Common Theater Terms

Auditions: Readings before a director to determine casting of a play.

Call Backs: An additional audition for the final actors being considered. Similar to semifinals in sports.

Clear the Stage: A direction given to all actors, musicians, and technicians to leave the stage area prior to the beginning of a play.

Places: The direction for all actors, musicians, and technicians to go to their proper position and be ready for the beginning of a play or scene.

Strike: Taking down, changing out and putting away costumes, props and sets after a production.

Run Through: An uninterrupted rehearsal of a scene, act, or the entire play.

Curtain Call/Bows: The carefully choreographed appearance of actors on stage after the performance to acknowledge the applause of the audience.

Heads Up!: A term of warning used to call attention to overhead danger.

Technical Elements

Flats: Muslin or plywood covered frames used to build the walls of a stage setting.

Props: Small hand held items used by actors to create the period, character or setting.

Platforms: Wooden units joined together to build the floors for a stage setting.

Costumes: The clothing worn by the actors that helps determine character, time, theme and mood.

Mask: A term used meaning “to hide.” Also, a covering for an actors face that disguises or changes their character. Often made out of leather, plastic or paper maché.

Dark: A time when all lights are out or the theater is closed.

Stage Manager: Person responsible for the physical set up, actors, and technical cues of a production as it is performed.
Elements of a Play

**Dialogue:** Written conversation.

**Text:** The written word.

**Script:** A complete scene or play in a format to be produced by actors and directors.

**Initial Incident:** The first most important event in a play from which the rest of the play develops.

**Exposition:** The explanation of who, what, when, where, why of a play.

**Preliminary Situation:** The story of the play as the curtain rises.

**Climax:** The major event in a play, the turning point of the story.

**Rising Action:** The series of events following the initial incident. How the story builds towards its climax.

**Falling Action/Denouement:** The series of events following the climax.

**Conclusion:** The final outcome of the play.

**Protagonist:** The play revolves around this character. Often the “good guy” but not always.

**Antagonist:** This character forces change or creates conflict for the protagonist. Often the “bad guy.”

**Theme/Message/Purpose/Moral:** What the play as a piece of art is trying to say to the audience.

**Setting:** Where the play occurs in terms of time and place.

**Monologue:** A long speech said by a single actor to themselves, the audience, or to another character.

**Soliloquy:** A long speech said by a single actor to themselves or the audience, but *not* to another character.

**Act:** An organizational division in scripts.

**Scene:** An organizational division in scripts. Often several scenes make up an *ACT.*
Terms for the Actor

**Pantomime:** A story or action performed with out words relying on body language.

**Stage Business:** Small actions such as smoking, using a fan, pouring a drink, etc. Used to fill time, create character, and sometimes to make the action “more realistic.”

**Open Up/Cheat Out:** Facing as much towards the audience as possible.

**Take the Stage:** What an actor does when they take control of the scene or take focus of the audience.

**Given Circumstances:** The who, what, when, where, why of the play or scene or character.

**Focus:** Where the director wants the audience to look. The actors point of concentration.

**Diction:** The actors ability to be understood by the audience.

**Volume:** The actors ability to be heard by the audience.

**Cue:** The last words or actions indicating the time for another actor to speak or move.

**Ad lib:** Lines made up by an actor to fill in where there would be an undesirable pause due to dropped lines, technical problems, etc.

**Aside:** Lines said to the audience that other actors onstage are not supposed to be hearing.

**Pick up Cues:** A direction for the actor to begin responding immediately without allowing any lapse time.

**Build:** To increase the tempo or volume or both to reach a climax in a scene.

**Cheating:** Using a movement or position that may not be realistic but allows the audience to see the action more clearly.
Mapping the Stage

**Upstage:** The area of the stage that is the furthest from the audience.

**Downstage:** The area of the stage that is the closest to the audience.

**Stage Right:** The right side of the stage from the actor’s point of view (facing the audience.)

**Stage Left:** The left side of the stage from the actor’s point of view (facing the audience.)

**Center:** Center of the stage.

**Full Front:** Facing the audience.

**Full Back:** Facing away from the audience.

**Cross:** Movement from one area of the stage to another.

**Blocking:** The set movement of all the actors onstage throughout the play.

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THE PHYSICAL STAGE

**Wings:** The areas to the left and right of the stage out of view to the audience. A part of the backstage area.

**Proscenium:** An arched opening through which the audience sees the stage. Also a style of theater with the audience seated predominantly in front of the stage.

**Apron:** The usually curved area of the stage closest to the audience.

**Backstage/Offstage:** Usually the entire stage area not visible to the audience.

**House:** The audience area.

**Backdrop:** The drop farthest upstage in most settings. Also a large curtain, sometimes with a picture or design.

**Curtain Line:** The imaginary line across the stage floor which follows the line of the front curtain.

**Fly Loft:** The area above the stage where curtains and set pieces are stored and hidden during a production.

**Grand Drape/Main Rag:** The front, often decorative, curtain of a stage.

**Legs:** Narrow curtains in the wings to mask the backstage areas.

**Cyclorama:** A large, usually white, curtain that is lit to create setting and masks the back of the stage behind the set.

**Trap:** An opening in the stage floor for actors to pass through to make entrances and exits.