

Lighting Design.....

..... A guide to the creative working practice

OK, So let's be clear from the get-go; This is A guide.. not THE guide.

It's intended for students of theatre to help them work their way through the role of lighting designer by breaking it down into nine steps and by doing so, create manageable chunks of the workload. It's also the intention that, as students gain confidence in this area, they will find their own way of doing things.

1. Preparation

The most common mistake is to assume that lighting design is a technical problem with a clear technical solution to be achieved. It's not, well not yet anyway!

When taking on the role, challenge yourself to think creatively; ask yourself 'what will this show look like' and 'how will my lighting add to the overall quality of the product'. Consider what information you will need to know to begin your work and map out a work plan to get it. Set yourself deadlines and allow yourself time to think.

The most common mistake is to jump right in there and then start drawing a lighting plan... That's a rookie error. The most likely outcome is that you will over rig and over light the show.

2. Preparation #2

Get to know your show. Read the play thoroughly before you talk to the director and designer. Be ready to discuss the themes and ideas in the piece and be equally ready to take on board their ideas; chances are they have been talking about the show for some time. Also, if possible, get a look at the designer's research ideas and talk at length about how they see their space as being integral to the story and they too may have ideas about how it may be lit.

Ask yourself, 'how does this story work' and then 'how will my lighting help tell the story'

Find out about the venue and its equipment, the budget allocation you have (if any) and the planned production schedule. You may feel that these represent constrictions upon your challenge, but don't. Simply know what the plans are and be ready to work within them or, if you have specific needs which require changes, be ready to discuss them.

3. Development

This is where your work really begins. It's time to think about the look and feel of the lighting both in overall terms and in the specifics of each cue or scene.

A useful exercise is to write out a cue synopsis including information about where the cue goes, it's timing and a verbal description of what it looks like. (I've attached a copy at the back to give you a feel for what this can look like). The cue synopsis should become your version of the script not just in practical terms but also as a creative visual interpretation of the show.

Discuss this with the director and designer as often as possible, adopting their views and interpretations. It also helps to have some research references of your own or perhaps even some storyboard images to help the director "see" what you intend. Consider photographing the set model and creating a few photoshop images. (copy of this idea at back). Alternatively you could borrow the set model and "light" it with birdies or angle-poise.. a great way to colour test.

4. Development #2 Finalise you ideas.

This process should be cyclical, and as you go around, discussions with the other 'creatives' will establish and develop some key elements of your design such as colour palate and compositional feel of the show. Attend as many rehearsals as you can. This is never wasted time as it forces you to think about the show and how you can light it.

Your cue synopsis will develop, and as the verbal descriptions of each cue evolve, they will inform what lanterns etc. you need to create those looks.

Some of these may be relatively simple to achieve, but you should challenge yourself to be creative and as your experience and confidence grow, you should include some risks i.e. looks that you want to create but are uncertain how they will work or even how they can be achieved. As you develop as a designer, taking risks will become part of the process as will being able to cover these risk by building in back up ideas and contingencies. But don't wait to be experienced, take this approach from the outset and you will become a better designer quicker.

Once your ideas have been finalised it's at this point when lighting design becomes a technical challenge.

The challenge is; **to achieve what you have designed.**

5. Drawing the Plan

A common mistake is to refer to the lighting plan as 'the lighting design'. It's not! But it is a critical tool for others to help you create. The technical team who will rig and focus your plan need it to be precise and detailed. So give yourself time to draw, whether you are using a CAD programme or paper and stencils, do not rush this.

Ideally the plan should be scaled 1:25 and in most cases this will fit to A1 or A2 (perhaps A0 in larger venues). Making the scale smaller, say 1:50 can make it hard to read and so mistakes will follow. Allowing a CAD programme to re-scale the drawing to fit the page can also lead to misunderstanding so try to avoid this where possible.

It's at this point when your knowledge of the venue, the kit list and the budget will inform your choices, they may even force you into decisions you'd rather not make. But as always, be flexible; it may be that one lantern does more than one job. You also have to think about how long it takes to rig and focus.. does this fit into the schedule?

Take the time to check and double check your drawing. Take every care to remove mistakes and possible misunderstanding.. it's time well spent! Once complete, consider what hire equipment you need (if any) and what gel (if any) you need to buy. Make sure you schedule time for a gel call. Cutting in advance saves hours in the rig!

6. Rig and focus

The Rig Plan is a tool for the rigging team. As the designer, make a reduced A4 version you can carry on a clipboard. This means you don't have to carry a big sheet of paper around with you and comes in handy when focusing. It's also a convenient size to have when plotting (see example attached).

If you are part of the rigging team, make it your role to ensure the accuracy of the work. A good Chief LX/ Production LX should do this, but there is nothing worse than switching on the rig, to realize there are wrong lanterns with wrong gels in!

The focus session is really your time and perhaps the only time where you can really test the rig. Be ready to direct the proceedings and manage the time available.

Never focus yourself. Always be on the floor directing others. This will allow you to truly see what the light looks like from different areas of the stage and auditorium. Build into the focus session time to compare i.e. once you've focused a lantern, bring up others you know will be part of the same scene and make sure it all fits the ideas you have in your head.

This activity helps avoid a typical error for inexperienced designers who will focus too tight. Always focus with the lantern at 100%, but taking time to bring up others and reduce the intensity. This will show you how the light beams work together to create a scene or feel. If in doubt, focus bigger than you originally intended.

7. Plotting

It's always worth considering a pre-plot; a short session when you can play around with the rig and try your ideas prior to the arrival of the director, DSM and possibly others including the designer.

If you can have such a session (it may be that you whizz through the focus and use the remainder of that session) it is time to look at creating groups or subs on the desk which will reduce the time needed to call up individual channels. Ideally you should work with a programmer or board op, allowing you to look at the stage and evaluate what works and what doesn't!

You may also plot a few states, so that when the others arrive, you can quickly show them what you have in mind.

If nothing else, this session will help you learn the circuit numbers and build your confidence in what you have achieved already.

Plotting with the director and DSM should be methodical; working from the start and getting every cue into the desk. The director may want to add a few here and there, but the cue synopsis is the primary tool to ensure an accurate plot of every planned state and cue. Make sure you have walkers, even if it is the DSM so that you can clearly see every part of the action relative to the position of the performers.

Always plot from the 'back forwards'. By that I mean; create the look of the state and then add the front light. If you start with the front light, often it will be plotted in at too high a level (it will be the only light on stage). If you start with the backlight, add any top and sides and then put in the front/face light, the stage will already be lit. The front light should be just enough to see the actor, but not wash out the scene you've created.

The cue synopsis will help you plan the workload. You will know the number of states you have to plot and therefore give you a feel for how far ahead or behind you are as you progress. The synopsis may also help you plan out where you can copy/paste states and again, that helps you evaluate progress.

A common error is to spend too long plotting the early cues, and as you run out of time you will produce poorer quality states near the end of the show. Be clear, that doesn't make for a 'big finish'! So ensure you get every state in the desk and, once complete, be prepared to quickly flick through to ensure that there is continuity in the quality of your design.

8. The Technical Rehearsal

In Many respects, most of your work is done. It is now time for the cast, stage management and operators to learn how the show works.

That said, you should use this time to begin to evaluate the quality of each element of your work. Ask yourself if the fade times are right, is there a good balance of composition within and across states.

It's at this time that you should check that all the states/cues look like they all belong to the same show... that there is a "feel" or "concept" to the overall look of the lighting.

You may have to make the changes as you go, you may have to make notes instead and hope to get some time later for a quick re-plot. If you have to make notes, make sure they are precise!

Depending upon time constraints, you may have to prioritise what gets fixed when. Tough to know, but worth checking with the director what their priorities are!

9. The Dress Rehearsal(s)

Once the 'tech' is complete and the re-plots and repairs are in the desk, you might think that the role of lighting designer is complete. Up to a point that's true, but the dress rehearsal should provide you with a different opportunity. Take this time to put yourself in the shoes of the audience and ask yourself how the lighting works for you. Revisit your preparation work and ask 'does the lighting really add to the overall quality of the show'. If not, why not and how might I make improvements.

Be prepared to move around during the dress and watch the show from different seating positions; you'll be surprised how that changes the look of the lighting!

As with the technical rehearsals, make notes on what needs fixing. Hopefully these will be minor changes to what already exists e.g. 5% up here, 5% down there and an extra two seconds on the fade etc.

At the end, make sure you check in with the director; not just attending the notes session, but having a quick chat about any changes you intend and what they would like to amend.

In many respects, that's it. Except it's not!

Although I have suggested there are nine steps, there is a tenth.

If you serious about being a lighting designer, then....

10. Analysis and Reflection

Record your work. During the dress rehearsal, photograph each state as a record of the show. Archive the cue synopsis, the lighting plan and if possible, get a print out of the plot. (Actually all of this is essential if it's going on tour or if planned to be revived!)

Spend time going over your work. Think about your working process and evaluate what worked and what didn't. Did you do enough research? Did you pay enough attention to detail in the focus? Did the plotting yield the visuals you'd hoped to achieve? Did the show actually look like how you originally envisioned?

Be honest and clear about your strengths and weaknesses.

Ask yourself; how would I do that differently if I were to do it over again.

These questions will help you develop and evolve your own working method. Remember, as I said at the top; this is A way... not THE way.

Hired Man Lighting Q Synopsis UPDATE 05/03/08

Q1 Preset Some animation of the sky using effects wheel to simulate clouds moving

Stage is dark. a few dapples from gobos.

Needs; Cyc gobos Blue stage Dapples

Q2 House lights to zero.. Poss lift stage a little.. Lift cyc ??, drop animation.

Needs warm cyc, pre-heat cross light

Q3 Music begins. Lift side light . Pre-heat warm B/L Cast enter Build cross light

Pre heat warm B/L

Q4 Slow build of stage..through first verse.. may be adding warm back light

Needs warm up blue down Watch fade times up 5/
down 8

Q5 Big build to warm general as second verse .. bringing up faces.

Add front light swell into bright general

Q6 Pp3 Might be nice to drop for John's lines " Two dozen.... ?? where is he?

John MSL moves into kitchen. Dropout all front except him..lift
ktichen

Q7 Pp 3 Return to Q5 Back up for Chorus "hear us coming....

Q8 PP 4 End of song...drop front light..see people moving
(covers scene change and applause)

Needs physical, watch Pub USR NB Scene change.

Q9 Into pub USR on higher level. Daytime.. don't lose all stage.

Keep DSR pre-heated

Dapple out the rest..??

Q10 pp5 lift a bit for song?? Where are the chorus?? See them in side light??

Lift a little boost DSR

Q11 Pp6 Emily enters MSL John goes to meet her. Quite general,

but drop front light on Pub

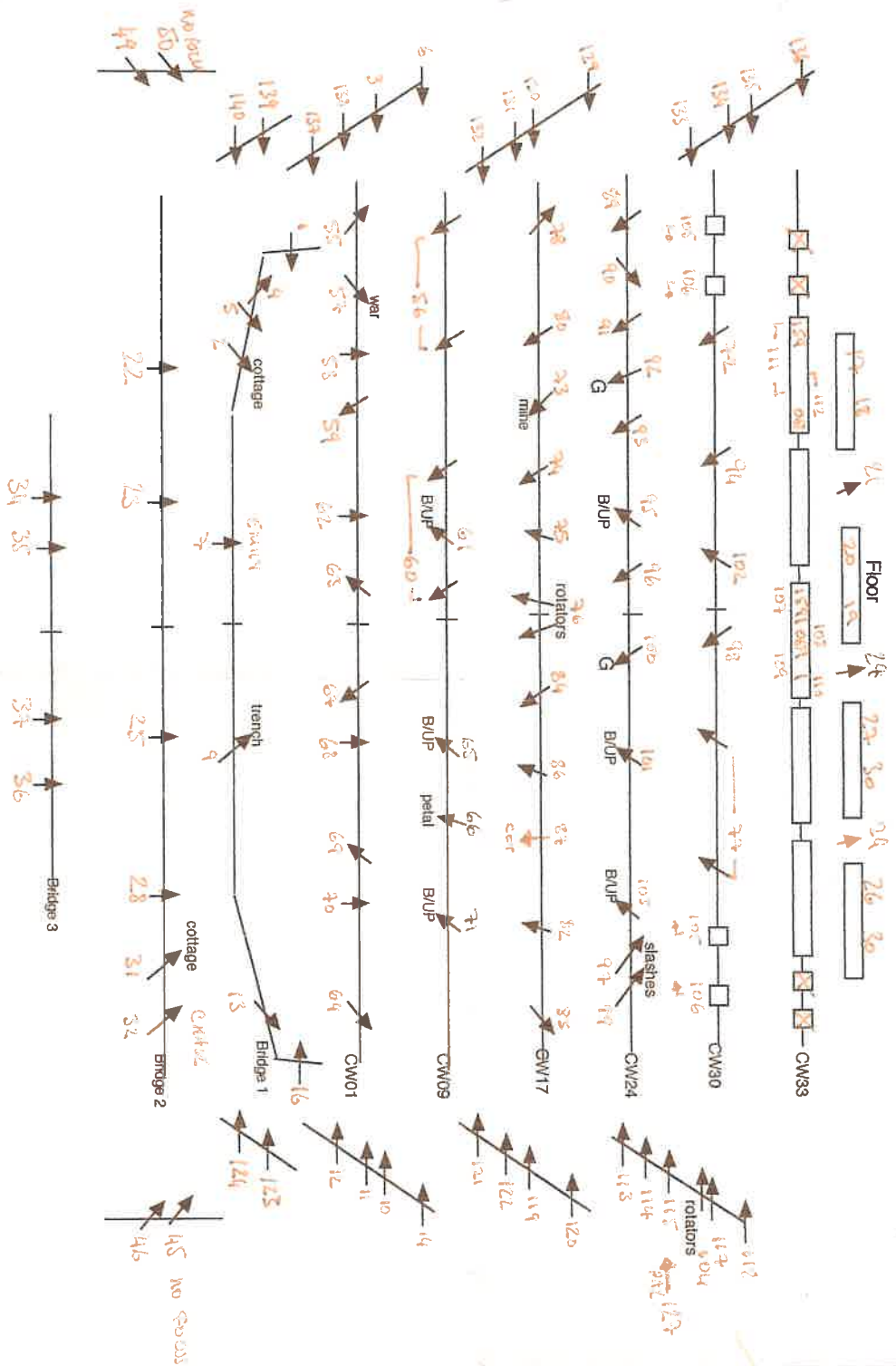
Q12 pp9 End of fight watch timing..

Emily & Jackson Mostly mid stage right

Don't drop too much

Q13 pp9 Song 4 Hired Man reprise.. see the chorus exit in Side light

HIED MANI



UWTSD Level 4 Lighting Project

Lighting Project Brief Mon 20th Jan 2020

Each student should select a short speech to be performed and then design the lighting for that performance.

As part of the week's training, you will receive guidance and support to help develop your ideas and design.

The performances and designs will be presented on Friday 2-4

Some Pointers

Choosing a speech.

It can be a speech from a play or perhaps a film. It could also be a poem or even the lyrics of a song (but won't be sung..will be read). Whichever it is, it should take between 2-3 minutes to recite.

Designing the Lighting.

Don't worry, this is not an exercise in electrical engineering! Once you have selected your speech, think about how it would look when it is performed. How would/could the lighting be used to enhance the mood of the speech? Where might lighting changes (cues) go? How might colour add to the overall presentation?...will it?

As a guide, aim for no more than 8 lighting cues.. (it may be only two or three). You will have a tight schedule to create this!

How it will work. On the day of the presentations, the group will be split into three teams. Within each group each individual will take turns to be present their design. The other members of the group will support them as; Performer, DSM and Board Operator /Technician.

So not only will you have to present your work, you'll work on the other presentations in your group.

Timeline

Tues afternoon... Group tutorials and 'playtime' in afternoon session

Weds & Thurs... space and kit available for practice

Friday 10-1 each group gets an hour to 'tech rehearse' their presentations

Friday 2-4 each group gets 40 mins to present...