

Guide for Basic Stage Movement and Business

Entrances

Get into character before the entrance. Begin your entrance in the wings, at least 5 to 6 feet away, in order to take on the physical attributes of the character. Go over in your mind the reason you are entering the scene and what you are going to do onstage. If two characters share an entrance, the speaking character should enter last.

Exits

Remain in character until you are 5 to 6 feet into the offstage area. If the exit requires a long cross, make sure the last few lines are spoken near the exit. When several characters exit at the same time, the character with lines should exit last.

Professionalism Onstage

Remember to avoid turning your back to the audience unless so directed. Avoid standing in front of another actor or upstaging an actor by forcing that actor to turn his or her back to the audience in order to talk to you.

Crosses

Take "strong" crosses downstage (below) other actors, "weak" crosses upstage (above). Most crosses are made downstage (below) of the standing character and upstage (above) of the seated characters. "Strong" and "weak" crosses are determined by the purpose of the movement and the lines spoken. The shortest distance between two points is usually the best guide for a cross. A cross can be softened by moving in a curved pattern. Curved crosses can be used to convey a casual approach, hesitation, or doubt.

Gestures

Avoid covering the face with a gesture. When handling stage props such as a telephone or making large gestures, use the upstage hand.

Walking

Carry your weight in the chest rather than the feet. Head and shoulders should be up. Steps should be even and not too long. When moving, step off with the foot closest to your destination.

Backing Up

This is a weak move and should be avoided unless the move backward makes a dramatic point.

Walking Up and Down Stairs

Practice leading with the toes and coming down on the heel without looking down at the steps. Avoid bouncing up and down the stairs. Before descending a flight of steps, pause slightly, drawing attention to the movement.

Sitting

Approach the piece of furniture without staring at it. Secure your position of the furniture with the back of your upstage leg. Keep the weight of your body on the upstage leg as you lower

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yourself onto the seat by bending your legs. Avoid plopping or slumping into an easy chair or sofa. Sit near the front edge of the chair to make rising easier. Unless told to do so, avoid crossing your legs onstage. Females usually sit with ankles crossed or one foot slightly in front of the other; males sit with legs slightly apart.

Rising

Keeping the back straight, push up with the upstage leg. Next, shift your weight to the downstage leg, allowing you to move forward with the upstage foot.

Kneeling

The downstage knee should touch the floor, helping to keep an “open” position. When kneeling on both knees, the downstage knee should be lowered first; then the upstage leg can be lowered into position.

Turning

Always turn toward the audience unless your director tells you otherwise.

Stage Slaps

Using a cupped hand, strike the receiver on the chin or jawbone, away from the ear. Be especially careful not to hurt the receiver when administering a stage slap.

Falls

To prevent injury, all stage falls should be planned and rehearsed. Place your body weight on the leg opposite from the direction you will fall. As the fall begins, the knee (on the side that is falling) relaxes and bends. The fall is broken as the knee, hip, and shoulder hit the floor (in that order). The head can be supported by the outstretched arm on the floor.

Eating

Eating while talking always poses problems, especially onstage. Avoid foods that get stuck in the throat or foods such as crackers which dry out the mouth and make talking more difficult. Also avoid carbonated beverages to prevent unwanted burps or belches onstage. Weak tea and fruit juices such as lemon and grape are easy to drink. Use tea and lemon for light-colored drinks and grape juice for dark drinks such as coffee.

Movement

Visible movements, such as entrances, exits, crosses, sitting, and rising, draw focus (the attention of the audience). Always move or gesture on your own lines, so as not to steal the audience’s attention during another actor’s lines. All movement should be in character. All movement should be motivated. Make every movement count.

Personal Business

This consists of small actions that a character performs without moving from place to place. An actor enhances characterization with appropriate personal business, such as handling a cup, straightening clothing, reading the newspaper, fanning with a fan, or writing a letter.