

Getting Started with Vectorworks Spotlight: From Concept to Production Package

A 3.5-Hour Course Overview for Designers & Technicians

Software: Vectorworks Spotlight 2026

Audience: Entertainment designers, lighting and scenic technicians, production managers, stagehands, and educators — from first-time users to those looking to sharpen their workflow

Format: Live demonstration + guided hands-on practice + optional advanced workshop

Total Duration: 3 hours 30 minutes

Course Summary

This hands-on workshop introduces the full Vectorworks Spotlight workflow — from a blank file to a publishable production package — with a special focus on the event design tools, document collaboration, and the Showcase previsualization environment built into Spotlight 2026. The first 90 minutes are instructor-led demonstration; the remaining two hours are hands-on at your own machine, with an advanced track running in parallel during the final hour for experienced users.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the session, attendees will be able to:

- Navigate the Spotlight 2026 workspace, palettes, Resource Manager, and 2D/3D view environment confidently
- Build a basic event or stage layout using the event, scenic, truss, and lighting tools
- Insert and configure lighting devices with label legends, focus points, numbering, and patch data
- Assemble a simple, complete production package: light plot, paperwork, and a published PDF
- Use the Showcase environment to previsualize lighting, scenic movement, and video playback
- Share and review documents using Project Sharing and Vectorworks Cloud Services
- Understand how Spotlight exchanges data with consoles and previz systems via GDTF and MVR

Attendee Requirements & Preparation

Required Equipment

- **Laptop** with Vectorworks Spotlight 2026 installed. The free trial is sufficient and must be downloaded, installed, and launched at least once before arriving.
- **Full-size keyboard** strongly suggested (greatly improves 3D navigation experience) **Optional**
- **External mouse** strongly suggested — a 3-button mouse with scroll wheel is ideal **Optional**

Recommended (Optional)

- Any sample show file or venue drawing you'd like help with during the advanced hour

Provided by the Instructor

- A prepared **starter file** for the beginner hands-on session (a simple venue with stage, soft goods, and a basic rig already roughed in)
- A **completed reference file** showing the finished production package
- A folder of sample fixtures, truss, and video content

Before you arrive: Launch Vectorworks 2026, confirm your trial is active, and run through the First Run / Setup dialog so the library downloads complete at home rather than eating into class time.

Course Agenda

Time	Duration	Segment	Format
0:00 – 1:00	60 min	Software Features & Collaboration Demo	Instructor demo
1:00 – 1:30	30 min	Showcase Previsualization Highlight	Instructor demo
1:30 – 2:30	60 min	Beginner Hands-On: Simple Production Package	Guided hands-on
2:30 – 3:30	60 min	Advanced Hands-On Workshop (beginners continue practicing)	Hands-on / self-paced

A short 5-minute comfort break is built into each transition at the instructor's discretion.

Segment 1 — Software Features & Collaboration Demo (60 min)

An instructor-led tour of the Spotlight 2026 environment, the event-design toolset, and the collaboration features for sharing documents with a team. No laptop work required — watch and ask questions.

1.1 Orientation & Interface (≈15 min)

- The Spotlight workspace overview: tool sets, palettes, mode bar, and floating data bar
- Navigation: pan, zoom, orbit, walk-through, and the view bar
- Design layers vs. sheet layers, and the concept of layer scale and units
- Classes: what they are, why they matter for visibility and plotting
- The Resource Manager: browsing libraries, placing symbols, and managing resources
- Saved Views and the new class/layer filtering when creating them
- Snapping and smart point cues for fast, accurate drafting

1.2 Event & Venue Layout Tools (≈15 min)

- Setting up a venue: stage, risers, decks, and seating layouts
- Soft goods: curtains, borders, legs, and masking
- Truss and pipes: inserting truss, rotating, and attaching to system
- Projector and LED Video Wall tools (including curved and complex wall geometry)
- Video and display surfaces for media content
- Quickly generating 2D layouts and 3D renderings within a single file
- Integrated worksheets for event-item costs and counts

1.3 Spotlight Lighting Workflow (≈15 min)

- Inserting lighting devices from the built-in library of fixtures and trusses
- Fixture symbols, fixture data, and the role of GDTF profiles
- Label legends: creating, assigning, and customizing what prints on the plot
- Focus points and directing fixture orientation
- Numbering, channel, address, and patch basics
- Equipment list worksheets that update live with the drawing

- Data visualization to color-code the plot by type, color, or system

1.4 Documentation & Output (≈10 min)

- Title blocks and Sheet layers
- Viewports: creating scaled light plot, section, and rendered views
- The updated worksheet interface — ribbon toolbar, worksheet slicing, and pinned headers for large reports
- Depth Cueing for legible, presentation-ready hidden-line and shaded drawings
- Publishing a coordinated PDF set

1.5 Collaboration & Sharing (≈5 min)

- Project Sharing: multiple users working in the same Vectorworks file
- Referenced files and shared resources across a project
- Vectorworks Cloud Services: bi-directional sync, the web portal, and the mobile app for on-site markup
- Cloud Document Reviewer for real-time team review
- Sharing PDFs, interactive 3D models, and panoramas with non-Vectorworks collaborators (free account or Nomad guest access)
- Export and exchange formats: PDF, DWG, and MVR

Segment 2 — Showcase Previsualization Highlight (30 min)

A focused demonstration of the Showcase environment built into Spotlight 2026 — a fast, in-application way to test-run a show design and communicate looks to clients and crews without leaving Vectorworks. This is a highlight demo, not full training; the goal is to show what's possible and where to go next.

What Showcase Is and Why It Matters

- Showcase defined: real-time, in-application previsualization for lighting, scenic movement, and video
- Where it fits between your Spotlight drawing and a dedicated previz system

- The relationship between Showcase (built in) and Vision (stand-alone previsualization software) for console-driven programming

Preparing a File for Showcase

- File and model hygiene: clean geometry, sensible classes, and the File Health Check palette (subscription) for catching hidden issues
- Making sure fixtures, focus points, and video surfaces are correctly defined
- Applying materials and textures for realistic looks

Lighting Previsualization

- Real-time fixture focus, color, intensity, and beam looks
- Gobos, prism, and movement parameters
- Building simple cue-like looks and moments to communicate a sequence
- Rendering quality and performance trade-offs on a laptop

Scenic Movement

- Animating moving scenic elements and show moments
- Demonstrating a simple flown or tracked piece in motion

Video Playback

- Placing video/display surfaces and assigning media content
- Playing back video across LED video walls and projection surfaces
- Syncing media with lighting and scenic cues

Beyond Showcase (Brief)

- Exporting to Vision for console-driven programming
- The role of MVR-xchange for sharing MVR data over a network
- GDTF/MVR as the bridge between Spotlight and consoles / previz systems
- Cloud computing: offloading Showcase animations and rendering to Vectorworks Cloud Services to free up your laptop

Realistic Expectations

- Showcase is for design communication and look development — it is not a substitute for a full production rehearsal or an advanced previz system for final programming

Segment 3 — Beginner Hands-On: A Simple Production Package (60 min)

Guided, step-by-step practice. Everyone works from the same prepared starter file so the hour is spent learning the workflow, not drawing a venue from scratch. By the end you will have produced a simple, complete starter production package suitable for learning the workflow.

What You'll Build

- One small event/stage space
- A basic scenic layout: stage, backdrop/soft goods, and one video screen or scenic element
- A simple lighting rig: on trusses with 10-20 fixtures
- Focus positions and basic fixture numbering/channeling
- A label legend applied to your fixtures
- One sheet layer with a title block
- One light plot viewport
- One 3D/isometric or rendered view
- One simple worksheet/report (instrument schedule or equipment list)
- A published PDF package

Step-by-Step Topics

- Open the starter file and save it to your own workspace
- Confirm drawing scale and units
- Navigate 2D Top/Plan and 3D views; set up a Saved View
- Place and arrange scenic objects and a video screen
- Insert and configure lighting devices on the FOH truss
- Assign fixture types, apply a label legend, and set numbering/channel/address

- Add focus points and direct fixtures to them
- Create a sheet layer and drop in a title block
- Add a scaled light plot viewport
- Add a rendered 3D/isometric viewport
- Generate a basic instrument schedule or equipment list worksheet
- Publish the sheet set to PDF

The instructor and a helper will circulate. If you fall behind, you'll be handed the completed reference file so you can keep moving.

Segment 4 — Advanced Hands-On Workshop (60 min)

A self-paced workshop with a menu of optional challenges for experienced users, while beginners continue practicing and refining their production package with instructor support. Pick the topics that match your work.

Advanced Topics & Challenges

- Importing and cleaning DWG, PDF, and venue geometry as a starting base
- Building reusable resources: custom symbols, default content, and a personal library
- Custom label legends and Data Tags for tailored paperwork
- Advanced fixture data: multi-circuit fixtures, universe/address management, and custom worksheet reports
- Schematic Views for coordinated rigging and paperwork
- Truss and rigging documentation: sidearms, clamps, and load attachment workflows
- Project Sharing in practice: setting up a shared file, check-out/check-in, and avoiding conflicts
- Preparing files for Showcase and external previz exchange (Vision, MVR, GDTF)
- MVR-xchange workflow overview for live data exchange with consoles
- Braceworks overview (where available): an introduction to truss and rigging load analysis
- Producing a polished multi-sheet package: multiple sheets, saved views, and formatted reports

- File performance and hygiene for large entertainment drawings (File Health Check, purging, and resource management)
- New-for-2026 touches to try: Depth Cueing in viewports, worksheet slicing for big reports, and the LED Video Wall tool

What Attendees Leave With

- A completed simple production package (light plot, paperwork, rendered view, PDF) built from the starter file
- The starter file, completed reference file, and sample content library
- Take-home PDF quick-reference guides for tools and shortcuts
- A clear next-steps path: where to go for Showcase, Vision, Braceworks, and GDTF/MVR training
- A working knowledge of how to share and collaborate on Spotlight documents with a team

Suggested Follow-On Learning

- **Showcase deep dive** — full session on cue building, scenes, and animation
- **Vision for console programming** — sending your Spotlight file to Vision and connecting a console
- **Braceworks** — rigging load analysis and truss design
- **GDTF & MVR workflows** — round-tripping fixture data between Spotlight, consoles, and previz
- **Project Sharing in production** — managing multi-user files on a real show

Course content reflects Vectorworks Spotlight 2026. Feature availability for some items (e.g., Braceworks, Cloud computing, File Health Check) depends on license tier.