

# Welcome to Musical Theatre!

You are about to begin rehearsals for a music theatre production. **Rehearsing** refers to the process of learning and practicing a play or musical in order to perform it for an audience. Because a **musical** uses songs and dances to tell a story, you may be called upon to act, sing and dance in your production – that’s a lot to rehearse!

Your script or libretto will be your most important resource as you prepare for your production. The main section of the book contains dialogue, lyrics, music and stage directions for the musical.

- **Dialogue** refers to the words the characters speak, or **lines**.
- **Lyrics** are the words the characters sing in the show.
- **Music** indicates the notes and timing for the songs.
- **Stage** directions describe the setting and important physical actions performed by the characters.

The dialogue, lyrics and stage directions make up the **libretto**, or **script**, of the show. The script has **acts**, which are in turn divided into **scenes**, each scene usually taking place in a different location, or **setting**. Some shows may consist of only one act.

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## How to Talk Like an Actor

Every profession has its own vocabulary. As you read and rehearse for your show, learn the words on the next few pages so you can talk like a theatre pro in no time! The term **theatre** (sometimes spelled **theater**) may refer to plays of musicals as an art form, a building where they are presented, or the community of people who create and perform them. In this document, theatre will be the activity and theater will be the place.

## What You’ll Find in a Theater

The **stage** is the area where actors perform for an audience. The **house** is where the audience sits to watch the performance. Anything on the stage and within view of the audience is said to be **onstage**; anything outside the view of the audience is said to be **offstage**. The entire area off and behind the stage is the **backstage** area. The various onstage, offstage and backstage areas vary from theater to theater. Most theaters have **wings**, areas to the side of the stage just out of the audience’s view. Actors who are about to come onstage are said to be “waiting in the wings.”

The entire physical environment onstage is known as a **set**, and may include backdrops, flats, furniture and props. **Backdrops** and **flats** are large pieces of painted paper or cloth that hang or stand behind acting areas to represent different locations, or **settings**. **Props** are objects used by the actors during the show.

In order to see the set, special **theatrical lights** are hung above, in front, or to the side of the stage. Most lights are focused on a certain area of the stage, but **spotlights**, or **follow spots**, are movable and can follow actors crossing the stage. In order to hear the actors, microphones, or **mics**, may be used to amplify their voices. These may include **foot mics**, flat microphones arranged along the front edge of the stage, and **body mics**, portable microphones strapped to the actors' bodies.

## Where You'll Go Onstage

"Stage" also describes how the director chooses to have actors move and interact onstage. Each section of the stage has a specific name. When you stand at the center of the stage (**centerstage**) and face the house, **upstage** is the area behind you, and **downstage** is the area in front of you. **Stage left** is the area to your left and **stage right** is the area to your right. These terms can be combined. For example, the area to your right and behind you is **upstage right** or **up right**. Stage locations remain the same no matter what direction you face or where you are located onstage or in the theater. The section of the stage closest to the audience is always "downstage."

Another useful set of terms describes what happens onstage during the show. An actor **enters**, or makes an entrance, when he steps onstage. An actor **exits**, or makes an exit, when she leaves the stage. An actor **crosses** when he moves from one place onstage to another. An actor **counters** when she moves to fill the space left by an actor who has crossed. A **cue** is any line or action that triggers another line or action.

## Who You'll Meet Doing Theatre

There are many people who work together to put on a musical. The **actors** performing characters in a show are collectively known as the **cast**. The people who work backstage during a show are known as the **crew**. Together the cast and crew are known as the **company**. The company is headed by the **creative team**, the people "in-charge:"

- The **producer** oversees the budget, calendar and staffing
- The **director** provides the artistic vision for the show and coordinates all of the creative elements.
- The **music director** teaches the music and maintains its quality
- The **choreographer** creates and teaches the dances
- The **designers** create the sets, costumes, lighting and sound
- The **technical director** coordinates the construction and painting of the sets, hanging of the lights and the set-up of the sound system.
- The **stage manager** keeps rehearsals and performances running smoothly and on schedule.

There are a few important members of the creative team you will never see at rehearsals: the writers of the musical. The **composer** wrote the music, the **lyricist**



**1** Always write your name legibly, either on the cover of your script or in the space provided on the title page. Student Books have a way of getting lost or changing hands during rehearsals!

**2** Mark your lines and lyrics with a bright-colored highlighter to make your part stand out on the page. This will allow you to look up from your script during rehearsals, since it will be easier to find your place when you look back down.

**3** Underline important stage directions, lines, lyrics and individual words. For example, if your line reads "But a journey of a thousand miles..." and your director wants you to stress the words "journey" and "thousand," underline those words in your script.

**4** Save time and space by using the following standard abbreviations :

ON: onstage	OFF: offstage
US: upstage	DS: downstage
SL: stage left	SR: stage right
CS: centerstage	X: cross

You may use these abbreviations to modify other instructions (e.g., you could write "R hand up" to remind yourself to raise your right hand). You may also combine them in various ways (e.g., you could write "X DSR" to remind yourself to cross downstage right).

**5** Draw diagrams to help clarify your blocking. For example, if you are instructed to walk in a circle around a table, you might draw a box to represent the table, then draw a circle around it with an arrow indicating the direction in which you're supposed to walk.

**6** Mark your music with large commas to remind yourself where to take breaths while singing.

**7** Draw stick figures to help you remember your choreography.

**8** Although you should feel free to mark up your script, be careful it doesn't become so cluttered with notes that you have a hard time finding your lines on the page!

# What to Expect in Rehearsals

Knowing a little about the rehearsal process can help you plan ahead and make the most of your time. Although your exact rehearsal schedule will be determined by the creative team, this is a common rehearsal plan for a musical:

1. **Read-through:** at the first rehearsal, the cast sits together and reads the script aloud.
2. The cast learns the music, choreography and blocking for the show, usually in that order.
3. **Run-throughs:** the cast rehearses the show from beginning to end.
4. Once the set is complete, the cast begins rehearsing in the theater. (Earlier rehearsals are often held in smaller rehearsal rooms.)
5. **Technical rehearsals** (or **techs**): the company rehearses with the lights and sound equipment.
6. **Dress rehearsals:** the cast rehearses in costume.
7. **Final Dress:** the company runs the show exactly as if there were an audience, but there's no one in the house except for the creative team.

Rehearsals usually begin with a warm-up led by a member of the creative team, who takes you through exercises to prepare your muscles – including your voice – for the work ahead. Next you learn the scene, song or dance on that day's rehearsal schedule. The director, music director or choreographer gives you notes on your performance. Then you practice the scene, song or dance again, keeping those notes in mind.

The first few rehearsals will be **on-book** – you rehearse with the script in your hand. Later, as you memorize the lines, music, lyrics, choreography and blocking, you'll rehearse without your script, or **off-book**. The sooner you get off book, the better; it's much easier to act when you don't have to carry a script. If you forget your dialogue, simply call "LINE!" The stage manager always has a script ready to remind – or **prompt** – you on lines or blocking.

When you rehearse, stay alert. The theater can be a dangerous place, especially when the lights, sets and props are in place. Make sure you eat a healthy meal before rehearsal and get enough sleep so you will have the energy to perform well.

## Be a Team Player!

As a cast member of a show, you have an enormous responsibility to the creative team, the crew and yourself. Every member of the company is vital to the success of the show. Actors rely on their fellow cast members to speak each line and perform each stage action as rehearsed. Everyone depends on the crew members to change the set, provide the props, help with costumes, etc.

Because each person's actions affect the entire company, it is essential that you are always punctual. The time you are expected at rehearsals, or at the theater before a

performance, is known as your **call time**. Once you arrive, you must focus and follow instructions. Create a calendar with all your call times, what you need to prepare for each rehearsal, and any other important information.

The student book or script contains a lot of information, but once rehearsals start, you'll be amazed at how quickly you learn. And remember to have fun. So get out there and "break a leg!"

**BREAK A LEG** - is theatre slang for "good luck." Theatre people have a long history of superstition. Many believe if you wish for something aloud, the opposite will occur. So to avoid saying anything to jinx a performance, performers wish each other harm rather than luck to bring about the opposite result!

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