

Theatre People: Wigs, Hair, and Makeup

Hair and makeup can be transformative tools for an actor to portray a character. If a hairstyle is complicated, very different than an actors' own, or there are changes in hair throughout the show, wigs are used. Wigs and makeup are often designed by the costume designer. Depending on the size of the theatre, there may be a hair and wigs department made up of multiple staff, each with their own specialties (like at the Stratford Festival), a wigs and makeup coordinator (like at Royal MTC) employed through the season, or contract someone only on a case-by-case basis. Theatres also may augment their team with other people who have special skills required for a show.



Wigs onstage and off! On the left, Royal MTC's Wig and Makeup Coordinator Beverly Covert created the green wig for Fruma-Sarah in *Fiddler on the Roof*, worn by Rebecca Poff. (Costume design Michael Gianfrancesco, lighting design Michael J. Whitfield, set design Douglas Paraschuk; photo by B. Monk). On the right, Bev fits John B. Lowe for wig and beard as The Ghost of Christmas Present in *A Christmas Carol*, also shown onstage (costume design Judith Bowden, set design Gillian Gallow, lighting design Scott Henderson; photo Dylan Hewlett).

Tasks and activities in a typical day

The work of someone in the Wigs, Hair, and Makeup (WHAM) department can vary depending on their exact role or on the show, but here are some of the things that they may do regularly:

- Read the script and look for references to hair style, texture, or colour – does someone mention a moustache? Does a character complain about their new haircut? – or makeup, including potential effects like wounds.
- Flagging other needs of the show that can affect this department – are actors using microphones taped to their face or running through their wig? Will they be getting sweaty from dancing? Are there quick changes between looks?
- Consult with the costume designer about looks for the show
- Assess actors' current hair, take head measurements, and fit them for wigs
- Learn about actors' makeup needs and purchase supplies needed
- Pull wigs and facial hair from stock, order, or create new wigs, and adjust fit as needed
- Manipulate wigs to match the desired style
- Show actors using their own hair how to style it, or schedule/supervise a visiting stylist
- Show actors how to apply makeup, or schedule/supervise a makeup tutorial for specialized looks
- Maintain wigs during the run of the show
- Keep wigs and hair/makeup supplies organized, maintained, and stored properly
- In some shows, work backstage each performance to help actors prep and change

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10 skills that someone working in Wigs, Hair, and Makeup may use:

- Hairdressing, including working with different hair textures
- Specialized skills in creating wigs and makeup prosthetics
- Makeup application
- Research – of historical periods, techniques, and new innovations
- Shopping/sourcing, including budgeting
- Communication – conveying the designer’s vision in workable steps
- Interpersonal skills – being sensitive to working with peoples’ appearance
- Record-keeping and organization
- Imagination and creativity
- Time management

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 [department]. Some of these are:

- Practice hairdressing and makeup on yourself and your friends! It can feel very different to work on someone else.
- Follow tutorials online to create hairstyles for different time periods or to experiment with makeup effects.
- Arts and crafts like crocheting or sewing that use your fine motor skills.
- Take care of your body. This department asks a lot of your eyes and hands, so knowing ways to rest and rejuvenate that work for you is important.
- Watch theatre and film and pay attention to how the hair and makeup impacts the character. What clues does it give you about the setting, time period, status, personality, and themes that the director might be trying to get across? (Is this a realistic world? Whimsical? Sad?)

Extra Insights

Here are some interesting articles and videos from other theatres that go into detail about this department!

- [The process of wig-making from Melbourne Theatre Company](#)
- [How are wigs made? From Melbourne Theatre Company](#)
- [Wigs and Makeup from the Royal Shakespeare Company](#)
- [The World of Wigs and Makeup at American Players Theatre \(*Dramatics* magazine\)](#)
- [Interview with a Theatrical Makeup Artist from Friends Beauty Blog](#)
- [The Matchmaker: Wigs from The Stratford Festival - Video](#)
- [How to Make A Wig from the National Theatre - Video](#)
- [Gory Makeup from the Royal Shakespeare Company - Video](#)