

The First Rehearsal

The first rehearsal is the launchpad for the rest of your rehearsal process leading up to opening night. Preparing yourself and setting your students up for a successful first rehearsal will help set the framework for an excellent play and memorable rehearsal process. You may only actually perform the play a few times so the majority of your time will be spent rehearsing rather than performing. Make it fun, make it positive, it all starts on day one.

No matter what your skill level consider the following as you prepare for day one:

- How do you want to set up the room?
- What paperwork or materials do you need to provide your students?
- Set up the expectations of the rehearsal and play process

NASCENT

It is important for the first rehearsal that the room is inclusive for the entire company. You can achieve this in one of two ways.

- If the cast is small enough you may all sit around one or multiple tables.
- If your cast is larger you will want to set chairs in one large circle with music stands or a hard surface available for students to write on.
- Make sure everyone can see and be seen by all.

At the first rehearsal you will want to collect and/or pass out all the paperwork that you will need to have a safe and successful rehearsal.

- Rehearsal Calendar
- Emergency Contact Information
- Student/Parent Contracts
- Dramaturgy and research needed for the actors
- Student Contact Sheet

Just like a good teacher sets up classroom expectations the first day of class, a prepared director will do the same with their cast. Topics you will want to cover in this section could include

- Late/absence policy
- When are we supposed to be “off book”
 - » **off book** is the term theatre practitioners use to describe the moment with an actors lines are memorized and they no longer need the aid of their script
- How we respect each other in the rehearsal room

If you have access to the location you will be performing give your students a guided tour of the space.

- Make sure everyone is aware of the safe way to enter and exit the stage.
- Where the emergency are located, etc.

Give the students a rough outline of what the set will look like.

- For example: If you will have a wall on stage left that students will have to act around; walk the students to stage left and point out where on stage the wall will be.
- It's sometimes difficult to visualize objects that are not there so placing a table or chair on stage to represent “the wall” will help student’s remember that a wall is on stage left.

The first read will also happen. The first read though is the first time all the actors come together to read the script with the director for the first time. This is a time to just share the story together. After you have read through the script allow some time at the end of rehearsal to answer any questions your actors might have. Possible questions you might want to cover could include

- What were you initial reactions?
- What fascinated you?
- What was confusing?

INTERMEDIATE

Setting the scene sets students up for success!

- It is important for the first rehearsal that the room be set up to be inclusive for the entire company. You can achieve this in one of two ways.
 - » If the cast is small enough you may all sit around one or multiple tables.
 - » If your cast is larger you will want to set chairs in one large circle with music stands or a hard surface available for students to write on.
 - » Make sure everyone can see and be seen by all.
- Using what resources you have you will also want to have your set mapped out on stage for the actors to get a feel of what the space will look like.
 - » Where can they enter and exit? Tables and chairs work well as substitutes for walls and platforms until you're set is constructed.

Feeling safe and confident in the space

- Walk your students through what the set will look like on stage to give them a sense of space.
 - » Does any of the set pieces move on and off?
 - » Will the actors have to carry set pieces on and off?
 - » Are they levels where the actors are on a plane higher than the ground floor? Having students stand on a sturdy chair helps give the illusion they are on a higher set piece until the set is complete or you have access to a high level.
- Allow your students time to explore the space on a guided tour so they feel comfortable and safe traveling backstage from scene to scene.

How we tell this story

- The first rehearsal is the perfect time for the director to unify all the actors and designers into telling the same story.
 - » Is there a specific reason you are producing the play right now?
 - » Does it have a period or style of production required?
 - For example: If a director is producing *Noises Off* (a farce style comedy) they would want to spend a few moments talking about what a farce is and how they want to go about achieving that style of production.
 - **Farce**, a comic dramatic piece that uses highly improbable situations, stereotyped characters, extravagant exaggeration, and violent horseplay.

For more information on how genres support the text of the play please see the video resources as well as the links below.

Styles, genres and practitioners <http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/topics/zm72pv4>

Genres Resource <http://www3.northern.edu/wild/th100/chapt5.htm>

Reading together for the first time

- The first read though is the first time all the actors come together to read the script with the director for the first time.
- This is a time to just share the story together.
 - » Avoid stopping to answer questions or concerns as you read.
 - » Read the whole scripts aloud without any interruption.
 - » Encourage students to write down any questions that they have as they read.
 - » Answer questions at the end as a group

If there are questions you want your actors to consider while they read go ahead and address them at the beginning.

- For example: If your school is producing *West Side Story* you might want your actors to consider the following questions as they read the script.
 - » Who is my family?
 - » Where do I belong/where is my home?
 - » Who do I take care of?
 - » Who takes care of me? Who has my back?

ADVANCED

Setting the scene sets students up for success!

- Prior to the first rehearsal you will want to tape out your set on the stage floor using spike tape.
- Spike tape is used to create a stage marking called a spike. It allows the actors to know where a door or wall is on stage prior to the set being constructed and loaded/build on the stage.

If a ground plan of your set is available you will want to measure out the distance from each individual set piece so your tape can be near to exact to the size of your set.

- This will allow the least amount of re-spacing and blocking when your set is ready to be utilized.
- Have the room set up as close to the actual playing space as possible.
- If you have props ready (whether a rehearsal prop or the actual item used in the show) you will want to designate a prop table.
- If you have any set pieces ready to rehearse on bring them into the room.
- The more time you can give your actors with a set/costume/prop the better they will be prepared for opening night.

If the play involved your actors to be in costumes that are different than what they normally wear (Long dresses, corsets, and suit jackets) you should have these items on a rack in the room so they may begin to use them as they rehearse.

Setting up the world of the play

- Before you read the script together for the first time have your design team present the costume, set, lights and other designers to the cast.
- Students are eager to know what they will look like and it might effect their acting choices.

Telling the same story

- The first rehearsal is the perfect time for the director to unify all the actors and designers into telling the same story. Is there a specific reason you are producing the play right now? Does it have a period or style of production required?
 - » For example: If a director is producing *Noises Off* (a farce style comedy) they would want to spend a few moments talking about what a farce is and how they want to go about achieving that style of production.

An advanced theatre program will provide their students with scripts prior to the first rehearsal.

- Students should be familiar if not memorized with the text on day one

As you read through the text encourage your company to do the following

- Read through without interruptions
- Make bold courageous choices, begin to take risks
- Connect with those around the table

MUSICAL THEATRE

The read through for a musical is similar to that of a play with the exception of now we are adding in music in between/mixed in with the dialogue. You have a few options of how to cover the material while still moving forward in the reading.

- Use your Music Director: if you have a music director who is able to play and sing the score of the musical then have them sing through each song to give an overview of each musical moment. Then proceed to the next scene
- Use the soundtrack: Play the musical recording to give the students a baseline of the structure of each song.
 - » Be careful with using the musical recordings in your rehearsal room. It is a fine substitute when your accompanist is not available but let your students know that they expectation is to not sound like or replicate that sound.
 - » Often time's musical recordings do not match the notation or text you have rented. Make sure rehearse the music and lyrics that are written in your rented librettos. A **libretto** is the text of an opera or other long vocal work.