

ACTING 101--A quick guide for first time performers and a refresher for the rest.

Direction and/or movement definitions

Stage Left—the actor's left facing the audience

Stage Right—the actor's right while facing the audience

Upstage—towards the back wall (away from the audience)

Downstage—towards the audience

Above—towards the ceiling or over (i.e. a table)

Below—towards the floor or under (i.e. a table)

Diagonal—moving diagonally upstage or downstage

When entering from Stage left, your right (upstage) foot should be first on to the stage.

When entering from Stage right, your left (upstage) foot should be first on to the stage.

Blocking—the process of creating the movement and action in a show (who goes where, when, and does what)

Cheat out—keep your face pointed towards the audience even if you are speaking to someone next to you or upstage of you.

Shtick—a type of movement or line delivery intentionally and inelegantly designed to get a laugh (generally NOT a good thing)

Underscoring—(music playing underneath dialogue)

Principle (also Lead)—an actor with solo speaking lines.

Speaking and singing

Breathe—get into the habit of breathing deeply before you speak or sing. Use your diaphragm (stomach muscles) and feel your ribs spread. Pretend you're yawning. You can practice this at any time. Try it when something irritates you.

Project—speak loudly and clearly. Pretend you are trying to be heard across a large room or outdoors..

Enunciate—OVER emphasize consonants. I cannot stress this enough. Nothing is more frustrating to an audience than not being able to understand what is being said. Practice saying your lines as though the consonants are extremely important. It should feel a bit ridiculous and will still probably not be enough. I will tell you if it is too much. This is doubly important while singing or while saying your lines with underscoring and vitally important if you are without a microphone.

Listen, listen, listen. If you cannot hear the orchestra or the people next to you will probably be off pitch.

Watch, watch, watch. If there is a difficult musical entrance, watch the conductor. He will be beating time and you can get your bearings from him. If you cannot see the conductor, get to where you can. Even if it means adjusting your blocking slightly.

Acting

All of you are already actors. The only difference is you don't do it in a musical play on a day to day basis (I assume--Aerospace may very well be a rockin' place to work). Just try to relax, be natural, have fun and remember the "Speaking and singing" guidelines. I am speaking generally to the cast. I will work with individuals as well in scene work on more detail work.

Think of who you are as your character, choose a name if you like, and ask yourself questions. I will assign roles for the chorus players (for instance—so and so will be the blacksmith, so and so his wife and kids and so on) for those who don't come up with something on their own. Read the scene you are involved in and ask yourself (as your character): Where have I been? Why am I here? Where am I going? How am I getting along with my wife? children? neighbors? And most important, *what do I want?*

Listen, listen, listen. Here is this word again. More than half of acting in my opinion is just plain listening. When you really listen, your body reacts naturally. When you listen, your lines will have been preceded by a thought and that will make your lines, your action, and thus you, believable.

Pick up your lines. This is a phrase meaning to get rid of the dead space after another actor says his or her lines. Not picking up your lines can add 30 minutes or more to a show that is already fairly long, making the show tedious and causing the audience to lose interest in the story. Dramatic pauses are only effective when used rarely—very rarely—very, VERY rarely. I am from the “faster, funnier, louder” school of acting. There is only one exception to this rule: if a line gets a laugh from the audience, wait until the laughter has crested before you begin your line, otherwise there is a chance you will not be heard.

When you are in groups do not get into a straight line unless I block you that way. Straight line=boring! Straight line=death! Always be aware of your body and where you are in relation to your colleagues. You can vary the angle of your body to keep out of that straight line look.

Go into the light my child. This is especially important for leads. I will not block you into the dark and if you find yourself there, get into the light. You should feel this light on your face or in your eyes. The show is much less enjoyable if we the audience can't see you. Don't deprive us of your lovely face.

And lastly and most importantly—TELL THE STORY. All the singing and dancing and acting are pointless unless you remember that we are telling a story. No action, no line, no song exists on its own. There is a favorite line I learned from my mentors years ago: “Never forget that in your audience at any given performance, it will be someone's first show and someone's last.” Make it memorable by telling the story.