An Introduction to Technical Theatre
Glossary

**acting area**: in lighting; an area of the stage where actors play a moment or scene, and which requires illumination.

**acting notes**: refinements and corrections given to actors during the rehearsal or performance process. These notes usually come from the director or stage manager.

**additive color mixing**: in lighting; the combination of several filtered lights on one area. Lighting color mixes toward white light.

**amplifier**: in sound; a devise that boosts a sound signal to a level strong enough to push a speaker.

**arena theatre**: a theatre space wherein the audience surrounds the playing area.

**apron**: the flat extension of the stage that projects from the proscenium toward the audience.

**audition**: a try-out session in which actors are seen by a director for potential selection to play a role in the show.

**balanced cable**: for audio; a cable that has three wires to help reduce noise in the signal chain.

**barn door**: In lighting; an accessory equipped with adjustable flaps to block the source.

**batten**: pipes suspended above a stage used for supporting scenery, drapery, and lighting.

**beam angle**: in lighting; the portion of the beam of light that is at least 50% as bright as the center of the beam.

**binder**: in paint; the glue in the mixture that affixes the pigment to the painted surface.

**black box theatre**: a theatre space wherein the audience and performance are in one room. These theatres are usually equipped with movable seating to allow for various configurations.
**blackout**: in lighting; a cue that fades all lights out.

**blackout drape**: a full-stage, black drape.

**blackout traveler**: a full-stage, black drape that can open and close horizontally.

**blocking**: the planned movement of actors around the playing area.

**border light**: a multi-cell fixture primarily used to light drops. Aka strip light.

**breakaway**: any prop that has been designed to break apart without injuring the performer.

**build schedule**: a chart of each piece required for a production with reference to when each stage of construction must be completed.

**bump-up**: in lighting; a cue that quickly raises the lighting level.

**bump-out**: in lighting; a cue that quickly goes to a blackout.

**butt joint**: a simple wood joint in which two pieces are cut square and abutted together.

**carriage bolt**: a bolt whose upper face has a rounded surface with the underside shaped as a tapered square collar. Used to join wood without leaving a protruding head.

**cast**: the group of actors playing all the parts in a play.

**circuit**: in lighting; a numbered cable associated with a dimming system.

**color**: in lighting; one of the four controllable qualities of light, achieved through use of color filters, aka gels.

**color rendering**: a colored sketch or painting of design elements or costumes.

**community theatre**: a noncommercial, local group made by and intended for their community.

**company**: a group including all the members of a theatrical organization or production.

**complementary colors**: colors opposite from one another on a color wheel.

**connector**: the style of electrical plug on a piece of equipment.

**contact sheet**: a document with contact information listed for the entire cast and crew of a production.
control booth: an area or room dedicated to the equipment used to control theatrical equipment for presentation.

consumable: anything that is intentionally used up or destroyed during a production.

control channels: in lighting; the numbers used at the lighting control console to control the actions of the dimmers.

controllable qualities of light: for lighting; intensity, color, movement, direction.

corner block: a thin plywood triangle used to support the corner joints of a flat frame.

costume: the wardrobe and accessories designed for a character in a play.

costume rendering: A designer’s full-body sketch of a costume design. Usually colored, often accompanied by fabric swatches.

costume parade: a showing of characters in their wardrobe under stage light for director’s approval and adjustments.

counterweight arbor: the vertically tracked weight carriage of a counterweight fly line.

counterweight system: a fly system utilizing a tracked arbor to control the movement of a batten.

creative team: the group of people responsible for the design of a production; typically the director, designers, choreographer, and musical director.

crossover: a method of travelling from one side of the stage to another, unseen by the audience.

cue: a directive for action. For example, a change in lighting.

cue-to-cue: a technical rehearsal in which action around cues is rehearsed but dialogue between is skipped over.

cultural associations: for color; those associations we learn through our culture.

cut drop: a drop that has a profiled edge.

cutter: for costumes; the person who cuts fabric to be sewn into costumes.

cyclorama (aka cyc): a large backdrop often used to represent sky. These traditionally wrap around the upstage wings.

cyc light: a lighting fixture designed to light drops and cycloramas.
deck: the stage floor or level built on top of the stage floor.

design presentation: A meeting in which designers present and explain designs to the company.

dimmer: in lighting; a unit that controls the electric supply to the lighting instrument allowing it to fade.

dimmer per circuit: in lighting; a theatre where each lighting circuit is wired to its own dimmer.

direction: in lighting; one of the four controllable qualities of light.

DMX512: in lighting; the electronic protocol language used by control consoles to control lighting equipment.

draaper: in costumes; a person who builds wardrobe by draping fabric over a dress form.

draping: the art of building wardrobe by draping fabric over a dress form.

drop: a large flat piece of fabric used as part of the scenery for a show.

dry tech: a technical rehearsal for crews for which the performers are not present.

drywall screws: specialty screws with qualities of sharpness and brittleness.

Edison connector: in lighting; a standard style, two-bladed plug in common use in U.S. homes.

effects: in sound; one of the three major areas of sound design, effects cover any sounds that are not music cues or related to reinforcement.

electric: in lighting, a batten specifically fitted for use as a place to hang lighting instruments.

ellipsoidal reflector spotlight: a standard hard-edged theatrical lighting instrument using a two-lens system and an elliptically shaped reflector.

facing: a surface added to the sides of a platform so that it appears solid.

false proscenium: a portal that sits in front or inside of the natural proscenium creating a new frame for the stage.

field angle: in lighting; the portion of the beam of light that is less than 50% as bright as the center of the beam.

fight call: a preshow rehearsal conducted to review any physical business in a performance to minimize the chance for injuries.
fill light: in lighting; the dimmer or unmotivated source of light representing the reflected light of the scene, it fills the shadows created by the key light.

filler: in paint; particulate matter added to increase its opacity.

first hand: a costume shop employee who assists the costume shop manager in day-to-day operations.

fixed caster: a caster wheel that cannot swivel.

fitting: an appointment for an actor to be fitted into their costume.

flat: theatrical walls built as scenery.

flat-patterning: the use of paper patterns to cut fabric pieces for costumes.

flood: in lighting; to widen the beam of a lighting instrument.

fly: to rig objects in the theatre so they can be lifted and lowered above the stage.

fly system: a system of ropes or cables allowing scenery to be rigged to a grid over the stage.

focus call: a work call to adjust the lighting instruments to the designer’s specifications for a production.

follow-spot: a lighting instrument on a rotating base allowing an operator to follow an actor with its beam.

Fresnel: in lighting; a soft-edged instrument with a step lens.

functions of light: in lighting; mood, illumination, modeling, and selective focus.

gel: a common term used to refer to color filters for lights. Gel is a holdover term from days when filters were made of gelatin.

gobo: a common term used to refer to cut-out template patterns for lights.

grand drape: the main curtain on a stage, often richly colored.

grand teaser: a short and wide drape that hangs over the main drape and is often richly colored.

grid: the network of beams above the stage that support the rigging system components.

ground row: a low horizontal scenic element, usually used to hide lighting along the stage floor.
**hand:** in costumes; the feel of a fabric.

**hand prop:** a prop handled by performers.

**hard-cover flat:** a flat frame with a hard face typically ¼” plywood or luaan. Can be flat framed, metal framed, Broadway, or studio style.

**hard-edged light:** a fixture with a defined edge to its beam of light.

**hazer:** a unit that continuously puts out a relatively light atmospheric fog.

**head block:** a multi-sheave block used to change the direction of control lines for a batten.

**headset:** a part of the communication system used by crews during a performance.

**headset system:** a communication system allowing crews to remain in contact throughout a theatre.

**hex bolt:** a bolt fastener with a hexagonal top for easy tightening with a wrench.

**hold:** a temporary stop of rehearsal action.

**house:** the audience area of an auditorium.

**illumination:** in lighting; one of the four controllable qualities of light.

**input device:** for sound; a playback device or microphone.

**intensity:** in lighting; relative brightness.

**jack:** a triangular frame used to brace flats and keep them vertical.

**jackknife platform:** a platform designed to pivot onstage from a fixed point on one corner.

**key light:** in lighting; the brighter source of light, motivated by the presumed source of light for the scene.

**keystone:** a thin plywood brace used to support the rail joints of a flat frame.

**lamp:** in lighting; the bulb (envelope), base, and filament unit for a lighting instrument.

**LED fixture:** a lighting fixture that uses light emitting diodes rather than an incandescent source.

**leg:** a style of drapery, these tall narrow drapes mask the wing space along the sides of a stage.
levels: raised areas on the stage.

lift line: the lines that support a batten in a rigging system.

light plot: a scaled plan showing the placement of lighting equipment for a production.

lighting control console: the interface for control of theatrical lighting. Typically a computer based control that replays preprogrammed lighting cues sequentially.

lighting filters: colored translucent sheets placed in front of lights to filter their spectrum.

lighting rehearsal: a showing of light cues by their designer for the director and stage manager prior to technical rehearsals.

lighting system: the components of lighting equipment that allow for control of lighting states on a stage.

line level: a low-level electronic signal used to route and process sound.

load-in: the time when technical support elements are installed in a theatre for a production.

load-in door: the door or opening provided by a theatre for production equipment to enter the space.

loading dock: an area adjacent to the load-in door where trucks can offload equipment into the space.

loft block: an individual sheave that changes the direction of a line in a rigging system.

main drape: sometimes referred to as a grand drape, the main curtain in a theatre often richly colored.

mask: to hang curtains so they block the audience view of backstage areas.

mic level: a very low-level electronic signal used to transfer the transduced microphone signal into a system for processing. Ordinarily this signal must be run-through a pre-amp.

mixer: for sound; a signal routing device allowing adjustment of audio levels from and to various sources.

modeling: in lighting: one of the four functions of light, the use of highlight and shadow to sculpt objects with light.
mood: in lighting; one of the four functions of light, the emotional quality of a lighting moment.

monitor: in sound; a speaker placed so that performers can hear one another.

movement: in lighting; one of the four controllable qualities of light, the physical movement of light sources or perceived movement through changing cues.

moving light: a lighting fixture with motorized components to allow for remote control.

moving mirror light: a lighting fixture equipped with a motorized mirror to allow for remote control of the beam direction.

music: in sound; one of the three primary responsibilities of a sound designer, any music played during a production.

natural associations: for color, any associations we may be born with.

natural stage floor: the top surface of the stage floor without scenery added.

nominal dimension: the dimension of lumber prior to finishing, not the actual dimension.

notions: for costumes; items including buttons, zippers, hooks, and other fabric construction accessories.

orchestra pit: the space between the stage and the auditorium, usually below stage level, where an orchestra can be held.

paper tech: a meeting in which cues are placed in the stage manager’s prompt book.

PAR: a lighting instrument using a parabolic reflector lamp.

PARNel: a highbred lighting instrument blending features of a Fresnel and a PAR, producing a soft-edged light.

patch panel: a flexible connection bay where lighting circuits are routed to dimmers.

personal prop: any prop that may be directly associated to a character, may include jewelry, parasols, combs, etc.

pigment: an additive that provides color.

pin connector: in lighting; a three-pin, flat, paddle-style electrical connector., aka stage-pin connector.

pin rail: a horizontal rail where lines are tied off to hold battens at required heights.
places call: a directive made by the stage manager to the company for all to go to the spot they need to be in in order to begin a performance.

plan: a graphic representation drawn as an overhead view.

plano-convex lens: in lighting; a lens that is flat on one side and has a convex curve profile on the other.

platform: a framed unit intended to support people or any raised area on a stage.

playback: the replaying of recorded media or type of media supported by equipment.

playing area: the area of the stage where the audience can view a performer.

portal: an archway formed by two legs and a border or similar framed opening.

practical: an item that must function onstage as it would in real life.

pre-amp: an amplifier designed to boost a mic level signal to a line level.

preproduction: the time before rehearsals and construction have begun.

preview performance: a public performance given before the advertised opening of a production.

primary colors: the base colors from which all others can be mixed. For pigment: red, blue, and yellow. For light: red, blue, and green.

proscenium theatre: a traditional theatre space where the audience and the stage are essentially two rooms with an archway cut from the adjoining wall.

production concept: the creative interpretation of a script that unifies the artistic vision of the creative team.

production meeting: a conference of appropriate production team members to share information and updates.

production resources: assets available to realize a given production.

production schedule: the calendar developed to track a production from inception through performances.

production team: the group of people responsible for realizing a production.

professional: generally refers to those paid for their efforts rather than volunteers.

profile flat: a flat wall with a shaped edge or edges.
prompt book: a copy of the script, maintained by the stage manager, that records the blocking and cues for a production.

property list: a list of all prop elements required for a production.

pull: to choose an item in the theatre stock for production use.

put-in rehearsal: a special rehearsal for an actor taking over an existing role.

raked stage: a stage for which the floor of the playing area has been raised at the back such that it angles up and away from the audience. This arrangement lends a false depth to the playing area.

reflector: in lighting; the element that collects wasted light from the lamp and refracts it in the direction of the lens.

reinforcement: in sound; one of the three main responsibilities of a sound designer, the balance and amplification of live sound elements and voices.

rehearsal clothes: clothing worn by actors during rehearsal periods to approximate the style of wardrobe they will wear for the show.

rehearsal report: Daily reports sent to the production team by the stage manager that chronicle the events of the previous rehearsal and list needs for upcoming rehearsals.

rehearsal room: the space where the directors and actors develop the performance.

rehearsal prop: an approximation of a show prop given to actors for the rehearsal period.

rehearsal schedule: a schedule of all rehearsals and their locations for a production.

resident designers: staff designers who may be assigned design work within a theatre season.

revolve: a rotating platform or stage.

rigged/rigging: something that has been hung on ropes or cables. In costumes; a garment that has been altered for fast removal.

rise/run: refers to stairs and the relative change in height over each individual tread’s depth.

rope set rigging: a flying system relying on a pin rail and sandbags to counter weight placed on a batten.

run: the length of time or number of performances for a production.
run-through: a rehearsal during which the entire show will be run in performance order.

sandbag: a bag of sand used to counterweight a rigged line or to add ballast to a unit.

scale: in drafting; the relative measured scale the drafting represents.

scene shift: a moment in which technicians change the locations of design elements during a performance.

script: the text of a play.

secondary colors: colors that can be created by mixing two neighboring primary colors together.

selective focus: in lighting; one of the four functions of light, the use of contrast to guide the eyes of the audience to the action.

set: the scenic environment designed for a play.

set dressing: items on the set that the performers do not handle, but add atmosphere and detail.

set props: large prop items and furniture pieces.

sheet goods: building materials such as plywood sold in flat sheets, typically measuring 4 feet by 8 feet.

shift light: a lighting state used during scene changes to facilitate the work and indicate to the audience that these moments are not part of the action of the play.

show curtain: a specialty curtain designed as scenery for a play.

shutters: in lighting; the metal flags that allow the beam to be shaped in the fixture.

signal chain: in sound; the path through the system the electronic signal is routed. Aka signal path.

signal to noise ratio: in sound; the balance of desired electronic signal to unwanted electric interference leaking into the signal.

signal path: see “signal chain.”

site-specific theatre: theatre performed in a nontraditional location.

sitzprobe: a rehearsal for singers and the orchestra in which the singers are seated or at least not following their set blocking.
skin: in scenery; the top surface of a scenic unit.

sky drop: a large drop representing the sky on a stage.

slip stage: a stage wagon, often large enough to hold an entire setting.

smoke machine: an effects unit that produces a vapor for fog and smoke.

snow cradle: a sling used to drop dry materials like snow and confetti from above a stage.

soft-cover flat: a temporary wall usually built with a wood frame, the face of the frame being covered in a fabric.

soft-edged light: in lighting; an instrument whose beam fades toward its edge, causing the perimeter to be indistinguishable.

sound system: the system of equipment allowing for controlled playback for a production.

source device: in sound; any input device bringing a signal into a sound system.

spacing rehearsal: a rehearsal conducted once scenery has been loaded into a theatre so the cast can make the adjustment from the tapelines of the rehearsal room to the physical setting.

special effect: any unusual effect used for a performance, these may be physical, pyrotechnic, auditory, or based in light.

spot/spotting down: in lighting; the narrowing of an instruments beam.

stage crew: the group of technicians needed for performance of a play.

stage combat: movement created to create the illusion of combat while keeping the performers safe.

stage direction: a system of directions given from the actor’s perspective to describe areas of the stage.

stage house: the stage area between the proscenium and the upstage wall including the stage, wings, grid, and fly system.

stage monitor: a system that allows actors backstage to hear the dialogue being spoken on stage.

stock scenery: scenic elements built and stored for reuse by the theatre.

stock size: a predetermined size that stock elements are built in for easy reuse.
straight-run platform wagon: a platform equipped with fixed casters to run in a straight direction on stage.

strip light: a multi-cell lighting fixture typically used to light drops. Aka border light.

stumble-through: an early rehearsal held after show blocking is complete to show designers the shape and flow if the show.

subtractive color: in lighting; the use of filters to limit the spectrum of light.

sugar-glass: a term used to describe breakaway prop items that appear as glass to the audience. Though sugar can be used, resins are frequently employed to manufacture these breakaway items.

swatch: a small piece of fabric that accompanies designs for color and textural reference.

swivel caster: a caster with a rotating base allowing for it to roll at any given angle.

teafer: traditionally the first short and wide drape upstage of the proscenium. This drape masks the first electric.

technical notes: rehearsal and performance refinements or correctives regarding the technical elements of a production.

technical rehearsals: rehearsals that focus on refining the technical elements of a production.

template: in lighting; a cut-out placed in a lighting instrument to project an image. Aka gobo.

tertiary colors: colors mixed from a primary and its neighboring secondary color.

thumbnail sketch: an early, rough sketch of a design idea.

tie-off cleat: a piece of stage hardware used to secure a line for quick adjustment.

title block: a window of text on a scaled drafting that lists the subject of the draft, its scale, and other pertinent information.

thrust theatre: a theatre space where the audience surrounds three sides of the playing area.

top of show: the beginning of a play or performance.

tormentor: The first set of tall and narrow drapes hung upstage of the proscenium and used to mask the wings of a stage.
**transmission:** in lighting; the percentage of source light allowed to pass through a color filter.

**trap:** an opening in the floor of a stage or platform used to facilitate appearances and disappearances.

**transducer:** a device that translates an electronic sound waveform into a physical sound wave or reverses the process.

**twist-lock connector:** in lighting; a three-blade connector in a circular formation equipped with a locking ground.

**unbalanced cable:** in sound; a cable equipped with only two wires that has little resistance to electric interference.

**valence:** a horizontal curtain designed to mask the rod or batten.

**vehicle:** one of the components of paint. The vehicle allows the paint to be spread and either evaporates, cures, or is absorbed.

**wagon:** a rolling platform.

**washes:** in scenic painting; translucent paints used to layer colors on scenery.

**wet tech:** a technical rehearsal incorporating cast and crew.

**wing:** the area outside the playing area of a stage that is unseen by the audience.

**wood grain:** in lumber; the longitudinal arrangement of wood fibers. In painting; a finish imitating the surface of wood.

**yoke:** in lighting; the U-shaped support connecting the lighting instrument and the C-clamp allowing for a tilting action.