

STAGE MANAGER JOB DESCRIPTION & DUTIES

THE STAGE MANAGER'S ROLE

The Stage Manager (SM) is key to creating an efficient and positive production. Your ability to successfully lead and work with the company, although at times possibly stressful, will be of utmost importance. Your overall purpose is to work directly with the director, cast, and production people to move a show from inception to closing. Aside from the obvious technical aspects of the position in many cases you will be involved in that call on human relations skills and diplomacy.

WHO MAKES A GOOD STAGE MANAGER?

- Someone who is organized.
- Someone who knows their theatre building.
- Someone who knows how to solve problems.
- Someone who has a basic understanding of all the technical demands of a production: lights, sound, props, set changes, costume and make-up changes, and special effects.
- Someone with a firm, kind, polite, respectful, and calm manner who can encourage and lead a large number of people to achieve a high standard of backstage discipline.
- Someone with stamina and a sense of humor.

PREPARATION (3 WEEKS BEFORE REHEARSALS):

- Get to know the building. A large part of your job description is the safety of the cast, the crew, and the audience.
- Know the location of fire extinguishers and how they operate.
- Check that all fire exits are clearly marked.
- Make notes of potential safety problems, and pass on concerns to the appropriate person.
- Know the location of all fuse boxes.
- Check the backstage first aid kit and replace any missing supplies.
- Read job description for production positions.
- Become familiar with the basic operation of the following:
 - Where to turn on work lights, running lights, house lights, rehearsal lights, the stage lighting console.
 - The sound system.
 - Head set intercom system, if applicable to your venue.
 - Monitor and hearing-assist system and where it plugs in, if applicable to your venue
 - Heating/cooling system
 - Security Alarm and operation, including password or key
- Make arrangements to be trained as necessary. When in doubt, and ask for help.
- Check the box office for flashlights and batteries.
- Have a reliable watch or a clock in the theatre to reference SM desk
- Know the location of the workshop and costume rooms and who has the key for both.

- Learn how to accommodate wheelchairs in the house and backstage, if needed.

GET TO KNOW PRODUCTION TEAM

- In our theatre, the production meetings are run by the Producer and/or Director. Find out when the production meetings will take place. Attend all production meetings and help support your technical staff to solve any problems they may have. All heads of production must have a chance to voice their concerns and should be assured that they will get help if they need it. If someone is feeling overwhelmed or overworked, they need to know that help can be found.
- Read the script several times
 - Make notes of set changes, lighting needs, special effects, sound needs, and any special rigging. Also, make notes of costume and make-up changes, especially those that happen back stage.
 - Start to make notes on how to best move set pieces, as this will have an impact on number of running crew required.
- Meet with the set designer and arrange a time to help tape the rehearsal area floor to indicate the layout of the set.
- Arrange a time to meet with set decoration and props persons to find rehearsal furniture and props before first read-through.
- Deliver a copy of script to each crew head (lights, sounds, props, special effects, costumes, makeup) and the Assistant Stage Manager.

Production Schedule/Timeline

Arrange a meeting with the entire production staff to create a production schedule, in which each person's tasks and deadlines are listed. Make sure that copies of the finished schedule are widely distributed.

The schedule includes all rehearsals, tech week, opening night, performances, and final strike, as well as key events such as completion of costumes, sets, lighting setup, etc.

As the SM, it is extremely important that your script is complete and up to date. Be sure to record all cues legibly in your SM script. Depending on the production, there will be two to four full run-throughs. Two include fine tuning with make-up and hair and costumes; at least one with lights, sound and special effects and full crew for cue to cue, with the SM in the booth.

In addition:

- Arrange one tech rehearsal (usually on a Saturday morning) for checking light and sound cues and levels. Arrange a time that works with everyone's schedules: you will need the Director, Lighting Designer, and Sound Designer present.
- Establish which nights to have an early call for a costume parade with the director, the actors, and the Costume Designer. Ask Costume Designer which night would be appropriate.
- An early call might also be necessary for make-up and hair.

- You may, depending on the complexity of the production, have to call a few rehearsals of just your crew to rehearse changing scenes or props. These changes have to be orchestrated so that they will be smooth, swift, and economical.

****TO EACH THEIR OWN, BUT YOU MIGHT WANT TO TRY:**

Prepare your script for the run of the play. This will be separate from the rehearsal script.

- Photocopy each page of the script, and paste onto one side (only) of an 8.5 x 11” piece of card stock, and punch for inserting into a 3-ring binder.
- Arrange pages in a 3-ring binder so that the script is on the right side, and the blank side on the left, when the book is opened. The blank page will have all cues written on it, and any additional notes, as needed. You may also want to color code them.

******Ultimately, each SM has a way of doing things that works best for them. At the end of the day, the SM needs to make sure that all of their notes are up to date; that all cues are recorded and identified in the right spot; and that you feel comfortable calling the show using said SM binder. A good idea to keep in mind is that you ideally want to create a SM binder that is organized to the point that you could literally hand it over to someone else to call the show and they would be able to call the show flawlessly using your binder.******

REHEARSALS:

Encourage respect. Set a good example for everyone by being supportive to all.

Cast and Crew

- Collect phone numbers and or e-mails from all actors and crew.
- Arrive at least ½ hour before call time. The SM is always first to arrive for each rehearsal and last to leave.
- Arrange and set furniture for the scene.
- Help props people arrange props on and off stage.
- Call actors who are late.
- Record all blocking in pencil - you may need to erase later.
- Time each rehearsal. It’s good to break every 90 minutes or so, however, it depends on the schedule you and your Production Team has created for the day.
- Find out what’s planned for the next nights rehearsal, so you know which scene to set up before leaving. This depends on your work style, the nature of the show, and what your space allows though.
- Leave notes for crew heads of changes or that may have taken place when they haven't been at rehearsal.
- Close down all lights, close all fire doors, and lower thermostats where they have been manually set.
- Make sure that you are the last person to leave the theatre as you set the alarm and lock the door.

TECH WEEK:

Continue to build morale of cast and crew. Help foster a good team spirit.

- Set up work lights for props and quick costume changes backstage.
- Tape down all extension cords (run overhead whenever possible.)
- Apply glow tape where needed.
- Put down backstage soundproofing when needed. (old carpets work fine)
- Make sure fire exits are clear (both onstage and in scene shop)
- Remind all running crew, lights, sound, props, makeup, hair, special effects, set decoration, costume designer and dressers and ASM to be at all rehearsals from now on. It is also helpful if they stay for notes at the end of the night, as sometimes notes can be lost in translation from one person to another.
- Start timing each act.
- During the technical rehearsals, all cues are numbered and recorded by the SM. The lighting and sound people may also record these numbers (lighting and sound cues are numbered separately).
 - Sound cues are labeled SQ
 - Lighting cues are labeled LX
 - Special effects can be labeled SPE
 - Each may be given a color code.
 - Each cue is called approximately a ½ page before they happen and are called on “Stand By.” When the cue starts, you say “Go!”
 - For your information, the house lights, (although done manually) the pre-set lights, & the pre-show music may also be numbered and included in your cue book. Blackouts are also numbered.
- Stay organized and the next two weeks will go smoothly.

TWO NIGHTS BEFORE OPENING:

Stay focused and supportive to the whole production team.

- Make sure that the backstage area is tidy, swept and damp-mopped.
- The stage must be swept and damp-mopped every night by you and or the ASM.
- Inform cast and crew where they are not allowed to go during the run. They should be limited to backstage and dressing rooms.
- Post the sign-in sheet at the stage door. This is essential in keeping track of who is, and is not present, so that you can make a phone call as needed.
- All crew must wear black, and good, sturdy quiet shoes.
- Inform the house manager about any special exits or entrances from the foyer.
- Inform house managers about when to seat latecomers.
- Do a last walk-through of the entire building. Ropes tidy? Carpets stapled down? Lighting instruments all safety chained? Fire exits clear inside and out? ETC...

DURING THE RUN:

You are the one responsible for everything and everyone to be ready and to maintain the director's intentions.

- Have a secure place for show members to place valuables.
- Be there 1½ hours before curtain or earlier depending on the complexity of the show.

- Inform house people before each performance about special procedures.
- Inform actors about checking props before house is open - usually ½ hour before curtain.
- Check that lights and sound crew have done their sound and lighting checks, and they are ready to go to first cue before the house opens.
- Check that special effects are ready to go.
- Check that all masking and set pieces are in the correct place and that all props are in their correct places. If not, respectfully ask props to remedy.
- Inform house manager that you will tell them when to open the house.
- No "visitors" are allowed in backstage area or in the booth. If someone should enter, introduce yourself and ask them if you can help them. If not, explain why it is important for them not to be where they are. For example, "I'm sorry, but safety [or fire] regulations do not permit backstage visitors, but we will be happy to relay a message, or deliver flowers to the dressing rooms."
- Give actors and crew a 30-minute call, a 15-minute call and a "5 minutes to curtain" or "Places!" Ask actors to respond to your calls, so you know you've been heard.
- At five minutes to curtain, the ASM will alert audience by lights or sound, depending on your venue. Ask ASM to inform you when the house doors are closed.
- Start on Time: If you always start late, your audience will always be late.
- Sometimes the House Manager will ask you to hold the curtain. Give them a couple of minutes to seat people - it is less disruptive than seating them during the show.
- Any damage to set pieces or props must be repaired before you leave the theatre.
- Valuable items or weapons should be locked in the cabinet in the control booth.

AFTER THE RUN:

- Be there for the strike (dismantling of the set and return of reusable items as appropriate).
- Make sure that all heads of departments know that they are responsible for returning borrowed or rented items.
- All stage areas should be cleaned, set pieces put in storage areas, stage swept, damp-mopped, and painted back to black.
- Light and sound booth must be cleaned, as well as dressing rooms, bathrooms, and lobby.
- The set shop should be swept, and garbage put in the dumpster.
- If keys have been given to production team members, these need to be returned and noted in the log.
- Check with the Studio Manager to make sure all tasks are completed before closing and locking the facility.