

A woman with braids is sitting at a desk, looking at a tablet. On the desk is a laptop, a coffee cup, and glasses. The background is a blurred office setting.

HOW TO PRODUCE YOUR OWN VIRTUAL READING

THE
THEATERMAKERS
STUDIO

THE EXECUTION PLAN SERIES

INTRODUCTION

So, now your first draft of your play is finished and you're sitting wondering how you can get it to the stage. If these are your thoughts, then understand that you're not alone because everyone who writes a play wants to see it performed on a big stage. But what happens if the "big stage" isn't accessible or you don't have the resources to execute that?

Don't worry! Most creatives starting out all have these same woes. This execution plan is going to show you how to produce your own virtual reading so that your play doesn't have to remain stagnant!

You're probably wondering can it be done? And the short answer is, YES!

HERE'S A SHORT LIST OF SOME THINGS YOU NEED TO DO BEFORE WE GET TO THE "VAGE" (VIRTUAL STAGE, CORNY I KNOW):

1. Find a platform for your reading
2. Find a cast
3. Have rehearsals. . . or not!
4. Set a date
5. Invite people to your reading
6. SHOWTIME!

STEP I

FIND A PLATFORM FOR YOUR READING

Finding a platform for your virtual reading can be a daunting task because there are so many different streaming options for you. Here are a few that you can choose to look through:

- a. Zoom
- b. Facebook Messenger
- c. Microsoft Teams
- d. Google Hangouts
- e. Skype
- f. Streamyard
- g. and more!



As you can see, there are many platforms that you can use for your virtual reading and there will be some work you have to do on your own to decide which is the best for you. Zoom is king when it comes to video conference software, but others are compatible. You can download the basic version of Zoom for free, but the duration of your meetings will be limited to 40 minutes and only 100 participants can attend. That may be all you need, but it might be worth looking into the other plans Zoom offers if you'd like to be able to host more participants for a longer amount of time.

You'll want to schedule the Zoom meeting in the Mac or PC Zoom app ahead of time so that you can send the link out to all participants (performers and attendees) in advance.

1. Open up the Zoom app and click on the Schedule icon. Set the topic to the title of your show or 'Virtual Reading' so that attendees know what you're inviting them to. Choose a convenient date and time for the meeting and fill in any other necessary details (see below for guidance on *Advanced Options* you may want to use).
2. Once you've scheduled the meeting, navigate to the *Meetings* tab at the top of the Zoom app. Press *Copy Invitation*, then paste this wherever you'd like to communicate the information about the meeting with your attendees/participants (perhaps in an email or Facebook post). You can also just copy the link to the meeting by clicking *Show Meeting Invitation*.

Even if you schedule your meeting for a specific time, you can start it whenever you'd like from the Zoom app. This may be helpful if you're interested in holding a rehearsal with your performers before the actual reading, without having to create a separate meeting. In the Zoom app, navigate to the *Meetings* tab and press the *Start* button. This activates the Zoom link and allows participants to join. After the rehearsal is over, you can end the meeting and still reactivate it later for the actual reading by pressing the *Start* button again.

If you have music that you'd like to play for a musical, you might consider using Zoom because they have sound specific options for you to use while doing your reading. As the host, you'll have to preconfigure some settings in your Zoom account before creating the Zoom meeting:

1. Enable stereo.

Your best bet for optimizing your audio is by using a stereo line out from a soundboard for the music/performers. If you do so, you'll have to enable stereo in advance. Login to your Zoom account in a browser (not the app) and go to *Settings*, then *In Meeting (Advanced)*, then enable the option for *Allow users to select stereo audio in their client settings*.

2. Enable original sound.

This setting is the most important for audio. Once again, login to your Zoom account in a browser and go to *Settings*, then *In Meeting (Advanced)*, then enable the option for *Allow users to select original sound in their client settings*.

3. Mute participants on entry.

Getting disrupted by new people joining the meeting in the middle of a performance is the last thing you want to happen. When you schedule your Zoom meeting, you'll want to enable *Mute participants upon entry*. You can find this under *Advanced Options* at the bottom of the window when you're scheduling the meeting. You will then be able to unmute participants at appropriate times. Be sure that you, the host, stay on mute during performances, as well.

Those performing will also have to configure similar settings once they've joined the Zoom meeting, so be sure to brief them in advance on how to turn on the following settings. Note to them that it's best to join the Zoom meeting from the Mac or PC Zoom app, not from a tablet or phone because they won't have access to these advanced options needed to optimize audio:

1. Enable stereo.

After joining the Zoom meeting, each performer will need to go to *Audio (bottom left of the app)*, then *Audio Settings*, then *Enable Stereo*.

2. Enable original sound.

This step is a bit more complicated, but it's the most important one. After joining the Zoom meeting on the Mac or PC app, in the main Zoom window, the performer will need to click *Audio (bottom left)*, then *Audio Settings*, then *Advanced (bottom right)*. Check the box for *Show in-meeting option to 'Enable Original Sound' from microphone*. After that, close the settings window. Back in your main Zoom window, click on *Turn on original sound* in the top left. When it says *turn off original sound*, you'll know it's turned on.

You'll also want your listeners/attendees to enable stereo by following the same step listed above for the performers, so be sure to instruct them to do so upon joining the meeting.

The music portion will be the trickiest part of the whole virtual process, but you'll minimize it by following the above steps. You can also pre-record all of your demos and play them by sharing your computer's sound, OR you can send instrumental demos to your cast members and have them sing and play demos from their computer. (This is probably the better option if you want your cast members to sing your tunes).

There's no real easy way around the music portion of this because virtual doesn't always mean better and by the time you get around to this, someone will have created some software that eliminates this issue altogether. However, don't panic because you can still have a successful reading with music if you follow these steps.

NOTE: Because Zoom isn't designed necessarily for music sharing and singing, if you have really high notes in your show, Zoom might not be able to catch the frequency and those notes will disappear. It'll look really cool to see a cast member belting a high C, but you sadly won't be able to hear anything.

Zoom also has the capabilities for you to be able to record your reading! This is key if you're interested in continuing to share it with others and get even more feedback. Or you may just want to have some sort of documentation of it! Once the actual Zoom meeting is set up and participants are present, you can start recording the meeting by pressing the *Record* button at the bottom of the window (in between *Chat* and *Reactions*). To find the recorded meeting after it's completed, It should automatically download to the documents folder on your computer.

As mentioned, the other platforms all have their own capabilities, so it's up to you to research them to see what best fits your budget and your plan! Nobody knows your show better than you and when doing it this way, you're in charge!

STEP 2

FIND A CAST

This is one of the scarier aspects of this process, but don't worry! You don't have to spend any money for this portion of the reading (contrary to popular belief). If you don't know any actors or have access to a community of theater creatives, here are the spilled beans.....ask your family!

I know this doesn't sound ideal, but if you lack the resources, the first place you can start is with your family.

Fortunately, you do have access to a community of theatermakers - this one! Just allow yourself to be vulnerable and address the community. All of the members are working toward a common goal and would be glad to assist you.

With this, be sure that you know how to draft up an NDA agreement if you desire to have a private reading. Tip: not sure how to draft an NDA? Contact support@theatermakersstudio.com for entertainment lawyer recommendations.

Send them PDFs of the script and make sure they know which characters they'll be reading. Be open to taking questions they may have about their characters during this process. Remember that this is remote and virtual. Meeting time will be MINIMAL, so be sure to make yourself available.

Also, think about having someone read the stage directions for your production so that people listening in can get the full feel for the show.

STEP 3

HAVE REHEARSALS. . . OR NOT!

Look, let's simplify this. It may be ideal to have rehearsals for this, but depending on the type of cast you have, you may not even NEED a rehearsal. Go by this rule-of-thumb when producing a virtual reading: If the actors can read, it'll be fine.

This isn't the big shebang. This is just a reading to get the first iteration of your work on its "veet" (virtual feet...ok, no more cornball word smashes).

This is just a test run, so as long as you distribute your script with enough time for your characters to go through their lines before the reading, you'll be golden.



If push comes to shove and you're dying to have rehearsals before your reading because you're opening it to a public audience and the stakes are higher, put a rush on #1 (see above). This way, you'll have an opportunity to practice with the platform and work out any kinks.

STEP 4

SET A DATE!

Make sure you set your date before asking your cast to be involved so that they can let you know whether or not they are able to do it. Also by doing it this way, you can eliminate scheduling fiascos because (trust me) they do happen!

Pick a date and stick to it! Especially if you're going to invite a public audience.

STEP 5

INVITE PEOPLE TO YOUR READING

You only get one chance at making a first impression, and that's true for in-person events as well as virtual. If you feel confident about your reading and are far along in your process with the script, then this might be a good time to invite industry members and a wider audience.

Consider emailing friends, family, colleagues to attend your reading. Be sure to include the essential details, like date and time, and the zoom (or other video) access information.

Post about your reading on social media. People are craving activities, so your friends very well might show up to a virtual reading when they may not otherwise have had the time to attend an in-person reading.

Does your show have specific themes or topics that are relevant to organizations or larger groups? Reach out to organizations that might be interested and ask them to invite their friends, followers, members, etc.

If your reading is meant as a tool to hear your work read aloud for the first time so that you can receive feedback and make initial edits, then skipping this step is completely fine.

STEP 6

SHOWTIME!!!!

So you've done all of the above steps and now it's time to share your art! WOOHOO!! Come in with a positive and excited attitude for your readers and those you've invited to listen in.

Be patient with this process because streaming is SUPER POPULAR now and depending on which platform you choose, everyone will be using the platform all at the same time. Prepare yourself for technical difficulties and be patient with wifi (I know! BLAH!).

If you've found or hired people to cover the technical component and you don't have to do anything, just sit back and listen to your work being brought to life!

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EXTRAS!!!!

- Think about preparing a survey for your attendees in order to get some feedback. If you don't feel comfortable doing this, maybe think about having a small talk back with attendees after the reading in a private setting to dish about the show.
 - › Be open to perspectives and understand you don't have to use all of the feedback you receive.
 - › Getting outside opinions is especially important when your work is self-produced. No matter how confident you are in your work, it can always use some polishing.
- Now you have a recording of your show, so do with it as you wish! You can send it to friends for feedback, watch it over and over again to make your own notes of things to fix, or post it on your social media to continue promoting your project!
- Congratulations! You self-produced your own virtual reading and now your show has continued its life. This will look great on the show's resume as you begin to "shop" your show to the perfect home (theater).

For more execution plans like these visit The TheaterMakers Studio at www.TheaterMakersStudio.com!