

Theatre People: Audio Technician

Audio/sound technicians specialize in the technical side to bring sound design to life. They may be employed on a casual basis, an independent contractor who takes calls show by show to work for hours or days on an installation. A technician might also be hired for the run of a show to deal with microphones and other equipment during the performance. As well, most theatres employ at least one venue technician who works at the theatre full time during the season (MTC has a Head of Lighting and a Head of Audio for example.) Many calls for technicians on a casual basis in Winnipeg go through the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees, the local “backstage union.”

Tasks and activities in a typical day

Tasks vary whether you are a casual crew member or in residence at a theatre, but some things that an audio crew member does regularly are:

- Collaborating with a sound designer about the best equipment to achieve certain effects (Head)
- Ordering or renting instruments, speakers, mics, etc (Head)
- Supervising a team, scheduling people, and managing a budget (Head)
- Participating in or supervising hanging and installing sound equipment
- Programming cues into the sound board
- Performing maintenance and making sure equipment functions correctly
- Keeping up to date with technology
- Practicing good safety procedures to take care of all crew, cast, staff, and audience
- Running soundchecks with the performers
- Operating the board during a performance, executing cues and ensuring levels are consistent; monitoring the quality and adjusting accordingly

10 skills that a sound technician uses:

- Time management
- Organization
- Working as a team and independently
- Communication and collaboration
- Inventory management
- Quick and creative thinking
- Knowledge of sound equipment, control systems, and software including editing
- Safety awareness
- Troubleshooting technical issues
- Attention to detail

Building Abilities

There are probably lots of things you are already doing, and things you can start to do, that will serve you in a career as a sound technician. Some of these are:

- Join a school theatre program or community group and volunteer in the areas that interest you. Learn by doing!
- Find an organizational system that works for you to track different tasks and projects.
- Explore free software to start manipulating and creating sounds. You can learn technical skills by consulting tutorials on Youtube or software websites. Try free music software like Garageband, Reaper, and Audacity. The basic version of Qlab, the standard industry software for playing back audio, is free to download on a Mac.
- Make and shape sound: learn an instrument, play with others, do sound for your friend’s band, sing in the shower - anything can be good practice!
- Listen: to lots of different kinds of music, to the sound in video games and movies and TikToks, to the sounds of the city, classroom, doing the dishes - sound is all around, all the time.
- Take care of your body. Audio technicians ask a lot of their ears and bodies, so knowing ways to rest and rejuvenate that work for you is important.