

Theater Glossary

- a tempo:** A musical marking meaning that the music has returned to the original speed of the song; generally occurs after the music has slowed down for dramatic effect.
- act:** 1) The process of performing as a character. 2) A main section of a play. Your musical has one act, which includes many scenes. Some shows have two or more acts that are divided by an intermission.
- accent:** 1) A note that is emphasized or stressed to make it stand out from the other notes in the phrase. Accents can be represented in the score as ">" over the note. 2) A variation on word pronunciation based on where a character is from.
- actor:** A person who performs as a character in a play or musical.
- antagonist:** The opponent to the protagonist (or hero) of your play. An antagonist may sometimes be called the "villain."
- apron:** A section of the stage that juts in front of the main curtain and the proscenium arch.
- assistant director:** A person who helps the director stage and rehearse a play.
- audience:** The people who gather to watch your show. The audience sits in the house.
- auditions:** Tryouts held for actors who want to perform in a show. Actors auditioning for a musical may be asked to sing and read a particular character's lines from a scene.
- author:** A writer of a play or musical. Also known as a playwright. A musical's authors include the book writer, the composer, and the lyricist.
- backdrop:** A large piece of paper or cloth that hangs behind the actors on the stage. Backdrops are painted to represent different locations.
- backstage:** The area out of view of the audience that include the wings and dressing rooms.
- balcony:** The third level of seating in the house; the first level is the orchestra and the second level is the mezzanine. Some theaters only have an orchestra.
- ballad:** A song with a slow tempo that expresses how a character is feeling.
- battens:** Metal pipes from which backdrops and lights hang.
- beat:** 1) A small moment of action within a scene. 2) A moment of silence and stillness during which a character reacts to something that has been said or done.
- blocking:** The actors' movement in a play or musical, not including the choreography. The director usually assigns blocking during rehearsals.
- body mics:** Portable mics that are strapped to the actors' bodies. Also called lavaliers.
- book:** The script of a musical, also called the libretto.
- book writer:** One of the authors of a musical. The book writer writes the lines (dialogue) and the stage directions. Also called the librettist.
- box office:** The place where tickets to a performance are sold.
- break a leg:** A wish of "good luck" in the theater, which comes from a superstition that saying "good luck" is actually bad luck!
- Broadway:** The theater district in New York City that is home to 40 professional theaters and is one of the world's greatest capitals of live theater.
- callbacks:** A second round of auditions. A director will "call back" actors for an additional audition when they have narrowed casting for a role to a few candidates.
- call time:** The time at which the company is asked to arrive at the theater before a performance or rehearsal. It is very important that everyone sticks to their call time!

calling a show: During each performance, the stage manager follows along in the script and cues lights, sounds, and other technical components of the show at the appropriate time.

cast: The performers in a show.

casting: The process of assigning roles to the actors in a show. Casting is usually done by the director and the production team after auditions.

center stage: The middle of the stage.

character: A human (or animal) represented in a play. Each actor plays a character, even if that character doesn't have a name in the script. An actor may play many characters.

cheating out: Turning oneself slightly toward the house when performing so the audience may better see one's face and hear one's lines.

choreographer: A person who creates and teaches the dance numbers in a musical.

choreography: The dances in a musical, often used to help tell the story.

chorus: 1) The ensemble; all the cast members other than the principals. 2) A refrain in a song.

climax: The height of the dramatic action in a play.

closing: The last performance of a production.

cold reading: Reading a script aloud without having read it before.

company: All of the people who make a show happen: actors, musicians, creative team, crew, producers, etc.

composer: A person who writes music for a musical.

costume: A garment worn by an actor during a play.

costume designer: A person who designs or selects the garments worn by the actors during a show.

counter: When an actor fills the space on the stage left by another actor when she crosses to a new location.

creative team: The author(s), director, choreographer, music director, and designers for a play or musical.

crescendo: A dynamic marking that indicates the song should get gradually louder. A *crescendo* is represented in the score by the symbol " < ."

crew: Short for "stage crew." A team of people who move the set, handle props, or work backstage during a production.

cross: An actor's movement to a new position.

cue: A signal that tells the cast or crew what to do next.

curtain call: The entrance of the company at the end of the show to bow and acknowledge the audience's applause.

curtain time: The time at which the show is scheduled to begin.

dance captain: A member of the company selected to help the choreographer teach and maintain the dances.

debut: A company member's first appearance on a stage or in a theater.

decrescendo: A dynamic marking that indicates the song should get gradually softer. A *decrescendo* is represented in the score by the symbol " > ."

delivery: The way in which an actor says her lines.

designers: The people who create the sets, costumes, makeup, masks, puppets, lighting, and sound for a production.

dialogue: A conversation between two or more characters.

diction: The articulation, or clearness of speech, while delivering one's lines. Also known as "enunciation."

director: A person who provides the artistic vision, coordinates the creative elements, and stages the play.

double casting: When two or more actors are cast in the same role and then alternate performances.

downstage: The portion of the stage closest to the audience; the opposite of upstage.

dramaturg: The detective of the theater; a person who looks for important information to help the playwright, actors, director, and designers better understand the play.

dress rehearsal: One of the final run-throughs of a show that usually includes full costumes, props, and technical elements.

dressing room: The room where the performers get ready for the show.

dynamics: How loud or soft the music should be performed.

ensemble: 1) A group of people who work together to create a production. 2) The spirit of camaraderie cultivated while rehearsing and performing a show.

entrance: When a character steps onto the stage from the wings or other offstage area.

exit: When a character leaves the stage.

final dress: The last dress rehearsal before the show that is performed for an audience.

finale: The last song of a musical that usually includes the entire cast.

flat: A large canvas or board that stands on the stage and is painted to become part of the scenery.

fly space: The area above the stage where set pieces and backdrops are often stored and can be lowered onto the stage. Not all theaters have a fly space.

focus: 1) The part of the stage where the audience is meant to look at any given time. The director manipulates the focus using lighting, sound, sets, and blocking. 2) Concentration used by an actor when rehearsing and performing.

follow spot: Large, movable light at the back of the house that follows an actor as he crosses the stage. Also called a spotlight.

forte: A dynamic marking meaning "loud." *Forte* is represented in the score by the symbol "*f*."

fortissimo: A dynamic marking that means "very loud." *Fortissimo* is represented in the score by the symbol "*ff*."

front of house: Any part of the theater that is open to the audience, including the box office, lobby, restrooms, and concession area.

full house: A sold-out performance.

green room: A backstage room where the actors can rest and wait for their entrances.

hit: A successful production.

house: The area of the theater where the audience sits to watch the show.

house left: The left side of the theater from the audience's perspective. If something is located "house left," it is to the left side of the audience as they are seated in the theater.

house manager: The person who manages the front of house and makes sure the audience is ready for the show.

house right: The right side of the theater from the audience's perspective. If something is located "house right," it is to the right side of the audience as they are seated in the theater.

improvisation: Performing extemporaneously, without a script. Improvisation is a useful tool for developing character, staying "in the moment," and remaining in character should something go wrong on stage.

intermission: A break between acts when the audience gets a snack or uses the restroom while the company changes the set and costumes.

libretto: The script of a musical. Also called the book.

license: Permission, or the rights, to produce a play in exchange for a fee, which covers script copies and royalties for the authors.

lighting board: A board that controls all of the theatrical lights for a show.

lines: The dialogue spoken by the actors.

lyricist: A person who writes the lyrics, or sung words, for a musical. The lyricist works with a composer to create songs.

lyrics: The words of a song.

matinee: A performance of a show held during the day, often followed by another performance at night.

melody: A series of notes that form one complete musical idea. The melody of a song is sometimes referred to as the "tune."

mezzanine: The second level of seating in the house, above the orchestra and below the balcony.

mezzo forte: A dynamic marking meaning "medium loud." Represented in the score by the symbol "*mf*" and performed slightly softer than *forte*.

mezzo piano: A dynamic marking meaning "medium soft." Represented in the score by the symbol "*mp*" and performed slightly louder than *piano*.

mic: Short for "microphone," a device that electronically amplifies the voices of the actors. A mic may be placed on the floor, hung from the ceiling, or attached to an actor's body.

monologue: A large block of lines spoken by a single character. When spoken alone onstage or directly to an audience, a monologue reveals the inner thoughts of a character.

motivation: The reasons behind a character's actions.

music director: A person who is in charge of teaching the songs to the cast and orchestra and maintaining the quality of the performed score.

musical: A play with songs that are used to tell a story.

note: 1) A musical sound with a particular pitch. 2) A suggestion given by the director to an actor.

objective: What a character wants.

off-book: An actor's ability to perform her memorized lines without holding the script.

offstage: Any area out of view of the audience.

on-book: Rehearsing a play while holding the script because the lines are not yet memorized.

onstage: Anything on the stage and within view of the audience is said to be onstage.

opening night: The first official performance of a production, after which the show is frozen, meaning no further changes are made.

orchestra: 1) The first level of the house. 2) The musicians who accompany the cast during songs and play underscoring during scenes and set changes. Your Accompaniment CD features a recorded orchestra.

orchestra pit: A sunken area under or slightly in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

overture: A piece of music that may be played at the very beginning of the show before the play begins to set the tone.

pantomime: To act something out without words.

part: 1) An actor's role or character in a play. 2) A musical note or series of notes that create harmonies when produced together with others.

performance: 1) A single showing of a production. 2) An actor's interpretation of a character in front of an audience.

piano: 1) A musical instrument that often accompanies a musical theater rehearsal or performance. 2) A dynamic marking that means "soft," represented by the symbol "*p*" in the score.

pianissimo: A dynamic marking that means "very soft." Represented in the score by the symbol "*pp*."

play: A type of dramatic writing meant to be performed live on a stage. A musical is one kind of play.

playback: Any source used for theater that is pre-taped and then used during the performance or "played-back."

plot: The chain of events that occurs during a play.

presto: A tempo marking meaning that the music should be played fast.

preview: A public performance of a show before opening. Adjustments to a production occur during previews based on audience response.

principal: An actor who performs a main character in a play.

proscenium: A type of theater in which a large frame, or arch, divides the stage from the house.

producer: The person in charge of a production who oversees budget, calendar, marketing, and the hiring of the creative team, cast, and crew.

production: This term refers to everything about your show onstage and off, every given night. A production includes the performing and technical aspects of your show, which means that each group that presents a show will have a unique production.

production number: A song in a musical that typically involves the entire cast and elaborate choreography.

program: A booklet that lists the entire company of a production and may include other information about the play.

projection: 1) Speaking and singing loudly enough to be understood by the audience. 2) An image that is projected onto a surface, which can be part of the set for a show.

prompt: To give an actor her next line or stage direction during a rehearsal if she has forgotten what comes next.

pronunciation: The correct sound of a spoken word.

prop: Anything an actor holds or carries during a performance. Short for "property."

prop master: The person who makes sure all the props are ready before the show and are safely put away afterwards.

protagonist: The main character or hero of a play.

quick change: When an actor changes his costume extremely fast.

raked stage: A stage that is raised slightly upstage so that it slants toward the audience.

read-through: An early rehearsal at which the cast reads their parts from the script without blocking or memorized lines.

refrain: The recurring verse of a song. Also called the chorus.

rehearsal: A meeting during which the cast learns and practices the show.

rehearsal prop: An object used in rehearsal to represent a prop that will be used in the show. Rehearsal props are typically used so that performance props are in perfect shape for opening night.

reprise: A repetition of a song from earlier in the show.

rest: A beat of silence in music when no sound is made.

rights: Permission to perform a show that is obtained through a license and payment of a fee.

ritard: A tempo marking that indicates a song should slow down. Represented by "*rit*" in the score.

role: The character that an actor plays.

run-through: A rehearsal in which the whole show is performed from beginning to end without stopping.

scene: A section of a play in one particular location and time.

script: 1) The written words that make up a show, including dialogue, stage directions, and lyrics. 2) The book that contains those words.

score: All musical elements of a show, including songs and underscoring.

segue: A musical term indicating that the next song should directly follow the previous song without any breaks.

set: The entire physical environment onstage, which may include backdrops, flats, furniture, props, and projections.

set change: A change in scenery, often between scenes or acts.

set designer: A person who designs the set.

setting: The location, environment, and time period of a play.

sforzando: A dynamic marking that means “suddenly loud.” Represented by the symbol “*sfz*” in the score.

sheet music: Printed song, including lyrics and musical notes, that gives instructions for singing or playing live.

side: A portion of a script that an actor reads during auditions.

solo: A song or part of a song that is sung by one person.

sound board: An electronic board or computer that controls the mics, sound cues, and any other audio in a production. Also called a sound console.

sound check: Testing and balancing the sound levels of microphones, speakers, and performers before a performance to ensure that the audience will hear everything clearly.

speed-through: An accelerated run-through of your production that emphasizes blocking, transitions, picking up cues, and accuracy of lines in the script.

spike: A tape-mark on the stage that shows where an actor is supposed to stand or where a set piece should be placed.

spotlights: Movable lights that can follow actors crossing the stage. Also called follow spots.

stage: The area where the actors perform in a theater.

stage business: Small actions performed by actors that make a play more realistic and believable.

stage directions: Unspoken text in the script that describe the action or intention of the play.

stage left: The left side of the stage, from the actor’s perspective. The same side of the theater as house right.

stage manager: A person responsible for keeping all rehearsals and performances organized and on schedule, and for calling sound and light cues during the show.

stage right: The right side of the stage, from the actor’s perspective. The same side of the theater as house left.

strike: 1) To remove a prop or set piece from the stage. 2) To clean up the stage and theater after closing.

tableau: A frozen stage picture, made up of students’ or actors’ bodies, that tells a story.

technical director: A person who coordinates the construction and painting of the sets, the hanging of the lights, and the setup of the sound system.

technical rehearsal: A rehearsal when the crew begins adding sets, lights, sound etc., to the show once the performers know the lines, songs, and blocking. Also called “tech.”

tempo: The pace music should be performed. Often the composer will write suggestions, or tempo markings, at the beginning of a piece, such as "Excitedly" or "Slowly."

theater: 1) The art of producing plays and musicals for a live audience. Sometimes spelled "theatre."
2) A building in which a show is performed, including a stage, backstage, and house. Another building or room, like a cafeteria, can be turned into a theater.

theatrical lights: Lights that hang from the ceiling of a theater or on poles, or "booms," above or on the side of the stage. These lights illuminate the actors and convey time of day and specific moods.

traveler curtain: A curtain that hangs on a track upstage of the proscenium. The curtain opens in the center and can be pulled offstage into the wings. Traveler curtains are often closed to hide scene changes.

underscore: Music that plays under dialogue or during a scene change.

understudy: An actor who learns a role and can perform it in the event the cast actor is sick.

upstage: The part of the stage furthest from the audience; the opposite of downstage.

usher: A person who shows the audience to their seats and distributes programs.

warm-ups: Exercises at the beginning of a rehearsal or before a performance that prepare actors' voices and bodies.

wings: The area to the side of the stage just out of the audience's view.