

Film Industry Roles: Costume Designer

What's the Difference Between a Costume Designer and Fashion Designer?

Theatrical costumes must adhere to the specific requirements of the narrative while also being durable enough to withstand repeated wear and quick changes between scenes. Where a traditional fashion designer might be asked to design a contemporary maxi dress, a costume designer might be called upon to create a period hoop skirt that must withstand daily wear for months on end.

A costume designer is also tasked with working in concert with other design professionals in mediums like lighting and scenic design to create a cohesive aesthetic for the production as a whole.

What Are the Roles and Responsibilities of a Costume Designer?

- 1. Costume designers start their process by doing a close reading of the script and making a careful analysis of the plot, tone, and period of the story being told.
- 2. After preliminary conversations with the writer, director and other members of the production team, the costume designer will begin researching the fashion history and trends of the relevant time period and location.
- 3. During this process they'll compile a collection of visual references for specific materials, patterns or clothing pieces that they wish to draw on in devising their own final designs.
- 4. In assembling the costumes, the designer must ensure that each outfit effectively communicates the age, social status and dramatic function of each character, bearing in mind that this can change over the course of a narrative. Each individual costume design is compiled into what's called a costume plot which tracks each character chronologically through the story and documents their changes in attire. Plots are generally made up of hand drawn sketches, photographs or digital renderings.
- 5. Once the director and production team have signed off on the costumes, the designer gets to work putting them together. Sometimes costumes are constructed from scratch, but oftentimes pieces may be purchased from retailers.
- 6. Most costumes are then altered after fittings with the cast.

What Skills Do You Need to Be a Costume Designer?

- 1. **Passion for design.** A costume designer must have a deep knowledge and appreciation of clothing and fashion across history and locale. Before the designer begins devising their designs, they must spend a great deal of time researching and compiling reference materials.
- 2. **Artistic ability.** Costume designers must also possess the ability to draw freehand and oftentimes with computer aids. The blueprint for every costume is generally a hand drawn sketch that the designer creates and is seen as an essential skill for costume designers.

- 3. **Software capabilities.** That being said, more and more costume designers are now integrating computer design programs into their process and many mock-ups are now produced digitally.
- 4. **Rudimentary construction knowledge.** While not all costume designers have full proficiency in sewing or tailoring, all must have a basic knowledge of the technical process through which clothing is constructed. Whether or not they are directly involved in the production of their costumes, they will be working closely with sewing and alteration professionals and must be able to communicate their design needs effectively.