

Dealing with Stage Fright

According to a nationwide survey, speaking in front of others is the number one fear of Americans. We experience stage fright—dry mouth, shaky knees, trembling hands, sweaty palms, and queasy stomach—because we suspect we won't do well. Minor stage fright can be helpful to a performer because it releases extra adrenaline, a chemical our bodies produce to help us deal with unfamiliar situations. The surge of adrenaline provides the performer with increased energy, enthusiasm, and animation. But uncontrolled stage fright can derail a performer. Here are a few tips for managing stage fright and using it to your advantage.

Be Prepared. Know your lines and blocking well, and have your character's thoughts and behaviors firmly in mind. Before a performance, make sure all stage and personal props are in place. When you are prepared, you automatically feel more comfortable and confident. If you find your hands are shaky or your mouth is dry, take a moment to remind yourself that you know exactly what you're doing.

Use Good Posture. Good posture provides a strong base for movement and vocal production. Your good posture will give the audience an impression of confidence—and it just might make you feel more confident yourself!

Breathe. Don't forget to breathe! Inadequate breath can lead to a shaky voice and a feeling of physical insecurity. If necessary, take a couple of deep breaths to ground yourself before you begin speaking.

Use Relaxation Techniques. After doing routine warm ups, run in place for two to three minutes. The running will put some of the adrenaline to use and will focus both movement and breathing. Some actors consciously try to exaggerate movements, such as shaking the knees or hands for a short period in order to get those movements out of their systems.

Give Yourself Time. Remember that even those people who suffer intense stage fright usually warm up after a short time in front of the crowd. And for most people, the more public speaking they are asked to do, the easier it becomes.

Basic Theatre Terminology

apron—musion of the first am.

apron	the stage floor between the front edge of the stage and front curtain	ellipsoidal reflector spotlight (ERS)	a spotlight with an ellipsoidal reflector, usually hung from the auditorium ceiling to light downstage acting areas; also called a <i>Leko</i>
arena stage	staging in the center of a room with the audience sitting on all sides of the playing area; sometimes called <i>theatre-in-the-round</i>	external traits	characteristics that make up a character's physical appearance, such as posture, gestures, mannerisms, voice, and clothing
aside	words spoken by a character to the audience rather than to the other characters, who supposedly do not hear the speech	flats	pieces of canvas stretched over wooden frames or thin pieces of wood; painted and linked together, they create scenery such as walls and doorways
audition	a tryout for a part in a play	floodlights	lights that illuminate broad areas of the stage
backdrop or drop	a painted canvas or muslin curtain hung from a batten to form part of the scenery	fly space	the area above the stage where scenery, drops, and lights are hung when not in use
backstage	the area behind the scenery not visible to the audience	fourth wall	the imaginary wall through which the audience views the play
batten	a horizontal pipe suspended over the stage, from which scenery, lights, or curtains are hung: also called a <i>rail</i>	Fresnel	a spotlight with a step-lens that throws an efficient and soft beam, usually hung from the teaser batten to light upstage areas
blocking	the director's planned movement for the characters	full back/full front	facing completely away from or completely toward the audience
build	1. to make a costume from scratch 2. the increase of vocal intensity toward a climactic point	gelatins (gels)	transparent color sheets inserted into a frame in front of a spotlight or floodlight
casting	the process of selecting actors for various roles	going up	forgetting one's lines during a rehearsal or performance; also called <i>blanking</i>
cold reading	when an actor auditions for a role without having read the script beforehand	greenroom	a room where actors relax before and after performances
counter-cross	moving in the opposite direction—and out of the way—of another actor who is moving across the stage	house	another name for auditorium, the place where the audience sits
counterweight system	a system that uses lines, cables, and weights to raise and lower the battens that hold scenery, drops, and lights	house lights	auditorium lights used before and after the play and during intermission
cross	when an actor moves from one side of the stage to the other	illusion of the first time	the actor's ability to perform in a show over and over while making it appear that the dialogue and situations are happening for the first time
eye or cyclorama	a curtain or wall that surrounds the back and sides of the stage		
dimmers	controls that change the level of lighting intensity		
downstage	the area of the stage closest to the audience		

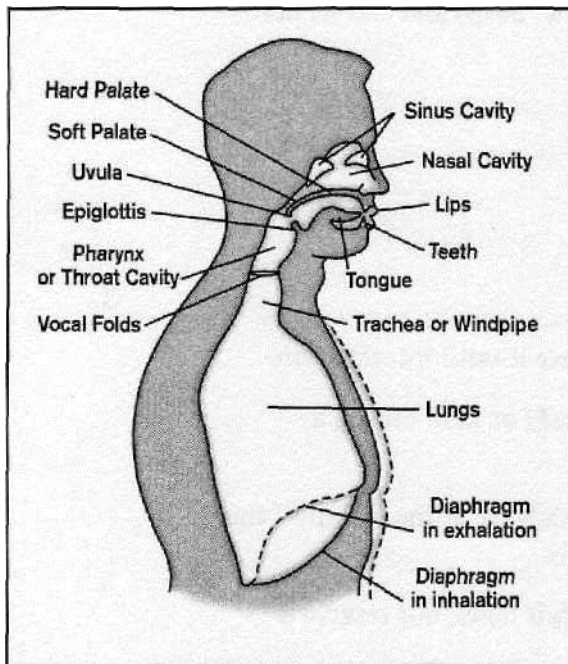
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improvisation	an impromptu scene where the actors make up the dialogue and action on the spot	scenery	the background pieces such as flats and drops that create the play's setting
instrument	term used to refer to a stage light	scoring a role	1. marking the script with notes on blocking and delivery 2. analyzing the script as an aid to character development
Method acting	an approach that calls on the actor to use personal experience and sense memory to develop a character	scrim	a loose-weave curtain on a batten used for "visions." "flashbacks," and so on. The scrim is opaque when lighted from the front; transparent when lighted from the back.
monologue	a long speech by one character	sense memory	memory that uses the senses to recapture an experience
motivation	1. a specific reason for saying or doing something 2. to show a character's desires through voice and movement	sightlines	imaginary lines indicating visibility of stage areas from different points in the house
off book	having a part memorized so that a script is no longer needed	soliloquies	speeches in which one actor speaks aloud revealing his or her inner thoughts
offstage	any part of the stage where the audience cannot see	stage left	the left side of the stage from the actor's perspective as he or she faces the audience
onstage	any part of the stage that is visible to the audience	stage right	the stage area to the actor's right as he or she faces the audience
pantomime	telling a story or presenting an idea through bodily movement and expression rather than words	teaser	the overhead curtain that masks the first batten of lights and that adjusts the height of the proscenium opening
project	increase voice or actions so they will earn' to the audience	thrust stage	a stage that juts out into the audience area, with the audience usually sitting around its three sides
prompt book	a book (usually a three-ring binder) that contains the script annotated with the director's ideas and blocking notations	tormentors	side curtains or flats that adjust the proscenium width
props or properties	set furnishings; set props include furniture, pictures, ornaments, drapes, etc; hand props are items handled by actors, such as books, glasses, etc.	trapdoor	an opening in the stage floor where actors can enter and exit
proscenium stage	a stage with a permanent framed opening through which the audience sees the play	upstage	the stage area farthest away from the audience, toward the backstage wall
raked stage	a slanted stage, where upstage is slightly higher than downstage	upstaging	drawing the audience's attention to yourself when it should be focused on another character
Readers Theatre	a form of drama in which actors are seated and read aloud from a script	voice-over	the voice of an unseen narrator
role	a part in a play	wings	offstage to the right and left of the acting area
run through	a rehearsal without interruption		

Voice Production Diagram

Technically, speech sounds are produced by air that has been forced through the lungs by the action of certain rib muscles and the diaphragm, a flat muscle that separates the chest from the abdominal cavity. The exhaled air vibrates the vocal cords (or folds) in the larynx. The sound produced is modified by the resonators (throat, nose, mouth, and sinuses) and formed into vowels and consonants by the articulators (tongue, jaw, teeth, cheeks, lips, and hard and soft palates).

Breathing from the diaphragm instead of the chest is the foundation of good vocal production and something every actor or singer must practice until it is second nature. The following exercises will show you how to breathe properly.



- 1 Lie down in a comfortable position and relax your back, neck, and shoulders. Put one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest. Breathe, keeping your chest still and letting your abdomen rise up and down.
- 2 Stand up and put your hand on your stomach. Stick out your tongue and pant like a dog. When you breathe in, your stomach moves out. Keep practicing this activity until breathing from your diaphragm comes naturally.

Performers' Etiquette

There are certain rules of behavior that all performers should know and practice.

- 1 Always be prompt for rehearsals.
- 2 Come to rehearsals prepared to work.
- 3 Study your part when you are not on stage; also study it at home.
- 4 When not studying your part, actively watch the others on stage. You will learn from their errors and successes.
- 5 Don't leave rehearsal until you are dismissed by the director.
- 6 Cooperate with all cast and crew members. There are no "stars" in a show; each person is needed to create a good production.
- 7 Accept criticism cheerfully.
- 8 Allow the director to direct. Listen when you are given directions, write down criticism, and incorporate suggestions in the next rehearsal.
- 9 Avoid displays of temperament. Be patient and pleasant. Don't criticize others.
- 10 Be quiet in the wings of the auditorium.
- 11 Be ready for entrances without having to be called. Never be late for an entrance.
- 12 Remain in character whenever on stage. Never break and laugh.
- 13 Don't look at the prompter if you forget a line. Remain in character and wait for the prompt. Listen to it carefully.
- 14 Do not "mouth" other actors' lines.
- 15 When the director interrupts rehearsal for another actor, stand quietly in character, ready to start again when the interruption is finished.
- 16 If anything accidentally falls on the stage floor, pick it up.
- 17 Never appear in makeup or costume except backstage and onstage.
- 18 Don't touch items such as lights or props that are under the jurisdiction of another crew.
- 19 Give your best performance for every audience.
- 20 Don't confuse acting with living.
- 21 Never peek through the main curtain at the audience!
- 22 Keep your grades up. If you can't participate in drama and simultaneously maintain good grades, don't accept a role.

Crew Etiquette

Understanding and respecting the roles, responsibilities, and efforts of all those you work with on stage is an important part of theatre work. Whether you are a beginner or a seasoned professional, you can go a long way toward winning the respect of your colleagues by simply being courteous and following the rules below.

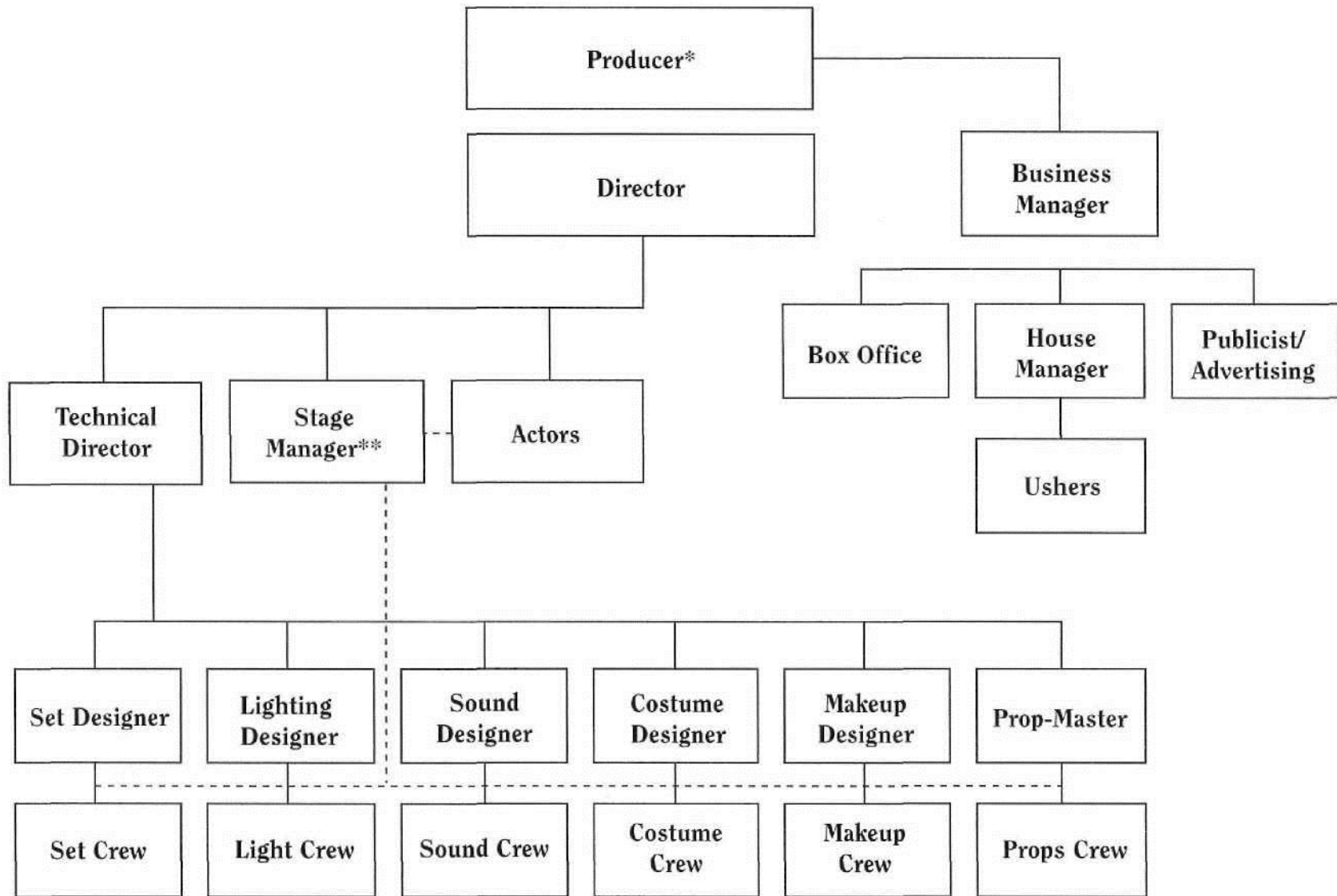
- 1 Always be prompt for meetings, work sessions, and rehearsals.
- 2 Come to work sessions and rehearsals in appropriate attire and ready to work.
- 3 Maintain respect for the needs of other professionals.
- 4 Cooperate with all cast and crew members.
- 5 Accept criticism cheerfully and be willing to learn from others.
- 6 Be ready for cues and set changes without having to be called. Never miss a cue.
- 7 Don't touch items such as lights or props that are under the jurisdiction of another crew.
- 8 Follow all safety rules. If you see a potential problem, fix it or report it to the stage manager.
- 9 Be very careful with tools while working around others.
- 10 Always keep tools in their proper location when not in use.
- 11 Never peek through the main curtain at the audience!
- 12 Don't leave rehearsal until you are dismissed by the stage manager.
- 13 Be available for strike when the show closes.
- 14 Return all borrowed items promptly and in good condition.
- 15 Do not schedule appointments, sports, or meetings for the time you are scheduled for production work.
- 16 Make sure your parent or caretaker understands the time commitment involved in working on a show.
- 17 Keep your grades up. If you can't participate in drama and simultaneously maintain good grades, don't accept a position.

Safety Rules and Reminders

Post a list of emergency numbers for police, fire, and medical help. Make sure all cast and crew members are aware of its location.

- 1 Make sure there is a well-stocked first aid kit in an accessible location.
- 2 Let your teacher or other supervisor know immediately about any accidents that occur.
- 3 Be sure all cast and crew members know the locations of fire alarms and extinguishers.
- 4 Keep emergency exits unblocked and unlocked.
- 5 Wear work gloves when pulling ropes, moving flats, or performing any other tasks that might cause abrasions to the hands.
- 6 Use safety goggles when working with power tools or doing anything else that might cause eye injury.
- 7 Wear sturdy shoes—preferably with steel toes—when working backstage. Avoid sandals, sneakers, or open-toed footwear.
- 8 Avoid loose clothing, scarves, jewelry, or other items that could get caught in power tools.
- 9 Never climb a ladder unless someone else holds it steady for you.
- 10 Use your knees, not your back, to lift heavy items. Ask for help when an object is too heavy or awkward for you to safely lift alone.
- 11 Make sure anyone working with electricity knows where the master switch and circuit breakers are.
- 12 Avoid overloading circuits or trying to bypass fuses or circuit breakers.
- 13 When on ladders or catwalks, make sure tools are connected to your belt to avoid them falling on someone below.
- 14 Use a shout of "heads" or "heads up" to alert other crew members that something might be falling from above.
- 15 Pull the plug, not the cord, when disconnecting electrical tools or instruments.
- 16 Make sure that power tools are unplugged before changing blades, bits, and so forth.
- 17 Keep all work areas clean and neat. Return all tools and other materials to storage when a work session ends.

Who's Who: Flow Chart of Theatre Personnel



* May be a teacher in school productions

** Once the show opens, the stage manager has the responsibility for everything that happens, both onstage and offstage.

Who's Who: Job Descriptions of Theatre Personnel

Producer Chooses the play, obtains theatre space, handles the finances of the production, supervises the business and house managers, and handles publicity and advertising. Sometimes casts the actors. (In school productions, the producer is often the theatre instructor.)

Director Interprets the play and develops an overall artistic vision. Casts actors, plans blocking, directs rehearsals, and blends performances and technical aspects into a unified production.

Technical Director Supervises the design team—sets, lighting, sound, costumes, makeup, and props. (Some schools may have a full-time technical director/instructor. In others, there is no technical director and designers report directly to the director.)

Stage Manager Arranges for auditions; posts audition, callback, and casting notices; schedules acting and technical rehearsals; prepares the prompt book; and "calls" the show during performances by alerting crew members to upcoming cues and giving them the "go" signal. Beginning with opening night, the stage manager has complete responsibility for everything that happens both on and off the stage.

Actors Play the characters in the script by analyzing them and fitting them into the director's overall concept for the play.

Designers Work with the director and/or technical director to develop plans for set design, lighting, sound, costumes, makeup, and props.

Crews Work with the designers to take the production from the planning stage to reality by building and decorating the sets, finding props, hanging and setting lights, creating a soundscape, and designing and creating costumes and makeup. Crew members are also responsible for running these areas during performances, under the direction of the stage manager.

Business Manager Creates and sticks to a production budget, tracks expenses, pays bills, handles payroll, banks receipts, and oversees the box office. The business manager also supervises the house manager and those in charge of publicity and advertising. (In school productions, many of these tasks are handled by a teacher or financial official of the school.)

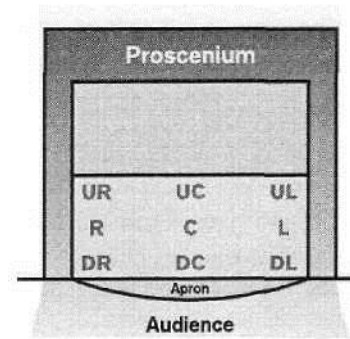
House Manager Supervises ushers, makes sure programs are available and that the theatre doors are open at least one-half hour before show time, advises the stage manager when the audience is in place and the show can begin, and sees that the auditorium is clean before and after each show.

Stage Configurations

Types of Stages

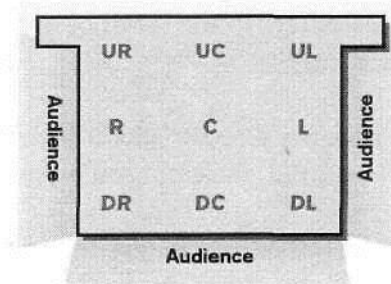
The kind of stage available for your production influences the kind of set design you can create. You must know your performance space very well—its drawbacks and its potential. See the images and explanations below.

The Proscenium Stage The proscenium stage is like a frame. The audience sits looking into the frame to see the play. The action is separated from the audience by three stage walls and an invisible "fourth wall," which the audience looks through. Proscenium productions generally require the most elaborate set designs since they cover three sides of the performance space.



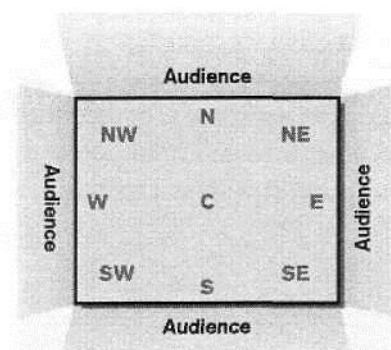
Proscenium stage

The Thrust Stage A low platform stage that juts (or "thrusts") out into the audience, with seating on three sides, is called a thrust stage. This kind of stage offers opportunities to create several distinct acting areas. Set designs are usually minimal with more emphasis on set properties than scenery.



Thrust stage

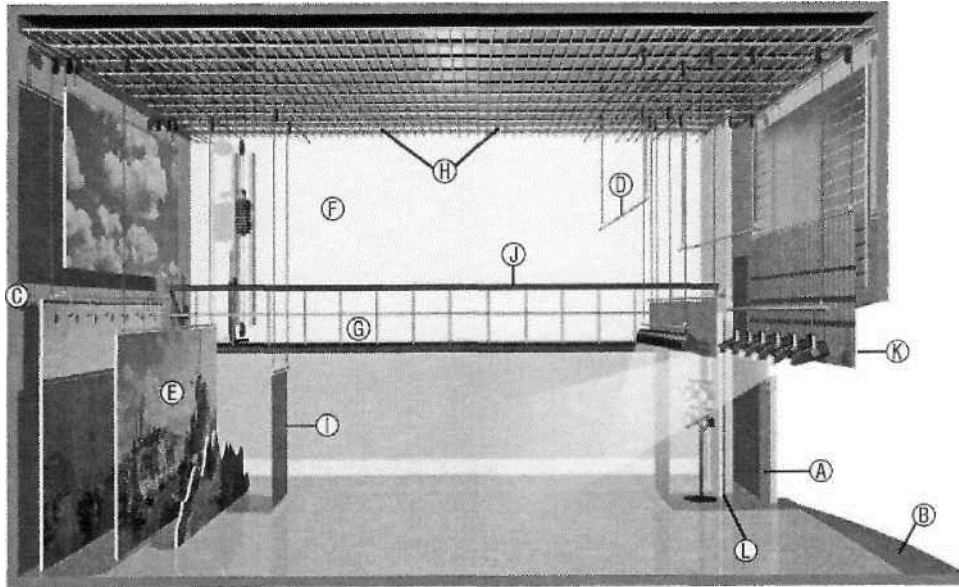
The Arena Stage Arena staging, sometimes called "theatre-in-the-round," seats the audience entirely around the playing area. An arena stage encourages actor-audience interaction, but it requires a set that allows for continuous movement onstage and one that does not block the sightlines on any side of the house. As with the thrust stage, set properties are the main scenery. Note that due to the closeness of the audience, props and scenery must be as authentic-looking as possible.



Arena stage

Stage Diagram

Knowing, understanding, and using the terms that follow will help you as you learn about the environment of the theatre. Take time to read the definitions and find their counterparts on the accompanying diagram.



Act Curtain (A) Curtain that masks the acting area from the audience. Sometimes called the front or grand curtain, it is opened at the beginning of the play and closed between acts or scenes. It usually parts in the middle.

Apron (B) Narrow acting area between the front edge of the stage and the front curtain.

Back Wall (C) Opposite the proscenium opening; it can be used as a background for exterior sets.

Battens (D) Long pipes or poles from which curtains, lights, or flats are hung.

Cyclorama or Cyc Background curtain covering stage back and sides.

Drop or backdrop (E) A canvas or muslin curtain, usually painted, that forms part of the scenery.

Flies (F) Area above the stage where scenery is hung out of view.

Fly Gallery (G) Narrow platform about halfway up the backstage side wall from which the lines for flying scenery are worked. Without a fly gallery, you may work fly lines from the backstage floor.

Gridiron or Grid (H) Framework of beams above the stage that supports riggings for flying scenery.

Ground Cloth Canvas to cover the floor of the acting area that may be painted to resemble bricks, stones, carpet, and so forth.

Leg (I) Drapes hung in pairs, stage right and left, behind the tormentors to mask the backstage.

Pin Rail (J) Rail on the fly gallery or backstage wall to which lines are pulled and tied off.

Proscenium Arch Frame or opening of a proscenium stage through which the audience views the play.

Teaser (K) Heavy curtain or canvas-covered wooden frame hung above the proscenium opening to adjust the height of the opening.

Tormentors (L) Curtain or flat at each side of the proscenium opening used to regulate the width of the opening.

Trap Opening in the stage floor.

Wings The offstage area to the left and right of the stage.