

Acting and Stage Terminology Vocabulary List

“Magic If” – Acting tool invented by Stanislavski in which the actor asks, “What would I do if I were the character in the situation?”

Aside – A character’s brief remark, often witty, delivered directly to the audience. Other characters on stage are presumed not to hear it. It is a presentational technique that was most often used in comedies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century.

Beat – The section of the script during which a single objective is played.

Blocking – The physical ingredients of storytelling onstage—movement, gestures, & business.

Cheating or (Cheating out) – Angling the body slightly toward the audience, while still presuming to face the character you are in a conversation with.

Cold Reading – An audition in which you are asked to read from a scene without having the opportunity to fully prepare

Cue – In general, the line preceding your own that “cues” you to speak.

Cue to Cue – A rehearsal where actors are asked to play only the moment leading up to and during a section of the play where lighting, sound, or set elements are added or taken away.

Emotional Memory – The use of personal memory to create an emotion that can be applied to an acting situation. An age-old technique, made prominent by Stanislavski in his early writing, but later discarded by him.

External Technique – The outside-in approach to acting in which an actor focuses first on what his or her character needs to be doing rather than what the character is thinking or feeling.

Fourth Wall – The imaginary separation between the actors onstage and the audience watching a production. The actors do not acknowledge the presence of the audience.

Gesture – A specific physical action that communicates emotion, information, or attitude.

Given Circumstances – The who, what, when, & where of a play.

Goal – What the character wants to achieve.

Inciting Incident – An event that is the catalyst for the action of a play.

Inner Monologue – The subtext that an actor goes through while acting a role; the thoughts and feelings that may be as important to the role as the dialogue itself.

Intention – Another word for acting objective, or action, that an actor pursues while onstage.

Line Cue – Specifically, the last syllable of the last line preceding your own.

Monologue – A sustained speech delivered by an actor without interruption, or a sustained speech delivered by an actor spoken without the physical presence of another actor.

Motivation – The reason a character pursues a particular super objective. The motivation cannot be played directly; rather, it can be used as a detective device to find the need.

Objective – The needs an actor playing a character pursues at all times while onstage.

Obstacles – The things in a scene or play that keep a character from fulfilling his or her objectives. They provide conflict and heighten the stakes of a situation by creating conflict and upping the risk factor.

Pace – The speed at which you pick up your cue and deliver the next line of your dialogue.

Practical Props – Props that actually have to work during a performance.

Props or Properties – Small and usually hand-carried objects used by actors during performance.

Sense Memory – The use of our strong powers of recall relating to smell, sound, taste, touch as well as sight to enhance the emotional power of an acting moment or situation.

Soliloquy – A speech given directly to the audience, ordinarily with no one else on stage. It was common in ancient and Elizabethan drama and in modern drama as well. Usually played as a direct address to the audience, sometimes played as a character thinking aloud in the audience's presence.

Stage Business – Hand or other small movements that actors make, often with props that although normally incidental to the plot convey lifelike behavior.

Stage Left – In a proscenium theatre, the actor's left, while facing the audience.

Stage Right – In a proscenium theatre, the actor's right, while facing the audience.

Stanislavsky, Konstantin – The Russian theatre director, actor, and teacher most responsible for the manner and technique in which acting craft is taught. (1863-1938) Co-founder/director of of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1897.

Strasberg, Lee – Austrian-born (but American) acting teacher, artistic director of the Actor's studio, and developer of what came to be known as "Method Acting," an approach based on early writings of Stanislavski.

Subtext – The meaning of a line of dialogue in terms of the acting objective being pursued.

Superobjective – The overall need that an actor as the character pursues during the course of a play – Stanislavski.

Tactics – The means by which a character seeks to achieve his or her goal. Tactics can be inductive or threatening.

Three-Quarters (Actually $\frac{1}{4}$) – A stage position in a proscenium theatre, where the actor has his or her side facing half-way toward the audience. Thus the audience is essentially seeing a three-quarter view of the actor.

Throughline – the combined series of actions that are mapped out in a script by an actor in working out his or her character’s story moment by moment, scene by scene.

Upstage – The opposite of downstage; the back part of a stage in a proscenium theatre; the farthest part from the audience. Derives from the eighteenth century, when the stage was slanted (“raked”) toward the audience, with the rear of the stage higher than the front.

Upstaging – To deliberately go upstage of an actor with whom you are sharing a scene, in order to make the actor face upstage to maintain the illusion of eye contact, or even a genuine conversation. Considered – if done for this purpose – selfish behavior worthy only of a prima donna.