# Costume designer

The costume designer is responsible for designing all the costumes to be worn in a production. This can involve a mix of designing from scratch, and sourcing existing items of clothing.

As a designer, you might work with a team of people in the wardrobe department.

### What is the job like?

Costume designers work very closely with the director, and often also the other designers on the show, like the set designer. Your aim as a costume designer is to find a look and feel to complement the vision of a play.  
  
Often you might start by finding appropriate reference materials, such as images, fabrics, textures, and period drawings. You would then devise costumes within the budget available.

This might involve:

* going shopping for clothes and accessories such as hats, gloves or jewellery, either from a theatrical costumier or high street shops and markets
* creating something absolutely new from design to finished product
* adapting some existing pieces of costuming for the purposes of a new show
* Overseeing costume fittings and last-minute changes, ready for the dress rehearsal.

As a designer, you might work with a team of people in the wardrobe department with a wide range of skills. As you move through your design career, you might also work in these roles too.

### What jobs make up a costume design department?

Many of the costume team may have had specialist art, fashion design or drama school training. However, in some cases people do work their way into the industry without formal training.

* **Wardrobe supervisors**handle records of what the wardrobe department already has 'in stock', and help with sourcing new items of costume.
* **Tailors and dressmakers**make new garments. They will often have served an apprenticeship in the clothing industry, and adapted these skills to theatre use.
* **Cutters**are assistants to the dressmakers. They cut out patterns ready to be sewn together into costumes. Specialist pattern cutting courses are often available at places like the [London College of Fashion](http://www.fashion.arts.ac.uk/).
* **Milliners**are hat specialists who design and make headwear.
* **Dyers** 'break down' costumes, shoes or boots before they are seen on stage. Breaking down is the process of distressing a costume, to give it a worn and authentic look.

For example, jacket sleeves can be tied up with string, sprayed with water and left overnight to get authentic creases. Pockets are made to realistically sag by filling with paper or stones.  
Costumes can also be rubbed with sandpaper or soap to make the garment look worn or greasy. Dyers might also regularly cover boots and shoes with specially made ‘mud’.

* **Dressers** help the artists into their costumes when making quick changes. This is a role that can be undertaken by people without previous experience, although often the jobs are often staffed by by experienced people who may have undertaken relevant theatre training, or people who are hoping to move into more qualified wardrobe work.

### How do I get into costuming?

You should be as interested in subjects like art and design as theatre. An understanding of costume history is also important, so try to build up as much knowledge as you can in this area.

Your aim is to find a look and feel to complement the vision of a play.

Many people finish school and study design by completing a [foundation pre-degree year](http://www.ucas.com/students/choosingcourses/specificsubjects/artanddesign/foundationcourses/) of art study and going on to do a degree in design, millinery or costume design. They may attend fashion design college.

However, others choose to study BTEC national diplomas or City & Guilds certificates in design or backstage art.

There are some apprenticeship schemes, such as the [BBC Design Training Scheme](http://www.bbc.co.uk/design/). The Royal Opera House also offers [limited work experience days.](http://www.roh.org.uk/about/work-here/first-stage-work-experience-at-the-royal-opera-house/work-experience-placements/first-stage-dye-shop)

Alongside any training, you will need to find practical work experience. You could try student and amateur theatre shows, volunteering as a helper on any TV and film sets you can or writing to theatres to try to get casual wardrobe work.

It's worth writing to costume hire shops and companies to see if they can give you work experience.

It may also help you to build a good portfolio of images of designs and costumes you have worked on to show to potential employers.