

2017-2018 Asawa SOTA Theatre Department Directing for the Thrust Stage Assignment

Students keep a Director's Notebook (your PRODUCTION BIBLE), which has these required elements:

- Short essay on Reason for Choosing the play (if applicable)
- Pulled quotes or moments that reflect theme/vision
- Author biography (includes other works by the author, major productions)
- Past production Photo Morgue file with any other research done as part of preparation.
- A Play Analysis worksheet (Plot & Given Circumstances)
- Production Paperwork
 - Props list
 - cast list
 - contact sheet
 - rehearsal schedule
 - lighting cues
 - set sketch/list of furniture needs
 - sound plot
 - rehearsal reports
 - rehearsal notes
 - any other research done as part of rehearsal
- Daily reflection journal
- Blocking Analysis (a close analysis of one scene and why they blocked it that way)
- Final Reflection essay

- PRE-READING:
 - Below chapter from **Handbook for Theatrical Apprentices** *A Practical Guide in All Phases of Theatre*
 - **DIRECTING & STAGING for THE THRUST STAGE** by Phillip Rayher (28 pages). Find on website: sfsotatheatre.org under CLASS ASSIGNMENTS. **Play close attention to the rules of acting and directing for the Thrust Stage.**

Except from **Handbook for Theatrical Apprentices** *A Practical Guide in All Phases of Theatre*

By Dorothy Lee Tompkins, Samuel French, Inc.1962

CHAPTER 12

The Director

ALL IS SPECIFIC

The director is the person responsible for transforming the authors written words into a live production.

In other words, the director must co-ordinate the four basic ingredients of any production-the choice of the play, the physical production, the cast, and the action or interpretation of the play. Each will be discussed separately.

CHOICE OF THE PLAY. The director must:

I Select the play or agree to the producers selection. He must consider:

A-The area in which the play is to be produced.

B-The physical plant in which the play will be produced.

C-The number and kind of sets, costumes, lighting effects, etc., the budget will allow.

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D-The number of actors the budget will allow.

E-The star available for the play (in star companies).

F-The other plays on the schedule.

G-The box office value of the plays title.

H-Whether or not he is capable of handling the play.

I-The artistic value of the play. Alas and alack, this last can only be given strong consideration if the theatre is already an established financial success or privately endowed.

2 After the play is selected he must study it thoroughly in order to carry on with the other aspects of production.

THE PHYSICAL PRODUCTION

The director must schedule conferences with his technical staff so that he can:

1 Approve the set.

A-Decide with the scene designer on the style of the settings, taking both practicality and final effectiveness into consideration.

B-Demand and check floor plans and color sketches far enough in advance to give scene designer time for making necessary and/or desirable changes before construction begins.

C--Check furniture prop list with scene designer before it is turned over to prop man.

D-Insist that all workable parts of the set be ready for tech rehearsal.

E-Make it absolutely clear that a complete set is expected for dress rehearsal.

2 Approve the props. (May be done through stage manager.)

A-Give basic prop list to prop man on first day of rehearsal.

B State what kind of prop is needed. For example: If a frying pan is on the prop list, whether it should be an old-fashioned iron skillet, a bright aluminum pan, or glass pan.

C-State definitely when he wants actual props to be used.

D-State definitely when he wants a reasonable facsimile of props, i.e., something in the actors hands.

3 Approve the sound effects.

A-Explain to sound technician what kind of sound effects he wants.

B-State when he wants to listen to sound.

C-Listen to the music and choose the section he wants used.

D-Set readings (sound levels) for music.

E-Set cues for music coming in or out.

F-State whether music should come in suddenly or fade up slowly, etc.

G-Co-ordinate music and other sound effects with action no later than tech rehearsal. (Sooner will be appreciated by actors, especially if music is to back long portions of dialogue or pantomime.)

4 Approve the costumes.

A-Check the costume plot with the costumier to see that they both have similar ideas on costuming the play-by the first rehearsal.

B--Tell the costumier when and if any actor has special business involving a costume- as soon as he knows it. For example: If the husband has special business of zipping up his wives dress in the bedroom scene, it is most helpful for the costumier to know this before he carefully prepares a costume that buttons up the front.

5 Approve the lighting.

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A-Go over basic lighting plan with lighting designer early in the rehearsal week to see that they have similar ideas on lighting the show. (Third day should be soon enough unless special equipment is needed for the particular show.)

B-Give light cues to stage manager as they come up in rehearsal.

C-Whenever possible set the readings, colors, etc., with light man before tech rehearsal.

D-Set light cues during tech rehearsal.

E--Be ready, willing and able to conduct a light rehearsal after dress rehearsal if the lighting has not worked properly. The director need not be a lighting expert, but he must know what he wants, and be able to ask for it in understandable terms. If this is so, he has a right to expect lighting to be nearly right for dress rehearsal.

6 Let the stage manager in on everything.

7 Take notes on all aspects of the physical production at tech and dress rehearsals, and give them to each department head.

NOTE: The director must make it clear to each department head that he expects to be able to do this *at dress rehearsal and not opening night!*

A-The director, scene designer, costumier, prop man, and lighting designer need at least one chance to see whether small changes would improve the final production. For example: If the book case isn't painted by dress rehearsal, it is impossible to tell whether blue or yellow flowers would look better on the coffee table. If all the men don't wear their suits under reasonably correct lighting, it is impossible to tell whether they will look too much alike or not, etc.,

B--If big jobs are left until the last minute, there will be no time to add the little touches that make the difference between an adequate physics production and an excellent one-even if director and staff agree that they are needed.

C-Actors need at least one chance to get the feeling of the set, props, sound effects, costumes and lighting and the pace of the show withal.

THE CAST

Casting a play is probably the most difficult job any director will ever have to face, but he must:

1 Decide upon a cast. He must try to make sure that each person in the company has:

A--Audience appeal. Defining this quality is as impossible as getting along without it. It turns up in all shapes and sizes. Every performer in any phase of show business needs it in one form or another. A good director knows how to spot it, but so far as I know, there are no special rules to guide him. He must rely on his own experience and intuition.

B--Ability to get along with others. People must work together for long hours. Sometimes they eat, live, and play together. When many vital people work in such close contact, personality clashes are bound to occur occasionally. Careful casting can keep them to a minimum. Bad tempers, petulance, and childish bickering are contagious. They grow and multiply like mosquitoes. They cannot be written off as mere examples of artistic temperament. They are pests. Pests detract from the efficiency of other sensitive members of the company. Fortunately (and contrary to popular opinion), they are seldom accompanied by real acting ability. Even if they are, they are hardly worth it. Avoid them at all costs.

C-Self-discipline. An actor must know his own capabilities. He must be willing to put aside his personal pleasures and problems to concentrate the time and energy necessary (for him) to work at top capacity.

D -Versatility. A cast is almost the only frontier left where versatility is an essential asset. In one show an actor may play a fuss-budget French father, in the next a stalwart Irish lover, and next, a

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clean-cut American egghead-and so on throughout the season. He will play drama, comedy, and farce. He will perform in classics and junk. He will play bits and leads. Even the most accomplished actor will be more effective in some parts than others, but he must be able to adapt his physical characteristics and his techniques to many roles without seeming ludicrous.

E-Experience. There is no substitute. Beauty, talent, clever direction, able supporting casts, personality, vitality, diligence or youth (ah, especially youth) may cover for it- often does, as a matter of fact; but never for a whole cast. Inexperience simply requires more time and attention than there is to give.

F-Knowledge of theatre policy. The director should explain as much and as truthfully as he can about the area, theatre plant, living conditions, rehearsal schedules, etc., before signing a professional actor, He may lose an actor who seems desirable, but the odds are that he will avoid much unpleasantness later.

G-Honesty. No human being, including directors, is infallible. Acting jobs being at such a premium, actors do put their best foot forward at interviews. They do say they have backgrounds which they do not have, or that they were excellent in parts in which they were barely adequate. The wisest policy is to check with several other people with whom the actor has worked. If the director checks with only one unknown person, he may discover too late that that person is a pest and he has lost a very fine actor because of it.

H-Wardrobe. I apologize for bringing this one up. It seems so mercenary, but the fact remains. An actor who owns a reasonably decent wardrobe will save endless hours for himself and the costumer- on errands, alterations, and fittings, not to mention the money saved for renting, special purchases, etc. And audiences just do like to see well dressed people on the stage. I may add, however (and it is not just to soothe my conscience), that an excellent wardrobe cannot replace any one of the other seven requirements. It is just nice if it can accompany them.

ACTION OR INTERPRETATION

There is an argument extant that if the play is good, the physical production, beautiful, and the cast well chosen, the director is a useless and unnecessary appendage. Not quite. No actor can see his own work, or indeed the work of other players while he is busy playing his own role; therefore, he cannot possibly judge his own work in relationship to that of the other players. True, each actor will, or should, have his own interpretation of the play. Each interpretation may be a valid one. Each actor may feel his own movements. These movements may also be valid, for his character. Without a director to integrate these actions and interpretations, rehearsals could turn into a bedlam of discussions (not to mention fights). The performance, no matter how brilliant, could turn the final production into hodge-lodge. For an exaggerated example: A sensitive and subtle character actor feels that the best way to show that he finally understands his older son is to reach out silently and put his hand on his sons head. He may feel that up stage center is the best place for this action to take place. Meanwhile downstage center left, an exuberant and appealing juvenile feels that he can best show his indifference by turning back flips while eating a banana. Obviously a director is essential to the unity of the had production, whether he serves as a dictator, guide, or selector. He must:

- 1 Continue to study the play in relationship to his cast and physical production.
- 2 Make the necessary cuts in the play-before the first rehearsal if at all feasible. Of course, additional cuts may be necessary because of set or cast problems.
- 3 Suggest rewrites to the author if it is a new play.
- 4 Post (or have the stage manager post) a rehearsal schedule.
- 5 Give out sides or play books at the first rehearsal. (Sooner, if they are available and he is sure of his casting.)

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- 6 Explain the set to his entire cast and show them a model, floor plan, or drawing of the set.
- 7 Explain briefly his method of working. Directors work in many different ways. Some prefer to have the actors read through the entire play first, then discuss the various aspects of the script-plot, characters, theatrical effects, etc.; then put the actors on the stage to more or less feel their way about, making necessary changes and adjustments as they go along. Others start by basically blocking the show, i.e., enter center, cross down right area, cross down center area, cross up left area, etc.; then work out motivations, bits of business, and interpretation later.
- Still others block rather meticulously from the beginning- working out the basic blocking, small business, characterization, interpretation, motivation and timing, scene by scene, or more precisely, segment by segment.
- These thumb-nail descriptions are over simplified, of course. Most directors use some personally devised combination of the three, and interchange them to suit the play, the players, and the rehearsal period.
- Any method can work provided the director can communicate his ideas to each member of the cast, using each actors creative ability as well as his own. Somehow he must impart to the actor faith in himself, confidence in his director, understanding of his role, and just plain old-fashioned enthusiasm.
- 9 Block the action. (Unfortunately many so-called directors believe their job begins and ends here.)
- 10 Not waste rehearsal time.
- A-Be on time for rehearsals.
 - B-Insist on punctuality from his cast and crew.
 - C-Not “freeze” his actors by being too over-bearing, particularly at early rehearsals.
 - D-Neither instigate nor allow an *overabundance* of unrelated banter to dissipate rehearsal time.
 - E--Discourage (in fact, forbid) childish bickering on the set.
- 11 Let the stage manager in on everything.
- 12 Set the curtain calls.
- 13 Take notes during final run-throughs, tech and dress rehearsals.
- 14 Give constructive notes to cast and technical staff following final run-throughs and rehearsals. (May be given during intermissions if director prefers.)
- 15 Give best wishes to cast and crew at half hour on opening night. (Not necessary, but nice.)
- 16 Turn the entire production over to the stage manager at half hour on opening night.
- A-For better or worse, the stage manager must have complete authority back stage during performance. Naturally, if some drastic thing happens which the stage manager cannot possibly see, but which can be corrected, the director should let him know about it. For example: If an actor becomes so carried away with his own inner feelings that he cannot be heard (this happens all too frequently with inexperienced players) the director may ask the stage manager to tell him to speak up.
 - B-During performance each actors part must belong to him alone. After the final curtain call, the directors notes, criticisms, and suggestions are not only appreciated but sought by serous actors. During the show he is, or should be, the forgotten man. He is about as useful back stage as “mother” is in a bridal suite.

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GRADING CRITERIA

Meets Standard: Collaborate to create original works of art

Basic: Does not contribute to performance or detracts from group dynamic

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Critical attributes:

Argumentative when other participants explore alternate interpretations

Does not contribute to group design

Efforts do not support group success (e.g., fails to memorize lines or care for costume and properties.)

Approaching: Marginal contribution to performance and group dynamic

Critical attributes:

Unresponsive to changes made by other artists during creative exploration

Contributes to group design only when requested

Efforts focused solely on personal contributions

Meeting: Demonstrates commitment to group success

Critical attributes:

Explores various interpretations and artistic presentations of personal contributions during rehearsal

Adjusts personal performance elements to support a unified design

Supports artistic contributions of group members

Exceeding: Facilitates artistic expression from entire group

Critical attributes:

Initiates exploration of alternate presentations with group members

Actively elicits design elements and artistic choices from other group members

Provides constructive feedback to group members on contributions

Integrates artistic contributions of group members

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Directing Rubric

Student Name _____ Title of Piece _____

	4	3	2	1
Rehearsals	Rehearsals were planned and communicated to cast and Director spent the entire allotted time rehearsing with the cast	Rehearsals were planned, but director was not always clear with communication with cast and was not focused 100% of the time.	Rehearsals were not planned and communication was somewhat unclear, but director was pretty much focused during rehearsals	Rehearsals were not planned, communication was unclear and director was rarely focused on the rehearsal.
Direction of actors	Director used techniques and direction to help actors discover objectives, tactics and relationships	Director attempted use of techniques and direction to help actors, but mostly continued to run rehearsals without much input for actors.	Director gave direction to actors at times, but did not the majority of the time.	Director did not give actors direction on their objectives, tactics and relationships within the play
Staging	Director staged the piece using the principles of blocking. Stage picture was interesting to watch	Director staged the piece with some thought but the stage picture was sometimes muddled	Director staged the piece without much thought to character objectives, tactics or stage picture	Director did not stage the piece, but actors created the staging during rehearsals or performance
Preparedness	Director was fully prepared and present for all rehearsals and performances	Director was somewhat prepared but may have had some absences did not always have materials	Director was partially prepared for rehearsals and several absences	Director was not prepared for rehearsals and had excessive absences

Notes:

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Above Directing Rubric *printed as list*

Student Name _____ Title of Piece _____

Rehearsals

- 4: Rehearsals were planned and communicated to cast and Director spent the entire allotted time rehearsing with the cast
- 3: Rehearsals were planned, but director was not always clear with communication with cast and was not focused 100% of the time.
- 2: Rehearsals were not planned and communication was somewhat unclear, but director was pretty much focused during rehearsals
- 1: Rehearsals were not planned, communication was unclear and director was rarely focused on the rehearsal.

Direction of actors

- 4: Director used techniques and direction to help actors discover objectives, tactics and relationships
- 3: Director attempted use of techniques and direction to help actors, but mostly continued to run rehearsals without much input for actors.
- 2: Director gave direction to actors at times, but did not the majority of the time.
- 1: Director did not give actors direction on their objectives, tactics and relationships within the play

Staging

- 4: Director staged the piece using the principles of blocking. Stage picture was interesting to watch
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Preparedness

- 4: Director was fully prepared and present for all rehearsals and performances
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Notes: