



Observations Guide (Design) 2025

This guide provides advice for both those looking to **observe** a lighting designer at work and the designers themselves. Whether you're a Student, Associate, Affiliate these tips will help make the observation process smooth and beneficial for everyone involved.

There is a big difference between Observing and a Placement. Observing is visiting a theatre to meet a designer during their process and watching part of their process, this could consist of a focus session, a session of tech or a dress rehearsal. It is not a job interview so observe and see what happens rather than try to impress or angle for work.

A Placement is something more structured that you will have discussed with the designer and planned with a clear objective and your involvement along the way. *See separate guide.*

ADVICE FOR THE OBSERVER

- When reaching out via email, make your approach personal and friendly. Remember, designers are often busy with tech or rehearsals, so patience is key.
- Think about what you hope to observe and discuss these with the designer and their team. It doesn't have to be a whole process, but could be a focus session, plotting or a section of tech.
- Share your preferred timeline for the placement and check if it fits with the designer's current projects.
- Take some time to familiarize yourself with the designer's lighting style and past work. This can be a great way to start a conversation.
- Arrange to talk / zoom, so you've had some direct conversation before you arrive.
- If you are a student, be aware of your college's guidelines for visits and observations and have details to share with the designer. Be prepared to talk the Designer through what the college will need for them to complete.
- Understand that the designer is focused on delivering their vision for the show and has a commitment to the Producer / Theatre / Other creatives. You are not their sole focus of attention.
- Be aware of the efforts the designer has made to arrange your visit, this will involve Producers and management. Be respectful of their time and effort.

WHAT TO DO

- Be on time. Be polite to everyone you meet.
- Be aware of the "room" and the people around you. The creative team will be discussing aspects of the production, don't be offended if you are asked to leave whilst some conversations happen.
- Ask the Designer to give you some time to ask questions, coffee breaks are sometimes useful – make notes throughout the process as this will be useful to refer to.
- Keep an eye and ear out for the conversations that do happen, it will be fascinating to see how the process works and the communication the designer will have with many different people in the room, to complete the task on which they are working.

DON'T

- Don't become needy or create problems for the designer. You are there to observe.
- Don't take photos, you are watching a process not documenting it; productions are very keen to keep their surprises or choices secret until the show is opened. Also don't be on your phone/devices. This suggests to everyone you are not interested.
- Don't expect to be part of creative dialogues.

Enjoy the experience and really take-in what you see, Everything is useful.

ADVICE TO THE LIGHTING DESIGNER

on having Observers.

Firstly: Fantastic you got to this point of reading. Industry experience is hard to find and your willingness is key to giving people the opportunity it is essential.

Don't panic about someone asking if they can come and watch you "light a show". The skills lacking in our industry are not necessarily technical skills but more the "soft" skills of interaction, communication and planning that you have with all of your team, production and other creatives. Therefore, it doesn't need to be an epic production with huge visual effects and lots of lighting, it can be a small production as the process is always useful to observe. Real life experiences of fast focus sessions, little or no lighting time and speedy tech rehearsals with big expectations.

We've written this guide with Students in mind, but of course it can apply to any observation experience. There are no rules and regulations and therefore you are perfectly situated to make the call as to how and what part of the process you allow someone to come and observe.

A few tips, to consider.

- Reply to emails from those wanting to observe, it can be disheartening to not receive a reply to your email - even if it's to say no.
- Arrange to meet / zoom if someone seems suitable to come and watch and discuss what they want to get from this observation.
- Make it clear that you are offering Observing and that is NOT being your assistant, so don't feel you need to assign duties or a role during the process. It might be a focus or tech session. They are solely there to observe.

WHAT THEY NEED

- Provide schedule details and make arrangements for their arrival at the stage door and times.
- Introductions are important to allow your observer to feel comfortable, introduce them to your team and maybe other creatives to explain who the new face in the room is. Give them a spot in theatre where they can see and hear what's happening. It doesn't have to be at your elbow or behind you where the Producer or Director end-up. Maybe the sound department have a spare comms pack or headset, but only if you feel comfortable.
- Similarly, if appropriate give them access to relevant drawing as a guide. Take a moment to talk them through it.
- Ensure the building/management is happy to have a student, especially in terms of Insurance.
- Give them the opportunity at some point to sit down with you, let them ask questions. It is fascinating to see what observing can bring-up in questions, you never know when something useful might come out of an innocent question.
- Don't feel bad if you need to ask them to step out of the the space if there are difficult conversations going on around you at the tech desk. Keep in mind, your work is the most important part and if having someone observing is making it difficult for whatever reason then don't be afraid to bring the observation to a close, but be fair and tell them why you are shutting it down. Perhaps its tech tension around you or perhaps you sense they are not interested (on their phones): you don't need the distraction.
- If your observer is a student, maybe their college might ask for some form of paperwork to be completed both prior to and after the period. Ask in advance from the college what you might expect to see, so you can manage your time.

Observing is a great opportunity for the person coming in to observe, as we have said, not only for the experience of seeing real-life work happen in real life situations but also to illustrate the many conversations that you have as a designer with other creative people in the theatre.