

Common Theater Terminology

Act Curtain - Curtain usually closest to the proscenium, which when opened reveals the scene of playing area to the audience. Also called Front Curtain, **Main Traveler**, Main Curtain, Working Curtain, or Grand Curtain.

Acting Area - The area of the stage where the play is performed. Also called the Playing Area.

Ad-Lib - To improvise lines or speeches that are not part of the script.

Anchor - To secure a set piece to the stage floor.

Apron - Stage area in front of the proscenium.

Arbor - The metal frame that holds the counterweights.

Areas - In lighting design, the divided portions of the stage used to apportion the light.

Arena Stage - A stage in which the audience is seated on all four sides. Also called Theatre in the Round.

Back Drop - A large piece of canvas hung from a batten and painted to represent a particular scenic element. Also called a Drop.

Backstage - The area away from the acting area, including the dressing rooms and the green room. Also called Offstage.

Batten - A bar made of wood or steel from which scenery, lights, or curtains may be hung and flown in and out. Also called Pipe or fly bar.

Beam Projector - A type of lighting instrument that has no lens, used to emit a powerful beam of light with diffused light.

Black Out - A rapid extinguishing of all light on stage.

Blocking - The movement and business of an actor on stage.

Book Flat - Two flats hinged together in order to be self-supporting when folded on the hinge.

Borders - In scenery, material hung at the top of the set to hide fly system from the audience. Also called Teasers.

Box Set - A set that utilizes three walls to enclose the stage area.

Break Character - When an actor says or does anything that is out of keeping with the character.

Breakaway - A prop that is specifically made to break at a certain point in the play.

Cable -
Electrical cord used in circuiting lighting instruments or other stage devices requiring electricity.

Call - The notification to cast and crew of rehearsal or performance. Also the countdown to curtain provided by stage management, usually half-hour call, fifteen minute call, five minute call, and places.

Call-Board - The bulletin board used by stage managers to post any information pertinent to actors and crew, such as rehearsal schedules and costume fittings.

Can – or Par Can – a lighting instrument shaped like a coffee can containing a lamp that resembles a round headlamp from an older automobile. Lamp can be rotated 90 degrees to change the throw.

Caster - A small wheel used on scenery and scenic equipment for ease of shifting.

Catwalk - An immobile platform above the stage that reaches from one end of the stage to the other, used to gain access to the stage equipment.

Center Line - An imaginary or real line that divides the stage area into two equal parts, running from downstage to upstage.

Center Stage - The Middle of the Performance space.

Contact Sheet - The address book of a production, comprised of sheets that contain the phone and address of everyone on a show. These sheets are sometimes broken down and given out by department.

Cornerblock - A piece of 1/4" plywood cut in the shape of a triangle, used to connect the stile to the rail on a flat.

Costume Plot - A list and description (breakdown) of every costume piece worn by every actor and character in a play.

Cross - In blocking, to move from one area of the stage to another.

Crossfade - A lighting action in which a particular light cue fades down as the next light cue fades up.

Counterweight System - A type of rigging that uses weights to counterbalance horizontal battens containing scenery, curtains, or lighting equipment.

Cue - As a verb, the word may be used by the stage manager, who "cues" all technical personnel either verbally or on a light, and "cues" actors by giving them their line when they have forgotten it.

Cue Lights - Specific lights used by the stage manager to cue backstage technicians and actors. Normally, when turned on functions as a warning and when turned off signals them to GO.

Cue Sheet - The page(s) used to note the cues given by the stage manager to the different technicians.

Cue-to-cue - A technical rehearsal that focuses on getting the physical production caught up with the acting by skipping over scenes or dialogue that have no technical cues in them in order to run the next cue.

Curtain - In addition to its normal definition relating to draperies, a term used to indicate the start or end of a performance such as "Five minutes to curtain" (five minutes to the start of the performance).

Curtain Line - 1) The line on the stage floor where the front curtain touches when brought in. 2) The final line in the play. Also called the Tag Line.

Cyc Lights - Type of powerful lighting instruments used to light the cyc with a smooth wash.

Cyclorama or Cyc - A curved drop or wall used as a background to partially enclose the set. Quite often used to depict the sky. May be painted or lit.

Dark Theatre - A day or night when there is no performance.

Deck - The stage level, derived from ship terminology.

Dim - To decrease the intensity of a stage light.

Dimmer - An electrical apparatus used to control the intensity of the lighting instrument to which it is circuited. Found on the lighting board.

Discovered - A person or object on stage when the curtain goes up.

Downstage - The area of the stage closest to the audience.

Dress Parade - A designated time when the costumes are worn by the actors under stage lights in order for the director and costume designer to make any necessary changes or improvements to the costumes.

Dresser - Crew person assigned to help with quick changes and general maintenance of costumes throughout the run of the show.

Dressing A Set - The decoration of the set with items that are principally for aesthetic purposes only.

Dry Tech - A technical rehearsal without actors.

Dutchman - Thin strips of cloth used to mask cracks between flats. (Sometimes wide masking tape is used).

Electrician - A technician who installs and/or operates the lighting for a production.

Ellipsoidal Reflector Spotlight (ERS) - A type of lighting instrument that emits a hard-edged circle of light. Commonly called a Leko.

Escape Stairs - The steps, unseen by the audience, that an actor uses to "escape" after an upper-level exit; also used to get in place for an entrance from upper platforms or doors.

False Proscenium - A constructed proscenium that fits inside the permanent proscenium.

fight Director - The person who stages, with an eye for safety and hte actors' ability to repeat the actions, any fight scenes, duels, etc.

Fill Light - Lights used to illuminate shadowy areas.

Fire Curtain - A non-flammable curtain hung directly behind the proscenium that protects the audience from fire or smoke emitting from the stage. May be the same as the Act Curtain. Also called Asbestos Curtain or Fireproof Curtain.

First Electric - The first row of lights hung on a batten behind the proscenium.

Flash-pot - A small box that will cause a noisy explosion of smoke when ignited.

Flat - A covered wooden frame, usually rectangular. (Soft flat is cloth covered, hard flat is covered with thin wood.

Flies - The area above the stage that contains lines to be raised or lowered.

Floor Pocket - A small iron box containing an electrical outlet, sunk into the stage floor.

Fly - To lower or raise lines hung from the gird that are affixed with scenery or stage equipment.

Fly Gallery - A platform that runs above the stage on one side, used in the operation of fly lines.

Flyman - Crew person in charge of raising and lowering the flies.

Focus - To direct and lock down a lighting instrument in its specified stage area.

Followspot - A hand-operated lighting instrument mounted on a swivel stand that emits a high intensity beam of light, used to follow an actor on stage.

Footlights - Striplights used for general lighting. Maybe permanent or mobile.

Fourth Wall - An imaginary wall between the actor s and the audience that disallows interaction between the two groups of people.

French Scene - Scene that begins and ends with an actor's entrance or exit.

Fresnel - A type of lighting instrument that emits a soft-edged, diffused light.

Front Elevation - A scale drawing that gives a front view of the set.

Gel - Transparent material used to color the lights.

Ghost Light - A light left on when the theatre is locked up for the night.

Glow Tape - Tape that glows in the dark, placed in small pieces around the set so the actors and crew will not bump into anything during a blackout.

Gobo - A metal cutout used in an Ellipsoidal Reflector Spotlight that projects an image on stage. Also called Template.

Grid - A steel framework above the stage from which the fly system is rigged.

Grip - Crew member who moves scenery.

Green Room - A backstage room used by actors and crew as a waiting and meeting area.

Ground Cloth - A heavy piece of muslin used to cover the stage floor.

Ground Plan - A scale diagram that shows where the scenery is placed on the stage floor. Also called Floor Plan.

Ground Row - A short piece of scenery, usually self-supporting, placed in front of a backdrop or cyc to mask stage equipment.

Half-Hour - The 30-minute warning to curtain.

Hand Props - Properties that are handled by actors during the performance.

Hand-off - The action of a crew member handling a prop for an actor at a designated time and place during a performance.

Hanging - The process of putting a lighting instrument in its designated spot according to the light plot.

Hot Spot - The area of the greatest illumination projected by a lighting instrument.

House - The part of the theatre where the audience sits.

House Lights - Lights used to illuminate the area where the audience sits.

Instrument - A term used for any lighting device.

Instrument Schedule - A list of the types of lighting instruments to be used in a show. Also called a Hookup Sheet.

Jack - A triangular-shaped brace used to support scenery.

Jog - A narrow flat, usually between one and four feet wide.

Keystone - A 1/4" piece of plywood used to connect the stile to the toggle bar on a flat.

Lamp - The part of a lighting instrument that emits the light; the "light bulb" of the instrument.

Legs - Narrow Curtains or cloth that hang vertically on the sides of the stage to mask the backstage area. Also called Tormentors.

Leko - A type of lighting instrument that emits a hard-edged circle of light. Known for its brand name. (Usually called an Ellipsoidal Reflector Spotlight (ERS))

Light Board - The console that controls all the lighting instruments. Also called the Dimmer Board.

Light Plot - A drawn-up plan that designates the placement of lighting instruments relative to the set.

Lighting Tree - A vertical pipe that is placed on the side of the stage to hold lighting instruments. Also called Boom.

Lines - Cords hung from the grid, used to fly scenery and stage equipment.

Load-in/out - The time a show goes into or out of a theatre. Large crews are usually assembled just for this period.

LORT - League of Resident Theatre. A group of Equity theatres around the U.S. that have joined together and created a specific LORT contract. The theatres categorize themselves into LORT A, B+, B, C, and D, according to their box office receipts. Each LORT level has slightly different rules.

Masking - To hide any stage equipment or offstage area through the use of curtains, flats, etc.

Muslin - Material used in construction of soft flats. Also used to make mock-up costumes.

Off Book - The term used to describe when the actors put down the script in the tenuous but brave belief that they now know their lines well enough to be "off-book."

On Book - When either the stage manager or an assistant is following the script in order to help actors when they stumble over lines.

Pace - The tempo of the performance.

Paper Tech - A meeting between director, designers, and stage management to define and record the series of technical events required to operate the production.

Paper The House - To give away free tickets to a performance in order to fill the house.

Can - or Par Can - a lighting instrument shaped like a coffee can containing a lamp that resembles a round headlamp from an older automobile. Lamp can be rotated 90 degrees to change the throw.

Patch - To connect a circuit to a dimmer.

Patch Panel - The board on which one connects circuits to dimmers.

Periaktoi - Three-sided flats that can be rotated to depict three different scenes.

Pin Rail - A rail connected to the fly gallery used in the securing of fly lines. Also called the Fly Rail.

Pit - The area below the front of the stage. May be used to house the orchestra. Also called Orchestra Pit.

Places - The request for cast and crew to take their positions for the start of the performance.

Plaster Line - An imaginary line that runs across the proscenium along the upstage side of the proscenium wall. This line is used by designers and technicians to position various technical elements in the theatre.

Practical - Any prop or piece of scenery that is usable.

Pre-Set - The setting on stage that the audience sees before the play begins. Refers to lights, set, and props.

Preview - A performance before the official opening; often these are rehearsals with an audience, and a time when new material is tested and tried. (Usually you get a discount for these performances.)

Prompt - To help an actor with his lines when he either asks or is stumbling.

Prompt Script - The notebook kept by the stage manager that contains all paperwork necessary to the production of the play, including a script with blocking and cues. Also called a Prompt Book.

Prop Table - The table backstage on which props are laid out, usually in a mapped out order.

Props or Properties - All objects, except for scenery, used during a play. Categorized into hand props or set dressing.

Proscenium - The outlining frame of the stage opening that separates the house from the stage. Also called the Proscenium Arch.

Quick Change - A fast costume change.

Quick Change Booth - Temporary backstage dressing rooms used for quick changes of costumes, wigs, etc.; it may be used by different actors at different times during the show.

Raked - A stage that is built on an upward slant.

Read-Through - Usually the first rehearsal at which the company reads through the script.

Rear Elevation - The scale drawing that gives a back view of the set.

Rigging - The way in which mobile scenery is controlled.

Run - The total number of performances for a production.

Run-Through - To rehearse the show by performing from beginning to end without stopping.

Running Crew - The backstage group of people who perform all the technical tasks during the show.

Running Order - The order in which a show's scenes and songs are performed.

Scene Breakdown - Careful annotations of each scene in a play, with all necessary actors listed and some indication of the action and setting.

Scene Shift - The process of moving from one setting into another during a play. Also to move (shift) a prop or piece of furniture.

Scrim - Loosely-woven material that is used as a drop. When lit from the front scrim is opaque, when lit from behind it is transparent.

Set Dressing - Props that are used to decorate the set and are usually not handled by actors.

Side - An excerpt from a play that focuses on one character's lines.

Sightlines - Imaginary lines of sight that determine what is visible to the audience on stage and what is not.

Slip Stage - A Platform on wheels or casters that moves on and off stage during the course of a play to facilitate rapid scene changes. Also called Wagon and Jackknife Stage.

Spike - To mark on the stage or rehearsal floor the placement of set pieces.

Spike Mark - A mark on the stage or rehearsal floor, usually a piece of tape, that denotes the specific placement of a piece of scenery or a prop.

Spill - Extraneous light that can be cut off with a shutter.

Stage Brace - An adjustable piece of stage equipment that fits into a brace cleat to support scenery.

Stage Directions - Instructions indicating the movement, blocking, or stage business of the performers or other descriptions of the physical setting or atmosphere of the play.

Stage Left - When facing the audience, the area of the stage on the actor's left.

Stage Right - When facing the audience, the area of the stage on the actor's right.

Stage Screw - A screw used to fasten the bottom portion of a stage brace to the floor.

Strike - The removal of all stage equipment, scenery, props, lights, and costumes from the stage area.

Striplights - A long, narrow lighting instrument used for a general wash of light. This trough-like instrument may be sunk in the floor permanently or may be mobile.

Swatch - A small piece of fabric or paint used to demonstrate the color and/or texture of the material being used.

Technical Rehearsal - The rehearsal or series of rehearsals in which the technical elements of the show are integrated with the work of actors. Also called Tech.

Thrust Stage - A type of theatre in which the audience is seated on three sides of the stage.

Traps - Removable area of the stage floor that allow access to the area underneath the stage.

Traveler - A curtain that can open to the sides of the stage.

Trim - The height to which a piece of scenery or stage equipment will be flown.

Turntable - Portion of the stage that revolves.

Unit Set - A set that can serve as several different settings by changing only one or two set pieces, or by adding different set dressing.

Velours - Curtains hung both to mask the backstage area and to shape the onstage area. Also called Blacks.

Wash Light - Light used to give a general illumination of the stage; quite often a specific color is used in a wash.

Wings - The right and left sides of the backstage area.

Working Drawings - Drawings to scale that give specifics of both set and prop construction.

Worklights - Lights used for general illumination of the stage when not in performance.

Work Call - A time period during which the crew is called to work on any technical element of a production without actors or rehearsal.

This Page will be updated as new terms are defined.

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