

Stage Manager's Handbook

Wayland High School Theater Ensemble

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Pre-Production and Auditions

Pre-Production

1. Meeting with Director

Communication is one of the most important skills in a stage manager's toolkit. The strength of theatre lies in communication between all departments and disciplines. The stage manager's responsibility is to ensure that communication and collaboration occurs on a regular basis throughout the process. This can be done by holding weekly production meetings as well as individual meetings with designers and directors to ensure the production is going in a unified direction all around.

It is important that the stage manager acts as a liaison between the creative and artistic teams as well as the administrative teams. Regardless of what may happen throughout the production, remain unbiased and never find yourself swaying to the favor of one side.

2. Meeting with Designers

Check in with the designers you will be working with and make sure to establish an open and easy channel of communication. You'll be working with these so make sure you are on the same page.

Make sure to ask for a ground plan from the scenic designer as soon as possible. The layout and spacing directly effects your rehearsal process, so it is important you know the space you will be working in and if any changes are made.

Auditions

The roles of each of the stage managers during auditions often differs depending upon the team, but assuming that there are multiple stage managers the following process works well.

1. Stage Manager

As the auditionees arrive, greet them. They should collect their headshot and resume (if they have them) for the audition team and have them fill out an audition sheet.

It is the job of the SM to keep track of who is currently auditioning, who is next, and who has completed their audition. For each auditionee, the SM will get the actors' paperwork and escort them into the audition room. As soon as the auditonee leaves the room and the audition team indicates that they are ready, you can send in the next person.

2. ASM

The ASM will help the SM keep track of who is currently auditioning, who is next, and who has completed their audition. The ASM should monitor the halls and keep them quiet.

The Rehearsal Process

Stage Management Team Responsibilities

1. Atmosphere

As a stage manager, it is part of your duties to help create a safe and creative rehearsal space. A stage manager's dedication manifests in many ways, including remaining alert throughout rehearsal and staying on task especially while using laptops. This helps to instill confidence in the stage manager.

2. Production Meetings

Use these meetings to make sure everyone on the production team is kept up to speed on all developments with the scenic, costumes, lighting, sound, and props departments as well as pertinent developments in the rehearsal room.

3. Communication With Departments

Communication is vital to stage managing. You should make a point to have check in's as often as you believe is necessary but at least weekly to create rapport and disseminate information.

a. Scenic Check Ins—Make sure blocking development that is pertinent to the design such as which way the door open are observed during rehearsals.

b. Costumes Check Ins—Communicate about necessary rehearsal pieces. Be sure to distinguish between rehearsal pieces and show pieces when bringing them into rehearsals. While scheduling, remember to include fittings.

c. Lighting—Alert them to pertinent blocking and any effects mentioned in rehearsal.

d. Sound—Alert them to any effects or thoughts decided upon in rehearsals.

e. Props—Communicate about necessary rehearsal props. Be sure to distinguish rehearsal props from show props when bringing them into rehearsals. Meet the props master when they drop off props to ascertain each prop's purpose and check in. Typically the 1st ASM is the designated props liaison of the stage management team.

Pre-Rehearsal Duties

Prior to the first rehearsal, there are many duties that the Stage Management team must perform, including the following.

1. Duties of the Stage Manager

The Stage Manager is responsible to create the Daily Call for each rehearsal after consulting with the Director about the schedule for each day. The Stage Manager should email the Daily Call each day to all cast.

2. Duties of the Assistant Stage Manager(s)

Assistant Stage Managers are often responsible for rehearsal Scenic Elements, Props, and Costume Pieces. ASMs should arrange for the delivery of Rehearsal Props to rehearsal when they are needed. ASMs should pick up Rehearsal Costume Pieces from the Costume Team prior to rehearsal.

First Rehearsal

1. Set-Up

The stage management team should start to form their daily routine of setting up the rehearsal space on the first day of rehearsal. For the first rehearsal, the room should have chairs set up in the center for a first read through with the acting company. There should be plenty of extra chairs around for designers to watch. This is because it is the first time for designers and staff to see the actors read their roles. During this read through, the stage manager typically reads the stage directions.

2. Getting Started

To make everyone feel comfortable it is important for everyone to introduce themselves by name and position on the show. This facilitates the start of the full company's interaction.

3. Rehearsal Etiquette

Remember that the rehearsal room is a professional atmosphere. Keep in mind that your presence in the room is being observed by the directing team and acting company; they will feed off of your energy. Remain alert and ready for anything that may come up. Keep use of cellphones in the room for rehearsal purposes only and laptops for paperwork only. Facebook, twitter, tumblr and other social media forms should not be used in the room.

Rehearsal Period Responsibilities

1. Stage Manager Paperwork

a. Daily Calls

The Daily Call is to be sent out to the actors after every rehearsal at least 12 hours before their next call to let them know if they are called for rehearsal that day or not. Typically it is the 2nd Assistants who update the call board every morning with the new Daily Call. If you are not the one doing it check it every once in a while to make sure it's being done.

b. Blocking Pages

Before the rehearsal process starts, the Stage Manager should create Blocking Pages with one to three mini ground plans on them and blank space in order to draw and notate each actors' blocking.

c. Scenic Piece Change Plot

Once the Scenic piece list has been compiled and finalized between Stage Management, the Director and the Set Designer you can create a Scenic Piece Change Plot. It should list all of the scenic pieces that move for scene changes.

2. Assistant Stage Manager Paperwork

a. Weekly Rehearsal Reports

Weekly Rehearsal Reports keep everyone in communication about what is going on. Any notes for Scenic, Costumes, Lighting, Sound, Props, or in General should be noted within the rehearsal report. Each week, the report should be sent out as early as possible on the designated night so that the designers and technicians can see it by the next morning.

b. Props Preset Sheet

Once the Props list has been compiled and finalized, you can create a Props Preset Sheet. It should list each location of where props are preset as well as the prop, act, scene and page number of when its used in the show.

c. Costume Quick Change Plot

After the SM team has received the Costume Plot from the Costume Designer, you can go about creating a Costume Quick Change Plot. It should list any quick changes that are made by the actors during the course of the show, as well as amount of time they will have for the change, location of each quick change and a basic outline of what the actor is changing out of and into.

d. Line Note Form

This form includes space for the act, scene and page, the line that was wrong and then boxes for called line, dropped word, dropped line, switched word or switched line.

3. Stage Manager Duties

a. Rehearsal Attendance

The SM is responsible for taking attendance as the actors enter the rehearsal room. They should call missing actors 3-5 minutes before rehearsal start time to verify their whereabouts.

b. Taking Down Blocking

Blocking notes are an important part of the rehearsal process because they are a record of all of the actors' movement on stage. As you go through rehearsal, notate in short hand the movements of the actors such as entrances and exits, crosses and locations.

4. Assistant Stage Manager Duties

a. Taking Down Notes for the Rehearsal Report

In order to facilitate taking Report notes during rehearsal, it can help to use a log form so that you can not only take notes that will go into the report that everyone gets but you'll also have your own notes that you will take for yourself that might not end up in the report. It's important to write down everything, you never want to begin writing your report and have forgotten half of what happened that week.

b. Line Notes

An important job of the 2nd is to be on book. Being on book requires you to focus on the script to make sure that you are ready to jump in if an actor calls line. A great skill to develop when on book is the ability to speak loudly and clearly. If you are constantly jumping in with their next line even if they haven't called for it, they could be taking a dramatic pause or get into the bad habit of expecting Stage Managers to anticipate their needs which is impossible to do consistently.

Post-Rehearsal Duties

1. Clean-Up

All members of the Stage Management team should assist with cleanup. Clean up includes breaking down any equipment, storing equipment, storing rehearsal props and costumes, sweeping and mopping if necessary, and turning off all lights.

2. Post-Rehearsal Communication

After each rehearsal, the Stage Manager should meet with the Director to check in about any final notes, and finalize the Daily Call for the next rehearsal. The Stage Manager should then email the Daily Call to the company.

Pre-Tech and Tech

Pre-Tech

1. Running Order Signage

A helpful tool for the green room and backstage is a running order list. This list contains each scene number and who is in it. On many occasions, the cast and director have a nickname for a scene that acts as a reference point. They may be included as titles so the cast can easily recognize which scene is which.

2. Call Board

The callboard should be for official business only. Items found on the callboard include:

- a. Tech Week Cast & Crew Sign In**
- b. Performances Cast & Crew Sign In**
- c. Rehearsal & Tech Schedule**
- d. Pen (Attached by string)**

3. Crew Assignments

- a. Crew Positions**—Crew members will have multiple responsibilities on a show. Their first assignment is what position they will be fulfilling during the show itself. It is helpful to ask crew members during the crew calls what jobs they may wish to perform in order to get a clearer idea of what they are interested in.
- b. Pre/Post Show Duties**—Crew members will also be assigned Pre and Post Show Duties. Pre-Show duties can include sweeping, mopping, and scenic preset. These tasks all vary depending on the production. Post-Show Duties, completed after a tech run or performance, include resetting scenic pieces, cleaning backstage trash and other general maintenance.

4. Blue Run Lights

See how dark the backstage area is when the theater is in show mode. Make sure to do this before actors begin onstage. Decide what type of light is best to use that will allow for the smallest amount of light leaking onto the stage. Clip lights and LED rope lights are often used.

Friday Before Tech Weekend

This is the opportunity to organize, clean and assign duties for actual tech rehearsals. Each dry tech is different per a production's needs and a stage manager's schedule. Here are some tasks that should be done this day.

1. Teach the Crew to Sweep and Mop

2. Use Cast & Crew Members As Stand-Ins

The lighting team may ask for bodies to stand in for actors so they can judge how the lighting will work. Keep extra crew members in the house and use them for this purpose.

3. Sweep and Organize Backstage

This is a great time to organize where scenic pieces will be stored backstage. Remember to tape out locations on the floor with white gaff and label everything.

4. Tape Out Prop Tables

5. Show Crew Pre-Sets

This will be your time with the crew to prep them for the week to come. Use it to show them the proper way to set the stage.

6. Assign Crew Members To Transitions and Review Run Sheets

Plan out your transitions and talk through the steps with your crew so they will need less direction during tech. Assign crew members to as much as possible while maintaining the flow of the transition.

7. Dry Tech

The SM will start from the top of the show with the designers and run through the whole thing. As this goes the SM will write cues in the book, and coordinate any cues backstage with the ASMs.

Tech Week

Tech is the time to really whip a show into shape. It is where most things will get changed and the most vigilance is required. At this point, stage management's job is tying up loose ends from rehearsals and solving the challenges of being in the actual performance space. In order to make sure tech runs smoothly, there are a few pointers for staying on top of paperwork and organization for this time period.

1. Sweep and Mop

Make sure the crew does this as soon as possible!

2. Check Sign In Sheet/Call Latecomers

Sign-in sheets should be checked promptly 5 minutes before call. ASMs should call any cast or crew members who are late.

3. Headset Check/God Mic Check

Place two crew members on headset check. One crew member will be stationed at the SM console listening with their headset as the other crew member moves to each headset location. At each location the crew member should speak into the headset to make sure the SM can clearly hear without interference.

4. Write Cues In Prompt Book

Make sure you have all the cues (lighting, sound, etc.) written down and that you understand what every cue does so that it is easier for you to call.

5. Production Meetings at End of Night

Production Meetings should include the entire production team.

Performances

Pre-Show

The duties of the stage manager and the assistant stage managers on the day of, but prior to the opening of, a performance are essential in having a smoothly running show. First and foremost, it is important to remember that in order to be completely prepared for the show, the stage managers need to arrive a certain amount of time earlier than everyone else – just like they do for everything. On the night of a show, the pre-show duties usually begin about 2 hours before “places” are called.

1. Arriving and Unlocking

The stage manager should always try to arrive first so that they can be there as everybody else comes in. Unlock everything. Depending on what theater you’re in, this includes areas such as the theater, technical booth, and hallway doors.

2. Stage Manager

- a. The stage manager should check in with everybody to make sure there are no questions or concerns about the show – and to sincerely make sure everybody is doing well and ready to go. This includes: your ASMs, the Cast/Company, the Pit Orchestra, and the Musical Director.
- b. While you’re waiting to start, review your script and go over your cues. You can never know your show too well.
- c. Check your headset. The ASMs will likely do a headset check, but you should double check that your headset is completely functioning.
- d. You should give “house open” warnings at 90 mins, 60 mins, 30 mins, 15 mins, 10 mins, 5 mins, and on open just to be sure everyone is ready.

3. Assistant Stage Managers

a. Crew

- i. A few minutes before the crew’s call time comes, you should check their sign-in sheet and call any of them who are running late. Once they are all there, brief them with any questions, concerns, or notes you have for them.
- ii. Check that everyone is wearing blacks.

b. Actors—Check sign-in sheet for actors (as if you were taking attendance). Actors who have not arrived within about five minutes after their call time should be called on the phone.

d. Preset—Preset the set pieces for the top of the show.

e. Headset/Monitors check—One person should sit on the stage manager’s headset and another person should go to each of the others and test them to make sure they’re working. Then go around and check audio/visual monitors.

Performance

1. Basic Procedure

After technical rehearsals everything should be in place for a running a smooth show. However, this may not always happen. The stage manager, by creating a safe, collaborative environment a show can have a smooth and safe run.

Unfortunately, sometimes accidents will occur and it is the responsibility of the state manager and the ASMs to communicate effectively to the cast, crew, and audience to alleviate emergency situations.

2. Stage Manager

- a. **Calling Script/Cue Sheet** - Put final touches on your calling script to create a clean, legible script. Anyone should be able to call a show from your calling script. Your script should include anything that will need to be cued, this will include lights, spots, sound, SPFX, etc.
- b. **Calling** - To call a show effectively, one must have a calm voice and speak clearly and with certainty. By giving adequate time for standbys, and giving a clear "Go" there should be no confusion regarding placement of cues and should execute smoothly.
 - i. **Standby:** Typically given about 20 seconds (a line or two) prior to the cue. This gives time for the technician to put their hands in position.
 - ii. **GO:** The execution of the cue. "GO" This should be calm, clear, and confident. ALWAYS, avoid saying, "go" over headset unless you are calling a cue.

3. The ASMs

The ASMs should continue to be responsible for run sheets, the backstage area, following preset procedures, collecting valuables, and leading the crew. These responsibilities may vary by production.

Post-Show

Post show is the time following performance when you clear and reset the stage but there are a few other tasks that need to be completed before you head out for the night. After a long evening everyone is eager to leave as soon as possible but you want to make sure that all tasks are completed before returning for your next performance. To ensure that all post show tasks are completed in a timely matter it is helpful to divide up responsibilities among your stage management team and run crew early on. The key is to have everyone doing something so that time is not wasted. Here is a breakdown of tasks that should be completed during post show.

1. ASMs and Run Crew – Clearing The Stage

While you're waiting for the house to clear, have the deck crew standing by to strike anything on stage. Once the house is clear, send your deck crew onstage to strike whatever they are assigned to.

2. Stage Manager – Dismissing The Cast & Crew

When everything has been put away and your crew has finished cleaning up gather all of your run crew members onstage to give them tomorrow's call time and release them for the night.

Strike

The stage management team needs to check in with various departments to see what they will need to make the process happen in the best possible way. During the actual strike itself, the most important thing is to make sure things are constantly happening and staying on track, but more importantly at the same time everyone is staying safe.

Emergency Situations

General Emergency Information

In the event of an emergency, the following steps should be followed:

1. Notify Mr. O'Hara
2. Notify Public Safety/911 (if needed)
3. Perform First Aid (if needed AND someone is certified)
4. Fill out an Accident report (Mr. O'Hara can help guide you through this process)
5. Keep the injured person calm and in good spirits.

1. Emergency Backstage:

By being in constant contact with the backstage ASMs you can be aware of a situation, while still calling a show. The SMs and ASMs should be aware of the location of all fire extinguishers and first aid kits.

2. Emergency In House:

Always have a house announce mic at your calling station. It's often helpful in stressful situations to have a house speech visible at the calling station.

a. Tech problem—"Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention please. We are currently experiencing some technical difficulties on stage. Please bear with us and the performance will continue shortly. Thank you for your patience."

b. Evacuation—"Ladies and Gentlemen, may I have your attention please. A situation that is not immediately threatening requires us to evacuate the building at this time. We ask that you please walk to the nearest exit. The front of house staff will be available to assist you and will direct you to a safe gathering point. Thank you for your cooperation."