

A Crash Course in Stage Management:

10 Golden Rules of Stage Management

1. **Please & Thank You.** Use these word everyday, especially when you are working with volunteers.
2. **Early Is On Time.** The SM should always be the first person in and the last person out of the theatre for a meeting or rehearsal. I always try to show up about 15 minutes before I really think I need to be there.
3. **Put Everything In Writing.** In other words, be a communicator! Dated daily rehearsal notes aid in communication and help to avoid conflicts over when requests or changes were made.
4. **Safety First!** The cast shouldn't set foot on the stage unless you would walk on it barefoot. Inspect the set daily for potential problems. Are all stairs and platforms secure? Are all escapes adequately lit and glow taped? Do you know where the first aid kits and fire extinguishers are located?
5. **Plan & Think Ahead.** What can be done to avoid problems? How can the Stage Managers make life easier for everyone?
6. **There Are No Dumb Questions.** It is better to ask and feel silly for a few seconds than to cause a disaster later.
7. **Don't Panic!** Always remain calm, cool and collected. Never, never, ever yell. All Stage Managers should know the difference between raising their voices to be heard and yelling. If the Stage Manager loses it, everyone will panic.
8. **Learn From Mistakes.** No one is perfect. We all make mistakes as we practice our crafts. The best thing anyone can do is to analyze these situations and learn how to avoid making the same mistake again.
9. **Prioritize Tasks & Delegate Authority.** One person can't do everything. Why do we have assistants if we don't use them?!
10. **Stage Managers DO Make Coffee.** They also do a million other menial tasks that are meant to make people happy and boost morale. Sweep the stage, make sure birthdays are recognized, and hole-punch all paperwork. These little things are really appreciated by everyone.

Stage Manager/ Rehearsal Assistant Responsibilities:

The stage management crew is an extension of the director. They should serve as a liaison between the director and actors and technical crews. The stage management crew may rehearse with individual actors, read through individual scenes, among other responsibilities. They may read parts when actors are absent from rehearsal. In short, the assistant director assists the director in various ways during rehearsal.

Prior to each rehearsal:

1. Know the scenes to be rehearsed.
2. Review previous character/blocking notes.
3. Open up the green room, restrooms and hallway doors.
4. Set up the first scene's furniture, etc.
5. Check and sweep the stage.
6. Bring out the stage management kit and prepare the stage management area.
7. Have the script open to the first scene and be ready to work.
8. Check in all actors as they arrive and call anyone who SHOULD be at rehearsal who is not (check conflicts list and check with the director to make sure no one has called in sick).

At each Rehearsal:

1. Be a role model for conduct during the rehearsal.
2. Keep blocking and line reading notes.
3. Work with actors as instructed by the director.
4. Rehearse scenes as instructed by the director.
5. Keep track of the artistic decisions of the rehearsal.
6. Keep track of any prop or costume questions or needs.

After to each rehearsal:

1. Put away the stage management kit.
2. Put away any scenery as needed.
3. Put away all props (acts should return props).
4. Lock up the green room, restrooms and hallway doors.
5. Make sure all actors have a ride coming.

Prior to Tech Week:

1. Perform tasks as assigned by the director.
2. Coordinate work with the Design team, ensuring all technical aspects are prepared, working with the production team as needed.

On production dates (including dress rehearsals):

1. Help keep morale of the actors high.
2. Help inspire the actors and crews.
3. Perform assigned tasks, keeping notes of anything that needs to be addressed.

BLOCKING NOTATION:

Areas of the Stage and their abbreviations:

Up Right (UR)	Up Right Center (URC)	Up Center (UC)	Up Left Center (ULC)	Up Left (UL)
Right (R)	Right Center (RC)	Center (C)	Left Center (LC)	Left (L)
Down Right (DR)	Down Right Center (DRC)	Down Center (DC)	Down Left Center (DLC)	Down Left (DL)
AUDIENCE				

Other Useful Blocking Notation:

X = Cross (move to a new location)	NTR = Enter	EX = exit
CX = Counter-cross (move opposite another's move)	/ = Beat (short pause)	Kn = Kneel
FZ = Freeze (no motion)	BK = Break (stop a freeze)	@ = At
w/ = With	w/o = Without	Letters in circle for character names.

Examples of Notation:

(S) X DR 2 Desk. **(C)** FZ // CX UC & EX

Means Scrooge crossed Down Right to the Desk; Cratchit Freezes, pauses two beats, then counter-crosses Up Center and exits.

PROMPTING (ACTORS GETTING MEMORIZED):

1. Follow the script meticulously, noting dropped words or phrases to give to the actors at the end of work.
2. When an actor calls for a line, prompt them with the first few words of their next line. NEVER call out a line until it is asked for.

PROPS

1. A place for every prop and every prop in it's place.
2. Create a prop table (or tables) in which EVERY prop is placed, marked out with masking tape and labeled on the tape (with arrows as needed.)
3. It is best to have props grouped by how they are used – either by act/scene or by actor. I prefer by act/scene, going from beginning to end along the table.
4. Make sure the prop table can be seen well and get running lights if need be.
5. Check props every night to make sure all props are returned (tell actors to return props as needed) and that they are all in good condition.
6. During rehearsals, note props like an actor – when they enter, when they are put in one place for a long time and when they leave. Keep track of WHO brings on/off the prop and WHERE/HOW it is used.

SCENES

1. A spike mark for every scenic piece and every scenic piece on it's spike mark.
2. Use spike tape to designate on the stage where EVERY piece of scenery is put, when it is moved UNLESS there is another PERMANENT way of marking it's location (ie, in the corner).
3. Use about 1 ½ to 2 inches of spike tape to create two Ls on the Upstage corners of where the item is to be located.
4. Use different colors for different acts or scenes as appropriate.
5. Early in rehearsal, write the item's name on the spike tape in pen to recall it's purpose later.
6. Before tech rehearsals, confirm all spike marks and replace with glow tape if needed.
7. Apply glow tape (about a ¼ inch by 1 inch piece every 1 – 2 feet) along the edges of platforms, steps, etc. as needed. (If the show never goes to blackout, there is not really a need for glow tape.)
8. Keep track of EVERY scenic item that comes on/off the stage and WHO brings it on/off. From these notations you will create a Scene Change worksheet.

TECH REHEARSALS

1. Tech rehearsals are for the production crew to perfect what they do, so the actors won't have to think about it. Actors will be needed to ensure they are comfortable with all the technical changes that will occur.
2. Prior to tech rehearsals, have lists of ALL props, ALL scenic changes, ALL costume changes, ALL light and sound cues and any special effects.
3. If an ACTOR is responsible for bringing on a prop, it is NOT part of the prompt book (though it may be on a master prop check list).
4. The Stage Manager (SM) will create the Prompt Book that will contain ALL of the necessary notations.
5. A Prompt Book will have the necessary lighting, sound and scenic numbers/letter (cues or Qs) and the EXACT word or action that they are to happen. It is the Stage Manager's job to then call the Warnings, Stand-bys and GOs for ALL Qs.
6. Every time there is a change in scenery, lighting or sound, the tech rehearsal will run that change and the appropriate information will be recorded..
7. All lighting levels will be recording into the lighting console by the Lighting Designer and the Light Board Operator.
8. All light Q numbers will be recorded in the Prompt Book by the SM.
9. All sound sources, levels, and fade times will be established and recorded by the Sound Designer and the Sound Board Operator
10. All Sound Qs will be recorded in the Prompt Book by the SM.
11. All scene changes (who moves what to where) should already be recorded and will be verified/modified if needed by the Back-Stage Manager (BSM).
12. When all scene changes begin will be recording in the Prompt Book by the SM.
13. Keep track of how long the rehearsal is going and remind the Director/ Designers to take periodic breaks.

DRESS REHEARSALS and PERFORMANCES

1. The only difference between a Dress Rehearsal and Performance is the Audience.
2. The Stage Manger will coordinate all Production Crews to ensure that everything is being done promptly.
3. Make sure everything and everyone is ready prior to allowing audience.
4. Make sure performers are kept informed about minutes to go (show time).
5. During the show, the SM talks via headset to all Crews to prompt them when to do their respective jobs – this is “Calling the Show.”
6. Short hand for the Prompt Book:
 - a. Light Cue (#) = LQ(#); Example LQ10
 - b. Sound Cue (Letter) = SQ(letter); Example SQ-F
 - c. Scene Change to Act(Roman #), Scene(#) = SC- Act(Roman #), Scene(#); Example SC-II,3
7. Cues should be written on a CLEAN, ONE-SIDED script, with the cues on the BACK of the previous page, with lines drawn across the page to the appropriate cue line or action.
 - a. Write Cues in PENCIL, as they may change.
 - b. Cues may later (prior to performances) be highlighted in various colors, or similar to denote different cues.
8. Sample calls, written in shorthand:
 - a. Sample calls:
 - i. SM: “Warning LQ15” (30 sec – 1 min. prior to Q)
 - ii. LBO: “Ready.”
 - iii. SM: “Stand by LQ15” (10-15 sec. prior to Q)
 - iv. LBO: “Standing by.”
 - v. SM: “LQ15...Go” (note that GO is the last thing said at the precise moment.)
 - vi. LBO: (after Q is completed) “Light Q15 complete.”
 - b. OR
 - i. SM: “Warning SC-II,5” (1-2 min. prior to Q)
 - ii. BSM: (Back-stage Manager checks list of things to accomplish and talks to stage hands): “Ready.”
 - iii. SM: “Stand by SC-II,5.” (30 seconds prior to Q).
 - iv. BSM: “Standing by.”
 - v. SM: “SC-II,5...Go.” (note that GO is the last thing said at the precise moment.)
 - vi. BSM: (After shift is finished.)
 - c. It is important to know that SEVERAL Qs may be called at the same moment and you’ll need to leave time to connect with all crews, and it is acceptable to put multiple Qs in one call. For example:
 - i. SM: “Warning LQ-20, SQ-B and SC-II,5.”

SOUND CREW DUTIES

1. Prior to techs
 - a. Learn how to safely set up and operate the sound equipment.
 - i. Know (be able to explain) how the entire sound system is connected.
 - ii. Know what every knob, button and slider on every piece of sound equipment used, does. (at least all that are potentially used.)
 - iii. Know how to explain the safe use of all equipment to be handled by the performers.
 - iv. Know what to do in case of feedback.
 - v. Know where all sound equipment is stored and how to handle it properly.
 - b. With the Sound designer, set up all sound equipment.
 - c. With the Sound designer, set all the fundamental (nominal) levels of all the equipment.
 - d. Label all inputs and outputs.
 - e. Assemble the sound cue sheets with input level, fade times and cue event.
 - f. Have a script for all notations as needed.
2. Preshow
 - a. Turn on ALL sound system components to be used.
 - b. Get out wireless mics from the storage room.
 - c. Prep all sound inputs.
 - d. Check that ALL sound inputs are working (wired mics, CD, Computer, instruments, etc.)
 - e. Check that the monitors are working.
 - f. Check that the main speakers are working.
 - g. Prep all wireless mics and put them on all performers.
 - h. Check ALL wireless mics ON the performer to use them.
 - i. Ensure that the light in the storage room is OFF, but the door is left open (in the event of an emergency).
 - a. Inform the stage manager and/or supervisor when ALL sound is ready for the house to be opened. Sound should be fully prepared for the show 45 minutes prior to show time.
 - j. Be at the light board from the time the house opens.
3. During the show
 - a. Maintain a quiet control area.
 - b. Change any wireless mics that switch between performers.
 - c. Ensure that ALL sound inputs are ON when they need to be ON and OFF when they need to be OFF.
 - d. CONSTANTLY monitor the sound quality, making adjustments as needed.
4. Post show.
 - a. Collect ALL wireless mics from the performers.
 - b. Put wireless microphones away in the storage room.
 - c. Turn off ALL sound system components used.

LIGHTING CREW DUTIES

1. Prior to techs
 - a. Learn how to safely set up and operate the lighting fixtures.
 - i. Know (be able to explain) how the entire lighting system is connected.
 - ii. Know what every knob, button and slider on every piece of lighting equipment used, does.
 - iii. Know how to explain the safe use of all equipment to be handled by the performers.
 - iv. Know all the necessary functions of the light board, including how to record and run Qs, sub-masters, the patch and other features.
 - v. Know how to safely change a lamp in a lighting fixture.
 - b. With the Lighting designer, set up all lighting equipment.
 - c. With the Lighting designer, set all the light Qs.
 - d. Label all sub-masters to be used.
 - e. Have a script for all notations as needed.
2. Preshow
 - a. Uncover and turn on the light board.
 - b. Turn on any spotlights and special effect devices to be used.
 - c. In the upstairs control booth, turn off and lock out the lighting panels (key in the black cabinet).
 - d. Make sure all lights in the upstairs control booth are off.
 - e. Do a light check (ensure all lights are functioning by doing a lamp count.)
 - f. Replace any lamps that are burned out.
 - g. Run through a few light cues to ensure the board is functioning properly.
 - h. Ensure that the light in the storage room is OFF, but the door is left open (in the event of an emergency).
 - b. Inform the stage manager and/or supervisor when ALL lighting is ready for the house to be opened. Lighting should be fully prepared for the show 45 minutes prior to show time.
 - i. Be at the light board from the time the house opens.
3. During the show
 - a. Maintain a quiet control area.
 - b. Execute all light cues as prepared.
 - c. Execute all spotlight cues as prepared.
 - d. Keep an eye on the stage in case of a burned out lamp, and know how to which sub-masters could substitute for a single failed instrument.
4. Post show
 - a. Turn off any spotlights and special effect devices used.
 - b. Wait until the vast majority of the house is empty.
 - c. In the upstairs control booth, unlock and turn on the lighting panels (put key in the black cabinet).
 - d. Make sure all lights in the upstairs control booth are off.
 - e. If any lights are known to have burned out, replace lamps.
 - f. Clear the light board of all light cues.
 - g. Turn off the light board and cover.

STAGE CREW DUTIES

1. Prior to techs
 - a. Know how to safely set up and operate any running lights.
 - b. Know how to turn on/off any monitor camera and monitors.
 - c. Have prepared all prop lists and scene change lists.
 - d. Have a script for all notations as needed.
2. Preshow
 - a. Turn on all running lights.
 - b. Turn on any camera monitors being used.
 - c. Turn on any effect devices relegated to your control.
 - d. Get headsets out from the storage room and distribute to everyone assigned to having a headset.
 - e. Ensure the stage is set for the opening of the show (assist performers as appropriate).
 - f. Go over your duties for the run of the performance and make sure you know where everything is that you will need. Make sure any chairs, props, etc that YOU interact with are set.
 - g. Inform the stage manager and/or supervisor that the Stage Crew is ready. Stage crew should be fully prepared for the show 45 minutes prior to show time.
 - h. Be backstage from 45 minutes prior to show time.
 - i. 15 minutes prior to the house opening, turn off the backstage work lights, (wings and scene shop), turn off the main lights in the green room, pull black curtains going to the hallway and green room.
 - j. Relay warning times to the performers:
 - i. 15 minutes to house open.
 - ii. 5 minutes to house open.
 - iii. House open.
 - iv. 15 minutes to show time.
 - v. 10 minutes to show time.
 - vi. Places (2 minutes to show time.)
3. During the show
 - a. Maintain a quiet backstage (yourself and performers).
 - b. Execute any scene changes smoothly, quickly and quietly.
 - c. Always be prepared for what is your next duty.
 - d. Keep your attention on the stage in the event of something unexpected happening that you can help fix.
4. Post show
 - a. Turn off any effect devices relegated to your control.
 - b. Turn off any camera monitors used.
 - c. Turn off all running lights.
 - d. Open black curtains going into the hallway.
 - e. Reset any stage pieces, props etc, that are your responsibility.
 - f. When the vast majority of the house is empty, turn on the work lights in the wings.
 - g. Collect all headsets and put them in the storage room, ensuring all headsets are OFF and put all rechargeable headsets in their chargers.
 - h. At this point, you may reset anything you would like to for the following days' performance.