

# **Stage Managing Co-curricular Theater At MIT**

**A Stage Management Manual  
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Additional editable forms are available for download at:  
<http://web.mit.edu/tere/www/smExamples/>

# Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to outline the processes of stage managing a co-curricular production at MIT, clarify the role of the stage manager in the production process, and provide a general reference of useful information for all production staff.

## What Makes Theater at MIT Unique?

The incredibly diverse interests of students and staff are reflected in every aspect of MIT life, not the least of which is its performing arts community. With academic and student groups producing everything from Molière to musicals, and Shakespeare to performance art, students have an opportunity to participate in a wide variety of productions. The MIT Theater Department also offers a broad range of performance studies and technical courses, and students play critical roles in every aspect department productions.

Although many students passionately pursue their interest in the arts, there is a very tight cap on the amount of time available to devote to any production. MIT students may seem to have the unique ability to cram 36 hours worth of work (and several hours of punting) into a single day, but the truth is that course work puts a heavy strain on every student's time. Luckily, there are people who understand the pressures of Institute life, and try to help.

This manual is written with the concerns of time-crunched, sleep-deprived students in mind. We hope that the tips in this manual will alleviate some of the stress experienced by stage managers at MIT who juggle classes, a production, and any number of other activities.

## What is a Stage Manager?

Many words can be used to describe the role of a stage manager. A stage manager must be *creative, organized, efficient, able to adapt, unflappable, a confidant, a friend, a leader*, and a million other words like these. But the first question, and probably the hardest to answer is "What does a stage manager do?"

The brief answer is that a stage manager is the person responsible for managing auditions and rehearsals, calling shows, providing an environment that will nurture the creative process, and serving as the communication hub between the director, technical staff, and actors. A far more accurate definition is given in Daniel Ionazzi's [Stage Management Handbook](#):

*Perhaps the most encompassing definition I have ever heard came from a young stage management hopeful. After a forty-five minute discussion of the duties and responsibilities of a stage manager, I asked if she had a good understanding of what I expected. She replied: "Sure. Totally responsible for totally everything."*

Ionazzi's student was right. Although a stage manager is not responsible for *doing* everything, s/he is responsible for making sure that it gets done. Because the job requires you to be so multifaceted, it is both challenging and extremely rewarding.

There is no job quite like stage managing. Though the stage manager is not a designer, director, or actor, she is an intricate part of the creative process, and that is (in my opinion) what makes the job so fulfilling. To be part of the coming together of such an intensely collaborative effort, the spirit of even the smallest production, is truly an amazing experience. I hope that you will find this for yourself, and that the tools presented here will help you to meet the challenge of participating in a production and understand the Art that is Stage Managing

This manual is divided into three major sections: The Production Process, The Psychology of Stage Managing, and Reference. The first part of this manual concerns itself with the actual duties of a stage manager regarding auditions, rehearsals, shows, and post-production. The second is a detailed discussion of the attitudes and personality characteristics that make a good stage manager. And finally, the last part of this manual provides a reference for all stage managers including MIT Regulations regarding performances.

# **Part I**

## **The Production Process**

# Overview

The production process can be broken down into five major sections: Play Selection, Pre-Production, Rehearsals, Performance, and Post-Production. Before beginning a discussion of each of these parts in detail, however, it may be useful to provide a short overview of how a play gets produced at MIT. Since there are several co-curricular group and Theater Arts workshop productions each semester, this process can vary, especially in play selection. Below is a fair approximation of the whole process:

## Play Selection

- First the director selects a script. The process of play selection may vary from case to case depending on whether the producers are MIT Theater Arts or a co-curricular student group.
- The script is then passed on to Rinaldi (MIT's technical theater HQ in E33), and after some discussion between the technical staff and the director, a final "yes" or "no" decision is made about the play.
- Once a script is decided upon, the pre-production process begins.

## Pre-Production

- The first step in pre-production is for the stage manager and director to meet and discuss various aspects of auditions, rehearsals, etc.
- The production staff is assembled.
- The stage manager meets with any Assistant Stage Managers to define responsibilities, etc.
- Auditions are held and the cast selected.
- The first production meeting is held to discuss administrative matters such as scheduling and any remaining unfilled production staff positions.
- Now, everyone is prepared to enter into the rehearsal phase.

## Rehearsals

- The rehearsal process will be discussed in great detail later in this manual, so suffice it to say that rehearsals continue for approximately 6 weeks for a standard production.
- During this time, production meetings are held once a week, and preparations are made for the upcoming technical rehearsals and the opening of the show.

## Performances

- The run of a play may vary, but tends to be 1 to 2 weeks, Thursday through Saturday.

## Post-production

- After a production closes, the set must be taken down, props and costumes returned, etc. This process is known as Strike, and generally happens immediately following the last show. The strike is overseen by the technical director, and the entire cast and technical crew is needed to get the task done quickly and efficiently.

- A post-production meeting is held with the cast, crew, and Rinaldi staff to discuss various aspects of the production and get feedback.
- Any remaining administrative matters are completed.

Where does the stage manager enter this chain of events? Ideally a stage manager would know which show s/he will be managing the semester prior to the production. This gives plenty of time to prepare and plan his/her schedule accordingly. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. An MIT stage manager usually joins the production anywhere from a week before auditions to the time of the first rehearsal. Because of this time crunch, the stage manager's pre-production preparation becomes even more important, and unfortunately, even more rushed.

When does the stage manager's responsibility end? Officially the stage manager's responsibilities are complete after the last of the post-production work is finished. However, it is usually handy to hang on to your records for a short period of time after the show is over, just in case something is needed by the director or Theater Arts. Most stage managers keep their prompt books as a permanent reference – a Production Bible, if you will.

# **Pre-Production**

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# Pre-Production

Pre-production work can save numerous headaches down the road. Thorough pre-production work allows a stage manager to be prepared for whatever may spring up later. This section details the four major elements of pre-production work: Research, Production Environment, and Planning and Organization. Research involves accumulating knowledge about the play itself. The discussion of Production Environment addresses the technical side of productions. Planning and Organization provides a template for organizing the mountain of the information you just gathered in the previous two sections, along with future material, to help streamline the processes ahead.

While pre-production work is extremely important for stage managers, it is rare for most stage managers (especially at MIT) to be given much time before the start of rehearsals to prepare adequately. In some cases, it may be that you step in as stage manager just as, or shortly after, rehearsals have begun. Nevertheless, this groundwork is crucial to a successful production.

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## Researching the Script

Good research at the beginning of the production processes will help you to best anticipate the needs of the production, and will also save much time and energy in the future. Each production is unique and will offer its own challenges, but familiarizing yourself with the play will help you to avoid a great number of surprises.

The script itself provides a vast amount of information about the rehearsal and design requirements of the play. It is to your benefit (and everyone else's) if you know the script backwards and forwards. This involves reading the script several times.

### **First Reading**

First, read the script for fun. It's important that you understand the play as a whole (and doesn't hurt to enjoy it a bit while you're at it). Even if you are familiar with the script, read it again. Scripts can change from show to show, especially if the director has made cuts or modified it in any way. After you have read through the play for the first time, it is time to begin gleaning as much information from it as possible.

### **Design Requirements**

In your next reading, you should look for specific technical and design requirements. You will need to make notes of these elements for yourself, the director, and designers. What sort of things are crucial to the action of the play? An example would be a telephone ring that is heard by the characters and influences the action of the play. Such items can be found in characters' dialogue, exposition, or noted in the stage directions.

Be careful when searching for these items. Many times scripts have design notes made by the author or from the original direction of the play that the current director may not want to use. For example, if you are stage managing Shakespeare's *King Lear* set in the 1950's deep south (you never know...) then the line: "In cunning I must draw my sword upon you—" indicates the usage of a weapon, though perhaps not a sword. All of these details should be discussed with the

director prior to the first production meeting. If you are not sure whether a note from a script is of importance to the designers or director, take the note. It is better to be over prepared than under prepared.

These preliminary lists of technical requirements are certainly not final, but they help to give everyone involved an idea of what to expect. Many more items will probably be added and deleted from the lists as the production progresses. At the very least, you will need lists of preliminary requirements for:

- Lights
- Sound
- Costumes
- Set
- Properties
- Rehearsal

It is important to include certain details in these lists such as act, scene, and page numbers, as well as a short description of the scene. (see Figure 1 at the end of this section) Such things as time of day, season, or weather can have a large impact on each of the design elements. Each of the lists for designers (lights, sound, costumes, set, and properties) should also contain any special requirements. For example if the script states: “Linda: (slams the window shut against the noise and turns) I SAID FINISH EATING YOUR DINNER!” It may be assumed there is some kind of noise outside of the window of which the sound designer will need to be made aware. The food for the dinner may have to be edible, and if the window is on stage, will have to be able to be shut (slammed shut to be exact). All of this is vitally important information and should not be left out of your notes.

The rehearsal list should include items that you will need for rehearsal, such as rehearsal props, set pieces, sounds, etc. Rehearsal materials should be acquired as early as possible. The director might not require the props etc. until the third or fourth meeting, and you should consult with him/her about rehearsal needs.

Blank design requirement forms can be found in Appendix C.

*Note: It is worth remembering that some of the most important items to have at rehearsals early on are usually costume related. If applicable, actors should have rehearsal shoes, hats, glasses, scarves, and jackets made available to them as soon as possible.*

## **Scheduling Information**

Your next reading of the play should be to research information you will need for scheduling. Because everyone’s time at MIT is very precious it is important that rehearsals make the most of the time allotted. Depending on the production, an actor may have to attend staging, fight, music, and/or dance rehearsals. This means that each of the respective directors/choreographers will have only a portion of the actors’ time, and need to make the most of it. Since the directors at MIT are usually faculty as well, they may have an ideal schedule they would prefer to use, but can be flexible. The rehearsal schedule is, of course, always subject to the availability of the actors, and music director/choreographer as well.

There are several ways to begin acquiring scheduling information. Each involves breaking the script down into smaller, more manageable parts. All help you to understand, very importantly, just who is on stage and when.

*Scene  
Breakdowns*

One way in which to break the play down is to divide it into French scenes. Each play is already divided into acts and scenes, but it is helpful to break it down into something less general. A French scene is a scene that begins and ends with an actor's entrance or exit. (see Figure 2)

Other useful methods of doing scene breakdowns are illustrated on pages 24 and 25. Figure 2 is a listing of which characters are on stage and when. This list includes the actor's name, character name, and the scenes in which s/he appears. Figure 4 is an example of a page-by-page breakdown. This method is best used with small casts, and not with new scripts that are likely to change during the rehearsal process. Of course, both of these methods are used in conjunction with the French scene breakdown.

**Directorial  
Information**

Next, it is important to read the script to gather "directorial information", that is to gather information that may be helpful to the director, cast, or anyone with questions regarding the script. This allows you to anticipate possible questions, and will allow you to quickly clear up confusion during the rehearsal process. *You should always check with the director to ensure that your research is in line with his/her vision of the play.*

Creating a quick reference of facts will prove useful later on and could even be handed out to the cast/production staff at your first meeting. Questions regarding characters' ages, the year, etc may arise. It may also be handy to have background information on historical events/people mentioned in the script. Samples of musical pieces mentioned in the play would be very helpful to the actors, as well as a listing of proper pronunciations of foreign or unfamiliar words or dialects. Use your imagination. Some of this information can be requested from the dramaturg if there is one on the production staff. If you can think of anything else that may prove useful to the director, cast, or designers, by all means make a note of it.

## **Production Environment**

Along with knowing the script, it is also important that you know the environment in which you will be working. Understanding the producing group, organization of Theater Arts, technical organization, and facilities will help you to better facilitate communications among those involved in the production. Every stage manager should quickly become familiar with who does what, and where to look for specific resources. If at any time you are in doubt of who is responsible for something, check with the Technical Director.

**Theater  
Organization:**

It would be impossible to describe an organizational structure for every production at MIT. However, because co-curricular theater is overseen by the MIT Department of Theater Arts, it is possible to give a fairly specific organizational overview of the administrative/design side of a production, and a more general description of the rest of the production staff.

*Artistic Staff*

The artistic staff is most immediately concerned with the creative process and design of the production. The production's director heads this team, which includes designers, choreographers, the writer, musical director, etc. The following describes the artistic staff in further detail.

*Director*

The job of the director is to oversee the creative aspects of the production, stage the play, and bring it together as a whole in his/her vision of the play. To a stage manager, the director is the most important person in the production process. It is important to understand exactly what your director expects of you, and to maintain a good working relationship with him/her. Meet with the director as early in the production process as circumstances allow. In order to be an asset to the production, you must understand the director's vision of the play, be able to anticipate him/her

and react quickly to new situations. This will not only make you well appreciated by your director, but also by the actors and technical staff of the production.

*Choreographer/  
Music Director/  
Fight Coordinator*

As their titles suggest, the choreographer, fight coordinator, and musical director oversee the dance/fight sequences and direction of musical elements of the play respectively. From the stage manager's point of view, their production needs should be handled in much the same way as those of the director. Their rehearsal needs may be very different from those of the director, and you must find a way to balance things so that each gets the time and resources that they need to enhance the creative process.

*Technical  
Director*

It is the job of the technical director to oversee the design and technical components of a production. Mike Katz (mkatz@mit.edu) is the current technical director for theater arts and oversees the technical aspect of all co-curricular productions relying on the designs, etc. of the Rinaldi staff. Some productions may have a student technical coordinator. In such a case, Mike Katz serves as an advisor on technical matters. Any questions regarding usage of Theater Arts equipment, etc. should go through Mike Katz.

*Designers*

The designers are charged with creating a way to transform the empty stage into to the world of the director's vision. They handle the design of set, costumes, lights, sound, and special effects. In most MIT productions properties are the responsibility of a properties master, under the supervision of the set designer. Special effects are handled by a designated member of the design staff, such as sets, in collaboration with other members of the design team. Special hair and makeup needs are managed by the costume staff. Theater Arts employs professional designers to oversee the design of, or serve as advisors to students designers in, co-curricular productions. All questions regarding design should go through the production's designer.

*Production  
Crews*

Production crews consist of everyone who helps construct and assemble the set, lights, costumes, etc., and then operate them during the show. It is important to meet and get to know the people on each of the production crews. This may not always be possible, since many times students help with productions at various times, whether to fulfill shop hours required for the class, or just because it is fun. It is imperative, however, that you get to know the master carpenter, properties master, and sound technician.

You must also become very familiar with the crew running the show. Typically, this will include stage hands, light board operator, sound board operator, and spot light operators. The run crew is assembled as the show nears, and crew needs become clear.

*Cast*

If the show has not been cast yet, you will have the opportunity to participate in auditions. If the show has already been cast, you should get to know the cast as quickly as possible. It will be helpful to have handy the actor's paperwork from auditions (if possible), their contact information, and scheduling conflicts.

*Administration*

The administration of a specific group determines how such things as publicity, financial matters, etc are handled. A better understanding of how the group works can be obtained by contacting the show's producers or the group's executive committee.

**Tax  
Exemption**

Since student groups, and MIT itself, are non-profit/educational organizations, MIT is tax exempt. Therefore, anyone who may be involved in making purchases for the productions should be informed that they can acquire a tax exempt form from the Administrative Assistant. *MIT will not reimburse tax on any item.*

## **Facilities**

Once you have met the people involved in making the production happen, it is important that you also familiarize yourself with the facilities in which you will be working *prior to the first rehearsal*. This involves getting to know the rehearsal space, performance space, etc. Special care should be paid to the location of the room. Even if all of the people involved in the production are affiliated with MIT, they may have trouble finding a rehearsal room located in Building 1. Make sure you know several ways to get to the rehearsal rooms, and acquire maps if necessary. The room's location will also determine who you call if there is a problem with the space. You should know where all safety equipment is located and how to operate it, the locations of emergency exits, and general information such as where the lights are, where the nearest telephone is located, and where the bathrooms are. Begin to start thinking about the best arrangement for the rehearsal space. If the rehearsal space is in a classroom, or even in Rehearsal Rooms A or B (W16-033 and W16-030, respectively) which are used as classrooms during the week, the space will need to be returned to its original configuration after each rehearsal.

## **Design of the Production**

If the designs are completed before the start of the production, you should obtain copies and study them in detail. This will help you answer any questions the cast or director may have regarding the technical aspects of the play. Check to be sure that all of the items on your preliminary list have been or are being addressed.

### *Scenic*

It is imperative that you acquire copies of the set design as early as possible. In studying these plans, make sure to check for safe exits and entrances and that all exits and entrances can be kept clear at all times. If there are several scene shifts, it is also important to plan out the location of a props table, safe storage of set pieces etc. in collaboration with the Technical Director.

### *Costumes*

When looking over costume designs, keep an eye open for items that an actor may be unfamiliar with, or may restrict his/her movement. Even hats or suit jackets may throw an actor off if he or she is not used to dealing with them. Noting such items will help you to decide what you may need in the way of rehearsal costumes and identify any possible problems that may arise from other aspects of the production. An example of the kinds of questions you may want to keep in mind is: "Will the actors be able to easily and safely walk up the steps in their kimonos?"

### *Light and Sound*

Generally, lighting and sound design are finalized later in the rehearsal phase. This is because so much of the design depends on the decisions made by the director during rehearsal.

If a problem arises in any area of design, you should immediately open a dialogue between the parties involved. Many times you will be able to answer questions the director or designers might have, but keep in mind that you are merely communicating this information. You cannot make any changes to the design or direction of a play, but can certainly identify possible problems and open communication in order to get them resolved.

## **Planning and Organization**

Now that you know what kind of information you will need, this manual offers an effective way to organize the information so that it becomes useful. Organization is key to being a good stage manager. Perhaps that is an understatement. Organization is crucial.

## **Production Book**

The Production Book contains all necessary information for the show. As I stated before, it is like a class bible, all the necessary information is contained within and, at the end of the show, becomes an official record of the production. It contains such things as the prompt script, blocking notes, contact information, reports, etc. – all vital to the production. It is standard for a stage manager to leave his/her production book in the theater throughout the run of the show. This way, even if you can't make it to the theater for some reason, the show can be performed. If the theater has a safe place to lock up the prompt book, this is a very good policy. Little Theater's light booth locks, for example. However, in La Sala, there is no place secure enough. Remember, the production book is vitally important to running the show. If you have doubts as to where to keep your prompt book during a production, ask the Technical Director or make sure that you are not the only person who knows where it is.

A large 3 ring binder should be used to create a prompt book. Some stage managers prefer to break the production book into two volumes, one for the prompt script, and one for all other information. This is a personal preference. It is also a good idea to invest in dividers so that items can be located easily.

## *Prompt Script*

The prompt script is the official text for the production, and includes all changes made to the script. It also contains all blocking and staging information and cues for the production. This information will, of course, be acquired throughout the rehearsal process.

When assembling your prompt script, photocopy the script, leaving large margins. Make sure that the script print is large enough for you to read easily in dim light, and that you have room to write. Only copy the script on to one side of the paper, leaving the other blank (copy lined paper on to the opposite side). This will be utilized when taking blocking notes in rehearsal. The actual format of the prompt script is left to your personal preference, but several examples are provided in Figures 5 and 6 at the end of this section. It is also helpful to index your prompt script (acts, scenes, and in even more detail if necessary) using tabs. Some organizational materials are made available in the Rinaldi stage management kits. Stage Management kits will be covered in more detail later in this manual.

Some stage managers, especially in productions with large casts, opt to have one prompt script with all the blocking notes from rehearsal, and another for calling the show. If there are a lot of blocking notes that clutter the script and make it difficult to read cues, it is to your benefit to make a second prompt script which contains only the blocking necessary for calling the show, and clearly marked cues and warnings. Again, this is a personal preference and methods may vary depending on the production and time limitations.

## *Other Information*

Besides the prompt script, all other information you have researched must also be contained in the production book. All should be easily locatable and clearly marked. Some sections that will become necessary are:

- Preliminary Design Requirements
- Scene Breakdowns
- Pronunciation Guides
- Contact sheets
- Ground Plans
- Light Plots (if available)
- Conflict Schedule
- Rehearsal and Performance Schedule
- Rehearsal Schedules for musicians
- Prop Tracking
- Preset Sheets
- Calendar
- Rehearsal Reports
- Blank Forms
- Extra Copies of All Handouts

## **Rehearsal Schedules**

There are several factors that need to be taken into account when deciding on a rehearsal schedule: 1) the director's preferred method of rehearsing, 2) the actors' and stage managers' availability, 3) the work you have done in breaking down the script, and 4) the over all production schedule including rehearsal period, technical deadlines, and the opening date of the show.

Soon after auditions, you will sit down with the director and settle on a rehearsal schedule. Make sure to distribute this to the cast members and technical staff as soon as possible so that they can plan accordingly. If at any time there are changes to the rehearsal schedule, everyone should be notified as soon as possible. I have found that along with posting a schedule and handing out paper copies, it helpful to e-mail out a weekly reminder. The weekly reminder should include the act and scene that the director is intending to rehearse so that the actors can prepare appropriately.

## **Rehearsal Rooms**

There are a wide variety of rehearsal/performance venues on campus. Because of this it is important to know who is in charge of which rooms. While Theater Arts is responsible for making room reservations, it is not directly responsible for any of the spaces on campus. For example, even though Kresge Little Theater is used by Theater Arts as a performance venue, the space is scheduled through the Campus Activities Complex.

Room reservations for Theater Arts are made by the Theater Arts Administrative Assistant. If room reservations for rehearsals are needed, or need to be cancelled, please make sure to let the administrative assistant know as soon as possible. Her office can be found in E33.

If there is a problem with a reserved room, or you need to make a reservation yourself, you should approach the administrative organization directly responsible for the rooms. You must be on a signing list for a student group in order to reserve any rooms at MIT. Signing lists are submitted to the Undergraduate Association by each student group. Quick reference to all of these administrative offices is made in the Appendix A under "Rooms".

## *Campus Activities Complex*

Campus Activities Complex (CAC) manages most of the multi purpose buildings on campus. The areas that can be reserved through CAC are:

- The Stratton Student Center (W20),
- Kresge Auditorium (W16)
- Walker Memorial (50)
- The Religious Activities Center (W11)
- Lobby 7 and 13
- The MIT Chapel (W15)
- Tang Center (E51)
- The Barbecue Pits

Submitting a space request to the CAC office on the fifth floor of the student center is the only way to reserve a rehearsal room in one of these buildings without going through Theater Arts.

## *Schedules Office*

MIT Schedules Office is responsible for handling classroom reservations for various activities. They are located in 7-131. You can make reservations by e-mailing [schedules@mit.edu](mailto:schedules@mit.edu), calling them at x3-4788, or dropping by their office.

## *Office of Music and Theatre Arts*

MIT Office of Music and Theater Arts is responsible for scheduling classrooms with musical equipment (such as pianos), and the dance studio in Walker. The office is located in 14N-207.

If there is a problem with a room under CAC jurisdiction call x3-3913 during business hours, or x3-1500 (after 5pm and on weekends) and ask for the CAC manager. If you have problems concerning a classroom, call campus police at x3-1212 (if a friendly janitor isn't around).

All rooms must be returned to their original condition after use. This provides a bit of a problem when spiking a rehearsal space. Even if you leave tape on the floor, it is unlikely that it will be there the next day, especially in classrooms with heavy traffic. Because of this, you should prepare before hand to spike the floor very simply for the scene that is going to be rehearsed that day. Remember to pull up the tape after each rehearsal. Most MIT directors are faculty members and understand that a floor cannot be permanently spiked for rehearsals, and are very flexible. It is best to discuss the rehearsal room set up with the director just in case, and to notify him/her if there is a concern about the minimal amount of spiking they will require for their rehearsals.

## **Production Meetings**

A weekly production meeting is scheduled with the director, stage managers, designers, and crew heads to discuss various technical aspects of the production. These meetings are an important part of keeping everyone informed and making sure all of the aspects of the production will fit well together as a whole.

Production meetings are run by the Technical Director, but it is the job of the stage manager to arrange a time for the first meeting. The first production meeting must be held as early in the production process as possible. The stage manager should also take and distribute minutes after each meeting.

At the first production meeting, you should be prepared to distribute (at the minimum) the following items:

- Contact list
- Preliminary design requirements
- Copies of schedules that have been finalized (there will also be scheduling done at the first production meeting)
- Copies of the script (if needed)

## **Supplies and Equipment**

It is probably obvious by now that you will need a wide variety of supplies in order to manage a show effectively. Below is a list of items that you should have handy at all times. Most can be found in the stage management kits supplied by Theater Arts. Stage Management kits for both Dramashop and Shakespeare Ensemble can be signed out from Rinaldi in building E33.

Stage management kits are kept in a portable, durable, box that can be easily organized. Tackle boxes are great for this and can be purchased in the hunting and fishing section of any sporting goods store.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> #2 Pencils with erasers           | <input type="checkbox"/> Scissors        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pencil Sharpener                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Straight edge   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pens                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Spike tape      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highlighters                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Tape measure    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Felt tip marker                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Stop watch      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra Blank Paper and lined paper | <input type="checkbox"/> Band-Aids       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hole punch                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Tylenol/Aspirin |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Post it notes and tabs            |  |

## Information Distribution

There are three major ways of handling information distribution and communication that can be very useful when stage managing an MIT production: 1) Paper, 2) E-mail, 3) the internet. When used properly, these three methods provide ways for everyone in the production to stay well informed, and save you a lot of time as well.

### Paper

Paper distribution is very important. Although there is an amazing amount of technology available at MIT, nothing can beat hardcopy distribution as a way of making sure everyone gets the information they need. The following are examples of items that should be handed out in paper form:

- Contact lists
- Rehearsal schedules
- Performance schedules
- Copies of scripts
- Maps (if needed)
- Ground plans and section views of scenery
- Research – text or visual examples

It is also very useful to make business cards that contain your contact information, emergency numbers, applicable e-mail list names, and the URL for the production's web page. These should be distributed to everyone involved in the production including the director, cast, and technical staff. Business cards can easily be kept in wallets and come in extremely handy when least expected.

### E-mail

E-mail is a wonderful way of distributing reports, reminders, etc. Such things as rehearsal reports, performance reports, meeting minutes, calls for costume fittings, and weekly rehearsal reminders are best distributed via e-mail.

#### *E-mail Lists*

There are two e-mail lists necessary for each production: a list containing cast members and a list containing technical staff. It is entirely possible to manage a production using just one e-mail list for all involved in the production, but having two cuts down on unnecessary e-mail traffic. You, the director, and producers should be on both lists. Although you may not have administrative access to the lists and may not be able to change them yourself, it is your job to make sure that all e-mail lists are kept up to date. Details on how to create and maintain MIT e-mail lists are located at

<http://web.mit.edu/ist/isnews/v15/n05/150504.html>

#### *Variable Levels of Experience*

Most people involved in an MIT production have access to and are familiar with using e-mail. It is vital to remember, though, that the levels of expertise may vary. If you are at all unsure of the e-mail and web accessibility of any member of a production, ask him/her. It is not generally a good idea to send documents such as contact information, script rewrites, etc. over e-mail since they may be easily deleted, or the recipients may not be able to retrieve the attachment. E-mail is best used for quick notes or daily reports. Remember to notify the cast and technical staff that you will be using e-mail and the internet to distribute information, and to what extent. This way anyone who reads their e-mail infrequently will know to check their e-mail more often during the production.

### Internet

The fact that the internet is accessible twenty four hours a day, seven days a week from any location with a computer makes it a wonderful asset to stage managers at MIT. It is a way to post

such things as contact lists, rehearsal calendar, etc. such that they are accessible anywhere on campus. A web page can easily serve as a virtual callboard.

An example of an electronic callboard is available at:

<http://web.mit.edu/tere/www/smExamples>

Feel free to copy the folder and modify the files as needed.

If you are unfamiliar with HTML, or are uncomfortable using the web for stage management purposes, you can certainly request help from the producing organization. If you decide to use any other kind of information distribution method, make sure to include the information on the business card and information sheets you hand out.

I realize it may seem that you are posting much of the same information multiple times using paper, e-mail, and web. Nevertheless, using these methods insures that everyone has access to the information they need. Keeping everyone well informed takes far less time than trying to clear up confusion later.

## **Auditions**

If you join the production early enough in the process, you may have the responsibility of assisting with auditions. This is an excellent time to meet the actors and try to start creating a comfortable, supportive work environment. Although auditions are anything but relaxing for actors, you can do your best to make them feel comfortable and as calm as possible. Providing a supportive environment will help the actors give the best possible audition they can. Your exact role in the audition process at MIT may vary depending on the director's preference and the audition practices of the producing group. If you are to participate in the audition process, it is best to ask the director exactly what s/he expects of you. The following describes responsibilities commonly given a stage manager during the audition process.

### **Preparation**

Before auditions, one of your responsibilities as stage manager is making sure the director has chosen several sides and to make copies them. Sides are excerpts from the script that will serve as the readings for auditions. You should also make sheets containing a short summary of events leading up to the scene contained in the side. Double check that you have enough copies so that several people can study them and take them into their audition. Copies of the script must also be made so that actors can read through it while they wait for their audition.

### *Rooms*

On the evening of the audition, you will need to prepare by setting up the audition room, in accordance with the director's preferences. You will also need to prepare a waiting area away from the audition room. If at all possible, acquire a second room as a waiting area so that the actors can be made comfortable while they wait. If the audition involves singing, make sure the waiting area is such that the waiting actors will not be able to hear the current auditionee. This, of course, holds for all auditions, but because the acoustics of the rooms on MIT's campus vary widely, special attention must be paid to this in cases where the audition will involve elevated volume.

### *Paperwork*

Prior to his/her audition, you will need to have the actor sign in and fill out an information sheet. The information sheet should include name, contact info, year, prior experience, and conflicts

(i.e. I have a class Tuesday and Thursday, have exams at night, and will be in New York the first week of April). An example of Dramashop's audition sheet can be found at the end of this section.

Now, you have all the information you need, but what about the actor? The actor is coming into the audition without any detailed knowledge about the production and will have many questions. The best way to handle a large portion of the questions actors might have is to create a fact sheet that actors can pick up at auditions and take with them when they leave. Information sheets should include performance dates and times, rehearsals that they are required to attend, other activities such as put-in and strike that they will be required to help with, the contact information for the producing group, and any other information you think an actor may find useful.

It is very important that you make the actor feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible. Offer them encouragement, answer all of their questions to the best of your ability, and treat them with courtesy and respect. This, of course, includes learning the actors' names and wishing them luck on their audition.

*During Auditions*

Make sure that those in the audition room are ready to begin before bringing in the actor. They may have immediate comments to quickly discuss about the last auditionee, or a note or two to jot down. This only takes a few minutes, but is very important. Before an actor begins his/her audition, you should introduce the actor to everyone present and give his/her information sheet to the director. Then the audition begins. (If you have an assistant managing the waiting area, you should remain in the audition room.)

*After Auditions*

After all the auditions are complete, the casting decision is made. Be prepared to answer any questions a director might have to the best of your ability. Knowing the names of actors, audition order, and a short physical description can come in very handy when a director is trying to recall many actors. Your job is to also keep careful notes of the casting meeting. After the show is cast, you will be responsible for notifying the producers and/or actors of the casting decision and posting the cast list.

You now have enough information to complete your contact lists, and decide upon a rehearsal schedule. The rehearsal schedule should be discussed in a separate meeting with the director shortly before the first rehearsal.

Once the show is cast, you are ready to enter into the next stage of production. A first rehearsal time needs to be decided upon by the director (and designers in the event of a design presentation) and the cast notified immediately after the cast list is sent out.

**Figure 1**

**Preliminary Scenic Needs**

**Lives of the Great Waitresses**

Nina Shengold

**Date:** 5/6/99

**Act:** 1 **Scene:** 1

<b>General Description:</b> A "greasy spoon" diner, just before the breakfast shift.		
<b>Page #:</b>	<b>Scenic Element:</b>	<b>Note:</b>
1	Diner Table	
1	2 Chairs	
2	Diner Counter	Sugar Shakers will have to be stored behind the counter
2	Stools	
5	Diner Door	Door does have to be functional
6	Hook to hang apron on	The effect should be that Melissa is hanging her apron on an invisible hook. The audience should not be able to see the hook or whatever supports it.

**Figure 2**

**Much Ado About Nothing**  
**Shakespeare**

Page   1   of   7  

Date: 9/15/00

French Scene Breakdown

Act/Scene	Character	Actor Name	Comment
I-i (a) p. 10-14	Leonato	Actor #1	
	Hero	Actor #2	
	Beatrice	Actor #3	
	Messenger	Actor #4	
	Don Pedro	Actor # 5	Enter p. 14
	Balthazar	Actor # 6	Enter p. 14
	Don John	Actor #7	Enter p. 14
	Claudio	Actor # 8	Enter p. 14
	Benedick	Actor #9	Enter p. 14
I-i (b) P. 14-16	Claudio	Actor # 8	
	Benedick	Actor #9	
	Leonato	Actor #1	Exit p. 16
	Hero	Actor #2	Exit p. 16
	Beatrice	Actor #3	Exit p. 16
	Messenger	Actor #4	Exit p. 16
	Don Pedro	Actor # 5	Exit p. 16
	Balthazar	Actor # 6	Exit p. 16
	Don John	Actor #7	Exit p. 16
I-I © p. 16-18	Claudio	Actor # 8	
	Benedick	Actor #9	
	Don Pedro	Actor # 5	Enter p. 18

### Figure 3

## Antigone Sophocles

Page   1   of   2  

Date: 9/15/00

#### Actor/Scene Breakdown

Actor Name	Character Name	Act/Scene
Actor #1	Antigone	Prologue, I=ii, I-iv
Actor #2	Ismene	Prologue, I-ii
Actor #3	Eurydice	Exodos -b
Actor #4	Creon	I-I, I-ii (c), I-iii, I-iv, I-v, Exodos (d)
Actor # 5	Haimon	I -iii (a), Exodos (d-e)
Actor # 6	Teiresias	I-v
Actor #7	Sentry	I-I, I-ii
	Messenger	Exodos (a-c, e)

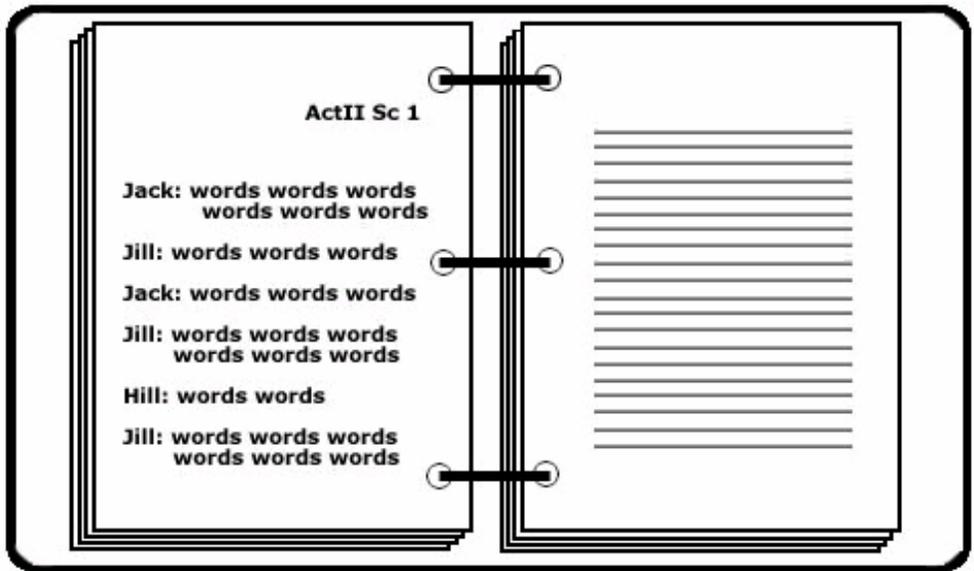
# Hamlet

Shakespeare

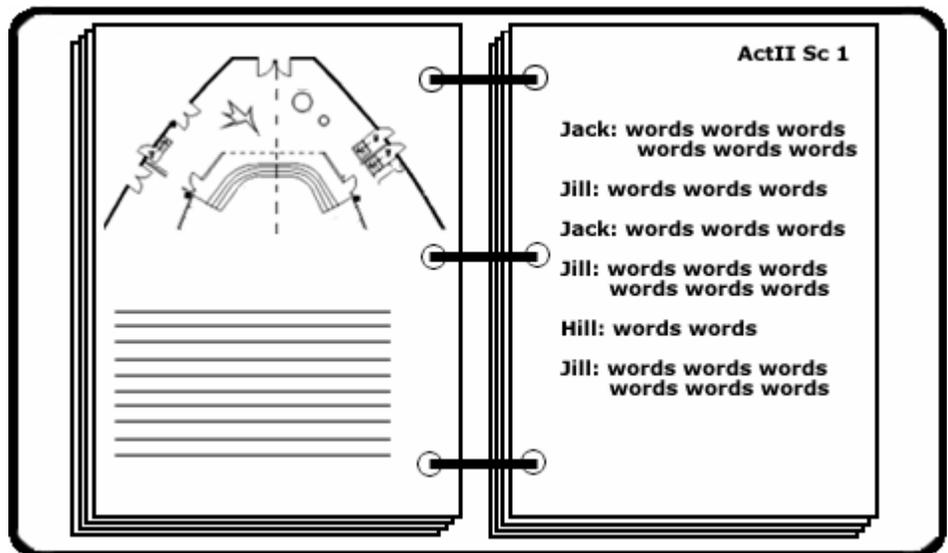
8/14/00

## Scene Breakdown

Character Name	Actor Name	Page 10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Hamlet	Actor #1								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Horatio	Actor #2		X	X	X	X	X	X						X	X	X	X		
Claudius	Actor #3								X	X	X	X							
Gertrude	Actor #4								X	X	X								
Marcellus	Actor #5		X	X	X	X	X	X						X	X	X	X		
Bernardo	Actor #6	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						X	X	X	X		
Polonius	Actor #7								X	X	X	X							
Laertes	Actor #8								X	X	X	X						X	X
Ophelia	Actor #9																	X	X
Fransisco	Actor #10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X											
Reynaldo	Actor #11																		
Voltimand	Actor #12								X										
Cornelius	Actor #13								X										
Etc.....	Etc...																		



**Figure 6**  
Prompt Script – Lined paper on the left with floor plan.



**Figure 6**  
Prompt Script – right side lined paper. Works great for right handed people.

**Figure 7**

**Audition Sheet for Dramashop Spring '00 Production**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**Experience (use back if necessary):**

**Conflicts in spring term and for dates listed below (ie. evening classes, plans for spring break, etc):**

**Want to/willing to/ACHING to do TECH WORK? If so, what (stage managing, light designing, sound, costumes, ABSOLUTELY ANYTHING)?**

**Anything we should know? (i.e. only interested in a particular character, time restraints, etc.)**

**IMPORTANT DATES!!!**

You must be at these events:

Put-in/Tech Week: Apr 16-19

Performance Dates: Apr 20, 21,  
22, 27, 28, 29

Strike: Apr 29 (after performance)

Rehearsals: Mar 4 – Apr 15

**\*NOTE** All participants are required to perform shop hours, approx. 4/week (2/shop/week) as well as ticket booth hours during the performance weeks.

***I understand that if I am cast, I am responsible for performing shop hours and ticket booth hours in addition to rehearsals. If I do not fulfill my responsibilities, my actions may affect my participation in future Dramashop productions.***

**Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_**

# Rehearsals

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# Rehearsals

The length of the rehearsal phase of production can vary, but is usually six weeks long. By the time you enter the first rehearsal, you should be very familiar with the script, anticipated rehearsal needs, and organizational structure of environment in which you will be working. It is time to begin the process of transforming the play from a written script into a world of living characters.

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## The First Rehearsal

The first rehearsal usually consists of a read through of the play, director's discussion of his/her vision of the play, design presentation, and discussion of administrative matters.

### **The Read Through**

A read through is exactly what it sounds like. The actors sit down together for the first time and read through the script from start to finish. As stage manager, it is your duty to make sure that everyone has copies of the scripts, and to time the read through. Timing the read through gives you a general idea of the least amount of time the play will run. As blocking and character development occur throughout the rehearsal process, the show's run time will increase, but the read through's run time gives you a ball park figure as to what to expect. You may be expected to read the written stage directions during the read through. Check with the director on this point prior to the beginning of this rehearsal.

### **Design Presentations**

If the designs are completed by the first rehearsal, there may be a design presentation. This is where designers (usually set and costume) display and explain their designs to the actors. These designs may be changed or modified as the play develops in rehearsal, but the presentation gives the actors a good idea of what the over all visual effect of the play will be.

### **Administrative Matters**

Administrative matters, such as rehearsal schedule, are presented to the actors at the first rehearsal. Actors should be handed hardcopies of all information that they will need. Contact lists, rehearsal schedules, fact sheets, shop hour sheet, and any other information you have prepared should be handed out in packets. Shop hour requirements are also explained to the actors. The necessary number of shop hours required from each actor varies depending on student group and production. The actors should be made aware of the production web page (if one exists) and e-mail list, and that they need to notify you as soon as possible if an unexpected conflict arises with the schedule.

## Managing Rehearsals

The saying that a stage manager is "the first to arrive and the last to leave" describes the attitude and actions of any good stage manger. You should be the first to arrive at the rehearsal or performance space and the last to leave it. From preparing the rehearsal or performance space to making sure it is locked, a stage manager is attentive to the needs of the director, actors, and technical staff. The trust placed in the stage manager by the entire company is a result of this reliability. However, like all things, trust must be earned. Skill in managing rehearsals will help you to earn the faith of the company from day one.

The following section discusses various aspects of managing rehearsals. While directing styles, rehearsals (staging, music, dance), and productions may vary, there are some generalities that hold constant in any production.

## **Blocking Notation**

A large part of stage managing a rehearsal is recording blocking. Even very preliminary blocking needs to be noted for later reference. Blocking will change a lot throughout the rehearsal process, and the director, actors, and technicians will need to be informed of the changes that effect them. Always take blocking notes in pencil, and have a large eraser handy.

There are many ways of record the blocking for a show. The optimal method is, obviously, the one that best allows you to record the necessary information for your production clearly and quickly. If you have not already, you will very likely develop your own personalized method of taking blocking. What you must remember is that others must be able to read and understand your blocking notes. This way if you are not present questions regarding blocking can still be easily resolved.

One method of taking blocking notes is to use stage direction notation. The stage can be divided into several areas such as “upstage right” or “downstage center”. Stage directions are always given with regard to the point of view of the actor. A simple reference for stage directions is provided at the end of this section. In this style of blocking notation “X” is used to represent “crossed”. Therefore “XDR” means that an actor has crossed down stage right. You can, of course, designate your own area names if these directions are not specific enough.

It may also be helpful to use points of reference. For example “X Window” means that the actor has just crossed to the window, a part of the set. Your blocking notation should include symbols for “sit” “stand” and symbols for each individual actor. A key should be developed and kept in your production book near your prompt script. Examples of blocking and keys are available on pages 40- 42.

To the inexperienced stage manger, trying to keep up with blocking in rehearsals may seem frustrating at first. Not to worry, with practice you will develop your own method and it will get easier.

## **Prop Tracking**

During the rehearsal process, it is to be expected that the placement and usage of props will change as the action of the play develops. The props will travel from one area of the stage to another and from one wing to the other as they are used. It is imperative that you know where the props are so that they can be made ready when an actor needs them during performances.

As the rehearsal process starts to enter its final stages, and the blocking becomes more solidified, you should begin do what is known as prop tracking. Prop tracking involves the formulation of a simple, clear sheet from which you can tell at a glance when props come onto the stage, how they get there, and how they come off. All pre-sets should be included in this list.

The prop tracking list becomes invaluable when technical rehearsals begin and during the show’s run. Examples of ways to format your prop tracking list are included at the end of this section (Figures 12 and 13). Remember that your entire run crew must also be able interpret the list so that the show will run smoothly, and props will not be misplaced.

## **Rehearsal Cues**

At some point during the rehearsal process, you will need to begin giving rehearsal cues. Cues, noted in the script or not, will effect an actor's timing. Such things as telephone rings, or a sudden blackout all fall into the category of cues you will need to begin giving in rehearsal. These are all elements that a character reacts to, and events for which an actor must be prepared. You should discuss the giving of rehearsal cues with the director, and decide on a method that would most enhance the creative process.

When giving rehearsal cues, just reading the cue from the script, "phone rings", is not necessarily optimal. There is no sense of how long the ring is or how many times the phone rings. Actually making the ringing sound "brrriiiiiinnnnggg" will probably be of more help to the actors. Important light cues should also be read aloud. For example "lights up" and "lights out" at the beginning of a scene. If you are giving a verbal cue such as the phone ring remember to treat it very seriously, and not to laugh or even act as though it is out of the ordinary. If you don't take the cue seriously, the actors won't either, and you will break the moment and hinder the rehearsal.

Be consistent in your cue calling. Once you have started to read a cue, always read it unless the director has opted to omit it. An actor may depend on the cue to provide motivation, or as part the rhythm of the scene. Calling cues infrequently will only disrupt the concentration of the actor and director.

Another alternative to giving verbal cues is to acquire rehearsal sounds. For example, a CD with sound effects would work fine. Make a great effort to use the same sounds that will be used in the actual performance. The closer rehearsals reflect what will be the final reality of a production, the easier and faster an actor will be able to adapt once rehearsals begin in the performance space.

## **Prompting**

Prompting (cueing the actors on their lines when they have forgotten them) is something that should be discussed with the director early on in the rehearsal process. As a rule, once actors are off book, an actor should only be prompted when s/he requests it by saying "line".

A stage manager should always be on book when the actors are not. If you have an assistant available to help you, make sure that s/he is on book in order to free you to take care of other matters in the rehearsal. If no assistant is available, following along in the script while you are taking blocking is also an effective way of staying on book.

Make sure that you are only prompting actors when you hear "line". This helps you to avoid giving them a line while they are experimenting with new ideas, and breaking their concentration. Lines should be given promptly so as not to interrupt the momentum of a scene. Often actors will only need a partial reading of their line in order to remember it.

Anytime you give a line or a verbal cue of any kind, make sure to speak loudly and clearly so that the actor can hear. The actor should not have to ask you to repeat what you just said because they could not understand you.

## **Line Notes**

Once an actor is off book, you should begin making note of the lines s/he misses, and give them to him/her after rehearsal. This way, an actor can identify trouble spots, and review specific sections of the script. Blank forms for line notes are included in Appendix C. The actual line note slips can be handed to an actor after rehearsal, or sent via e-mail.

If you notice that an actor is consistently missing a line, or having trouble memorizing a specific part of the script, offer to help them outside of rehearsal. If an actor is not in a scene currently

being rehearsed, and you have an assistant at the rehearsal, your assistant can also run lines with the actor.

## **Time Keeping**

Throughout the rehearsal process you will need to keep careful track of the running time of the show, acts, scenes, and even smaller sections of the performance. This information will help the director determine the final running time of the show, and aid in his/her directorial process.

Others to whom this information is vitally important include house management and the lighting and sound designers. Timing plays an extremely important role in both designs and you should be prepared to answer any number of questions regarding the length of different pieces of the play. A stopwatch is provided in the stage management kits at Rinaldi. If you do not have access to a stopwatch, make sure you have a watch with a second hand at every rehearsal.

It is also your responsibility to keep track of the length of the rehearsal itself, as well as any breaks. For example, if the director tells the actors to take a five minute break, it is your responsibility to let the actors know when their five minutes are finished, and they are to return to rehearsal. Many directors will lose track of time, and it is the stage manager's job to keep them on schedule using gentle reminders. By keeping careful track of time, you help the director and your actors. As the end of rehearsal nears, find a convenient time to inform the director of how much time s/he has remaining in the rehearsal. The director will be able to pace the rest of rehearsal, and your gesture will be greatly appreciated. If a rehearsal is running over time, you may be hindering the actors by eating into time that they had planned to use for their studies or another activities. If a rehearsal runs significantly over time, it is your job to politely inform the director. Some times the actors will opt to continue working, but it is always best to give them the option.

## **Rehearsal Reports**

One of the key elements of keeping the lines of communication open throughout the rehearsal processes is the daily rehearsal report. Rehearsal reports must be sent out after every rehearsal, even if there are no new developments to report. Rehearsal reports can be sent via e-mail to all production staff, the producers, and the director. The stage manager should also have a hard copy of all production notes in his/her prompt book. It is often very helpful to be able to refer back to previous rehearsal reports, especially for the designers.

The rehearsal report should consist of separate sections for all technical aspects of the play. An example of a rehearsal notes form is included at the end of this section. Any format that works best for you can be used, but remember that all rehearsal notes should be kept concise and to the point. In the template for the production web page, there is included a web based rehearsal notes form, which allows you to easily send out rehearsal notes over e-mail.

What do you include in each section? What kind of information is it important for each technical department to know? Below are suggestions as to the kinds of things that you would want to include in each section of your notes. These are by all means not the only things that should be included, but will give you a good idea as to what is expected. If you have no notes to include in a section, simply write "no report". The following list was composed by the Rinaldi staff for their fall 2000 stage management workshop.

### **Your report to *all* departments include:**

- Any script changes, additions, or cuts.

- Any changes in the production week schedule (these changes must be approved by the technical director)
- Any particularly athletic or tumultuous movement (i.e. “The actor stands on the table.”)
- Any additional characters the director has added to the play
- Any problems concerning rooms, CAC, late actors, etc.
- Changes in the rehearsal schedule
- The next day’s rehearsal schedule.
- Activities unspecific to the script (i.e. The characters have a picnic)
- Any sex changes to characters. (i.e. Much Ado About Nothing’s Dogberry has been cross cast. Will the character be played as female or male?)
- Quick changes and where they will be happening.
- Run crew needs
- Any damage that has occurred to props, costumes, set pieces, etc.

#### **Report to Sets:**

- Any movement that may require special set considerations
- Any leaning, slamming, or opening of practicals
- Changes in furniture requirements or usage
- Food needs

#### **Report to Costumes:**

- Any movement that may require special costume considerations (i.e. going up a step unit in kimonos, sitting on the floor in period clothes, or the need for knee pads)
- New costume needs (Be specific as possible. There are many kind of “hats” but “a beat up old gray fedora” is much more specific)
- Items that will be handled. Include size, how they are handled, if it is stored in a pocket, and how it is put away.
- For example: *a character is told to look at his pocket watch in rehearsal, you know that 1- the character will need a pocket watch, and 2- he also needs a pocket in which to put the watch.*
- Another example: *a character hides a map somewhere on his person, you know that 1- properties needs to provide a map (and need to know what kind of map), and 2- both properties and costumes need to know where the map is hidden.*
- Any cut or addition of props or costume accessories
- The usage of practicals or perishables such as food or cigarettes.
- Places in the script where clothing will need to be distressed (i.e. rips, tears, “wear”, filth)
- Any use of blood
- Any garments (like an overcoat) of which the character disposes
- Any costume changes that will occur on stage.

#### **Report to Properties:**

- Any new props that are needed
- Be as specific as possible when requesting new props. Include the number, size, usage, and classification in your description.
- Any prop cuts
- How the props are handled
- Any usage of food, blood, cigarettes or practicals

**Report to Lights:**

- Any use of practicals
- Cue lights you may need backstage
- Any time an actor breaks the proscenium arch
- Usage of unusual parts of the theater
- Times of day discussed in rehearsal

**Report to Sound:**

- Any cuts or addition of sound cues
- Background sound the director may want to add
- Any comments on sounds that start or stop with a visual cue (i.e. the character's piano playing is interrupted suddenly.)

**Report to the theater arts administrative assistant:**

- Any rehearsal space cancellations

What kind of things should not be included in the rehearsal report? Rehearsal notes should not contain blocking notes unless they are directly related to design alterations that designers and technical crews may have to handle. Costume notes given by actors should also not be included. Actors may come up to you saying "I need a..." or "This needs to be fixed." But the actors should be made to understand that all design notes must come through the director, and that if they have comments or suggestions, they should discuss them with the director. Of course, if an item becomes damaged in some way, for example, a skirt gets snagged and rips, the note must be given to the costume designer. This however does not involve modification of the actual costume design. All creative decisions must be referred to and approved by the director.

**Preparing for Dress and Technical Rehearsals**

Because at MIT the average amount of time between put-in, and a show's opening is a week or less, it is very important to be as well prepared and organized as possible for technical rehearsals. What is known as "hell week" (thus named because of the amount of work, and often frustration, involved in bringing all elements of a theatrical production together) begins with Put-in, and ends with the opening night performance.

The process of put-in involves moving the set from the shop and installing it in the theater. The lighting equipment must be hung, and props and costumes transported from Rinaldi. This process is a great deal of work, and many hands are needed to help. At MIT, it is a requirement that all actors help with put-in. They should have been informed of this at auditions, had the date pointed out to them on their rehearsal schedules, and reminded as the time for put-in drew near. It is the duty of the stage manager to ask those in charge of the various crews how many actors they will need and for how long, and then schedule actors accordingly. There may also be a preference described by some crews. For example, lights may specify that they would like to work with actors who have had some previous experience hanging lights, and are not afraid of heights. A sign up sheet should be passed around at rehearsal, and the final schedule should be passed on to the technical director.

## **Stage Management Areas**

Once the set has been put into the theater, and with the go ahead of the technical director, you can begin to prepare your areas of the theater. This would include the prop table, backstage, off stage costume change booths, your area in the booth or stage management table, and green room.

### *Prop Table*

The prop table should be located where actors can easily access it, and be lit just enough so that they can easily find the prop they need. If your prop tracking was done carefully, it should be a simple matter to determine your prop preparation needs.

The prop table should be divided into sections using tape. All sections should be clearly marked so that each prop has its place (see Figure 14). Before every rehearsal and performance, the prop table should be checked and double checked to make sure that no props are missing. A well sectioned off and clearly labeled table allows you to identify any missing props at a glance. At the end of each performance, all props should be returned to their proper place on the table, or locked up securely if classified as valuable or irreplaceable.

### *Backstage*

The backstage area is also your charge as stage manager. You must make absolute sure that it is safe for actors and technical crews. Glow tape any areas that may be tripped over or bumped into in the dim backstage light. For example, backstage stairs should be clearly marked by placing a long piece of white tape at each step's edge, and the center and sides of the edge marked with pieces of glow tape. All cables running along the floor should be secured and covered with gaff tape. These cables should also be clearly identifiable so actors do not trip over them. If you have any doubts as to whether an item needs to be glow taped, tape it.

Both the stage and backstage area should be swept before every show. Special care should be taken to search for stray screws, staples, etc. that may have escaped notice after put-in. This is especially important if actors will be barefoot or in socks on stage. Safety is a primary concern of any stage manager.

### *Off Stage Costume Change Booths*

The location of off stage costume change booths should be decided upon by you, the Technical Director, and Costume Designer. You should also consult the Costume Designer about any basic needs that s/he might have (i.e. mirrors, tables, chairs, screens, etc.).

### *The Booth*

The booth or stage management table is the place from which you will be managing the rest of rehearsals, and calling the shows. In some cases you may not be able to move into the booth until after the bulk of the technical rehearsals have been finished, but because Little Theater and La Sala both have easily accessible booths, this should not be a problem. From wherever you are to be sitting during technical rehearsals, you should have a way to communicate with the actors on and off stage, the stage crew, lighting board operator, sound board operator, and director. You should have plenty of space on which to put your production book, any other necessary records you will need to run the technical rehearsal and performances, and a place to write.

### *Green Room*

A green room area may or may not be available to the actors. Generally this area is a small section of the dressing room where water and other refreshments can be placed. If a separate room is available, put all refreshments in there, and not in the dressing rooms. Keeping this area organized and clean is a must. Initial set up of this area may include setting out plastic cups, napkins, etc.

## **Managing Rehearsals**

Although stage management is only directly responsible for overseeing the set up of their specific areas, it is the stage manager's responsibility to manage the actors and notify the proper people of any problems with technical aspects of the show. Because of this, it is best to begin several practices that will carry over into the run of the show.

You will want to post a sign-in sheet for actors, and create a pre-performance checklist. Both of these items are covered in the "Pre-performance preparation" section of this manual.

## **Taping the Floor**

Once the set is in place and the floor painted, you will want to lay down spike marks. Spiking is the process of laying down small pieces of tape to indicate the placement of props or set pieces. This is especially important for any set pieces that move. All spike marks should be clearly marked with a felt tip marker, and taped over with a small piece of packaging tape. Covering the spike mark with this clear tape keeps the mark from coming up and you will not have to replace it as often. Throughout the technical rehearsal processes you should never be without spike tape, and the stage crew should also have easy access to tape.

If the placement of the item you are spiking has to be handled by an actor, or in dim light, it is a good idea to use bright spike tape. If the object must be set in a blackout, use glow tape. However, if your stage hands will be setting the object in a preset or at intermission, you can probably use spike tape that is closer to the color of the floor. Prior to the beginning of the technical rehearsals, you will want to walk the director through the stage area, explaining to him/her exactly where and what everything is regarding the set etc.

If you are unable to have specific spike marks measured before moving into the theater, due to the fact that you have not been rehearsing in a space that has lent itself to accurately measuring the location of objects in the rehearsal room with precision, you will have to take time during the first technical rehearsals, to have the director approve of the placement of objects, and spike as you go along.

## **Dress Parade**

The dress parade, scheduled at the beginning of the rehearsal processes, also usually occurs just prior to or within this final week of rehearsals. The actors wear their costumes, if possible on the set with performance lighting conditions, and the director and costume designer discuss any necessary changes or improvements that need to be made to the costumes. This is very likely the first time that the director will see the costumes as they appear on the actors, and each actor should be viewed individually, as well as part of the group. (*The dress parade may not be necessary if the director has already seen all the costumes. Check with the costume designer and director to determine if a costume parade will be needed.*)

## **Paper Tech**

A paper tech is the time in which the stage manager, director, and designers sit down to finalize the technical functions of the performance. Here all cues are defined and recorded in their appropriate place on a master cue sheet and in the prompt book. All elements such as lights, sound, curtain, scene changes, special effects, and quick changes should be noted in this meeting.

Cues should be numbered and clearly printed *in pencil* at the appropriate places in your prompt book. If there is more than one element that needs to be cued, the elements are numbered/lettered separately and given a letter designation (Using letters for sound cues and numbers for light cues can help alleviate confusion). For example, a lighting cue might be designated as “L-17” and a sound cue may be “S-G”. These lighting and sound cues are then called as “Lights 19” and “Sound G”. Each technical element is given its own designating letter (i.e. L for lights, S for sound, etc.). It is very likely that the exact placement of these cues will change during the upcoming technical rehearsals, but by holding a paper tech, the bulk of cue placement is done and will help the technical rehearsals move along much more smoothly.

After the paper tech, and before beginning your first technical rehearsal, make sure to take the time to write in warnings or “standby”s for the cues you have just acquired. “Standby”s are given a short time before the actual cue is called and ensures the person awaiting the cue is prepared to execute it. For example, “Ready Lights 25.... Lights 25- Go” would be the sequence given for a

lighting cue. Warnings and “Go”s should be clearly marked and easily distinguished in your prompt book.

## **Technical rehearsals**

The first technical rehearsal marks the final stage of the rehearsal process in theatrical productions at MIT. It also marks a shift in your role as stage manager. Although up until now you were responsible for organizing and overseeing the rehearsal process, the control of the show was completely in the hands of the director. Beginning with the technical rehearsals, the production becomes almost entirely yours. This transference of authority is complete with the opening of the show’s run. It is now your responsibility to run rehearsals. The director, actors, and technicians will all look to you to keep the rehearsals moving along, and oversee the run of the show.

There are three kinds of technical rehearsals that are common to theatrical productions: Dry Tech, Cue-to-Cue, and Wet Tech. Each is discussed in detail below.

### **Dry Tech**

A dry tech is a technical rehearsal done without actors present. The technical aspects are rehearsed and specific problems worked out. This is a great opportunity for run crews to become familiar with scene changes and the operation of trap doors, curtains, etc. For example, a dry tech may give a crew member the chance to figure out how to manipulate a large prop through a trap door. Unfortunately, in the time squeeze characteristic of the technical schedule, there is rarely time to arrange a full dry tech. However, a scene shift rehearsal or partial dry tech is sometimes scheduled for a time prior to the start of actor-attended rehearsal.

### **Cue-to-Cue**

One type of technical rehearsal is called a cue-to-cue. The name originates from the fact that a cue-to-cue literally moves from one cue to another, and may skip over much of the text of the script. The rehearsal is used to rehearse and adjust lighting and all other applicable cues accordingly. A cue-to-cue can certainly be done without actors present. However, it is usually done with them on stage in order to set the timing of cues etc.

### **Wet Tech**

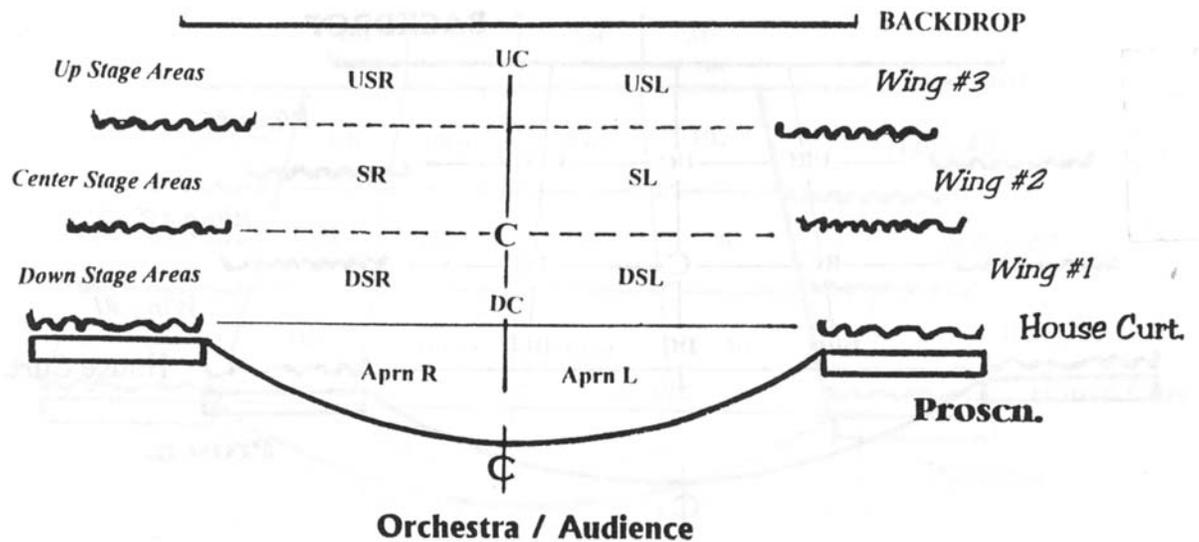
Wet Tech. A technical rehearsal with actors present is called a wet tech. The actors are not generally required to wear costumes or makeup during a wet tech unless quick changes or special makeup effects need to be rehearsed. Actors are expected to speak in the stage voices they intend to use during the performance so that sound levels on microphones or sound effects can be set. However, an all out performance effort is not generally required, or even possible to achieve. The scenes are often interrupted and repeated in order to adjust lights, sound, etc. Technical rehearsals can often be long and frustration is not uncommon. Make sure that you assure the actors that you understand they are tired, and thank everyone involved for their patience and hard work.

Please note that a wet tech is not a staging rehearsal. Some directors may want to make changes in staging, or coach the actors in their scenes. This is entirely appropriate if the lights need to be adjusted, or the rehearsal has stopped for some other reason. Allowing the director the freedom to work with actors for a short amount of time is a perfectly valid option. However if the direction is obviously holding up the process of the tech rehearsal, you should politely inform the director that the rehearsal must move on, and take a note of the scene in case the director wants to work on it later. Most directors will respect the fact that the technical rehearsal must continue in an efficient manner, and allow the rehearsal to continue.

## **Dress Rehearsals**

A dress rehearsal is a rehearsal in which all of the elements of the show are put together. Unlike technical rehearsals, actors are required to treat the rehearsal as a performance. There are usually two dress rehearsals scheduled for each production. During the first dress rehearsal, the only stops that are made are in the case of pressing immediate problems. The second dress rehearsal is run entirely under performance conditions—no stopping. The calls for all dress rehearsals are the same as they would be for performances, and pre-performance checks should be done before every technical or dress rehearsal.

**Figure 8**



**Dividing the stage into more specific areas:**

The above diagram is an example of how dividing the stage into several smaller areas gives a much clearer idea of where something is located in the stage. The diagram above is not of Little Theater, but it shows the most commonly used area designations. These particular areas are definitely worth learning if you do not already know them. You can certainly refer to additional areas in your blocking. It is best to decide on area names once you have a ground plan in hand.

*Key for standard areas shown above:*

- C = Center
- SR = Stage Right
- SL = Stage Left
- D = Down (i.e. DSR = Down Stage Right)
- U = Up (i.e. USL = Up Stage Left)

\* The above diagram was taken from Larry Fazio's Stage Manager: The Professional Experience

Figure 9

JULIUS CAESAR Prompt Script Key		
L = Stage Left		hnd = Hand
R = Stage Right		ft = Foot
U = Up Stage		P → = Push
D = Down Stage		L ↙ ↘ = Look at each other
C = Center Stage		
X = Cross		Δ = Change
X <sub>n</sub> = Cross n steps		⊙ = Sit w/ legs out In this direction
↪ = Shape of path of cross		→ = to
st = Step		↵ = Kneel
⊔ = Position of lying down		h = Hunker Down (squat)
ch = chair		
mes T = Massage table	Ⓢ = Caesar	Ⓐ = Antony
T = Table	Ⓟ = Brutus	Ⓟ = Portia
cof T = coffee table	Ⓢ = Calpurnia	Ⓢ = Decia
Ⓢ = Table cloth	Ⓢ = Metellus	Ⓢ = Calus Ligarius
ben = Bench	Ⓢ = Trebonius	Ⓢ = Flavius
⊥ = Stop	Ⓢ = Marullus	Ⓢ = Soothsayer
F = Face	Ⓢ = Publius	Ⓢ = Popilius
T = Take	Ⓢ = Lucius	Ⓢ = Lucilius
G → = Give	Ⓢ = Volumnia	Ⓢ = Clitus
P/⊔ = Pick up	Ⓢ = Cinna	Ⓢ = Cassius
L → = Look	Ⓢ = SS Man	Cop = Cop
Ⓢ = Sit	Ⓢ = Maid 1	Ⓢ = Octavius Caesar
Ⓢ = Rise	Ⓢ = Casca	Ⓢ = Cicero
Ⓢ = Stand	Ⓢ = Artemidorus	Ⓢ = Cinna, a Poet
dwn = Down	Ⓢ = Titinius	Ⓢ = Messala
↑ = Up stage of	Ⓢ = Varro	Ⓢ = Antony's Servant
↓ = Down stage of	Ⓢ = Pindarus	Ⓢ = Octavius' Servant
∞ = Turn	Ⓢ = Dardanius	Ⓢ = Carpenter
	Ⓢ = Cobbler	Ⓢ = First Plebeian

The above is an example of a blocking key taken from Daniel Ionazzi's The Stage Management Handbook.

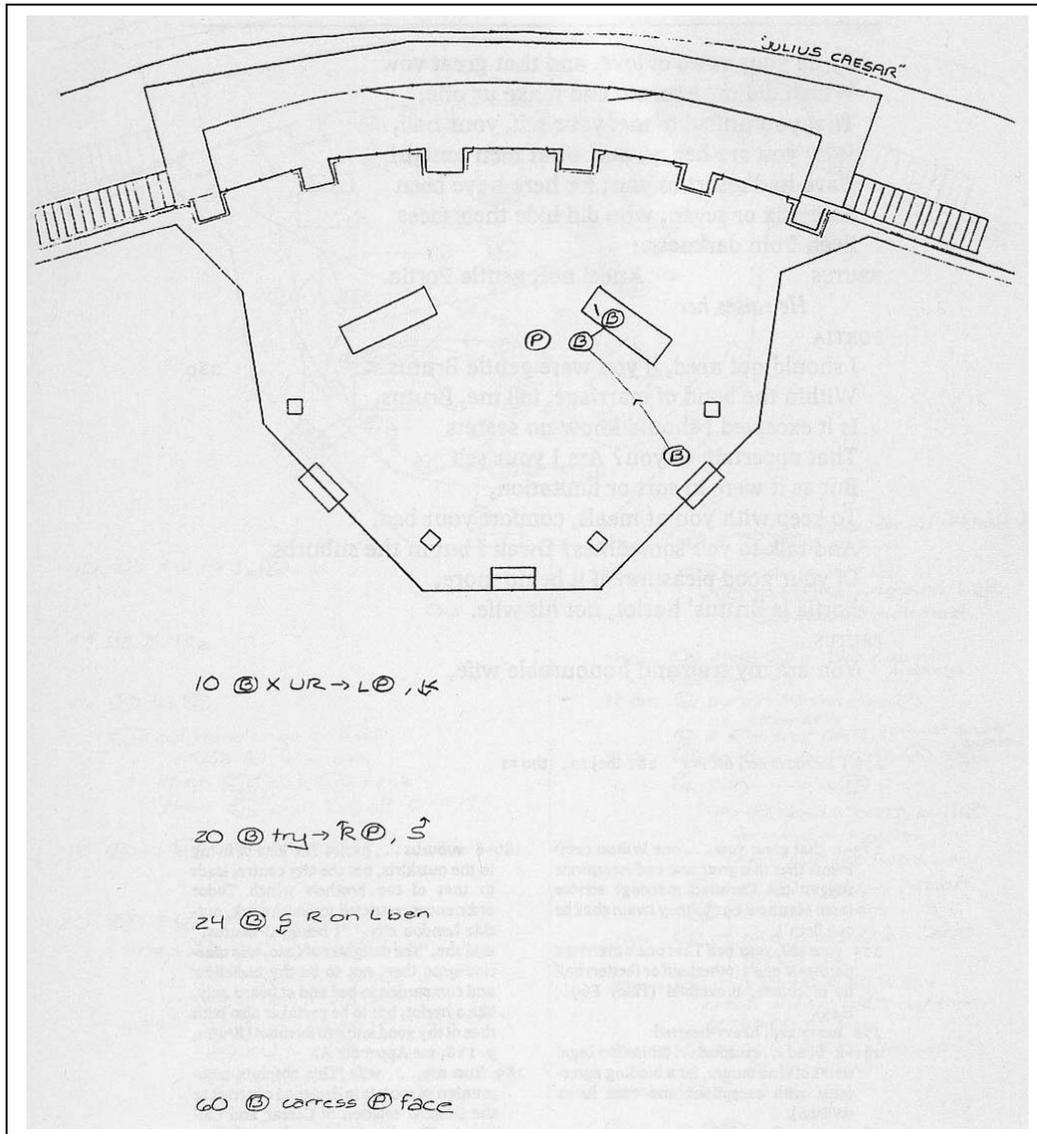
Figure 10

(The blank backside of the previous page)	(The manuscript page)
<p>① (M) entro. USR door (bdm.)</p> <p>② (M) wears tattered terry-cloth robe, towel on head, barefoot.</p> <p>③ (M) carries decorative vanity tray w/ red polish, clippers, nail file.</p> <p>④ (M) x to tbl. DSL, sits in DL chair, put cotton balls between toes, polish toe nails.</p> <p>⑤ Phone rings! (M) calls out...</p> <p>⑥ Phone rings! No (Flo) (M) calls out...</p> <p>⑦ (M) starts to hobble to cordless phone on desk UC</p> <p>⑧ Ans. Mach. p/u, (M) returns to seat</p> <p>⑨ as phone rings lights ↑ on (Fr), side-stage, house left.</p> <p>⑩ (Fr) ad-libs and mimics the voice of message mach, word for word.</p> <p>⑪ (Fr) too is dressed in old terry-cloth robe w/ towel on head. She too sits while polishing toe nails.</p> <p>⑫ etc., etc.</p>	<p>John and Mary</p> <p>① Mary enters in a robe, with a towel wrapped around her head. ② She carries with her a tray with nail polish and manicuring items. ③ She sits and begins polishing her toe nails. ④ (The phone rings) ⑨+⑪</p> <p>MARY</p> <p>Florence!</p> <p>⑥ (The phone rings)</p> <p>Florence! ⑦+⑧</p> <p>The answering machine kicks in.</p> <p>ANSWERING MACHINE</p> <p>Hello, this is John and Mary's answering machine and Fax center. If you want to send a fax press your start button now. Otherwise leave your name and phone number. ⑩</p> <p>Frieda ⑫</p> <p>Mary! Pick up the phone Mary. I know you're there monitoring your calls.</p> <p>⑭ Mary</p> <p>Hello mother!</p> <p>Frieda</p> <p>I knew you were there! I'm calling about this Saturday. ⑬</p> <p>(Florence enters)</p> <p>Florence</p> <p>Oh! I see you got the phone</p> <p>Mary</p> <p>Good timing girl!</p> <p>Frieda</p> <p>WHAT?</p> <p>Mary</p> <p>Not you mother! Saturday? SATURDAY!! Oh god, is it this Saturday? I can't. We are having game night here. George and Alice are coming over with another couple Mike and Sheila.</p> <p>Frieda</p> <p>I see you put your friends above your mother. You put me here in the old person's home and throw away the key.</p> <p>etc.. etc.</p>

The SM's numerical way of noting blocking. Numbers are placed on the dialogue page, while details of the blocking are noted on the blank page to the left (the backside of the previous page of dialogue).

The above is an blocking example taken from Larry Fazio's Stage Management: The Professional Experience.

Figure 11



The above is an blocking example taken from Daniel Ionazzi's The Stage Management Handbook.

**Camelot**

Prop Tracking		Updated: 12/15/00	
	Set Props		Hand Props
<i>TOS</i>			
On Stage	Red cloths in DS boxes Snow in snow bags	On Stage	
SR	G's chair Small table and glassware Loom Embroidery	SR	Bee puppet (top of ladder in tree) Daisy (US of white box) Scroll Shawl (on G's chair)
SL	A's chair Vanity Benches Armless chair Chaise	SL	Flowers                      Hairbrush Book                          Telescope G's cloak 11 knight swords Pell's sword Lancelot's sword
<i>Act I</i>		<b>Act I</b>	
<b>ii</b>	<b>G's Entrance</b>		
<b>p6</b>	<b>"Are you sure..." – Lionel</b>	<b>p6</b>	
<b>p7</b>	<b>"Sound the Trumpet" – Dinadan</b>	<b>p7</b>	Merlyn enters from USR w/ scepter and book
<b>p11</b>	<i>After song "...Kind is doing tonight"</i>	<b>p11</b>	All exit w/ props, guys down aisle and ladies DSL DA X to L façade w/ book Guenevere enters from L w/ cloak

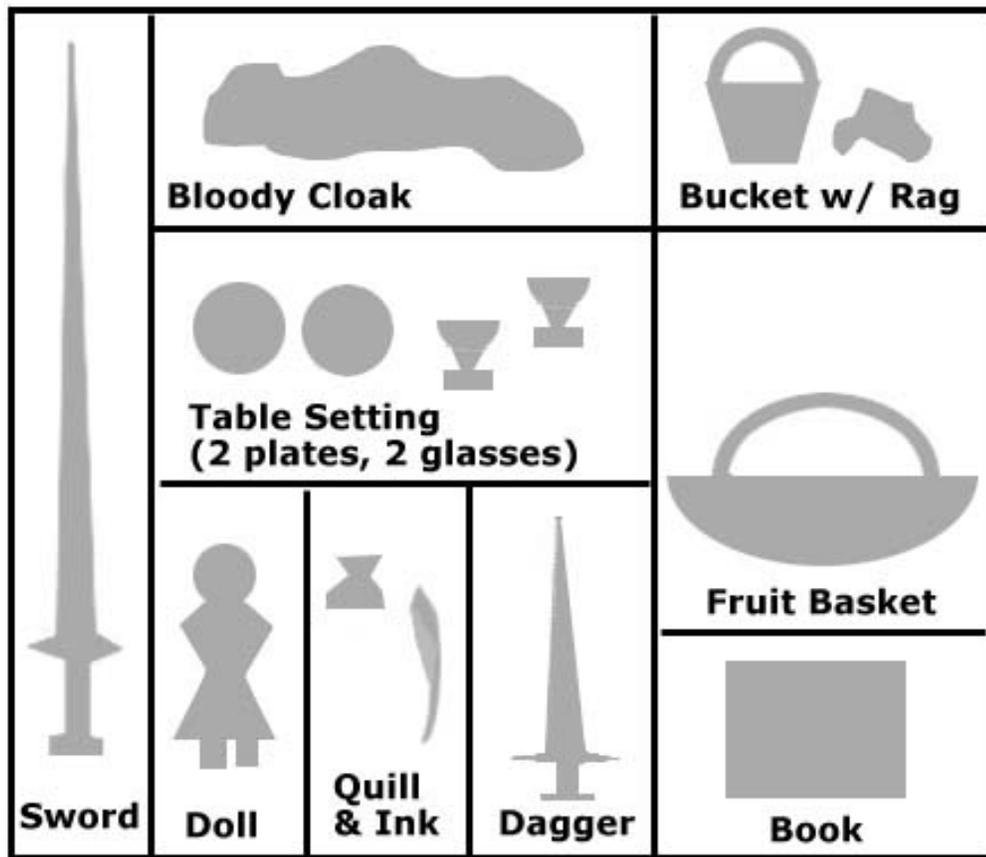
## Toys in the Attic -- Lillian Helman

### Pre-set Act I (cont.)

Item		Notes
Watering can	SR porch	
Hose	DSR behind chair	
Topaz pin	Carrie's dress	
Sheet music	Piano	
Mirror	SL living room wall	
Jambalaya	SL	
Ice	SL	

Item	Pg on	Character on	Side on	notes	Pg off	Character off	Side off	notes
Package (cologne)	5	Carrie	SR	In Carrie's purse	----	-----	----	Left on hutch
Plant	5	Anna	SR		----	----	----	Left on porch
Carrie's purse	5	Carrie	SR	w/ perfume, lipstick	38	Carrie	SR	
Carrie's hat	5	Carrie	SR		38	Carrie	SR	
Plate of ice	6	Anna	SL	<b>HAND OFF</b>	30	Anna	SL	Wash when it comes off
Mint	6	Anna	SL	In shot glass, <b>HAND OFF</b>	Interm	-----	----	
Ice tub	6	Gus	SR		9	Gus	SR	

Figure 14



This is an example of how a props table should be taped off and labeled. It is easy to see how, with this method, it would be easy to locate a prop, or identify a missing object.

# **Performance and Post-Production**

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# Performances and Post-Production

The time has finally come to present your weeks of work to an audience. There are numerous emotions that everyone involved with the production is feeling: excitement, fear, anticipation, uncertainty, and a hundred others. By this point the production is completely in your hands. The cast and crew are all counting on you to see them through to the final closing curtain.

The average run of a show at MIT is six or seven performances over a two week period. As stage manager, you must still be on your toes, and prepared to handle anything. The following sections discuss the duties of a stage manager during the performances. Following this processes will help you to stay prepared, and guide the show through as smooth a run as possible.

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## Pre-Performance Preparation

### Check List

Because there are numerous duties that need to be completed before every performance, it is helpful to have a check list handy. All pre-show duties should be finished, at the very latest, a half hour before curtain. A check list should also be handed out to the run crew, and duties divided up. Although your assistants may be charged with a portion of the duties in readying the theater, it is your responsibility as stage manager to make sure that it has all been done. The detail with which you will have to review the presets etc. will depend on how much you trust your stage management crew. Remember that although your stage hands report directly to you, if a mistake occurs, you are answerable to the producers, directors, designers, and audience members. A good leader will recognize this fact and use this to build trust and reliability in his/her team.

A pre-production check list should consist of at least the following:

- Making sure the theater and all dressing rooms are unlocked well in advance of the call
- Lighting instrument check
- Sound check
- Special effects check
- Headset check
- Properties check
- Sweep and mop the stage
- Preset the stage
- Posting of sign up sheet and providing a pencil or pen
- Posting of any other information of which the actors need to be informed
- Collect Valuables
- Turn off all work lights

### *Light and Sound Checks*

Although you will not generally be required to perform the light and sound checks yourself (the board operators will do this), it is your job to make sure that it has been done. All light checks

should include cue lights and any lights used to illuminate the backstage area. Any problems should be reported to the appropriate technicians.

### *Headset Check*

A key element in communication during a show is the headset. Make sure that there are fresh batteries in the headsets and that everyone wearing one can hear and respond to what is being said.

### *Pre-sets and Props*

The pre-sets and properties must be checked in order to ensure that everything is in place and ready to start the show. Before every rehearsal and performance, the stage should be swept thoroughly, and mopped if necessary. Although the set crews are very careful to not leave such things as screws and other items lying around, you or your assistants should also make a thorough sweep of the stage to look for any stray construction material. If anyone in the performance will be going barefoot or stocking footed, this examination should be done especially carefully.

### *Posted Information*

Outside of the dressing rooms you should post a sign in sheet for all actors. The actors should be told to initial the sheet when they arrive. *No one but the actor himself is allowed to sign him in as present.* This requirement avoids you having to look for the actor later when someone says “I saw him around so I signed him in, but he must have wandered off”. There should also be posted any information the actor will need to know about the performance, announcements, etc. It is helpful to have a sheet of paper posted where actors can write comments about their costumes. This provides the actor with an easy way of letting you know if any repairs or alterations need to be made to costumes.

### *Valuables*

Approximately 15 minutes prior to the start of the performance, you should collect valuables from the actors. Because the dressing rooms are unattended during performances, it is important to be able to keep jewelry, money, and wallets in a safe place. Each actor should have a ziploc bag with their name on it. They can then put any valuables they have brought with them to the theater in the bag and hand it to you. This ensures that nothing gets lost and provides you with a quick and easy way to return the valuables. Generally, valuables can be kept in the booth with you. If there is some reason why they would not be secure with you, they should be put in a locked closet or office.

### **Warming Up**

The actors are responsible for whatever warm ups or preparations need to be done prior to the performance.

### **Fight Calls**

If there is a fight sequence in the play, the actors involved *must* be called earlier for a fight rehearsal before *every* performance. This helps to avoid injuries and mistakes during the performance. If weapons are to be used, they must be checked and double checked for safety, and provided for the pre-show rehearsal of the scene. The following outlines some basic guidelines for fight calls:

- Fight Call should happen as close as possible to the time the house opens. This way the actors will have the least amount of time between the rehearsal and the performance.
- All actors are required to be present and wearing their costume shoes and any other costume items that will effect their fight performance.
- No other actors or crew members are to be allowed on the stage or its periphery during Fight Call. The entire cast and crew should understand that during this rehearsal, *the theater should be absolutely quiet.* Other cast and crew are welcome to be in the house, but movement should be kept to an absolute minimum, and conversation should not be permitted. Fight Call is the actors' time to be allowed to focus entirely on a safe run-through of the fight work, and distractions are forbidden.

- The actors should go through each fight once at a slow speed – just to mark it – and then once more at about half speed.
- Once they're satisfied and comfortable that the fights are in good shape, the actors are free to return backstage.
- The only set pieces required on stage for Fight Call are the set pieces that the actors interact with during the fight scene and objects that may be in the path of the action.

## **Cast and Crew Calls**

As stated before, the stage manager should always be the first person to arrive at the theater for any performance, and the last person to leave. Arrive early enough to allow yourself a deep breath or two and time to prepare mentally for the performance.

The crew should be called at least an hour to an hour and a half before the show in order to perform all pre-performance duties. The amount of time it takes them to do these will depend on the size of the crew and the size of the show. With practice, this preparation will be finished more and more quickly. You do not want to call your crew so early that they are doing nothing for an hour, but you certainly want them there in plenty of time to handle any problems that may arise.

The cast should be called a minimum a half hour to an hour before curtain. This time again will vary depending on how much time it takes an actor to get into costume and makeup and attend warm up and fight calls.

You will want to give 15 minute and 5 minute warnings to the actors and technical crew. These are usually given as “15 minutes to places” and so on. You should wait for a “thank you” or some kind of response that indicates the actors have heard you. The last thing you want is an actor panicking because they didn’t hear you call 15 and now have only five minutes to finish getting ready.

Call “places” when you are just about ready to begin the show, and then wait for one of your assistants to confirm that all of the actors are in place before starting the show.

## **Front-of-House**

Areas occupied by the audience, such as lobbies, the seating area of the theater, etc. are all referred to as “front-of-house” and are under control of the house manager. The stage manager is responsible for giving the house manager an “ok” to open the house to seat audience members and close the house so that the show can begin. The house is usually opened 20-30 minutes before the publicized start time of the show. This time should be decided on between you and the house manager before the start of the run. If a problem arises and you will be late in opening the house, the house manager must be told immediately so that the waiting audience can be notified of the delay. You and the house manager should also decide on a late seating policy. It can be very distracting to have ushers seating audience members during the performance and late seating should be done at a time when it is least disruptive to the performance. If the production is a dance production or a concert of some kind, it may be possible for people to be seated between numbers. Once the house is closed and all the actors in place, the performance may begin.

## Performances

### Calling the Show

Once you call the first cue, the show begins, and you become an intricate part of the performance. By now you should be familiar with your cues and their timing, but you will have to adjust your performance in response to the audience. Sometimes laughter or clapping will force you to adjust the timing of your cues in ways you had not anticipated. This is all part of the challenge and magic of live performance. The way in which you call the cues, however, must remain constant so that your technical crew will know what to expect.

A cue is generally called as illustrated in the following example:

*“Standby Lights 25”*

*“Lights 25 – Go”*

or for a sequence of cues listed that need to be called quickly:

*“Standby Lights 15 through 18”*

*“Lights 15 through 18 – Go...Go...Go”*

The crew member receiving the cue will respond to your warning with a “standing by” in order to let you know that s/he is ready.

For cue lights, turning on the cue light signifies “Ready” and turning it off signifies a “Go”. Do not assume that all stage hands and actors will know about cue lights. Make sure everyone involved knows which cue light to look for and what “on” and “off” mean.

### Performance Reports

Just as you needed to fill out rehearsal reports in order to keep everyone informed of new developments, you must continue with performance reports. Included in the report should be the run times of various aspects of the show, notes for designers and technicians, maintenance needs (damaged props, costumes, etc.), and general comments regarding the house and performance. Like rehearsal reports, performance reports can be sent via e-mail, and a hardcopy should be kept in the production book.

Line and blocking notes should also be taken and given to actors after the performance if necessary.

### After Each Performance

After each performance, the stage manager is responsible for seeing that the backstage area is cleaned, props are placed in their appropriate places on the prop table, perishables are properly stored, valuables are returned to actors, and the theater is locked for the night. This sounds like quite a bit of work, but much of this can be delegated to your assistant and run crew. It does not take very long if everyone is assigned a duty and performs the same one every night. As Production Stage Manager, you should be the one to call CAC to lock the dressing rooms, back stage areas, and theater. The same motto for running rehearsals holds true for performances: “First one in, last one out.” You should wait for CAC to lock the doors, and only when this last step is complete, leave the theater.

## **Closing the Show**

After the final curtain drops on the final performance, the work of the stage manager is nearly complete. You have seen the show through from its beginning stages to its final curtain call. Now, all that is left is to strike the show and finish up any administrative business yet undone.

Removing the set, lights, costumes, and props from the theater and putting them away is known as Strike. All actors and crew members are required to participate in this process and should have been informed of this at auditions and in the rehearsal schedule. Strike is overseen by the Technical Director.

## **Post-production Meeting**

Usually, within a week after the production closes, a post-production meeting will be held with the cast, crew, and Rinaldi staff. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss what aspects of the production process went smoothly, and what could have been handled better. All students receiving credit for their participation in the production are required to attend this meeting. You will want to alert the cast and crew to the date and time of the meeting. The meeting should be scheduled by yourself, the Rinaldi staff, and the director.

Once Strike and the post-production meeting are complete and you have sent out the final performance report, your job as stage manager is officially complete. Congratulations. Your prompt book holds all the records of the production, and should be saved for some time after the closing of the show. As mentioned before, most stage managers will keep a prompt book as a reference.

# **Dance Productions**

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# Dance Productions

Thus far the discussion has lent itself mainly to the stage management of plays. What about concert dance? In general, most of the stage management methods described in the previous pages hold for dance productions as well. This section deals with some of the major differences between managing a dance production or musical with many dance numbers, and a play.

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## Pre-Production

In a dance production, it is the choreographer's vision being brought to life. S/he plays the same role as the director of a play, and should be approached in the same way.

The dance stage manager should be able to read music or have a very good ear for music. Prior to the beginning of rehearsals of either a musical or a dance piece, the stage manager should become very familiar with the score. If you cannot read music then obtain a previous recording of the music that will be used. Even in a world premier production, a demo tape usually exists.

There is a high risk of injury in any dance production. Any stage manager should be well prepared to handle an injury by calling campus police and the medical center. A dance stage manager should be on special alert for anything that may jeopardize the safety of the dancers, and be ready to take appropriate measures immediately if there is an injury in a rehearsal or performance.

The role of the stage manager in a dance production in auditions is similar to the play. In addition to all of the duties already discussed regarding auditions, the stage manager should make sure that a separate person will be at the auditions to accompany singers and dancers or work any stereo equipment. Many times dancers are auditioned in large groups. The auditions move quickly and it will be vital that you keep careful records of each dancer.

## Rehearsals and Performances

The dance stage manager is entirely responsible for the condition of the stage space before the performance. In a play there might be assistant stage managers or stage hands who mop the stage down and check scenery. However, in dance, the stage manager is the ultimate authority in charge of getting things ready and ensuring that all safety precautions have been taken. The stage manager must take care to see that the dance floor is in place and "danceable". That is, that the flooring is properly secured and cleaned.

At MIT, the dance stage manager tends to call a large number of light and music cues, and has to organize an extremely large number of people. The dance companies on campus are all big, and the responsibility of the stage manager is heightened because there are so many bodies involved.

## **Part II**

# **The Psychology of Stage Managing**

# The Psychology of Stage Managing

Thus far, this manual has concerned itself with what a stage manager *does*. While certainly detailed, this does not yet encompass what a stage manager *is*. In order to answer the question “what *is* a stage manager?” in its most complete form, the mental component of this job must be considered. The stage manager must play the role of advocate, leader, and creative problem solver. These roles are not in addition to the stage manager’s duties described in Part I, but rather flow naturally from them. The following section describes several of the qualities any stage manager should continually try to foster in his/herself.

## The Advocate

First and foremost, the stage manager is an advocate. S/he is an advocate to the actors, director, and designers of a production. S/he protects the production by protecting all involved in the collaboration. A stage manager serves as the communication hub of a show, but his/her duties do not end at sending out rehearsal schedules and design notes. *Because the stage manager is not a member of the producing committee, cast, or creative staff, s/he serves as an impartial party, with the best interests of the production and everyone involved in mind.*

The production process can at times feel stressful and overwhelming. If there seems to be an undue amount of stress or dissatisfaction among cast or crew, it may be best to hold a meeting to discuss concerns. Everyone involved in the creative process of the production should feel as though they can trust you with their concerns, and that they will be heard and taken seriously. Most of the time, individuals may only need someone to listen to them vent their frustrations in order to calm themselves. Other times, you may decide to tactfully mention their concerns to the director. By serving as a go-between for members of the creative team, the stage manager helps to smooth over strained relationships and work out misunderstandings. Putting on a show can be a lot of fun, and extremely rewarding. By keeping conflicts from escalating, everyone will have a much more enjoyable experience.

These few simple actions can go a long way in resolving any serious conflict:

- Open a dialogue between all involved parties as soon as possible.
- Be patient.
- Stay calm.
- Be tactful.
- If you feel for any reason that the situation is one you are unable to handle it, ask someone in Theater Arts for help. Don’t feel that you have to handle everything on your own.

There is one key concept that it is important for any stage manager to remember, and can greatly undermine your authority should you forget: *The cast and crew should be able to trust you with any concerns they’d care to share, but as stage manager, you should not complain to the cast or crew.* If you have concerns that need to be addressed, discuss them with the director, the technical director, a faculty member, or the producer. If you need to vent, choose a friend who is not in the show. Because of the level of responsibility and trust placed in a stage manager, your complaints may be taken much more seriously, and undermine the confidence of the actors or crew in the show itself.

## The Leader/Guide

As must be obvious by now, a stage manager is also a leader, but a leader within a framework. The framework is set by the director, and the stage manager sees that the director's artistic vision is maintained.

Recently, I asked a group of people what kinds of images came to mind when I posed the question "who is a leader?". Among the most common answers were politicians, activists such as Martin Luther King, and images of military leaders. All examples of someone standing in the limelight, and loudly say to a group in the background, "Follow me!"

A stage manager is a different kind of leader. Perhaps the best (and most poetic) analogy is that of a sailing ship captain. The captain doesn't forcibly pull the boat to its destination, but gently guides the crew and ship, keeping the boat from being drawn far off course by unexpected weather. Although the stage manager does not (and should not attempt) to direct the play creatively, s/he provides the structure and environment to allow the production to flourish.

Several examples of how a stage manager effects the work environment are:

- Confidence in others:  
If you show confidence in the ability of those around you, they will be more likely to trust themselves. Actors and directors will fill more at ease when taking creative risks. A little encouragement goes a long way.
- Confidence in yourself:  
When others see that you have confidence in your own abilities, they are more likely to trust you themselves. This allows you to maintain authority.
- Positive attitude and energy:  
The attitude and energy level you come with to rehearsal will affect everyone in the room. I've found that actors are especially sensitive to energy levels. So, even though you may be ready to fall asleep while setting up Rehearsal Room B, try to present as much of a positive attitude as possible once people start to arrive for rehearsal. It will help make the rehearsal more productive, and well worth the effort of not napping on your script.

The best stage managers I've known seem follow 6 common principles:

- Enjoy your work. Genuine enthusiasm shows, and will help motivate you, and everyone around you.
- Lead by example.
- Be professional. Do your job well, respect others, and you will easily earn the respect and trust every stage manager needs.
- Don't panic. If you don't panic when the unexpected occurs, others will tend to stay calm as well.
- Recognize the efforts of others. If someone is going a good job, let them know it. When offering a criticism, make sure it is constructive.
- Never lose your sense of humor.

There are many books on how to become a better leader. Most relate to the world of business and finance, but the same basic principles apply. If you are interested in reviewing ways in which to further develop your leadership skills, you may want to start with *The Leadership Challenge* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.) by Kouzes and Posner.

## The Creative Problem Solver

Unlike many other art forms, Theater is always an intense collaborative effort, regardless of the size of the production. Because of this, the stage manager must become skilled in dealing with many kinds of personalities. Experience will allow you to find the best ways to deal with different situations. Just remember that you can be as creative with your solutions to problems in a production environment as you are in other fields.

Below are two examples of creative problem solving during the production process. Remember that each show is unique, and all problems should be considered individually.

### Example 1: The creative suggestion

A stage manager observed what she felt was a slight misinterpretation of a particular scene. While she had been invited by the director to make creative suggestions, she also knew that this particular director would not be very likely to take a direct suggestion well. Instead, while the director and stage manager were grabbing a cup of coffee and discussing the progress of rehearsals, the stage manager asked the director to explain her interpretation of the scene in more detail. This initiated an amiable discussion about the play, and allowed the stage manager to make her suggestion without directly saying, “No, I think you’re wrong.”

### Example 2: Getting an actor to hit her mark

During the run of a show, an actress consistently missed her mark and was never 100% in the light while delivering a monologue. Though she had been told several times, she never quite remembered in the moment. When giving individual notes after a performance, the stage manager took her aside. He mentioned that she needed to deliver the monologue slightly upstage of where she usually stood, and how lovely she looked in her costume when she stood completely in the special. The actress never missed her mark again.

## Student Stage Managers

Lastly, I would like to remind all stage managers, new or experienced, that MIT is an educational institution, and co-curricular theater at MIT is meant to be as much as a teaching tool as a student activity. The amount of work outlined in this manual may seem overwhelming, but can be made quite manageable. Here are a few helpful tips for student stage managers who are feeling crunched for time:

- Delegate. No one can do everything themselves all the time. If you have assistants, use them.
- Don’t try to stage manage and hold another production position.
- Stay organized and make sure to schedule your time well, including time for sleep.

***If at any time you feel overwhelmed, in over your head, or just have questions, the faculty and staff of Theater Arts is certainly here to help. Remember: “You are in service to the production, not a servant of it.”<sup>1</sup> If for any reason, a situation arises in a production that you feel uncomfortable handling, or need a little advice on resolving, don’t hesitate to ask for help.***

<sup>1</sup> Janet Sonenberg

# **Part III**

## **Reference**

## References

Dilker, Barbara (1982). *Stage Management Forms and Formats*, New York, NY:  
Drama Book Publishers.

Fazio, Larry (2000). *Stage Manager: The Professional Experience*, United States:  
Focal Press.

Kelly, Thomas A. (1992). *The Backstage Guide to Stage Management*, New York,  
NY: Back Stage Books.

Ionazzi, Daniel A. (1992). *The Stage Management Handbook*, Cincinnati, Ohio:  
Betterway Books.

# **Useful Phone Numbers**

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Internal copies only. If you are an MIT student, staff, or faculty member, please contact MIT Theater Arts for a current listing of these numbers

## **Theater Arts Faculty and Academic Staff**

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### **Administration**

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### **Emergency Phone Numbers/Room Management**

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# Safety Regulations

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Many of the safety considerations listed here are the responsibility of designers, technicians, house managers, and producers. However, it is *strongly recommended* that you familiarize yourself with all of these safety regulations. As a stage manager, one of your pre-rehearsal/performance duties should include a walk-through of all stage, backstage, greenroom, and dressing room areas looking for possible safety infractions. These regulations were put in place to protect everyone in the building, and special attention should be paid to make sure they are followed.

## The Stage

- No open flame allowed in any area of the theater
  - This includes candles and cigarettes, unless approved by CAC and the following precautions are taken:
    - Candles are allowed *if* enclosed in a glass chimney or in a hurricane lamp.
    - Cigarettes may be lit and smoked on stage *if* ash trays containing a layer of water are provided for extinguishing on stage or metal cans with a layer of sand and water are provided for off-stage extinguishing .
  - The “no open flame” regulation includes the *entire* building.
  - If there is a definite need to have a totally open flame on stage, it must be approved by CAC and a “fire watcher” must be present backstage with an extinguisher, etc. any time the flame is used.
- Little Theater also has a fire curtain, which should be inspected from time to time.
  - It is to be dropped should a flame get out of control on stage.
  - The fire curtain protects the audience, keeps them from panicking, and keeps the fire from spreading towards the house.

## The Set

- No emergency exits or the decent path of the fire curtain may be blocked by set pieces or other paraphernalia.
- Any platform higher than 48 inches must have a railing.
- All set designs, lights, and safety concerns should be cleared through the Associate Director of Campus Activities, Michael Foley (mwf@mit.edu).
  - All approval should be obtained in the planning stages, not at put-in.
- All set pieces should be fire proof or treated with a fire proofing material.
  - If a vintage piece of furniture is used in a production, it should be checked for rips or tears. Even if the outside has been fireproofed, the stuffing of such pieces is still very flammable.

## **The House**

- Conventional Seating
  - Nobody may be farther from an aisle than 7 seats, thus no continuous row of seats should be more than 15 in number.
  - There may be no less than 33" from seat back to seat back.
  - There should also be an 8ft unobstructed aisle with access to emergency exits (6ft necessary, 8ft preferred).
- Continental Seating
  - There can be any number of seats in a continuous row as long as there is a distance of 48" seat back to seat back and fire exits exist at both ends of each row.
- Aisles should be wide enough for a wheel chair.
- Both Kresge theaters have a infrared listening devices for hearing impaired patrons. The hearing aid devices can be obtained from CAC and MIT Audio Visual.
- Be overly compassionate to people coming into the theater. Always consider accessibility, seating, and hearing needs.

## **Dressing Rooms**

- Make sure all curling irons, etc. are unplugged if the room is to be unattended.
- No paper should be stored near places where curling irons or other heated devices are to be used.

## **Fogging Devices**

- Due to hygiene concerns, all fogging devices must be approved by the Safety Office.
- The only performance venue at MIT where fogging devices are permitted is Kresge Little Theater. All other venues lack proper ventilation systems and an audience area separated from the stage.

## **Licenses and Registration**

- All performances must be registered with CAC.
- CAC will let you know if there are any required licenses or fees necessary.
  - A general rule is that if a performance is free for an audience of MIT students, there is no need for a Cambridge license.
  - If the audience must purchase tickets, there will be a license necessary.
- It is recommended that all licenses be posted near the box office before every performance, making it easy for Cambridge Spotters to see.
- If the person who has signed for the license has forgotten it for some reason, CAC has a copy.













**Production:**

**Date:**

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French Scene Breakdown

Act/Scene	Character	Actor Name	Comment

**Production:**

**Date:**

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Actor/Scene Breakdown

Actor Name	Character Name	Act/Scene





Actor: \_\_\_\_\_ Scene/Page: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Line: \_\_\_\_\_

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|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paraphrased             | <input type="checkbox"/> Skipped Phrases | <input type="checkbox"/> Jumped Cue   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inverted Line           | <input type="checkbox"/> Inverted Words  | <input type="checkbox"/> Dropped Line |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Check Script | <input type="checkbox"/> Blocking        | <input type="checkbox"/> Dropped Word |

Added: \_\_\_\_\_

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Actor: \_\_\_\_\_ Scene/Page: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Inverted Line           | <input type="checkbox"/> Inverted Words  | <input type="checkbox"/> Dropped Line |
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| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Check Script | <input type="checkbox"/> Blocking        | <input type="checkbox"/> Dropped Word |

Added: \_\_\_\_\_

# Rehearsal Report

**Production:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rehearsal #:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Stage Manager:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Rehearsal Start:</b> :	
<b>Rehearsal Break:</b> :	
<b>Rehearsal Start:</b> :	
<b>Rehearsal Break:</b> :	
<b>Total Rehearsal Time:</b> :	
<b>Rehearsal Notes:</b>	
	<b>Properties:</b>
	<b>Set:</b>
<b>Fittings, etc.:</b>	<b>Sound:</b>
<b>Schedule:</b>	<b>Misc.:</b>

# Performance Report

**Production:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Performance #:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Stage Manager:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Act I Up:</b>	:	:
<b>Act I Down:</b>	:	
<b>Act I Running Time:</b>	:	
<b>Intermission UP:</b>	:	
<b>Intermission Down:</b>	:	
<b>Intermission Time: :</b>	:	
<b>Act II Up: :</b>	:	
<b>Act II Down: :</b>	:	
<b>Act II Running Time:</b>	:	
<b>Total Running Time:</b>	:	
<b>Total Elapsed Time:</b>	:	
<b>Performance Notes:</b>		
<b>Tech Notes:</b>		
<b>Additional Calls:</b>	<b>Misc.:</b>	



# Sign-in Sheet

**Production:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Name:</b>						

**At This Performance:**

**Notes:**

# Glossary

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Note: All definitions followed by a (\*) are taken directly from Ionazzi's Stage Management handbook

<b>Apron</b>	Stage area in front of the proscenium*
<b>Backstage</b>	The area away from the acting area, including dressing rooms and the green room*
<b>Blackout</b>	A rapid extinguishing of all light on stage*
<b>Blocking</b>	The movement and business of an actor on stage*
<b>Box set</b>	A set that utilizes three walls to enclose the stage area*
<b>Call</b>	The notification to cast and crew of rehearsal or performance; also the countdown to curtain provided by stage management, usually half-hour call, fifteen minute call, five minute call, and places*
<b>Center line</b>	An imaginary or real line that divides the stage area into two equal parts, running from downstage to upstage*
<b>Center stage</b>	The middle area of the performance space*
<b>Cross</b>	In blocking, to move from one area of the stage to another*
<b>Cue</b>	A signal for the stage manager that puts into action a shift in light, sound, or scenery*
<b>Cue lights</b>	Specific lights used by the stage manager to cue backstage technicians and actors*
<b>Curtain</b>	In addition to its normal definition relating to draperies, a term used to indicate the start or end of a performance such as "five minutes to curtain" (five minutes to the start of the performance)*
<b>Cyc</b>	A curved drop or wall used as a background to partially enclose the set, may be painted or lit*
<b>Dimmer</b>	An electrical apparatus used to control the intensity of the lighting instrument to which it is circuited*
<b>Downstage</b>	The area of stage closest to the audience*

<b>Dresser</b>	Crew person assigned to help with quick changes and general maintenance of costumes through the run of the show*
<b>Dry tech</b>	A technical rehearsal without actors*
<b>Fire curtain</b>	A nonflammable curtain hung directly behind the proscenium that protects the audience from fire or smoke emitting from the stage*
<b>First electric</b>	The first row of light hung on a batten behind the proscenium*
<b>Followspot</b>	A hand operated lighting instrument mounted on a swivel stand that emits a high intensity beam of light, used to follow an actor on stage*
<b>French scene</b>	Scene that begins and ends with an actor's entrance or exit*
<b>Gel</b>	Transparent material used to color the lights*
<b>Glow tape</b>	Tape that glows in the dark, used in small pieces for spiking or marking areas that may be bumped into backstage*
<b>Gobo</b>	A metal cutout that projects an image on the stage*
<b>Green room</b>	A backstage common area used by actors and crew as a waiting area
<b>Grid</b>	A steel framework about the stage from which the fly system is rigged*
<b>Ground plan</b>	A scale diagram that shows where the scenery is placed on the stage floor; also called floor plan*
<b>Half-hour</b>	The 30-minute warning to curtain*
<b>Hand props</b>	Properties that are handled by actors during the performance*
<b>Hand-off</b>	The action of a crew member handling a prop to an actor at a designated time and place during a performance*
<b>Hanging</b>	The process of putting a lighting instrument in its designated spot according to the light plot*
<b>Hot spot</b>	The area of the greatest illumination projected by a lighting instrument*
<b>House</b>	Area of the theater used for audience seating
<b>House lights</b>	Lights used to illuminate the area where the audience sits*
<b>Instrument</b>	A term used for any lighting device*
<b>Lamp</b>	The part of a lighting instrument that emits light-- the "light bulb"*
<b>Lighting tree</b>	A vertical pipe that is placed on the side of a stage to hold lighting instruments*

<b>Light board</b>	The console that controls the lighting instruments
<b>Light plot</b>	A drawn-up plan that designates the placement of lighting instruments relative to the set*
<b>Mask</b>	The use of curtains, flats, etc. To hide an offstage area
<b>Patch</b>	To connect a circuit to a dimmer*
<b>Places</b>	The request for cast and crew to take their positions for the start of the performance*
<b>Practical</b>	Any prop or piece of scenery that is usable*
<b>Pre-set</b>	The setting on stage that the audience sees before the play begins. Refers to lights, set, and props*
<b>Preset Board</b>	Basic lighting board console, operated manually. Consisting of two identical fader banks controlling all dimmer channels, the board allows the operator to preset one lighting cue, while keeping another live. A cross fade is generally used to switch between cues. Also known as manual light boards or A-to-B boards
<b>Prompt</b>	To help an actor with his lines when he either asks or is stumbling*
<b>Prompt script</b>	The notebook kept by the stage manager that contains all paperwork necessary to the production of the play, including a script with blocking and cues*
<b>Prop table</b>	The table backstage on which props are laid out*
<b>Properties</b>	All objects, except for scenery, used by an actor during a play
<b>Props</b>	<i>see properties</i>
<b>Proscenium</b>	The outlining frame of the stage opening that separates the house from the stage; also called the proscenium arch*
<b>Quick change</b>	A fast costume change*
<b>Read-through</b>	Any rehearsal where the all of the actors read through the script from start to finish*
<b>Run</b>	The total number of performances for a production*
<b>Running crew</b>	The backstage group of people who perform all the technical tasks during the show*
<b>Run-through</b>	To rehearse the show by performing from beginning to end without stopping*
<b>Set dressing</b>	Props that are used to decorate the set and are usually not handled by actors*

<b>Sightlines</b>	Imaginary lines of sight that determine what is visible to the audience on stage and what is not*
<b>Spike mark</b>	A mark on the stage or rehearsal floor, usually a piece of tape, that denotes the specific placement of a piece of scenery or a prop*
<b>Spill</b>	Extraneous light that can be cut off with a shutter*
<b>Stage left</b>	When facing the audience, the area of the stage on an actor's left*
<b>Stage right</b>	When facing the audience, the area of the stage on an actor's right*
<b>Strike</b>	The removal of all stage equipment, scenery, props, lights, and costumes from the stage area*
<b>Strip lights</b>	A long narrow lighting instrument used for a general wash of light*
<b>Stumble-through</b>	Any rehearsal in which the show is run from beginning to end, with some stopping for problems encountered by the director or actors. This is usually done without the technical elements in place, prior to the first technical rehearsal
<b>Thrust stage</b>	A type of theater in which the audience is seated on three sides of the stage*
<b>Traps</b>	Removable areas of the stage floor that allow access to the area underneath the stage*
<b>Traveler</b>	A curtain that can open to the sides of the stage*
<b>Wings</b>	The right and left sides of the backstage area*
<b>Worklights</b>	Lights used for general illumination of the stage when not in performance

**The End**