

## A Practical Guide for UT Actors in Rehearsal and Performance

### Collaboration

Theatre is the most collaborative of art forms. We cannot do what we do without the work and support of many others. At the Clarence Brown Theatre we uphold high standards of professional behavior and artistic practice, for guest artists, faculty, and students alike. A core part of our mission and philosophy is to train students in a fully professional context, alongside seasoned veterans. It is your responsibility to learn how our community operates, and to do your part to contribute to excellence here. Failure to do so will not only compromise our theatre and your experience, but will follow you beyond UT into the profession. This is your chance to step up to the mark, as you have dreamed of doing.

If you are a member of Actors Equity Association, or become one while you are here, there are rule books available online for whatever job you might undertake in the company. If you are not AEA, it is still important to know the Equity rules as they are the basic code of the collaboration within a production. You will particularly want to look at section 23: "Duties of the Actor." Go to:

[http://actorsequity.com/docs/rulebooks/LORT\\_Rulebook\\_09-12\\_LNF.pdf](http://actorsequity.com/docs/rulebooks/LORT_Rulebook_09-12_LNF.pdf)

The thoughts below are offered by your faculty from the benefit of experience, out of their own aspirations to artistry in this community.

### Elements of good collaboration:

The most effective theatrical teams share certain characteristics such as those that follow.

1. *Dedication to aesthetic excellence.* Things work best when all the individuals on the team are focused upon a vision larger than themselves: that is, the common goal of serving the play and creating the best work possible.
2. *High individual standards in your work, and in your collaboration with others.* Bring your best work to the whole endeavor, and your best self to the team, and the whole will thrive, which in turn will bring the best work out of you. Actors are expected to commit fully to all rehearsal exercises, scene work, and performances. Absolute integrity and reliability of presence and commitment are a hallmark of successful professionals.
3. *Respect for others.* The respect you receive will equal the respect you offer. You have a responsibility to be supportive of everyone associated with a production. Such support will go a long way to establish your reputation not only as a good actor, but as a good person to work with. Accomplished, successful actors are not only the most prepared part of the team but are also those that show great respect to other members of the team. 'Divas' may be very talented, but they are not the most respected artists. Your reputation and creative opportunities depend not only upon your talent, but also on how you treat others.

4. *Honesty, compassion, kindness.* Theatre is physically, emotionally, and mentally demanding, and often exhausting for all members of the team. To be aesthetically effective and ethically responsible requires a serious commitment to compassion for others, to personal honesty, and to that most basic of human values: kindness.
5. *Good communication.* Good collaboration depends upon honest, considered, and timely communication. Lines of authority and availability of others to address a given issue are ordinarily clearly delineated and should be respected. In other words, respect established practices – they have been worked out over a long time by many of people, and they are there for good reason. Carefully consider how an issue you have affects the whole endeavor, and whether it really needs addressing before you bring it up. If after consideration you still think it does, do it in a calm, appropriate, and timely way.
6. *Discipline and organization.* Getting each production up is akin to building and then learning to sail a new ship under a short and absolute deadline. The level of success depends entirely upon the discipline and organization of every player in the game. Months of planning and building have gone on before the actors even enter the room. In a way, actors come on board to begin the trial sailing. We need you to come on board knowing your job, and behaving in a way that doesn't upset the whole, but lends impetus to all the parts coming together to catch the wind.
7. *Courtesy and attention to detail.* Manners are important and the "little things" are not so little. These things make a big difference to the morale in the creative space, and thereby directly affect the creative outcome. Remember to say please and thank you, sign in on time to respect the stage manager and the company, don't use your cell phone or computer in the rehearsal room, keep your voice down in the green room, respect the wings, and so on. Establish good habits in your professional demeanor in rehearsal and performance, and they will greatly help to forward your career.
8. *Calmness in adversity.* Theatre often occurs in crisis. People learn what a star really is in making a production work when the pressure is on. When the people with the biggest roles are humble and generous, the positive effect they can have as leaders of the team is truly amazing. When they are 'divas,' unfortunately the same thing is true negatively. When the going gets tough, the tough get going: focus, and figure out how you can best lend your support to the team.
9. *Patience and fortitude.* Rehearsing takes long hours, often of waiting and listening. Being patient and tirelessly present makes everyone's job better and easier.

### **Preparing the role, or doing your part as an actor in the play**

There are certain general skills the actor must cultivate, beyond the obvious actor's skills of movement, voice, spontaneity, precision of execution, and analysis of a play. These include listening and memorization skills and discipline. There are many written and internet documents outlining ways to hone these things. The actor should also familiarize his/her self with the history, mission, and traditions of the theatre he/she is working in. This can help with understanding much of what is going on around you, in your professional behavior, and in shaping your work.

*Prior to Rehearsal:*

1. Read the play, multiple times, until you know it thoroughly.
2. Know the meaning of all words and all historical, literary, and metaphorical references in the play. Footnotes, dictionaries, and lexicons are an actor's friends.
3. Know your character's given circumstances as found within the play.
4. Know your character's relationship to all the other on-stage and off-stage characters.
5. Have a specific back-story for your character, consistent with their given circumstances, and as indicated by the particular play. (Different plays and different characters require different kinds and degrees of back-story).
6. Have specific ideas about your character's objectives, obstacles, and actions, yet remain open to discovery in collaboration with the director and other actors. In other words, make choices, and have an idea of how you are going to approach the character and the world of the play. However, do not *set* the idea of your performance before you come to rehearsal. Be open to discoveries. As the great director Lloyd Richards has said: "All choices are temporary; they serve until you find a better one." Readings, table work and rehearsals will change your ideas about the character's life. This is a good thing.
7. Supplemental research before and during rehearsal should include:
  - The life and works of the playwright
  - The life and times of the playwright
  - The historical and social context in which the play was written
  - The historical and social context which the play depicts
  - Extra: literary criticism, other production reviews, film (If you watch films do it months before rehearsal begins. Film work can be an aid in your research but is not the answer about the play or your role.)

In brief, before and during rehearsals you are working to find your way into thinking like the playwright, deeply understanding his/her frame of reference, and the nature and motivations of the characters who reveal that world. The story *as written* is the foundation of whatever the director and production are trying to reveal, whether they are faithful to the original, or reframe it conceptually, or entirely deconstruct it.

*Rehearsals:*

Be off-book, or as familiar with your lines as possible for the first day of rehearsal. It is highly recommended that you are off-book for the entire play by the end of the first week of rehearsal. An actor cannot find an organic way into a character with book in hand. The sooner you are off-book the sooner you will be able to listen to your scene partners, the sooner you will be able to *play* and discover, and the sooner you will be able to find natural organic movements and gestures. *The biggest actor offence is not knowing your lines.*

Warm up vocally and physically before each rehearsal. Be nourished before rehearsal, but not over fed.

Listen to other characters' table work. It may give you insight into your own character. However, if it is not your table work, do not butt in. Your time will come.

Write down your blocking! Do not depend on the director or the stage management team to know *your* blocking. You may do this during the staging rehearsals or immediately following

scene work. Make sure you *do it* so you have it when you return to the scene. Sometimes you think you know it and will remember, and then you don't get back to that scene for more than a week, at which point you are lost on the stage, and slowing everyone down. This is painfully amateurish and embarrassing for everyone involved.

Do not, under any circumstances, give fellow actors critiques of their work. If you must, give praise. Remember this is a process for all. Some actor's may be ahead of the others. It is the director's job to give notes and bring others up to speed. However, if you wish to work out moments or discuss relationships with a *scene partner* do so in the spirit of creative co-operation and artistic collaboration. That kind of collaboration is necessary. If a fellow actor asks for help, talk to the director before further discussion, or come to the director together to discuss the issues. Avoid directing yourself or others. It puts you and them in the wrong frame of mind and engenders mistrust. If you have a constructive suggestion to share, do so with the director privately.

In the same vein, do not gossip negatively about the work of fellow cast members. This only hurts morale. Remember, you are all on the same team. You have the same goals. Take the high-road.

Study your part when you are not onstage during a rehearsal. You should be rereading the play, studying the background of your character, learning about the things your character does that have nothing in common with you. If you are serious about your craft, even if your character is on stage for only 2 minutes, you will have serious work to do and it will show when you show up to your next rehearsal.

Do not give the director explanations of what you are planning to do, *show* it in your scene work. Your homework will give the director something to work with.

No company member should receive guests at the theatre, except after a rehearsal or performance has ended.

Rehearse as if it were a performance, your best performance. In other words, give one hundred percent in rehearsal. Do not slough your way through it. By giving your all, the playing will become more joyous and the good choices will come to the forefront.

Risk in rehearsal. Don't be afraid of being wrong. Rehearsal is a testing ground. It is for trying choices that you and the director have made, for testing new ideas. Make those choices during your preparation, and then try them out in rehearsal. Make sure you have based those choices in the text and in your objectives. Your objectives are always found in the text.

Be on cue for entrances and exits without having to be called. It is very disrespectful to make the whole team wait and stage management come searching to find you.

If you forget a line, remain in character, call "line," and wait for the prompt. Listen to the prompt carefully. Cursing yourself or getting upset only wastes time and shows that your focus is more on yourself than upon the character and what they are doing.

When the director interrupts rehearsal for another actor, remain still and in character, and be ready to start when the interruption is finished.

When you are in the wings or waiting upon stage when you are not in character, such as during tech, watch other actors to learn from their errors and achievements.

Do not let your performance be a secret until opening night. That is lazy and selfish and will throw the production off.

Trust your director. If a director gives you a note you do not like, figure out a way make it your own. They have been working on the play for at least a year. They are looking at the whole, while actors tend to look at a portion of the play. However, if a director proves to be incompetent, seek advice from stage management or the artistic director. There are ways to happily work with unprepared directors.

Do not expect the director to have all of the answers. The director's job is *not* to tell you what to do, or force-feed you choices. Part of a director's job is too look at the whole and see if the details work in a unified production, in a unified world, in their unified vision. Do not wait for the director to give you everything or anything. *Own* your choices. Even bad choices may spark great ideas for new choices. *Make a choice, any choice* carefully based in the script. The most wonderful actor for a director to work with is one that has a creative imagination, one that makes choices, one that risks – one that thinks. Be a thinking actor!

During note sessions, listen. If you do not understand a note, ask for clarification. However, if that clarification does not satisfy you, do not waste everyone's time working it out or arguing with the director. Simply say, "Would it be okay if we talked about this after so I make sure I understand the note completely." A good director will say yes.

Write down the director's changes and incorporate them into your performance by the next rehearsal.

Do not take things too personally. At least you brought some work to the table. Just take the direction, and do it well. Do not argue your point. Even if you see another way, do it the director's way first then ask if you can show him something else as well. If he prefers it his way, do that.

If you are receiving harsh criticism from the director, avoid arguing about it - especially in public. If you cannot let it go, talk to the director privately. Try to work it out. You would not be in the show if the director did not want you there. Often times, if you ask a director for help in improving they will relax and approach the problem in a different way. If private communication does not work say 'thank you' and move on. Just as directors deserve respect, so do actors. Do not forget that.

Do not monopolize the director's time. Twenty other people are waiting. If you need their undivided attention, schedule time.

Listen to all notes. Someone else's note may affect you.

Do not let resentments linger. Address problems you have with fellow actors with the director or stage manager immediately.

Once you have found your performance, stop messing with it. Stop adding behaviors, frills, pushing. Relax and allow what you have done to unfold; let the audience in and the story hold its form and pressure.

Do not change your choices or blocking in performance without consulting your fellow scene partners or the stage manager beforehand.

Remember that you are working for the play and the audience, not for yourself. They are your reason for being. The play is your story and the audience members are the listeners in whom it comes to life through you. It is not about you. It is about the story and them. You are an interpretive artist.

### **Preparing the way, or doing your part as a professional in the company**

Everything you do in a production will affect the progress and quality of the whole. In terms of standards and practices, performance is not more important than rehearsal. Your behavior in both is crucial to your success in a particular show and in your career. Personal responsibility, discipline and organization are crucial to smooth sailing for everyone. It is a serious matter to be even a minute late or forget to mention a conflict until a rehearsal is planned. It means other people have to straighten out entire schedules because of you, and like one person rubber-necking in traffic, your behavior affects the flow of the whole in ways that magnify well beyond the single incident.

When you are cast, *report all conflicts or potential conflicts* to the stage manager or theatre administrative office, *not to the director*, as soon as you know of them. Examine your schedule carefully to prevent unexpected surprises, and be honest about your schedule. While you really want this job, if you make promises that you can't or won't keep, you will not do the job well, and it will be remembered the next time the director thinks about casting.

Be organized and disciplined. Keep all your show materials in one place, and know your responsibilities. Check your call every day and double-check it if you are doubtful. Do not rely upon anyone else for your call – YOU are the one responsible, and it is easy for others to get it wrong for you, or for misunderstanding to occur in the relay of information. Being well prepared and on time is the foundation of successful collaboration and performance. *Be on time for everything associated with a production. In fact, be early.* This includes all rehearsals, secondary rehearsal calls, voice-overs, costume fittings, photo shoots, press interviews, etc. Lack of discipline in promptness affects EVERYONE associated with the production. Realize that schedules are planned in advance of your appointment with departments. Nothing will annoy people more quickly than sloppiness with time, and nothing will more quickly tarnish your reputation.

Sign in when you arrive!!! This saves the stage manager's valuable time and energy, and prevents unnecessary stress.

Do not leave rehearsals until released by the director *and* the stage manager and if you need to leave a rehearsal let the stage manager know in advance, if possible.

Come to the first day of rehearsal enthusiastic, energized and genuinely happy to be there. Thousands of actors would give their eyeteeth to be sitting where you are. After you leave the university, you may be one of those thousands, so relish the time you have here - now.

Complete all paperwork (including conflicts, bio and headshot) requested by stage management properly, *before* or during the first day of rehearsal. Bring the proper personal paperwork to accomplish this. Stage management needs this information, which is often passed on to the Marketing Department, Costume Department, and the Director. Failure to report information requested of you can cause serious problems in scheduling.

Bring writing material to all rehearsals. Write notes, questions, anything you deem necessary.

Actors with physical limitations or other known, pre-existing conditions (e.g. – asthma, trick knees, back problems) that might affect their participation in rehearsal must inform the stage manager of those conditions no later than the first day of rehearsal. Actors should not be expected to take part in any activity that might cause them harm. But by the same token, don't accept a role under false pretenses, knowing that you can't do what's required of the role because of physical limitations.

All ensemble members have permission and indeed a responsibility to intervene at any time if they feel the safety (emotional or physical) of an ensemble member is in question. Speak with the director or the stage manager.

*Completely turn off* cell phones and all other electronic devices 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.

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

Publishing or posting accounts of rehearsals without first informing the cast and crew is a breach of rehearsal etiquette. Avoid talking or writing about collaborators (student, staff, and faculty), even in positive terms, on any public internet posts.

Rehearse in clothing and footwear similar to your costume, particularly when skirts or period footwear is involved. Many actors do not know how to walk in period shoes, and how one moves in a skirt vs. pants is very different experience. Try to match the style of your costume as closely as possible---tight, long, short, flowing. Contact the stage manager to request from the costume manager if you need appropriate skirts or shoes or jackets.

Wear proper shoes to rehearsal. Flip-flops are a big no. Not only are they inappropriate, they are dangerous.

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 stage manager or another appropriate person either in the moment or after rehearsal.

One-on-one coaching sessions may be used by directors, coaches, or choreographers, depending on the needs of the production. If one-on-one coaching makes an individual uncomfortable, he or she can request to have another student present.

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 the audience, and is free to stop rehearsal or performance at any time s/he feels someone may be in danger.

#### *Backstage:*

Never speak to or approach another actor in a social context who is waiting for an entrance.

Do not talk backstage during rehearsal and/or performance, unless it is mandatory and concerns the integrity of the production.

Be quiet in the wings, backstage, and in the costume areas. This is a mark of a professional -of someone who understands the value of other people's work.

Be ready, be early, for your entrance. This is your responsibility during rehearsals and performances.

Do not loiter in the wings.

During a scene shift, an actor should completely clear off the stage space unless he is involved in the change or about to make an immediate entrance.

At the same time, the crew must not distract the actors.

Never touch a piece of lighting, sound, or stage equipment unless assigned to do so.

Non-authorized people are not allowed backstage. Authorized people are those that are members of the production in progress or those who have obtained permission by the director.

Maintain a professional attitude by staying in character and on-task, by never appearing in makeup and costume, except backstage and onstage, by not peeking through the main curtain at the audience.

Check your prop and costume pre-set before every rehearsal and pre-show and during intermission. Do not rely on others to have what you need, when you need it.

#### *Technical Rehearsals:*

Remember that technical rehearsals are for the designers and the crews and operators. Technical rehearsals are not for the actor. You are there to aid the rest of the artistic and production teams.

During technical rehearsals, make sure you are consistent with your timing. Designers and stage management are relying on you for cues.

Never get angry during tech. If there is a problem, address it appropriately, with humor if possible.

If not in costume, wear black clothing to tech.

#### *Fittings, Props, Costumes & Dressing Room Etiquette*

A call for a costume fitting is as important and urgent as a rehearsal call. DO NOT MISS COSTUME FITTINGS. Unless your measurements are taken and fittings are held on schedule, your costume cannot be made and/or ordered.

During fittings make sure your costumes are completely comfortable, and if they are not, talk to your costume designer about what you have to do physically in the show. Tell them specifically what you need to accomplish in the performance that will affect your costume and how you move in general. A good designer wants to know. Sometimes the director and designer will not have a chance to talk in detail about these needs. Don't be afraid to inform a designer.

Make sure your shoes fit properly. If you hurt, you can't act properly.

Treat your props and costumes with great respect, touching only those items needed for your character. Hang costumes when not in use, or store as instructed by the wardrobe manager or stage manager. Do not eat or drink in your costume or cover it with a robe. The same goes for accessories. Report costume damage or cleaning requirements to the stage manager or costume manager as soon as possible. Never remove costumes from the theatre. Many hours of work went into the vision, design and build of each piece found on-stage. Do not ever throw costumes on the floor.

Do not cut your hair before rehearsals begin. Grow it until the costume designer tells you otherwise.

NEVER restyle wigs and/or hair pieces unless you are trained and requested to do so. This should be done by the costume crew.

After each rehearsal and performance, remove your costume first, and then remove makeup, making sure that all items are returned to their assigned places for the next performance.

If your costume needs repair or adjustment, tell the stage manager and wardrobe supervisor *and* also be sure your needs are on the costume repair sheet.

Apply your own makeup, assist with makeup application, or have your makeup applied by a member of the makeup crew, *as designed by the makeup manager*. Cast members (particularly those with sensitive skin) buy your own makeup, unless something specific needs to be provided by the theatre. Provide your own towel, washcloth, and skin soap.

If styling your own hair, do it as designed by the costume designer. Get permission from the costume designer before making any changes to your makeup or hair design. Much research has gone into ensuring historical accuracy, or specific designs have been chosen for specific effects within the larger context of lighting and costuming and other components. To maintain the director's vision for the show, it is important that your makeup and hair "fit" into the unified production.

Always remove your costume, accessories, and makeup before entering public areas of the building or leaving the theatre. The public should see actors in costume and makeup only while they're performing.

Keep your dressing room area clean.

The dressing room is where actors prepare to enter a new world. It is a place of respect for each other's personal space and creative process. It is as much a sacred place, in its way, as the theatre itself.

#### *Miscellaneous items:*

Never touch items that are under the jurisdiction of another character or crew member.

NEVER TOUCH A WEAPON unless assigned to do so.

Remember to thank anyone who helps you with your performance. FYI, all professional actors give gifts to their personal dresser on closing night.

Lighten up! If you don't have a good sense of humor leave the theatre. The creativity and the tensions of our business require a good sense of humor.

Avoid complaining. Complaining does not solve problems. Be an active in problem solver.

Treat everyone in the theatre with respect. Treat everyone behind the scenes with great respect. They are working just as hard as you and receiving no glory. Help them, do not demand of them.

The stage manager has the authority to give you acting notes after opening night. Take them. Use them. After opening, the stage manager is the voice of the director.

### **Failure to Uphold Standards**

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, actor or student behavior may 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 Artistic Director and the Director of the specific show, be grounds for dismissal. Ensemble membership includes a willingness to commit to the rehearsal process. 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.

### *Types of Rehearsals*

*Reading Rehearsal (Tablework)*: All cast and crews attend, with the cast sitting around a large table. The director discusses the play and explains the concept of the characters, theme, climaxes, ground plans, costume and makeup requirements, and props needed for the performance. The actors read their parts in character and ask questions about their motivation in a scene, possible blocking, areas of the script that they do not understand, and characterization.

*Blocking Rehearsal*: Cast and crew attend on stage and practice lines with basic movement, groupings, entrances, exits, crosses, etc. Actors write their blocking on their copies of the script in pencil to be able to make changes as needed. The act will be walked through slowly the first time to discuss blocking in the scene and then run at normal speed to iron out the movements. All lines and blocking should be memorized (if not required earlier) before the first technical rehearsal at the very latest.

*Developing Rehearsal*: This begins after each act is blocked and is a rehearsal without scripts. The director will go over any changes needed in blocking, help with character development, motivation, and memorization. During developing rehearsals the actors work on projecting emotions, reacting to others, using props and sets, and practicing in costume.

*Technical Rehearsal:* Technical rehearsals are conducted onstage as crews practice scenery shifts, label scenery locations, practice prop locations and storage, and work for a quick and quiet change from scene to scene and lights sound, costumes are added. The stage crew practices opening and closing the curtain along with working with the actors as the scenes progress.

*Dress Rehearsal:* Dress rehearsals involve actors and stage crews to act as if the performance was happening at the rehearsal. The rehearsal co-ordinates all sound, lights, scenery shifts, and properties with the action taking place onstage. The director will sit out front, the performance will not stop for interruptions, and the director will watch the stage to evaluate problems. The director will add a curtain call to the final dress rehearsal. Only cast and crew are allowed backstage and in the actor preparation areas during dress rehearsals and the performance.

## The Team

It is important to know your job, and to keep your focus on excellence in your own work. Do not step into others' territory, it only creates mistrust and gums up the works.

The following jobs are present in most theatres and productions. If you do not know what each of these jobs are, do research to familiarize yourself with all the members of the collaborative team in a theatre.

Producer	Costume Shop Artisans
General Manager	Head of Shop
Artistic Director	Wardrobe Supervisor
Associate Artistic Director	Draper
Director	Cutter
Assistant Director	Properties Shop Artisans
Dramaturge	Head
Scenic Designer	Props Associates
Lighting Designer	Lighting Technicians:
Costume Designer	Master Electrician
Sound Designer	Sound Technicians
Prop Supervisor	Production crews
Production Manager	Dressers
Production Stage Manager	Runners
Technical Director	Light, sound board operators
Stage manager	Deck crew
Assistant Stage Manager	Spotlight crew
Literary Manager	Front Office: marketing, development, etc....
Company Manager	Front of House: box office manager, head usher, etc.....
Scene Shop Artisans:	Custodians, security personnel, etc.
Head of Shop	
Carpenters, painters ....etc.	