



STAGE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP



TRAINING:

What exactly is Stage Management? How do I do it? Strategies for the 50-minute official rehearsal. How to manage the 8-hour practice limitation and still get your show ready. What to pack and how to pack it.

Presenter:

Jenny Nichols, UIL Staff j.nichols@mail.utexas.edu

A Definition from Wikipedia:

Stage Management is a sub-discipline of stagecraft.

Although a somewhat fluid line of work, in essence the stage management team (which can consist of a production stage manager, several assistant stage managers, and any number of production assistants) is responsible for organizing the production, communicating across different disciplines (e.g., between the director and the backstage crew, or the actors and production management), and keeping everything running smoothly. This refers not only to seamless management of the technical aspects of a production, but of the human aspects as well.

The responsibilities of stage management:

The responsibilities and duties of stage management vary depending on the setting of a production, *i.e.*, rehearsals or performance, and the type of production being presented (theatre, dance, music). Typically in theatre, the stage manager acts as an adjunct to the director in rehearsal, recording the [blocking](#) and seeing that cast members stay on script, have necessary [props](#), and follow the blocking. As the lighting, sound, and set change [cues](#) are developed, the stage manager meticulously records the timing of each as it relates to the script and other aspects of the performance. The stage manager also ascertains that the lighting and sound cues are taken at the right time. As an example, a typical lighting cue might be called as “LX Q 38, stand by” (or , “stand by lx 38”), with the light board operator replying, “standing” (in the UK, “standing by”), and in turn the stage manager’s “LX Q 38, go” (“LX 38, go”) setting everything in motion at the appropriate time. The stage manager also maintains a prompt book, sometimes called “the bible.” which contains all cues, technical notes, blocking and other information pertinent to the show. This book is considered the property of the theatre company.

During rehearsals, stage managers are responsible for helping establish the show’s rehearsal schedule and then ensuring that rehearsals run on time. Once the house opens, the stage manager essentially takes control, calling the cues for all transitions (this is known as “calling the show”), as well as acting as communications hub for the cast and crew. After a show opens, the stage manager is also responsible for calling brush-up, put in and understudy rehearsals to make sure that the show’s quality is maintained. [\[1\]](#) The stage manager is also responsible for seeing that the director’s vision is carried out when he or she is no longer attending the shows and giving notes. In a large production, a team of stage managers will work each performance; one will be responsible for calling the show, and others will be backstage ensuring that actors and crew are ready to perform their duties.

Terms, Definitions and Lingo for the OAP Stage Manager:

Apron: The front portion of the stage, in front of the curtain and proscenium arch.

Blocking notation: shorthand version of the stage directions given to each actor.

Sample: X DL, exit OL in 2. Translates to: the actor crosses down left and exits off-left in the 2nd opening.

Business: things actors do onstage during a performance: walking, eating, sitting, writing. This is recorded in the blocking notes.

Call Board: place where all schedules, sign-in sheets and notices are posted for cast and crew. Each company member is responsible for reading this everyday.

Call Time: the time actors and/or crew are “called” to the rehearsal or performance.

Calling the show: the process of cueing actors and technicians in a professional and consistent manner so that the show is the same every time.

Company: all persons involved with the production. Cast, crew, alternates, directors.

Deck: the main floor of the stage. Some of the crew members who work on the deck include: Deck Carpenters, Deck Electricians, Shift Crews.

Dressers: those crew members who assist in quick changes or complicated costume changes for cast.

Electrics: refers to all lighting aspects of the show. Some of the crew members who work with the lights are: Electricians, Board Operators, Deck Electricians, Follow Spot Operators.

Flies (fly space, fly floor): area above the stage used for flying scenery on pipes or battens. The crew members who operate these are “rail crew” or “flymen”

Proscenium Arch: The picture frame of the stage dividing the house and stage.

Prompt Book: the master script used for recording all stage business, blocking, light cues, sound cues, timings, etc. This becomes a permanent record of the production and usually stays with the company or school rather than the individual.

Stage Directions: Center Stage, Stage Left, Stage Right, Upstage, Downstage, Backstage or Off-stage, On-stage.

Stage Kit: A box or container with all the tools that a Stage Manager might need during the course of a production.

STAGE MANAGEMENT 101

I. Learning your place in the production team

- a. how to take good notes
- b. how to keep schedules
- c. how to gain control

II. Rehearsals

- a. how to take good blocking notes
- b. keeping order
- c. timely planning

III. Tech week

- a. scheduling
- b. keeping peace
- c. making a routine

IV. Production

- a. keeping it fresh
- b. keeping the routine
- c. being ready for problems

V. Post Production

- a. completing the record
- b. looking with hind sight
- c. completing the cycle

STAGE MANAGEMENT FOR THE ONE-ACT PLAY

I. Learning your place on the team

- a. how to take good notes
- b. how to gain control
- c. how to set the schedule

II. Rehearsals

- a. keeping the script
- b. keeping the time
- c. keeping order

III. Hitting the Road

- a. how to pack
- b. what to pack
- c. what to do when you get there

IV. Official Rehearsal

- a. evaluating the space
- b. setting your show
- c. preparing for the performance

V. Performance

- a. keeping the time
- b. keeping the peace
- c. setting an example

VI. Awards/Critique

- a. setting an example
- b. being a good listener
- c. learning from the process

THINGS YOU MUST LEARN

1. to type
2. to use the phone book
3. to use the internet
4. basic first aid
5. to read a ground plan
6. to balance a ledger
7. to take a measurement (lumber, material, an actor)
8. to use a jam box/cd player
9. to use a stop watch
10. to use the copy machine/fax machine

THINGS YOU SHOULD LEARN

1. to focus a light
2. to use the computer – word, excel, iphoto/photoshop/itunes
3. to tie a good knot
4. to draft
5. to use a glue gun, hammer, screw driver, soldering gun
6. CPR
7. to read a road map
8. to play a musical instrument and read music
9. to sew
10. to speak another language

SKILLS THAT WILL KEEP YOU EMPLOYED

1. selling tickets
2. answering phones
3. sewing costumes
4. building props
5. building scenery
6. focusing lights
7. running a follow spot
8. ushering
9. painting scenery
10. writing grants

THE 50-MINUTE REHEARSAL:

The first 5 minutes:

- ✱ Look at the lighting areas.
- ✱ Set your spikes.

The next 10 minutes:

- ✱ Set your props & spike.
- ✱ Set your sound levels & spike.

The next 15 minutes:

- ✱ Actor vocal check.
- ✱ Entrance/exit check.
- ✱ Stage combat/movement sequences. Scene changes.

The next 15 minutes

- ✱ Cue to Cue with lights, actors and sound. Be sure to run the opening and closing of the show with lights, sound, actors and curtain.

The last 5 minutes:

- ✱ Strike all props into storage space so that it is easy to set for performance. Thank your site crew and exit on time.

If you are fortunate enough to have more than 50 minutes for your rehearsal you can expand this outline to fit whatever time you have been given. I strongly recommend rehearsing the rehearsal process and set-up and strike procedures prior to taking any show on the road.

The most important thing to remember about the rehearsal is to communicate with each other in a civilized manner and remember that you are all here to accomplish the same thing.

The 8-hour rule and rehearsals:

Remember that the 8-hour rule is per student, per activity. You, as a director do not have an 8-hour rule. You can schedule more than 8-hours of rehearsal per school week when not all actors are called as long as each student does not rehearse more than 8 hours. Save the run-thru for Saturday or Sunday. There are no UIL restrictions on Sunday rehearsals.

The 8-hour rule does not apply from 3pm Friday to Midnight Sunday for academic contests, including One-Act Play.

A good rule of thumb is to have a sign-in sheet at every rehearsal where students must record the number of hours they are attending at rehearsal each day.

Team building:

Requiring all cast and crew to contribute to the production in different ways helps to build the team. Including the crew in physical/vocal warm-ups and trust exercises. Cast members helping to paint, build costumes, props, sets. Getting the parents involved with transportation, costumes or set building. Something that seems to evade many directors are the students grades. Many directors loose students to failing grades at inopportune moments. You might find a weekly check with instructors a good idea. If you see a problem, get them a tutor. Have other cast members tutor during rehearsal time instead of rehearsal if necessary. This invests the whole company in the student that needs help and gives the student the incentive to keep trying so that the company is not let down.

Official Rehearsal:

Directors should not need to raise their voices to be heard. There should not be unnecessary talking during the on-site rehearsal. Most facilities have headset systems if not, ask the contest manager to secure a set of walkie-talkies that can be used by all for both rehearsals and performances.

Actors should use their time to acclimate their voices and bodies to the space, but at appropriate times.

Crew members should have very specific tasks to complete and should let director's know when each is completed.

One trick to setting your show the same way every time is to get the playing dimensions from each theatre you will perform on along with the lighting plot. This will enable you to know how far away unit set pieces are from each other or the center line. You can even go so far as to make a paper or plastic template based on center that you can lay down on the bare stage first thing and set your spike marks for set pieces.

Don't micro manage your cast & crew. If you have trained them well, they will be quite capable of doing what is asked of them without being told a hundred times.

Performance:

Stick to a routine. Don't rush. Make sure you are ready to start your show before you tell the site crew you are finished. Don't feel you have to stay until everything is set.

Make sure that your show's time is consistent. Mark timings in your stage manager's script

showing where you should be at certain key points. If you are behind, have a plan to cut to another part without disruption. (If you are behind when x exits the stage, then when xx enters they will start with a specific line alerting everyone to pick-up the tempo.) A properly trained crew will be able to feel if the show is running slow. While students are not permitted to ask an official or backstage person what their time is, they can look at the watch and compare it with their own. Don't let your show run more than 39:45. It takes at least 15 seconds to go to black in most cases, get the actors to stop talking and end the show. The curtain does not have to be all the way in if the stage has gone to black and all action and sound has stopped. A good judge will judge what they have seen, not what they didn't.

Strike:

It is not a race. Nearly everyone can strike in less than ½ the time it takes to set up. Make sure things are put away properly and struck to the appropriate location. Make sure you do a visual sweep of all wings and backstage areas for stray objects. Make sure someone checks under drapes, curtains and the front apron of the stage. Thank your site crew and exit in an orderly manner.

How to Pack the Bus

Not everyone has the luxury of a van or truck for traveling with their One-Act Play. Most companies travel in the very lovely yellow school bus. Therefore it is essential that you learn how to take your show on the road in one.

Before building any piece of scenery or prop, find out what you will be traveling in and measure the vehicle's inside space and doors. Do not build anything that will not fit through the door of the bus. Chances are that it will not fit through the personnel door that you have to load in through either. Most of the time you are safe if all items will break down to 4' x 8' (although not always; so measure twice). Don't forget to measure costume racks and wardrobe units.

If you must travel with French doors/windows, be sure that they are constructed well and are sturdy enough for travel. Have a plan as to how to secure the doors and jacks from flopping about. Same goes for extra door and window units that are not always available from the contest site.

If you have hand props or set dressing items, put them in boxes, clearly labeled, and easily stackable in the bus and your storage space. Clear plastic ones work well but reclaimed cardboard boxes work, too. If you have collapsible wardrobe racks, great; use them. If you don't, try an expandable shower curtain rod on the bus to hang them on. I recommend each actor's costumes be grouped together and wrapped in plastic to keep them clean. This also makes transportation to and from the theatre easier if each actor knows what they are responsible for.

Important Papers. Every one of you should have several important documents with you at all times. These would include your eligibility form (several copies), your sound log, copies of royalty payment, proof of permission to perform, your official script, a copy of your light cue sheet, *Handbook*, and important phone numbers (UIL office, Principal or Superintendent, Parents). Put these papers into a binder, folder, backpack, organizer or briefcase, whatever you prefer to carry with you EVERYWHERE you go.

The Emergency Repair Box. Every company should have a box for the emergency repair of nearly everything, including actors. You should always pack basic tools like a hammer, screwdriver or screw gun, hot or cool glue gun, double stick tape, gaff tape, staple gun, tape measure, needle and several colors of thread, buttons, velcro, extra pair of panty hose, several magic markers (especially black). A basic first aid kit should include Pepto Bismol, hard candy, chewing gum, band-aids, anti-bacterial soap and ointments, scissors, a flashlight and a gallon of water. Then there are the expendables, like any food that is eaten on stage or any special props that require batteries - always have an extra set. If you have anything that gets plugged in, carry extra extension cords. Anything with a light bulb-carry extras. If any of your boxes or the backs of vans or trucks have locks, be sure the extra set of keys is given to someone to put in their pocket (in case the bus/van/truck gets locked with all the stuff inside and all the people outside).

As far as the actual order of packing, that depends on the actual space and items you have. Sometimes it is possible to remove the rear seats from the bus which makes the process much easier. Basic rule of thumb: heavier items on the bottom, lighter ones on top. Use ropes or bungee cords to secure everything. If you have oddly-shaped items, they might need a seat of their own. Plastic trash bags and cardboard boxes are excellent for packing things in. If you are traveling with lighting equipment, break it down to the smallest unit and secure it. Do not try to travel with lighting instruments attached to stands. Sound equipment usually has its own type of road case; if not, build it one even if it is to put the jam box back into the cardboard box it came out of. It will be safer than just flopping about the bus. If you have particularly heavy items (which are not recommended), you may pack one dolly for use during the set/strike process.

As always, practice safety and common sense and you should arrive with everything in one piece ready for a day of theatre.

A Stage Manager's success generally can't be measured in quantitative terms. There are, however, some basic qualities and character traits of good Stage Managers which remain constant.

- ✳ A Stage Manager is someone who desires and accepts responsibility.
- ✳ A Stage Manager is a tactful communicator with a sense of humor.
- ✳ A Stage Manager is organized, adaptable, and thinks quickly on their feet while keeping the goals and priorities of the director in mind.
- ✳ A Stage Manager is often privy to confidential information such as disciplinary action, family situations or health problems. As a condition of this knowledge, a Stage Manager knows when to keep their mouth shut and their eyes and ears open.
- ✳ A Stage Manager creates positive energy and inspires those around them to give 110% to the task at hand.
- ✳ A Stage Manager has at least some basic knowledge of each aspect of a theatrical production.
- ✳ A Stage Manager should be familiar with the basic rules of the UIL OAP, the OAP Handbook & Contest Manager's Guide.
- ✳ In short, a Stage Manager is an artist, parent, friend, confidant, nurse, drill sergeant and cheerleader.

10 Golden Rules of Stage Management

1. **Safety First!** The cast shouldn't set foot on the stage or rehearsal area unless you would walk on it barefoot. Inspect the area daily for potential problems. Are all stairs and platforms secure? Are all escapes adequately lit and glow taped? Do you know where the first aid kits and fire extinguishers are located? Who is certified in CPR and First Aid? The SM should be!
2. **Don't Panic!** Always remain calm, cool and collected. Never, Never yell. All Stage Managers should know the difference between raising their voices to be heard and yelling. If the Stage Manager loses it, everyone will panic.
3. **Plan & Think Ahead.** What can be done to avoid problems? How can the Stage Managers make life easier for everyone?
4. **Learn From Mistakes.** No one is perfect. We all make mistakes as we practice our crafts. The best thing anyone can do is to analyze these situations and learn how to avoid making the same mistake again.
5. **There Are No Dumb Questions.** It is better to ask and feel silly for a few seconds than to cause a disaster later.
6. **Prioritize Tasks & Delegate Authority.** One person can't do everything. Delegate to other crew members or cast members when necessary.
7. **Early Is On Time.** The SM should always be the first person in and the last person out of the theatre for a meeting or rehearsal. Always try to show up about 15 minutes before you really think you need to be there, just in case traffic is bad or any problems or delays occur.
8. **Put Everything In Writing.** In other words, be a communicator! Dated daily rehearsal notes aid in communication and help to avoid conflicts over when requests or changes were made. (Voice mail and email are also great forms of communication! Set up and USE that callboard.
9. **Please & Thank You.** Use these words everyday.
10. **Stage Managers DO Make Coffee.** They also do a million other menial tasks that are meant to make people happy and boost morale. Buy donuts, bake brownies, make sure birthdays are recognized, and hole-punch all paperwork. These little things are really appreciated by everyone.

Preparation:

First, you should read the play for pure enjoyment. Become familiar with the story and the characters. Try to visualize the play in your head as you read. Now walk away from the script for a little while and let things sink in.

Go back for your second reading prepared to play detective. You will need a blank pad of paper, a ruler and a pencil. Begin your analysis of the script by dividing the paper into columns reading, from left to right:

Midsummer Night's Dream Production Technical Requirements						
Act/	Set	Lighting	Costumes/ Makeup	Props	Sound	Special Effects
I.1.1	Palace-courtyard	Area 1	-	-	Track 1, CD 1 - birds	-
I.2.5	Forest Clearing	Area 2,3		Scripts	Track 2, CD 1 - crickets	Leaf Gobo
I.3.20	Forest -Fairyland	Full Stage		Flower	Track 3, CD 1 – Puck Music	Leaf Gobo
I.4.21	Forest - Clearing	A 2 & 3	Quick Change	-	Track 4, CD 1 - crickets	Leaf Gobo
I.5.28	Titania's Bower	A 2 & 5	Ass Head	Grapes	Track 1, CD 2 – Bottom Music	Strobe light

- * Act/Scene/Page
- * Set
- * Lighting
- * Costumes/Makeup
- * Props
- * Sound
- * Special Effects

Slowly and meticulously go through the script making notes of each clue that you find which relates to any technical aspect of the production. Be sure to read both the dialogue and the stage directions as clues could be hidden anywhere.

Include the Act/Scene/Page column so that you can quickly locate things in the script. These notes will be helpful in planning for rehearsals and can also be invaluable in production meetings. You might even want to make copies to share with the director and design teams. Your analysis will probably look something like this:

The Production Book

Now that the production process is in full swing your pile of paperwork should be

growing. At this point the Stage Manager will begin to assemble the Production Book, also known as the Prompt Book or Production Bible.

Buy a large 3-ring binder and several insertable index tabs. Include your copy of the script, all production meeting notes and any of the charts or script analysis that you have produced in this binder. A copy of every piece of paperwork regarding the technical and artistic operation of the production should be kept in this book.

The sections that you decide to create in your production book depend on the complexity of the production. The following list illustrates how you might normally organize a production book for the One-Act Play Contest.

- * To Do
- * Cast List
- * Contact Sheet
- * Rehearsal Schedule
- * Attendance Sheet
- * Conflict Calendar
- * Emergency Information
- * Approval Letters/Permissions
- * Eligibility Notice
- * Blocking Key
- * 7-minute set up
- * 40-Minute
- * 7-Minute strike
- * Cue Sheets
- * Rehearsal Reports
- * Performance Log
- * Performance Reports
- * Publicity
- * Program Information
- * Scenery
- * Lighting
- * Costumes, Makeup & Hair
- * Properties
- * Sound
- * Special Effects

“The Comfort Zone”

On the Stage Manager’s opening night, there are no costumes, no cues to call and usually no applause. Opening night for the Stage Manager is actually the first day of rehearsal. The mood that is set for this first rehearsal will determine the productivity, creativity and general atmosphere of every rehearsal which follows. It is the duty of the Stage Manager to create an atmosphere in which anything is possible. Some refer to this atmosphere as “The Comfort Zone.”

The two most important words of advice for a SM about to begin rehearsal for any production are, “Be prepared.” The best way to gain the trust of any company is to be able to quickly and efficiently deal with any situation which arises. Actors who trust their SM will also listen to their SM.

Many times, the quickest way to begin to establish The Comfort Zone is to become a magician. A Stage Manager who can reach into “The Kit” and produce any item that they are asked for is always appreciated by the company. The awe-struck look on an actor’s face when they ask for a cough drop and one appears in their hand is priceless. The following list is a rough inventory of a thoroughly stocked Stage Manager’s Kit:

Medical:

First Aid book, allergy medication, burn cream, iodine, latex gloves, Midol, sugar packets (for a diabetic emergency), Ipecac syrup (for poisoning), gauze, cloth tape, antiseptic towelettes, ammonia inhalants, isopropyl alcohol, hydrogen peroxide, Cortaid, sting-aid, aspirin, medical scissors, tweezers, cotton, Ibuprofen, children’s pain reliever, Pepto-Bismol, Antacid, Orajel, sinus medication, Band-Aids, antacid, cough drops, pain reliever, throat spray, Epsom salts, eye drops, chemical ice packs, antihistamine, cotton balls and ace bandages.

Wardrobe:

Safety pins, hair bands, bobby pins, scissors, seam ripper, shoe laces, runstop, Shout wipes, thimble, fabreeze, crazy glue, beeswax, needles and thread.

Tools:

A crescent wrench with a lanyard (leash), a Maglight with gels or tinted lenses, work gloves, knee pads, hex key set (5/16” for Roto-Loks), screwdrivers, hammer, fencing pliers, a 50’ tape measure, at least one 25’ tape measure, a 12’ tape measure, a scale ruler, matte knife, grease pencil, plastic ties chalk, wood glue, tie line or string, stopwatch, various sizes of batteries (especially AA and 9V), Scotch tape, glow tape, gaff, electric and spike tape.

Office Supplies:

3-hole punch, Post-It notes (a Stage Manager’s best friend), paperclips, pushpins, hole reinforcements, large erasers, highlighters, garage sale dots, Post-It Tape Flags, Post- It Tape, various colored ink pens, mounting tabs, a large black marker, rubber bands, binder clips, Post-It Glue Sticks, a stapler, staples, a staple remover, scissors, pencils and a pencil sharpener, loose paper & pads of paper.

Courtesy & Prop Items:

Lighters, matches, washers, nail files, nail clippers, Kleenex, breath mints, playing cards, travel size games, shaving cream, a razor, a tooth brush, toothpaste, dental floss, mouthwash, Q-tips, eyeglass cleaner, a eyeglass repair kit, zip bags, hand cream, wetones, a contact case, saline solution, coffee singles, tea bags, candy, clear nail polish, toilet paper pantliners and tampons.

Blocking the Show

A blocking instruction such as, “Jane, cross stage right and pick up the vase. When John enters you will break it over his head and then use the phone cord to tie him to the chair. After you do so, gag him with his necktie. Take the roll of packing tape from the table and tape his ankles to the legs of the chair. Remove his wallet from his jacket pocket and sit down opposite him on the couch as you go through it,” contains several important clues. Do you see all of them?

- Note to Props: There must be a breakaway vase on stage right. It will need to be replaced or repaired every night.
- Note to Props/Scenic: There must be a phone cord somewhere on the set. (Is it attached to the phone? Will she rip it out of the wall? How long does it need to be?)
- Note to Props/Scenic: There must be a chair that Jane can easily tie John to somewhere on the set. The chair should face the couch or be easy to move so that it can face the couch.
- Note to Costumes: John must be wearing a necktie. It will be abused every night because Jane will be using it to gag him.
- Note to Props: There must be a roll of packing tape on a table. Several rolls will be needed because the tape is used to bind John’s legs to the chair.
- Note to Costumes/Props: John must have a pocket in his jacket. He should have a wallet in his jacket pocket and it should contain ID.
- Note to Props/Scenic: There must be a couch somewhere on the set.

Taping Out the Set

Before the actors are ready to be on their feet blocking the play, you will need to tape out the set on the stage or rehearsal room floor. Taping out is the process of creating a life-sized copy of the floor plan on the floor where the actors will rehearse. This allows the Director and actors to get a sense of the physical space they have to work in before the scenery is ready for rehearsal use.

If you are taping out a rehearsal room with mirrors, be sure to ask the Director if he would like the company to face the mirrors. Also, be sure to leave room downstage of the playing space for a table for yourself, the Director and any assistants. You will want to try to keep the doors to the room behind the Director so that people coming and going from the space do not distract from the action on-stage.

To tape out the floor, you will need: a copy of the floor plan, a scale ruler, several

colors of spike tape, white gaff tape, a black marker, some chalk, a 50' tape measure, two 25' tape measures, and preferably two assistants.

You begin by laying out a line of dark colored spike tape along the Proscenium line and the US edge of the acting area. Starting at Center, you will place a piece of white gaff tape and write "0." Every two feet on either side of Center you lay a new mark with the appropriate measurement until you reach the wings. (You can also use the large sticky numbers that can be found at office supply stores instead.) Next, you will return to Center and lay a line from DS to US. You will lay two-foot marks along this line as well. These first tape marks placed on the stage floor would look something like this:

12 10 8 6 4 2 0 2 4 6 8 10 12
|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|

These marks will allow you to envision the stage as a large piece of graph paper and simplify the process of taping out the set. They are also helpful to your lighting tech when they do focus and to help you adjust to the areas begin provided to you at contest. Choreographers and Directors will use them to set spacing on the stage. You will use them when you notate blocking in your production book. The actors will even use them as points of reference for their own blocking notes.

You can now use these two lines as references to plot some points in the set. With the scale ruler, measure the distance from these lines to the end of each wall or platform on your floor plan. Call out your measurements and have an assistant mark these points on the stage floor with the chalk. Once the basic wall units have been plotted, the assistants can begin to lay the tape, connecting the dots.

Now do the same thing to indicate platforms, stairs, etc. Each playing level should be indicated with a different color of tape to remind everyone that there is a change in elevation. (Staircases can remain all in one color.) Using the white gaff tape, indicate the height of each elevation. (Example: +80")

You may also want to lay dotted lines across the stage to indicate where drops will fall for some scenes. You should use the white gaff to mark the names of the drops, such as "black scrim" or "tree drop." For a multi-set production, you might consider using a different color scheme for each setting.

When you are finished taping out the set, walk around and check your work. You don't want to discover any mistakes during rehearsal with the Director and cast present and ready to rehearse!

Taking Blocking Notation

Once the cast is on their feet, the SM is also responsible for taking blocking notation. Each SM will develop their own shorthand system and set of abbreviations. Whatever system is chosen, there should be a key to the shorthand used in the production book.

Remember that directions are given from the actor's perspective when looking at the audience. Here are some useful shorthand blocking abbreviations:

Areas of the Stage		
SR = Stage Right	SL = Stage Left	CS = Center Stage
RC = Right of Center	LC = Left of Center	US = Upstage
DS = Downstage	DR = Down Right	DL = Down Left
UR = Up Right	UL = Up Left	UC = Up Center
DC = Down Center	PL = Plaster Line	QS = Quarter Stage

Other Useful Blocking Notation		
X = Cross	ntr = Enter	Kn = Kneel
FZ = Freeze	/ = Beat	w/ = With
CC = Countercross	BK = Break	@ = At

When recording blocking, you should also be taking notes to track the movement of every prop, costume and set piece. You should know where all of these items start, when and where they move, who moves them and where they end up. This will allow you to prepare accurate, detailed preset lists for your crew. It also allows you to quickly reset the stage during rehearsals if the Director wants to pick up in the middle of a scene.

Handling Artistic Temperaments

People management is not a science. It is an art form. You will definitely earn everyone's respect if you don't raise your own voice and you listen attentively to their problems and complaints.

When handling an upset performer during a show, the best words of encouragement you can offer are, "The audience doesn't know what it is supposed to look like,"

and “Clear your head, regain your focus and move on.”

“All things are not of equal importance.” Each new challenge that a SM faces is a learning experience. Prioritize your tasks and remember that it’s only theatre, not brain surgery. No one will die if the coffee is five minutes late.

Actor Rules:

- Respect the privacy and property of others.
- No unnecessary talking backstage.
- No food or drink backstage/on headset.
- Avoid eating or drinking in costume. If you cannot do so, wear a robe.
- Be aware of sightlines. If you can see the audience, they can see you. (Peaking through the main curtain is also not allowed!)
- Company members should never be seen offstage in makeup or costume.

Check Lists:

Pre-show Check List – All prop, scenery and actor pre-sets.

Backstage Tracking Sheet – tracks all props, scenery, actors, costume changes. Very similar to the original tracking chart, but with complete information and timings.

Calling the Show

There are four different methods that are commonly used to set a call for a cue. The Stage Manager must study the cues before the first technical rehearsal and decide which of the four methods is right for each individual cue.

Visual Cues:

A visual cue is when the Stage Manager is watching for something to happen onstage to trigger the call for the cue. Examples of visual cues include: when the actress is on the second step up from the deck, when the actor touches the light switch, etc. Sometimes a visual cue will be taken by the operator without the SM calling a “Go.”

Text Cues:

A text cue is when the SM is waiting for an actor to say a word or phrase in the text on which the cue will be called. This is often broken down so far that the SM might call a cue on a syllable.

Music Cues:

In the case of a musical cue, the Stage Manager is following the music or watching the conductor to trigger a cue. You could be listening for a change in the rhythm, the entrance of a particular instrument or simply watching the conductor for a downbeat. It is more important for a SM to be able to read basic rhythms than to actually be able to read the music note for note.

Timed Cues:

When calling timed cues, the SM is usually watching a stopwatch to time out a complicated sequence of events.

Once you have determined how each of your calls will be set, there are five key points to actually calling a good performance. These are five skills that every Stage Manager should work to achieve:

Stay Focused:

It is just as important for the Stage Manager and crew to remain focused and keep their heads in the show at all times as it for the performers on stage to have focus. In many ways, it is more important because scene changes are not safe if the Stage Manager and crew are not focused on what they are doing. Because of this, it is important to keep unnecessary conversation backstage and on headsets to a minimum. When a mistake occurs, talking about what has happened over headset can often cause more mistakes or missed cues. Solve the problem and go on with the show. It can be discussed after the final curtain falls.

Eyes On-stage:

Keep your eyes on-stage because that is where all the action is taking place. The Stage Manager needs to know the show forwards and backwards before Tech Week starts. You should be able to turn the pages in your production book without even looking. In most cases, you have the best view of the stage. If your eyes are on-stage, you can recognize and correct problems more efficiently. Hopefully before they even occur. Your eyes must tell you if it is safe for the crew to execute a scene change or detonate a pyrotechnic.

Anticipation:

One of the hardest things to learn about calling cues is to anticipate the call. You must call a cue a split second before you want it to occur in order to give the operators time to react. Timing is everything, the SM must know the show like the back of their hand. Knowing the rhythm of the show is

crucial. How does the director want the pacing to feel? You should also know where your cast tends to ad lib, change lines or occasionally get lost. (If possible, you should do your best to break them of these bad habits!) In OAP it is important to keep your eye on the stopwatch to see if you need to cut to an alternate ending or to stop the show before running overtime.

Consistency:

As tech week progresses, you should begin to develop a consistent calling style and rhythm. Your crew members should be able to count on you warning them of an upcoming sequence at the same time during each performance. They should be able to anticipate the pause you insert between the words “Light Cue 38” and the word “Go.” You’ll know when you find that magic rhythm that drives the performance because everything will feel smooth and automatic.

Composure:

No matter what happens on-stage, keep your cool. You must be able to make quick, level-headed decisions if something goes wrong. This is a very hard skill for many people to master. Unfortunately, the best way to learn to maintain your composure is to survive a few performance crises of your own.

STAGE MANAGER REHEARSAL REPORT

SHOW TITLE: _____

REHEARSAL DATE & TIME: _____

STAGE MANAGER: _____

ACTORS CALLED: _____

ACCIDENT REPORT: Y / N

CREW CALLS

Board op:

Audio op:

Deck Hands:

Spot ops:

RUNNING TIMES:

PROP NOTES:

COSTUME NOTES:

SET NOTES:

Resources for this material were compiled from the following websites:

- Stage Managers' Association: Professional Organization Created by and for Stage Managers. Site includes Stage Manager Directory and Job Search Listing for those wishing to hire a Stage Manager. www.stagemanagers.org
- SM Network: Great Community Site for Stage Managers www.smnetwork.org
- Site Dedicated To Technicians and Stage Managers www.ukslc.org
- Stage Managers Do Make Coffee: a great, comprehensive stage manager's handbook www.mts.net/~skirzyk/SMscoffee.htm