

THE ART OF DIRECTING



THE ROLE OF THE DIRECTOR

The director is the one who sets the vision for the play. They have the challenging task of bringing together all the different parts of the production - the script, actors, set, costuming, lighting, sound, props, and music - into a unified vision. To accomplish this the director needs to:

- Interpret the script
- Cast the production
- Collaborate with the designers
- Plan the rehearsals
- Guide the actors in their work during rehearsals

If a director does his job well, the play will seem effortless. A job well done by a director is often a job unnoticed - everything works together seamlessly and all for the good of the play.

CASTING & AUDITIONS

- When done correctly this will complete about 80% of your job as the director.
- Should you cast for "type" or "skill"? Always lean towards skill. A talented and professional actor will always deliver a strong character and performance. An actor that fits the "type" will potentially leave you pulling your hair out to get a strong, believable performance.
- The exception when type casting works is usually for shorter rehearsal periods and/or less experienced performers.
- When auditioning for roles make sure you remember that you're seeing the actor in an uncomfortable situation. They are wanting to be the right person for the part, and are probably feeling nervous. Give them grace.
- An actor should always leave an audition room with a positive interaction with you.
- Begin the audition by introducing yourself and anyone else in the room, then politely ask "What are you going to do for us today?"
- Thank the actor at the end of their audition. It took a lot of courage to walk in and perform.
- Do not mislead the actor at the end of the audition. Keep your comments positive and general, e.g. "Thank you for coming in today. That was well done. If you're the right person for this role we will contact you via *communication method* by *time frame*".
- Have the actor play just above your eye line, never directly at you.

THE DIRECTOR'S PROCESS

PRE-PRODUCTION:

1. Read and Research

The first thing the director needs to do is to read the script over, and over, and over again. read it in different moods and environments. Read it quickly to get initial impressions. Read it slowly to ask questions, map out connections and note details. Read it just to understand the story, then to understand the characters, then to identify the themes. Read, read, read, and take notes.

Do research on the playwright, and when/why they wrote the piece. Research the time and location in which this is set. Research the societal norms of the time, and any historical events that may have occurred. If the play is set in the future or a time not in our history, then do research and answer these questions for yourself. Be as specific as possible.

2. Design Concepts

When you begin looking at the design elements of the piece it is best to look for a visual metaphor that encapsulates your vision. Find a painting or photograph that most clearly symbolizes the entire concept of the play. Then work on limiting your creative direction to that metaphor. Use the colors, textures, and other design elements of the metaphor to guide your creative vision. Then communicate this vision with those in charge of costuming, hair & make-up, and set design. This will help make sure all elements are focused on a unified vision.

3. Text Preparation

Make sure all your edits have been made BEFORE your first rehearsal. Do not walk in and cut things as a group on day one. We want to be prepared as directors and walk in with as much of a completed vision as possible. It can also be demoralizing for the actors to come in excited for day one, only to be given a pencil and asked to sit and cut out line after line, which could potentially have been their own dialogue.

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS:

1. Read Through

It's important with the read through that you emphasize this is "for sense only". This means you are all reading the script to familiarize yourself with the story. There is no need to nail your performance as the actor, or to know the character's objectives, obstacles, etc. If there are words or phrases in the script the actors don't understand or can't pronounce this can be a time to clearly mark them for rehearsal. Don't worry too much about explaining or correcting things here. Just read the script.

2. Blocking

When we talk about blocking we are referring to the choreographed movement of actors on the stage. This may be for logistical purposes (I have to get this prop off stage), story purposes (I need them to move closer for this conversation) or visual symbolism (I need him to stand higher than them to appear more powerful). Good blocking should be able to communicate the story without words, and will make an actor feel comfortable. They might even feel the blocking helps motivate them to achieve their objective. Bad blocking will feel like choreography and seem clunky on stage.

Some directors like to do all the blocking ahead of time. Some like to have the beginning and ending of the scenes mapped out, and discover the transitions during rehearsal. Whatever your process is make sure you have a plan. And make sure you are familiar with it so you don't need to teach it out of your prompt book. If you are unsure of what to do in a scene, start with the questions "Where were you right before this scene?", "Where does the script say you enter from?", and "Where does it say you exit?".

Make sure your actors are writing down their blocking. Not only will it help when you revisit scenes to be able to quickly remember who moves where, but it can also help with memorizing. If an actor is practicing at home with their blocking it can help to connect the words to the movement and vice versa. Blocking should be completed with enough rehearsal time left to run the show 3-4 times through.

3. Workshopping Scenes

You can begin workshopping things once blocking has been completed for that particular scene. Your actors don't have to be off book straight away, however you must remember that the first rehearsal without scripts will always feel like a mess. Any workshopping done prior to being off book will need to be reviewed. Make sure you give them adequate and regular reminders when they will be off book - "We need to be off book by Thursday. Today is Tuesday so you have 2 days before we put our scripts down. Thank you".

Once the actors are off book the fun begins. By focusing on the objectives of the characters, the physicalization of the characters, and embracing the blocking you can begin to play with the scene. Allow opportunity for your actors to make choices and communicate when those choices work. Together, work on creating truthful and believable moments. Find moments of honesty. Instruct your actors when physical touch is appropriate. Just have fun!

4. Full Run Throughs

Once you have workshopped the play it is good to walk through it top to bottom. Do not expect it to be a full, clean run. It will be choppy but it will highlight the rough spots and what needs more attention. It is important for you to not interrupt the run-through under any circumstances. This usually pressures the actor into continuity. Issues will be resolved on their own, new meanings will break through for you and the cast, and transitions will become

automatic and clean. When something goes wrong, the actor will feel a rush of adrenaline and will often find creative ways to keep going.

5. Technical Rehearsals

The technical rehearsals often happen the week before/week of production. This is usually the first time that the cast and crew all work together in the space of the performance. This run-through can be handled 1 of 2 ways. Option 1 is to stop and start whenever there is a hiccup in the technical cue or something needs to be adjusted. The benefit to this is handling things right in the moment. However it can be a very choppy run, and can cause problems figuring out where to start again. Option 2 is the "barrel through" approach. You let the play run uninterrupted, and take notes of the missed/incorrect cues. Any adjustments happen once the final line has been spoken and the curtain closes. The benefit to this is getting a feel for the piece as a whole and how it flows. However there can be a lot of fixing to do on the back end. It is always important that the director maintain a positive attitude, to help alleviate any stress or frustration felt by the rest of the cast and crew.

6. Dress Rehearsal

The main purpose to have a dress rehearsal is to have a full, uninterrupted run through. This serves as the opportunity to make sure everyone knows their cues, has their costume changes down pat, entrances/exits correct, cues lined up and on time, and to get a final few runs of the show. The director sits quiet during the run, letting the actors and crew be responsible for handling any mix-ups. At the end the director can give a few notes. It is vital that anyone involved in the show act as if there is an audience present.

7. Performance

This is it! The director gets to sit back and watch their actors and crew do what they love. The confidence of the actors is increased when the director is relaxed and positive leading up to the first performance. Do not introduce anything new or adjust anything. This is now up to the actors and crew. Enjoy seeing the fruit of your labor!

DIRECTING DO'S & DON'TS

<p>DO create an environment that is safe. (i.e. free of fear, humiliation, intimidation and victimization.)</p>	<p>DON'T send messages of disrespect or contempt. Make sure everyone feels equally seen and valued.</p>
<p>DO encourage collaboration with your actors. Let them do their job, and act as a guide.</p>	<p>DON'T come in with a rigid idea of everything that must happen. That squashes creativity.</p>
<p>DO encourage your actors to make bold decisions and trust their instincts.</p>	<p>DON'T make an actor feel bad for a poor/lacking impulse. Let them fail and encourage them to try again.</p>
<p>DO give frequent compliments such as "You're doing great in this scene!" "This is coming along nicely" "Great work today"</p>	<p>DON'T wait to only praise moments that work perfectly. Encourage the actor to live in the imperfections, and call out whatever you see as praise worthy.</p>
<p>DO listen to the concerns of your actors and find a helpful, creative solution.</p>	<p>DON'T let your ego get too big that you refuse to listen to other members of the cast and crew</p>
<p>DO teach your actors that self-forgiveness is an important quality.</p>	<p>DON'T linger and wallow in someone's mistake. It wastes time and does nothing for morale.</p>
<p>DO start rehearsal on time.</p>	<p>DON'T let a rehearsal run over time.</p>
<p>DO take notes and give them quickly and concisely to your actors.</p>	<p>DON'T constantly interrupt your actors when they are running a scene. Wait until an appropriate moment to give notes.</p>
<p>DO allow opportunity for collaboration. Invite engagement by asking, "Let's workshop this", and guiding a discussion.</p>	<p>DON'T allow an actor to give notes/ direction to another actor. That is your job, not theirs.</p>

HOW TO STRUCTURE A DRAMA REHEARSAL

1. WARM-UP (20% of rehearsal)

- * Most important part of a drama rehearsal.
- * All of us come into rehearsal with different attitudes and stages of energy. Warm up exercises allow the group to bring their energy to the same level. For some, this may be focusing their already existing energy, for others it will be engaging their mind and body more.
- * Warm up exercises should engage the mind (mental), body (physical), and voice (vocal)

2. TECHNIQUE/WORKSHOP SCRIPT (35% of rehearsal)

- * Time to develop skills (Projection, Connection, Expression, Characterization, etc)
- * Best practice is to focus on techniques that will help the ensemble target areas of weakness (eg. Your cast isn't projecting enough so focus on breathing and vocal exercises). The other option is to focus on techniques that will be useful in your performance piece (eg. Focus on creating strong physical archetypes/gestures for their character in the piece).
- * Depending on how long your rehearsal is you can use up to 20 minutes of this section to workshop some pieces you have in mind for the future.
- * To workshop a script, you would have the group do a "dry read" or perform a piece for you from scratch. This will allow them time to throw themselves into things right away. Sometimes this is more exciting for them than the process of breaking down a piece in order to prepare it for performance. Of course these "workshop pieces" will eventually need to be really rehearsed, but in this part of rehearsal they just go for it.
- * This also gives you, as director, an opportunity to see who would be best to cast in each role.

3. WORK PERFORMANCE PIECE (45% of rehearsal)

- * Begin working the piece with scripts in hand.
- * Write down ALL blocking IN PENCIL (in case it needs to be adjusted)
- * Work doesn't really begin until memorization is complete - the first run through after getting off book will be a disaster. All blocking, emotion, action and objectives will go out the window. Let the actors get comfortable being off book and trust the next rehearsal will run smoother.
- * Work a piece step by step. Don't try to teach blocking/character/etc all at the same time. It can be hard to retain all that information so it's better to complete the blocking of the piece in one rehearsal, then the following week begin to layer it with characterization, then physicalization, then costumes etc.