

Stage Directions

Every actor should know his way around the stage and the terminology associated with it. It is important to know these directions since every director uses them when blocking actors or telling them where to stand during an audition.

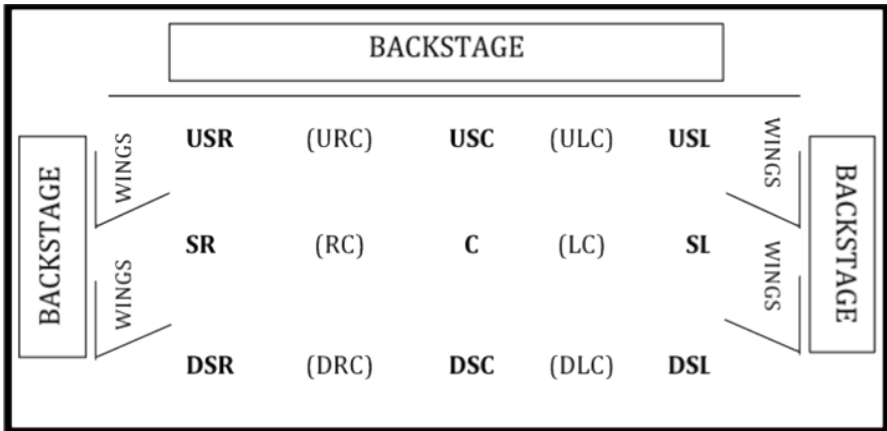
Back in the early days of theatre, the stage was raked. This means that the back end of the stage was raised. When an actor moved towards the back of the stage they were moving up or upstage. When the actor moved closer to the front of the stage they were moving down or downstage. The terms upstage and downstage remained after stages were built parallel to the ground and no longer raked.

Also, remember that moving on stage is always from the actor's point of view. So when facing the audience, stage right is to the actor's right side and stage left is to the actor's left side. Upstage is behind the actor and downstage is in front.

On the next page, I've included a diagram of a stage with all the points of a stage that you should be familiar with as an actor. Learn these terms and positions as soon as possible. This will make your job moving on stage and taking direction much easier.

One more thing, I'd like to point out: not all stages are created equal. There are stages in $\frac{3}{4}$ thrust, which means the stage is shaped like a baseball field with one of the corners of the stage thrust towards the audience. There is also theatre in the round, which means the audience completely surrounds the stage area. The diagram I'm using is for a basic proscenium stage.

Bolded stage directions indicate more commonly used stage directions by directors. The stage directions in parenthesis are rarely used.



USR – Upstage Right **SR – Stage Right** **DSR – Downstage Right**
 URC – Up Right Center RC – Right Center DRC – Down Right Center
USC – Upstage Center **C – Center** **DSC – Downstage Center**
 ULC – Up Left Center LC – Left Center DLC – Down Left Center
USL – Upstage Left **SL – Stage Left** **DSL – Downstage Left**

House – The area where the audience sits

Wings – The side areas off the main stage area

Backstage – The area behind the stage

Also, remember that there are strong and weak points on a stage. Knowing these basic principles will help give you a stronger presence on stage and also prevent you from being upstaged by another actor either unintentionally or deliberately.

Downstage is stronger than Upstage.

Center Stage is stronger than Stage Right/Left.

Stage Right is stronger than Stage Left.

Stage Terminology

Not only is it important to know where to move on stage, it is equally important to understand how to move on the stage. Below is a short, simple glossary of common terms for moving on stage. In addition, I've also included acting terms you may hear when being directed. The movements for stage are underlined.

Ad-lib – Any unscripted dialogue spoken by an actor on stage.

Beat – A slight pause. Can also indicate a change of emotion, objective, or thought from the character.

Blocking –

1. To prevent an actor from being seen on stage by standing in front of them or to prevent yourself from being seen on stage by the audience by standing directly behind an actor.
2. The movements and/or staging for a scene given to an actor by a director.

Business – An action the actor does on stage that may or may not be related to the main focal point of the stage, i.e., folding clothes, making a drink, reading a book, etc.

Cross – To move on the stage from one place to another. Start with upstage leg. Turn downstage when ending cross unless otherwise directed. A cross is written as an X when you mark your script for blocking.

Counter-cross or Counter – To adjust yourself when an actor crosses in front of you or blocks you on stage. Start with your upstage leg. Slightly move SR/SL of the actor that is crossing you. Turn towards

actor, ending in a ¼ profile to the audience unless directed otherwise. A counter-cross is written as CX when you mark your script for blocking.

Note: Countering is defensive acting. It keeps you open to the audience and prevents you from being blocked or upstaged.

Cue – The previous line said by another actor before your line.

Dialogue – The words a character speaks in a play.

Delivery – The way the actor speaks his lines.

Gesture – To make a movement with your arm, hand, or head towards someone or something on stage. Using your upstage hand or arm will prevent you from blocking your face and body to the audience. This also applies to picking up objects on stage.

Hand prop – Any object that is hand-held by the actor on stage such as a mirror or fan.

Kneeling – Use your downstage leg to kneel. This will keep your body open to the audience.

Off-Book – When you are no longer allowed to use your scripts in rehearsals and expected to have your lines memorized.

Pace – The rate of speed at which dialogue, pauses, and actions are measured on stage.

Pause – A period of silence. It is longer than a beat. It usually is filled with objective, thought, or action by the character.

Positioning –

1. This relates to the way the actor's body is angled on stage. Imagine that you are standing in front of an audience on stage. You are the center of a large clock. 12 o'clock is directly in front of you (downstage) and 6 o'clock is directly behind you (upstage).
 - a. Front – When you are facing the audience completely. You are facing 12 o'clock.
 - b. $\frac{1}{4}$ profile – When your body is facing 2 or 10 o'clock on stage allowing the audience to see your face and body.
 - c. Side Profile – When your body is facing 3 or 9 o'clock, allowing the audience to see your side profile.
 - d. $\frac{3}{4}$ profile – When your body is facing 4 or 8 o'clock, cutting off most of your face and body to the audience, revealing most of your back.
 - e. Back – When your body is facing 6 o'clock and completely turned away from the audience. Your back is facing the audience.
2. It is also used in voice to describe the placement of the soft palate for producing a proper air channel for breath and sound.

Pick up cue – To remove a pause between your line and the previous line said by another actor.

Pick up pace – To increase the speed or tempo of the dialogue, pauses, or actions on stage.

Prop – Any object used on stage in a play by any actor. This can also include furniture.

Projection – The amount of sound the actor produces when speaking his lines on stage.

Set – The fixed stage scenery such as walls, doors, platforms, etc.

Set piece – Any individual part of the set scenery, it is usually freestanding, such as a table.

Turn out – To face towards the audience more, so your face and/or body is visible to the audience.

Upstage – To block yourself or another actor through movement on stage or stage positioning.

Before You Step on Stage

There are some basic but vital rules you should follow when you are acting in theatre. These rules should be embedded in your core and never forgotten. These are things that every actor knows and adheres to when acting for an audience. Learn these and implement them every time.

1. NEVER TURN YOUR BACK TO THE AUDIENCE.

Nothing appears less professional than an actor who turns his body to the audience while acting. They didn't pay to see your back, they paid to see your face, your body. There are three ways you can stand on stage: $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{4}$ angle, profile, and front. This is the order of preference. However, I will say though I mentioned that you should not act with your back to the audience, this rule can be broken if the director has explicitly blocked you that way for purposes of the scene.

2. PROJECT YOUR VOICE

Unlike film, a theatre actor must learn to support and project your voice to be heard. You may be asked to perform for an audience of 20 or 2,500, or if you're lucky Broadway and then that number greatly increases. And

3. DON'T DEPEND ON MICS

Even though theatres these days use mics to help the actors be heard. They don't increase your voice they amplify it. So if you're speaking in a whisper it will amplify a whisper, it can't create a fuller sound. Learning to use your voice effectively will increase your chances of getting work as an actor.

4. DON'T GIVE OTHER ACTORS NOTES

You are not the director and it not your job to tell another actor what they are doing wrong or advice on how to act. If they're supposed to pick it up something with their right hand

and not their left, don't correct them if they do it wrong. Don't tell them how to say a line, or where their mistakes are in a scene. Nothing is more annoying than an actor telling another actor how to act.

However, if someone comes to you first and ask your advice, you can help them if you feel comfortable talking to them (such as a close friend or peer) or you can suggest they talk to a director first. I've seen many actors talking and giving others advice but it's because it was a mutual collaboration on the help being given. Think of it like this, you can help other actors if they want your help on the "how to do something" but don't tell them "what to do".

5. COMMIT YOUR ALL

From the first audition, to the closing night, you should give 100% of you talent and skill to the process. From very first rehearsal you should give your all. Don't hold back the creative process. You may be thinking, "I'll just wait till we're further in the rehearsals", but you're only cheating yourself, the director, and other actors.

6. RESPECT

Everyone working in the theatre plays a part; the actor is not the most important one. Don't fool yourself into thinking you're better than someone else. You should treat everyone with the same respect and I mean everyone: the set designer, prop master, costume designer, lights designer, stage manager, house manager, box office staff, the ushers...everyone.

In fact, I tell all my students that they should work every aspect of backstage to understand what makes a production work. You'd be surprised at what you learn. I've worked almost all aspects of tech and I understand and appreciate every individual involved with the process. As my student, you should as well.