

STAGE MANAGING AT WSU SPA

A practical guide for the Stage Manager

Every stage management job is going to be different. Different theatres have different criteria for Stage Managers, as do different directors. And even more importantly, you should develop your own system of stage managing. This handbook is designed as a guide to what stage managers at Wichita State are expected to do and it will lay a solid foundation for stage managing outside of The University.

I. Pre-rehearsal

Once you have been asked to stage manage a production, there are several jobs you must accomplish before rehearsals begin.

A. Get a hold of a script and become familiar with it. You will be the one people will come to with questions about the show. What is the play about? How many male and female characters are there? You should be prepared to answer almost any question asked about the play.

B. Talk to the director. If you do not know the director, introduce yourself. If you have never stage managed before, let the director know -- you may be able to get some helpful hints. Talk about how rehearsals should be run, and find out what the director expects from you. Learning about each other and your working habits before rehearsals begin will allow you both to work more effectively and efficiently with each other.

C. Once the play is cast, make sure all the cast members have scripts. Also make sure the following have copies of scripts:

1. Yourself
2. Costume Designer
3. Set Designer
4. Lighting Designer
5. Sound Designer
6. Property Master
7. Technical Director

II. The Prompt Script

This is a separate section unto its own self because the prompt script is

THE MOST IMPORTANT thing you will do for any production.

The prompt script should be clearly documented and include as much information about the production as possible. You will be running the rehearsals and the performances from this book, as well as providing information about rehearsals and performances, and the progress of the production to anyone who needs it. Someone else should be able to come in, pick up the prompt script, and be able to run the show from your information.

Prompt script will include:

A. The script with blocking notation. During rehearsals you will follow along in the script and take notes on where the actors move and when. Everyone has a different method of taking blocking notes. Use whatever method is easiest for you. There may be some old prompt scripts in the Production Office. Or find other Stage Management handbooks for examples. A good handbook is Lawrence Stern's *Stage Management*. Also look Online at [Stage Managers Do Make Coffee](#)

B. All the cues and their placement in the script. Cues should include the Warning, Standby and Go for all light, sound, special effects, music, and any other cues used in the production.

C. Rehearsal Schedules. Always keep extra schedules in you prompt script for actors who tend to lose things.

D. Any plots. Plots include:

1. Prop lists. You should make up a prop list as well as the Property Master. When more than one person makes a list, there is less of a chance of forgetting something. Keep all the lists in a section in your prompt script.

2. Entrances and exits of actors. Sometimes this plot isn't used, but it can be helpful in making up rehearsal schedules. You have at your fingertips a list of who is on stage at what time so you do not have to keep flipping through the script.
3. Shift plots tell you who must do what during a shift.
4. Set sketches, costumes plots, lighting plots and sound plots are all difficult things to get a hold of. If you can get a copy of them, you should include them in your book.

E. Rehearsal and Performance reports (discussed later).

F. Checklists of everything that needs to be done before, during, and after performances (discussed later).

G. Contact sheet. Your book should contain a cast and crew list with their address and telephone numbers so you can contact any one at any given time. This should also be copied and distributed.

H. Master Calendar. The master calendar includes:

- a. The first rehearsal
- b. Deadlines for memorization
- c. Deadline for rehearsal props
- d. Publicity photo calls
- e. First rehearsal with musicians
- f. Deadline for final props
- g. Deadline for completing the sound
- h. No-actor tech/all set changes
- i. Technical rehearsals
- j. Dress rehearsals
- k. Invitational dress/preview
- l. Opening night
- m. All performances
- n. Closing night and strike
- o. All other uses of the stage

I. Pronunciation guides. If you are doing a show with any difficult words in it, put a pronunciation guide in the back of your script.

III. Rehearsals

Aside from the tech rehearsals, this is probably your busiest period of the production. During the rehearsal process, you can make a big difference in a production. You are responsible for making the rehearsals run smoothly and efficiently with minimal interruptions. When everything runs smoothly, the cast ultimately has more time to rehearse, which in turn leads to a better performance. There are several things to accomplish during rehearsals.

A. Before the Rehearsal. You should arrive about 20-30 minutes before the rest of the cast. The amount of time needed before rehearsals depends on how much you need to accomplish before the rehearsal begins. Before each rehearsal, you should:

1. Turn on all the lights. In Wilner, the house and work lights can be turned on from stage right. In Welsbacher, there are several light switches on the Booth wall.
2. Set the stage. You should simulate a set using chairs and anything else you can find so the actors can work on a "set." Measure out where the walls are, where the furniture will be, etc. and spike the stage. Use your imagination in "creating the set" and explain to the cast what each piece represents.
3. You are responsible for keeping the cast on time. Tell cast members that they are responsible for telling you if they are going to be late or absent. If cast members are late, you should call and remind them. Talk to them and find out why they are late. Maybe there is a problem with the rehearsal time. If cast members are continually late, something will need to be done.
4. You will also want to touch base with the costumer to see if any cast members are needed for fittings during rehearsal.

B. The Rehearsal. During the rehearsal, there are several things that need to be done. This is where the Stage Manager's ability to do several things at once comes in! Such duties include:

1. Taking down blocking notes. This job is most important in the first few rehearsals. Neither directors nor actors can remember where they are supposed to be for the first few days, so your blocking must be accurate and complete so you can remind people. No doubt, the director will change a lot of the blocking during the course of the rehearsals, so use pencil that is easy to erase so you can make the appropriate changes in your script.

2. Prompting. Once the actors start to go off book, you need to follow the script very closely during the rehearsal so you can give them their lines as soon as they ask for it. This is part of your job of managing time. If you have to find their line, you are wasting everyone's time.
3. Line notes. There are several ways to take line notes. Some people just put a light check mark in their scripts next to the lines that the actors miss or paraphrase, then copy the line notes to hand out at the next rehearsal. Others like to copy the lines notes during the rehearsal and hand them out at the end of rehearsal. Use whichever works better for you.
4. Timing rehearsals. This is an easy, but nonetheless important job. As soon as you can, start timing scenes and acts. This is important because many people need to know approximately how long the show will run, and you are the one who can tell people. It is also useful for the director to know so they can schedule rehearsals and they know about how much they can accomplish during each rehearsal.
5. Bring several extra pencils to rehearsals. Someone is always forgetting a pencil, and you can save time by having some ready.

C. After the Rehearsal. After each rehearsal, there are a few things that need to be done. If you ask the cast to help, the work can get done faster and you can go home sooner. This includes:

1. Post rehearsal cleanup. There is a list at the end of this guide that tells you what is expected of you in terms of cleanup.
2. Rehearsal reports. These are infinitely helpful for you. During or after the rehearsal, fill out a rehearsal report stating what happened during the rehearsal. Rehearsal reports will include the date, cast members absent or late and a reason, scenes that were blocked or run, number of times the scenes were run and the running time, delays and causes in delays in rehearsal, failure to run scheduled scenes, and any costume, prop, or set information that should be passed along. By filling out the rehearsal reports, all this information is readily available for future use.
3. Rehearsal schedules. Whenever the director announces a new rehearsal schedule, it is good to write a note to all cast members and send it to them so they have a written record of the schedule.

D. Production Meetings. Production meetings are for everyone on the production staff to get together and discuss their problems and progresses. This is a good chance for the designer to let the director how the designs are coming, etc. For mainstage productions, the Production Technical Director will facilitate weekly production meetings. In the event of their absence, the Stage Manager will facilitate the meeting.

IV. Technical Rehearsals

The technical rehearsals will probably be the most trying time of the whole production process. This is the time when everyone is tired and their patience is dangerously thin. You must try to manipulate the rehearsals in such a way that everyone involved can make the most of the rehearsals.

One of the most important parts of your job now is to be aware of exactly what is going on at all times. Sometimes, tech rehearsals involve a lot of waiting for things to happen.

ALWAYS be aware of what you are waiting for. Many times everyone thinks they are waiting for someone else, and as a result, valuable time is lost. Manage the rehearsal time wisely. If you feel you are waiting unnecessarily for something that can easily be done later, speak up. Make sure the rehearsal can run as efficiently as possible. Your other primary job during tech rehearsals is to run the technical aspects of the show. By now the actors should know what they are doing. However, actors sometimes still want your undivided attention. Be firm and explain to the actors that unless it is an emergency they should leave you alone. If you have an Assistant Stage Manager, they should voice their concerns to the ASM.

Treat tech rehearsals as you would a performance. Do as many duties as you can as if you were in a performance situation. This gives you the practice and allows you to perform your duties in a more professional manner.

V. Performances

If everything has gone all right so far, the performances will be a lot of fun. In order to prepare for the performance, there are several things you must do.

A. Have checklists made up of everything you need to do before, during, and after a performance and place it in your prompt script so you know exactly what you need to do in order to prepare yourself for a smooth run of a show. No matter how good a memory you have, always make a list of everything you need to do, in the order they are done in, because eventually you will forget something. Another reason for doing this is, in the event of your absence (like if something happens and you end up in the hospital or morgue), someone can come in, read your lists and run the show. It is an unlikely occurrence, but nonetheless, a possible one. These lists include the prop preset, set and costume presets, and everything you need to do before the show begins.

B. Arrive at least fifteen minutes before the cast call. Turn on all the lights in the theatre and the makeup and dressing rooms.

C. Make sure everything is ready. This sounds easier than it is. Check all your plots and make sure the set is in the right place, all the props are where they should be, and all the dimmers work. These things should also be done by the prop master and light board operator, but you must make the final check. You will also want to sweep the stage and make sure everything is basically clean.

D. Talk with the House Manager. The House Manager will arrive about 30 minutes prior to the opening of the house. There are several things you should discuss with the House Manager.

1. The House Manager is directly responsible to the Stage Manager. Set up a means of communication so the House Manager can inform you on the front-of-house operations. The House Manager should be able to inform you when the house is in and the show can begin. At Lawrence, it is customary to hold the show for the audience. Try not to hold the show for more than five minutes. If it is necessary to hold the house longer, you are responsible for informing the audience of the delay

2. You should inform the House Manager when it is all right to let late comers in.

3. The house will be opened 30 minutes prior to the start of the show. Tell the House Manager *in person* when it is all right to open the house. Make sure the actors have had the opportunity to inspect their props, and no one else needs to go out on stage before you let the House Manager open the house.

E. Cast Calls. The cast should arrive before the half hour call. Many will arrive sooner to give themselves plenty of time to get into makeup and costume. Post a sign-in sheet where everyone will see it, and have cast and crew initial themselves in so you know at a glance who is and who isn't there. It is also a good idea to have personal contact with everyone in your cast and crew to make sure they are there.

You WILL give the cast four calls before the show:

"Half hour, please."

"Fifteen minutes, please." Move this to Tech Rehearsals

"Five minutes, please."

"Places, please."

(Notice, the "please" at the end of each call - it helps maintain respect and friendliness.) Repeat each call two or three times, and personally make sure everyone in the cast and crew heard the call. That way, everyone is aware of how much time they have left, and no one has to hurry.

"Places" should be called two minutes before the curtain rises (or the lights go up), to give everyone time to get on stage.

F. Calling the show. Call all the cues clearly. When calling cues, the last thing you say should be "GO." That way you can warn the operator that the cue is about to be called, and the cue can be executed exactly where it should be. For example, a cue would be called "Light Cue 3.....GO" at which point the cue would be executed. Do not use the word "GO" for any other reason than calling a cue. This insures that no cues will be executed accidentally.

G. Supervision of shifts. This is a very important responsibility. Never use yourself in a scene shift so you are free to take care of anything that goes wrong. A shift plot is very helpful. You will make the shift plots on a computer so it is easier to make changes in them. The shift plot should include:

1. Where to enter the stage from.

2. Order number on which to travel.

3. Set pieces or props to be carried on and where it should be placed.

4. Set pieces or props to be struck and their final destination.

5. Where to exit.

6. Whom a shifter is working with if more than one person is to carry a piece.

H. Timing the show. As you do in rehearsal, time the show as well. Shows rarely run the same time each night, so you want to time the show to see if the cast is slowing down too much, etc.

I. Performance Reports. Just as in rehearsal, you want to keep a record of each performance. The performance report allows you to keep notes in case something goes wrong so you can fix it later. It also gives you a check-off list so you know everyone is there and you have seen them. The director may not be able to make it to a performance, and the performance report allows you to recap the performance for the director.

J. Maintaining sets, props, and costumes. Usually in the short run of our productions, nothing happens to the set, props, or costumes. But occasionally something will break, rip, or have something wrong with it. It is your responsibility to keep a check on these items and make sure any necessary repairs are made before the next performance -- whether you do the repair yourself or inform someone else if there is time.

VI. POST PERFORMANCE

Your duties will extend past strike. Your duties include:

A. Strike. Every cast and crew member must participate in strike in order to receive participation credit for classes or scholarships. Even if someone is not in a class or on scholarship, they are expected to stay and help with strike unless they have made prior arrangements. Once strike is finished, you must have every one sign out from strike. Strike is not over until the Technical Director Calls it finished.

B. Make sure everything you borrowed for the production is returned on time. It may not be your personal responsibility to take the borrowed item to its owner, but make sure whoever is responsible for returning items does return them.

VII. GENERAL NOTES

-Stage managers are responsible for making the production run smoothly on stage and off in rehearsal, performance, and post performance phases. **This is your primary responsibility.**

-Think ahead. One of the greatest contributions to performance quality is making the most of every minute between first reading and final curtain. Anticipate issues before they become problems.

-You are responsible for maintaining harmony within the cast and crew. Do not let personality conflicts enter into the workplace. If someone is creating problems, talk to them after rehearsal. Create an environment in which everyone can work efficiently.

-Keep your personal problems at home. Come to work with the resolve to stay happy.

-Be organized and efficient. Be punctual and dependable.

VIII. POST REHEARSAL CLEANUP

One of your responsibilities after rehearsal and performance, as well as after strike, is to make sure the theatre is neat. Before you leave the theatre each night, you must go through the theatre and check the following:

-The light board is turned off

-Sound equipment is turned off

-All amplifiers are turned off

-All properties and set pieces are struck and locked

-All personal property is removed

-All house lights are turned off

-All work lights are turned off

-The ghost lights are turned on

-Theatre doors are locked

-Dressing rooms are cleaned and secured

My 10 Golden Rules of Stage Management by Carissa Dollar **(Stage Managers do Make Coffee.)**

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