

An illustration of a woman with long, flowing red hair, a white mustache, and a white skull and crossbones in the background. She is holding a handgun. The background is dark with various symbols and text, including 'KATH WICKED', 'FO.', and 'STUARTZ'.

KATH
WICKED

IATL PROJECT: KATH, THE WICKED

A handbook on
independent student
productions

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Bowden

STUARTZ

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Introduction

This handbook has been created for Warwick University students who are interested in putting on an independent production based on our experience creating 'Kath, the Wicked' (2022) by Nancy Cummins.

The main body of the document will cover the roles of the producer, director, and marketing manager. The last part of the handbook is dedicated to the actors of Kath, the Wicked as we wanted to include their voices as well as the crew members. This has taken the form of a Q&A section about their role and what it requires in general.

This handbook is intended to be something students can refer to and question at the same time. We do not claim that our advice is faultless and not up for debate. This is a documentation of the experience we gained as Director (Zoe Keogh), Producer (Alexandra Vasile), and Marketing Manager (Cordelia Bowden) and we hope it inspires other students to create theatre at Warwick University.

'Kath, the Wicked' wouldn't have been able to come to the stage in the vision we wanted without the support of IATL Funding. This project was a hugely rewarding teaching experience for everyone involved and became the highlight of our academic year. It was challenging, emotional and a lot of hard work, but we could not be prouder of our crew, cast, and everyone else who celebrated 'Kath, the Wicked'.

We thank IATL greatly and feel immense gratitude for their powerful show of support for the arts. And to you, reader, we hope you find this handbook useful and a kick starter for your theatrical ambitions!

The Director

Zoe Keogh

First up: the highs and lows

The job of a director can be a very rewarding and creative experience but if you're not aware of your multiple responsibilities at once, there are many potholes to fall into. With that said, it is irrational to expect yourself to make no mistakes.

In preparation for directing a play, it can feel a lot like writing a novel: you structure each scene, build life into the characters, and explore what creative vision you intend to convey. However, when you begin working with actors, even from the auditioning stage, you realise how much you can't control. A novelist can cast whoever they want in their story, but a director is restricted by who signs up for the audition dates. A novelist does not have to deal with characters that wake up in a grouchy mood, that haven't answered your 15 missed calls, and that have panic attacks right before they're meant to enter the next scene. A director must not only bring a story to life, but they also have to adapt to the many inconveniences of real life. However, depending on how you look at it, the unpredictability of actors is partly a gift to the director.

Every single success and failure is invaluable to you. You learn, you win, you embarrass yourself, and you get into arguments. You might find yourself, at times, locked in a bathroom because you need a really big cry (2 times in my case). You will surely develop strong friendships with a range of people. Directing not only gives you a niche experience in entertainment, but it also teaches you brilliant communication and leadership skills as well as resilience, which I believe, is the most important skill to practice if you want to go further in theatre.

Auditions

One thing that never gets easier for actors is auditions. Whether it is their first or fiftieth time in the audition room, the experience of walking into a room of judging eyes is naturally going to provoke a level of anxiety. Importantly, a director must recognize that auditions are equally a test for you as well as the actor. This is your moment to help your actor reach their potential and give them a sense of what talent you have to offer.

Below is a list of tips I recommend based on my experience putting auditions on for *Kath, the Wicked*, and from the feedback of my cast.

1. Tell the auditionee the structure of their audition and what you will ask from them.
 - This can reduce their anxiety if they know what to expect.
 - After you outline the plan, ask for their explicit consent and give them the opportunity to ask any questions. Consent is especially important as the actors might not feel comfortable telling you at that moment how they really feel, and you might even receive a complaint after the audition process, even if you think they wanted to carry out your plan.
2. Don't stay in your seat the whole time.
 - When asking them to redo an extract, get up from your chair and stand next to them.
 - By simply leaving the infamous director's seat and matching their level you are helping to alleviate the barrier of authority (think of how a dragon's den operates) and increase a sense of teamwork between you and the auditionee – the dream dynamic for making theatre!
 - Note: only do this once, you want to take the time to properly analyse their performance as well.
3. Formulate each audition as if it was a rehearsal.
 - Give feedback to their first performance and allow them another go with your direction, or challenge them to do their piece in an entirely different way – this is a great way to see how versatile and adaptable your actors are.
 - Act with them. For example, play an improv game that you partake in. This can lead to great fun and strongly conveys that you like to work WITH your actors, rather than dictate them.
 - You can then ask the actors how they felt doing these exercises you've chosen. If they like it, then it shows they will also enjoy this directing style.
4. Encourage them to challenge you.
 - For example, if you think one way about a character, ask them if they agree or disagree with you.
 - This could lead to an interesting conversation that gives you insight into what the actors could offer the characters
 - This sets the tone of your directing style as one that is comfortable with criticism and values your actors' opinions/creativity.

Rehearsal techniques

1-10 character scale

Size: 1 or more actors

Instructions:

1. Get your actor(s) to find a space in the room.
2. Tell them to start walking around the room without a particular pattern.
3. Explain that you will be giving out different levels of being (as oneself and as a character).
4. Start with level 1, which requires them to walk, sound, and interact as their own, natural self.
5. Levels after 1 require them to embody their character and demonstrate the way the characters would walk, sound and interact.
6. Gradually build up to level 5. Observe how they respond and change to the increasing levels.
7. Level 5 requires them to act as their character at a level they would put on for a show. A balance between changing from their original self into their character but not going so far as making it absurd.
8. As you get closer to level 10, you want to encourage intensity and energy. Actors will likely start running or perceiving the higher level as needing more movement – remind them this is not always the case and intensity can also be portrayed by stillness.
9. At level 10, you want the room to be chaotic. We are at the absurd level that the actors will not perform nor feel comfortable at in real life. However, push them to really explore what the most extreme portrayal of their character feels and acts like.
10. For the next 5 minutes, play around with changing the levels. Change from 10-5, 10-1, 2-8. Challenge your actors to adapt and improvise on the spot to these different, fast directions.
11. Finish at level 5.
12. Debrief with actors on the exercise and how they found it.

Purpose:

This is a brilliant technique to use at the beginning of rehearsals. The scale gives actors a clear mental note on which level they need their character to be at. The range allows them to properly explore who they are playing. I had one actor who interpreted level 10 as going to their character's primitive, animalistic psyche. I had another who saw it as

their character in a moment of extreme stress, others in extreme pride or glory. It is very interesting seeing how the actors interpret the exercise. Furthermore, the fast pace of it means a lot of what the actors are doing is experimental. This improvisational attitude is important to nurture in the early stages as they develop their character.

Catwalk

Size: 3 or more actors

Instructions:

1. In the format of a catwalk, have the “model” at one end of the room and everyone else sitting on each side of the room.
2. Firstly, you will ask the “Model” to walk up and down the path in their normal, natural gait. Before they do this, tell your audience to observe how they walk and pick up on one feature they can feed back to you.
3. Ask the audience to share what they saw.
4. Secondly, ask the whole room how you think the “model” would walk in accordance with their character.
5. Direct the “model” to walk up and down the catwalk again, but this time in the way they think their character would.
6. Ask the audience what they noticed.
7. Ask the whole room how the natural catwalk compared to the characterized one.

Purpose:

The Catwalk rehearsal technique tends to be very interesting to actors as most of us have never properly analysed the way we naturally walk before. Starting with their natural gait and then their character’s, this raises the actor’s awareness of the different movements they must practice in order to transition from just reading lines on stage to stepping outside of their body and embodying a character. Conversely, it is beneficial to embrace an actor’s natural habits into their character if it provides an interesting twist or uniqueness to their role. The features picked up on by the audience enable the “model” to consider actions they weren’t aware of doing or the effect it gives off. If an actor naturally fidgets when they walk, directors can train them to conceal this in them when performing. However, if their character is anxious, then tell your actor to embrace this! Or maybe you never considered the character to have an anxious trait but now you and your actor feel it could be an interesting possibility to explore. Boom! You and your actor have successfully made the character new and unique to your production.

Bamboo exercise

Size: 2 actors

Instructions:

1. Have two actors standing in the centre of the room, holding a long stick from different ends.
2. There are two ways you could do this exercise, (a) have a scene read out involving when the actors interact with each other as their characters. (b) set an improv stimulus for your actors to work in as their characters (e.g. an argument, a first meeting).
3. As the lines are read out, the actors must replicate how they want to address the other by the way they share the stick.
4. Are they assertive? Do they jolt the stick back, pull the stick and the other subsequently the other person, or do they push the stick towards the other character as if turning it into a weapon?
5. Are they submissive? Do they hold the stick passively, do they allow the other to pull them around the room, do they accidentally let go of the stick or struggle to push back?
6. Finish the exercise when the scene is over, or the improv has come to a resolution.

Purpose:

The bamboo exercise is great fun and a good way to warm your actors into improv, focusing on movement. There are a number of ways the scene could develop, and it can either get very farcical or very tense... I have had my actors say they found this exercise helped strengthen their understanding of a scene due to the simple way they can direct their energy into something real and tangible. There is a reason why an introduction to improv involves passing an object back and forth from each other. A prop helps actors ease into a scene, narrow their focus, and challenges them to think creatively about how they interact with their environment.

Hot seating – The Detectives

Size: whole cast

Instructions:

1. This is an improv exercise inspired by hot seating¹.
2. There are three roles: the suspect, the good cop, and the bad cop.
3. Come up with a crime that all of the play's characters could commit. For example, there's been a murder, a bank robbery or someone has gone missing. Announce the crime but do not tell them who has done it. The aim for the actors is to improvise and as a group, gradually establish a direction in the story. As the game develops, actors may skew who the likely criminal is or even direct attention towards themselves. Make it clear that there is no winning or losing aspect to this game, so they do not need to worry about convincing themselves about being innocent; if the character they are playing is mischievous, allow them to lean into that.
4. Pick on one actor to be the first suspect and place yourself as the first detective to question them. Ask basic questions to get the ball rolling and to give the actors an idea about what they're meant to do.
5. When you're done, ask the group who wants to play the next suspect, good cop, and bad cop, and let the improv develop.
6. Give each round 5 minutes. When the time is up, the roles are swapped.
7. When everyone has been questioned, you go onto round 2.
8. Round 2 is the same as round 1, but now the actors should know what they are doing, and the story should begin taking proper shape.
9. Round 3 changes the scene from an interrogation room to the courtroom. Ask the actors to put their hand up on who they think is guilty. The two with the most votes will "stand trial".
10. Depending on who the two characters are, choose from the rest of the cast who you think would want to support them (be their lawyer).
11. The characters not chosen now become the "jury" and move to one area of the room next to you.
12. You now enter the improv game by becoming the magistrate. You control the scene by asking the questions.
13. First, ask each lawyer to give a speech on why their client is not guilty.
14. Secondly, ask the suspects to say their final say to the courtroom.

¹ Hot seating – an improv rehearsal technique that involves an actor sitting on a chair and being given a series of questions by a group who are trying to learn more about their character or a scene they are involved in.

15. Lastly, go to the jury and ask them to discuss secretly who they think is guilty. Have one of them announce it.
16. As the magistrate, you make the final decision and declare who is guilty.
17. End the game by discussing what the actors thought and took from the exercise.

Purpose:

This game is arguably the most intense on the list. It takes at least half an hour to complete it, from explaining the instructions to the inevitable overrunning of timed questioning and finally the heated courtroom round. However, it is worth dedicating rehearsal time to this if you want your actors to explore the relationships between characters. In this scenario, would their character become a snitch or an unshakeable alibi? The game also enables actors to explore their characters' morals. Would they be capable of committing the said crime? If they did do it, would they feel guilt, panic, or amusement? How does their character react to authority, do they respect or despise them? All these questions can reveal a lot about a character to both the actor and the director.

Director's Toolbox

1. A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on Art and Theatre (2001) - By Anne Bogart
2. List of Tongue Twisters: <https://bbbpress.com/2013/02/drama-games-tongue-twisters-the-ultimate-list/>
3. The Director's Craft (2008) – Katie Mitchell
4. The Geese Theatre handbook: drama with offenders and people at risk (2002) – edited by Clark Baim, Sally Brookes and Alun Mountford.
5. Tips on characterization: <https://www.ernestgoodmanstudio.com/tool-2-characterization-building-a-character/>
6. Warm-up up exercises for actors: <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/vocal-physical-actor-warmup-guide-74817/>

The Producer

Alexandra Vasile

Always prepare in advance:

A general tip for producing is to always prepare in advance. A producer must go into pre-production with a very clear and ample view of what the final night will look like. That accounts especially for everything that will be spent, as without an accurate budget a production simply can't afford to happen. That is why, when creating the budget, you must include contingencies for every section. There will always be unforeseen expenses, so you must set aside some money for the things you can't prepare for. Make sure to log everything you do onto an excel sheet, so you can always keep track of what you spend.

How to plan for IATL Funding:

If you want to get IATL Funding, make sure to leave enough time in your pre-production to apply. Firstly, you will have to schedule a consultation call with IATL to talk about your project and ask any questions you may have (details about whom to contact are listed on their website). Then, you can start working on your proposal, which includes questions regarding the artistic, financial, and administrative aspects of your project. Apply for the full £1,500 amount. Always apply for the full amount. After you've sent your application, it will take at least a month to hear back. If you've been accepted, it takes another few days for the money to enter your bank account. So, you should send your application at least a month and a half before your ideal audition date. After the production is over, you will have a month to send IATL your chosen sharing practice and hopefully finish paying for everything. Especially with tech equipment, it might take longer for the SU to process your bill, so make sure to email and let IATL know if that's the case.

The importance of being firm

Preparing in advance also means having a schedule for all the stages of the production, and deadlines for everything everyone must do throughout the project. It is a producer's responsibility to make sure everyone gets their job done on time. You cannot let friendships or politeness intervene here, or the production will never happen. This is not to say you should be inconsiderate, that will never get things done either. It means there will be moments when you have to be firm.

Make peace with contingencies

As with budgeting, you must include contingencies in this schedule, and add a few extra days. You will always need a few more days than you'd initially think. Adding more time also means ensuring everything is done properly and considerately and nothing is rushed. Also, a few extra days mean you leave time for workshops.

Value workshops

While not extremely necessary, workshops can be very useful. I'd recommend scheduling at least 3. One general workshop where cast and crew get to know each other, as this will give a friendlier vibe to your production. At least one for the cast, where they get to develop and understand their characters, before getting into scripted rehearsals. One later on in the production, for both cast and crew, exploring the themes of the play, so you allow everyone to familiarize themselves more in-depth with the key topics of your production.

Good producing means knowing when to ask for help

Being a producer means you are in charge of everything. From stage managing, to set design, to costumes, make-up, marketing, directing, welfare, and script-managing, everything that happens in production is your direct concern. You must help with all these sections, make sure everyone has everything they need, and make sure everyone feels comfortable with their tasks. At the same time, always be honest and ask for help when you need it. Even if it's a little bit of encouragement, reaching out to people strengthens your bond and productivity as a team. In addition, there will be lots of people with Warwick Drama experience whom you can reach out to for advice.

Recognise your power to inspire

Especially before show dates, everyone, including you, will be emotional. It is your job to make sure all the cast and crew feel in control and reassure them that you believe in them. Inspiring trust and confidence in people is probably one of the most powerful things you can do for a production. If they know you believe in them, they will also believe in themselves and the performance will go that much smoother.

The Producer's toolbox

- **Excel for budgeting.** Save your spreadsheets on and offline, for better security.
- **Warwick Room Booking System** for room bookings. Select rehearsal room under suitabilities and facilities, as you will need a big space where you can also make noise. If you cannot find any free rehearsal rooms, a general advice is to try and book any room in the Avon Building, as those are generally free and not used much. Try not to make lots of noise if you're not in a rehearsal room.
- **Warwick Print** can be a very cheap tool for posters, flyers, QR codes, and trigger warnings. Note on trigger warnings: always have them on your website/Instagram, printed and posted in multiple places as people get into the performance room, and mention them out loud at the beginning of your performance.
- **Calltime** for scheduling rehearsals. Always double-check this, to make sure you don't schedule over people's other commitments.
- **Doodle** is great for auditions, as people can select time slots that fit them best. Tip: make sure to schedule auditions for 2 or 3 days maximum. If you schedule them for a whole week, you will spend lots of hours sitting in an empty room, as everyone will be very spread out. Always offer the possibility to reschedule auditions / online self-tapes if you can, it is kind and doesn't take up much of your time.
- **Eventbrite** is a free website where you can sell tickets, very easy to use and professional-looking.
- **Google Forms** is also a useful tool. Especially if you have intimate scenes in the play, it is good to give people an anonymous space where they can write their concerns or suggestions. Make sure to let them know this form will be checked regularly, and actually check daily, so you don't ignore anyone's worries or issues.

The Marketing Manager

Cordelia Bowden

Design a marketing plan

The role of the marketing manager is to decide exactly what material will be released and when. It is essential to design a marketing plan at the beginning of a production's run, both so that you can meticulously plan the flow and build-up of your campaign, but also so that anyone that you may need materials from, such as graphics from publicity designers or videos and pictures from directors, is aware of when you'll need what. Active and effective communication is essential in this role in order to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

Establish a tone

The key thing to consider when designing a marketing plan is what you want the tone to be. Is your marketing playful to highlight the comedy aspects of your production? Does the production centre around a serious issue that must be delicately communicated? Does your production empower an oppressed group and would benefit from authentic communication from them directly? These are all things to consider.

Create a connection with the cast and crew

Regardless of the answer to these questions, something I often find important in a marketing campaign for student production is building a personal connection with the cast and crew. Sneak peeks into rehearsals and videos of crew members speaking instead of long paragraphs of information can help to create a human connection to the content. Videos of the cast talking about their characters and from crew members encouraging people to come to the show can be a lot more effective than simple text on Instagram stories.

Essentials and extra

I would say that essential content for any marketing campaign of a student production at Warwick is to make an Instagram that would include audition announcements, crew reveals (ideally starting around the time of auditions so that people aren't as intimidated by a new face, but if this timeline isn't possible then videos of directors/producers on the

Instagram story also work), cast reveals, venue and time announcements (usually tied into a poster), and an official poster.

Great extras to have are funny photos from rehearsals, videos of the cast speaking about their characters or their favourite lines, and videos of crew members giving an insight into the process. On top of this, giving crew members the password to any social media associated with the production so that they can create organic and authentic casual posts throughout the process with mini updates can be a great way to make a genuine and human connection.

Making the program

Canva can be a great tool for creating a digital program (which cuts down on both cost and environmental impact!), which you can share through a QR code on the door. A program should include cast and crew photos and roles, but it's also great to add a director's note, maybe some stories from the cast and crew, photos from rehearsals, or a note from a character to create a more immersive experience!

Physical advertisement

If your production has the budget for it, printing posters or even stickers with a QR code leading to your ticket sales or social media can be great for increasing your reach beyond the typical followers of drama at Warwick. I personally use Printed.com as I find they have a quality and speedy service, but make sure to allow for up to a week for your posters to arrive, so ordering them a week and ½ to potentially two weeks before your production if possible is a great idea.

The Actors (Q&A)

1. Do you have any tips for auditions?

- Fully commit to playing the character and don't hold anything back. Lay all your 'cards' out on the table and be confident in your portrayal of the character- it is as valid as anyone else's and there is always a potential that the director will share your character vision. Preparation is key - make sure you have a good understanding and are familiar with all the extracts and characters, and the overall play concept.
- Don't try and play the character the way you believe the panel wants them to be played. Play the character the way you would play them, as it'll be better and more authentic.
- Try and stay calm and be honest with the panel (if you are feeling stressed and need a moment to breathe, tell them). Take your time when performing and be polite.

2. What makes good rehearsal etiquette?

- Show up on time ready to rehearse. Keeping personal chatter going is fun, as long as it doesn't impact the progress or content of the rehearsal. Make sure you've read through the scenes you're going to rehearse beforehand, so it's fresh in your memory.
- Nurturing a supportive, safe, and enthusiastic environment is vital to ensuring that both you and the rest of the actors feel as though they can explore new ideas (which may potentially fail) without fear of judgement.

3. How do you learn your lines?

- I feel the best way for myself is to add or assign actions to the lines you are trying to learn. For example, walking to a certain area of the stage or picking up a certain prop. It allows me to remember the line through association with muscle memory.
- If you have someone who can read for the other characters, the natural flow of the script will trigger the lines. When doing a monologue, focus on any big/unusual words, it helps to know where those words come in to break up the paragraphs.
- I tend to write out my lines as this helps me really engage with what I am required to say. This method also helps me to make sure that I am accurate with my line delivery.

Conclusion

Thank you for reading this handbook! We hope you found it useful. As well as providing directions and advice, this book is meant to show Warwick students that anyone can put on an independent production if they are willing to work hard for it. It takes courage, strength, and resilience to do, but what is marvellous is that you can develop those traits in the process of production. By doing it independently, you give yourself more challenges and have to take bigger risks. As a result, you become more confident in yourself and subsequently your artistic vision.

If you would like to get in contact with us, our emails are below:

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Cordelia.Bowden@warwic.ac.uk (Marketing Manager)

We wish you the very best of luck in theatre and if you ever have any tickets to spare ... we don't mind filling those seats!

Zoe, Alex, and Cordelia