

Designing Costumes for a Show? Don't know where to start? Try step 1....

1. **Read the play.** Ignore all stage directions and comments- just read the story. *All the other information is distracting to your first understanding of the show.* Don't try to multi task and get it all done at once. You'll be limiting yourself. Then you can actually get a feel for the play itself. Some plays are dark. Others are light. Some are very fast paced – others are very slow and brooding ... all of these descriptions have certain colors and emotions associated with them in our minds- all of these descriptions have certain colors and emotions associated with them in our minds.
2. **Annotate.** Write down all of your immediate thoughts and motivations about the script, the characters, **anything that crossed your mind** about the characters, the story, the setting, the feeling, the themes, if you thought it or felt it- WRITE IT DOWN!!! It's important.
 - a. **Before** you jump to 3 start sketching! *These sketches are more of your "feelings" or thoughts just in images.* They don't have to be fancy and shouldn't be elaborate. Just enough to get your initial ideas about these characters out of your head and on paper. You won't even show them to anyone (mostly). You may not have sketches for the entire cast or for an entire costume but some 'idea seed' should settle in your noggin. That idea may inspire the whole production's costumes or it may fall to the back of the binder after you start step 3.
 - b. **Talk to the Director** and learn her "**concept**" and plans for the show. Directors have their own style and ideas, and it is very important to include her at this stage of the planning.
3. **Research** the time period of the play in which the costumes designs will be used. Not just the styles on the young and hip men and women, but that of the elderly, middle aged, babies and school aged children. The clothing for all seasons in the climate that the production is set in. This will help you create the world that your characters live in. If your production is surrealistic, you can start your design with realism and then start 'breaking it down.' Look up pictures, colors, patterns and fabrics.
 - a. **Create a story board** or portfolio of some kind to present to the director. Be sure to leave room for other additions.
4. **Read the Play AGAIN.** Go back through after your first pass – and make your notes.
 - a. Occupation of characters that may require a specific type of costume. For example, a soldier will need to be decked out in a uniform, while a society woman will need to be dressed fancy.
 - b. This is where you can start your Costume Break Down (List of every actor: who they play on what page & what they are wearing.)
 - c. Often, playwrights will include specifics within the dialogue or stage directions that allude to the characters' costumes. Make special notes of these requirements as well when you begin planning the costumes. Make a complete list of characters, along with any special notes about costuming found within the context of the script. Don't apply these to your stage limitations yet – just be aware of them.
 - d. Now you can go look at how other people have done this play and get some ideas BUT this is very controversial in terms of having your own original thoughts and ideas on stage and not sealing other people's ideas. If you need a little kick start though, by all means, just remember- you can NOT copy another person's work.
5. **Choose Color Palate.** Color plays an important part in the presentation of the play and the director's concept. Keep in mind skin and hair color of your actors when planning colors to use these tools to enhance your story not detract.
6. **Pre Design Sketches, Renderings & Fabric Research**-More Sketches and Research
 - a. **Thumbnail Sketch**- a rough sketch typically small and unpolished that gets the 'feeling' of the image
 - b. **Rendering.** A polished drawing of each costume (front & back) the way you would like to look. Add human features to the figure wearing the outfit to give them the attributes of the character they are portraying. This will help your presentation to the director. You must create 1 rendering per costume. So if you have 5 characters and they each have 2 costumes =10 renderings. If you are meeting with the director to get your design theme approved you do not need to have the entire cast rendered, **ONLY THE MAIN CHARACTERS'S COSTUMES SHOULD BE PRESENTED.**
 - i. **Close up rendering/ images** of hats, shoes, neck ties, and gloves should be provided if they are being used.

- c. **Fabric Swashes** If you are building (making) any of the costumes the designer must choose the kinds of fabric that the costumes will be made of. This is why swatch samples of the fabric must be given with the renderings. If you are not having the costumes built then the exact fabric choices are not required for replication but should be included for garment type. Ex: If the dress is made of silk it will move differently than if it were made of oiled canvas.
7. **Present to the Director** with a set of material swatches representing the color scheme of the costumes & renderings for *Design/Concept Approval*. (Remember theater is a collaborative sport.) You do not need to present research but be prepared to talk at length about your choices and your reasons for picking them.
8. **Complete Rendering & Make Adjustments** to original designs after meeting with the director. Finish all renderings for each character and all costumes that they may have.
 - a. When sketches are complete look to see what uniformities or redundancies that appear which you might have missed before. You don't want costumes to look identical. (unless on purpose)
 - b. Update your Costume Break Down sheets
9. **Estimate** build time & cost for pieces & garment props (ex: fake glasses)
10. **Meet your Team!** Present your design to your costume team and divide labor (if not already divided) into departments. (fittings, builders, wardrobe)
11. **Measurements!** Meet with fitting team and actors for a 2 fitter:1 actor ratio (1 for measuring & 1 for note taking). Include: bust/chest, waist, hips, length from waist to knees, length from waist to instep, around upper arm, around wrists, shoulder to shoulder, and shoulder to wrist. Keep individual sheets for each actor. {10+11 can happen at any point in the 1-10 process}.
 - a. **Be sensitive** to the insecurities of your actors. If they are feeling insecure with an aspect of themselves, do your best to not draw attention to it.
12. **BUILD, SHOP, PULL!!!** Pull your team together and start creating each full costume for each character and checking that it is completed and ready for the first fitting
 - a. **Actor First Fitting** happens when all costumes for that actor have been completed. (This should be early on in the rehearsal process) The Designer is present with a builder and a fitter. If any alterations need to be made, the fitter will pin the garment as needed & builder can make notes about the garment on the Costume Break Down or Actor's Character Chart (same as costume break down but just for that character) Designer can choose to make changes to the look at this time.
13. **Actor Final Fitting** happens if there are any changes that have occurred since the first fitting.
14. **Update paperwork** always, every day, very, very, very important.
15. **Lay out costume policies to the actors-** what they are and are not allowed to do in costume (eat/ drink and if so what) also make it clear that they must hang up their costumes and take good care of them. Introduce the wardrobe team and that they will be handling costumes for the run of the show.
16. **Tech** Any changes will be made now at this time, after tech, nothing changes only gets repaired or washed!
17. **Post Show-** make sure costumes are returned/tracked down to be checked in, repaired washed, returned to rentals or owners, and stored properly.
 - a. **Update all paperwork & renderings.** Keep the originals for yourself and give a copy to the theater for archive.