

Stage Movement and Acting Rules

STAGE DIRECTIONS:

- Stage Right: The actor's right as he stands onstage facing the audience.
- Stage Left: The actor's left as he stands onstage facing the audience.
- Downstage: Toward the audience.
- Upstage: Away from the audience.
- Below: Toward the audience. Same as "Downstage of."
- Above: Away from the audience. Same as "Upstage of."
- In: Toward the center of the stage.
- Out: Away from the center of the stage.

STAGE AREAS:

In order that a director may designate an actor's position onstage precisely. The acting portion of the stage is divided into areas:

UR	UC	UL
SRC	CS	SLC
DR	DC	DL

- Apron: The segment of the stage in front of the main curtain.
- DSR: The strongest area of the stage. In our culture, we read left to right. The innate habit is to look left first when in the audience, then survey the rest of the stage. The **audience left** is **stage right**. Downstage is stronger than upstage, because it's closer to the audience.
- Onstage: That part of the stage enclosed by the setting which is visible to the audience in any particular scene.
- Plane: A segment of the stage running the full width or depth, as in "the downstage plane"
- Offstage/Backstage: All parts of the stage not enclosed by the setting.
- Wings: the offstage areas to the right and left of the acting area.
- Outfront/House: the auditorium where the audience sits.

BODY POSITIONS:

Body positions apply to the actor as he faces the audience:

Full front (FF): The actor faces directly front. This position is used for important lines.

One quarter (1/4): The body is a quarter turn away from the audience, R or L at a 45 degree angle. This position is the most frequently used when two actors share a scene, for it places each of their bodies so that the audience can easily see them, in this position the

Profile (Pro): Two actors face each other directly with the upstage foot advanced slightly toward center. This position is used for intense scenes such as quarreling, accusing, romancing, etc. It is sometimes used to obtain comic effects.

Three quarter (3/4): The actor turns away from the audience so that they see three quarters of his back and only one quarter of his face. This position is used when it is necessary for an actor to "give" a scene, or turn all attention to another actor upstage who "takes" the scene.

Full back (FB): The actor stands with his back to the audience. This position is used only in special cases.

Notice that the one quarter, three quarter, and profile **positions can be turned toward the right or left**. For example, one quarter right would be when the actor assumes the one quarter position with his body slightly facing the right.

Stage Crosses, indicated by "X," are movements from one stage area to another. Generally the actor takes the shortest, most direct route, which is a **straight** cross. Straight crosses indicate strength and determination. A **curved** cross suggests indecision, casualness, grace, or ease.

Open: An "open" position is one in which the actor is facing toward the audience, or nearly so. To "open" is to turn toward the audience. Since effective communication requires that the actor be seen and heard, he must-without sacrificing believability-keep himself as "open" as possible. You should follow these practices unless there is reason for doing otherwise:

1. Play shared scenes in a quartered position.
2. Make turns downstage.
3. Do not cover yourself or other actors in making gestures or passing objects. In other
4. Kneel on the downstage knee.

Closed: A "closed" position is one in which the actor is turned away from the audience. To "close in" is to turn away from the audience.

ACTOR'S POSITIONS IN RELATION TO EACH OTHER: Actor's positions in relation to each other are considered with regard to the relative emphasis each actor receives.

Share: Two actors share a scene when they are both "open" to an equal degree, allowing the audience to see them equally well.

Give, take: When two actors are not equally "open" and one receives a greater emphasis than the other, the actor emphasized is said to take the scene. The other is said to give the scene.

Upstaging: The term applied when one actor takes a position above another actor which forces the second actor to face upstage, or away from the audience. Since the downstage actor is put at a disadvantage, "upstaging" has an unpleasant connotation and is generally to be avoided. You should take positions on the exact level of the actor with whom you are playing. Learn neither intentionally nor unintentionally to upstage another actor unless you are directed to do so.

STAGE MOVEMENT

Cross: Movement from one area to another. In writing it is abbreviated by **X**.

Stage Crosses, indicated by “**X**,” are movements from one stage area to another. Generally the actor takes the shortest, most direct route, which is a **straight** cross. Straight crosses indicate strength and determination. A **curved** cross suggests indecision, casualness, grace, or ease.

Motivation means you must find a reason for the character to move. (to advance; to retreat, to do some business.)

Always start a cross with your **UPSTAGE** foot.

If you need to get upstage, it takes **two** crosses. Cross to L or R; turn in, then cross US.

Unless directed to, don't back up on stage. Looks amateur. (Exception: your line is "John, put down the gun." In that case, bck up. Way back.)

Don't "hug the furniture" as you move around it. Give it clearance. It looks better.

Countercross: A movement in the opposite direction in adjustment to the cross of another actor. The instruction usually given is “Counter to left” or “Counter to right.” If only a small adjustment is necessary, the actor should make it without being told.

Cover: An actor is said to be covered when another actor moves into a position between him and the audience, thus obstructing him from view. Covering is usually to be avoided. These principles and practices are generally to be observed:

1. The responsibility is on the downstage actor. In other words, do not stand in front of another actor.
2. If another actor does stand directly below you, make a small adjusting movement.
3. Since a moving actor usually should receive attention, make crosses below other actors so you are not covered. This rule does not apply if the moving actor should not receive attention.

Dress stage: A direction requesting the actors to adjust their positions to improve the compositional effect of the stage picture.

STAGE BUSINESS: Small actions, such as smoking, eating, using a fan, tying a necktie, are known on the stage as “business.”

PROPERTIES: Business often involves the use of properties. Props, as they are commonly called, are divided into several categories.

Hand props: Small objects which the actors handle onstage such as teacups, letters, books and candles.

Personal props: Hand props which are carried on the actor's person and are used only by him- such as watches, spectacles, cigarette holders. An actor is usually responsible for taking care of his personal props during rehearsals and performances.

Costume props: Costume accessories used by the actor in executing business- such as fans, walking sticks, gloves, handbags.

Stage props: Objects for dressing the stage which are not used by the actors in executing their business. Vases of flowers, lamps, clocks, bric-a-brac might be stage props.

Prop table: Tables are usually placed offstage right and left to accommodate props which the

actors carry on and off the set. The property master and the stage manager are responsible for placing props on the tables, but a careful actor checks his props before each performance. And it is the actor's responsibility to return immediately to the table all props he carries off the set.

LINES AND DIALOGUE:

Ad lib: Coming from the Latin *ad libitum* (at pleasure), the term applies to lines supplied by the actor wherever they may be required as in crowd scenes or to fill in where there would otherwise be an undesirable pause. "Ad libs" must be motivated and related to the character's intention as carefully as the playwright's dialogue. Mechanical or indifferent "ad libs" can destroy belief in an otherwise effective scene.

Aside: A line which the other actors onstage are not supposed to be hearing. The aside was a regular convention in plays of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. It is rarely used by modern dramatists.

Build: To increase the tempo or the volume or both in order to reach a climax.

Cue: The last words of a speech, or the end of an action, indicating the time for another actor to speak or act. An actor must memorize his cues as carefully as he memorizes his lines.

Drop: Lines on which the actor does not project his voice sufficiently to be heard are said to be dropped. The direction in such a case is usually, "Don't drop your lines." The term is also used to mean unintentional omission of lines.

Pick up cues: A direction for the actor to begin speaking immediately on cue without allowing any lapse of time. Beginning actors tend to be slow in picking up cues with the result that they often fail to maintain a tempo fast enough to hold the interest of the audience.

Pointing: Giving special emphasis to a word or phrase. An actor may also be directed to "point" a movement or a piece of business.

Tag line: The last line of a scene or act. It usually needs to be "pointed".

Telescoping: Overlapping speeches so that one actor speaks before another has finished. It is a technique for accelerating the pace and building a climax.

Top: To "build" a line higher than the one that preceded it.