

The Sound Check

1. Running a sound check will take two people and it is good practice to listen through the headset in the auditorium while a colleague speaks into the mic. You are checking for two things:
 2. To ensure you can deliver the description efficiently and appropriately.
 3. To ensure that your audience will hear you and have a comfortable experience.
4. Make sure you can't hear your colleague in the auditorium unless you use a headset. Some description points are not soundproof. If this is the case, it's a good idea to work with one earphone off so you can monitor the volume of your voice. Take this opportunity to find out how loudly you can speak without being heard through the window.
5. Make sure the signal can be heard clearly through all points in the auditorium. Remember to sit down in the seats, as a signal that seems clear when you're standing may be lost when you sit.
6. Make sure the signal does not cut out or fade when the user turns their head, or they will have to sit immobile throughout the performance.
7. If there is any hiss on the signal tell the technician immediately so that s/he can rectify it.
8. Make sure you know which channel you're transmitting on so that you can brief ushers and inform patrons at the touch tour. There have been

times when hard of hearing audience members have been given the audio description channel by mistake and the blind and partially sighted audience have missed the description because they've been given a headset tuned to the show relay channel.

9. You might like to make an announcement as you read the introduction – “Hello and welcome to the (theatre’s name) audio description service” to warn hard of hearing patrons if they are on the wrong channel.
10. Ask your colleague to speak as they will during the show over music or loud effects to make sure there’s no distortion. If there is, alert your technician so s/he can make adjustments.
11. Make sure the show relay is not transmitted to the description channel, or every time there’s a burst of music and the patron switches up the volume to hear you, they’ll be switching up the show relay too, making the whole exercise rather pointless.
12. Make sure that your mic is fully muted when you switch it off. Check by asking your colleague to count to 20 slowly and to lower the fader at some point before bringing it up again. You shouldn’t be able to hear the numbers while it is switched down.
13. Make sure you can hear your own voice in the headset (foldback) and can control the volume without affecting what is going out in the auditorium. Turn the volume up and down as you are speaking

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and ask your colleague if they experience any difference.

14. Make sure you can hear show relay, preferably through headphones. If there's no noise onstage while you're doing your sound check ask your colleague to walk to the stage, where the mics are, and speak or clap. Don't wait until you're reading your introduction and all the technicians are busy elsewhere to find this out.
15. Check that the balance of show relay and foldback in your headphones is even. If your foldback is too loud you might not be able to hear the show.
16. Check to make sure there's no irritating click in the listeners' headphones when you switch the mic on or off. If you are using a freestanding mic it might be possible for the technician to run the sound through a mixer to give you faders or knobs to control. An hour before the show is not the best time to ask for this, but it might be something to request for the future.
17. By far the best type of mic for live description in a theatre is one attached to a headset. This gives you flexibility of movement and means that the mic can be set at a fixed distance from your mouth, so you never need to worry about going 'off mic.' Generally, a headset mic should lie just above your jawline to enable you to speak slightly over it, eliminating popping. It should not be so close that you bump it every time you speak and the earphones should not be so far down that you pick up clicks from every movement of your jaw.

18. If you're using a headset mic, ask your colleague to listen for any 'popping' when you say 'p' or 'b' and hissing when you say 's'. If there is any, move the mic while listening to the foldback in your headset until you find the right sound, using tongue twisters like 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper' and 'Sister Susie's sewing shirts for soldiers'. And make sure the cable doesn't bang against the desk if you lean forward. Sling it over your shoulder if necessary.
19. If you are using a freestanding mic, get yourself into position, set your script out and *then* move the mic into position. Move the mic to you, don't lean into the mic or you will sound forced. The same goes for the mixer desk. Get it into a position where you can reach it, and your script, comfortably.
20. Mics should be switched off every time you are not actually speaking, or your listeners will pick up every squeak of your chair and every breath you take, distracting them from the performance. Some describers have a switch or a button to turn off the mic, making an irritating click in the listener's headset, so they say they have to leave the mic open. This is not acceptable. A small mixer desk with silent faders is not expensive and provides your listeners with a much more comfortable experience.
21. Put a wad of paper under the leg of any wobbly tables and avoid any squeaky chairs.
22. If you and a colleague are changing over half way through the introduction, remember to lower

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the mic before you swap headsets or change seats, or your audience will experience every bang and bump. Do a rehearsal to see how quickly you can do this.

23. If you are working from a monitor, turn the volume to zero or every time you open the mic, the listener will get a blast of show sound in their headset as well as your voice.
24. If you are working in an area where there are backstage calls coming over speakers, ask if they can be muted. If there's no other way of doing this, hang a jacket over the speaker or your listeners will hear them through their headsets.
25. Have your colleague or a technician listen in to the start of the introductory notes on a headset so they can confirm that the signal is still working.

Do these checks every time you output. Just because it was OK during the dry run doesn't mean it's OK for the performance. Our audience deserves a comfortable experience or they may not come back..