

Theatre People: Buyer (Wardrobe)

The wardrobe buyer is responsible for purchasing the clothing, fabrics, notions, jewellery, shoes, and other accessories required for a production. This is done within a provided budget and in consultation with the costume designer and the head of wardrobe. They set up and maintain good relationships with vendors, especially shops where you might return show after show. The buyer also returns all pieces that aren't going to be used, and has to keep track of timing and budget for those. The wardrobe buyer's job is different depending on the type of show being worked on. A show set in the present has more clothing shopping in local stores and online while a show set in the past is usually built, so there is more fabric shopping. You might shop online, in department stores, at vintage shops, or specialty boutiques.

The buyer may be a full-time job, or combined with other duties (for example, at Royal MTC, the buyer is also in charge of accessories). A theatre might employ a buyer all season, or bring them on only for certain shows. In a smaller company, you might have one or a few wardrobe workers who share all the duties.

Tasks and activities in a typical day

- Look at costume sketches for details about each costume, and make lists
- Research and understand the time period in which the play takes place
- Get measurements of each actor to understand which sizes to purchase
- Meet with costume designer to ask questions about each costume
- Meet with head of wardrobe and costume designer to discuss which fabrics to buy and how much of each
- Look online for options of costume pieces that suit the design; show designer for approval and discussion
- Shop in stores for clothing, shoes, accessories and fabrics as necessary – often with the designer
- Look in the theatre's stock for shoes and accessories that might work for design and might fit actors
- Keep track of all receipts and spending
- Organize receipts and items for possible return with dates things need to be returned by
- Maintain budget and reconcile receipts
- Clean, organize and maintain costume storage and fabric storage areas
- Maintenance of wardrobe shop tools
- Ensure health and safety of team members and shop space
- Remain current with fashions and what items stores carry seasonally



In *Matilda*, Mrs. Phelps (left) wore pieces from thrift stores. School uniforms with jackets, ties, shirts, skirts, shorts, socks, shoes, and pinafores had to be bought, but not all pieces came from the same supplier. (Set/costumes: Cory Sincennes, lighting: Gerald King, photos: Dylan Hewlett.)



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Skills that a wardrobe buyer uses:

- Communication
- Attention to detail
- Time management
- Creative problem solving
- Computer internet and research skills
- Budget management and accounting
- Relationship-building
- Collaboration

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 in wardrobe. Some of these are:

- Online and thrift store shopping
- Sewing and textile projects
- Looking at labels: what fabrics are different clothing made from, and how complicated is their care?
- Noticing design trends from today and different periods in history
- Finding an organizational system that works for you to track tasks and budgets
- Paying attention to the cost of things. Buyers have to keep in mind pricing for things like fancy fabrics like silk, men's suits, and shoes
- Noticing how measurements relate to clothing sizes
- Learning about fabrics: how they move, feel, look
- Observing costumes in plays, TV, and films you watch and noting which pieces make up each outfit



Bang Bang is an example of a show that was mostly shopped, because it was set in the present time. The designer still makes clear choices, and the buyer looks for pieces in the right colour palette and silhouette, but the finished product reflects what is available in the world. (Costume design: Joseph Abetria; set: Adam Parboosingh; lighting: Scott Henderson; photos: Dylan Hewlett)

