

MediaStage User Guide

Make your first performance in MediaStage using this step-by-step guide and familiarise yourself with MediaStage's main features.

MediaStage is a virtual production studio that lets teachers and students practise rich media-making skills as if they had access to a professional TV studio, film set or theatre company. MediaStage lets its users build stage and film sets in 3D, direct a cast of virtual actors and control a fully-functional lighting and camera rig in a simulated environment. Each performance produces a script allowing fully flexible movie editing. Performances can be exported in industry-standard movie file format for sharing and play back on any PC.

Here's all you need to know to construct your own performance from scratch in only a few minutes.....

It is a good idea to decide what your performance will be about before you start. Perhaps you could create a TV chat show? This is the example that we will use when working through the points within this guide.

A simple starting point for your script could be:

"Good Evening and welcome to the xxx show"

"Tonight we welcome etc."

Two Recommendations for First Time Users

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- a) *Press the F9 function key on your keyboard to increase the size of the tool tips and labels referred to below. Press F9 again to hide tool tips.*
- b) *Press F7 to turn off dynamic shadows if the screen seems sluggish when using MediaStage. This will improve the performance for lower spec graphics cards and slower machines.*

1) Select a Stage:

- a) Open MediaStage and click on the **Scene** tab at the bottom right of the screen.
- b) You will see a column of tabs on the right half of the main screen – click on the top tab. It is marked with the tool-tip **Stage Selector**.
- c) Thumbnails of all available stage floors and stages will appear at the top of the screen. Scroll through them using the horizontal scroll bar. Click on the purple looking TV Studio thumbnail labelled **Chat Show** (fifth from the end).
- d) Practise navigating through the Chat Show studio by using the keyboard arrow keys to move up, down, left and right. Hold the right mouse button down and press the up or down keys to zoom in and out. Hold the right mouse button down and move the mouse to move your current 'point of view'.

2) Add Props:

- a) Click on the second tab from the top marked **Prop Selector** in the tab column. More than 400 prop thumbnails will appear at the top of the screen. Scroll through them to preview or choose a category from the list at the right of the screen such as **Furniture**.
- b) Scroll through the Furniture selection at the top of the screen and click on the brown leather-chair thumbnail marked **Executive Chair**. Position it within the Chat Show studio using the mouse. Left click the mouse once to secure the chair's position. Now the mouse will offer a 360 degrees rotation for the chair. Left click again to secure the chair's orientation. (*N.B. you can cancel the placement of the Prop at any time by right-clicking the mouse*). Look at the bird's eye view of the stage in top right hand corner of the screen to help align props accurately.
- c) Click on the **Prop Selector** tab again to look at additional props. Add the **Green Topped Desk A** and place it well in front of the Executive Chair. Then add the **Large Television** and place it somewhere to the side of the Chat Show studio. (*See section 9 to add a video or still image to your television*) Finally, by clicking on the top prop category marked **All** add any other props to the set. Some props such as pen pots, computers, desk lamps etc., can be positioned on top of other props. You can delete a Prop at any time by dragging it into the Bin icon to the right of the main viewing screen.

3) Add a Character:

- a) Click on the **Act** tab on the bottom right of the screen.
- b) Navigate to a position where you have a complete view of the stage set.

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- c) You will see a different column of tabs on the right half of the screen – click on the top tab with the tool-tip marked **Actor Selector**.
- d) Use the horizontal scroll bar at the top of the screen to browse through the thumbnails – add a character to the Chat Show studio by clicking on a thumbnail and moving the mouse to the position where you would like the character to appear. Then left click the mouse to position the character. Click the mouse again to rotate the character and one final time to anchor the character to a position. *(N.B. As with the Props, right-clicking on the mouse at any time during the placing of a character will cancel it).*
- e) Repeat the steps above to add more characters.

4) Move and Animate a Character:

- a) Position your mouse over your chosen character, then click and hold down the left mouse button to drag the circular cursor to wherever you wish the character to move to on the stage.
- b) Release the mouse button and the cursor will change to a rotational arrow. Move the mouse around to set the destination orientation of the character. Click the left mouse button again. The character will walk across the set, automatically avoiding any props in the way!

5) Make the character sit down:

- a) Navigate around the studio to a position where you can see the character and the studio's executive chair.
- b) Click on the character. Move the character by holding down the left mouse button and dragging the circular cursor to the chair. Release the mouse button when the circular cursor changes to a starburst – when the cursor is exactly under the chair
- c) Left click on the chair to make the character go to the chair and sit.
- d) The character will walk to the chair. Notice the shadowing effects appear as they would in the real world. *(NB If the character does not sit down, your chair maybe too close to the desk for him to be comfortable. Move the chair back by pressing the **Set** tab and moving the chair with the mouse. Remember to click on the **Act** tab again to continue directing your performance!)*

6) Make the character speak:

- a) Navigate to a close up of your character. Select the character (if not already selected) and choose the **Speech** tab underneath the **Acting State** tab, on right-hand side of screen. A speech dialogue box will appear.

- b) Click on the **Subtitles** checkbox at the bottom of the speech dialogue box.
- c) Speech can be added in two ways.
 - (i) Type text into the text box and click p on the Lips Icon to use the Text to Speech function
 - (ii) Click on the red record tab and talk into a plugged-in PC microphone to record your voice. Click on the red tab again to stop recording and click on the grey lips to hear the voice file spoken by the character. *Notice how in both cases the character will speak back the text or recording with full, automatic lip-synchronisation.*

7) **Add a Spot-Light:**

- a) Navigate through the studio so that you fill the screen with the character's head and body.
- b) Click on the fourth tab in the column of tabs marked **Light Selector**. A series of four greyed-out Lights Selectors will appear at the top of the screen.
- c) Click on the first grey thumbnail to turn on the Spot-Light
- d) To point the light, right click in the smaller window at the right of the screen marked **Light 1**. Click and hold the right mouse button, and by dragging the mouse, you can point the light into any direction you wish. You Use the keyboard arrow keys to make the light zoom in and out and go up and down - just as you navigate around the main screen.
- e) To change colours, light intensity and alter the spread of the light, adjust the slider controls under the **Light 1** window.
- f) To make the light follow the character, click on the **Follow** tab and select the character from the menu.

8) **Add Cameras:**

- a) Navigate to a position where you wish to place a camera
- b) Click on the **Camera Selector** tab (third tab down on the column of tabs) and a choice of five greyed-out camera thumbnails will appear at the top of the screen.
- c) Click on the first thumbnail to select this position for Camera 1. Click on the **Position Lock** tab on the far right side of the screen to lock the camera into place. Click the **Off** tab to turn the camera on

- d) Repeat to add at least two more cameras to your stage, remembering to navigate into position before setting up your camera, to view the set from different angles. Choose the **Follow** tab for at least one camera and select your character's name from the list.
- e) You can change the position of any of your cameras, by selecting the appropriate camera from the thumbnails at the top of the screen, unlocking the **Position Lock** tab and re-positioning the camera by holding down the right mouse tab and dragging the mouse around the smaller window. This window will be labelled with the Camera number. *(N.B. In **Set** mode this will move the camera's initial position. In **Act** mode this can be used to move the camera during a performance. A time duration box will pop up that will enable this movement over a period of time).*

9) Add a Video or picture to a prop (Optional Step):

You can add an avi file to an 'editable' prop which will display a still image or play video files. The large screen TV set already on the stage is one such prop.

- a) Click on the **TV Set** prop
- b) To add a still image click the **Picture** button, then load a picture. MediaStage provides lots of pictures in the Image folder, but you can use any digital image.
- c) To load a video, click on the **Video** check-box labelled **Video Feed On/Off** on the right of the screen
- d) Click on the Hammer tab labelled **More Stuff** (second from the bottom of the tab column).
- e) Click on the tab marked **Video**.
- f) Click on the **Load** tab, to your selected video file, select it and click on **Open** in the dialogue box.
- g) Click on the **Play Once** or **Play Looping** tab

10) Play Back in FREE mode:

In FREE mode you can navigate around the set to view the performance: –

- a) First check that the tab to the left of the rewind tab on the control panel says **Free** *(this switch toggles between Free and Director mode – for Director mode see below).*
- b) Click on the **Rewind** tab on the control panel at the bottom of the main screen, then click **Play** to playback of your performance in FREE mode,

- c) To see the performance full screen, click on the **Full Screen** tab at the bottom far left of the control panel *Press Escape to leave full screen mode.*

11) Make a "Directors' Cut":

In DIRECTOR mode you can create your own 'cut' of the performance using the **Live Edit** interface. *(N.B. To do this you will need to have placed more than one camera onto your stage).*

- a) First, click on the **Camera Selector** tab. At the top right of the screen, click the tab marked **Live Edit**. You are now in the production gallery of the TV studio where you can see your camera and video feeds simultaneously.
- b) The different camera views are represented in the small monitors beneath the main screen. Practice toggling between these cameras by pressing the F1 to F6 keys or click on the individual camera feeds.
- c) When ready to make your cut, click on the **Online Edit** tab and then press **Play**.
- d) During playback you can cut between the cameras and the video feed by pressing the F1 to F6 keys, or clicking on the Camera feeds, as the action unfolds in the main screen.
- e) At the end of the performance click on the **Back to Scene** tab.
- f) Ensure that the tab to the right of the **Rewind** tab now says **Director**. If not, toggle it from **Free** mode into **Director** mode by clicking on it
- g) To review your Director's Cut click on the **Play** tab followed by **Full Screen** to see the performance as cut by you!
- h) If you are not happy with your cut, just go back to the **Live Edit** screen, click **Online Edit** and have another go!

12) Review and Edit your Script:

When you make a performance in MediaStage a list of events is being recorded by the software in the **Script** window. To review these events, click on the up arrow icon at the bottom right of the main viewing area which is labelled **Open Script View**. There are two scripts - one for the stage set and one for the performance. Click on the **Set** tab at the bottom right of the screen to view the Stage Set script. Click on the **Act** tab to view the performance script.

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Using either script you can:

1. Delete any prop or any performance event by highlighting the appropriate line of script and clicking on the **Bin** icon.
2. Add in comments at any point during the script by clicking on the round icons at the start of each event line labelled **New Bookmark**. Then type in your comments in the notebook window on the right of the screen.

Using the Performance script only you can also:

1. Alter the playback sequence of events. To do this:
 - a. Highlight the event you wish to re-sequence and locate that event's trigger by following the blue arrow (it will usually be the preceding event).
 - b. Click and drag the red square plug on the event's trigger and place it onto the blank socket at the end of whichever event you wish to be the new trigger.
2. Add in new events part way through the script. (*N.B You can **either** add a new event so it happens at the same time as another event **Or** so it gets inserted between two events that are already in the script.*)
 - a) Here's how to insert a new event so it happens *at the same time as* another event:
 - i) Click on the event where you wish the new event to be inserted (the performance will now automatically advance to this position in the script). The insertion point is identified by a round icon with a red cross at its centre, labelled **Current Insertion Point**.
 - ii) Exit the Script view by clicking on the arrow at the top right of the script window and add the new event (be it a move, speech, light etc).
 - b) Here's how to insert a new event *between two events that already exist*
 - i) In the Script identify the two events between which you wish to add the new event. Click on the first event. The insertion point is identified by a round icon with a red cross at its centre, labelled **Current Insertion Point**.
 - ii) Click on the red plug next to this insertion point (*If there are several of these, pick the one that is linked to your second event with a red arrow*). This will move the insertion point across from the empty socket to the plug, indicating that the new event will be inserted after the first event but before the second event.
 - iii) Now exit from the Script view by clicking on the arrow at the top right of the script window and add the new event (be it a move, speech, light etc)

13) Save and Export your Performance:

- a) Click on the ***Production*** tab on the bottom right of the screen. Click the ***Save As*** tab and name the file in the dialogue box that appears on the top right of the screen, then click the ***Save*** tab underneath the dialogue box.
- b) To export your movie as a standard video file (.avi), Click on the ***Export*** tab and choose the quality of recording (resolution) by clicking on one of the ***Small, Medium*** or ***Large*** tabs. Click the large rectangular ***Export*** tab located beneath these tabs to save your performance as a movie file that can be played back on any PC or posted on the Web.

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