

MBU Theatre Handbook: Stage Management

I. Introduction

*There is no definitive list of the duties of a stage manager that is applicable to all theaters and staging environments. Regardless of specific duties, however, the stage manager is the individual who accepts responsibility for the smooth running of rehearsals and performances, on stage and backstage. **Laurence Stern***

A performance is the conglomeration of numerous elements executed by a team of individuals. In theatre, we seek to attain unity in these elements such that the audience does not see the individual, but the whole. The stage manager is, largely, the conductor of this unity.

Missouri Baptist University Theatre Department strives to achieve excellence while nurturing its artists spiritually, emotionally, and professionally. It is the stage manager's duty to relay the expectation of excellence to the cast and crew of the production while simultaneously being aware and attentive to the needs of the cast and crew. This balancing act is vital to success in a career in this field.

This handbook is designed to give you all the tools necessary for success in stage managing a production at MBU. Read it through completely before you begin your duties. Please remember that you are here to learn and we are here to teach you- don't be afraid to ask questions or voice concerns.

Please report any errors and/or omissions to the Stage Management Supervisor for inclusion in subsequent revisions.

II. Important Things to Remember

1. The actors, designers, directors, and crews must be comfortable during the production process. Always address your peers with respect. You should function as a servant-leader (model your leadership style from Jesus!). You are in charge of many aspects of the production, but you are a servant to the production. A stage manager must ensure that the mechanical processes run smoothly so that the designers, directors, and actors can concentrate primarily on the creative processes of the production.
2. Learn to communicate clearly and in a timely manner. This may be the single most important piece of your job. Communicate with your director prior to each rehearsal. Check in with production personnel via rehearsal reports after each rehearsal and be available daily to

answer any questions. Remember that gossip and the repeating of gossip can be very damaging to the production process.

3. "Please" and "Thank you" go a long way if said regularly and with sincerity. It may be someone's job, but the job may be done more quickly and with better results if done with a cheerful heart brought on by common courtesy!
4. Stage management is the ultimate exercise in critical thinking skills. Develop the habit of thinking ahead and anticipating any potential problem, then set about to methodically examine the problem in order to generate possible alternatives and solutions.
5. Be prepared to react to emergencies or problems that you are unable to solve. Learn to exercise self-control, reacting calmly and with a level head in times of emergency or crises. Consult with your faculty supervisors. They are there to support and help you.
6. Be a prepared and willing participant in the production and display confidence in yourself.
7. Set up a system of organization that will help you perform your stage management duties and allow you time for study and other important activities. Manage your time wisely.
8. Try to achieve a balance in your life between work, study, and play. This is important in managing stress. Learn to leave your personal problems outside the theatre yet deal with the stresses of daily life quickly so they won't impact your work and study.

Getting Started

I. Who to See

When you are first notified that you will be stage managing a production, you will need to obtain items from the following people:

Fine Arts Administrative Assistant:

1. A copy of the Stage Management Handbook, Stage Management Forms, and other appropriate information.
2. Stage Manager Materials and rehearsal supplies
3. A speaker/boom box for rehearsals if needed
4. Copier code for the production
5. Audition forms and other appropriate information

The Director

1. A production calendar and list of production meetings for the production
2. Audition information
3. Production notes, if any, for the first production meeting

II. The Director

The stage manager is to meet with the director prior to the first production meeting, auditions, or the first read-through in order to establish an early positive relationship. The stage manager is to have read the play *at least twice* prior to the meeting and be knowledgeable about the play and its basic needs. Topics to be discussed should include but not be limited to:

1. Outline of director's concept
2. Director's expectations of the stage manager and rehearsal procedures
3. Schedule conflicts
4. Rehearsal schedule
5. Audition format
6. Script alterations
7. Rehearsal needs (set, props, furniture, costumes)

III. Scripts

Any hard copy scripts or scores become the responsibility of the stage manager after auditions. When issuing the scripts, record the script numbers. If the production is a musical and scripts are rented, notify cast, crew, and orchestra members that no permanent marks are to be made in the script or scores and the scripts must be "clean" when returned to the stage manager at the close of the production. Do *not* assume your cast members know this information.

Return all scripts to the fine arts office.

IV. The Prompt Book

The prompt book is a working document that organizes lists, schedules, notes, reports, script, etc. with color page dividers for easy and swift reference. It is bound in a three-ring binder.

1. Be sure to put your name and phone number, title of the production, director's name, and the Missouri Baptist University Theatre Department name and address on a title sheet in the prompt book.
2. Construct or lay out your own prompt script. This requires copying and may include reduction or enlargement. Make sure you are working with the same edition/translation of the script the director and actors will be using. Be sure to leave room in the margins for blocking notes and cues. Index the script with tabs, one for each scene. Make sure act, scene, and page number appear prominently in the upper right corner of each page of the script.
3. Obtain a ground plan from the set designer. Give a copy to the director and lighting designer for their own use.
4. Make a reference page that includes a contact sheet and emergency telephone numbers.

5. The prompt book should include but is not limited to:
 - a. Prompt script with
 - i. Actor blocking notation
 - ii. Light, sound, and/or music cues with warnings and standbys
 - iii. Shift cues
 - iv. Actor cues
 - b. Costume plot
 - c. Property lists
 - d. Preset diagrams of set and props for each act
 - e. Act/Scene/Character breakdown
 - f. Master production calendar
 - g. Rehearsal schedule
 - h. Cast and crew contact sheet
 - i. Crew handbook
 - j. Rehearsal checklist
 - k. Pre-performance checklist
 - l. After-performance checklist
 - m. Rehearsal and performance reports

V. Communication

Accurate information requested or delivered in a timely manner is one of the major responsibilities of the stage manager. The prompt delivery of messages and rehearsal notes contribute greatly to the smooth operation of the production. Establish friendly and frequent contact with the production staff to exchange information and note the progress of the production.

Distribution

Distribution of lists, contact sheets, reports, schedules, and notices is the responsibility of the stage manager. This may be done through the call board, handouts, emails, and posts to the facebook group. A combination of the above is recommended.

Distribution of Rehearsal Reports

After each rehearsal, the stage manager will take relevant notes related to the production team. This includes any alterations made that could affect design work as well as specific wants/needs for the production. The report should be distributed via email to the production team and posted on the call board. This distribution should be accomplished by noon the following day.

Call Board

The theatre department has a segment of the bulletin board located in the first floor CFA building between rooms 102 and 104. A current rehearsal schedule as well as current notices should be displayed publicly on the

board. You should date and initial all notices. Cast lists with names and characters only (no addresses or phone numbers) may be displayed publicly on the call board. Rehearsal reports should be posted on the call board by noon the following day so that production staff members may check for notes.

Contact Sheets/Phone Lists

An accurate contact sheet for production staff should be generated the day after the first production meeting and circulated to all production personnel. An accurate contact sheet for cast should be generated by the stage manager one day after the first read-thru and circulated to all personnel. Updates are the responsibility of the stage manager.

VI. Assistant Stage Manager

Please remember that you do not have to do all the heavy lifting alone. Please develop a good relationship with you ASM(s) early on and delegate responsibilities to them. Some examples of things an ASM can do: copy and distribution of paperwork, track props in rehearsal, set up and strike rehearsal, hold book, coordinate costume fittings, etc. Please remember that all tasks delegated will still be attributed to you, so check in with your ASM often and give accurate and detailed instructions on how to complete the assigned tasks.

The Production Process

I. The Script

You should read the play four or five times before rehearsals or production meetings begin. **As you reread the play, make lists of needed props, entrances and exits, special lighting requirements, changes of scenery or costume, special effects, sound effects, and any other element which should be discussed during design and production meetings.** Look for the implied as well as the obvious. This advance preparation will enable you to contribute and facilitate problem solving.

II. The Production Calendar and Due Dates

The stage manager distributes the calendar with due dates for each production. The production calendar should be reviewed at every production meeting and the stage manager should consult the production calendar regularly to review the production process. Conflicts, changes, and missed deadlines should be addressed and resolved immediately. Absent members of the production staff must be informed of the changes by the stage manager.

III. Production Meetings

The stage manager must attend all production meetings. The meetings will be arranged by the producer and/or director. Although the producer and/or director will run the production meetings, it is the stage manager's responsibility to ensure that every topic is adequately covered. If a particular topic is not discussed at one meeting, make sure it is discussed at the next meeting. Keep your own running lists of problems, questions, or concerns which have come up since the last meeting and make sure they are added to the agenda. Poll production staff members prior to the meeting to see if they have a concern they wish to have discussed at the meeting.

Auditions

The stage manager should be present to assist with auditions. The stage manager should meet with the director to find out the format of the auditions and call backs and what type of assistance the director will need during the audition process.

The duties of the stage manager include but are not limited to:

1. Work the audition table. Know the details of the production, i.e. rehearsal and performance dates and times and the name of the director. Be familiar with the script. Be able to describe the audition process to those who are going through it for the first time.
2. Get blank audition forms from the Fine Arts Office and have each actor fill one out completely before the audition. Have actors take forms into their audition with them.
3. If you need assistance, ask an assistant stage manager to help.

After the director has posted the cast list, distribute scripts and post the time, date, and place of the first rehearsal. Obtain copies of the audition forms from the director. Use these for preliminary schedule and conflict information as well as contact information.

Rehearsals

I. The Director

The stage manager works very closely with the director in achieving and maintain a good rehearsal process. The stage manager should adapt to the director's methods as rapidly as possible, become an invaluable assistant, and be familiar with the director's script intentions. In a discussion with the director, the following method of working and operating should be established:

1. Rehearsal schedule
2. Daily operating schedule (warm-ups, announcements, breaks, notes at end of rehearsal, etc.) and the preferred method for staying on schedule

3. Room arrangement (ground plan, where do director, stage managers, and unoccupied cast sit, etc.)
4. How long and how often breaks will be taken
5. Warm-up procedures
6. Preferred method for prompting, line and blocking notes for actors

II. Time and Space

Become very familiar with each rehearsal, performance, and shop space. Turn off all electronic equipment and all lights before exiting the space. Rehearsal space is also used as classroom space during other hours. The stage manager is responsible for restoring the rehearsal space to an orderly, clean condition for use by other events scheduled to follow in that space.

III. The Rehearsal Schedule

Prior to making up the rehearsal schedule, an act/scene/character break down must be completed.

Create a master conflict calendar from the audition forms.

The stage manager and director will work together to make up a rehearsal schedule for the entire production outlining what is to be accomplished each day and which actors are called.

Schedule a time for the designers to watch a run/stumble-through. This should be at least one week before the light plot is due and may take place over a period of one to three rehearsals.

IV. Rehearsal Preparation

Taping the Floor: Discuss with the director any items that he/she might like to tape prior to any rehearsals. Email the chapel production manager and Special Events to find out when/if tape must be removed.

Contact Sheet: Distribute cast/production staff contact sheet by the second or third rehearsal.

Rehearsal Props: It is the stage manager's responsibility to obtain rehearsal props and return them after they are no longer used. Consult with the Director to find out when to integrate rehearsal props into the rehearsal. The stage manager should adhere to proper protocol when checking props in and out of storage. Rehearsal props may be stored in a tub in the prop closet. Have props ready prior to the start of each rehearsal and return them to the cabinet after rehearsal is over.

Rehearsal Furniture: Wooden furniture is available for rehearsal use. It is located in the loft of the props closet.

Rehearsal Costumes: On rare occasions, it will be necessary for actors to rehearse using a specific costume piece (corset, hoop skirt, etc.). Please contact the costume designer to request these pieces.

Injuries During the Rehearsal Process:

1. Determine the severity of the injury. If it is a minor cut or abrasion you may proceed with First Aid. If there is any doubt as to the severity of the injury, do not treat the individual. Advise them to contact their doctor or visit urgent care or an emergency room.
2. Any injury which could require a doctor's care should be reported to Public Safety (314-744-5355) during the rehearsal in which it occurs.

V. The First Read Through

The following items should be accomplished by the stage manager during read thru:

1. Have actors correct information on the contact sheet or initial next to their name if all information is correct.
2. Outline any "Company Notices" that affect the cast. For example, remind them that no food or drink is permitted in the theatre. It is a good idea to remind the cast that you are there to assist them and that each cast member is expected to arrive promptly at each rehearsal ready to work.
3. Take a running time of the first read through. This time will be close to the actual final playing time of the show. Report this time to special events and box office student workers as they will receive many questions about the run time of the show.
4. Announce any publicity needs. This may include headshots and biographies from the actors and when they are due, program information, and other promotional needs.
5. Distribute rehearsal schedule
6. Announce the act/scene breakdown if different than that indicated by the playwright.

VI. Running Rehearsals

The stage manager should arrive at the rehearsal room at least 15-20 minutes prior to the start of each rehearsal in order to prepare the room for rehearsal. The following items should be accomplished before the actors arrive for rehearsal. Develop a rehearsal check list so that you do not forget anything and that placement of props, furniture, etc. will be consistent for each rehearsal. This check list will eventually grow into a performance check list so it is very important.

1. Turn on rehearsal lights
2. Unlock all doors
3. Set up space with rehearsal furniture in place

4. Lay out rehearsal props and costumes. Preset any props on the set.
5. Set up a stage manager's station and/or a director's station. This may include a small table and two or three chairs. You will need sharpened pencils, scratch pads, watch, calendar, extra contact sheets and schedules.
6. Keep a check in sheet for actors in your prompt book. If an actor has not arrived at call time, have an assistant stage manager call the performer. Read the absentee's lines if necessary. Do not hold up rehearsal for a tardy actor.

The stage manager is responsible for the following during each rehearsal:

1. Call "places" when the director is ready to start rehearsal. Keep on track of breaks.
2. Maintain silence in rehearsal room among non-working personnel. Keep the door closed leading into the rehearsal room.
3. Try to help the director maintain the schedule as outlined
4. Record running times of each act or scene of the play on the rehearsal report. This is not necessary until running large sections of the play.
5. Record blocking and blocking changes in the prompt script.
6. Make detailed notes as to the placement of props (stage left, right, on stage), where and when they appear on stage and who carries them on or off. Make detailed notes of all props to be preset prior to the show and at intermission. Update at every rehearsal.
7. Perform any "shifts" in furniture or props that would normally be accomplished by shift crews in an actual performances. Make detailed notes of all shifts accomplished by cast members.
8. Hold book for the actors once they have gone off book. Give lines loudly and clearly and without emotional inflection only when an actor calls "line." Ask the director when you should stop giving lines. After this time, take notes on missed lines.
9. Develop prop lists and plots, shift plots, preset lists, checklists, actor entrances and exits, and lighting, sound, and wardrobe plots.
10. Make detailed notes of any and all changes or additions made in rehearsals in the rehearsal report.
11. Take careful notes and record timings for sound cues that must last a specific duration. Report these to the sound designer.
12. Take notes as requested by the director
13. Be knowledgeable and ready to answer all questions about sets, costumes, scheduling, rehearsals, etc.
14. If a director should be late, rerun or review scenes already worked on or rehearse lines. Do not go on to new material.
15. If performers approach you with questions of a directorial nature refer them to the director.

The stage manager is responsible for the following items after the rehearsal has concluded:

1. Check with the director for additions or changes to the next rehearsal's schedule
2. Make announcements or give reminders to the cast about upcoming activities or changes and additions to the schedule. Remind the cast of their next call time.
3. Return rehearsal props and costumes to storage
4. Restore the rehearsal room
5. Turn off all lights
6. Copy and post rehearsal report and notify appropriate production staff members of particular notes

VII. Crew Orientation

The stage manager is responsible for assembling run crew and for checking with production team members to ask if they require additional assistance. Via email, explain the stage manager's role to the crew and give them a brief orientation to theatre rehearsal and performance etiquette. This may include a reminder of how important it is to arrive promptly at call time, notification that the crew is expected to wear "blacks," sign in procedures, and a brief outline of the technical process. It is important to stress that all crew must report personally to the stage manager for dismissal at the conclusion of their duties for each rehearsal and performance.

Be acquainted with the "Crew Handbook." The stage manager is ultimately accountable for ensuring that all crew members complete their tasks.

Technical and Dress Rehearsals

I. Preparation

Getting Cues in the Book: The stage manager must receive cues from the designers prior to the first tech. They should be recorded in pencil. Warnings or Standbys are not necessary at this time since the cue placement will undoubtedly change during the technical rehearsal. If the first technical rehearsal is a dry tech or a cue to cue, mark the place of each cue in the book with a post it note for easy reference.

Headsets: Notify the technical director how many headsets will be needed and where they are to be located. Make sure that headsets are set up and working prior to the start of the first tech. Orient all people on the headset in the proper use. Remind them that mics should be on only if speaking and to keep headset chatter to a minimum.

Monitor System: Ask director whether or not the monitor system in the green rooms should be set up for the actors. Alert the sound designer at least two weeks prior to the first technical rehearsal.

Video: If a backstage video monitor is necessary, this should be determined in advance and should be discussed with the technical director.

Fog and Pyrotechnics: Fog and pyrotechnic needs should be determined in pre-production and brought to the technical director.

Preset Lists and Check Lists: Refine preset and check lists that have been developed over the course of the rehearsal period. It is very important to follow this list for every rehearsal.

“God” Mic: Ask the sound designer to set up a microphone at the booth to assist you in communicating with the actors onstage

Running Lights: Notify the technical director at least one week prior to the first tech where running lights should be placed backstage.

Glow Tape: Obtain glow tape from the Fine Arts Office. Place small pieces on the set prior to first tech and after the set has been painted. Remember that the tape must be exposed to light in order for it to glow. Tape located in places where there is not very much light must be “charged” with a flashlight prior to the performance.

Call Times: Issue call times to actors and crew. Allow time to train and orient the crew before actors are called.

Call Sheet: Prepare and post a call sheet for all actors and crew in the green room hallway.

Preparing the Schedule: The stage manager should prepare a schedule of the tasks to be accomplished at the first tech, estimating the amount of time each will take. Things which may be included on the schedule are the spiking of furniture pieces, the training and orientation of crew and actors, preset, and scene shift choreography and rehearsal.

II. **Orientation, Training, and Preset**

Orientation: The following orientation should be given as soon as the cast and crew arrives.

1. Notify cast and crew rules of food, drinking, smoking, talking, and noise backstage, sitting on props or scenery, tampering with technical equipment, tools, rigging, etc.
2. Explain to the cast and crew the type of tech and the procedure which will be followed during the tech. Explain the system for calling cues.
3. Ask the cast and crew to report all problems to you or an assistant stage manager after rehearsal.

4. Give a brief "tour" of the set and note changes that have taken place.
5. Make sure the cast and crew know where emergency exits are and location of fire extinguishers and how they are operated.
6. Distribute preset lists and shift lists to the crew.
7. Instruct the cast and crew to leave valuables at home during dress rehearsals and performances.
8. Explain that those crew members working backstage must wear "stage blacks." Light and sound operators must wear a dark shirt.
9. Train each crew member on head set as to the appropriate use and storage of the equipment.

Training: The stage manager or set designer will train the stage crew in the proper operation of working scenery and special effects. With the prop master and set designer, the stage manager will train the crew in presetting and shifting of props and set pieces. The technical director will train the sound board operator. The lighting designer or technical director will train the light board operator. Allow time in the schedule for all this to be completed before the start of tech.

Preset: The following must be accomplished prior to the start of the tech.

1. Spike all furniture, entrances, exits, etc.
2. Sweep and/or mop the stage if necessary. Make sure back stage is clean and free of obstacles.
3. Preset all props and scenery.
4. Perform light and sound checks.
5. Check all headsets.
6. Refer to your preset lists and check lists to make sure nothing has been missed.
7. Confirm with all ASMs that preset has been completed
8. Make a safety check
9. Call "half hour," "15 minutes," "5 minutes," and "places." **Make all calls in person.**

III. During the Technical Rehearsal

The stage manager should take a leadership role in running all technical rehearsals. Make all announcements loudly and clearly. Be able to answer questions about the production and the rehearsal. Be friendly and courteous. Remember to say "please" and "thank you." Try to make all members of the production aware they are making a valuable and important contribution.

1. Notify the director you are ready to start the tech
2. Call "places"
3. Give all warnings, standbys, and "go's" as noted in the prompt script

4. Try to solve as many technical problems as possible during the course of the tech. If a cue was not called or executed well, resist the temptation to let the problem go unattended until the next rehearsal
5. Make adjustments to cue placement and record the changes as well as specific cue instructions into the prompt script
6. Call appropriate breaks. Start promptly after the break is over
7. Do not leave the tech table to locate people or run errands once the tech has started. Send someone else.

Cue Calling Procedures: Speak clearly and with confidence

WARN: "Warn, Sound Cue 10" (Approximately 30-60 seconds prior to the "go")

STANDBY: "Standby, Sound Cue 10" (Approximately 5-10 seconds prior to the "go")

GO: Sound Cue 10 Go

If giving a warning or standby for a series of cues: "Warn, Sound Cues 10 through 15 and Light Cues 17 through 20"

If two cues are called together: "Sound Cue 10 and Light Cue 17 GO"

Try not to pause for very long before saying "go" and do not use any unnecessary or confusing words when giving cues. Keep headset chatter to a minimum.

Ask each crew member who has received a "warning," "standby," or "go" to acknowledge the command. The correct acknowledgements are:

WARN- "Warned"

STANDBY- "Standing By"

GO- "Going" or "Cue 10 Going"

WHEN CUE IS COMPLETE- "Cue 10 Complete" or "Scene Shift 3 Complete"

IV. Clean Up

1. Assemble cast, crew, director, technical director and designers in the theatre for notes
2. Put all props away and store scenery and furniture per the instructions of the technical director. Clean all eating utensils.
3. Put all headsets away and dress cable.
4. Turn off work lights, house lights, and stage lights.
5. Complete rehearsal report with notes and running times and post it on the call board and email to appropriate personnel.

Performances

Preparation: Prepare for performances as you would a dress rehearsal. Use the checklists and present lists you have developed over the course of the rehearsal process.

Cast and Crew Calls: Remind cast of the call times as specified on their rehearsal calendar. Crew call times are specified in the Crew Handbook, but may be changed at the discretion of the stage manager. Phone each crew and cast member who did not arrive at the specified call time. Note tardiness and send a report to the director and/or faculty supervisor.

Opening the House and Starting the Performance: Meet with the house manager prior to each performance. Notify him/her of the approximate running time of each act and the length of intermission. After confirming that the pre-show checklist is complete and everything is ready, tell the house manager that he is free to open the house. **The standard time for opening the house is one half hour prior to curtain.** Coordinate times and manners of communication with the house manager to keep each other informed.

After the audience is seated, the house manager will inform you that the audience is in and the performance may begin. If for some reason there is a delay in getting the audience seated, the house manager will inform you of the problem and place the performance on a "hold" of a specified length. Inform the actors of the hold. The same procedure is used for intermission.

Running the Show: Use the same procedure in the running of the performance that you have been using in dress rehearsals. Keep notes as to problems which occurred and record them on the performance report. Make notes of missed lines for the actors. If the actors skip a massive amount of lines, be aware that there may have been cues missed and be prepared to calmly handle the situation.

Clean Up: Follow the clean-up procedures used during the dress and tech rehearsal process. **Do not clear stage lights, turn on work lights, or let the crew come out on stage until after the house has completely cleared or the curtain has closed.**

Performance Reports: Post the performance report with the recorded running time next to the call sheet in the green room hallway and distribute to the production team via email. Notify the appropriate personnel by noon the next day of any problems which should be corrected before the next performance.

Strike

Remind the cast and crew that everyone must participate in strike. Create strike assignments by the next to last performance and distribute via email and by posting in the green room hallway. Contact all production team members to ascertain how many cast members they need for their part of strike and to see if they would like to request a specific student. All students should be working throughout strike. Make sure that you have an approximate time in mind for the completion of each task and that you have "extra" tasks that can be performed during strike (cleaning/organizing storage areas, making sure all scripts are properly erased, any work which can be done for the next show, walking the auditorium, Great Hall, and bathrooms to pick up trash, etc.)

It is the stage manager's job to collect all rented scripts/scores, record them, and return them to the Fine Art's Office as well as supervise the successful completion of strike.

Record all those present at strike **at the end of the strike session.**