

**Notes for directors**

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# Introduction

The rehearsal period is actually the culmination of all your work so you should prepare as much as possible before starting rehearsals. This also maximises the opportunity to publicise the show to potential cast and creative team, along with being included in programmes for shows prior to yours.

The following are some general guidelines for GST directors, both old and new. Every show and director is different so you may find there are some aspects that are not relevant to you or things you just wish to do differently.

The guidelines and tips have been put together from notes and feedback from some of our experienced directors to help other directors by having a check list drawn from the experiences of previous shows. They are not intended to be prescriptive, frustrate creative talent or innovation.

The final pages of these notes include a rough overall timetable of the 12 months leading up to the show.

If you are worried about any aspect of your show, talk to your mentor or staging representative. Don’t be afraid to ask for help. Remember we do this for fun!

**Key steps**

1. Work with casting and selection to choose your play and performance slot, this will likely be in part dictated by the theatres available for each slot
2. Get your team in place
3. Planning
4. Publicity
5. Audition
6. Rehearsal period
7. Show week
8. After the performance

The notes will be updated each year to include any specific pointers for different venues etc. If you think there is anything missing please discuss this with someone from General Committee.

# BEFORE YOU Direct

Before you direct your first full show for GST, Casting & Selection will ask you to direct a rehearsed reading. This is a performance in a smaller venue with a limited number of rehearsals, props and costumes to help you get to grips with the GST processes and see how you feel about directing.

These notes are designed for directors putting on a full production but may be useful for those doing a rehearsed reading.

In addition to this you will need to have completed at least one back stage role with GST previously, this doesn’t need to be a lead role but assisting back stage, with props, costumes or other areas will help to ensure you have a good overview of all the different aspects of putting on a production with GST.

# Your play

Casting and Selection (C&S) will work with you to select a script, confirm the venue and arrange for any royalties.

When choosing the play you may want to consider the following:

* Do you like the play
* What are the problems?
* Can it be cast? Do we have sufficient men, women and children of approximately the right age to audition?

**TIP 1:** If in doubt ask Casting and Selection for their advice. They will know who is likely to be available.

If your show includes singing and dancing you will need to find a musical director and choreographer straight away. This will also double your rehearsal period.

**TIP 2:** As a rule of thumb for each hour spent on acting, you need two hours for singing and three for dancing!

The running time of your chosen play should not exceed two-and-a-half hours including interval(s) so don’t be afraid to make cuts. You should, however, bear in mind that some licence holders, if approached, may refuse to allow any changes to a script.

**TIP 3:** If in doubt have a timed read through with a small group. It will give you a good feel. Add about 25% for business, scene changes, and incidental music

# Your team

The General Committee is essentially the producer of every production. There is a duty to ensure that a good standard of performance is achieved and that there is control of the production budget.

It is useful for a director to have a disinterested but experienced person in the background, to bounce questions off, to be another pair of experienced eyes and to help monitor expenditure.

To help achieve these aims, it may be appropriate to have a mentor for the director drawn either from one of the committees or from a seasoned director. The guidelines below are intended to help both the representative and director by having a check list drawn from the experiences of other directors and budgets from similar shows. They are not intended to be prescriptive, frustrate creative talent or innovation.

Choose:

1. Your Production Assistant (PA). Each director works differently with their PA, however, as a general rule the role of the PA consists of setting up the audition, taking notes in rehearsals, booking rehearsal venues and liaising with the cast.
2. The rest of your production team, depending on your arrangements these are likely to include
	* Choreographer and MD if appropriate
	* Set designer
	* Set builder (if not your SM)
	* Stage manager and any assistants
	* Programme design
	* Poster design
	* Lighting (this could be a separate designer and operator)
	* Sound (this could be a separate designer and operator)
	* Costumes
	* Wigs & make up
	* Props
	* Prompt.

Knowing how you are going to stage your show will affect everything you do so it is vital you get the experts around you as soon as possible. The earlier you put together the team the more time you will have to plan together and the easier it will be for you to focus on working with the cast once the rehearsal period starts.

Although some directors are reluctant to tie members into production roles rather than being able to audition, it will make a real difference to have as much of the team in place as possible.

When looking for your creative there are various sources of information

* The member’s interests list (ask Mirrie Clark)
* Facebook requests within the GST members group
* Anyone from the audition not cast in a role
* Ask staging committee for any ideas of people who may be interested (it is not their remit to put together your production team, but they might be able to advise)

Staging Committee will delegate one of its members as a staging rep to answer any immediate queries.

# Production meeting

Once you have the key members of the team (or indeed the full team) it is helpful to hold a production meeting where you can clearly set out your ideas and ask for advice or comments. This should be some time before the audition period.

While you should have strong ideas, a good designer will want to have input and will complement your ideas to make the whole thing workable and ensure it can be constructed in the time available. Discuss your ideas with the set designer and ensure a model of the set is prepared for presentation at a staging committee meeting.

From four months before the production, you and your key team members will be asked to attend one or two staging meetings to discuss your plans, ensure your team is in place and any particular challenges are identified and ironed out.

Once you have a model of the set it is useful to meet again with your team to ensure the ideas you have agreed with your designer are carried through to all aspects of the production.

# Other planning considerations

Order six copies of the play for members of backstage. These can then be used at the audition. Cast members are expected to buy their own copies. If there are several versions/editions available, you need to be clear about which one you are using to ensure everyone has the same version.

Arrange incidental music if appropriate (it's worth bearing in mind that we might need to pay a licence fee for music if it's in copyright). Details of the incidental music should be passed as soon as possible to the secretary of C&S who will deal with the licence.

Consider any special effects and lighting required.

Props will need a detailed props list and lighting and sound a detailed list of light and sound cues. If people volunteer to lend items to the show ensure you know exactly who is taking responsibility for them and keep a note of where things are handed over. We have had situations where expensive props or costumes have been lent and then lost along the way which causes difficulty. Please ensure that nobody lends any props to the production that have either monetary or emotional value, as GST as an entity cannot be responsible for keeping them safe.

Publicity will want rehearsal photographs or images for programmes – consider who will take these for you.

If you are not using all the available seating or having an alternative lay out for the venue ensure General Committee are made aware as early as possible.

For shows with childrenyouwill need an additional PA to look after their needs, chase up errant parents, arrange dressing room rotas etc. In addition you will need to look carefully at the rehearsal times – an earlier start and finish time may be required. You also need written consent from parents before children audition.

**TIP 4:** Choose children as old as possible to play important or lead roles. They look considerably younger on stage anyway and are less likely to cause you problems. You don’t want to have to fit rehearsal times around bedtime requirements

# The budget

The current position is that the target budget is £500 to cover staging, lights, sound, props, music and sundries. This is usually closer to £750 for a large ‘February’ show

Hire, rehearsal space, royalties are all outside of this. As are publicity and programme costs, although it is important that all directors make sure they get value for money on printing by giving lots of notice and using some of the suppliers we know have decent rates.

The overall profit or loss for the show will include ticket sales, bar income, venue costs, an allocation for rehearsal space and all of the costs mentioned above.

With regard to costumes, where we are buying things, particularly modern dress, please encourage the cast to use charity shops! Where we are paying for costumes we should also be taking ownership of them at the end of the cast (and adding to our stock). We have a large stock of existing costumes which may also be useful.

Van hire costs vary depending on the requirements of the show and the time of the get in and get out, therefore this sits outside the core staging budget if required, although the hire cost should still be reasonable. Many shows are now hiring a ‘man and van’ rather than just the van.

Please note there is a vehicle hire policy regarding the insurance excess on vehicle hire. Please ask staging for a copy if required.

If you would like to see how previous directors have spent their budget please ask the treasurer for the historical accounts. In addition to this, if you have any special requirements that may incur additional costs, this should be identified as early as possible and discussed with staging and the treasurer.

# The audition

The audition notice should contain the following information:

1. Dates, times and venue of the performances and audition
2. Some information about the play
3. Characters' names and descriptions - it is best not to be too prescriptive about ages as it can put people off if they think they're not exactly the right age
4. Contact details for you and your PA or our central email address info@gardensuburbtheatre.org.uk
5. How to borrow a copy for quick reading.

Keep to one page only – see example included in the appendices to this document. Choose suitable brief audition pieces and, if you wish, they can go on the website. You may offer to audition people at another time if they really can't make the audition, but if someone is keen they will probably contact you anyway. Encourage all appropriate acting members to attend. Speak to publicity who can arrange to mailshot those who have expressed an interest in auditions.

Prior to the audition, talk about your play with enthusiasm to everyone you meet at plays, readings, socials etc. Ask people in what way they would like to be involved or whether they are going to audition. Everyone needs to be chased up at least once!

Prepare audition forms to be filled in by everyone who comes to the audition. They should ask for name, contact numbers and email addresses, the role(s) the person would like to audition for, any days of the week when they can’t rehearse (see section below on [rehearsals](#_Rehearsals) for more notes on this) and the dates of any unavoidable commitments during the rehearsal period. You should also ask whether they are prepared to help backstage if they are not cast.

At the audition the members of Casting and Selection Committee will help you select the cast. They are there to help ensure fairness and provide objective comment, but you have the last word.

**TIP 5:** If in doubt about someone’s suitability, let them have a go.

Everybody who has auditioned must be told whether they have been cast, preferably within a week. You can share this task with your PA and members of Casting and Selection. They should also be reminded not to let others know their good/bad news until a list of the cast is sent out. With social media ‘leaking’ has been a real problem.

Let the committee know if you have to make any changes to your cast. If someone does drop out or declines the part offered to them then you should, if possible, choose another person who auditioned for that part. For this reason it is advisable to contact those who have been cast before those who have not. Only if no one else was really suitable should you re-audition. If you do need to re-audition then, out of courtesy, you should inform anybody who auditioned the first time but was not cast and offer them the chance to audition again.

If the production is to be entered for a festival then you should provide details on the audition notice, although make it clear that people will not be excluded because they cannot or do not want to go to the festival.

# DATA PROTECTION

As a society it is essential that we comply with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Our full data protection policy can be found on our website.

Please be sensitive to data you are gathering with regard to members and ensure lists with telephone numbers and personal details are not left lying around.

# Publicity

You and your cast are the main sellers of tickets so the smaller the cast the harder the task. Your confidence and enthusiasm for the production are crucial to its success and the cast needs to feel the same way.

All queries about Publicity should be addressed to publicity@gardensuburbtheatre.org.uk

Posters/poster image

You need to think quite early on about what kind of poster you would like. We have a number of talented people who can put together a poster. We can do either photos or a drawn/designed image. Please talk to Publicity as soon as possible.

Ideally, a temporary (or final, if you are very organised) image needs to be agreed upon with publicity at least three shows ahead of yours to go on the back of the programme. The following timelines apply:

 - October show - ready by February show of prior season

 - December show - ready by May show of prior season

 - Feb show - ready by summer/wood show of prior season

 - May show - ready by October show

 - Summer/wood show - ready by December show

At the very latest, an image and the full poster needs to be designed no later than a week before the show before yours opens so that we can print flyers to hand out at this show.

Please note if you want photos of the cast on the poster, we can use a temporary image for this, until the play is cast and the photos can be taken.

Blurb

This needs to be written around the same time as the audition notice or, by the latest, a few weeks before the show before yours opens. A short, snappy summary of the play that will get audiences lining up to come and see the show is what is needed. Publicity can help, but the first draft should come from you.

This will go on the flyer, on the website, on Facebook, etc.

Press release

We put together a short article and a photo to send around to the local newspapers. An angle (other than “we’re doing a show”) and an interesting/eye-catching photo of the cast are always helpful with this. Publicity can help with this, but your input is invaluable.

Since we almost always get featured in the East Finchley paper, The Archer, if we send them something, we aim to have the press release ready for their deadlines. This is usually around the 10th of the month before your show, e.g. if you’re doing the May show, whether the first or last week of May, then the press release needs to be ready for 10th April.

Spreading the word

Please encourage the cast to start spreading the word as soon as possible. There should be a show page on the GST website before rehearsals start - please alert the cast to this so that they can point people in the right direction for booking tickets.

We try to print flyers and posters as soon as possible once rehearsals are underway and they should be available to the cast at rehearsals - please liaise with Publicity to organise this.

It is sometimes worth posting flyers door-to-door in certain areas (e.g. in the Suburb for the Wood shows). Please encourage your cast to help with this if prompted by Publicity.

Publicity will try to get the show listed on websites, local papers, etc. If you know of anywhere that can be contacted, please talk to Publicity.

New and interesting content about the show is invaluable for Facebook and Twitter. Please talk to Publicity as soon as possible once rehearsals start, either by email or face-to-face, to discuss ideas. Rehearsal photos, candid shots from the cast, videos… there are plenty of ways to promote the show.

# Rehearsals

The normal requirement for rehearsals is three per week for 6-8 weeks although this will likely be longer for musicals or shows involving children. If anyone is unable to fulfil this, he/she should withdraw and a suitable replacement be found. Bear in mind that priority must be given to the current show if you need to start rehearsals before the end of the previous production.

Arrange a read through at someone’s house within a few weeks of the audition.

**TIP 5:** Showing your set model to the cast from the read through onwards will help them picture the acting area and has the benefit of making them realise other people are involved in the show! It is also helpful to mark out the staging space during rehearsals.

We currently have access to The Free Church Hall in Hampstead Garden Suburb for rehearsals. These should be booked via Diana. There are some prior bookings which put restrictions on dates so you need to select your rehearsal days as soon as possible and let Diana know. Restrictions on availability may mean you wish to set the rehearsal dates prior to the audition.

You should consider holding the early rehearsals in someone’s home, particularly if the previous production is still rehearsing at our normal rehearsal venue. Issue a rehearsal schedule taking into account the cast’s commitments. Ensure that every actor you ask to attend a rehearsal is used and does not have to wait around for a long time, even if it means having to move from one scene to another to do this. Actors resent being called and not doing anything for a whole rehearsal.

The date for 'books down' should be clearly stated on the rehearsal schedule. Books down is more likely to be achieved if it is ‘phased’, perhaps an act at a time.

Some directors like to block in advance. In any case some clear ideas on, for instance, exits and entrances, need to be brought to the initial rehearsals. Flexibility is essential if certain moves or planned business do not work out.

If there are props or the cast will be involved in set changes, make sure these are factored into rehearsals from the beginning.

Consider whether you want to have a prompt, this is becoming less common but some productions do use a prompt for either early rehearsals after books down or for the full production. If you are using a prompt, they must attend rehearsals from the week before books are down.

**TIP 6:** Time all run throughs and tell the cast. Not only does this help get the overall running time, it helps the cast assess if the show is gaining momentum from one rehearsal to another. Casts will accept cuts [almost without murmur!] and would prefer them to risking the audience becoming restive.

**TIP 7:** Watch and listen to the show from different angles and each side to ensure you can see and hear all the actors.

If you cast new or newish members, ask a more experienced member of your cast to keep an eye on them and make sure they don’t have any unvoiced concerns.

**TIP 8:** Actors in period plays often require guidance on the appropriate way of standing, sitting and walking. It may be necessary to get an expert or fellow director to help you with this. Rehearsing in appropriate shoes and skirts is always helpful.

Try to start and finish rehearsals on time. If you start late, you will get creeping late arrivals from your cast.

# Programmes

We have a number of people who are able to design a programme. Please talk to Publicity about this early on in the rehearsal process.

You will need to work with your PA to collate all material you would like included in the programme (details of cast and backstage plus any photographs, comment, extract from articles or quotes etc) and pass to the person preparing the programme at least a month before the production date. Ensure you have considered who will be arranging printing of your programme.

Late printing of programmes increases cost and creates a risk that they will not be ready on time.

# Show week

The timing for final set building and technical rehearsals will depend on the venue. The timing should be agreed with your production team. Where possible we discourage set building on a week day as this relies on retired members or people taking time off work. This is not always possible for some venues, such as the Gatehouse.

An ‘average’ show week will run as follows:

First weekend – set building

Monday – technical rehearsal

Tuesday – dress rehearsal

Wednesday – dress rehearsal

Thursday – performance

Friday – performance

Saturday – performance

Sunday – get out

You should not assume that you will be able to have a rehearsal on stage before the first dress rehearsal as the set builders and lighting need time to finish their jobs first. Check with backstage, stage manager and lights whether they would like the cast to be available for the technical rehearsal and let the cast know in plenty of time.

The technical rehearsal should be used to focus on running all the technical cues and ironing out issues. Your cast **will** all be needed at this rehearsal – remember this is the one opportunity for stage management, props, lighting and sound to ensure everything works properly. A good technical rehearsal will reduce issues in dress rehearsals.

The timing of the get out will also vary depending on the venue.

Set building and the get out should be included on the rehearsal schedule. Unless clearly stated otherwise by the set builder or stage manager the cast must attend the set build and get out, particularly if it is in a short time slot after the last show.

# Things you don’t need to worry about

General Committee will arrange for the management of online ticket sales, telephone sales and running the box office.

General Committee will also arrange for front of house to be arranged for the show and organise a float.

The secretary will organise any Temporary Event Notices required for the production.

# After the event

Make sure it is clear who is responsible for returning any hired costumes, props or equipment.

Remind everyone with expenses to send them to the treasurer as soon as possible to ensure the production accounts can be accurately completed. Please request the expense form if you do not have it.

Complete your director’s report and pass it to C&S as soon as possible.

Let General Committee know anything else that should be added to these notes.

Relax!

# Venue Specifics – The Gatehouse

Performances are usually Thursday, Friday and Saturday evening and a Sunday matinee.

Get in is usually on the Monday and get out on the Sunday after the matinee.

# Venue Specifics – The Bull

Get in usually on the Sunday and get out after the show on Saturday evening. We occasionally do a Saturday matinee at The Bull, this is at no extra cost so is to be agreed between you and C&S.

# Venue Specifics – The Wood

Rehearsals should be outdoors as early as possible with a focus on projection.

General committee will organise chairs and toilets for the venue.

# Overall Timetable

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Time to show** | **Key actions** |
| 12 months | Select play and performance slot, know who has been allocated as mentor and staging repIdentify PA, stage manager and set designerWork on any planning points over the next six months |
| 6 months | Produce poster and initial marketing materialMeet with staging committee to discuss initial design ideasAppoint the rest of your staging team |
| 4 months | Hold the auditionMeet with staging committee to finalise set design and solve any queriesHold the read through |
| 3 months | Hold first production meeting and ensure team understand what they need to doStart rehearsal period, ensure books down date is set out |
| 5 – 6 days  | Set building |
| 3 days | Tech rehearsal |
| 2 days | Dress rehearsal |
| 1 day | Dress rehearsal |

# Useful reading list

To be completed

# Example Audition Notice

**GARDEN SUBURB THEATRE – Audition form**

Name (CAPITALS please):

Role(s) auditioning for: …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

Best contact phone number:

Alt contact phone number: Date of birth:…………………………

Email (CAPITALS please):

* We will be having three rehearsals a week – eg Tuesday, Thursday at 7.30pm and Sunday afternoon from 4pm. Are there any specific dates **in rehearsal schedule (XX – XX, working weekend and performances from XX)** that you would not be able to rehearse (e.g. holidays, other show commitments etc)? Please bear in mind we need a cast who are fully committed to working very hard on the production. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* If you’re not cast would you be willing to help out backstage? YES NO

**GENERAL INFORMATION:**

Length of time a member:

How did you hear about us? ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

Please put a tick by all GST activities that interest you

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Acting |  | Lights (design/operating) |  |
| Directing a play/play reading |  | Props |  |
| Acting in a play reading |  | Costumes |  |
| Prompting |  | Wigs and/or make up |  |
| Telephone line for advance bookings |  | Manning box office for shows |  |
| PA to director |  | Helping front of house  |  |
| Stage management/backstage |  | Dancing/choreography |  |
| Set design |  | Designing posters/leaflets or organising print |  |
| Set construction/carpentry |  | Being on a committee |  |
| Photocopying/printing  |  | Telephone tree (to let people without email know about events) |  |
| Sound |  | Giving lifts to members so they can see shows |  |
| Helping distribute leaflets/newsletters |  | Writing for the newsletter |  |
| Taking cast photographs |  | Helping at working Sundays/hut clear outs  |  |
| Having play reading at your house |  | Helping with social events |  |
| Playing an instrument |  | Singing |  |
| Painting |  | Any web/database capabilities |  |
| Offering rehearsal space |  | Publicity stunts/press releases etc  |  |

# Van Hire Policy



**Van Hire Policy**

There may be occasions where a vehicle needs to be hired to transport set or props for Garden Suburb Theatre (GST). Please note the following:

GST does not carry out checks regarding driving licenses, the individual hiring a vehicle should ensure they have the appropriate license documents, as well as sufficient skill and confidence required to drive the vehicle.

Members are responsible for operating / parking hire vehicles within the law and GST accepts no responsibility for payment of fines / penalty charges / surcharges or similar incurred.

GST Cannot accept any responsibility for loss or damage to goods left in hire vehicles.

GST does not have vehicle insurance, any hire must include sufficient insurance for the driver. If applicable this should include contents and any passengers.

Where offered, additional insurance should be taken out with the additional hire fee to reduce the excess that would be charged in the event of an incident to nil. This additional hire cost will be covered by GST.

Wherever possible van hire should only be organised with companies that offer the opportunity to reduce the excess to £nil or alternative insurance provision sought. In the event of an incident, if there is still an excess, this will be covered by GST if the reduced excess option has been taken.

If it can be clearly demonstrated through documentation that the additional insurance was not available and there were no other hire options, GST will cover the full excess. The individual involved should ask the hire company to prove the amount required to be paid is reasonable for the repair required before payment is made.

The excess should be paid, documentation saved and sent to the treasurer following the usual expense claim system.

This policy will be included in the notes for directors, circulated via staging and available on our Google drive. Any individual who may be responsible for hiring a vehicle should be given a copy and asked to email confirmation that they have read the details when submitting expenses to the treasurer for payment.

Where required, GST will update this policy. Last update April 2018.