that looks real. Otherwise, make sure you have a cooler for any products that need to be kept fresh. Set a reminder for yourself to replenish any food promptly - you don't want spoiled food!



Double check all your mics.

Check to see if they have full batteries, are plugged in, and work properly



Make sure you turn off all the lights before you leave for the night.

You don't want any lights to burn out- but on that same note, make sure they all work, too!



Check to make sure any lighting gels/color gels are in good shape, and attached securely to the light.



Check to make sure all of your sound and lighting cues are written in your script.

We suggest giving each crew member in the booth a personalized script with their cues, to avoid any mishaps.



Make sure the stage is swept.



Make sure any wood props or set pieces are splinter-free.



Check the backstage wings for cleanliness.



Make sure any wires (for lights, set pieces, etc.) are taped down with Gaff tape.



Tape the Wings.

There's nothing that ruins a show like seeing actors in the wings: have your production team stand in the wings, and find the sweet spot where you can't see them from anywhere in the house.



Have walkie talkies for your crew?

Make sure they're in their places and charging. Double check that they're plugged in!



Pro Tip

When I was an assistant director, I had my stage manager make a highlighted note in their blocking every time I mentioned a prop. This way, when the dry tech came (see more of that above), they'd easily be able to run through their script and make sure we had everything.



Don't mess around with safety precautions. It never hurts to double and triple check that the entirety of the backstage and onstage area is clear of any hazards, but it can definitely hurt to not check. Consider delegating two or three background actors to do safety checks before every show.

You did it!

You got through the run, but now you need to make sure everything is set for tomorrow. It's important to take a few extra steps the night before the next tech run, or show, to relieve some stressors for the next day.



Make sure all your props are returned to the prop table.



Make sure all your mics, headsets and anything else that might need to be charged are plugged in.



Make sure the stage gets swept. This is extremely important for safety!



Lock up any valuables, and/or any stage weapons you might have, like swords, knives, or prop guns.



Shut down the house! This includes lights, locking doors, closing any windows, turning off your sound systems, etc.

Doing this before AND after every show ensures the stage is clean of anything that might trip or hurt someone, like nails, pins, earrings that fell out, spilled liquid, etc.

A series of three small squares in orange, red, and yellow, arranged in a descending staircase pattern.

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Backstage Fundamentals

Once the show starts, a lot of the pressure shifts from on the stage to backstage. Keeping your crew, stage managers, and actors equipped with anything they might need will be key to keeping everything running smoothly.



The Backstage Box

Things are bound to happen throughout the show. Here's our list of what makes the show go on.



- **Wardrobe:** Bobby pins, safety pins, hairspray, hair ties, earring backs, hair gel
- **First Aid:** Band-aids, antiseptic, ace bandage, scissors, hydrating supplements like Liquid I.V., muscle relaxants like IcyHot, wet wipes, etc.
- **Personal Care:** Deodorant, tissues, make-up wipes
- **Mints** can also help crew stay alert!
- **Notebooks and Pens:** Eliminate the backstage talking!
- **A Script** with all the cues and blocking
- **Tape:** gaff, duct, scotch, all of it!
- **Phone Bin:** Your actors might hate it, but it's important that everyone's phones backstage are turned off and silent, to avoid any distractions.

Key Backstage Rules



In addition to keeping the backstage area equipped, it's important to set some ground rules for backstage. These should be practiced all throughout tech week, so it's a habit by the time the real curtains go up. Here are a few important ones:

- **Enforce no talking backstage.** Not only can the audience hear it, but if your mic is accidentally still on when you get off stage, you could risk saying something on the speakers. We're proud that you "Nailed it!" but the audience doesn't need to hear that!
- **Discourage any lallygagging in the wings.** This might vary depending on the setup of your theatre, but generally, having a designated space for actors to sit when they're not in a scene that isn't too close to the performance stage is helpful in preventing any unnecessary obstacles or injuries.
- **Set designated eating and drinking areas, or times** (not during the show). Drinks and snacks can be a huge hazard- someone could slip, it could spill onto equipment, a costume could get ruined, and it's just messy!
- **Stress the value of theatre etiquette.** Show by example! Asking "please" before requests, and saying "thank you" after them, arriving ten minutes early and expecting to stay ten minutes late, treating your crew with kindness and respect, refraining from unsolicited advice, etc. These things go a long way in keeping morale high during a stressful time, for you, your actors, and your crew.
- **Last but not least:** honor stage traditions! Don't whistle backstage, or say Macbeth in the theatre. Say "break a leg" instead of good luck, never bring a peacock feather... These seem silly, but hey- if Broadway enforces it, we all should!

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Mental & Physical Health Reminders



Tech Week Reminders

For Directors and Producers



As a director, if you keep in mind these few things, you'll be feeling your best for tech week.

Stay flexible! Go into tech week with an open mind. You're likely going to have to change an entrance to work with a lighting cue, change some choreography to adjust to costumes, or figure out how to work around a faulty spotlight. If you're too rigid in your vision, making these adjustments will be a lot more stressful than it needs to be.

Try to turn off your director's brain once you get home. Trust us, we know it's not easy! But distinguishing your workspace and homespace can be vital in avoiding burnout. If you're worrying about the show all hours of the day (and night), you'll be overtired and your best work won't shine.

Keep yourself fueled and hydrated! Drinking and eating enough will keep the headaches to a minimum, your brain out of a fog, and your daily to-dos more manageable. So set reminders! As silly as it sounds, you'd be surprised how often you might forget!

Get some support. You have a lot on your plate. With On The Stage's all-in-one platform, we take the stress of ticketing, marketing, merchandising, and fundraising off your plate! Schedule a personalized demo to see how we can help you feel relaxed going into tech week.

Understand when to take breaks and give breaks. If you feel yourself getting stressed or frustrated, don't hesitate to step away. Same thing goes for your actors and crew- if you see someone getting frustrated, pull them aside and don't be afraid to tell them to take a breather. In the moment it's tough, but in the long run, it keeps everyone from saying things they don't mean or acting in ways they'll likely regret.

Tech Week Reminders

For Cast and Crew



Keep yourself hydrated. Not with coffee or energy drinks—these things can make you temporarily alert, but combined with the anxiety and spotlight heat, can cause a spike in your heart rate. Opt for room-temperature water with lemon or herbal teas.

Make a rehearsal bag. To avoid forgetting anything, set aside a bag with everything you need for shows (any hair/makeup things, script, snacks, water, etc.)

Support your mental health. To avoid mental health burnout, try meditating before and after rehearsal, journaling about what's worrying you, or even just turning on Netflix for a comfort show! As always, if you're struggling, talk to your director.

Know when to give your all. It's important to find the balance between giving it your all, and practicing like it's the show. You can provide your rehearsal best without stretching yourself too thin during tech week and leaving no leftover energy or vocals for the show!

Listen to your body. If you're feeling lightheaded, dehydrated, or over-exhausted, it's perfectly okay to take a minute to find solutions before the show goes on.

Warm up and cool down. Your vocals, your body, and your mind! Try taking a bath when you get home, or a nice shower, to rest your vocals, loosen your muscles and calm your mind.



Pro Tip

Don't overlook hygiene! Shows can be gross and sweaty! At the end of the day, when you just want to sleep, ensure you're still doing everything you'd normally do to keep yourself clean and healthy. Also, stage makeup can be a lot on your skin, so make sure you're washing your face and taking it all off thoroughly!

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It's Showtime

It's the night of the show, the house is open, people are settling in – it's likely that this will be the moment you question everything. It's normal! All your hard work and preparation has been building up to this moment. But the most important thing to do now is breathe, and know that whatever happens, everything will pull through. The little things you're stressing about will likely go unnoticed by your audience, because this is the first time they're seeing the show- not the 100th, like you! So relax. After all, the show always goes on!

That's a Wrap

Tech week is designed to ensure that all the hard work, hours, sweat, and tears you've put into creating your art culminates into something magical for your patrons, cast, crew, and community. The magic comes together in the form of teamwork, preparation, dedication, and having the tools and resources you need to succeed.



On The Stage

If you're looking to expand your community, On the Stage is passionate about helping you achieve the show you deserve and have worked so hard for. Tech week is stressful! Let us take the logistics off your shoulders, so you can carry what matters most. Taking care of all your marketing, ticketing, fundraising, merchandising, and organizing needs is what we love to do- so you can focus your energy on what you love to do!

To learn more about On The Stage and becoming part of our community of theatermakers, schedule a personalized demo today.

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