



Theater Terminology

Adaptation

A written work (as a novel) that has been recast in a new form; "the play is an adaptation of a short novel"

Antagonist

The person who is opposed to, struggles against, or competes with the main character (protagonist) in a play.

Aside

The dramatic device in which a character speaks his/her thoughts aloud unheard by other characters onstage at the same time.

Blackout

Stage goes to complete black; the blackout lighting cue is often used for a startling effect at the end of a scene.

Blocking

Pattern of actors' movements onstage.

Box Set

A two- or three-walled set representing the interior of a room; a feature of realistic theatre.

Callback

A selected group of actors who are asked to return for a final audition.

Character

A role played by an actor using body and/or voice.

Characterization

The art of developing the character (e.g., his/her life, emotions, choices, motivations, objectives).

Cliché

A mannerism or approach to a role that has been used many times before.

Climax

A decisive moment that is the turning point in the plot.

Conflict

Opposing forces in a scene. Can be person v. person, person v. object, person v. environment, person v. society, or person v. self.

Critique

Honest feedback on writing or performance. What did work, what didn't work, what we saw, and what we didn't see.

Cue

A prearranged signal to enter or exit the stage, or to begin or end an action, stage business, dialogue, light, sound, or set changes.

Denouement

The solution of the conflict in the play, the untangling of the complications and conflict between the antagonist and protagonist.

Dialogue

Two or more characters speaking with each other.

Director

Person responsible for the coordination, guidance, and development of all aspects of a production so that the performance represents a unified vision.

Draft

A version of a play.

Exposition

As part of dramatic structure, the information that is often presented at the beginning of the play. Here the playwright may set the atmosphere and tone, explain the setting, introduce the characters, and provide the audience with any other information necessary to understand the plot.

Falling Action

The action after the climax of the plot.

Fourth Wall

The invisible, imagined, or implied wall through which the audience see the performance.

Freeze or Frieze

Remaining motionless in frozen pose (as in a photograph or sculpture).

Gesture

A movement that expresses or emphasizes a feeling or idea.

Given Circumstances

The given information which sets up the situation of the scene.

Improvisation

A spontaneous performance in which the actor simultaneously performs and creates dramatic material.

Intention (Objective)

What your character wants in the scene.

Justify

The reason your character performs a particular action.

Lights Fade

A common stage direction to end a scene.

Melodrama

A dramatic form, using exaggerated suspense, romance, and sensational plot twists, which generally ends happily.

Monologue

A section of the play spoken by one actor as either part of a scene or alone on stage.

Obstacles

The barriers that prevent characters from doing what they want to do.

Pantomime

Creating an imaginary object, situation or character through hand and body movement.

Playwright

A person who writes a play.

Plot

Describes the action of a play and sequence of events.

Prior Circumstances

Events in the play occurring before the scene or entrance of a character.

Protagonist

The leading character in a play.

Proscenium

The arch over the stage which separates the stage apron from the rest of the playing area. In a proscenium theatre, the audience sits in front of the stage.

Rising Action

The events of a play leading up to the climax; the creation of conflict; the entanglement of forces.

Run Through

Rehearsal technique in which actors go through the complete performance from beginning to end without stopping.

Scene

A subdivision of an act in a dramatic presentation in which the setting is fixed and the time continuous.

Script

The original text of an author's work.

Sides

Pages of a script containing only the lines and cues of a specific role to be learned by a performer.

Soliloquy

When a character is alone on stage and speaks, usually directly to the audience.

Stage Areas

Stage left and stage right (left and right from the actor's point of view as he/she faces the audience). Upstage (the part of a proscenium stage farthest away from the audience). Downstage (the part of a proscenium stage that is closest to the audience). Center stage (the middle of the stage).

Stage Directions

Instructions in the text of a play for the actor (e.g. entrances, exits or significant actions) and stage crew (e.g. lights fade).

Subtext

The information (i.e., thoughts and motivations) that are implied but not spoken by the character. Subtext may be revealed through actions, movement and interaction of the character as created by an actor.

Tableau

A frozen picture on stage.

Theme

The playwright's message through the text of the play.

Transition

A shift from one emotional state or idea to another. Can also be moments of change necessary to go from scene to scene, act to act, or place to place.

Warm-Up

A series of vocal and/or movement exercises to prepare for rehearsal or performance.

Wings

The offstage areas to the right and left of the set used as entrances but concealing backstage areas.