



Basic Q-Lab for Sound Operators

Q-Lab is a playback system, which, although simple to operate, is very powerful and can be used to trigger lights, video, reverb etc. We are using it for Sound Cues, replacing the actions you previously would have achieved with Mini-Disks or CDs and the various faders on a sound desk.

Turn on all the hardware by entering 1, 2, 3, 4 on the 'Switcher' unit. When all power is on, switch on the Computer. Then turn on the Audio Interface. Once the computer is booted up enter the password (contact any of the Tower's technical team to find out what the password is) and when the desktop opens you should see an icon labelled with your show, possibly also with 'Playback bundle'. It will also have the Q-Lab symbol (see right).



Double clicking on this will open Q-Lab. This is the main Playback screen, which you will probably use all of the time. Move the mouse pointer up to the top cue ('Pre-Show Music') and click. The selected Cue will be highlighted in blue.



Pressing the 'Space' bar will start the Cue.

Once the Cue has started playing, a little green arrow will appear in column to the far left of the Cue to indicate that it is active and the blue highlight will move down to the next cue on the playback list.

Alongside each Cue there is a symbol. In the above example they are all 'Group' cues, which has become standard practice for many designers. They have a border round them and a small white arrow to the left of the cue name. Clicking on this arrow opens the group if you want to see what is inside. The advantage of Groups is that many operations can be done automatically, with one cue following on from the previous one without you having to do anything. Keeping them in a Group stops the Playback list from getting over-cluttered and confusing. Also, a 'Fade' cue can be applied to a Group. For example, if all the Pre-show music is in a Group it can play through the list automatically, and when you get the cue to start the show you can press the next cue, which will fade and stop all the Pre-show music, wherever it has got to in the list.



When you open up a Group you are most likely to see icons for two types of cue:

The icon of a loudspeaker is for 'Audio' cues – pieces of music or sound effects.



Ones with a representation of a sound desk are 'Fade' cues – these can fade out and stop a cue, fade up a cue from silence or change it to a different volume.



Operating a show is generally quite straightforward. Pressing the Space bar starts a Cue and the next Cue is automatically selected.

In rehearsal you can move from cue to cue by clicking on it with the mouse, or by using the up and down buttons on the computer keyboard.

In the show, if you accidentally miss a Cue you'll need to decide whether it's better to play it in late or not at all. If you decide not to play it, you will have to move the blue highlight to the next cue.

If you accidentally hit the space bar twice then Q-Lab will start the next cue on the list. If this is also a sound effect or a piece of music it will play out at the same time. To stop just one of the cues, highlight the cue **that you want to stop** and press the **S** key. This will fade that cue out – if you want it to stop as quickly as possible press **S** twice. If you want to stop all cues press the 'esc' key (top left of the keyboard) and all cues will fade out. Again, if you want to stop everything immediately (without fading out) press 'esc' twice.

Pressing the 'Esc' key to stop playback is quick and easy and is the easiest way to stop cues in, say, the technical rehearsal when you are just doing a 'Cue to Cue' run.

Continued Overleaf

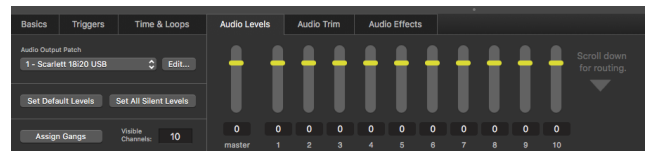
You are likely to open the session when it is in 'Show' mode. At the bottom left hand corner of the display are the buttons that toggle between 'Edit' state and 'Show' state. 'Show' state is safer for operators as you cannot make any changes or delete anything accidentally.

The Sound Designer will have the show in 'Edit' state to adjust levels etc. during the course of the technical rehearsal and any changes will be saved back to the session, so that the new levels are remembered next time the session is opened. It is good practice to have a copy of the Q-Lab session and the audio on a memory stick, which should stay in the theatre until the end of the run. Any changes to the session should also be saved onto the backup copy. 'Saving' will save to where you opened the session from (i.e. the desktop). The easiest way to put a copy of the updated backup on the memory stick is to select 'Bundle Workspace' from the 'File' menu and select the memory stick as the location. This puts a copy of all of the audio and the project details on the memory stick while retaining the original on the desktop. When all changes have been made the designer will put the show back into 'Show' state.


If, during the course of the run, you have to do any major changes to the session and the Sound Designer is not available it is best to do a 'Save As', with a new version number and the date of the changes, so that the original project is still available. Changes can only be made if the Project is in 'Edit' mode.

The most likely change you may be asked to do is change the level of a Cue. The cue may be inside a 'Group' cue, so you will need to open the Group by clicking on the small white arrow to the left of the cue name. Once you have selected the Audio Cue and it is highlighted blue there will be a number of Tabs available in the bottom of the window – 'Basics', 'Triggers' 'Time and Loops', 'Audio Levels' etc. Select 'Audio Levels'.

It is easiest to just alter the Master fader, which is at the far left of the faders. You can click and drag the fader up or down with the mouse, or click on the number under the fader and enter a new value – say '-5'. Hitting Return will confirm this.



You can adjust the level while the cue is playing, but you **must** make sure you are adjusting the correct cue. Once the cue has started playing the highlight will move on to the following cue and you will be looking at the Level page for the next cue. Move the highlight back up to the cue you want to alter by using the up and down buttons on the computer keyboard and make any changes. If your Designer is using a number of outputs with different speakers around the auditorium you will need to adjust the level of the fader of the output that is feeding that speaker.

When you are happy with the new level make sure you 'Save'. A quick way to save is to press and hold 'Command' and then hit S. If you are not using an Apple keyboard the key with the Windows logo  replaces the 'Command' key. You can also select 'File' on the top bar and click 'Save'.

You may be asked to change the length of a fade. Select the particular Fade cue you want to change. The time the fade takes is shown in the column headed 'Action'. Q-Lab sets a default time of 00:05:00, (5 seconds) for a fade, which is often too short. If you put your mouse over this number and double click you can type in a new value for the fade. Pressing Return confirms this. Save any changes.

A Cue can be moved up and down the list by clicking and dragging it, and releasing it when it is in the new position. If the Director decides to remove a Cue from the show the safest thing to do is just drag it to the end of the session. If you decide to remove the Cue completely from the session, then highlight it, press and hold 'Command' and then hit 'Backspace'. Before you do, make sure you have done a 'Save As', just in case. If you want to Undo an action, press and hold 'Command' and then hit Z.

When you have finished and saved any changes use the button in the bottom left hand corner to put the project back into 'Show' mode.

You end your session by Saving and then Quitting Q-Lab ('Command' and Q, or 'Quit QLab' in the 'QLab' menu at the top of the screen). Once Q-Lab has shut down you turn off the computer by selecting 'Shut Down' from the Apple menu on the desktop, and then clicking on 'OK' or press Return. Turn off all the other sound hardware by pressing 1, 2, 3, 4 on the Switcher.