

The Stage Manager's Checklist for Stage Combat

by J. Allen Suddeth, excerpted from *Fight Directing for the Theatre*, and updated by the author.

THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

- Is the rehearsal room floor clean, taped out, and free of excess furniture?
- Is there a well-stocked first aid kit handy?
- Are there knee/elbow pads available for use in rehearsal?
- Is the room lighting bright and even?
- Are all the fight props available at the first rehearsal and thereafter?
- Are all the fight props accounted for at the end of the rehearsal and stored securely?
- Is an emergency phone number at your fingertips in case of an accident?
- Have an adequate number of fight rehearsals been called each week?
- Have the other departments (lighting, props, costumes, set) been consulted about choreographic specifics, or any changes in the fight?
- Have you planned an offstage track for each weapon? Where/how are weapons stored offstage? Should a sword rack be built? Are there any handoffs?
- Have you familiarized yourself with any firearms in the play? Where are they securely stored offstage? Who is allowed to handle them? Is there a written tracking sheet for each firearm, and clear on and offstage protocol?
- Have the understudies/swings rehearsed the fight scene(s) among themselves, and with principals?
- Have you worked closely with the prop department to determine where weapons must be placed for actors' entrances?
- Are special effects anticipated? Have they been planned for in the budget and are they being safely built? Is special rehearsal time needed in tech for safety reasons?

- Are substitute props necessary until the real thing arrives? (Examples include rubber knives, plastic guns, etc.)
- If falls are anticipated, will you need pads, a mat or perhaps several mats, at rehearsals?
- Have the stage blood requirements been discussed and planned for? And don't forget tearaways (costumes, curtains, etc.), or breakaways (bottles, windows, etc.) must be dealt with in terms of set up, rehearsals, clean up, and reset for the next show?
- Are there moments in the fight staging or choreography that also require interfacing with an Intimacy Coordinator, and if so, made sure to schedule that into rehearsal time?

BASIC SAFETY CHECKLIST- REHEARSALS

Rehearsal Space or Stage

- Sweep and mop the floor. Check for wet spots.
- Identify and fix or countersink any nail or screw heads, and splinters in the deck, and fix any marly tape joints that are questionable. Remove any excess furniture, props, or storage cabinets from the rehearsal room. Make sure that any railings are secure and exits clear for any quick actor exits.
- Make sure the lighting is bright and even throughout the room, or at fight call on set.
- During "tech" rehearsal, help actors get accustomed to low, or blinding side light for performances.
- Check platforms for shifting, holes, nail or screw heads, and splinters during the run.
- Have a first-aid kit available and have hospital or emergency squad numbers posted backstage and in the booth.
- Check that the rehearsal room has enough height for sword play.
- Round sharp corners of the set or furniture.

Weapons

- Check bladed weapons for burrs, pits, and splinters; if necessary, repair.
- Check that each performer uses an assigned weapon.
- Count weapons before and after rehearsal or performance.
- Check sword handles and guards. Look for loose pommels and check for edge burrs daily.
- Have a separate table or a sword rack backstage to organize the weapons and label them.
- Clean and oil bladed weapons at least once a week.

- Clean and oil guns every time they are used.
- Lock away guns and blank ammunition separately. Use trigger locks.
- Create a fail-safe loading and cleaning procedure for modern and black-powder firearms.
- Track all weapons through the production.
- Check shields for cracks, splinters, and loose handles. Check furniture and deck for nail heads, and structural integrity.
- Preset an "emergency" weapon offstage in case of breakage

Performers

- Check for old injuries.
- Organize warm-ups and walk through rehearsals.
- 3. Arrange for braces, ace bandages, and padding to be available during rehearsals and performances.
- Watch for signs of tension, exhaustion, drug or alcohol abuse, real aggression, bad partnering, or "red-light fever."
- Make sure that performers wear adequate rehearsal shoes and clothes, removing cell phones and jewelry. Arrange for show shoes as soon as possible.
- Arrange a safety routine in case of injury or memory loss during performances or rehearsals.

Staff

- Have first-aid equipment nearby and stocked regularly. Have emergency room and ambulance phone numbers posted.
- Discuss and create a theater policy for injury onstage to performers and injury to audience members.
- Someone on the staff should have the equivalent of Red Cross first-aid training, as well as CPR.

BASIC SAFETY CHECKLIST- PERFORMANCES

- Have a first-aid box offstage where it is easily found.
- Have emergency phone numbers posted in obvious places in the booth, offstage, and in the dressing areas.
- Supervise fight call before every performance.
- Make sure that the stage is clear and swept and that all work is finished before fight call starts.
- Arrange for all props to be in place at the start of fight call.
- Arrange for blood effects to be built and maintained. Have blood props cleaned and blood sponges onstage refilled before each performance.
- Arrange for understudies to observe fight call.
- Have a notated version of each fight in the prompt book, to refer to in case of changes.
- Be alert to "actor's improvements" in the fight scenes, and fix them, or bring them to the attention of the fight captain.
- Be alert to drug or drinking problems affecting the performance of any cast members.
- Arrange with the fight captain and prop personnel for the maintenance of the weapons (i.e., gun cleaning, sword maintenance, etc.).
- For touring situations, or long runs, always have replacement sword blades among the props for quick replacement of accidentally broken props. For a long run in the same theatre, have an "emergency sword" offstage left and right in case one breaks onstage. In this way, any actor can simply walk offstage to get a new one and carry on!