

**Sample Pages from
The Rehearsal Companion**

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THE REHEARSAL COMPANION



TheatreFolk®

Kerry Hishon

The Rehearsal Companion
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Published by Theatrefolk Inc.

e-mail: help@theatrefolk.com
website: www.theatrefolk.com

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Description

You've chosen the play, paid the royalties, done the script analysis, held your auditions, and cast the show. Tomorrow is the first rehearsal. **Are you ready?** Really ready?

Will you be ready if an actor drops out? Will you be ready for the mid-rehearsal blues? Will you be ready to have your tech week run as smoothly as possible? Will you be ready with a comprehensive strike checklist? You **CAN** be ready for all these rehearsal situations and more.

The Rehearsal Companion will be your guide through problem-solving, getting organized, choosing the best warm-up for your play, giving notes, and keeping track of production goals. There's more to think about than blocking and learning lines – be the director who's ready for anything!



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Get Organized

Have you got everything in place to start the rehearsal process? Do you have a rehearsal schedule? A creative team in place? Student assistants to make your life easier? Have you pre-blocked a couple of scenes?

An organized rehearsal means you know exactly what should happen and who is responsible for certain tasks. The more you prepare, the better. That doesn't mean everything will go according to plan, but there are definitely things you can get organized for ahead of time. Of course, you'll want to take care of some of these tasks before that first day!

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Creating a Rehearsal Schedule

Creating a rehearsal schedule can be a daunting task, but it is absolutely necessary for your production. Staff and students (both actors and crew members) must know the schedule expectations, so they can accommodate the production into their schedules. Having a clearly laid-out rehearsal schedule ahead of time will ease headaches and reduce conflict clashes, thereby smoothing the overall process.

For the purpose of this article, I assume that you are creating a rehearsal schedule for an extracurricular production and will be rehearsing solely outside of school hours. However, you can also adapt these guidelines to an in-class production.

When I am creating a rehearsal schedule, I like to start from the performance week and work backwards. Once you have decided when the show will run and how many performances will occur, calculate how many hours you feel you and your students will need to get the show on its feet. This will differ from director to director and show to show. If you have directed shows in the past, go back over your schedule and count up how many hours you used to mount each show. Did you feel adequately prepared or did you feel rushed?

From there, determine how many times per week you will be rehearsing, and for how many hours per rehearsal. Would it be more useful to rehearse for two hours three times a week, or for three hours twice a week? If you are starting early and have four or more months until show time, you might want to start with rehearsals twice a week and then increase the number closer to performance time. But if you have fewer weeks to prepare, you'll need to rehearse more frequently.

Once you've determined the number and frequency of rehearsals, you'll need to schedule your technical and dress rehearsals. A technical rehearsal (or "tech rehearsal" for short) is where the technicians, stage management, and actors get to work together for the first time with lights, sound effects, microphones, and special effects all together in the theatre, rather than in a rehearsal space. The dress rehearsal is exactly what it sounds like: running the show with lights, sound, costumes, props, hair and makeup. It's one last chance to rehearse everything before an audience comes in. These rehearsals are longer than regular rehearsals (usually five to six hours each) and often stressful, but absolutely necessary for the success of your performance.

Continue to work backwards. Your last few rehearsals before tech and dress rehearsals should be devoted to show run-throughs. Some can focus on just Act One or Act Two, for example, but you should aim to have a minimum of two full run-throughs of the entire show for timing purposes.

If your show is a musical, you will also want to include a sitzprobe rehearsal. **Sitzprobe** is a German word meaning "seated rehearsal." This is where the band/orchestra and

cast play and sing through the musical together for the first time, without any staging or production elements. A sitzprobe is beneficial for the actors so they'll know how the music truly sounds and how their vocals blend with the music (or get drowned out by the band!). It's also beneficial for the band, so they get familiar with the cast and know the tempos and volume level they need to play at. It's best to work out band/vocal problems now before tech rehearsal.

Next on the backwards rehearsal schedule we have costume fittings and costume runs. Students will need time to be fitted for costumes, have a costume parade (so the director can see and approve the costumes), and rehearse in their costumes (so they know if they have any problems, such as an impossibly fast change or restricted movement due to the costume). **Note:** Add props and furniture throughout rehearsals, so actors can practice entering, exiting, and interacting with these items. It's much easier to integrate them throughout the rehearsal process than to try and add everything during tech and dress.

Moving back to the beginning of your rehearsal schedule, your first few weeks of rehearsals will be devoted to an initial read-through, cast bonding exercises, establishing blocking, developing characters and relationships – and, for musicals, learning music and choreography. Allot time in your schedule to visit every scene *at least* twice: once to approach the scene and create the initial blocking, and then a second time to review, adjust, and add nuances and depth. You will want to designate some rehearsals near the middle of your schedule as "TBA" or "TBD" ("to be announced/determined"), so you have some wiggle room in case you need to revisit some scenes or work ahead.

Making a rehearsal schedule is not an exact science. You'll need to adjust as you go along. It takes practice! Every show, cast, and rehearsal process will be different. Be as prepared as possible, but always leave yourself room for flexibility.



If you've never created a rehearsal schedule before, you can use the provided sample schedule as a model.



Sample Rehearsal Schedule – Calendar Format

January 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 New Year's Day	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9 School Starts	10 2:30-5:30 Auditions (Day 1)	11 2:30-5:30 Auditions (Day 2)	12 2:30-5:30 Callbacks (if necessary)	13	14
15	16 Post cast list	17	18	19 2:30-5:30 Meet & Greet First Read-through	20 2:30-5:30 Blocking Act 1, Scenes 1-3	21
22	23	24 2:30-5:30 Vocal Rehearsal	25	26 2:30-5:30 Choreography	27 2:30-5:30 Blocking Act 1, Scenes 4-6	28
29	30	31 2:30-5:30 Vocal Rehearsal	—	—	—	—

February 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
—	—	—	1	2 2:30-5:30 Choreography	3 2:30-5:30 Blocking Act 2, Scenes 1-3	4
5	6	7 2:30-5:30 Sing through Act 1	8	9 2:30-5:30 Choreography Review	10 2:30-5:30 Blocking Act 2, Scenes 4-6	11
12	13	14 2:30-5:30 Vocal Rehearsal Costume Fittings	15	16 2:30-5:30 Review Act 1, Scenes 1-3 Costume Fittings	17 2:30-5:30 Review Act 1, Scenes 4-6 Costume Fittings	18
19	20	21 2:30-5:30 Vocal Rehearsal	22	23 2:30-5:30 OFF BOOK! Review Act 1	24 2:30-5:30 Review Act 2, Scenes 1-3	25
26	27	28 2:30-5:30 Sing Through Act 2	—	—	—	—

March 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
—	—	—	1	2 2:30-5:30 Review Act 2, Scenes 4-6	3 2:30-5:30 Review Act 2 (all) Costume Parade	4
5	6	7 2:30-5:30 Run full show	8	9 2:30-5:30 TBD	10 2:30-5:30 TBD	11
12 March Break	13 March Break	14 March Break	15 March Break	16 March Break	17 March Break	18 March Break
19	20	21 2:30-5:30 Run-through Act 1	22	23 2:30-5:30 Run-through Act 2	24 2:30-5:30 Run-through full show	25
26 12-5 (Extra Rehearsal) Run in costume	27	28 2:30-5:30 Run-through full show	29	30 5:30-8:30 Sitzprobe	31 2:30-6:30 pm Final run- through	—

April 2017

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
—	—	—	—	—	—	1
2	3 3-9 pm Tech Rehearsal	4 3-9 pm Dress Rehearsal	5 7 PM Opening Performance!	6 1 PM School Performance 7 PM Evening Performance	7 7 PM Evening Performance	8 2 PM Matinee 7 PM Closing Performance (Strike following)
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22



Rehearsal Schedule Template – Table Format

Show: _____ Date: _____

Date	Time	Topic	Actors Needed



Rehearsing in Layers

Along with creating a standard rehearsal schedule, consider introducing theatrical elements in layers.

Creating a theatrical piece is a bit like baking a cake – choose your recipe (the show), add ingredients (cast and crew), stir together and bake (practice and rehearse). At the end, you’ve got a fabulous cake... I mean, production!

Following this analogy, just as adding decorations to the cake (icing, sprinkles, cream, cherries, and so on) comes at the end of the baking process, it would seem that adding theatrical “decorations” (costumes, props, lights, sound effects, set pieces, furniture, and so on) would come at the end of the rehearsal process. And, for many time-crunched teachers and directors, that often happens. But, while that works for baking, adding the theatrical “decorations” during the final few rehearsals – or, worse, at tech or dress rehearsals – creates a stressful atmosphere when working with student actors.

Add too many new elements at once, and what you’ll find is that all the initial progress on entrances/exits, lines, character work, movement, and choreography seems to vanish, leaving the actors and the director frustrated. It’s hard enough for students to remember their lines when they aren’t worrying about what prop they’re supposed to be using, what costume they’re supposed to be wearing, or what scene comes next in the show.

So, going back to the baking analogy, I suggest that, instead of “decorating” at the end of the process, directors and teachers “mix their decorations” into the rehearsal process in layers. Rather than adding the extra elements right from the book-in-hand rehearsal stage or leaving them all to the end, use your rehearsal schedule to figure out what layers to add when.

First layer: Figure out your off-book day

Off-book means the actors must have their lines fully memorized and are no longer holding their scripts onstage. Depending on the show, I usually make off-book day halfway to two-thirds of the way through the rehearsal process. This gives students a specific date they must adhere to, but also provides a little leeway in case someone slacks off in the lines-learning department.

Second layer: Determine when you will add furniture, props, and costumes

Sooner is always better! My preference is to add **furniture first** (to assist with blocking and transitions early in the process), **props second** (to help with muscle memory for

bringing items on and off the set), and **costumes third**. The **exception to this** is if a student is working with a specific prop or costume piece that is vital to their character or that they need to get used to (for example, character shoes). You should incorporate those items as soon as possible. Work with the various design teams to get started on acquiring/making these items and get them into rehearsal. Use stand-in rehearsal props and furniture if the actual items are not available right away.

Third layer: Plan your technical elements early

If you know you'll need sound effects or scene transition music, start planning early in the process. Use them in rehearsals as much as you can. That way, when your actors get to tech rehearsal they won't be totally distracted by strange sounds they're hearing for the first time.

If you are directing a musical, you will of course work with your music right away (either with accompaniment tracks or a rehearsal pianist). If your show employs a band or an orchestra, you will need to add a sitzprobe to your rehearsal schedule so the actors, technicians, and musicians can hear what each other sound like.

Fourth layer: Make your schedule

For one of my previous productions, we had a 14-week rehearsal schedule. We devised a schedule that added a new element on each of those 14 weeks, beginning with basic blocking and character work, then adding (in this order) furniture, off-book day, props, costumes, and technical elements (sound effects/music/lights).



A sample schedule with added theatrical elements follows this article, along with an exercise to help you put this concept into practice

Adding show elements in layers allows your student actors time to adjust to each new aspect of the show. It can be overwhelming to actors and crew to have everything thrown at them at once. Help your students by making the process as easy and streamlined as possible.



Sample Schedule

14-Week Rehearsal and Performance Period

Show: Nancy Drew, Girl Detective

Week 1: Auditions, casting, first read-through of the show

Weeks 2-4: Blocking the show and character work

Week 5: **Add FURNITURE**

Week 6: Furniture + **OFF-BOOK**

(We scheduled off-book early for this show because some of the cast members were as young as 8 years old and needed extra time to memorize their lines.)

Week 7: Furniture, off-book + **PROPS**

Week 8: Furniture, off-book, props + **COSTUMES**

Week 9: Running show off-book with furniture, props, costumes

Week 10: March Break (no rehearsals)

Week 11: Running show off-book with furniture, props, costumes

Week 12: Tech rehearsal (add lights and sound)

Week 13: Dress rehearsal + opening weekend!

Week 14: Shows + closing weekend



Rehearsing in Layers: Exercise

Take your current rehearsal schedule and add in the various theatrical layers: furniture, off-book day, props, costumes, and technical elements.

DIRECTIONS

1. Review your rehearsal schedule. It should have all the following important dates: auditions, callbacks, casting release, first read-through, rehearsals, technical and dress rehearsals, and performances.
2. Count the number of regular rehearsals available. Select an off-book date that is halfway to two-thirds of the way through the rehearsal period.
3. For each week, add a new element (furniture, costumes, props, tech elements). If your show has extra elements that are not listed here, go ahead and add them (such as onstage instruments, stage combat, stage blood, extensive hair and makeup, etc.). Think about your show – what aspects of the show are the most important, or most difficult? Those should be added first.
4. Afterward, consider the following Reflection questions.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think back to the last show you worked on. How did you incorporate the different theatrical elements?
2. Is it useful to add different theatrical elements one at a time (in layers) or all at once? Why?
3. What theatrical element (for this show) do you feel is most important (hence, the reason you added it to your schedule to tackle first)? Why is it most important?



How to Pre-Block a Scene

When directing a show, it can be useful to “pre-block” a scene ahead of time. Pre-blocking means to plan all basic character movements in advance of the rehearsal and write them down. This can save a lot of time during rehearsals – you’re organized and ready to go with your staging already in mind. This, in turn, will give you more time to work with actors on developing their character and fine-tuning the overall look of the show.

How do you pre-block a scene?

1. Make a ground plan of your set

A ground plan is a drawing of the stage from above, a bird’s-eye view looking straight down on the stage from above. We’ve provided a basic sample. This view helps the director establish the flow of the action. Make sure you mark all your entrances and exits, and properly identify the type of stage you’re working with.

Types of stages:

- Proscenium stage (stage facing the audience straight on)
- Traverse stage (stage is surrounded on two sides by the audience)
- Thrust stage (stage is surrounded on three sides by the audience)
- Theatre in the round or arena stage (stage is surrounded by audience on all sides)

2. Have a blocking shorthand

Instead of writing out the full words for every entrance, exit, and movement (both crossing the stage as well as standing, sitting, jumping, climbing etc.) of every character, you’ll want a blocking shorthand. It’s much faster and tidier to write “XDR” (cross downstage right) than writing out the full sentence.

Here are some examples of simple stage direction shorthand:

- J = “John” the first letter of a name indicates a character
- DS = downstage
- US = upstage
- DR = downstage right
- DL = downstage left
- UR = upstage right
- UL = upstage left
- C or CS = centre stage
- X = cross/move
- + = with another character (include initial of character)

3. Make blocking notes in your script

If you're a visual thinker, you may skip past this step. But some people need to analysis the script and identify movements that way. So using your shorthand, go through the scene and indicate when, how, and where, each character will move.

4. Pre-block using your ground plan

Once you have planned all the movements on the script pages, use the ground plan to make a visual map of the characters' movements. When a character enters or exits, write on the stage drawing which entrance they use, and use arrows to indicate movement and/or the direction they're facing. Identify characters with dots, Xs, or stick figures, and a short form of their name such as the first letter or initials. It may also help to colour-code each character and their movements using coloured pencils. This will help you to visualize where the performers will appear onstage.



Sample versions of a script page notation and a ground plan are included on the following pages.

Pre-blocking won't work for every scene and sometimes you'll get into rehearsal and throw your pre-blocking completely out the window. But it never hurts to start with a plan and have an idea of how you want characters to move in a scene.



How to Pre-Block a Scene – Sample

Sample Pre-Blocked Script Page

Romeo & Juliet, Act I, Scene 1 (excerpt)

SAMPSON and GREGORY stand looking off. (SL)

SAMPSON: Let us take the law of our sides; let them begin.

GREGORY: I will frown as I pass by, and let them take it as they list.

SAMPSON: Nay, as they dare. I will bite my thumb at them; which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it.

Enter ABRAHAM and BALTHASAR (UR)

ABRAHAM: Do you bite your thumb at us, sir? (XCS)

SAMPSON: I do bite my thumb, sir. (XDL +G)

ABRAHAM: Do you bite your thumb at us, sir?

SAMPSON: [*Aside to GREGORY*] Is the law of our side, if I say ay?

GREGORY: No.

SAMPSON: No, sir, I do not bite my thumb at you, sir, but I bite my thumb, sir.

GREGORY: Do you quarrel, sir? (XDL) (A+B XDR)

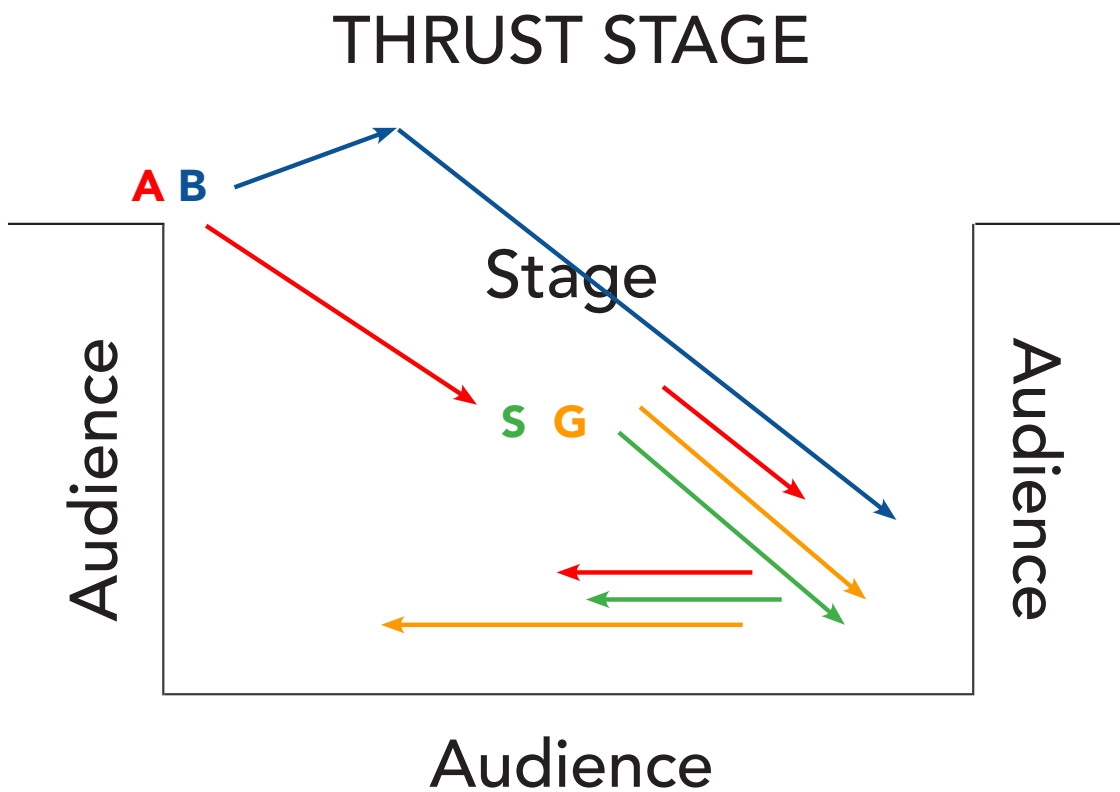
ABRAHAM: Quarrel sir! no, sir.

SAMPSON: If you do, sir, I am for you: I serve as good a man as you. (XDC)

ABRAHAM: No better. (XDC)



Sample Ground Plan





Getting Organized: Create a Personnel File

Teachers are busy people and have a million things to remember. Remembering every student who has ever worked on a show for you is a difficult (if not impossible) task. Yet when it comes to recruiting students for your next production, it is invaluable to have that information available to check back on.

Creating and keeping an updated personnel file can help you stay organized. You can use it for keeping track of students' volunteer hours, if they need you to sign off on volunteer work they've done, or if they're applying to colleges or universities and want you to write them a recommendation letter. It can be used for volunteer retention – if you're missing an important team member, you can simply look at your personnel file and reach out to students who have helped you out in the past. A personnel file can also be used for volunteer recruitment – those students who have volunteered for you in the past might have friends or family members who are interested in helping out or learning more about theatre. The students can advocate for the experience, helping you gain some more recruits.



I recommend having two files for recording personnel information. The file formats I tend to use for personnel files are: MS Excel or Google Sheets, and MS Access.

The first file is a **general overview personnel file**. This file lists the various backstage/technical/front-of-house roles (feel free to add/remove columns, depending on your program). Then, it lists the names of students who are already trained in those roles. This way, you can see exactly who you can tap if you need people for a particular role, or who you might be able to cross-train into another role. It's also a good indicator of whether you need to train more people in a certain position. For example, you might have a ton of students who are trained lighting operators, but a lack of students who are trained wireless microphone assistants.

Update this file frequently – be sure to add names as soon as a student has successfully completed the role (perhaps after closing night of a show), and note if/when the student is no longer available (graduated, moved, etc.). Don't delete the names though – perhaps change the colour of the font or cell fill, move the name to the bottom of the list, or move the name to a separate alumni page or tab. It's important to keep past students' names on the list in case they contact you in the future!

The **second personnel file** is a more **detailed file** for each student. This file should include the student's name, the date you added them to your system, their current grade and contact information, the show the student worked on, the date or season of the show, the role or position the student worked on, the total number of hours the student volunteered, and any additional notes (coaching, concerns, praise, etc.). This file could be digital or it could be hard copy and kept in a binder. Again, once the student moves on, you can move their file to an archival or alumni list. Don't delete or throw out their file right away in case you wish to access this information in the future.

Taking a few minutes to create and set up personnel files will help you immensely in the long run. They will help you stay organized and keep accurate records. They'll help you with recruitment and retention, and allow you have one less thing bouncing around in your busy brain!



Getting Organized: Create a Personnel File

General Overview File –Sample

_____ = Alumni

Lighting Operator	Sound Operator	Spotlight Operator	Wireless Microphones	Stage Manager	Assistant Stage Manager	Front of House
Mike Smith	Cory Jones	Danielle Black	Ashley Myers	Robert Zhane	Genevieve Delgado	Katie Dunn
Cory Jones	Isabelle Michaels	Chris Ackles	Emily Winters	Cathryn Sellars	Will Adams	Hannah Hunter
Sarah DiNardo	Oscar Antonio	Emily Winters	Adrienne Larkin	Lucy Saunders	Elizabeth Dunn	Greg Quinn
Payton Bannerman	Jasmine Carderas	Lucy Saunders	Jessie Sylvester	Sydney Pope	Esme James	Landon Summers
	Jennifer Cruz		Maya Lopez	Sydney Jessop	John Clark	Payton Bannerman
				Laura Tanner	Cory Jones	
				Colin Stevenson		



Getting Organized: Create a Personnel File

Detailed Personnel File –Template

Date Added: _____

Name: _____

Grade: _____

Email: _____ Phone Number: _____

Show	Date	Role / Position	# Hours Volunteered

Additional Notes:



Getting Organized: Create a Personnel File

Detailed Personnel File – Sample

Date Added: September 21, 2015

Name: Cory Jones

Grade: 11

Email: cory@highschool.com Phone Number: (555) 271-7070

Show	Date	Role / Position	# Hours Volunteered
The Crucible	Fall 2015	Lighting Operator	25
A Midsummer Night's Dream	Spring 2016	Sound Operator	32
Spamalot	Fall 2016	Assistant Stage Manager	76

Additional Notes:

- Completed wireless microphone training session – November 15, 2016



What Makes the Best Assistant?

Theatre is such a collaborative art form. As the saying goes, “many hands make light work.” Theatrical production assistants come in many forms. Pretty much any crew member or artistic staff member can have an assistant. In my own theatrical history, I have held a number of assistant roles including: assistant stage manager, assistant fight director, production assistant, assistant director, and director’s assistant (the last two are very different positions, despite their similar titles!).

An assistant’s most basic function is to make the life of the person they’re assisting easier by helping with various tasks and taking on necessary responsibilities to get the particular job done. Assistants also have the opportunity to grow and expand their skills – by being mentored by and learning from those who have more experience. Today’s assistants might be (and should be!) those people running future shows.

Assistant roles are a great way for new and upcoming drama students to get involved in productions and learn in a hands-on environment.

With this in mind, what makes the best assistant?

Here are the three must-have traits of a great assistant.

1. They’re organized souls

The best assistants know what’s on the schedule and what’s going to be worked on next. They have a list of what needs to be completed and by what deadline. Not only do they have everything important neatly noted (bonus points for colour-coordination!), but they’re always the first to show up and the last to leave.

2. They anticipate their leader’s needs

The best assistants have the answers (to questions) at their fingertips and they come up with creative solutions to problems. They also observe their leader and know what to do when situations arise. They get to know their director’s routines and habits, and then act accordingly.

The *really* awesome ones are proactive about helping things run smoothly. For example: During a production of *The Little Mermaid* that I directed, my amazing assistant director, Ben, went ahead and typed up a list of students’ entrance and exit locations and posted it backstage for the actors to refer to – without my asking him to do so. He showed it to me, saying, “I know that when I’m in a show, I find this sort of thing useful, so I thought the actors might as well.” Awesome!

3. They know when to speak up...and when to be silent

There comes a point where the artistic staff members' brains are so full that they need to just do something else (anything else!) to clear their thoughts. The best assistants will help them achieve this – whether it's by giving suggestions or alternatives, or staying quiet and letting the staff member talk through the issue. Remember, it's up to the assistant to anticipate the needs of their individual leader. That could involve anything: getting them a coffee, doing a line run with the actors, being a placeholder for the choreographer. I've seen all of these things happen before!

Each artistic staff role is different, so each assistant role has different responsibilities and demands. A lighting assistant might be taping down cables, while a dance assistant is leading a warm-up, while the assistant stage manager is phoning an absent actor. At the end of the day, an amazing assistant is an extremely valuable person to have around – train them well, treat them well, and keep them close.



Use the provided worksheet to determine if you have students who would make great assistants. There's also a sample to get you started!



What Makes the Best Assistant?

Worksheet

Select one artistic staff role that could benefit from having an assistant.

Suggestions to get you started: director, stage manager, producer, musical director, choreographer, lighting designer, sound designer, costume head, props head, front of house manager, hair & wig stylist, makeup artist.

Role: _____

List five major responsibilities of this role:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

List five ways that an assistant could make that staff member's job easier:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

List five simple tasks that the staff member could delegate to their assistant:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



What Makes the Best Assistant?

Worksheet – Sample Answers

Select one artistic staff role that could benefit from having an assistant.

Role: **Makeup Artist**

List five major responsibilities that this role has:

1. Designing makeup looks for each character
2. Maintaining makeup stock
3. Purchasing new makeup stock and staying on budget
4. Hiring makeup volunteers for the run of the show
5. Training new makeup volunteers

List five ways that an assistant could help make that staff member's job easier:

1. Assisting with cleaning the makeup area
2. Recruiting new volunteers to help with makeup
3. Coming up with possible designs for makeup looks
4. Practicing makeup applications at home
5. Listening and observing how the makeup artist trains new volunteers – so the assistant can be delegated to train new volunteers

List five simple tasks that the staff member could delegate to his or her assistant:

1. Cleaning and sanitizing makeup and tools before and after performances
2. Setting out makeup and tools before each performance
3. Making lists of stock that is running low
4. Purchasing extra tools (like cotton swabs, makeup remover, cotton balls)
5. Assist with applying makeup on specific actors during performances



Choosing Your Team

As a busy teacher and director, having a great artistic team is essential to a successful production. Having a great team in place means that you have a supportive, enthusiastic group all working together to create an amazing experience for your students. It also takes the pressure off you of having to run the entire production by yourself!

The earlier you get your team selected and committed to the production, the easier it will be on you. It's not just a matter of getting a "warm body" in the position – it's imperative to get the RIGHT person in the position.

Here are five things to consider when selecting an artistic team.

1. Establish what core artistic team members you need

Sit down and make a list of all the core artistic team member roles that you will need to fill for the production. For any show, you will need a stage manager and at least one assistant stage manager. Ideally, you will also want a producer to assist with things like budget, acquiring rights and royalties, helping with publicity, etc. You might also wish to take on an assistant director. Which roles will be filled by students and which ones will be filled by adults?

If you're doing a musical, you will need a musical director and a choreographer. You'll also need to decide whether you will use pre-recorded backing tracks (if they're available), or if you will use a band/orchestra (which will require more team members during the run of the show). **Note:** Check with your musical director to determine whether you or they are hiring the musicians!

Depending on your show's specific needs, you might also need to think about design, technical, and specialty team members. For example, if your show includes a lot of stage combat (e.g. *The Three Musketeers* or *Treasure Island*), you will want to hire a fight director as one of your core team members.

2. Passion for the project

Are your potential team members excited about the title you have chosen? Why are they excited about it? Are they just doing it because they are required to commit to an extracurricular activity? Or are they genuinely excited about contributing to this particular production? The attitude and enthusiasm of the team members will directly impact the attitude and enthusiasm of the other students involved. So you want to ensure that your team is just as excited about the project as you are!

3. Scheduling

You might have the most excited team members on the planet, but they are useful to you *only* if they can attend the rehearsals. Will you set your schedule first and then hire team members who can fit the schedule? Or will you hire your team members and then fit the schedule around their availability? Are you willing to create a rehearsal schedule for a potential “part-time” staff member? For example: Let’s say your show rehearses Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays, but your choreographer has a prior commitment on Mondays. Can you get away with having your choreographer only available for Thursday and Friday rehearsals, or do you need a larger time commitment from them?

Be aware of performance dates, as well. Are you expecting the team members to be at every performance in addition to all the rehearsals?

4. Compensation

It’s a touchy subject, but it must be addressed for team members outside the school system – is the role a paid or voluntary position? Be up front with potential team members as to whether or not the position is paid, and, if it is a paid position, how the payment works. Will the team member be paid an hourly rate or a lump sum? When will they receive their payment? On a weekly basis or after closing night? Does the team member need to sign a contract?

On a related note... If you are hiring an artistic team member who is not part of the school system, that person is probably required to provide a police background check. (If this person is a minor, then you can probably substitute the police background check with a vulnerable sector check.) The costs tend to be different depending on whether the position is paid or volunteer. You will want to check with your school board and police station to find out the requirements and costs, and whether the potential staff member will be required to pay for it themselves or will be reimbursed. Ensure that you take care of this *before* work begins with students!

5. The right mix of people

This is one of those things that is harder to gauge but can really affect a production. If at all possible, get the whole potential team together before auditions so you can see how everyone mixes with each other. Have your team members worked together before? Do your ideas blend together, or are people trying to talk over each other? If a conflicting idea is brought up, how is the conflict resolved? As the director, do you want to be the boss of the production or do you want a more team-oriented approach? These are all important things to consider. Also realize that different team members will work well with different people. Just because Choreographer X did an amazing job on their last production doesn’t mean that you will work well with that person – or vice versa.



How to Create a Budget

When You've Never Done It Before

You've gotten the go-ahead from your school's principal to produce a show this year! You have an awesome show in mind that would be absolutely perfect for your students, and you can't wait to get started. Let's just grab a script and go, right?

Well, it's not as simple as that. It costs money to produce a show – even the smallest, most basic production. You'll need to create a budget for your production so you can track where the money is coming from and where it's going.

It may seem intimidating to create a show budget if you've never done it before, but let's break it down into smaller steps.

1. How much is this production going to cost?

This is the million-dollar question (or in the case of many school shows, the \$1,000-or-less question). The first thing you must do when planning to produce a show is to figure out exactly what you're going to have to spend money on and how much you think everything will cost. Every show is different and will have different needs.

Create a simple spreadsheet with Excel or Google Sheets. Call the first column **Expenditures**. In that column make a list of everything that you could possibly imagine spending money on.

Consider the following:

- Performing rights for the show
 - You absolutely cannot do a show without purchasing the rights to the production – to do otherwise is illegal. This may also entail purchasing a logo package and video licensing, if they're available.
- Scripts and score – enough copies for all cast and crew members. Don't forget to include possible shipping costs.
- Rental for rehearsal and performance venue(s)
- Insurance if it is not already covered by your venue(s)
- Salaries/wages/honorariums if you are hiring outside professionals to work on your show – such as directors, musical directors, choreographers, fight directors, designers, band/orchestra members.
- Costumes

- Sets
- Props
- Hair/makeup
- Equipment rentals – this will depend on what equipment you already have available for sound, lighting, spotlights, microphones, video projection, and special effects.
- Printing – programs, posters, handbills, sign-in sheets, etc.
- Publicity
- Miscellaneous – you never know what expected costs might come up.

Call the second column **Estimated Amount**. In this column, record how much you think each item in the first column will cost. Some of these numbers will be easily available, such as the cost of performance rights – check the website of the show you want to produce and the costs will often be listed.

But for some items, you probably won't know how much money you'll need. Sometimes, you need to estimate. If you think you'll need to spend more money on costumes than on props, put a higher amount in the costume section. Always estimate on the high side so you'll have a little wiggle room.

2. How much money do you currently have?

This is your starting amount, the money you have right now. This could be money carried over from the last production, the amount of money that your show has been allotted from a school's budget, or money from a grant or a kind donor. Either way, it's the absolute minimum amount of cash you know you have to work with. Compare this amount to your estimated total amount of expenditures in Column 2.

3. How much more money can you get?

Think about how you can earn or raise money for the show. In a new table (or just below your previous table), create a list of possible income-generating ideas and how much money you might be able to make from each.

Consider the following:

- Ticket sales
 - Will you charge for tickets? If so, how much will you charge?
 - Will you have a different rate for adults, seniors, students, children? Or will you charge everyone the same amount?
 - Will any of the seats cost more than others? (For example, will the balcony be cheaper than the mezzanine?)

- Will all the performances have the same ticket prices? Or will you offer special deals (such as early-bird pricing, student rush, a less expensive “preview night”)?
 - How many performances are you offering? More performances will give you more opportunities to take in revenue, but will also cost more in terms of your licensing agreement.
 - What is the capacity of your venue?
 - When calculating potential ticket sales, never assume you will sell out every performance. You might want to start with 50% as an estimated number of tickets sold. Consider past performances and how well they’ve sold.
- Program ads
 - Corporate sponsorships
 - Donations
 - Grants
 - Fundraising
 - Concession/merchandise sales

Assume that you’ll receive the smallest amounts possible from each source. This is the opposite of how you estimate your expenditures (assume everything will cost more than you expect).

4. How does it all balance out?

Compare the amount of your total estimated expenditures with your total estimated income. Your estimated income minus your estimated expenses is your **estimated profit**. You don’t need to have a huge profit, but you need to at least break even – which means your expenses cannot exceed your income.

If your expenditures are a much larger number than your income, you’re either going to have to reduce your expenses or increase your income. If you need to reduce your expenses, think about what your absolute necessities are versus those items that are just “nice to have.” You may also need to sacrifice something in order to achieve your must-haves. For example: Perhaps you can reduce the number of microphones you need to rent in order to have enough money to purchase matching costume uniforms for your actors.

5. Going forward

Add a third and fourth column to your spreadsheet (**Column 3: Actual Amount** and **Column 4: Difference**) so you can track the actual amount of money spent and calculate the difference from your estimated amounts. This will show exactly where you spent/saved money, and help you to plan your budget for future productions.



Sample Budget Spreadsheet

Table 1: Expenses (Money Out) (Add extra columns as necessary)

Expenditures	Estimated Amount	Actual Amount	Difference
TOTAL:			

Notes:

Table 2: Income (Money In) (Add extra columns as necessary)

Income	Estimated Amount	Actual Amount	Difference
TOTAL:			

Notes:

Estimated income – estimated expenditures = estimated profit: _____

Teaching Resources

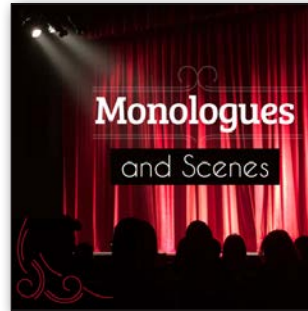
Quality resources to use in your drama classroom



The Drama Classroom Companion

The Drama Classroom Companion is filled with articles and exercises to build the skills needed for theatrical performance as well as real world skills like creative thinking, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.

theatrefolk.com/companion

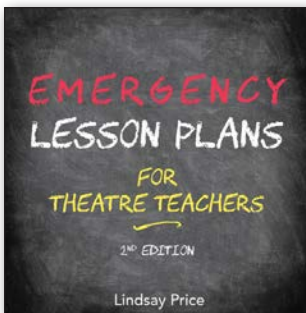


Monologue and Scene Collections

Whether it's for classwork, competitions or auditions, these collections of student-appropriate monologues and scenes can help you find what you're looking for.

All monologues and scenes come from published plays and include running-times, descriptions, character notes and staging suggestions.

theatrefolk.com/collections



Emergency Lesson Plans For Theatre Teachers

Emergency Lesson Plans For Theatre Teachers, 2nd edition gives you the tools and resources you need to confidently leave your class in the hands of a substitute teacher. Customize your lesson plans to suit the specific needs of your class when you can't be there.

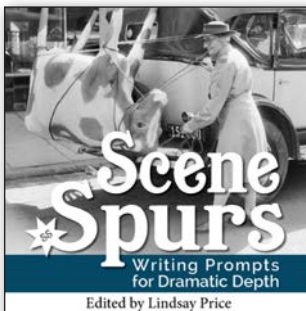
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The Student Director's Handbook

Help students take their show from first audition to opening night with *The Student Director's Handbook*. This easy-to-use ebook is full of guidelines, tips and templates designed to help students create a vision, circumvent problems and organize rehearsals on their way to a successful production.

theatrefolk.com/student-director



Scene-Spurs: Writing Prompts for Dramatic Depth

Scene Spurs is a collection of photo-based writing prompts developed by playwright Lindsay Price. The set includes 35 different Spurs along with an instruction guide to integrate them into your drama classroom.

theatrefolk.com/spurs

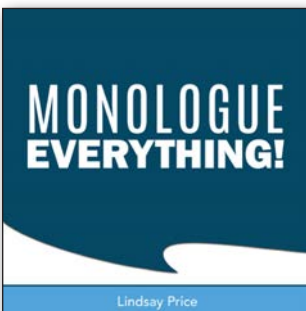


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The Monologue Everything Program

Want your students to write their own monologues? Have you tried to incorporate monologue units into the classroom with less-than-satisfactory results?

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Competition Material

Plays, monologues, and scenes for drama competitions including royalty information and exemptions.

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Practical Technical Theater: The Complete Solution for Technical Theater Classrooms

This series of instructional DVDs is perfect for the teacher who feels more at home with a prompt book than a hammer, and would welcome a new, visually oriented teaching tool for their tech classes and production crews.

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