

Guide for Directing Amateur Actors

As a designer of instruction, you are often playing multiple roles: performance consultant, designer, developer, LMS administrator. As you produce stories for training, you may also have to play several roles. One of those roles may be Director.

Most companies don't have access to professional actors for every project, which opens up opportunities to use a valuable resource: employee volunteer actors! If directing sounds like a challenge, be encouraged: many designers with no directing experience have successfully directed amateur actors before you. You've got this!

The Audio Recommendations document (also downloadable on the website) provides helpful tips for recording your actors' voices. The best practices listed here will help you cast the characters and direct amateur actors for the camera.

Casting

Once the story has been written and storyboarded, it's time to start thinking in concrete terms of who will play the characters. You may already have people in mind for certain roles. That's great, but keep an open mind. There may be a hidden gem in your work force who is waiting for a chance to shine. To successfully recruit these actors, take these steps:

1. **Determine the audition times:** Set aside enough days to hold auditions during times when employees are most available.
2. **Get the word out:** Whether you choose to have a closed audition or make it open to anyone, use your internal network to get recommendations on who to ask.
3. **Collect actor information:** Ask interested employees to complete a form or a survey. Tell them the time that is required and ask for their availability. Ask if they'd like a speaking role or a non-speaking role. This is your opportunity to get as much information as you need to make the best decision on who to cast.
4. **Schedule the auditions:** Call two or more employees at a time so you can hear them read a portion of the script with one another. Print several copies of the scenes you want actors to read through.
5. **Give them direction:** Ask them to read through the script once. Then give them one specific piece of direction, like, "I'd like for you to punch the last word of that sentence." Or, "On this line, show me, with your voice, how the character feels." Or, "I like how you reacted to her. This time, keep the same intensity, but respond to her with a whisper."
6. **Take notes!** After auditions, it may be difficult to remember who is who. Indicate which roles each actor read well for. Did they take your direction? Can they only read the line one way?
7. **Cast the story:** First, cast the roles that are the most challenging, and work your way through to the minor characters. Cast for diversity and physical and vocal

variety (A baritone speaking voice paired with soprano speaking voice provide a nice auditory contrast.) In your notification to the actors, thank them, celebrate them and put an invite on their calendar for the production days. Consider copying their manager on the casting email so they receive recognition for their hard work. Attach the script to your invite.

Directing

Production days are exciting for you and for the actors. It's something outside of their normal workday. The more organized you are on the front end, the more comfortable your amateur actors will be on production day. Whether you are shooting photos or video, these tips will help prepare you for the big day.

1. **Set the stage:** Book the space for the shoot. The space should be relatively free of interruptions from passers-by. And you don't want to interrupt the work of others if the shoot is onsite. If you need working computers, phones or props to make the scene realistic, bring everything on site and set it up.
2. **Add details to the storyboard:** Now that you know who will play the roles and you've spent time in the space, you may want to add details to the storyboard like, "Camera is looking over her shoulder onto the computer screen." Or "Bethany holding her hair back as she reads the report on her desk." In the calm of your own workspace, these details come to mind easily. But in the middle of a shoot, where things are busier and actors are looking to you for direction, these written details can save the day.
3. **Arrive early:** Organize yourself in the space and welcome actors as they arrive. If they need to sign a waiver for their participation, ask them to do so now. If you have someone assisting you, put them in charge of paperwork. They can also follow along with the storyboard to double-check that you are capturing everything.
4. **Talk to the actors:** As you take photos or video, talk with the actors about their performance. Similar to how you directed them during the audition, give them specific direction, like, "Reach toward the screen with your left hand. Put your right hand on the desk. Cheat your face toward the camera." Encourage them and keep the conversation focused on the task at hand.
5. **Take some fun photos:** After the shoot, ask them to pose for some photos as a group or individually. Use these photos for credits at the end of the story or at the end of the course.

That's a wrap

You've done it! Read through Chapters 8 & 9 in *Instructional Story Design* for inspiration on how to use your raw materials for producing your story. Once training is released and employees see their own peers in the story, get ready to expand your acting group!