

DIRECTING



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Foreword

There is a common belief that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become a master of anything. Why is it then that so many training programs spend most of their semester discussing theory and limiting workshop experience to practice mastery? In David Mammet's book on acting True and False he says "knowing the history of boxing does not make you a better boxer. Just like knowing the history of acting won't make you a better actor. If you want to get better, get in the ring and box." While this statement is insensitive to artists who have dedicated their lives to the study of their craft, there is a lot of truth to the statement. Directing, writing, acting, design and all forms of theatre require experience and application for improvement.

When you begin this process you are going to be bad. This is not a negative thing. Everyone starts off being bad at the beginning, the true key is learning from your failures and possessing a drive to get better. In the arts you have to do your best work and then put it in front of an audience and see if your ideas succeed. Often they will not but that does not mean that the idea was wrong, it might just be missing an element. The only way to learn is by doing and if you have a mindset that is based on improvement you will never fail, only learn. In the process of doing you will learn staging and story principles, how to work and communicate with people, and hopefully what works or does not work by watching the art of your peers.

I am not saying that you should not learn performance theories and history. Talking about theory is most helpful once you have developed your process and are looking to expand your understanding of the art. It also helps if you know why something works rather than just the fact that it works.

There are many necessary skills you will need regardless of the show in order to successfully complete a project. There are many books and approaches to directing, every director has a unique, beautiful, and effective approach to producing a production. Yet many textbooks about directing are theoretical rather than practical and spend most of their time teaching you how to approach a project rather than actually staging it. This is a tremendous problem for many new director's since they are often hired or placed in that position with little to no experience and have to 'fake' their way through the process of mounting their first few productions.

Staging a production is stressful and nothing can fully prepare you for it. Nothing ever goes according to plan and you often find yourself barely staying above the obstacles you encounter and often test your patience to its breaking point. Staging a production is the largest and most daunting of tasks for young or new directors and this book is designed to give you the tools you need to begin developing your own process.

If you are reading this you are a collaborative partner interested in creating stories that entertain your community and inspire positive change. I have directed over one hundred productions to date and still learn or relearn lessons every show. In addition I teach multiple courses on directing each year and needed a helpful guide that would not increase the financial burden on those wishing to pursue a life in the arts. The life of the artist is already hard enough and buying additional texts takes away from the tight budgets most artists and students are forced to live under. Many of the lessons in this book are stolen from all of the amazing directors, writers, teachers, and artists I have had the pleasure of working with and are compiled so that upcoming artists can carry that knowledge into the future.

Please view this book as a source of knowledge but know that every director you meet both good and bad you will learn from. Your journey is never over and the goal of any artist should be to take the lessons of the past, learn from your own experience, and transform your understanding into a unique approach that will change the future of the artform. This is my gift to you as you are the future. Best of luck on your journey.

Sincerely,

Nick Garcia

Licensing

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1: WHAT IS A DIRECTOR?

1.1: Introduction

1.2: The Directing Process

1.3: Script Selection

1.1: Introduction

If you were to sit with ten directors and ask them that question you would receive ten different answers. That is because each director develops a system based on their experiences crafting and producing plays. Since every individual is different and each artist that a director is forced to work with has different ways of working and communicating, then it is obvious that each director would develop a system/perspective/ideology that would respond to those experiences and allow them to be successful. While those experiences would vary in approach and perspective there are several common factors that will be found in all approaches.

A Director is a leader. The director is the glue holding together the production and is the central hub of communication between all of the elements that make up a production. A director does not always need a plan (although it helps) nor do they need to be the most knowledgeable person in the space. However, they must be an effective communicator and have skills in developing trusting relationships with those they work with. A Director needs to be able to have an idea of what they want, but be open to letting the artists you are working with help shape that idea. As a director you are going to work with difficult people, artists are often difficult, but all people want to be treated with respect and dignity and feel like their ideas have value. If you wish to be a director you will need to be good at dealing with different personality types, you will need to be good at listening, and you will have to get good at both negotiating and compromise.

A Director is patient yet demanding. I realize that statement seems like a contradiction but it is not. A Director demands each participant brings their best work, creates a game plan for success, and is constantly working to improve. Yet, as a director you will quickly find that all of the plans you have made are not possible, or that an actor is late, a designer is behind, or those supplies you desperately needed will not come in time for the show. It is at these moments where you must be patient. You must learn to deal with failure in a positive way. Obstacles force us to be creative and live in the moment and creativity is maximized when living in the moment. Remember when you are in stressful situations that you can turn any loss into a win with the right perspective. Furthermore, you do not need to solve every problem by yourself. You have a collection of brilliant minds by your side that also want your project to be successful. Your creative team can help solve these problems.

A director must believe in the project. I cannot stress this enough. Ernest Hemmingway said, "Writing is easy, you just sit at the typewriter and bleed." Directing a show is no different. As a director you are taking a part of yourself, your dreams, your perspective, and in a way your soul and planting it into the show. The show has to be important to you, otherwise why would you spend so much time, effort, blood, sweat, and tears into it? You will be investing six weeks or more into this project. You will also be asking others to invest six or more weeks of their lives in this project and support your vision. You have to believe that the messages held in the show will inspire both your audience and those in the show as well. When you believe in what you are doing, you gain support, determination, and provide the building blocks of success. Most of the things we have in our lives are only held together and are only possible as a result of belief.

Finally a director should know (though they sometimes do not) dramatic structure and basic staging principals. This is one of the major purposes of creating the book. Technique can be taught and you have to get practice in actually directing and staging if you are ever going to be good.

1.2: The Directing Process

1. Staging Lessons (you should always be working on to sharpen skills)
2. Assemble your Creative Team
3. Determine your Budget, Venue, and Target Audience
4. Select your Script
5. Research
6. Determine your Theme and Vision
7. Create a Ground Plan
8. Give Research and Ground Plan to your Creative Team
9. Plot Breakdown, Beat Breakdown, Script Analysis
10. Design Meetings
11. Casting
12. Rehearsal
 - a. Read Through, Design Presentations
 - b. Script Analysis/ Text Work with cast
 - c. Blocking
 - d. Stumble Throughs
 - e. Scene Work
 - f. Run Throughs
 - g. Tech
 - h. Open
13. Give over control of your show to your Stage Manager
14. Move on to your next project

1.3: Script Selection

When you have the luxury of choosing the script

The ability to select a script is a luxury often only afforded to those at the top of their careers or those at the bottom. At the height of your career everyone wants you to direct and you get to choose which scripts to invest your time. On the other hand when you are starting out or starting over you are afforded the luxury of script selection often while starting a theater company or when the company you work with does not yet have a planned season.

In the situations where you are at the height of your career you will not need this book and will already have a well developed process allowing you to choose a project that speaks to your soul at that moment in your life. Because this situation is far down the road we will not explore it.

When you are starting a company or working with a company that is just beginning, you will need to carefully select a script that will maximize your chances of success. Ask yourself these questions: What actors do we have, how many are there, and what can they play? What is our budget? Where are we performing? And most importantly who is our target audience?

What actors do we have, how many are there, and what can they play? No matter what, you need to make sure you have a play that you can do an amazing rendition of. You do not want your play to be mediocre. Look at the talent you have and find a play that showcases and capitalizes on their talents. If the show is good the audience will come back, if it is not you will lose them forever. One of the secrets to a good production is the acting. If you have really good actors you will not need much more in terms of costuming, lights, props, or sound, in order for the audience to be entertained and captivated. Dynamic performers have the ability to transport your audience to another world and every actor has this ability, but you must find a show that works with the group you have.

What is our budget? New companies have little to no money so budget is a tremendous factor in play selection. Luckily you have several options. A standard performance fee for a published play is a around \$100 per performance and musicals are about five times that amount depending on the venue. This means you will need to sell at least enough tickets to pay for the performance rights of each show. However, if you have not created an audience base then you can look at classical plays that are in the public domain which are free to perform or you can write your own work.

Where are we performing? Ask yourself what space you have available. Does the company own a space? If not, what spaces can you afford? You can look at theaters, ask landlords of vacant buildings, or apply for permits to perform at public parks. A good director can direct in any space. That being said, producing a play is hard enough as it is and you will want to choose a play that will be easily staged in the space available.

Who is our target audience? Your target audience is your ideal audience member. This is broken into age, race, gender, and social class. You need to know this because this will dictate not only the show you select but who you cast, how you design, and how much you can charge for tickets. I will go over this in detail in the preparation chapter.

You want to select a play that you can easily cast, is cost effective, fits your production space, and is something your target audience will be excited to see. Choose a show that you think will be easy, because believe me shows are NEVER easy and you want to give yourself every chance to reduce stress for the road ahead.

When you have the privilege of directing a show that is selected for you

There will be many times in your career where you will be hired to direct a show that you did not choose. In those instances, remind yourself that it is a privilege to work on your craft and serve others. Also remember that specific show was selected because it is perfect for the target audience of that theater and you were hired because of your perspective and artistic talent. Once you are hired and are informed of the show you will be directing, read it. Read it again. And read it again until you fall in love with the play and find how you connect with the play and the play's themes.

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2: PREPARATION

- 2.1: Creating a Vision
- 2.2: Target Audience
- 2.3: Finding the Theme
- 2.4: Venue/Space
- 2.5: Ground Plan
- 2.6: Research

2.1: Creating a Vision

The concept of 'a vision', is flawed. I say that it is flawed because we attribute 'vision' to a singular viewpoint and a leader guides us on the path towards this 'vision'. This is never the case in theater. A production is a combination or fusion of many perspectives, ideas, and artforms all working together to create something new. What you really have is a strong idea and sense of what you want the play to feel like, look like, and how it should be perceived. As an artist you will always read a play and see a vague movie version of the show in your head. Sometimes a great idea can really stand out but the more rigid you are in your 'vision' the more you shut out the creativity of those around you and the spirit of theater is lost.

I am not saying you should not have strong ideas, I am only suggesting that you realize that they are just ideas, and you as the leader need to give your team the freedom to contribute their artistic talents to the production. Come in with ideas and think of your ideas as planter boxes that each designer, actor, participant, can grow and shape into the garden that will become the show. The stronger your ideas are in the beginning and the clearer you can communicate these ideas in the beginning of the process, the more cohesive your overall show will be.

You will however, need to make sure that all of the ideas your team begins working on are cohesive and work to serve the overall story. Think of yourself as an editor and use your communication skills to help guide your team to a cohesive shared vision.

2.2: Target Audience

The Target Audience is the foundation of any vision for a production. The Target Audience is the ideal spectator, the person who buys the ticket, the person you most want to inspire. Every show, theater company, and product caters to a very specific Target Audience. Target Audience is broken into four areas and it is the combination of the areas that will focus your decisions and guide you towards success. The areas of Target Audience are as follows: Age, Race, Gender, and Social Class

Age

The age of your Audience is crucial to determining which plays to select, what jokes to allow, which themes to highlight, and how you will market the production. You want to have the age range be within a ten year window. For example 20-30 year olds or an audience comprised of people 40-50 years of age. Shows geared to audiences younger than 20 years of age need to be even more specific because the jokes and values that will resonate with a 7-10 year old audience will feel contrived, boring, and stale to a 12-17 year old audience. People develop different interests and values as they age and your play needs to reflect these values in content and presentation in order to resonate.

A show will change dramatically in response to its Target Audience. Let's look at Romeo and Juliet. If you are producing the show for 18-28 year olds you will have to edit the production to a runtime of around 90 to 120 minutes. Your Target Audience is used to digesting stories that hold their attention for that long and as soon as you get close to a two hour run time they begin getting restless and anything longer they begin losing interest. This is very important because it does not matter how good your show is if the audience is disengaging from it. The reputation of your theater or show will be "it's good but it's long." That compliment will hurt your ticket sales.

Another way Age range would affect a production is in who you cast and what themes you highlight. Your audience wants to see themselves in the characters and be taken on a journey that leaves them feeling transformed. Romeo and Juliet are teenagers in the play and if you have a young audience those actors had better look young or be teenagers. If however your audience is 20-30s you would have 20 year olds in the respective roles. Audiences 50s and up would cast 30 and 40 year olds in the roles and with those casting changes the themes of the material alter.

Race

Race plays a large factor in productions, especially if you are performing for a specific culture. Each culture has values, traditions, and experiences they hold sacred and it is your duty as an artist to make sure your Target Audience's culture is accurately represented and treated with dignity and respect. If you are not a member of this culture you will need to do research and invite community leaders and members to teach you about the beauty of their culture and ask them to be consultants along the way. You will also need to make sure that you cast actors from this community so that the culture sees themselves represented on the stage. Each culture also views the world through a different lens and you will see material you thought you were familiar with open up in new and exciting ways. When producing a show outside of your direct culture you must be humble and approach the community with respect, humility, and an openness to learn.

One example is when I directed a production of Fences by August Wilson. I looked within my department and knew I had the talent and actors to produce an incredible production of the show. I did however, have fears that because I am Latino and not African-American, that I could offend not only the students in my department that I have worked so hard to develop relationships with, but also my community. Once I cast the show, I met with the group for our first rehearsal. The first thing that I said at the meeting was "This is an incredible show and I have the best cast I could possibly ask for. Each of you were chosen because of your talent and work ethic and I know we are going to have a great show. One thing I hated in school was when someone who was not part of my culture would lecture me and teach me about my culture. I am not going to do that, I know how that feels. I also know that I am not African-American. I do however, have deep love for your culture and in textbooks growing up I didn't get to learn about heroes from my culture. I did however learn about some of your heroes and those were the leaders that inspired me to be who I am. I am not going to pretend that I know your culture, but I do know how to put on a good play. If you can, please teach me about your culture and I will help you put on this show that celebrates your culture, you, and our community and together I think we will be unstoppable. "

Our production of Fences sold out every night and was invited to the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival as a

regional semifinalist production. The week before we left for the festival we performed the show a final time for our community and it was standing room only. Community members were in tears of how proud they were of our students and years later people still talk about the show. At the festival the production received two standing ovations and the cast and crew held each other backstage following the show and cried for over 45 minutes and told each other how much each person was loved. The experience was transformative for me, my students, our program, and our community only because we all worked together and the goal was to honor the culture we were performing for.

Gender

I know this may sound controversial, but men and women often value different things. This is not always the case and there are always exceptions. However, when you are looking at your show you will need to be aware of your target audience's gender so you can highlight the themes that gender typically responds to.

Let us look at how companies sell vacuums. A vacuum cleaner commercial aimed towards women typically goes something like this: A mother walks into her home and discovers her clueless and messy family have once again destroyed the house. The mother must help clean the mess, but the problem is the husband and children are not only messy but their stupidity constantly leads them to the brink of death. The product enters to aid the mother in her quest to save family and home. The product tells mothers, "we know your struggle, and we've got your back."

A vacuum commercial aimed at men typically goes something like this: A monochromatic room (resembling a garage) is beautifully lit with a spotlight on a vacuum whose mechanical elements are exposed by plexiglass and whose colored components are vibrant shades found only in sports cars. A beautiful woman enters and uses the vacuum easily. Then the product's power is discussed through a CGI demonstration where the motor pulls apart and the internal mechanics are exposed and are then put back together.

I know that these examples can be frustrating because they rely on heavy gender stereotypes, but advertisers use them because they work. If you are staging Romeo and Juliet for men you will focus on male scenes of brotherhood and loyalty, redemption, and probably extend the fight sequences. Whereas if your Target Audience is women you would focus more on the scenes with strong personal relationships, and focus on the tragedy of these two people fighting the universe to be together. Again, this area is important in how you focus your production, but you have to be specific and know your Target Audience.

Social Class

This area is important not only in how you highlight content, but because it will determine your ticket prices. You want to charge enough so that you cover your expenses and that your audience feels they are purchasing something of value, but not so high that people cannot afford to attend your production. First ask yourself what social class is your show perfect for. Then set your prices to be competitive with the other items vying for that demographics attention. A social class that is used to paying \$50-\$100 for tickets to see a Broadway production, the symphony, or the ballet will expect ticket prices for a show of value to be higher. However, a social class that seldom attends live events and regularly sees movies will expect a two hour storytelling experience to be cost competitive with the cinema.

Exercises for identifying Target Audience

Books

- Choose two books. Identify the target audience for each.
- Look at the Name, Age, Race, Gender, and social class of the main character. The audience needs to see themselves as the main character.
- What world is the main character leaving and what world are they entering on their hero's journey.
- Write out and justify each choice. Then share your findings with another person and see if he/she agrees. If not discuss and see if you can find a Target Audience that you both agree on.

Movies

- Choose two movies. Identify the target audience for each.

- Look at the Name, Age, Race, Gender, and social class of the main character. The audience needs to see themselves as the main character.
- What world is the main character leaving and what world are they entering on their hero's journey.
- Look at the art direction, marketing, themes, and see if your choices align with the movies artistic decisions.
- Write out and justify each choice. Then share your findings with another person and see if he/she agrees. If not discuss and see if you can find a Target Audience that you both agree on.
- Commercials
- Choose two movies. Identify the target audience for each.
- Look at the Name, Age, Race, Gender, and social class of the main character. The audience needs to see themselves as the main character.
- What world is the main character leaving and what world are they entering on their hero's journey.
- Look at the art direction, marketing, themes, and see if your choices align with the movies artistic decisions.
- Why does the company think this Target Audience needs this product?
- Write out and justify each choice. Then share your findings with another person and see if he/she agrees. If not discuss and see if you can find a Target Audience that you both agree on.

How do I find a Target Audience for my project?

- Ask your theater what the target audience or demographic their theater appeals to?
- Ask your theater company what Target Audience you want your theater to cater to? Think for the next 30 years who do we want our audience members to be?
- Look at the play you are directing and ask yourself who would be most interested in seeing this show?

2.3: Finding the Theme

The theme is the heartbeat, soul, or central message of the story. More importantly, the theme is the message that you want your audience to absorb through seeing your show and then carry that message with them forever. You want the audience to feel as though they have figured the message out for themselves, because now the audience has a vested interest and partnership with the production. You do not want to hammer the message into the audience. As soon as the audience feels that your production is becoming 'preachy' the audience will disengage and you might as well end the show.

The theme is also the inspiration and motivation for you to do the show. Every play has thousands of potential themes. The theme you select is what makes your production unique, because that theme is a part of you and something sacred and true that you know deep within has to be shared with the world. The theme you select should be short, simple, and powerful. Think of the theme as the motto or slogan of your production. The message should be so inspiring that people would want it tattooed onto their bodies.

In order to find a theme that you connect with, you have to read the show multiple times. It helps when the theme is clear before you get started, but there will also be times where the true theme emerges through the rehearsal process. You will know when you find your theme because it will inspire you and give the production a purpose higher than merely entertaining your audience.

Things to ask yourself while finding the theme:

- What is this play about?
- What is this play about to me?
- Why does my audience need to see this play?
- What is the message from this play that I most need to hear?
- What character should the audience identify most with and what is the greatest lesson learned by that character?
- What is the line that keeps getting stuck in my head?

Activities for finding Theme

Books

- Choose a book, graphic novel, or short story you really enjoy. First look at the main character's transformation and ask yourself "what lesson did the character learn that allowed this transformation to be possible?" Write down your answer/s.
- At a critical point in the journey when the character wanted to give up, what advice were they given? Write the advice down.
- What are lines or passages from the book that stood out and made you think about them for several days? What passages did you find yourself quoting and incorporating in your everyday life? Write your answers down.
- Ask others who have read the book, why they enjoyed the book. Ask them what lessons from the book they applied to their life. Ask them what they believe the theme of the book was. Write each answer down.
- Once you have gone through each of these look at the themes and lessons garnered from the book. Which lesson appears to be the most profound and resonating? One lesson will jump out more than the others. Highlight the answer and see if it can be simplified.

Movies

- Choose a film you really enjoy. First look at the main character's transformation and ask yourself "what lesson did the character learn that allowed this transformation to be possible?" Write down your answer/s.
- Typically in a film the theme is stated early in the setup. The theme is stated within the first ten minutes, however the hero is not ready at that point in the journey/life to understand the theme's meaning and depth. It is only through the course of the film and the hero's transformation that the hero can truly understand the theme.
- At a critical point in the journey when the character wanted to give up, what advice were they given? Write the advice down.
- What are lines or passages from the film that stood out and made you think about them for several days? What lines did you find yourself quoting and incorporating in your everyday life? Was there a line that kept being repeated throughout the film? Write your answers down.

- Ask others who have seen the film, why they enjoyed the film. Ask them what lessons they applied to their life. Ask them what they believe the theme of the film was. Write each answer down.
- Once you have gone through each of these look at the themes and lessons garnered from the film. Which lesson appears to be the most profound and resonating? One lesson will jump out more than the others. Highlight the answer and see if it can be simplified.

2.4: Venue/Space

Early in the process of directing you need to determine what your performance space will be. Until you make this decision you will not be able to get designs for your show, you will not be able to create a ground plan and you will not be able plan blocking or staging. There are 3 common types of performance space configurations and each offers advantages and disadvantages. Every theater is different and some theaters have truly unique configurations but if you can learn to stage in the three most common configurations you will have the experience and knowledge to stage in any location. The differences between configurations is all about how the audience is positioned around the stage. The 3 types of performance space configurations are Proscenium, Thrust, and Round.

Proscenium

A proscenium stage is most common in schools, community venues, and large theaters. The proscenium stage has the audience directly in front of the stage and usually has a large proscenium arch that frames the stage and makes it resemble a large picture or television screen. When producing a show in a proscenium theater all of the theatrical elements are larger than life. This is the type of space that lends itself more towards spectacle. These spaces are perfect for musicals or shows with large elaborate sets. Because these spaces are very large your acting and movements will also need to be exaggerated in order to fill the space. If actors were to perform in a realistic fashion the performance would appear flat or like the actors do not care. Your advantages in the space are that you can capitalize on spectacle and stage pictures. Your disadvantages are that plays with deep characterization and nuance can often lose their power.

Thrust

A thrust stage is where the audience surrounds the stage on 3 sides. The actors and performance extend into the audience and it provides a more immersive theatrical experience than that of a proscenium theater. Thrust stages are most common in regional theaters and some schools but can also be configured in smaller spaces. You will likely spend most of your professional career directing in thrust and the round. You retain some degree of spectacle yet the theaters are usually smaller and what you lose in spectacle you gain in refined acting performances. In staging a play within a thrust space you will need to adjust your blocking so that everyone in the audience can see the play free from obstructions. You can achieve this by moving to a different side of the stage each night to watch rehearsals as the director. This will allow you to experience the show and blocking the way your audience will. Every thrust stage will have entrances and walkways for audience members to get to their seats. These entrances and walkways are usually on diagonal lines and you will want to utilize the diagonals for blocking in order to open up the stage so that every audience member has a good view of the action happening on the stage.

Round

Theater in the round is where the audience completely surrounds the performance space. This type of performance space eliminates backdrops and flats and now your set is suggested through small and unobstructive furniture pieces and flooring. This type of performance space will be hard to create stage pictures, but the audience will feel like they are part of the show. The acting in theatre of the round has to be fantastic because there are far less elements to distract the audience and the focus of the audience is not on spectacle but on story and acting. In this space you will need to have your actors cross the stage often and utilize the entrances and walkways of the space to create optimal sightlines.

2.5: Ground Plan

A ground plan is an aerial view of the stage that outlines the basic set pieces that the actors will interact with. You can create this before your meeting with your set designer or during the meeting, but you should emerge from your meeting with an agreed upon structure to the set. The ground plan will later be taped out onto the stage with spike tape by your stage manager and you will place chairs, tables, and acting blocks to represent specific set pieces.

Your ground plan is an initial road map in which you will base your staging. You will not get a lot of rehearsal time with your set and often will need to rehearse in a completely different location and so your ground plan allows you to reproduce an approximate set for your rehearsals. Remember that no matter how much you plan or how accurate your measurements, your blocking will need to adjust once your actors begin working with the actual set, so plan time to refine blocking in your schedule.

Activities for creating a ground plan

Exercise 1

- Grab a piece of paper and a pencil.
- Grab a play and choose one scene from the play.
- Identify the primary location in which scenes take place. Then Identify the base or primary elements needed to suggest this location. For example, two chairs can represent a car, airplane seats, a park bench, etc.
- Draw a diagram of your stage and mark where your audience is sitting.
- Place each base element on the diagram and see if you like the way it looks. Does it provide the image you are trying to convey? Can every audience member see the action if it were staged in that area? Is there another way you can place the object that could enhance the imagery?
- Finalize your ground plan and share it with a friend and get feedback.
- Edit changes discovered through the feedback session.

Exercise 2

- Grab a piece of paper and a pencil.
- Read any play and identify the primary locations in which scenes take place.
- Identify the base or primary elements needed to suggest each location. For example, a chair can represent a throne, a horse or chariot, a ledge, etc.
- Decide if you want to have all of the settings represented on the stage at once or use scene transitions and have only one setting visible at a time. A stationary set allows for quick and fluid scene transitions, but is limiting on ambiance. Full scene transitions allow the setting to be more elaborate, but they take time and slow down the show.
- Draw a diagram of your stage and mark where your audience is sitting.
- Place each item on the diagram and see if you like the way it looks. Does it provide the image you are trying to convey? Can every audience member see the action if it were staged in that area? Is there another way you can place the object that could enhance the imagery?
- Finalize your ground plan and share it with a friend and get feedback.
- Edit changes discovered through the feedback session.

2.6: Research

In all honesty, I am unsure how to approach this issue. Every director has a unique process and the amount of research you do depends on the project and your individual process. On one hand, researching the history of the time period of the play, the playwright, and issues explored within the play helps you make informed choices and allows you to expand your knowledge of the human experience which are both very beneficial. In addition, in educational theater you want each play to teach your students about their history and culture and to that end research can be very beneficial.

On the other hand, most of the research you do will not be put to use and can often detract from other work that can actually help your production. Often artists feel inadequate and are worried that their show will not be good and research gives them something to do that takes their mind off of the stress and allows them to discuss ideas with their friends. However, this type of research is more about impressing others than actually accomplishing what you were paid to do. Spend your time planning how to successfully produce your show, formulate blocking, budget expenses, or volunteer and help your designers. This work will actually pay off and help you become a better director and leader. Unless the research you do helps you get into a creative zone or informs your creative choices, I do not feel it is necessary and can be counter productive. I know my theater teachers from the past (and probably your theater teachers) will disagree and will hate what I just told you.

Ultimately the research you do will help you the most in unifying the vision and direction of your design team. When you are researching create a folder for each designer. As you come across looks, sounds, designs that you like, place them in the folder for the designer that needs that information so that it can help guide them on their research. Once you have all of your information give it your designers and explain what you like about each component in the folder.

3: BREAKING DOWN THE SCRIPT

3.1: Scenes vs. French Scenes

3.2: Dissecting the Plot

3.3: Developing Design Ideas and Mood

3.1: Scenes vs. French Scenes

Breaking your script up helps you focus on the content of each scene, each character's immediate objective, and determine what each scene is ultimately about. Upon your initial read of the play you determined your theme and know the overall story. Breaking up the script allows you to delve into the scene and find out where the specific scene fits into the overall narrative and how to make each scene climactic. You want each scene to be an event and the plot and pace of each scene should build and lead to a climax which ends the scene. You can break scenes up into two different ways.

Scenes

A scene is a particular section of the show that the playwright has selected and labeled. In a scene characters will enter a location and each will struggle to get what he or she wants. Once enough tension builds a character will make a choice that either succeeds allowing them to achieve their objective or fails and complicates the situation. When you break a play into scenes you are focusing on the scenes objective and how it fits into the overall plot. You need to be aware of pacing and how each character adds tension not only to the circumstances of the scene but also the main character's plight.

While studying the scene look for big moments or shifts where something happens or is revealed and mark them in the script. Make sure to write down what you want the audience take from the scene. Finally make sure you get a strong sense of how the scene should build tension and create a successful climax that you can build off of in the next scene. Make sure that you do not make the tension so great that it upstages the actual climax of your show.

French Scenes

A French scene begins and ends when a new character either leaves or enters a scene. This is a very beneficial tool in understanding characters and in helping your actors. Breaking a scene into a french scene allows your actors to think about which characters are in the scene with them and determine how much of the character's objective would be shared in that situation. Human beings alter their behavior depending on the people they are with, why would a character be any different?

Breaking up scenes into french scenes also allows you to build small climaxes within character relationships. If two characters are attracted to each other and are finally alone, a french scene can help you make the most out of the limited interaction those characters will have before another character walks in.

3.2: Dissecting the Plot

Every play is different and every new playwright is not only developing their voice, but also trying to break the rules. However, human beings have been telling stories since before we ever developed written language. Stories are how histories were passed down, how life lessons were learned, and how we found our place in society. There is a wonderful book called [The Storytelling Animal](#) by Jonathan Gottschall and in the book he talks about how human beings have evolved around story. We wake up and eat breakfast and read stories either on the phone, on the cereal box, or watch them on the television. We then go to school or work and listen to information that if it told in story form we remember more easily. On breaks we see our friends and tell them about the stories of our day. We then go home and watch stories on the television, phone, or read stories. Finally, we go to sleep and dream in stories. Every part of our existence is tied to stories. Religion is just a story large groups of people feel is so important it has become sacred. Because stories are the vehicle of communication with our species and as a theater artist you are a storyteller, it is a good idea to understand how a story is constructed.

Stories have been around for centuries and throughout that time the structure of storytelling has become solidified. There are always attempts to break the form and some are done quite well, but if you just follow the structure and deliver a strong and well crafted story your audience will be receptive and happy. Each story has essential components and below I will briefly outline them. These elements will be explored in more depth in the playwriting section of the book.

Essential components of a story:

- Opening Image
- Set up / Prologue / Exposition
- Catalyst or Inciting Incident
- Debate
- Decision
- Fun and Games or New World
- Midpoint
- Bad Guys Close In or Tensions Rise
- All is Lost
- Dark Night of the Soul
- Finale
- Denouement or Resolution
- Final Image

Opening Image

Every single story is about a transformation. Blake Snyder describes this beautifully in his book [Save the Cat](#). He says “Every play is about the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly.” Every story is also a hero's journey. We are introduced to a hero who like us is trapped in circumstances they cannot control. Yet this hero has a goal and in order to achieve that goal they will be met with many obstacles. It is watching this character overcome the obstacles that transforms not only the hero but the audience. The opening image is where the story shows us the main character in the beginning or caterpillar stage of their journey. This is important because the opening image and final image are things your audience will remember the most. It is the contrast of these two images that tell the story.

Setup/Prologue/Exposition

Every story has to have certain elements in the beginning in order for your audience to understand and follow the plot. In the set up you have to establish the setting or time and location, introduce the main characters, set up the rules of the world, and establish what a normal day is like in the main characters world.

Catalyst/Inciting Incident

The inciting incident or catalyst is the thing that happens that causes everything else to happen. This is the event that will

introduce the conflict of the story. This can be a character being introduced, an event occurring, or something as small as a letter being dropped off. This is the plot device that disrupts normal life and sets the plot in motion. There is usually a call to action following the catalyst.

Debate

Once the Catalyst or Inciting Incident has occurred the Hero contemplates taking the journey to confront the problem. This contemplation is usually a discussion with a friend or mentor, but can also be a soliloquy.

Decision

The Hero does not always make the decision to go on a journey to confront the problem. This is plot point where the decision is made. The Hero either decides to confront the problem and take the journey or the villain/circumstances make the decision for the hero.

Fun and Games/ New World

The main character begins the journey to confront the problem and this forces the character to enter a new world. The new world is the antithesis of the previous world and all of the rules from the previous world are broken. The section is called 'fun and games' by some writers but this does not necessarily mean that the world the character is entering is fun. The fun comes from the exploration of the world. Your main character is clueless to the rules of this world, as is your audience, and both will discover the world together.

Midpoint

The midpoint of the play is where the main character has adequately explored the new world and has unlocked a piece of hidden potential. This event usually manifests itself into a 'false victory' or 'false defeat.' This means that the character has a minor confrontation with a character and through the confrontation learns a new skill. This confrontation can either be a victory or defeat, but it is labeled as 'false' because there is much more to learn and the final confrontation is yet to come. Immediately following the midpoint is the intermission.

Bad Guys Close In/ Tensions Rise

Following the victory or defeat at the midpoint the Antagonist becomes aware of the hero and adds pressure. If the hero is part of a team, the team begins to struggle and fall apart.

All is lost

This is a major defeat at the hands of the antagonist causing the team to fracture and destroys the heroes confidence. This can be the perceived loss of the goal, a character dying, something being lost, etc.

Dark Night of the Soul

This is the part of the story where the Hero contemplates giving up. As the Hero decides whether or not to continue, he or she is offered guidance by a sidekick or mentor and through this conversation the hero finally understands the deeper meaning of the theme. At the end of the scene, the hero decides to meet the antagonist in a final confrontation.

Finale

The finale is the strongest point of conflict where the hero and antagonist collide. The more the hero has struggled throughout the journey, the more the audience has anticipated this confrontation, so make sure to capitalize on this by increasing the heroes struggles leading up to this point.

Climax

The climax is the highest point of tension. Tension is created when we are anticipating an event but it has yet to occur. This is the moment where you extend the anticipation of victory or defeat, because once the event occurs it becomes part of the resolution and the audience will begin the process of disengaging from the performance and reconnecting with their lives.

Denouement / Falling Action / Resolution

Denouement means to unravel or unknot. The plot has been building tension and tying knots in the audiences stomachs and denouement is where the story receives closure and the knots are untied. In the Denouement the conflict is resolved, the hero is either victorious or fails, life returns to as normal as possible for the characters following the events of the plot, and the audience begins to internalize the themes and knowledge gained from the story. This should not take too long, and do get 'precious' or sentimental with the subject matter.

Closing Image

This is our final moment or image of the character as the transformed butterfly. This image should be powerful and will be the image your audience will carry with them out of the theater.

3.3: Developing Design Ideas and Mood

The first time you read a script you will see images in your head as you read. These images are your initial interpretation of the script. You will unconsciously cast the roles, see a setting, and visualize the production. It is important to note that this is an interpretation of the script, but only one of many interpretations. Each participant involved in the production will have a unique interpretation that they create and this interpretation is a result of each person's experiences, aesthetic, and interests. Your job as the director is to give guidance to your team and unify your team's interpretations so that each element of the play looks as though it belongs in the same world.

Every designer is a visual person, and sees the world in a different way than you or I. For example if you are talking to a costume designer and you describe a person or character by their traits, passions, personality, and social class they will translate each of those items into color, line, texture, and fabric. For example: A carefree spirit will be clothed in fabric that is draped, soft in texture and will have very few straight lines. The social class determines what fabrics to choose and how to age them. Hobbies introduce styles, logos, and textures. The list goes on and on.

When speaking with your designers it is best to bring visual aids for ideas that you have. Research the looks, colors, lighting, pictures that you see when you read the play and convey what you would like to see on the stage. The clearer your visual aids are the more focused your designers can be.

Your goal is to give your team a shared vision and clear parameters so that each artist can contribute to the creation of the project and the project as a whole can remain cohesive. People need and want boundaries in order to hone their creative choices. If you do not give guidance your team will make their own decisions and if you change those decisions or have them redo them, they will resent you, because it was your job to guide them in the direction you had envisioned.

4: PREPARING FOR DESIGN MEETINGS

4.1: Set Design

4.2: Costume and Makeup Design

4.3: Sound Design

4.4: Lighting Design

4.5: Properties Design

4.1: Set Design

Your set design is going to be one of the most important decisions made. It will inform your blocking, create an atmosphere for your production, and is the first thing your audience will see when they enter the space. Your set design will set your audience's expectations and help transport them into the world of the play. You want to make sure that your set has levels so that you can create dynamic stage pictures, you want the color palette to compliment the mood of the production, and you want your set to offer insights into the character's world.

Give your designer a copy of the play in advance of the meeting. Once you meet explain the theme you have selected and then show the designer your research photos. Talk with them and discuss the way each of you see the set and its role in the production. Look at all of your designers as collaborators and equal voices in the creation of the imaginary world of the play.

How to prepare for your meeting

- First read the play and write down all of the locations in which scenes take place.
- See if your budget or space will allow for set changes and see if you want to have a stationary set, or if you would like a set change for each location.
- Research and see if there were productions of the show in the past that had elements you liked. If so save them, if not discard them and find examples from anywhere (magazines, comics, art, film/tv, etc.) that you do like.
- Research and find pictures for each setting. Find multiple options and make sure in your meeting with the set designer to communicate what you like about each picture and how you think it might be incorporated into the set design.
- Make sure your pictures are of the same style and feel, or be specific with your designer about which style you want them to emulate or take inspiration from.
- Let them know their budget

4.2: Costume and Makeup Design

Costumes and make up are arguably the most essential design elements of a play. In fact, many productions you will direct will only require costumes and make up and can be done without a set, props, or sound. Costuming is a difficult job and requires an extraordinary amount of time, resources, and patience. Make sure you go over each character, how many costumes each will have, and the budget before hand. Also know that there will need to be multiple fittings, alterations, as well as a costume parade along the process.

Costume Designers not only spend countless hours building costumes, they also spend many hours selecting costume options from their storage. Make sure each and every cast member is respectful and ON TIME for their costume fittings. Costume Designers have spent hours creating and selecting garments and when an actor shows up late or disregards an appointment, it disrespects the effort and contributions of one of the most important collaborators on the production.

How to prepare for your meeting

- Read the play and write down all of the characters, which scenes the characters are in, and how many costume changes each character will have in the play.
- Write down the words you would associate with each character and how you would like them represented. Also look at the journey or transformation each character makes throughout the show and see if there is any way that transformation can be reflected in the costuming.
- Research and see if there were productions of the show in the past that had elements you liked. If so save them, if not discard them and find examples from anywhere (magazines, comics, art, film/tv, etc.) that you do like.
- Research and find pictures for each character's costume inspiration. Find multiple options and make sure in your meeting with the costume designer to communicate what you like about each picture and how you think it might be incorporated into the overall design.
- Make sure your pictures are of the same style and feel, or be specific with your designer about which style you want them to emulate or take inspiration from.
- Let them know their budget

4.3: Sound Design

The music you choose for your production gets your audience in the mood of the play from the time they enter, to the time the production begins. When choosing music for your pre show you want to make sure that the music creates an atmosphere that compliments the theme, style, and pace of your production.

One huge storytelling aid is the music you choose to play during scene transitions. The song you select needs to fit the overall style you have chosen for the production. In addition, the song needs to capture the feeling and mood of the previous scene and then naturally transition in tempo to the feeling and mood of the next scene. Think of the scene transition music as a way of harnessing the audiences collective attention and energy and seamlessly guiding it into the next scene.

Consequently your final song of the evening, that ends the show and leads you into curtain call, should highlight the final moment of the play and then transition to something inspiring and uplifting. You want your final moments of the show to resonate with your audience and be powerful yet guide them to a positive curtain call full of energy.

How to prepare for your meeting

- Read the play and write down the list of sound effects. Then write down all of the scene transitions and look at how each scene emotional ends and begins. Write them down.
- Look at the styles and inspiration choices you have collected for your other meetings. What music style lends itself to be cohesive with these style choices? You want to make sure that all of your music is from the same style or your production will appear scattered and unfocused. You also do not want to be so consumed with finding music that reflects your theme that you sacrifice the mood and overall cohesion of the sound design for lyrical content. Find ideas and trust your sound designer.
- Find examples of music you really like and make sure to bring it to the meeting.
- Remember that your sound designer experiences storytelling through mood, beat, tempo, rhythm, and pace. The more examples you are able to give, the more focused the design.
- Let them know their budget

4.4: Lighting Design

Your lighting designer is a very special collaborator and what makes them unique is that like a great improvisational actor their artistry responds to the choices you and the production team makes. You will typically meet your designer in the beginning of the process to describe your ideas, and then later in the rehearsal process your lighting designer will sit in on run throughs to see how the production has been staged, understand the space, and create a plan to highlight the production. In the preparation of your meeting, make sure to give your lighting designer the information you gave your costume and set designer, in addition to pictures of specific lighting images you find inspirational. Your lighting designer will need to pick gels that compliment and do not work against the color palette of the production so it is imperative that you keep them informed.

Lighting enhances the set, can hide errors, or you can transport audiences to completely new locations just with lighting. A Lighting Designer will understand color, angle, shadow, and color mixing on a very deep level and it is important to give them as much information as you can about the stylistic choices your creative team will be making.

How to prepare for your meeting

- Read the play and write down the list of specific moments you want dramatic lighting to be featured.
- Look at the styles and inspiration choices you have collected for your other meetings. What is the overall feel and look you would like for your production? Think of the lighting in a similar way that colorists use filters in film editing. The lighting will provide depth, texture, and the gels will create an overall aesthetic to the piece. Comedies are usually more colorful and have brighter lights, while dramas tend to be darker and rely on lights to create mood.
- Find examples of pictures or images you really like and make sure to bring it to the meeting. Explain where you want the image of the picture to be reflected in the play.
- Let them know their budget

4.5: Properties Design

Props are important not only to the final production of the show, but also in the rehearsal process. Often scripts will contain a prop list. The prop lists attached with scripts are often deceptive and if you only follow that list you will spend lots of time and money creating props you do not need and missing others you discovered you will need throughout the rehearsal process. Every show has essential props, these are the props that are absolutely necessary to the story. Create a list of these props and get them as soon as possible. The sooner your actors can work with the props the less problems you will have down the line. Food props are essential props. I cannot count the number of times I have watched an actor pretend to eat something in a scene and then almost choke when food is later introduced. Actors often forget all of the necessary biological components of eating and when those components can no longer be ignored, trouble occurs.

You are going to need two sets of props: Rehearsal props and final props. Rehearsal props are stand in props that often bare little to no resemblance to the actual prop itself. These are placeholders used while the final prop is being created, purchased, or found and is a tool to get the actor used to moving with a prop in hand. Once the final prop is ready, introduce it into rehearsals. Make sure to have the actors claim and take responsibility for the props they use.

The Properties Designer should receive updates from rehearsals each night so that they know which props are needed and which props can be discarded. Make this person an intricate, respected, and constant part of the production.

How to prepare for your meeting

- Read the play and write down the list of all of the essential props needed for the production. Essential props are the props that, if removed would severely damage the story. Remember that food props should fit into this category.
- Look at the styles and inspiration choices you have collected for your other meetings. How should these props look and feel? Make sure that the prop designer is aware of all of the choices the other designers are making so that the props fit the time period, style, and color palette.
- Find examples of pictures or images you really like of similar props and make sure to bring it to the meeting.
- Let them know their budget

5: BUDGETING

5.1: Budget

5.2: Sample Budget

5.1: Budget

Budgeting is one of the most important and contentious issues in creating theater. All theater companies are broke and are looking to produce the show for as cheap as possible. You are going to need to look at all of the production needs and see what you can afford. Every production is different and there are always creative ways to save money. Things to keep in mind while creating your budget

Production Rights

Production rights are non negotiable and are absolutely necessary. You are using someone else's work in order to make money and you need to pay them in order to use their creation. Production rights for a non musical are approximately \$100 per performance for published plays. You will also need to purchase copies of the play for all members of the cast as well as designers and stage managers. Published plays carry name recognition, have been audience tested, have had successful productions at multiple theaters, and have a story you respond to.

Musicals are roughly \$200-\$500 per performance and you also have to rent the scripts which cost roughly \$100 per script. You will also need to account for stipends for a musical director, accompanist, and any orchestra members.

New Plays or plays held in the public domain are free to produce with no production rights fees. If you are doing a new play get a contract in writing where the playwright agrees to allow you to produce their work free of charge in order to workshop the script.

Venue Cost

How much does the space you wish to use cost to rent? Sometimes the space is owned by the company and is free for you to use. This is ideal since you can divert this savings to other areas of the production. Some venues will allow you to use the space in exchange for a portion of the proceeds.

If the venue you like is too expensive then you will need to get creative. Look around and see if there are vacant buildings in the area or if anyone you know owns a small business and would either rent the space to you or volunteer the space as a donation for the duration of the show.

If every building is out of your budget look to city parks and contact the city to see what is needed in order to hold a public event. If you need a permit then investigate the costs.

Set

The set establishes the atmosphere of your production and assists in the staging of the story. Plays can either have large and elaborate sets or can also be staged with minimal set pieces. I always try to train directors to develop the skills necessary to stage a production with as little as necessary. The good news is that you can stage most plays with a couple of acting blocks, chairs, and tables. However, the more minimal your theatrical elements, the more impressive your acting has to be.

Create a budget where you allow for supplies and a designer stipend. Your designer will hopefully be connected with other theaters, designers, and technical directors and can often borrow items from other venues.

When creating a budget for your set design you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- What set elements does your play require?
- Can you pull set pieces from storage or have them donated or will they need to be purchased?
- Can you afford a set designer?

Costumes

Costumes are vital to production and can be very expensive. The more modern the setting the easier you show will be to costume. If your play takes place in modern times and the age ranges of the characters match your cast you can cut costs by having cast members bring their own clothes. If you can afford a costume designer you will have to provide a stipend. Know that if the stipend is small the designer will select costumes from storage and there will be little to no construction, however your costume designer is also connected with designers and theaters around the area and can borrow from other venues or artists.

When creating a budget for your costume design you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- Can I afford a Costume Designer?
- What time period is the play set and can I cut costs by altering the time period without sacrificing the story?
- What specialized costumes does the play require?
- Can I pull costume pieces from storage or have them donated or will they need to be purchased?

Props

Props are the hand held items used by the actors. Read the play and determine which props are absolutely necessary in the story. Get rid of all of the others. Most props listed in the prop list of scripts are not necessary and will only drain your budget. See if you can get a props master or designer and if your budget is small, you can ask your cast to help create the props. You will need to get rehearsal props as soon as possible and throughout the process if actors need additional props they can bring them in and/or you can inform your prop designer if you have one. You will have 2 sets of props. Rehearsal props and show props. Rehearsal props are durable place holders that actors can experiment with and not damage or destroy. Show props are detailed art pieces that aid in the story telling.

When creating a budget for your costume design you need to ask yourself the following questions:

- Can I afford a Props Designer?
- What are the props essential to the story?
- What specialized props does the play require?
- Can I pull props from storage or have them donated or will they need to be purchased?

Marketing Materials

Producing a play is expensive and exhausting and it is all in vain if you have no audience to share it with. You will need posters, flyers, a social media presence, and word of mouth. First find someone you know to help you design a dynamic poster that appeals to your Target Audience. Next, go to a local print shop and see how much printed posters and flyers will cost. Look at your budget and then analyze your target audience. Where does your target audience hang out when not at plays. Target those areas and purchase enough materials to market to those areas. Have each member of the cast and crew promote the production on social media and promote the play by word of mouth. The process does not need to be expensive and sometimes your creative team can come up with incredible ideas for promoting your show. Use your teams ideas.

Programs

You will need and want to make sure that each individual who has contributed to the production receives recognition for their contributions. Create and order programs for each patron buying a ticket. In planning your budget go to the local print shop and inquire how much printing will cost. Factor in the printing and plan to print for a full house each performance night.

Stipends

See if your budget will allow you to compensate your team for their time. Do research by contacting local theaters and asking what a typical artist stipend is for the area. See if you can afford to provide a stipend competitive to what other theaters offer for similar services.

5.2: Sample Budget

Expenses

Production Rights.....# of performances x \$100..... \$

Venue Rental.....# of weeks (including tech)..... \$

Set.....Supplies/Construction/Stipend)..... \$

Costumes.....Construction/Rental/Stipend)..... \$

Props.....Supplies/Construction/Stipend)..... \$

Lighting Designer.....Supplies/Stipend..... \$

Marketing Materials.....Design/Supplies/Distribution..... \$

Programs/Tickets.....Supplies..... \$

Stipends.....Cast/Crew..... \$

Subtotal 1

Revenue

Ticket Sales.....# of seats x ticket price..... \$

Donations..... \$

Subtotal 2

Subtotal 2 - Subtotal 1= Grand Total

6: CASTING

6.1: Selecting a Stage Manager

6.2: Auditions

6.3: Callbacks

6.1: Selecting a Stage Manager

Selecting a stage manager is one of the most important decisions you will make. The stage manager is your go to person who not only manages the cast and crew, but who will take over and run the show after opening. A good stage manager is organized, responsible, can handle pressure, and has excellent people skills. Like all good managers, a stage manager should know how to communicate with others and be able to navigate different personality types without threatening or becoming a tyrant. Stage management is the hardest and most thankless job in theater, so make sure your stage manager receives support and respect.

6.2: Auditions

Auditions are the interviews of the entertainment world. Usually in auditions actors will come and present material of their choosing and you will hopefully get a sense of the actor's talent when working on a piece they are interested in. Do not cast solely off of auditions. Auditions can be deceptive and an actor could have spent years refining an audition piece and may not be near as good in performing your material. Auditions are similar to a screening process. When an actor comes on stage and introduces themselves you get a sense of who they are and what kind of person they will be in rehearsals. When watching auditions, write each actors name down and next to their name write what characters they could possibly play in your production. During the actual monologues you get a sense of how they perform. At the end of auditions thank everyone who attended and create a callback list where you will invite several actors for each role to audition again using sides from the actual script of your production.

6.3: Callbacks

Callbacks are where the real casting happens. Callbacks allow you to see in real time how actors listen to each other, take direction, and make creative choices. Print off scenes for each character and pair up actors to see how they interact and the choices they make. If an actor is good with various people not only are they talented, but they are able to listen and collaborate well with others. Try to see as many different pairings as possible and your goal should be to see which actors make the boldest choices, listen and collaborate, and take direction. Once you have a good sense of the actors talent and skills, cast the most central character first and base your other casting decisions off of that choice. Always cast work ethic over talent, since talented people are often the laziest and most averse to critiques. Remember hard work always beats talent.

7: LESSONS IN STAGING

- 7.1: Staging/Blocking/Technique
- 7.2: Lesson 1- Parts of the Stage
- 7.3: Lesson 2- Positions of Actors
- 7.4: Lesson 3- Levels
- 7.5: Lesson 4- Dynamics of Space and Building Tension
- 7.6: Lesson 5- Staging to Music
- 7.7: Lesson 6- Creating Areas of Power or Establishing Psychological Spaces
- 7.8: Lesson 7- Crosses and Transitions
- 7.9: Lesson 8- Composition/ Stage Pictures
- 7.10: Lesson 9- Creating a World with Movement
- 7.11: Lesson 10- Soundscapes
- 7.12: Lesson 11- Dreamscapes
- 7.13: Lesson 12- Dramatic Loops
- 7.14: Lesson 13- Staging in Different Venues

7.1: Staging/Blocking/Technique

The playwright tells the story through the dialogue they have written. Designers tell the story through color, line, texture, and materials. Actors tell the story through emotion. The director tells the story visually through movement and stage pictures. When staging a show the more experience you have with staging, the more effective your show can be. There are many lessons that can be gained from staging exercises and this is where your true training lies. This is your gym. Learn as much as you can and stage as much as you can, so that you can hone and improve your skills. The majority of the scenes in your training will be silent and that is because you need to understand and experience how much of storytelling in non verbal and that is the contribution you give to the production. Each lesson builds off of the others and you are expected to utilize all of the previous knowledge gained from prior lessons and apply it to the next exercise. Each of these exercises will take roughly one class period but as you work through them you will develop leadership and communication skills, workshop ideas, and learn from the artists around you. When you are a director lead and listen and when you are an actor, TAKE DIRECTION. Do not try to direct a scene if you are not the director, model the behavior a good actor.

7.2: Lesson 1- Parts of the Stage

The director and the actors have a different perception regarding directions or orientation. Right and left have different meanings based on where you stand and since the director and actors are facing each other, and the perspectives are so different a language needed to be developed so that directors and actors could communicate efficiently while discussing blocking. The areas of the stage are from the actors perspective, while facing the audience. Upstage is the direction moving away from the audience and Downstage is moving closer towards the audience. A long time ago theaters had their seating on the largest area with a flat floor and the stage was raked so that all audience members could see. In those days as an actor moved away from the audience they would literally walk up the stage and when they moved towards the audience they would walk down the stage. When working with your actors and as you train remember to go over the areas of the stage so that everyone is able to communicate and understand your direction. Never assume people have the same shared knowledge (Figure 7.2.1).

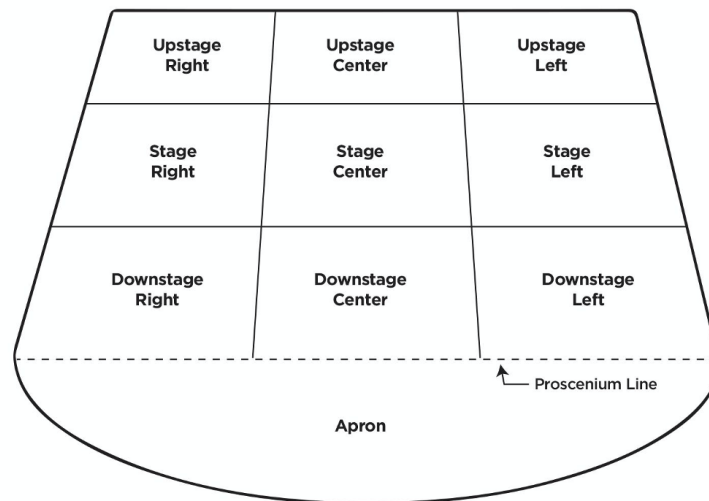


Figure 7.2.1: Stage

Hierarchy of Focus

Each area of the stage will draw the audience's attention and give one actor more significance just by where he or she is standing. By knowing each area's power of focus you can highlight certain moments or characters visually.

Downstage center (Figure 7.2.2) will always draw the most focus because that position is centered visually on the stage and the actor is closest to the audience. All of the elements on the stage frame the actor and if someone or something is staged in that area it will always draw focus.

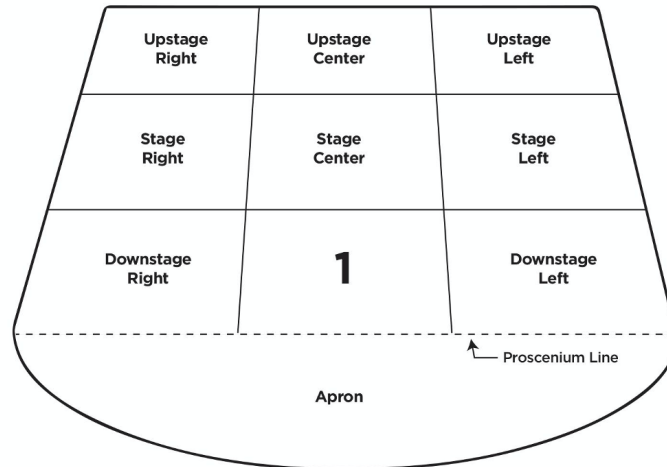


Figure 7.2.2: Downstage center

If you remove the actor or object from downstage center the next area the audience will look is Center Stage (Figure 7.2.3). Not only is the actor center stage, the objects or people in the downstage locations create a visual triangle that draws the audience's eye to its apex which is Center Stage.

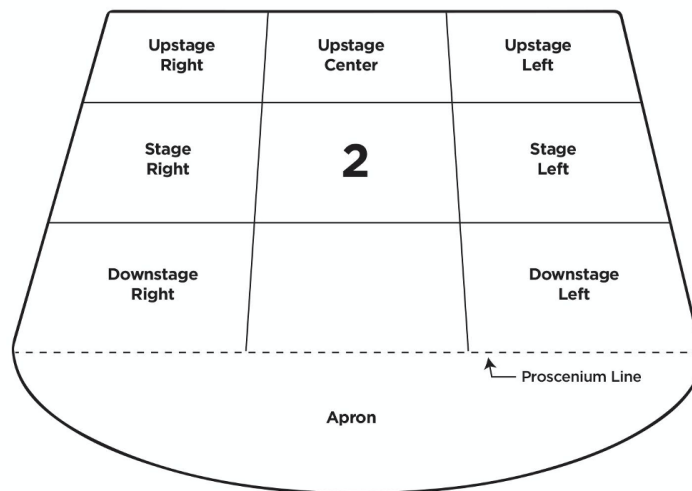


Figure 7.2.3: Center Stage

If you remove both Downstage Center and Center Stage positions, the focus is then awarded to Downstage Right. Upstage Center is so far removed from the audience that the audience will focus on the actors or objects closer to them in proximity. Downstage Right draws more focus for western audiences because those audiences are used to reading from left to right. Because we are used to absorbing information in this fashion the audience will naturally move to focus on information coming from their left, which is Downstage Right (Figure 7.2.4).

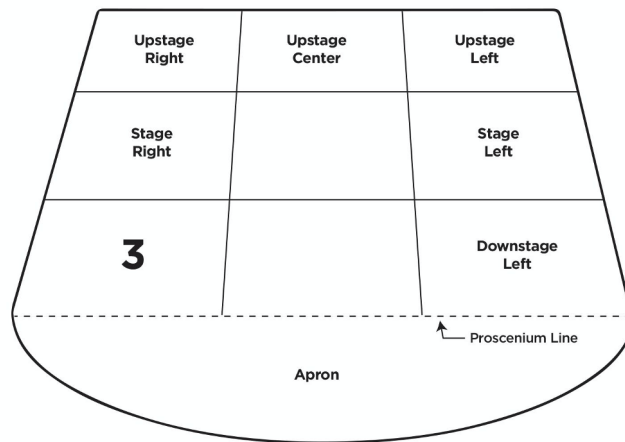


Figure 7.2.4: Downstage Right

Once you remove Downstage right your eyes will automatically move to Downstage Left. The entire stage is creating a triangle whose apex is Downstage Left (Figure 7.2.5).

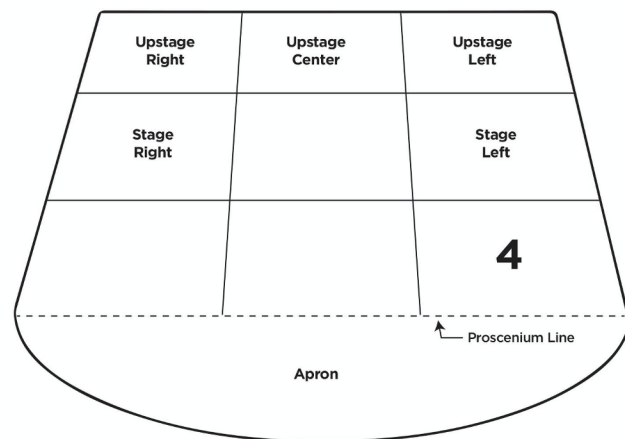


Figure 7.2.5: Downstage Right

Once all of the downstage areas have been removed then your eyes return to Upstage Center (Figure 7.2.6) which again becomes the apex of the triangle on stage.

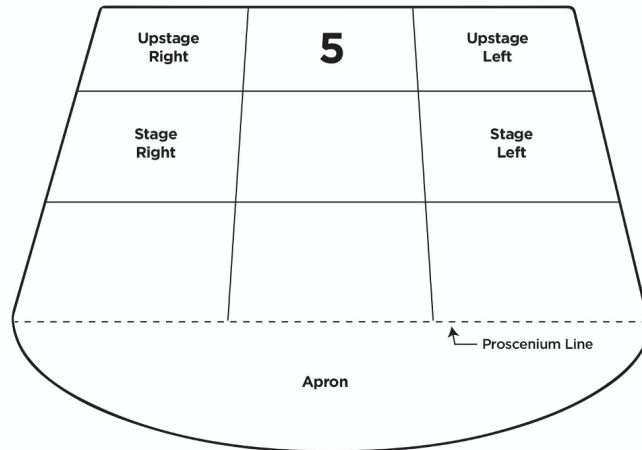


Figure 7.2.6: Upstage Center

After the removal of all downstage and center stage areas your focus will move from left to right and prioritize proximity (Figure 7.2.7).

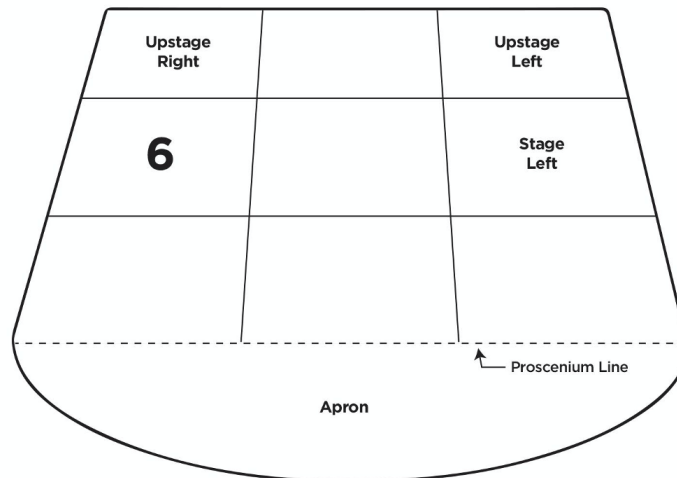


Figure 7.2.7: Stage Right

Stage left (Figure 7.2.8) is the apex of the visual triangle on stage and draws your focus.

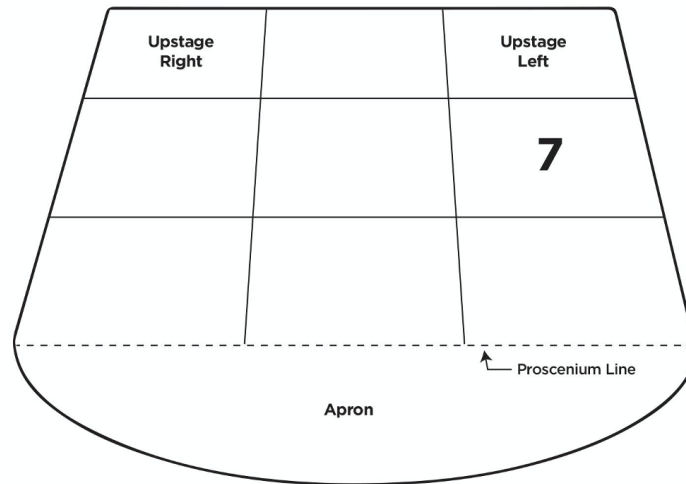


Figure 7.2.8: Stage Left

Upstage Right (Figure 7.2.9) and Upstage Left are the two weakest positions on the stage. Both are highly removed from the audience, yet between the two Upstage Right will always draw focus for western audiences because we read from left to right.

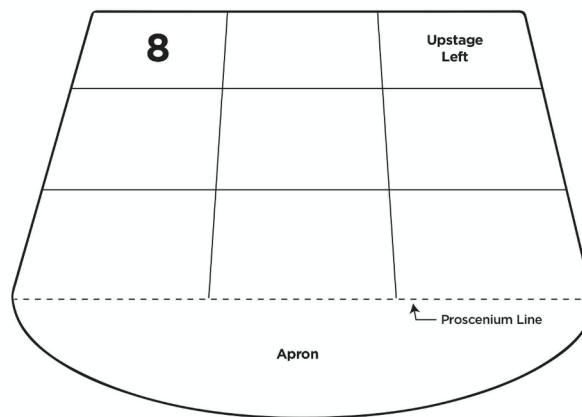


Figure 7.2.9: Upstage Right

Upstage Left (Figure 7.2.10) is the weakest position on the stage. If you wish to minimize a character or object's significance place them this position. It is important to note that an actors stance and posture can sometimes override these positions.

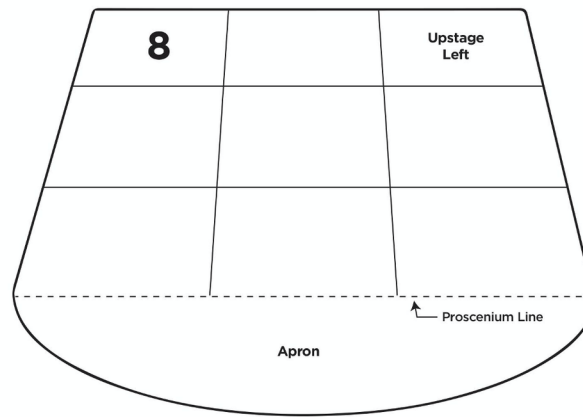


Figure 7.2.10: Upstage Left

Staging Exercise 1

- Create a silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end where a character either gains or loses status.
- Use the areas of focus on the stage and see if you can find instances where posture, stance, or action can draw focus and override the natural hierarchy of focus.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- Create a scene where someone in the scene is upstage, downstage, or centerstage the entire scene. You have to justify each movement and as someone moves to a new position, another character must shift to keep the balance.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.3: Lesson 2- Positions of Actors

Life on stage is a representation of real life, yet because it has a stationary audience some rules of real life do not apply to staged life. In addition, when an actor stands on the stage they are conveying information and story to the audience. Think of body positions as a way of telling the story. The more of the actor that can be seen by the audience, the more information or story the audience receives. Stage positions that are open to the audience provide information regarding dialogue and response while stage positions that are closed off from the audience reveal information based on action.

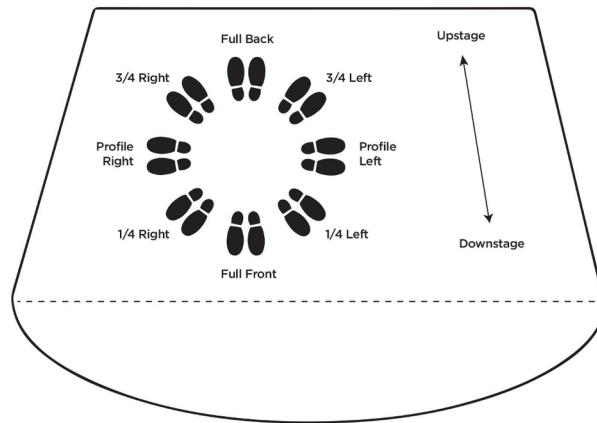


Figure 7.3.1: Position of Actors

Full Front

When the actor is facing the audience this position is called full front. This position is used for directly addressing the audience or to create a visual image that will help the audience understand a specific part of the story. Full Front is presentational in nature and engages the audience on the characters journey, but because the theater utilizes the 'fourth wall', when a character faces the audience it suggests to the audience that no other character on the stage is privy to the information being offered. This is the strongest of the positions for drawing focus because it demands the audience's full attention.

¼ Left or ¼ Right

When an actor's feet are turned ¼ right or left of the audience it gives the appearance of social interaction or engagement with the action happening on stage. This position is the most commonly used because it offers the appearance of interaction while also allowing the audience to see ¾ of the actor and thus we are able to see how the character responds to the situations happening on stage. This is also the primary staging position for dialogue between characters. This is the second strongest position for drawing focus because the actor is still open to the audience while focusing on the action within the scene.

Profile

When an actor's feet are parallel with the audience and only one side or profile of the actors body can be seen from the audience the actor is in the profile position. This position is used in crosses and while delivering secret information. Although conversations in real life happen in profile, if you stage a dialogue in profile it will appear flat and the audience will wish to see more of the characters responses to the conversation. Remember to think of body positions as a storytelling tool. This is the third strongest position because the audience is receiving half of the characters experience and information.

$\frac{3}{4}$ Left or $\frac{3}{4}$ Right

When an actor's feet are turned $\frac{3}{4}$ away from the audience, the audience is only able to see $\frac{1}{4}$ of the actor's face and $\frac{3}{4}$ of his or her back. This can be used to indicate secrecy, establish a location, or used to convey information. If for example you have two actors crossing from Downstage Right to Upstage Left and one of the characters reaches out to place his/her arm around the other actor and then abandons the impulse before making physical contact, the audience will understand that character has romantic feelings for the other character, yet is afraid to pursue them. By using the $\frac{3}{4}$ position the audience is able to see information not known by the other character on stage because the action happened behind his or her back. This is the fourth strongest position for drawing focus since the audience receives very little in terms of character experience, but can be very beneficial in terms of delivering information.

Full Back

Full back is when the actor is facing the same direction as the audience and all the audience can see is the actor's back. This is the weakest position in terms of character information and is often used to completely remove the focus from that character. However, full back can also be a very effective staging position. It can be used as a way for characters to exit a scene without having them leave the stage. It can be used as a way for the audience to see a situation from the characters perspective allowing the audience themselves to become the character.

It can also be used to provide very specific information to the audience. My favorite example of this is a scene I saw years ago that was a conversation in the living room staged exclusively in full back. As the conversation progressed the characters began talking about murders that were happening in the area. Finally, at one point in the conversation both characters were sitting on the couch and one character reached behind to put their arm around the other character, yet as the character moved his arm he flexed his arm in a predatory gesture for a moment and then gently placed his arm around the other character. In that moment, everyone in the audience knew who the murderer was.

Staging Exercise 1

- Create a silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end where a character learns something about themselves that allows them to overcome an obstacle.
- Incorporate at least 3 moments where different body positions are showcased.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- Create a scene where someone in the scene is Full, $\frac{1}{4}$, Profile, $\frac{3}{4}$, or Full Back at all times. You have to justify each movement and as someone moves to a new position, another character must shift to keep the balance.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 3

- Create a scene where a character goes on a silent journey. Use every part of the stage for this journey.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need

to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.

- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.4: Lesson 3- Levels

Levels create visual interest and provide opportunities for dynamic staging. Levels are necessary to staging and should be introduced as much as possible. One strong principal to keep in mind is to create a visual triangle (Figure 7.4.1) whenever possible. Triangles are visually pleasing and create a focal point. Anytime you have 3 or more actors on stage try to position them into either a triangle or a shape with a visual apex. When looking at staging you need to view levels in terms of depth and height in regards to the stage.

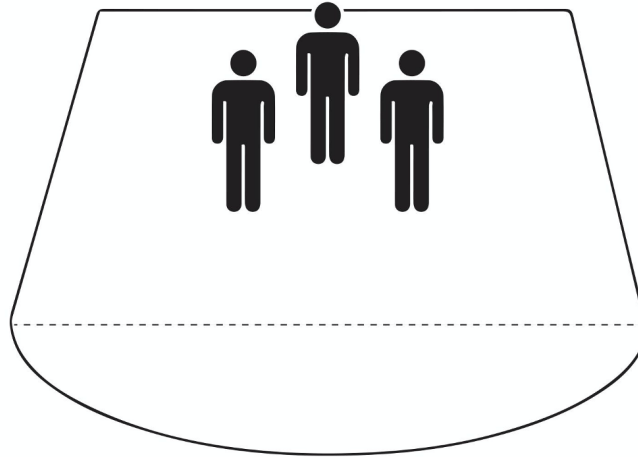


Figure 7.4.1: visual triangle

When actors stand in a straight line (Figure 7.4.2) the image for the audience is flat and uninteresting, yet when one member of the group moves slightly upstage or downstage to create a triangle (Figure 7.4.3), the image gains visual interest.

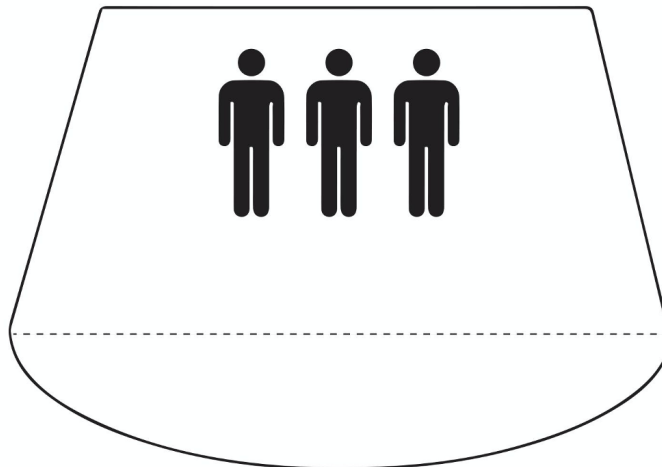


Figure 7.4.2: actors stand in a straight line

You can also create levels through height. If two actors are sitting and one is standing the person standing becomes the apex of the triangle and receives the focus and power. The same relationship applies in reverse. If two characters are standing the character sitting is again the apex of the triangle and draws focus.

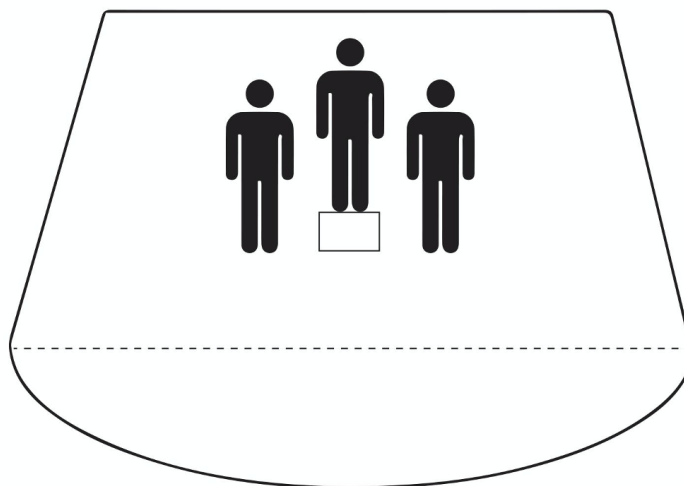


Figure 7.4.3: one member of the group moves slightly upstage or downstage to create a triangle

Utilizing levels built into the set is another way to enhance visual interest and create beautiful stage pictures (Figure 7.4.4 and Figure 7.4.5). As the director step back from the stage and try to create large visual levels when possible. Use the entire stage. When training use acting blocks, tables, and chairs to create your set and provide levels.

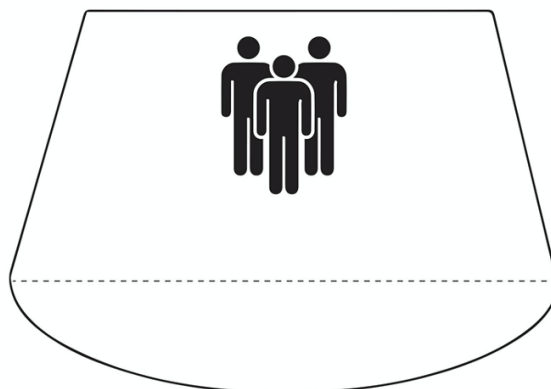


Figure 7.4.4

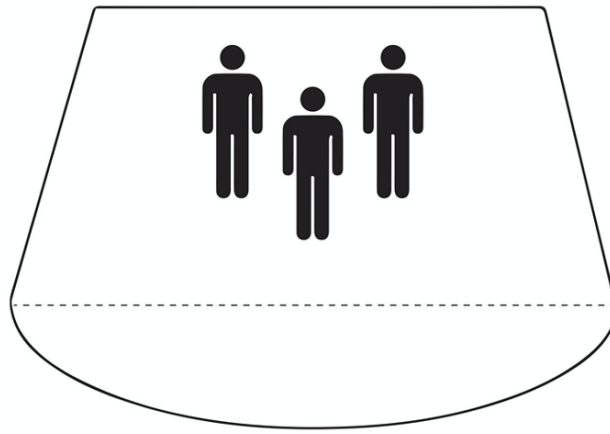


Figure 7.4.5

Staging Exercise 1

- Create a silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end in which a character enters a dangerous environment, encounters obstacles, and is transformed into something new.
- Utilize levels in at least 3 moments in the scene.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- Create a scene where someone in the scene is sitting, standing, kneeling, and laying down at all times. You have to justify each movement and as someone moves to a new position, another character must shift to keep the balance.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 3

- Create a scene where a character goes on a silent journey and something familiar become new and abstract. Use levels in at least 3 separate moments within the scene.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.5: Lesson 4- Dynamics of Space and Building Tension

Human beings process information in incredible ways and because storytelling is such a strong component in how we interpret and digest information, your audience will project story onto visual images even if no additional information is given. Human beings will also associate space with story. If two actors are on opposite sides of the stage, the audience will either interpret that they are strangers or have a relationship but are a great distance apart.

The proximity of actors tells the audience a lot about the current relationship between the characters. Most (over 70%) of human communication is non verbal. We as human beings subconsciously understand spatial dynamics in very sophisticated ways, but we do not ever think about it. As a director who stages stories, you do have to think about spatial relationships so that you can use them in order to tell your story.

Have actors move throughout the space then have them stop at varying distances from each other and ask yourself what relationships does this spatial proximity infer.

Characters 10+ feet away from each other

Characters who are on stage and are over 10 feet apart from each other will almost always be interpreted as strangers. If however, you have established in previous scenes that the characters do have a relationship, this distance represents the obstacle keeping them apart. This distance can be used if the characters had a fight and now feel as though they are strangers. This distance can also be used if the characters are in different locations. This distance can also be used to heighten tension and the space can be a visual or metaphorical representation of the obstacle between the two characters.

Characters 7-9 feet away from each other

Characters 7-9 feet apart will tell the audience that neither character feels comfortable with the other. This distance is close enough for the audience to infer that the characters are familiar with each other, but awkward and ambiguous enough for the relationship to be weak or mistrustful.

Characters 5-7 feet away from each other

Characters who are on stage and 5-7 feet apart from each other will appear as though they are about to engage in a fight. 5-7 feet is optimal striking distance, yet leaves space for evasion and your audience has seen enough physical altercations in their lives that they recognize this as the danger zone of true physical conflict.

Characters 3-4 feet away from each other

Characters 3-4 feet apart will be the most common spacing for conversations. This distance provides enough room for each person to occupy most of each others person's vision, while offering the other person their personal space and allowing for privacy from the public. This space can be dangerous verbally, but the physical danger has been reduced greatly.

Characters 1-2 feet away from each other

This distance is reserved for intimacy. Each character is invading the others personal space and is usually only reserved for lovers or enemies delivering intimate threats.

Staging Exercise 1

- Create a silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end where characters start off as strangers and become more intimate.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need

- to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end, in which the tension between the characters is so great that neither speaks. This relationship is either repaired or damaged further.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 3

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end in which an event occurs that causes conflict between the characters on stage.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.6: Lesson 5- Staging to Music

Music is an incredible asset when used in theater or storytelling. Music hypnotizes the audience and informs and manipulates the viewers perception of the visual events they are seeing. Music provides atmosphere and mood. Music can also inform the audience of the character's emotional experiences. Music can also tell a story.

There are two ways to stage with music. You can either allow the sounds, tempo, beat, and rhythm to inform your staging or you can stage based on the lyrical content of the music. If you are staging a musical you will rely heavily on the lyrics to inform your staging because the song is being used within the story structure to progress the plot. However, you can also break up the beat into counts and coordinate movement so that it coincides with the beat count.

Music can also inspire you and conjure images and story. When you listen to a piece of music and close your eyes what do you see? There are songs that tell a story in ways that only you can express as an artist because the music connected themes, experiences, and ideas that only you have.

Staging Exercise 1

- Choose a song without lyrics and stage a scene with a beginning, middle, and end where a character goes on an emotional or physical journey and in the end is transformed into a new person.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- Choose a song with lyrics and stage a scene to those lyrics. Make sure your scene has a beginning, middle, and end. Also make sure that your character's have changed in relationship or perspective by the end of the song.
- Rehearse for 2 hours and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 3

- Choose any song and stage a scene with a beginning, middle, and end to the music.
- Rehearse for 2 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

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7.7: Lesson 6- Creating Areas of Power or Establishing Psychological Spaces

Psychological spaces and areas of power are physical locations or spaces on the stage that represent identity or status. For example, if you have a throne on the stage that seat represents not only the Ruler who occupies that seat, but also the status of power within the world of the play. The audience understands that area is a psychological space that should only be reserved for the ruler, however if a character invades that space or area the audience understands that strong conflict and motive has occurred.

We create psychological spaces and areas of power in our everyday lives all the time. At home family members have designated seats, areas, and possessions that if invaded would result in conflict. Students select seats in classes and that if taken by someone else creates an imbalance within the classroom. People also can carry props or items that become synonymous with that person's identity. If for example your teacher walks into class every morning with coffee in the same cup and sits in a chair facing the class, both the chair and the cup can represent the teacher if the teacher were not in the room.

When staging a play it is often helpful to create not psychological areas and areas of power on the stage but also items or props of power as well. By creating these areas you are providing the audience with additional information about a character's status, ambitions, and threats.

Staging Exercise 1

- Create a silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end in which a psychological space or area of power is established and invaded.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end, in which a prop or item is endowed with power and is invaded.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 3

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end in which an area or item is associated with a character and when that character leaves the scene continues with the item or area taking the character's place in the scene.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

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7.8: Lesson 7- Crosses and Transitions

Crosses are the way that characters move across the stage. Although many actors and directors do not pay attention to the patterns of crosses character's make these patterns are very useful storytelling tools.

Arcs and Straight Lines

As much as possible have your actors move across the stage in arcs rather than straight lines. What you are doing when you do this is creating visual continuity that you can capitalize on later in the show as the tension rises. The arc pattern gives the appearance of ease and casualness to the movement. Whereas a cross that is a straight line conveys urgency. As a character's situation becomes more dire and their needs more urgent their crosses will become straight lines rather than arcs. This allows you to convey information to the audience that is not expressed in the dialogue.

Crossing Upstage or Downstage of Another Character

Crosses can also indicate the intentions of a character. If one character 1 moves across the stage behind or upstage of Character 2 the move can often be interpreted as happening 'behind the back' or without the knowledge of Character 2. This creates wonderful opportunities for characters to reveal hidden motives, feelings, or can even provide an opportunity for a character to break the fourth wall, without anyone else on stage being aware. Consequently if a character crosses downstage of another character, both characters are aware of the action and it is less threatening, deceptive, or hidden.

Crossing on the Line vs Before or After the Line

When a character crosses while delivering a line the audience's attention is drawn towards the movement rather than the line. However, when a character crosses and then delivers the line, the attention is drawn to line rather than the action.

Transitions

Transitions are the theatrical vehicle for transitioning the audience from one scene or location to another. Many time transitions are done by a lighting change and set transition, but you can also use this space to be creative. If you have few theatrical elements you can have your actors spin to indicate a transition. When the actors spin they do need to spin in the same direction and at a relatively consistent speed.

You can also transition with dance, music, or storytelling elements. Some plays will have transitions where characters come out and dance. Some plays will have a musician play a song for the transition.

However you can also use elements of the story you are telling as a way to transition between scenes. When I say storytelling elements I mean that characters can come out during scenes and through movement progress the story. For example, in a *Midsummer Night's Dream* you could use the fairies to help transition your scenes or use the opportunity to show the audience what is happening with the lovers during this transition.

Staging Exercise 1

- Create a silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end where characters movement patterns are established and then broken as the conflict becomes more urgent.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end, in which the tension between the characters is so great that neither speaks. However, the tension builds and the silence is broken by one word or phrase delivered after or before a cross.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 3

- Create a silent scene with a beginning, middle, and end that takes the audience on a journey. The scene must establish movement patterns and contain at least 3 transitions.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.9: Lesson 8- Composition/ Stage Pictures

A stage picture is a visual image that is captivating and tells a story. Think of it as similar to cinematography in film. The images you create tell a story and the beautiful and specific the image the more the audience will value the story. Some directors are incredible at developing stage pictures, some directors are incredible at blocking, and some are incredible at both. Stage trick to a beautiful stage picture is creating an image with visual apex. This is where your training in creating triangles will come in handy.

One remarkable thing about human beings is that we are hardwired to try and make sense of what we are seeing and so when we see an image we will automatically endow it with story. The best exercise I can think of to showcase this phenomenon is to have 4 actors go on stage. Hand one of the actors a tissue and have the actor throw the tissue in the air and while it is floating have every actor move around. Before the tissue hits the ground have the nearest actor catch the tissue and once the tissue has been caught everyone on stage must freeze and look to the audience. While the actors are frozen ask the class what story is being told or what stories are possible with this image? Repeat the exercise multiple times.

Even when you do mean to, your stage pictures are telling a story. What you want to do is create images that tell the story in a beautiful and interesting way. In order to do this you are going to need to fill the image database in your head with beautiful pictures or images that convey story.

Creating your image database

Go online and look up pictures with different themes. Look at the pictures that are the most captivating to you and look at how the people or objects are spaced, the angles and lines they are making, and ask yourself why the image is effective. Search multiple themes and save pictures that you would like to see on stage.

Staging Exercise 1

- Select 3 images that you have found while creating your image database. Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that connects the images and when the actors create the image have them hold in place for 2 seconds. Before you present the scene show the audience the images.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 2

- As a group select 3 unrelated images that found while creating image databases. Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that connects the images and when the actors create the image have them hold in place for 2 seconds. Before you present the scene show the audience the images..
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Staging Exercise 3

- Have the instructor or someone in the group provide 2 images and find a final image your image database that would connect the other two pictures. Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that connects the images and when the actors

create the image have them hold in place for 2 seconds. Before you present the scene show the audience the images..

- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.10: Lesson 9- Creating a World with Movement

Sometimes you will not have the money for a set. This is not a problem it is an opportunity. What you do have are actors and actors create. Actors can be characters and help create a set through their physicality. One example I often use with students is creating a wild west saloon using only actors bodies to create the environment. Two actors stand in profile with one arm extended becoming saloon doors. One actor leans over and becomes a bar or counter. Another actor becomes the bartender and I have two other actors sit in imaginary seats around a card table. Finally one additional actor is used as the cowboy entering the saloon. A confrontation happens followed by a stand off and one of the actors creating the saloon door transforms into a tumbleweed and rolls across the stage.

You can take your audience to any location and actors can transform, through a spin or other creative ways, into any person or object needed for the scene. You can also transition between locations as long as all of the actors spin in the same direction, at relatively the same speed, and reach their positions at roughly the same moment.

If you learn to stage utilizing the movement skills of your performers not only will your shows be more creative and unique, you can stage in any location.

Staging Exercise

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that uses the actors as the set.
- Your scene must include at least one transition
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

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7.11: Lesson 10- Soundscapes

Soundscapes are exercises in using sound to craft a narrative. In situations where you are allowed to be more experimental in your productions or at times when you are low on budget, soundscape training will be a blessing that can guide you through your project. A soundscape is an event in which the audience closes their eyes and the actors create the environment, sound effects, act, and create the entire story through collective vocal collaboration. The idea is to imagine that the audience is floating in a blimp and the scene is happening in the distance. As the blimp gets closer to the scene the sounds rise in volume and eventually the scene is happening at full volume. The story progresses at full volume and as the story concludes the blimp begins to travel away and the sounds slowly become softer until eventually the scene is silent.

With your cast determine a location and see how acutely you can replicate the sounds that would create that environment in your audience's imagination. You begin by starting with one actor quietly creating one sound. Each additional member of the cast will slowly contribute to the mix until a setting is created. You will need to step away from the group and close your eyes and experience the rehearsal as an audience member helping the group edit the sounds.

Once you have created the location determine the story you wish to tell. What is the conflict? How will the story develop? What is the climax? Once you have made these decisions start rehearsing the scene. Try to create a full and immersive experience for your audience. Discover and utilize the talents of your team.

Staging Exercise

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that uses the actors voices as the only ingredient for story telling.
- Your scene must include conflict and follow the model of a soundscape. It should start soft and gently take the audience into the world of the play, build in volume as the play progresses and once the play is concluded, gently take the audience out of the world of the play and back into the theater.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.12: Lesson 11- Dreamscapes

A dreamscape is a combination of a soundscape and creating a world through movement. A dreamscape creates a completely immersive experience for your audience and utilizes all of your actors' talents. You begin with the audience in the round. The cast begins the play by kneeling in a tight circle in the center of the stage and creating a soundscape. Once the 'blimp' has entered the scene and the scene is now at full volume, the actors quickly break from the circle and use their bodies to form the setting. The scene continues in this manner until it reaches its climax, at which point the cast reassembles the the circle and uses the soundscape to guide the audience out of the scene.

Staging Exercise

- Create a dreamscape with a beginning, middle, and end that uses the actors as the set and for all sound.
- Your scene must include at least one transition
- Rehearse for 2 hours and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.13: Lesson 12- Dramatic Loops

A dramatic loop is a break from the action of the story in order to jump into the past, future, or a fantasy in order to reveal more about the character or the character's situation. In order to have a dramatic loop you have to establish a 'button' or moment where the actors will freeze in a recognizable stage picture that will begin and end the loop. The loop is signified by a lighting or sound change and a new world is entered. Once the loop is completed the actors must return to the exact stage picture that began the loop and a lighting or sound change will return the scene to its previous reality.

One example I use is staging two students sitting next to each other with a candy bar between them. As they both reach for the bar and touch it the lighting changes and the Mortal Kombat theme song begins to play. During the conflict we stage a fight in which school supplies from their backpacks are used as lethal weapons. Once the scene concludes we return to the stage picture of both students touching the candy bar and end the loop.

Dramatic loops are ridiculously fun for both actors and audiences and can often be used in comedies.

Staging Exercise

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that includes a dramatic loop.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

7.14: Lesson 13- Staging in Different Venues

In your career you are going to direct shows in venues of all shapes and sizes. In order to prepare for this you will need lots and lots of practice creating shows in different venue configurations.

Staging Exercise

- Take a scene that you have developed in one of the previous exercises and restage it for a different venue configuration.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Proscenium Staging Exercise

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that is staged for a venue with a proscenium stage.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Thrust Staging Exercise

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that is staged for a venue with a thrust stage.
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

Theater in the Round Staging Exercise

- Create a scene with a beginning, middle, and end that is staged for a venue with a round stage
- Rehearse for 1 hour and then present
- Discuss and critique each scene
- Remember to always focus on successful elements first. People need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to improve. Encourage progress and try to give 5 positive comments to each suggestion for improvement.
- Rehearse for an additional 15 minutes in order to incorporate notes.
- Present scenes a final time without notes or critique.

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8: THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

8.1: Introduction

8.2: Giving notes

8.3: The First Week

8.4: Rehearsal Description

8.1: Introduction

The rehearsal process will be broken into phases. In the beginning of the process you will be filled with excitement and think there is nothing that can stand in your way of success. You will then make slow and steady progress staging the show. Slowly you will encounter obstacles and hopefully overcome them. About half way through you will be proud of the work you are doing and feel that the show is coming together. Around two thirds of the way through the process the amount of obstacles will increase and you will have your 'all is lost' or 'dark night of the soul' moment where you question whether or not the show will be successful or why you even pursued a career in the arts. Do not give up at this time! Stay positive! You will come out of it. Also know that if you are feeling stressed, so is your team so give them support. Finally, you will get back on your feet and the show will be successful and you will be so elated that you will forget all the pain you had to endure along the way.

Most of the time the rehearsal process will last around 6 weeks. This can change based on each theater's season and time constraints. I will outline the process in which your schedule will more than likely go, but in a shorter rehearsal period events will need to be accelerated.

Week 1

Introductions/ Design Presentations/ Table Read/ Team Building/ Script Work

Week 2

Script Work continued/ Blocking

Week 3

Blocking/ Stumble Throughs

Week 4

Blocking/ Stumble Throughs

Week 5

Run Throughs/ Scene Work

Week 6

Tech and Dress Rehearsals

8.2: Giving notes

How to Give Notes

Giving notes to actors really depends on the personality of the actor. Each actor will have preferred ways of communication and it is your job as the leader to develop trusting relationships with your cast and learn how each member communicates. Some actors will tell you “just tell me what I am doing wrong, I like it.” That is a LIE! One thing to always remember is that actors are sensitive by nature and all human beings need to know what they are doing well more than they need to know what to fix. Also remember that people can only work on one improvement at a time so be strategic in what you choose to point out.

One rule I find really helpful is PCP. Praise, Correct, Praise. You begin by letting the person know what they are doing well. This provides positive feedback on what to keep and also allows them to be more receptive to a critique. Next you correct. Choose one item that the person can improve. Then return to praising what they have done well.

Notes on Leadership

Nick Fury leads the Avengers not because he is the smartest avenger, that honor goes to Iron Man. Nick Fury is not the bravest, that honor goes to Captain America. He is not the most cunning, that honor belongs to Black Widow. Nor is he the strongest, those honors go to Thor and Hulk. Yet what Nick Fury is able to do is see the value and skills each member of the team brings to the group and because he has this skill each member of the group trusts him. When you are leading look for the best in others. Always publicly acknowledge your team members contributions and help them feel valued. When people feel valued they will work incredibly hard for you. One of the most important lessons I have ever learned is that it is essential that a leader believes in the individuals on the team, even and especially if that individual does not believe in his/herself.

8.3: The First Week

The first week is about establishing your team and getting everyone on the same page. The environment you create during this week will become the culture of your rehearsal process so take the time to build strong relationships and get everyone on the same creative page.

Day 1:

Introductions, Design Presentations, Table Read

Day 2:

Team Building Exercises

Day 3:

Character Work and Building the World of the Play

Day 4:

Script Work: Going through each scene in Act 1 to make sure the actors have a shared understanding of each scene's given Circumstances, Objectives, and function within the overall play

Day 5:

Script Work: Going through each scene in Act 2 to make sure the actors have a shared understanding of each scene's given Circumstances, Objectives, and function within the overall play

8.4: Rehearsal Description

The First Rehearsal

The first rehearsal is one of the most exciting. This is where you will introduce each member of the team and what their role in the production will be. This will be followed by presentations from each of your designers showcasing the design elements and outlining the creative plan. Once this has been completed you will take a short break and then begin a table read.

The Second Rehearsal: Building the Team

Now that you have a create team, stage manager, and have cast the show you are ready to begin building the supportive collaborative environment in which to hold rehearsals. Building a strong and supportive community allows people to feel safe and supported in taking creative risks. Also, If you can craft an environment that rewards creative choice and risk, you will give your performers the confidence to continue their creative growth throughout the entire process. The second rehearsal should be dedicated solely to team building, the environment you create that day will carry you through the production.

Character Work/World Building

In the beginning of the rehearsal process you want to build the imaginary world of the play with the actors. This process will allow to gain insight on how the actor is interpreting the role and also how to communicate with them. Throughout this process you will also need to guide each member so that they are making choices that fit within the world you are creating and also make sure that the choices correspond with other acting choices happening within the cast. You do not need acting experience in order to communicate with actors, although it helps, but you do need to know what the actor's process is like so you can communicate you needs to them within the language they use to create characters.

Blocking

Blocking is the process where you get the actors on their feet and begin staging the show. You can sketch out the movements before rehearsal in order to save time, but you will always have adjustments. Be patient with yourself and your actors during this time. Use your training and make sure that your blocking is telling the story as much as the dialogue of the play. Get your actors off book as soon as possible. It takes time for your actors to internalize lines and the first week after they are memorized they will not be present on stage because they will still be thinking of the lines rather than responding to the action on stage. The faster your group is off book, the better your show will be. You know a play is in trouble if the week before you open actors still have scripts in their hands.

Stumble Throughs

Stumble throughs are the events where you have completed blocking for a set of scenes and you present them in sequence, to see if the narrative works. As a director you never think that you will become physically ill while watching your first stumble throughs, but you do. They either go better than expected or they are absolutely awful. Do not get discouraged. It is a process. You need to try ideas and see if they work. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't.

Scene work

Once you identified what elements of the blocking are successful you can begin to edit the elements that need work or refine scenes. This is your chance to help your actor refine choices and craft the narrative of the show. Some scenes can be refined quickly and others take a great deal of time. Don't get lost in a detail that consumes your entire rehearsal. Pick your battles and know that some elements will be refined and ironed out through your actors having the ability to run through the entire show.

Run Throughs

The more your actors have the ability to run through their entire performance, the more they are able to get comfortable and confident in what they are doing. If you run behind in your schedule and the actors do not have time to run through the show and build confidence, the more they will panic. Allow time for run throughs and at the end of the performance gather the group and respond. Always highlight what is working and offer small areas of improvement.

Tech

Welcome to the longest days of the rehearsal process. Tech is where all of the design elements are added to the rehearsal process and you have roughly 2 days to do with your designers, what you have spent 5 weeks doing with your actors. During this time everyone will be tired, grumpy, and stressed. As the leader you need to anticipate this and be a constant positive force. Warn your actors that during tech you will not be giving notes but rather focusing on the theatrical elements that will make them look good.

With the designers, remember that they have spent hours crafting their contributions. Some things will need to be completely changed, and when this happens know that the designer will be frustrated and hurt because it will feel like they are being rejected. Remember to phrase things in positive ways but be assertive in the productions needs. This will be a difficult process but with the right mindset it can also be a lot of fun. This is where your play truly starts to come together and transform from an idea to a reality.

Final Dress

The final dress is your last opportunity to guide the show. Offer last minute improvements, but know that this is the time where the actors need to take full command of their performance. Once the show opens you are no longer in charge. The show belongs to the public and leadership belongs to the Stage Manager. I know some director's give notes after opening, but I feel this is a mistake and is counter productive. You want the actors to work hard in rehearsals so that they can play and live in the moment on stage. You do not want them thinking about your notes in front of a live audience.

9: THE ACTOR'S PROCESS

9.1: Understanding the Actor's Process

9.2: Warm Up Exercises

9.3: Team Building Exercises

9.4: Collaboration

9.1: Understanding the Actor's Process

One breath = One thought

I was in graduate school when my mentor Carol McVey pointed this out to me. I was floored by the concept and it helped me both as an actor and director immensely. Have the actors go through the script and make a / mark every time they see a period, exclamation point, or question mark. Many times an actor will take a breath in the middle of a sentence where a comma would typically be found and when they do this the thought is broken up and often sounds unnatural. Have the actors take a breath only when the thought has been completed. When you have a new thought you are inspired and that inspiration brings with it a new breath. Once your actors have identified the breaths they need to take, ask them what point is their character trying to make in that sentence or thought? Once the point of the thought has been identified, reinforce that they need to make that point. If you are thinking the thoughts and breathing the breath of your character. You are that character.

Given Circumstances

The Given Circumstances are the Who, What, When, and Where of the imaginary world of the play. All of the characters need to be living in the same world with the same rules. If you go over this publicly during script work you can ensure the actors and creative team will all be on the same page and understand the world you are creating.

Who

- Who am I?
- Name, occupation, family, income, etc.
- Who am I talking to?
- Name, occupation, family, income, etc.

What

- What am I doing?
- In the scene
- In the room
- What is my relationship?
- To everyone I mention or interact with in the play.

When

- Time the play takes place
- Era, Century, Decade, Year, Season, Month, Week, Day, Hour.

• Where

- Location of the play and scene
- Universe, Galaxy, Planet, Continent, Country, State/Province, Region, City, Neighborhood, Street, House, Room.

Objective

The objective is the motivation of the character. In order to connect with the character the actor must discover the Super Objective of the character. The Super Objective is the most primal need of the character. The actor must have a deep understanding and share this objective to truly connect with the character. This will determine the 'Why' of everything the character does or says within the play.

Super Objective

- What does my character need to survive for the entire play? The most important thing to your character.

Scene Objective

- What does your character need in the scene? Must be tied to the Super Objective.

Action

Action is what the character does to get what they want. Action is all we see. Ask the actor what does your character want to get or get someone to do in this scene? The Through Line of Action is what the character needs to do in order to obtain and retain the Super Objective.

Through Line of Action

- In one sentence how does my character get what he/she wants throughout the entire play? (If I want power how do I get power? I become King)

Scene Action

- What do I want the other characters in the scene?
- What do I need to get in order to leave the scene?

Tactics

Tactics are the strategies we use as human beings in order to manipulate people to do what we want them to do. Each person has a dominant tactics or 'go to' strategies that work for them most often in situations. If human beings have this trait so should characters. Have your actors identify 3-5 dominant tactics they feel the character uses to get what he/she wants.

Dominant Tactics

- Strongest way I get the other character to do what I want them to.
- Next strongest way I get the other character to do what I want them to.
- Weakest way I get the other character to do what I want them to.

Additional Questions for Character Development

The following questions can be useful in helping your actor's craft their characters and performances. The idea is to get the actor thinking about the character as a fully developed human being with positive and negative traits.

- What is your character's most treasured possession? (This must be in the play)
- What is your character's favorite feature?
- What type of music does your character listen to?
- What type of clothes does your character wear?
- What is your character's favorite time of day and season?
- What are your character's prejudices?
- Is your character happy with his/her life?
- What does your character despise?
- What is your character afraid of losing?
- How does your character feel about him/her?
- What does your character say about other people?
- What do other people say about your character?

- What is your character's biggest secret that it does not want the other characters in the play to know?

Working Monologues

There will be times in every show where you will need to refine and coach monologues. Each monologue is an emotional or intellectual journey for the character. They should be a different person at the end of the monologue than they were at the beginning. Always begin by asking the actor why the character is sharing this information at that moment? What is the character hoping to achieve by sharing this information? Once this is established the emotional journey of the speech should become clear. However, there are two additional items to be aware of when coaching monologues.

Operative Words

- Operative words are the words within a phrase or sentence that most communicate the thought or intention.
- One of my colleagues call this 'caveman talk.' In other words, if a cave man were to simplify the sentence in order to communicate the information, what words would be used? There should be only about 3 per thought. Once you find those words make sure they are emphasized.

Make your points

- Each thought or sentence in a monologue springboards into the following thought and the most important thoughts are at the end of the monologue.
- Build to your main point. Hit your operative words, make your points, and make sure you are building to your main point at the end of the monologue.

9.2: Warm Up Exercises

The following is a list of exercises designed to increase blood flow throughout the body, sharpen mental focus, and promote collaboration. Feel free to add any additional activities you have discovered.

Warm-Up Stretch Routine

- A good warm up is a full body stretch routine that prepares each student for the physical demands of the day. The warm up is also a time for students to begin focusing on connecting with their bodies and mentally preparing for the lessons of the day.
- The Warm up should also end in a fun interactive activity or game that causes the group to interact, increase energy and blood flow throughout the body, and excite each member of the group for the lessons to come in the future.

Ball Volley

Exercise

- Toss a lightweight inflatable ball into the air. The goal of the game is to hit the ball back into the air without it hitting the ground. No person can hit the ball twice in a row without the count starting over.
- Rule 1: One is just as important as One Hundred. The purpose of the game is to have fun and in order for that to happen, once the ball hits the ground do not give anyone time to comment or apologize. Quickly run and hit the ball in the air and start the game again.
- Rule 2: No comments and no apologies. Everyone makes mistakes but getting hung up on mistakes or commenting on them takes away from achieving your goals. Be supportive and remember the game is not about getting to a high number, it is about the joy of playing the game with your friends.

Purpose

- This game is not only fun but teaches some of the most valuable lessons an artist, or human being for that matter, can learn. Everyone has good days and bad days. Some days we are on top of the world and easily reach our goal of one hundred and others we are constantly starting over. In the words of Rocky Balboa "It's not about how hard you can hit. It's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward."
- The game also teaches students how to be supportive when people around them fail and how to work together to achieve a goal.

Dragon Tag

Exercise

- This game follows the standard rules of tag or touch and go. One person in the group is "it". If this person tags or touches someone, the person they touched becomes the new "it." Most games of tag have a concept known as "home base". If a person is touching home base the person who is "it" cannot tag them. "Home base" in dragon tag is safely and respectfully touching another member of the class who is not "it".
- The problem with "home base" in dragon tag is that all of the class could link up as one unit and the game would be over, so the rule for home base is that once the person who is "it" verbally counts to five, every person touching a "home base" must unhook and find a new "home base".

Purpose

- Not only is the game fun to play, it gets the blood flowing, and also gets students to get comfortable being close to each other and touching each other, which will be useful later in rehearsal if their character need to touch.

Dance Party

Exercise

- Play an uptempo song that invigorates the room. Each person in the room must dance to the music.
- At a given point in the song each member of the group must lock eyes with another member of the group and dance towards that person. Once together the pair of performers must create a dance move together.
- Once each pair has created a dance move have them lock eyes with another member of the group on the opposite side of the room and repeat the process.
- Repeat until song has concluded.

Purpose

- This activity increases blood flow and and also gets rid of nervousness. Each participant must have the courage to look silly and also be silly together with other classmates. In each pairing there is also a collaboration that is gained through silliness and fun.

Banana Dance

Exercise

- This is a song. Gather the class into a large circle and have a practice round where each verse and move is explained and then once everyone understands what is expected, begin. The goal is to go through the song as fast, big, and loud as possible.
- First Verse: You form the corn, form form the corn. Yes you form the corn form, form the corn. Then you shuck the corn shuck, shuck the corn. Then you shuck the corn shuck, shuck the corn. Then you pop the corn pop, pop the corn. Pop the corn pop, pop the corn.
- Second Verse: Then you form potato form, form potato. Then you form potato form, form potato. Then you peel potato peel, peel potato. Peel potato peel, peel potato. Then you mash potato mash, mash potato. Mash potato mash, mash potato.
- Third Verse: Then you form the egg form, form the egg. Then you form the egg form, form the egg. Then you crack the egg crack, crack the egg. Crack the egg crack, crack the egg. Then you fry the egg fry, fry the egg. fry the egg fry, fry the egg.
- Final Verse: Then you form banana form, form banana. Then you form banana form, form banana. Then you peel banana peel, peel banana. Peel banana peel, peel banana. Then you go bananas go, go bananas. Then you go bananas go, go bananas.

Purpose

- This is a great warm up activity that gets everyone's blood flowing and get everyone excited for the days rehearsal.

Contact Improvisation

Exercise

- Break everyone into groups of four or five and have each group line up behind each other.
- Begin by having each group cross from one end of the stage to the other by just walking.
- Once the group has gone then begin playing music (instrumental music is best) and have them cross the room again have them lead their movements with their feet. Reinforce that making big choices and movements are important. Don't do something ordinary when you could do something extraordinary.
- Once each group has completed the round then switch and have them move leading with knees, hips, stomach, chest, arms, head.
- Once each group has completed these rounds have them move exploring height. Have students move through the space adding jumps and moving low to the floor.
- Once each group has completed the round have them move together as a group and have them locate free and open space on the stage and quickly move to fill it. As soon as they reach the open space have them immediately seek out new open space in which to occupy.

- Finally repeat the last round but use the class as a whole. Have them move together to fill the space and remember to reinforce the idea of exploring what your body can do. Don't do something ordinary when you can do something extraordinary. Nobody in the class is aloud to stop moving until every member of the group has reached the other side of the stage.
- Once the round is completed bring everyone together to discuss the experience.

Purpose

- The objective of contact improvisation is for the actor to explore the limits and expand the awareness of the actor's body. We often only move in safe and predictable ways, however performance requires you to move past what is expected, even from yourself, to truly amaze and inspire. Students will gain an awareness of their bodies capabilities, learn to move and work together as a team, be constantly looking for ways to help the group and improve. This exercise is exhausting and will require a rest period following its conclusion.

9.3: Team Building Exercises

The following is a list of exercises designed to build a strong and supportive learning environment. Feel free to add any additional activities you have discovered.

High Fives

Exercise

- Begin by having the class move throughout the space for about thirty seconds to one minute so that the group feels comfortable navigating the space without collisions.
- Next, have each member of the class hold up one hand and continue moving throughout the space, but each time they make eye contact with someone in the group they must give each other a high five and say “hey!” in an enthusiastic way.

Purpose

- This activity forces the group to acknowledge each other and interact in a positive way. When someone looks at you and gets excited and you are met with an enthusiastic high five you immediately feel accepted and you get a small confidence boost. You will notice within thirty seconds how the energy in the room shifts and how forced smiles that occurred in the beginning of the activity will turn into genuine smiles of happiness.

Name Game

Exercise

- Have everyone in the group gather into a circle.
- Have each member of the group introduce themselves by saying his/her name and offer a few interesting facts about themselves.
- Create a movement/dance move based on one interesting fact and perform this move while saying the student's name.
- Have everyone in the group repeat the movement and name several times.
- Repeat with each member of the group.

Purpose

- This activity allows the group to learn each other's names quickly by connecting the name to a physical movement while also providing information that can help students connect through shared interests or experiences.

Ground Rules

Exercise

- Break the class up into pairs of two and have each pair create four rules that they feel the class should follow throughout the semester/camp. Some examples include: Treat others with respect, no favoritism, etc.
- Once each pair has agreed on the rules have them merge with another group and form a group of four. Each group must share the rules each have created and select only four to agree on together. This will narrow the rules from eight to four.
- Once each group of four has agreed on which four rules they feel should be adopted by the group, have two groups of four merge into a group of eight. In this new group each previous group must share the rules each have created and select only four to agree on together. This will narrow the rules from eight to four.
- Once each group of eight has agreed on which four rules they feel should be adopted by the group, have two groups of eight merge into a group of sixteen. In this new group each previous group must share the rules each have created and select only

four to agree on together. This will narrow the rules from eight to four.

- Repeat this process until the class is back together forming one large group. Decide which four rules will be adopted by the group and then write the rules down.

Purpose

- This exercise provides many wonderful outcomes. Each student is allowed to contribute rules and ideas that address fears they carried into the group. Each student also must listen and collaborate with other members of the group to agree on rules that address both students' needs. This allows the student to feel confident speaking up for his/her needs, understand compromise and think about the overall needs of the group. This also secretly has the students create their own culture of respect and trust while verbally creating the culture of respect and trust.

Spotlight

Exercise

- Place a chair in the front of the room.
- Have each member of the class or group sit and face the chair.
- One at a time, have each member of the class come up to the chair and sit down and let the audience look at them for one minute.
- In order to pass the time the student is allowed to answer one of the following questions. This question is selected by the instructor and the student receives only one question. The student is not required to talk, the question is there to help the student take their mind off of being stared at for a period of time. The point of the exercise is to gain experience being themselves in front of a group and allowing the group to see them, not to answer a question or entertain the group.

Questions

- What are your dreams?
- What is the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you?
- Who is your hero and why?
- If you could go back in time and relive any day of your life to experience it again, what would it be? Why?
- What gives you strength and what is your greatest fear?
- What was the happiest day of your life? What was the worst day of your life?
- What was an obstacle you were forced to overcome?
- What was the time you were your most vulnerable?
- What was a time you helped someone and a time that you betrayed someone?
- If you could go back in time and change one thing in your life what would it be?
- What was a time you felt helpless and a time you were on top of the world?
- What would your best friend say about you? What would your worst enemy say?
- What do you hope to be and what do you hope you never become?

Once the minute has passed the student is thanked and the next member of the class goes to the spotlight. Once everyone in the group has participated, gather the group into a circle to discuss the experience.

Purpose

- This is without question one of, if not the best team building exercise I have ever witnessed. The activity not only provides the experience of being the center of attention, it forces the student to confront the most terrifying aspects of stage fright by having them be the center of attention while also being unprepared. The student is then offered the ability to escape the uncomfortable situation by sharing an experience in his/her life that is true. Great acting requires truth and you will never be able to connect truthfully to a character or another human being if you cannot be comfortable being vulnerable in front of a group and connecting to a true part of yourself. Being vulnerable is what makes us human, yet human beings are so uncomfortable admitting weakness that we pay actors to be vulnerable in front of us so that we do not feel alone. Once a fear is confronted and conquered, acceleration can occur.
- There is another magical quality about this exercise. All friendships and meaningful relationships occur when we allow

ourselves to be vulnerable with another person and share something true about ourselves that asks the other individual not to judge us. When the other person listens, does not judge, and shares something in return we have a strong foundation on which to build the relationship.

- In the discussion you will find that people feel more connected with each other and that people will share how they now feel bonded with others who share the same struggles.

9.4: Collaboration

When each of us gives our best self to the group we are able to achieve incredible things. As a director it helps if you have experience in as many areas of theatre as possible. The more experience you have in various areas, the more you are able to understand the artistry each contributor brings to the project and you are able to appreciate the effort it takes in order to produce each contribution.

I always used to think that students took my classes because of the information they were receiving. I am proud of the rigor of my curriculum and am constantly pushing my students to strive to be the best versions of themselves. Yet everytime I hear my students talk about why they love theater or keep coming back to the theater, the only answer I ever hear is the relationships they make while creating theater. I think that is why we all love theater, it is the place where we find that our ideas matter, that it is ok to take chances, that failure is an opportunity to learn and improve, and where we ultimately find our tribe. Theater is a collaborative art form and as the leader of a production always remember that the relationships we create during the process are more important than the quality of the production.

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