



THEATER VOCABULARY

ACTOR

The person who portrays a character in a play. The word “actor” can describe a man or a woman. Actress is a woman who acts.

AD LIB

To make up lines that are not in the script, to improvise

AUDIENCE

A group of people who come to see a performance.

AUDITION

A try-out by an actor; the director decides who the best person for each part.

BACK-STAGE DIRECTING vs. WORKING BUSINESS

Back-stage directing is when one actor gives another actor direction, line readings, or character interpretation.

Working business is when one actor works with another on timing, handling props, or stage combat – both actors are in the scene together and benefit from working together.

BLOCKING

Movement on stage; it is developed during rehearsal by the director and the actors. Everyone knows where every actor, prop, and set piece is placed during the play. Blocking is very similar to a dance routine or a football play.

UP STAGE – the actor moves to the back of the stage and away from the audience

DOWN STAGE – the actor moves toward the audience

STAGE LEFT – the actor’s left when facing the audience

STAGE RIGHT – the actor’s right when facing the audience

OPEN TO THE AUDIENCE – keeping the actor’s face and body visible to the audience

CHEATING OUT – turning the body and face in an open position to the audience

CALLBACK

The last phase of auditions is the “callback.” A select group of actors are called to audition once more for roles in a play. They may read with a number of different actors, receive special coaching, or read the most emotionally demanding scenes one last time before a cast list is posted.

CALL TIME

The absolute latest time an actor can arrive at the theater. The actor then makes a check mark on the sign in sheet.

CHARACTER

A make-believe person played by an actor (or actress).

CHOREOGRAPHER

A choreographer is the creative-team member responsible for dance movement to songs and production numbers. He/she may be assisted by a “dance captain” who can also teach and review the choreography with cast members.

COSTUMES

Costumes tell about the character: personality, job (like a nurse or police officer), economic status: wealth or poverty, special occasion (like weddings or school photo day).

CUE

The line or music phrase before a line or entrance or exit that prompts an actor. When memorizing, actors must know the cue before every one of his/her own lines.

DIRECTOR

The person in charge of the play, who casts the characters and who works with the Scene Designer, Costume Designer, Prop Designer, Sound and Lighting Designers to determine how the play will look.

FLY / FLY RAIL

Scenery that is raised and lowered by ropes and/or wire is called scenery that “flies.” The fly loft is located directly over the stage; it is the tallest point in most theaters to accommodate flying scenery while it is out of sight from the audience. The “fly rail” is the rope, weights, and pulley system needed to fly the scenery. It is very dangerous and off limits to non-crew stage personnel.

ITALIAN RUN THROUGH

Lines, blocking, and emotions are performed double-speed to help actors pick up cues, practice character work, listen for cues, and run scene changes with greater accuracy and safety.

LOAD IN / LOAD OUT

Load In is when the set, costumes, props are taken to the theater and installed in their proper place for the run of the production. Load out is also “strike.”

PERFORMANCE LEVEL

All actors are expected to rehearse with the same energy, commitment, and focus “as if” an audience was present.

PHOTO CALL

Actors arrive at the theater and get into costume and make-up as quickly as possible to take production photographs.

PROSCENIUM ARCH

The main “picture frame” at the front of the stage – it frames the acting area.

PROPERTIES OR HAND PROPS

Any item carried by an actor: briefcase, hairbrush, puppet, book, ...

REHEARSAL

Time spent practicing the play. It includes blocking, memorizing, and creating the characters. Rehearsals don't have an audience present.

RUN-THROUGH

A rehearsal when the actors are memorized and rehearse the show from beginning to the end without stopping.

SCRIPT

The written version of the play. It tells a story using characters, dialogue (conversation), and actions. A playwright is the author of a play.

SETS/ SCENERY

Locations needed to tell the story: a classroom, a kitchen, a playroom...

SPIKE MARK

The tape mark on the stage floor showing the actors where to place a piece of scenery.

STAGE

The part of the theater where the acting takes place.

The “House” is where the audience sits.

“Backstage” is where the scenery is kept and where the actors wait to enter.

“Front of House” is where the audience buys tickets and waits in the lobby.

“Apron” is the extension or acting area in front of the proscenium arch.

“Upstage” is the area of the stage farthest from the audience.

“Downstage” is the area of the stage closest to the audience.

“Wings” are the areas off stage where actors and scenery out of sight of the audience.

“Legs” are the curtains located at each side of the stage that hide the wing space.

“Backdrops” are scenic pieces that hang from battens overhead to depict different locations.

“Cyclorama” or “Cyc” is a white sheet that hangs from a batten and lit with different colors.

“Flats” are smaller backdrops depicting locations and scenery in the play.

“Wagons” are scenic pieces on wheels and roll on stage and off.

“Platforms” are raised scenic pieces that actors can stand on.

STAGE MANAGER

A respected creative-team member who is second to the director. The stage manager is responsible for taking down blocking notes for actors, maintaining a property list, creating the property tables for a production, and the person who calls technical cues for lights and sound during a performance.

STOP & START or WORK THROUGH

A rehearsal when the director stops and works a scene or line or set change, and the actors begin the scene again.

STRIKE

The set and costumes and props are sorted, disassembled, moved from the theater, and stored in their proper place.

TABLE WORK

The director leads the cast through scenes stopping to talk about specific sections of dialogue (beats), vocabulary, time period, historical and literary references, character emotions, motivation, relationships, and interpretation.

TECHNICAL REHEARSAL

A rehearsal when the actors teach their technical crew the cues and movement for a production. Scenery, props, lighting cues, sound cues, music cues, costumes/fast changes are added to the rehearsal. The tech rehearsals always take place in the theater.

These are the most stressful and demanding rehearsals – time, energy, focus, and safety.

TECH/DRESS

A rehearsal when the actors are in full make-up and costume, and run the play as if it is a performance.

WINGS

The areas to the right and left of the stage where actors and scenery wait to come on.

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