

Dazzle Acting Class

#6 **The Lingo** #9

By  
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Every industry and vocation has its own community of folk and its own language. Here's a collection of terms, titles and words frequently used by members of the acting world.



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An **act** is a chunk of action that contains from one to several scenes.

An **actor** is a man or woman who performs a part and plays a character. The part an actor plays can be a lead, featured, or a walk-on role.

**Antagonist:** a character who most actively opposes the protagonist.

An **arc** is the shape of a script, the order of the pieces of a play script: the context, the conflict or build up, the climax and the resolution.

**Artistic economy:** the precise amount of anything needed to serve the actor or the play.

**Atmosphere:** expression of mood, usually applied to the set.

An **audition** is a short performance to show off the talents of an **actor**, **singer** or **dancer**. The **director**, **producer**, the **casting director**, and the play's creative team watch the audition to decide if the performer is right for the part.

The **audience** is made up of people who have purchased tickets to a performance and sit in the area of the theater called the house. The audience will applaud—clap their hands—when they like a song, joke, dance number or a riveting monologue.

**Backstage** is the area that is out of view of the audience, where dressing rooms, wardrobe department, scenery and prop rooms, and the crew are located.

**Blackout** is when the lights on the stage are turned off at the end of a scene, both for dramatic effect and to hide the scene change from the audience.

**Blocking:** the plotting of action by the director.

**Broadway** is the most famous theatrical district in the center of Manhattan in New York City. It is made up of 40 theaters, where some of the most successful shows in history have been performed. The best actors, singers, and dancers in the world traditionally play eight shows a week (6 evenings and 2 afternoons—except Mondays, when the theaters are dark).

**Break a Leg** is what actors say to one another instead of “good luck.” Actors believe it is bad luck to say “good luck.”

**Box Office** is an enclosed area, usually in the lobby, where tickets are sold. You can also purchase tickets online and over the telephone.

**Callback**—every actor wants to get a callback. It means being asked to return after the first audition.

**Cast**—all the actors and actresses who have an acting role in a production. Every member of the cast contributes to the success of a show.

**Center of interest:** point of focus at any given time.

**Climax:** the high point of action in the play, which is the turning point in the plot.

**Concentration:** focused attention.

**Conflict:** dramatic opposition of the protagonist with (a) himself, (b) with his fellow man, or (c) with society or fate.

**Contrast:** differences emphasized by the presence of the opposite.

**Costume** is the (different) clothing worn by actors in a performance. Once an actor puts on a costume, and wigs, and padding, and makeup, it helps him become the character he is playing.

**Costume Designer** is the person who imagines, designs and creates the costumes and is responsible for the total look of the show’s characters. The designer has to research the setting, time, and place of a play and to determine which colors, fabrics, and accessories will authentically and believably transform an actor into a character.

**Cover:** obscuring an actor from sight of the audience either by furniture or by another actor.

**Critiques:** evaluations wherein both strengths and deficiencies are noted.

**Craft:** the various artistic techniques that enable an actor to express him or herself.

**Crew** is the team of people who work backstage to help put on the production. Technicians, electricians, carpenters, painters, lighting designers, makeup artists and dressers are just a few of the many people who work behind the scenes.

**Cue:** a signal for an actor’s speech or action, usually the last three words of another actor’s speech.

**Cut:** take out; or stop action.

**Drama:** a composition in prose or verse portraying life and character by means of dialogue and action; a play, a story presenting the conflict of two opposing forces, designed to be presented by actors before an audience.

**The Director** is responsible for the overall artistic vision of a production, and also tells the actors what to do on stage.

**Dressing Room** is the backstage place where actors change into their costumes, put on makeup or just rest between acts. During a show, a **dresser** helps actors make their costume changes.

**Encore** is what the audience calls out when they really like a song or dance and would like to see it performed again. Encore is French for “again.”

**Expressionism:** an objective representation of the subjective---i.e., of thoughts and emotions.

**Farce:** a play in which the comedy is based on exaggerated or absurd situations.

**The Fourth Wall** is the invisible, imaginary wall that separates the audience from the stage. This space allows the actors to maintain their world of make-believe, and for the audience to believe the world they are watching is real.

**Front of the House** is the area in the front of the theater, including the box office, the lobby, and the concession stands, where souvenirs, programs and refreshments are sold.

**Glow Tape** is tape that is used in the dark to mark the stage floor so that actors can locate their places in a blackout.

**Headshot** is a photograph that an actor leaves with the director. His resume, with his name and contact information is attached to the back.

**High comedy:** a play based on wit.

**House** is the entire theater beyond the front of the stage. It's where the audience sits, and it also includes the orchestra pit.

**House Lights** in the theater are when the audience sits, which are turned off during the performance. They are blinked at the end of intermission to let the audience know the next act is about to begin.

**House Manager** is responsible for managing the auditorium, ushers, and anything to do with the audience. Seats, doors, lights dimmed, programs...the house manager is in charge.

**House Seating** consists of: Orchestra>the main seating area of the auditorium, on the same level as the stage. Messanine>the second level upstairs in the theater. Balcony>the uppermost seating area, behind the messanine.

**Impressionism:** the projection of a sense impression without adherence to reality or fact.

**Improvisation** occurs when actors invent the scene and the lines as they go along, straying from the script. Actors are trained to think on their feet and to react quickly when they improvise. A scene created from actors's imaginations without a script is called an **improv**.

**Intermission:** This is a short period of time (usually 15 to 20 minutes) during which people in the audience stretch their legs and maybe purchase a snack or drink.

**Indies:** short for independent films and productions.

**Lights** are used in the theater to illuminate the actors and scenery on the stage. They are used for setting the mood, establishing the time of day, and focusing the audience's attention. The Lighting Designer is the person who designs the lighting for a show. He/she plans which lights are used and when they are used to help create setting. A follow spot is a movable spotlight used by a member of the **lighting crew** to follow and highlight a performer. Gel is a thin sheet of colored plastic placed in front of lights to add color to the beam (an old technique).

**Low comedy:** a play based on broad physical humor.

**Marquee** is a permanent canopy over the entrance of the theater which displays the name of the play being performed. If a performer or director is well known, their name will be displayed as well.

**Mediums:** the different types of media where you might find acting, including TV, the radio, theater and the Web.

**Mood:** an emotional state, usually the result of a combination of emotions.

**Motivation** is the reason or reasons behind a character's actions or behavior.

**Naturalism:** an extreme form of realism.

**Nemesis:** forces set in motion by the character which cause his destruction.

**Notices** are the newspaper, television, and online reviews a show receives from theater critics. Reviewers usually give a summary of the plot, a critique of the performances, and an opinion about whether the show is worth seeing.

**Observation** is the act of looking closely at people and the environment to enhance your acting work.

**Orchestra** is made up of **musicians**—from pianists to violinists, from drummers to trombonists—who play the music for a show. During a performance they often sit in the orchestra pit, which is the lowered area between the stage and the front orchestra seats. Sections of the Orchestra: the orchestra is made up of four sections. Strings (violins, violas, cellos, double bass, harps, and guitars); Wind (piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, and saxophones); Percussion (drums, cymbals, triangles, tambourines, piano, and xylophones); Brass (trumpets, trombones, horns and tubas). There is a **conductor** responsible for hiring the musicians, running song rehearsals, leading the orchestra during the show; and is the

connection between the actors and the musicians. In a musical show, the composer writes the music, which is called the score, and the lyricist writes the words to the songs.

**Overture** is the introductory music played before a musical show.

**Pace** is the overall movement of the play; it is a combination of tempo and rhythm.

**Pantomime:** the bodily expression of an idea or emotion.

**Places:** the call for actors and technicians to take their places for the opening of an act.

A **play** is a musical, drama or comedy production that is performed onstage. A **playwright** writes a comedy or a drama, and a **librettist** writes the script (book) for a musical. A **drama** is a serious play, more thoughtful in its theme and subject. A **comedy** is a funny play—the more the audience laughs, the better. A **musical** can be either a comedy or a drama, but it uses music and lyrics to tell its story.

A **playbill** is the program given out to the audience that lists the cast and crew of a production.

**Plot:** the contrived sequence of events in a play; the production form of a stage production.

**Protagonist:** the pivotal character; the center of the conflict.

**Project** is to send your voice through space with quality as well as volume.

**Quick Change** is a change of costume that has to happen very fast and takes place close to the side of the stage, usually in the wings.

**Read-through or first reading** is the rehearsal period that begins with the entire cast assembled around a table, in a rehearsal studio or on the stage, reading the full script out loud.

**Realism:** a presentation of life—external reality—in acting and staging.

**Rehearsal** is the learning and practicing of a show. The dress rehearsals are the last rehearsals—done in full costume, without scripts—before the play opens. Notes are delivered by the director to the cast and crew during and at the end of rehearsals. These notes help develop the characters being portrayed and unify the production.

**Roadshow** is the theatrical performers or troupe that tours towns and cities with a show, usually one that has been a success on Broadway. This way, theater fans who cannot make it to Broadway can still see a real, live Broadway show.

**Rhythm:** the pulse and beat.

**Stage** is the acting area of the theater where a show is performed. There are different kinds of stages: *Proscenium Stage*—a traditional stage with a frame and curtain separating it from the audience. The curtain is a cloth or drape that separates the stage from the audience. The

wings are the areas to the left and right of the stage that can't be seen by the audience. Actors stand in the wings waiting to enter the stage. The wings can also be used to store scenery and props. The Proscenium is the frame around the stage that creates a boundary between the acting area and the audience. An audience sits facing the stage in a traditional proscenium theater.

**Thrust Stage**—a stage that extends out into the audience.

**Theater-in-the-Round**—the audience sits surrounding the stage and is close to the actors and action.

When **“upstage”** you are in the area of the stage farthest away from the audience. **“Downstage”** is the area nearest to the audience. **“Offstage”** is the stage area out of the audience's view. **“Stage Right”** is the right side of the stage when facing the audience. **“Stage Left”** is the left side of the stage when facing the audience. **“Fly Space”** is high above the stage, out of the audience's view.

The **stage set** is the physical setting of the play, designed by the **set designer** to express the concept of the show. The scenery is all the pieces that make up the set, including flats, furniture and backdrops. A flat is a wooden frame with a painted canvas stretched over it and is the most basic piece of scenery. **Trap** is an opening in the stage floor that can be used for special effects or for an actor to enter or exit a scene in a surprising way.

**Scene Change** occurs when the set is changed between scenes or acts—it may show a new location.

**Script** is the written text of a play or musical. It includes the stage directions, such as where and when a character enters the stage, where he stands and different scene descriptions. Memorizing lines is one of the hardest jobs an actor has. All actors have to know their lines.

**Showmanship:** a sense of what is theatrically effective.

**Stage Directions** are the playwrights written instructions to the director and actors about when characters enter and exit a scene, how they cross the stage, and how they say their lines. Stage directions provide details about what happens in the background, what sounds are heard, and what the lighting should be, and what the mood of the scene is. There are five major areas of the stage—which are also the five basic stage directions given to guide an actor's movements:

- Upstage
- Downstage
- Stage Right
- Stage Left
- Center Stage

The stage manager keeps a prompt book which has all the notes about actors' movements and positions on the stage (also known as blocking), as well as notes about lighting cues, props and costumes.

*Prompt Book Secret Code:* Stage Manager's notation in prompt book: XDSL to DSC, XUS and out SR. What it means: Cross downstage left to downstage center, cross upstage and exit stage right.

**Stage Fright** is when the feeling of nervousness performers feel before the show begins. It is also known as butterflies or the jitters.

**Standing Ovation** is when the audience stands up, claps and cheers for a performance.

**Tag line:** an actor's speech at the close of an act, or of the play.

**Tempo:** time, rate of speed.

**Theme:** sometimes also referred to as the spine, it is the main idea or ideas of the script/play.

**Timing:** the art of regulating the execution of a line or movement to occur at the exact psychological moment.

**Tragedy:** a play in which the protagonist, a noble character, is defeated by forces beyond his control.

**"Trod the boards":** slang for acting

**Understudy** is an actor in the cast who learns all the lines and blocking of a major role and is able to replace the regular performer at a moment's notice.

**The Voice** is one of an actor's most important tools when performing. They must train their voices to project, sing, speak and enunciate. Plenty of water, warm tea, and warm-up exercises help to keep their vocal chords in tip-top shape.

**Young Performers** are actors who are under the age of sixteen.



**"The Lingo"** was written by Neidre Mychals, a **Written Words Word Artist**, for the Dazzle Acting Class. It represents the most common theater-related words and terms most likely to be used in Dazzle's six acting courses. As student actors progress in their training, they will also need to become familiar with staging and lighting terminology.