

## Notes on Notes: How to Run a Production Meeting

As head of the production team, one of the producer's most important responsibilities is to organize and lead weekly production meetings during the pre-production/rehearsal phase, and daily meetings following tech and dress rehearsals (these meetings are more commonly referred to as "tech notes," or around here, "midnight meetings"). Focused leadership and detailed notetaking at these meetings is critical for keeping the process on track and everyone on the same page.

Find a weekly time when everyone on your production team can meet. At minimum the director, stage manager and all of your designers should be included, but depending on your production, you may also have a choreographer, dramaturg, music director, and others on your distribution list (also include the THST TD and PM). Once you move into tech, these weekly meetings will become tech notes following each rehearsal. Because the Whitney Theater doors are automatically red-lit at midnight, make sure that these meetings are scheduled to begin **no later than 11:45 pm**.

Before each meeting, read the prior week's rehearsal reports and take note of any issues that are likely to affect multiple departments. For example, if the director says in rehearsal that it's important for the baby in the play to sound as if it's really crying, this might require a collaboration between the sound and the props department- be prepared to facilitate that conversation. It's a good idea to send an agenda to everyone before the first meeting, with guidelines about what kind of topics they should expect to cover.

Production meetings can be divided into three sections:

1. **All Staff-Issues** (5 minutes)

Begin each meeting by addressing any issues that affect the group as a whole. This could be an announcement of any changes to staff or budget, or a just a reminder of how much time is left before you have an audience.

2. **Departmental Progress Reports** (30-40 minutes)

Ask for each department to give a brief progress report. This shouldn't be a chronicle of everything they've done in the past week, but a general overview of their activities with emphasis on those that affect multiple departments. If the publicity materials require an actor to be photographed in costume, the costume designer should know when the photo shoot is going to be so they can finish that costume first. The order of departmental reports is flexible, but should always begin with the director. As leader of the meeting, it's your job to announce which department is up next and keep the conversation focused. If there are issues that require longer one-on-one conversations between departments, encourage breakout meetings.

You should follow this same format for tech notes/midnight meetings, but expect to spend less time on each department. The purpose of tech notes is for the director to give notes to the individual departments, and for the departments to solve any conflicts that have become apparent during rehearsal.

The following is a recommended order, with common talking points:

- a. **Director/Stage Manager:** Update Prod Team on rehearsal process and address any direct questions to department heads.
- b. **Sets/TD/Paints:** Design/build update: show any new research or renderings and note any setbacks that could require additional resources. Make sure to consider whether new scenic elements conflict with lighting, sound or projection. If prepping for load-in, make sure you have the necessary labor and that load-in activities don't conflict with other departments.
- c. **Props:** Design/build update: show any new research, photos or renderings; note any setbacks that could require additional resources. Consider whether actors will need practice handling any of the props that you intend to use.
- d. **Costumes/Hair/Makeup:** Design/build update: show any new research, photos or renderings; note any setbacks that could require additional resources. Consider whether actors will need practice moving in any pieces (skirts, shoes) that you intend to use. Request time from Director/SM for actor fittings. If possible, bring fabric swatches for the lighting designer.
- e. **Lighting:** Design update: show any new research or renderings. Make sure to consider whether any lighting elements are likely to conflict with sets, sound or projection. Consider how your color choices might affect the appearance of the clothing or set decoration. Note any practicals and consider what kinds of joint efforts might be necessary to realize them. If prepping for load-in, make sure you have the necessary labor and that load-in activities don't conflict with other departments.
- f. **Sound:** Design update: play new samples and note any setbacks that could require additional resources. Consider the logistics of any recording you plan to do, and make sure you have access to actors if you need them. If prepping for load-in, make sure you have the necessary labor and that load-in activities don't conflict with other departments' plans.
- g. **Projections:** Design update: show any new research or renderings and note any setbacks that could require additional resources. Consider the logistics of any recording you plan to do, and make sure you have access to actors if you need them. If prepping for load-in, make sure you have the necessary labor and that load-in activities don't conflict with other departments' plans.

### 3. **Scheduling** (5 minutes)

Following the departmental notes, remind everyone when the next meeting will be.

During tech, this last section should be where the group agrees on time for work notes the following day. If Lighting or Projections needs "dark time," if Sound needs "quite time," and if Sets needs to do construction, you'll need to schedule separate blocks of time for each.

Keep concise but detailed notes. It's OK to take notes in shorthand, but translate them into full sentences before you send them, and make sure you include enough detail that a person not at the meeting would know what you're talking about (you can't always be sure about who's going to ultimately be doing the work or when). For example, a note that says "Props- Martinelli's darker" might

make sense in the moment, but could be open to interpretation later. Assuming everybody knows what Martinelli's is (which is a maybe), should the liquid be darker, or just the label? Or maybe the bottle itself needs to be opaque so the audience can't see the liquid at all.

Send your meeting notes on the same night that you have the meeting so that everyone has as much time as possible to react to them. You typically won't have to send notes following midnight meetings, since the expectation is that each department is there to take their own, but you may have to relay information if any team members are absent.