



Stage Management Manual

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Introduction

It is not the intention of this manual to teach you stage management in its entirety, but rather to be a guide for how productions are executed at the University of Windsor. This will serve as a refresher for general procedures as well as an introduction to specific policies and processes for University Players (UP).

As a UP stage manager you have been put in the unique predicament of holding a position of authority while still being a student. While it is important that you take charge and responsibility for your role, you're not expected to know everything; we understand that you are still learning. The staff and production team are always available to support and advise you. Always ask for help with a situation when you are unsure of how to deal with it. You can't possibly know how to handle every issue and you're not expected to figure things out all by yourself. In fact, you are expected to keep staff informed in order to find the best course of action and to lead you through difficult circumstances. If you have any questions or if a situation arises that you are unsure of please contact the Director, Technical Coordinator, SM mentor or another staff/faculty member.

The stage manager is often referred to as the hub of a wheel and it is their responsibility to maintain constant, open communication with all the spokes of that wheel. The SM must be able to clearly communicate the ideas of others, in a timely manner and without altering the intention of the message. It is also the stage managers job to maintain a respectful and positive creative environment throughout the production. This requires a lot of patience, tact, common sense, and certainly a sense of humor. This is not the role of a tyrant; it is more like a mama bear making sure all her cubs have everything they need and are safe.

"Please" and "Thank You" should be the two most used phrases in your vocabulary.

Pre-Production

Meet with the Team

Set up a meeting with the Technical Coordinator and/or SM Mentor to pick up pertinent paperwork such as a cast list & the production calendar; a photocopy of the play script; production design drawings & floor plans; and any other information you may need.

Take the time to introduce yourself to all the members of the UP production team. This can be done by email but it is recommended for you to visit each department in person so that you may familiarize yourself with the location and access points of each of the shops. UP staff generally works between 8:30am-4:30pm from Monday to Friday with a one hour lunch break at noon. Please try as much as possible to respect this schedule and don't book meetings, appointments or stop by outside these times without asking first.

Check in with the SODA office to sign out keys for the theatre and drama building. The colour code legend is posted at the SM position in the booth. The main office can do any photocopying required for you to perform your SM duties. It is not the SM's financial responsibility to make photocopies for a production.

Send out an introductory email to the cast requesting contact information and class/work schedule and any other possible scheduling conflicts. Include a copy of the production calendar as well as a confirmation of where and when is the first day of rehearsal.

Your uwindsor account must be used for all email correspondence and always include a signature line with your contact information.

Meet with the Director

The majority of UP Directors are out-of-town guest artist and therefore you'll often know more about our facilities, our policies and the University in general than they do. Be available to answer questions and offer information when needed.

In an initial meeting with the director you should ask them to explain their process and what their expectation is of you. The following are example questions:

- Will they be creating a rehearsal schedule or is it your responsibility or will you do it together
- How do they usually structure their rehearsals
 - How long will they be doing table work
 - Should breaks be scheduled at an exact time or at a natural breaking point in rehearsal
- Do they work autonomously or collaboratively; is your creative input welcome and to what extent
- What are their needs from props, costumes and other departments in the rehearsal process
- How strict should you be with missed lines, paraphrasing and altered blocking
- Should you be verbally calling out technical cues during rehearsal (ie. doorbell, blackout)

Production Meetings

The Stage Manager is required to attend all production meetings. In the event there is a conflict, an assistant stage manager should be in attendance. The SM's role is to take notes during the meeting. These notes should be organized by department and written out as clearly and elaboratively as possible.

Be specific and give as much detail as possible and include persons responsible for next steps. Include a list of who was present and who was absent and when referring to yourself always use the third person. Before distribution, have the SM mentor look over your notes to give feedback and make adjustments. Production meeting minutes should be distributed to the entire production team; essentially everyone that gets a rehearsal report gets these minutes. They should be distributed within 24 hours of a meeting.

Before the First Rehearsal

Before rehearsals begin, you should familiarize yourself with all aspects of the production. Read the script the first time just for pleasure and to understand the story. Then read it again to do a complete analysis and breakdown. Templates for specific forms and charts are included at the end of this manual. Company contact list, actor scene breakdown, and technical script analysis should be created well in advance of the first rehearsal and distributed where appropriate.

It is the SM team's responsibility to set up the rehearsal space and tape out the floor using the scaled floor plans and rolls of coloured tape provided. Only ever use the tape supplied by the production team on the floor in the rehearsal space or on the stage. NEVER use packing tape to cover spike marks. A workshop for learning how to tape out a rehearsal floor is part of the SM orientation at the beginning of the school year.

Rehearsals

First Rehearsal

In cooperation with the director, the SM is responsible for the following at the first rehearsal:

- Explaining the expectations of the actors and rehearsal room etiquette
- A tour of the space including explanation of the taped out floor and rehearsal set pieces
- Explaining the concept of a Company Deputy and facilitating the nomination & election of that person.
- Gathering information from all company members about allergies and other medical issues either verbally or confidentially within a sealed envelope.

During the Rehearsal Process

It is the SM team's responsibility to arrive to rehearsals in enough time to unlock the space and set up for the day's activities. In the theatre, this will include turning on worklights; unplugging and storing the ghost light; unlocking the backstage door & greenroom door and propping open the House Right (HR) theatre access door. The HR door should remain locked at all times – only ever prop or bungee it open.

At the end of each rehearsal, the space must be cleared of all rehearsal set pieces and props. In the rehearsal hall, larger pieces can be stored in the Storage room. Smaller props and rehearsal costume pieces must be locked in the cloakroom. Ensure that no one leaves any garbage or personal belongings behind.

After rehearsals all spaces used must be secured. When in the rehearsal hall this includes the rehearsal room, the cloak room, and all exterior Jackman building doors. In the theatre all work lights should be turned off and the ghost light plugged in and positioned at the furthest down right corner of the stage. All doors should be locked and secured including the booth, backstage, the HR door and the greenroom.

During regular rehearsals (ie before tech weekend) the company should only use the Jackman building washrooms to avoid having to unlock extra doors.

The Call Board is meant as a tool to disseminate information easily to the entire company. Adding decorative elements and being creative with its layout is completely acceptable but please remember to always remain professional and respectful. Do not post anything here that you wouldn't want the general public to see. The following should be included on the call board:

- Sign in Sheet for Cast & Crew
- Overall Production Schedule & Daily Schedule Breakdown
- UP Policies

Following each rehearsal, a report must be written and distributed by email before 7am the following morning. Sample templates are included in this manual. The distribution list is as follows:

- Creative team – director, assistant director, scenic designer, scenic artist, costume designer, assisting costume designer, Head of wardrobe, technical coordinator, props master, master carpenter, ASM's, and any other student assistants or faculty advisers.
- Administrative team – Director of SODA, UP chair, Publicity Coordinator

The entire report should appear in the body of an email as well as a PDF attachment for clarity and printability. Reports should be numbered and dated. The subject heading should include only the show name & report number (ie. Beauty & the Beast Rehearsal Report #24).

On Stage Rehearsals

Prior to the first on stage rehearsal, the SM will meet with the technical coordinator and master carpenter for an on stage safety walk. Assess if there are any issues from an actor standpoint (ie. railings on platforms, cables taped down or carpeted, technical equipment to avoid, clearance in tight spaces, etc.) Test moving parts and set pieces to understand how they should be used. Determine what is complete and what is still in progress. Inquire how much of the stage needs to be cleared of the furniture and set pieces after each rehearsal in order for technical work to continue in the daytime.

Once rehearsals move to the stage, all rehearsal props and set pieces should either be returned to where they came from if they're no longer needed or brought over to the theatre if still in use. All tape and spike marks from your specific production should be pulled up.

On the first day onstage, the SM conducts a tour of the set and backstage for the actors indicating where they should use caution; demonstrating how set pieces are to be used; and informing what is still in progress. Remind actors that the stage is still a work zone during the day and so shoes are mandatory when on stage and backstage during this time.

Production tables will be set up in the auditorium. The ASM table should be set up in the front row so that they have quick access to jump on stage when needed. An ASM should always be at the ready to assist on stage for whatever is required.

At this time the Green Room may be used as a 'break room'. It is the SM team's responsibility to monitor the maintenance of this room. It is everyone's responsibility to keep it as clean and tidy as possible. Dishes should be washed and all garbage put out in the hallway at the end of each rehearsal.

Before each rehearsal, the SM team should check all areas for any safety concerns or hazards (ie. set pieces in the auditorium, lighting instruments or tools or other equipment left backstage) and inform the company of any areas to use caution. It is also the SM team's responsibility to do a thorough sweep and mop of the stage space before each rehearsal.

The word GO is sacred and must only be used when executing a cue. Many stage managers have adopted the habit of spelling it (G-O) when not intending to call a cue.

It is the SM team's responsibility to generate running plots for everything that moves (furniture, props, set pieces, costumes, etc). Everything a backstage crew person does should be noted so that the job can easily be passed on in case of an emergency or illness. The backstage space should be clearly marked with tape lines to indicate parking spots for large set pieces and furniture. Props tables must also be clearly labelled. A scene breakdown or show running order posted backstage for all to refer to can be very useful in moments of adrenaline rush.

As the production inches closer to show conditions, the SM team must monitor the changes that are happening backstage as well as onstage to ensure the safety and efficiency of the all the action taking place. Ensure that adequate running lights, glow tape and clearance is available for cast and crew to move about with confidence.

Photo Call

During Tech Week, sessions will be scheduled for publicity photo calls and a media photo call. The SM is responsible for making sure actors are ready in a timely manner for these sessions so that photographers and reporters are not kept waiting. The Publicity Coordinator, in consultation with the Director, will supply a list of set up shots a few days prior. The SM then schedules the session in the most efficient manner possible; taking into consideration costume changes and scene changes that may be required. The SM drives this session forward all while ensuring Publicity is getting what they need.

Headset Etiquette

The SM is the most important voice on headset. When they are speaking no one else should be and once a standby is called there must be radio silence until all subsequent cues are called. Chatter should be discouraged, and talk should be restricted to things directly related to the production. Never say anything on headset that you wouldn't want broadcast to the whole company. Be mindful to practice respect and make sure all others do the same.

The mic on a ClearCom headset is very sensitive and for this reason these pointers should be followed:

- Only turn on (often referred to as "open") your mic when you need to speak.
- Never chew gum or eat, and avoid yelling, coughing, sneezing & sniffing when your mic is open
- Keep your mic tucked just under your mouth so your breathing won't be heard
- Always make sure your mic is off (or "closed") when taking off or putting on your headset. You only have to experience the painful noise this makes in your ear once, to understand why.
- Warn everyone on headset before unplugging or plugging in a headset or belt back. This produces an even worse horrific noise that everyone will want to remove their headset for.
- If you must leave your post and remove your headset, inform everyone on headset beforehand and when you return inform that you are back. Make sure never to interrupt a cueing sequence, always wait for an appropriate break in the process.

Dress Rehearsal

A dress rehearsal should be run in as close to "show conditions" as possible. Whenever possible the performance does not stop unless there is an emergency. If there are mistakes or issues the company must try to push through and get the show back on track without stopping.

At this point, the SM team begins to give call times to inform the company of how long they have before places. Calls should be phrased in this way or similar:

“This is your half hour call; half hour please” and the response required is “Thank you half hour”

This response ensures, not only that the company member has heard you, but also that they understand what you have said. The standard calls are:

- “Half Hour”
- “House is Open. Please do not cross the stage or enter the house” (*usually at the same time as half hour*)
- “15 minutes”
- “5 minutes”
- “Places for top of show” or “Places for top of Act II”

Sometimes certain calls are given over programmed sound. In this case, speak clearly and slowly and repeat the call several times because often people don’t tune in till partway through a call:

“Ladies and Gentlemen, this is your half hour call. Half hour till the top of the show. Half hour please.”

It is at the discretion of the Director whether a dress rehearsal will be open to an invited audience or not. In this case, sometimes the SM will act as Front of House to ensure invited guests are seated before the top of the show and that the company remains out of view until after the guests have left.

Performances

Front of House

House Management is the liaison between the production and the patrons. The SM must stay in contact with the House Manager to make sure the house is ready to be open; that the performance begins on time or if a hold is required; give warnings for intermission and end of show so doors can be propped open.

A latecomer policy should be discussed in advance between the Director, House Manager and Stage Manager.

Preshow

Establish a pre-show checklist for everything that has to be set-up and prepared for the performance. This includes board operators doing a check of all their equipment; backstage crew checking spike marks and setting up for the top of the show; sweeping and mopping the stage. Schedule in 'just-in-case' time for any issue that comes up and needs fixing or tending to (ie. burned out bulb). At the half hour call, before the house is given over, all elements should be in their first cue.

Schedule time for actors onstage or rehearsal studio warm-ups (physical & vocal); dedicated time for a fight call and a lift call (for dance or movement pieces). Once the half hour call has been given there is to be no more movement onstage in view of the audience. All on stage pre-sets must be done ahead of time.

If a situation arises during preshow, an SM can call a delay for the house to open. This must be clearly communicated to Front of House staff and the issue should be resolved as quickly as possible. Every effort necessary must be made in order for the house to open on time and the performance to start on time.

At the half hour, all cast and crew must remain within the confines of the theatre (ie. Backstage, greenroom, dressing rooms or booth). At the "5 minutes" call, all crew must report to their positions and put on their headset. The SM team and all crew must remain at their positions for the entirety of the performance.

Intermission

If there is a scene change that needs to take place, it is customary to wait until the audience is up and moving around. Generally, five minutes into intermission is standard timing for an intermission scene change.

Keep in contact with the House Manager to determine whether the intermission will need to be extended due to long bathroom lines or other issues. Once the audience has returned to their seats, the House Manager will give the house to the SM.

All cast and crew should remain out of sight of patrons during intermission as much as possible and there should be no socializing with patrons (this includes fellow classmates) during intermission.

Show Reports

Immediately following every performance, the SM generates a show report. This report is very similar in content and layout to the Rehearsal Reports and should follow all the same parameters. Additionally, the following information should be included:

- Running times for all Acts; the entire performance and intermission
- Any Front of House issues that directly affected the performance (ie. Holding the house, latecomers, disruptive audience members)
- An overall summary of how the show went (ie. Actor energy; audience engagement)
- The following performance date and time
- Reports from Costume Crew and Front of House should also be included as attachments

A sample show report can be found at the end of this manual.

Consumables should be closely tracked and a replenishment request for the weekend performances must be included in the Thursday evening show report so that staff can fulfill the request during the workday on Friday.

If any issues arise during a weekend performance that need immediate critical attention from the UP staff, the SM team should contact the appropriate personnel directly by phone or text. Use discretion whether the situation is pressing enough to contact staff, some issues can be resolved, even temporarily, by the student crew or SM team.

Post Production

Strike

It is the SM team's responsibility to ensure that all cast and crew remove personal belongings from dressing rooms, green room, booth and backstage immediately following the final performance. All spaces are to be tidied and all garbage disposed of.

All crockery props (plates, glasses, and cutlery) must be washed. Prep counters and fridges should be emptied and wiped down. Check with SM mentor about what to do with any remaining food and beverage items.

The call board must be cleared to be ready for the next production. Props tables and any other spaces backstage should have all the labels removed. The SM mentor will assign strike crew to help SM team to strike props.

Signing the Wall

Even though it is customary for the company of a production to pick a spot and sign the wall, permission must be granted. Signatures are only allowed in the downstairs dressing rooms and nowhere else. It is the SM team's responsibility to ensure that no one writes on any walls backstage, on stage, in the booth, green room, or the hallway, not even with chalk.

Wrap up

SM keys must be returned to the main office as soon as possible after the last performance because the SM for the next production will require them right away.