

ACTING & DIRECTING 101

Great improvisers spontaneously write, perform and direct the scene. Here are some basic guidelines to look your best on stage. Every director needs to think of space, time and focus issues. Below we address use of space and focus. Timing comes from personal experience and observing others.

AUDIENCE

DL (Down Left)	DS/DC (Downstage/Down-Center) Towards Audience	DR (Down-Right)
SL (Stage Left) Actor's Left	C (Center Stage)	SR (Stage Right) Actor's Right
UL (Up-Left)	US/UC (Upstage/Up-Center) Away from Audience	UR (Up-Right)

WHERE TO STAND ON STAGE - When in doubt, stand center stage. Standing upstage creates distance from the audience. Standing downstage creates increased relation to the audience. Standing in the extreme corners creates a sense of isolation. Actors should avoid upstaging themselves or other actors. This occurs when an actor tries to talk to someone behind them or otherwise looking awkward due to odd physical relationships on stage. Never stand right behind another actor. If you cannot see the audience, they cannot see you.

RELATION TO AUDIENCE - **Full Front** - Body/Feet facing the audience, parallel to front of stage. **Full Back** - Body/Feet facing face back of stage. **Profile** - Body/Feet facing the left or right, perpendicular to front of stage. This is actually the weakest of all positions. **¼ turned** - Body/Feet Angled away from audience – between profile and full back. **¼ turned** - Body/Feet Angled towards audience – between Profile and full front. When in doubt, always stand at the ¼. Use the other positions above to accent a purpose/message but awkward to audience. ¼ best allows you to relate to other actors and audience at the same time.

VERTICLE LEVELS - Choosing a variety of positions helps keep the pictures interesting. Look for ways Standing, Leaning, Sitting, Kneeling, Sitting on floor, and Lying on floor change the way characters relate to each other.

FOCUS - Be aware of the most important thing happening on stage (**THE PRIMARY FOCUS**) and then give all focus to that person or thing. This most often is the person talking. When in doubt throw all focus to that person or thing. If you are talking about a person or thing, you are creating to a **SECONDARY FOCUS**. It is your job to bring focus to that person or thing. You may also create scene with a **SHARED FOCUS** (two people or items coming together), **DUAL FOCUS** (Two seprate items or characters split focus equally) and

MOVING ON STAGE - The improv actor has to do this on the spot. All stage movements are a series of crosses and counter crosses. The ultimate goal is to achieve a visual balance (Or to be out of balance on purpose). If an actor crosses the stage, the other actor counter-crosses to balance the picture. Want to cross stage with out upstaging yourself? Take a large step upstage and cross slightly down. Using “S” and “C” patterns can create some interesting result.

These are guidelines not hard fast rules. Breaking the rules can provide visual stress and discomfort to the audience. Great actors and directors use visual stress and release the way a musician will use Dissonance (basically two or more notes creating clash of sound) for climatic effect before harmonious resolution. Think of your favorite action movie. The fight scenes are intense with fast moving pictures. But eventually, there is always a calm or release. Many comedy sequences resemble a roller coaster with ups, downs, loops, twists and turns before finally returning to the station.

TALKING HEADS – There is nothing more boring than watching two actors talk for three minutes. “**TALKING HEADS**” when actors due a scene and incorporate none of the above techniques. Making physical choice are always stronger than dialogue. People (and audiences) register movement more than sounds. That being said, if you have something important to say, stop and say it. **FRAME** your moments.

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