

THEATRE VOCABULARY

ABSURDISM	A form of theatre in which language becomes unconventional, and in which political and social problems are examined and presented to the audience in unconventional ways.
ADAPTATION	A written work that has been recast in a new form.
AD-LIB	To perform without preparation.
AMPHITHEATRE	An oval or round structure with no roof that has tiers of seats rising from the center. Used for public performances of plays and other productions.
ANTAGONIST	A person, situation, or the protagonist's own inner conflict that is in opposition to the protagonist's goals.
APRON	The Apron is a section of the stage floor which projects towards or into the auditorium. In proscenium theatres, it's the part of the stage in front of the house tabs, or in front of the proscenium arch, above the orchestra pit.
ARTICULATION	The clear and precise pronunciation of words.
ASIDE	A line spoken by an actor not intended for others on stage.
AT RISE	Who and what are on the stage when the curtain opens.
AVANT GARDE	Work describing new or experimental styles of an art form.
BATTEN	A wood or metal pipe from which stage lights, drops and scenery are hung.
BLACKS	A set of all black clothing traditionally worn by backstage technicians.
BLOCKING	The process of arranging moves to be made by the actors during the play, recorded by stage management in the prompt script. Positions at the start of scenes are noted, as are all movements around the stage (using terms such as 'Gardener X DSL' meaning the Gardener crosses to downstage left.) It must be described in minute detail, but simple enough to enable anyone to read and understand it. As well as being used to 'run the show' the prompt book is also used for the rehearsal of the understudies.
BLUEOUT	All lights onstage go out except for low level blue lights, used for scene changes.
BOX OFFICE	Where ticket sales are handled, usually located in the lobby of a theater.

BREAKING CHARACTER	Losing concentration or getting out of character. Using dialogue or behavior inconsistent with the part you are creating.
BURLESQUE	A low form of comedy that mocks a broad topic
CALLBACKS	Following an audition, the director may ask to see a shortlist of actors again - they are called back for an additional audition to enable the director to make her/his decision.
CALLING THE SHOW	When the stage manager calls each technical cue from the production notebook during a performance.
CHEAT OUT	A stage technique in which an actor who is facing sideways pivots the torso and turns the face towards the audience.
CHOREOGRAPHY	Staged dancing: the arrangement of dances for performances.
CHORUS	A group of actors reciting dialogue or singing in unison, often accompanied by synchronized movement. In Greek theatre the chorus functioned as a commentary on and accompaniment to the action of a play.
CLAMP	A fastening device of metal, used to hold lines or to fasten a light to a batten. Usually named for its shape ("C" clamp).
CLEARANCE	Message passed to Stage Management from the Front of House Manager that the house is ready for the performance to begin. (ie everyone is in their correct seat and there are no coach parties coming through the doors).
CLIMAX	The turning point in a plot when conflict comes to an emotional crest; the point at which the rising action becomes the falling action.
COLD READING	Auditioning with a script that you have not had the opportunity to read before the audition.
COLLABORATION	Working together to create a whole.
COLOR PALETTE	The colors used in a particular design or production.
COMPANY	The cast, crew and other staff associated with a show.
COMPLEMENTARY COLORS	Colors that are directly opposite each other on the color wheel.
CONNOTATION	Emotional, subjective, or implied meaning.
CONVENTION	An accepted rule or tradition.
COSTUME PLOT	A list, by acts and scenes or a play, of each character in a particular scene itemizing each costume piece and accessory used by that character in that scene.

CROSS	To move from one place onstage to another.
CROSSFADE	The practice of moving to a new lighting or sound effect without intervening darkness or silence: one effect fades in while the other is fading out.
CUE	1) The command given to technical departments to carry out a particular operation. E.g. Lighting Cue, Fly Cue or Sound Cue. Normally given by stage management, but may be taken directly from the action (i.e. a Visual Cue). 2) Any signal (spoken line, action or count) that indicates another action should follow (i.e. the actors' cue to enter is when the Maid says "I hear someone coming! Quick - Hide!")
CUE TO CUE	Cutting out action and dialogue between cues during a technical rehearsal, to save time.
CURTAIN CALL	At the end of a performance, the acknowledgement of applause by actors - the bows.
CYCLORAMA	Usually shortened to just cyc (pronounced sike). The Cyclorama is a curved plain cloth or plastered wall filling the rear of the stage or TV studio. Often used as a sky backing to a traditional set, or as the main backing for a dance piece etc.
DAISY CHAINING	Connecting items of equipment together by linking them from one to the next in a chain.
DARK	A venue that has been closed to the public. Some theatres go dark temporarily during production periods, when the next show is in preparation on stage.
DENOUEMENT	The final resolution of the conflict in a plot.
DIALOGUE	The spoken text of a play - conversations between characters is dialogue.
DICTION	Language, or meaning, expressed in words: one of the six elements of tragedy set forth by Aristotle.
DIFFUSION	Used like a gel, but to soften and spread the beam of light rather than to color it. Also called frost.
DIRECTOR	Broadly, the role involves being responsible for the overall artistic vision of a production.
DOUBLE CASTING	Using two people to play the part of a single character.
DOWNSTAGE	1) The part of the stage nearest to the audience. It's called Downstage because it's the lowest part of a raked stage. [See Diagram] 2) A movement towards the audience (in a proscenium theatre).

DRAMATURG	A special consultant who provides specific, in-depth knowledge and literary resources to a director, producer, or entire theatre company.
DRESS REHEARSAL	A full rehearsal, with all technical and creative elements brought together. The performance as it will be 'on the night'.
DRY BRUSHING	A painting technique in which a brush is dipped in paint, scraped nearly dry, and then streaked across a surface; often used to create wood grain effects.
EMOTIONAL RECALL	The technique of calling upon your own memories of emotions to understand a character's emotions.
EMPHASIS	The stressing of important elements: the point to which the eye is first directed.
ENCORE	An extra performance in response to audience demand.
ENSEMBLE	A cast other than the principals.
ENTR'ACTE	A song, dance, or short performance that takes place between the acts, most often in plays of an earlier period, although occasionally seen in children's theatre. also music between the acts in a play.
FADE IN/OUT	To increase/decrease illumination or sounds.
FLAT	A lightweight timber frame covered with scenic canvas, or plywood. Flats are used to provide a lightweight and easy to move and re-configure backdrop to a stage set. Flats sometimes have windows or doors built into them to provide extra flexibility, for use in realistic settings.
FLY	To be raised or lowered on lines in the fly space.
FLY SPACE	The area above the stage where lights, drops, and scenery may be flown, or suspended on wire ropes.
FRONT OF HOUSE (FOH)	1) the area above the stage where lights, drops, and scenery may be flown, or suspended on wire 2) Every part of the theatre in front of the proscenium arch. Includes foyer areas open to the general public. 3) All lanterns which are on the audience side of the proscenium and are focussed towards the stage.
FOURTH WALL	An imaginary wall between the audience and the actors in a representational play.
GAFF TAPE	Ubiquitous, sticky cloth tape. Most common widths are .5" and 2". Used for temporarily securing anything. Should not be used on coiled cables or equipment. Comes in a multitude of colors, also called spike tape.

GENRE	A class of art having a characteristic form or technique.
GHOST LIGHT	A light left burning overnight on stage to keep friendly spirits illuminated and to keep unfriendly spirits at bay. Also believed to keep the theatrical "muse" in a dark theatre and to stop people from tripping when they come into the dark theatre.
GOBO	A thin metal template with a pattern punched out - attached to a lighting instrument to create patterned or textured lighting effects. Also called cookie.
GREEN ROOM	Room close to the stage (i.e. the green) for the actors to meet and relax before or after going on stage.
HOUSE	1) The audience (eg 'How big is the house tonight ?') 2) The auditorium (eg 'The house is now open, please do not cross the stage')
HOUSE LIGHTS	Lights that illuminate the audience's part of a theater or other auditorium.
IMPROVISATION	A performance given without planning or preparation.
INFLECTION	Variety in speech reflecting changing thoughts and emotions.
INTENSITY	How light or dark a color or light is.
INTERMISSION	A recess or temporary stopping of action, usually about halfway through a play.
LEGS	Drape set as masking piece at the side of the acting area. Usually set up in pairs across the stage and used in conjunction with borders to frame the audiences view. The phrase "break a leg" originated from taking an extra encore from the legs after a successful performance.
LIGHT PLOT	A scale drawing detailing the location of each instrument used in a production and any other pertinent information. (dimmer #, focus position, and color number).
MAGIC "IF"	Drama term referring to "what would happen if...?" releasing the imagination to create a story with limitless possibilities.
MELODRAMA	A dramatic form popular in the 1800's, originally considered serious plays-now usually plays based on romantic plots that have little regard for convincing motivation or detailed characterization and that have the primary goal of keeping the audience involved and entertained at all costs.
METHOD ACTING	A technique used by actors in which the actor tries to become a character in as many ways as possible to facilitate a realistic performance.

MIME	An actor who communicates entirely by gesture.
MONITOR	1] an onstage speaker which allows a performer to hear the output of the amplification system. 2] a video display screen.
MONOLOGUE	A dramatic speech by a single actor.
MUSICAL REVUE	A production consisting of a series of independent songs and dances tied loosely together. Often satirical.
MUSLIN	Medium to lightweight unbleached cotton fabric used to cover flats.
OBJECTIVE	A character's goal or intention.
OFF/ON BOOK	Rehearsing without/with a script.
OPEN	The start of the run of a show in a venue. (e.g. 'When does the new musical open at the Variety Theatre?' or 'The show opened a few weeks ago - it's had some great reviews'.)
OVERTURE	Orchestral music at the beginning of an opera or musical.
ORCHESTRA PIT	Lowered area in front of a stage where an orchestra accompanies the performers.
PANTOMIME	A performance using gestures and movements without words.
PITCH	The high or low quality of a sound.
PLANES	Imaginary divisions giving depth to the proscenium stage. An actor moves through stage planes as he moves upstage and downstage.
PLAYBILL	A printed program for a theatrical performance.
PLAYWRIGHT	The author of a play. Also known as a dramatist.
PRINCIPALS	The main characters in a play or a musical.
PRODUCER	Someone who finances and supervises the making of a show.
PROMPT	To give lines to an actor who has forgotten them.
PROJECT	Cause to be heard. Speaking loudly enough for everyone in the audience to hear.
PROPS	(Properties) Furnishings, set dressings, and all items large and small which cannot be classified as scenery, electrics or wardrobe. Props handled by actors are known as hand props, props which are kept in an actors costume are known as PERSONAL PROPS.

PROSCENIUM ARCH	The opening in the wall which stands between stage and auditorium in some theatres; the picture frame through which the audience sees the play. The "fourth wall". Often shortened to Proscenium or Pros Arch.
RAKED STAGE	A sloping stage which is raised at the back (upstage) end. Many theatres with a 'stalls' seating area used to be built with raked stages as a matter of course. Today, the stage is often left flat and the auditorium is lifted to stage level and above to improve the view of the stage from all seats.
REPERTOIRE	All plays a company has ready to perform at a moments notice – also all monologues/scenes an actor has ready to perform at a moments notice.
ROYALTY	The fee paid to the playwright or the holder of the copyright in return for the right to perform the work in public.
RUN	1) A sequence of performances of the same production. (e.g. 'How long is the run of this show?' or 'This show runs for two weeks')
RUN THROUGH	An uninterrupted rehearsal.
SATURATION	The brightness or dullness of a color.
SCRIM	A thin - open weave fabric, used as a drop or as a section of a drop: when lit from the front it is opaque, when lit from behind it is transparent to translucent.
SENSORY RECALL	The ability to remember various sensory experiences associated with persons, places or things; the ability to remember, and to almost feel again, the stimuli that accompanied a particular experience.
SET	1) To prepare the stage for action. (verb) - e.g. 'Have you set the chairs for Act 1?' 2) The complete stage setting for a scene or act.
SOLILOQUY	A monologue usually delivered while the character is alone onstage, thinking aloud.
SPIKING	Sticking tapes to the floor of the rehearsal space to indicate the groundplan of the scenery. Also for marking position of furniture etc. within a set. Always be aware that some tapes may damage or mark some wooden floor surfaces!
STAGE CREW	Crew of workers who move scenery or handle properties in a theatrical production.
STAGE DIRECTIONS	An instruction written as part of the script of a play. Usually in italics.

STAGE LEFT/RIGHT	Left/ Right as seen from the Actor's point of view on stage. (ie Stage Left is the right side of the stage when looking from the auditorium.)
STAGE MANAGER	Someone who supervises the physical aspects in the production of a show and who is in charge of the stage when the show is being performed.
STAKES	The consequences of an outcome.
STOCK CHARACTER	An easily recognizable character. A flat, one dimensional character with predictable actions. (example: young lovers, witch, villain)
STOCK SCENERY	Standard set pieces that can be adapted and used for various purposes.
STRIKE	A removing of scenery to clear the stage; also to dismantle, remove, and store scenery used in a stage setting; a command given to clear the stage of scenery.
SUBTEXT	The meaning underlying the dialogue and stage directions in a script.
TABLEAUX	A living picture. Also spelled tableau.
TECHNICAL REHEARSAL	(also known as the TECH RUN, or just TECH). Usually the first time the show is rehearsed in the venue, with lighting, scenery and sound. Costumes are sometimes used where they may cause technical problems (eg Quick changes). Often a very lengthy process. Often abbreviated to the Tech.
THESPIAN	Actor. Named after Thespis, who is said to be the first actor from Greek Theatre.
THRUST STAGE	A stage with the audience seated on three sides. The stage extends, or thrusts out into the audience space.
TRANSITION	Movement, gesture, or words that acts as a bridge between beats in a monologue; verbal or visual connection that separates and links scenes.
TROUPE	An organization of performers and associated personnel.
TYPE CAST	Identifying and casting an actor in the same kind of role over and over again.
UNDERSTUDY	An actor able to replace a regular performer when required.

UPSTAGE	1) The part of the stage furthest from the audience. It's called Upstage because on a raked stage the stage slopes down towards the audience to improve sightlines. The furthest from the audience is literally higher due to the slope of the stage, so moving from close to the audience involves walking up the raked stage, towards 'Upstage'.
UPSTAGING	Improperly taking attention from an actor who should be the focus of interest.
WINGS	1) The out of view areas to the sides of the acting area (known as FLÜGEL in German). The wings are best identified by their position on stage (e.g. "Clive exits through the downstage left wing").