# Props Manager

One of the most often overlooked artists behind the theatrical stage is the properties master. The properties, or "props" manager is in charge of supplying all of the non-costume, non set-related physical objects that are part of a play. This may sound like boring and unglamorous work, but the props master's work is important to the quality of the play and requires a great deal of artistic talent. For the right person, theater props work is a highly rewarding and enjoyable career. Do you love the theater arts? Do you have a talent for designing and building [arts and crafts](http://www.ehow.com/how_4531700_be-theater-props-master.html)? Do you enjoy scavenger hunts and have a fascination with antiques, oddities, and other interesting "junk"? If so, theater properties could be a perfect match for you.

Props managers help to define the style and look of film, video and theatrical productions. Working as part of the art and design team, the props manager (also known as props master or mistress) is responsible for the selection, management and preparation of a wide variety of furnishings, furniture, ornaments and other objects. This might range from historically accurate period scenery to futuristic furniture or tribal artifacts.

The work requires close liaison with carpenters, artists and prop facility house staff. It demands the ability to work to high standards of accuracy and detail and meet often tight deadlines. Props managers have to be resourceful and must have a strong eye for detail to ensure continuity within a production. Props management work may overlap with other roles, such as stage manager.

Prop managers often double as Assistant Stage Managers (ASMs), which means you are backstage with the Stage Manager while the performance is going on, helping to set up before and clear away afterwards, and carrying out scene changes. The Stage Manager may ask you to stay with him / her near the SM's desk on Prompt Side (which at the ADC Theatre means the stage-left wing) so you are available to find missing people / props. If you are back-stage during the performance, remember to wear dark clothing. If you are not ASMing (acting as Assistant Stage Manager ), you will probably need to be present at least for the beginning of the various runs and the first few performances, in order to finalize the setting of props etc. During the Tech and Dress, it's a good idea to note down what needs to be set both on and off stage, where, when and by whom. On the whole, actors ought to take props from the prop table just before they go on, and replace them as soon as they come off. The Presets (props set on stage at the beginning of an Act) can cause problems. Make sure you know whether it is you or the actor that is meant to set something; if it's the actor, it's a good idea to check it anyway, at least for the first few runs.

After the last performance and BEFORE the party, get all the props out of the stage area, and pack away as many as possible. Return borrowed or hired props religiously, since you will annoy everyone who has kindly lent you things if they're not returned. If you've spent your own money on things, keep the receipts and give them to the producer as soon as you can, for repayment. If the show is funded by the ADC and has bought or made any props, then these should be added to the ADC Props store for use by future shows

## What does a props manager do?

The props manager is responsible for budgeting for, locating, begging, borrowing or stealing props (don’t really steal; the ADC doesn’t condone any criminal activity) for the show, and making sure that they meet the director’s requirements. Some props managers then also remain involved throughout each of the shows, working backstage making sure that the props all make it into the right places at the right time, although this can usually be left to the Stage Manager and his/her team, or just to the cast. For more complex shows, having a props manager backstage can be a great advantage.  
  The first thing you must do – and the earlier you do it the better – is to prise a props list and a budget figure out of your director and producer. The list needn't be anything like complete (most prop requirements surface during the rehearsal period) and you must expect it to be continually added to and changed, but the earlier you can get an idea of how many things are wanted, how difficult they will be to find and how expensive they may be, the less hassle you will have during the last few days before the show opens. Budgets vary from show to show, but for a typical MainShow, you might expect up to £75 – £100.  
  You will need to think about each prop that the director wants, and think about how much of the budget can be spent on it, whether it can be borrowed, or whether it will have to be made, bought or hired. If you decide that you need to make props, have a word with your technical crew to see if they might be able to help you at all.  
  Don't go over budget without checking with the producer – you may just conceivably need to, but the corresponding amount will have to be cut from somewhere else.

Typical work activities include:

* planning and managing the props budget;
* working with the art and design and production teams to agree on the props required;
* assisting with set design;
* coordinating the construction and completion of props;
* sourcing and acquiring furniture and accessories;
* attending production shoots/rehearsals to ensure suitability of props and noting changes that will affect props;
* instructing the cast on the care, maintenance or operation of the props;
* supervising the props assistant;
* overseeing props storage between shoots/rehearsals.

## What are props?

A prop is any small item used on stage during a show, and the word “prop” is a contraction of “property”. It is often difficult to distinguish positively between props and set. Certainly, anything which is moved or carried by an actor should be considered a prop, and things like doors and walls are definitely set, but books in bookcases, vases on sideboards and so on, are less easy to categorise. It is important to make sure that it is agreed for a given show, however, just who is responsible for each item.

## Where do props come from?

Props come from wherever they can be found! This might include second hand shops, theatrical suppliers, the ADC Props store, home (yours or other members of the crew or cast), borrowed from Departments of the University etc. If you need very specialist things (flaming torches, blood weapons etc) then the white book can be a good place to look. It’s online, and there is a paper copy in the ADC Theatre offices. It has lists of professional companies and suppliers for everything you could possibly want. Try under "Props Hire" or "Weaponry" or whatever else you're looking for, and it's always a good idea to phone around for the best deal; remember to include postage in your pricing.  
  Once you’ve acquired your props, make sure that everyone who helps you in any way is mentioned in the "Thanks" section of the program – this is polite, and goes for everyone on a production team. Civility costs nothing, after all, and will make people more willing to help you in the future!