

## Glossary of Theater Terms<sup>1</sup>

*Note: In the following definitions, “he”, “she”, “his”, and “her” are used interchangeable to generically refer to “he or she” and “his or her”.*

**Actor.** An actor is any theatrical performer, and refers to either a male or female performer. Actors memorize their lines and develop their characters.

**Blocking.** Blocking is where an actor stands on stage, and how an actor moves on stage.

**Business.** Business is a term that refers to physical movements and other actions that help to make a point in a scene, bring out a facet of the character, or add a moment of laughter in a comedy/farce.

**Calling the Show.** Calling the show means telling the light and sound board operators (see *crew*) when to fade or bring up the lights and sound throughout the performance. The stage manager is like a police officer that directs traffic backstage.

**Cast.** A cast is a group of actors in a play.

**Casting.** Casting is the act of assigning parts and duties to actors.

**Casting Call.** A casting call is an audition for a show where actors try out for and are cast in each character role.

**Casting Director.** The casting director is the person who casts the play. This could be merely the director, or may be a group of people such as the director, choreographer and musical director.

**Center Stage.** Center stage is the middle of the stage

**Choreographer.** The choreographer is the person who designs and teaches all of the dances in a theatrical production; the person who works with the musical director and the director to make certain the dance movements work with other production elements.

**Costumer Designer.** The costume designer is responsible for what the actors wear. Costumes are important to help recreate the look of the time period. For example, if the play took place in a castle in the 1800s, it wouldn't be right for the actors to wear gym shoes. (See also *designer*).

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<sup>1</sup> Resources for this glossary include: *The Director's Vision*, Louis E. Catron, Mayfield Publishing Company, 1989, ISBN 0-87484-760-5; *Kids Take the Stage*, by Kenka Peterson & Dan O'Connor, Back Stage Books, 1997, ISBN0-8230-7742-X; and *On Stage – Theater Games and Activities for Kids*, by Lisa Bany-Winters, Chicago Review Press, 1997, ISBN 1-55652-324-6; and.

**Crew.** During performances, the crew has a number of important jobs. The *stage crew* changes the set in between scenes, the *light board operator* fades the lights up and down, and the *sound board operator* runs the music or sound effects. There might also be a spot light or *follow spot operator* who shines a spot light on the actor who is speaking.

**Cross.** Cross refers to walking like you normally walk on a stage.

**Cue.** A cue is a specified signal to a performer or crew. A cue may be a word, movement, or gesture. For performers, cue typically refers to the preceding performer's last words. For the crew, cue usually refers to a signal to initiate a sound, a shift in lighting, curtain, etc.

**Curtain Call.** The curtain call is the final portion of performance when the performers bow to acknowledge the audience's applause.

**Designer.** There are different types of designers in a theatrical production. There are designers who make the sets (*set designer*), costumes (*costume designer*), lighting (*lighting designer*), sound (*sound designer*), props (*props designer*), and makeup (*makeup designer*). First, the designers meet with the director to come up with ways to make a show look and sound just right. Then they design or create their part of the show.

**Director.** The director is in charge of all movement onstage, other than dance. He casts the show and blocks the play. The director will coach the actors in developing their characters in the beginning of the rehearsal process, and by giving notes about how to improve the play during later rehearsals.

**Downstage.** Downstage is the stage area closest to the audience.

**Dress Rehearsal.** A dress rehearsal is one of the final rehearsals before opening. Usually a dress rehearsal is run as if an audience were present. Some theater groups prefer to distinguish a "modified dress" rehearsal (e.g., makeup will not be used) from a "full dress" rehearsal (run as if it were a performance).

**Ensemble.** An ensemble is a group of people who work together for a common purpose.

**Enunciating.** Enunciating means pronouncing or clearly saying every syllable and consonant. It is very important that the audience understand every word an actor says so they can follow the plot (story) that is being told on stage. Consequently, enunciation is an important skill for the theater.

**Lighting Designer.** The lighting designer creates the lighting, which can set the mood or let the audience know what time of day it is. (See also *designer*).

**Makeup Designer.** The makeup designer makes the actors' faces look like their characters. For example, by using stage makeup, young people can be made to

look very old. An actor can also become animals or other creatures with the help of makeup.

**Monologue.** A monologue is a scene for one actor who is speaking aloud to herself, talking to another character, or talking to the audience, uninterrupted by others.

**Musical Director.** The musical director is the person who works with the director and choreographer to see that the music in a play fits in with the acting and the dancing. She directs the actors in the music for the play and is in charge of the musicians.

**Off-book.** Off-book means without scripts.

**Offstage.** Offstage is the part of the stage that is not visible to the audience.

**Onstage.** Onstage is the part of the stage that is visible to the audience.

**Producer.** The producer is in charge of the business part of theater. She hires the staff and manages all the money. This means paying the staff and making sure tickets are sold. Some things a producer might do to sell tickets are advertise in the newspaper and make posters for the play.

**Production Meeting.** A production meeting is a meeting where designers and directors meet to discuss the backstage elements of a play.

**Projection.** Projection means to speak loudly. This is an important skill for the theater, so the audience and always hear and understand the actor.

**Prop.** Short for “property.” A prop is any object used by an actor in a scene.

**Props Master.** See *props* designer.

**Props Designer.** The props designer (also called properties designer or props master) is in charge of getting or making any items carried on the stage by actors. For example, in *The Wizard of Oz*, the witch’s broomstick is her prop, because she carries it. (See also *designer*).

**Rhythm.** Rhythm refers to general patterns of timing and tempo, but also to the speed with which the actors deliver their lines. A direction to “pick up the rhythm” often implies the actor is undesirably stretching out a line.

**Royalty.** A royalty is a fee charged by the playwright or play publisher / leasing agent for the right to present the play.

**Run-Through.** A run-through is a non-stop rehearsal of a scene, act, or the entire play.

**Set Designer.** The set designer creates the scenery: the background or setting for the play. (See also *designer*).

**Sound Designer.** The sound designer is in charge of any sound effects or recorded music needed for the play. Perhaps the play takes place on a stormy night. The lighting designer could make the stage look like night time, and the sound designer could create the sounds of the storm. (See also *designer*).

**Stage Directions.** Stage directions are instructions that tell actors where and when to move onstage. If stage directions appear in a script, they are typically written within parentheses and italicized, or on the right side of the page. Typically, the director adds additional stage directions, and the actors record such directions in their scripts. Actors do not read stage directions aloud.

**Stage Left.** Stage left is the stage area to an actor's left (not the audience's left).

**Stage Manager.** The stage manager is the person who (typically): helps the director during rehearsals, rights down the blocking so there is a recorded plan of movement, writes up the rehearsal schedule, makes sure the rehearsal space is set up for rehearsals, checks all the lighting and sound equipment to make sure it's in working order, makes certain that anything the actors or director need is available; and directs the technical people backstage during a performance. During performances, the stage manager *calls the show*.

**Stage Right.** Stage right is the stage area to an actor's right (not the audience's right).

**Tempo.** Tempo does not necessarily refer to speed. The tempo of a scene is the result of how quickly the actors "pick up their cues." The lines themselves may be delivered slowly but, generally speaking, the actors should deliver them right on cue from another actor. Actively listening to the other actors' lines will make it much more likely for you to respond promptly on cue. The right tempo in a scene means that the scene doesn't drag as a result of time lapses that serve no purpose. Pauses and silences that are needed for an emotional effect will not slow the tempo.

**Timing.** Timing relates to the actor's lines and business. An actor crossing the stage carrying a prop to another actor, speaking all the while, might time the cross by placing the prop in the other person's hand on speaking the final word. Timing also involves silences and pauses appropriately combined with words and business.

**Understudy.** An understudy is an actor who learns specific parts in a play to be able to substitute for an actor in case she cannot perform.

**Upstage.** Upstage is the area on stage that is furthest from the audience.

**Upstaging.** Upstaging occurs when an actor is blocking another actor so the audience cannot see him.

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