

Rehearsal Guidelines For Actors And Directors
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I. The Challenges of Rehearsals

These guidelines have been created by the faculty of the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Puget Sound to guide the work of students and faculty in rehearsal for all department-sponsored classes, workshops, and productions: the one acts, the Senior Theatre Festival, faculty-directed productions, scene work for classes. The department asks faculty and students to review these materials prior to the beginning of any rehearsal period.

Making theatre is often a challenging process. At minimum, it almost always calls for a significant and focused exertion of physical, emotional, and intellectual energy. Acting also often calls for an unusual degree of human vulnerability and even brokenness, in part because plays are often about vulnerable and broken human beings. Plays furthermore have an uncanny way of possessing actors and entire ensembles with their power, so that at times, the distinction between what is being experienced and performed is blurred or lost. The challenge in all of this is to create a safe place for this work to happen without blunting its power. Although the work of rehearsal may be extremely challenging and difficult, the ultimate result should be joyous and pleasurable in the deepest sense of these words.

Based on the play and its rehearsal techniques, actors frequently agree to attempt several, not always congruent, tasks:

- to play actions that are their characters'; this entails a willingness to portray a character's wishes and desires, a character's wants; this can be particularly challenging if what the character wants is far from what the actor wants or has been taught to want; even when the character's wants and actor's want are similar, the simple act of wanting can exact an emotional and physical toll;
- to assume an identity that is almost always to some extent different than the identities they normally assume whether in terms of age, temperament, appearance, occupation, belief system, appetites, desires, sexuality, gender, loves, fears, etc.;
- to do all this usually using words someone else has written for them;
- to do all this in costumes, make-up, wigs and hair styles that may be quite different from their own;
- to do all this using objects that other people have chosen and designed for them;
- to do all this in front of other people (class mates, friends, family members, acquaintances, strangers) multiple times whether they are in the mood to do it or not in a way that dozens and usually hundreds of these people can see and hear.

Bert States in *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* underscores the difficulty enumerated above:

When we applaud the actor at the end of the play we imply that he "became" his character well: we were moved not by a performance but by the illusion the performance signified. But we also applaud him for successfully passing through the pitfalls of his role. Virtuosity, in theater as in athletics, is not simply skill but skill displayed against odds which, when mastered, become beautiful passages. To round out the comparison, one might liken the film actor to the aerialist who works with a net. His performance is no less a thing of beauty than that of the stage actor, but it is relieved of all possibility of disaster except that of poor acting. But the theater offers the actor no net: the play is one long danger.

Rehearsal helps actors meet these challenges. Many of us find ourselves expending more of our energies when we make a play making than in any other activity we do. The analogy for what rehearsals are like is to practice for a team facing a season of tough opponents rather than a stroll in the park.

Of course, all of what is described above can also be remarkably fun.

II. Rehearsal Expectations and Techniques: A Representative List

Rehearsal may involve any of the following elements. When an actor accepts a role in a production or take on an acting assignment for a class, he or she is agreeing to enter into a rehearsal process in which these elements may play a significant role. If actors have questions regarding any of the following, they should contact the director (faculty or student) or teacher prior to the beginning of rehearsals. Expectations around the following do vary with the situation: e.g. – all faculty or student directors do not use the same techniques; techniques used with a Theatrical Experience student doing scene work for the first time will be different in various ways from those used in an advanced acting class. Still, the following list gives an approximate idea of the kinds of work rehearsals often entail.

- Intensive physical, vocal, emotional, and mental work that might on occasion be quite exhausting and perhaps even painful. Actors are expected to commit as fully as possible to all rehearsal exercises, scene work, and performance.
- Intensive reflection and dialogue at various stages of the process about the nature of the work and its effects on all of the participants to the end of making the work aesthetically effective and ethically responsible; this calls for a high tolerance for the complexity of each member of a class or ensemble along with an attempt to relate to one another with honesty and compassion.
- Action-based exercises (e.g. — actors pursue a character’s wants in character or with their own selves).
- Energy releasing exercises and games (e.g. – children’s games like “Red Light, Green Light” or “Tag”).
- Emotional and sensory memory work.
- Improvisation.
- Trust exercises.
- Storytelling.
- Singing and other vocal exercises.
- Physical contact.
- Face touching and massage: head and neck; arms and hands; legs and feet; upper body
- Deep breathing and meditation that may produce a mild, trance-like state.
- Rhythm, concentration, and coordination exercises.
- Physical work that may involve jumping, pushing, pulling, running, etc.

III. General Boundaries

The goal of the following boundaries is to create a safe space to do this work. That responsibility is shared by everyone in the production. Although many of the following guidelines are written from the perspective of an actors responsibilities and rights, the director is, of course, equally responsible for sensitivity towards the actors' point of view. To this end, directors should have clear objectives for techniques or improvisations which are used in the rehearsal process, and should maintain a clear line of communication with their actors to monitor any issues should they arise. Actors' concerns should be addressed as soon as possible and with respect for the actor. If a student director is unsure whether a certain technique or

rehearsal game is appropriate for a project with the UPS department of theatre, that director should check with any faculty member before proceeding.

A. Theatre uses human emotion both from the past and the present; if an actor feels that this use or any aspect of rehearsal is exploitive beyond the legitimate needs of the rehearsal process than he or she should initiate a conversation with the director, stage manager, or any other appropriate party in order to address this issue. Actors in a faculty or student directed production may choose to elect a cast representative at the first rehearsal to serve as an additional contact person for actor concerns.

B. All ensemble members have permission and indeed a responsibility to intervene at any time they feel the safety (emotional or physical) of an ensemble member is in question; to this end actors may choose to stop or not begin an exercise or scene.

C. An actor has permission to stop rehearsal and ask for a break if he or she needs time to think or talk about an exercise or scene work.

D. There will be no use of nudity as a general rehearsal technique, other than as called for by a scene in a script and only then with careful pre-discussion and agreement.

E. There will be no use of sexually intimate touching as a general rehearsal technique, other than as called for in the script and only then with careful pre-discussion and agreement. There will be advance discussion of scenes involving kissing and other physical forms of affection. If any form of physical contact in the rehearsal process makes the actor uncomfortable, he or she should talk with the director or another appropriate person either in the moment or after rehearsal.

F. There will be no use of hitting or slapping as a rehearsal technique, other than as called for by a scene in a script and only then with careful pre-discussion/agreement and the help of a fight choreographer as necessary: actors are not to strike other actors within the context of a scene or improvisation without prior agreement.

G. One on one coaching sessions may be used by directors and teachers depending on the needs of the class or production. In these cases, special attention should be given to keeping the atmosphere safe. If one on one coaching makes an individual uncomfortable, he or she can request to have another student present.

H. Actors with physical limitations or other known, pre-existing conditions (e.g. – asthma, trick knees, back problems) that might affect their participation in rehearsal are asked to inform the stage manager of those conditions no later than the first day of rehearsal. Actors are not expected to take part in any activity that might because of some known, pre-existing condition cause them harm.

I. The stage manager, along with any member of the Theatre Department's staff and faculty, has a central responsibility for the safety of all members of the production team and should feel free to stop rehearsal at any time that she or he feels someone may be in danger. Stage managers should also stop performances if they feel that continuing the show will harm or endanger ensemble or audience members.

J. Rehearsal or performance work involving weaponry of any kind must be approved in advance by a faculty member under the direction of Jac Royce or John Rindo.

K. The department fully expects students to abide by the university's drug and alcohol policies.

The preceding guidelines function within the university policies for students, faculty and staff, particularly the University's Standards of Integrity. Each standard is fundamental to the department's expectations for the rehearsal process:

Standard One. A member of the Puget Sound community must not harm someone physically or psychologically, or cause them to fear being harmed.

Standard Two. A member of the Puget Sound community must not engage in activities that threaten the safety and security of the University or its members.

Standard Three. A member of the Puget Sound community must not possess, use, distribute, sell or engage in activities with the attention of distributing any controlled substance or illegal drug on University premises or at University-sponsored activities.

Standard Four. A member of the Puget Sound community shall abide by the University's alcohol and drug policies and procedures and shall not consume alcohol, serve alcohol to minors, or host parties at which alcohol is served or consumed in violation of University policies or state, federal or local regulations.

For more information on those policies, please see the *Logger*.

Finally, the department fully supports the university's commitment to create a community that is free from any form of sexual harassment. For more information on the university's sexual harassment policy see the following url: [Sexual Harassment Policy](#).

IV: Dismissal from a Student- or Faculty-Directed Production

A conscientious effort will be made to find ways for all members of the production team to have a positive experience while working on a play. In certain rare instances, student behavior may, however, justify dismissal from the cast or crew of a production. Potential reasons for dismissal are as follows:

Absences: all absences must be cleared in advance with the director and stage manager; unexcused, non-emergency absences are not acceptable and will be grounds for dismissal

Ensemble: behavior that significantly undercuts the ability of the production team to function as an ensemble will, if not corrected after a conference with the Director of Theatre Production and the Director of the specific show, be grounds for dismissal; ensemble membership includes a willingness to commit to the rehearsal process within the guidelines outlined above. This includes the wearing of costumes or make-up as designed for the character.

Safety: behavior that endangers ensemble members will be grounds for dismissal; coming to a rehearsal or performance intoxicated or under the influence is grounds for dismissal

The Director of Theatre Production will be responsible for overseeing any decision to dismiss a member of the cast or crew. The Director of Theatre Production will pursue a fair and adequate hearing process prior to a final decision, eliciting help, as necessary, from the Dean of Student's office.

Dismissal for inappropriate rehearsal behavior for class work falls under the university's policy for removing a student from a class.

V: Rehearsal Etiquette

A. Actors should turn cell phones and other electronic devices completely off during rehearsals. In case of an emergency, actors can be contacted through the stage manager. That number will be announced the first day of rehearsals.

B. Photographing, filming, or taping rehearsals or performances is prohibited unless prior arrangements have been made through the director and stage manager.

C. Publishing or posting accounts of rehearsals without first informing the cast and crew is a breach of rehearsal etiquette. The department standard is to avoid talking or writing about collaborators (student, staff, and faculty), even in positive terms, when they are not present.

D. Please be aware that Jones Hall and other rehearsal locales are often shared spaces; be thoughtful of personal and work space of other individuals in the vicinity of your rehearsal; be particularly thoughtful

during office hours; avoid loud noises and rehearsing scenes or doing warm-ups/exercises with what some people might consider inappropriate language.