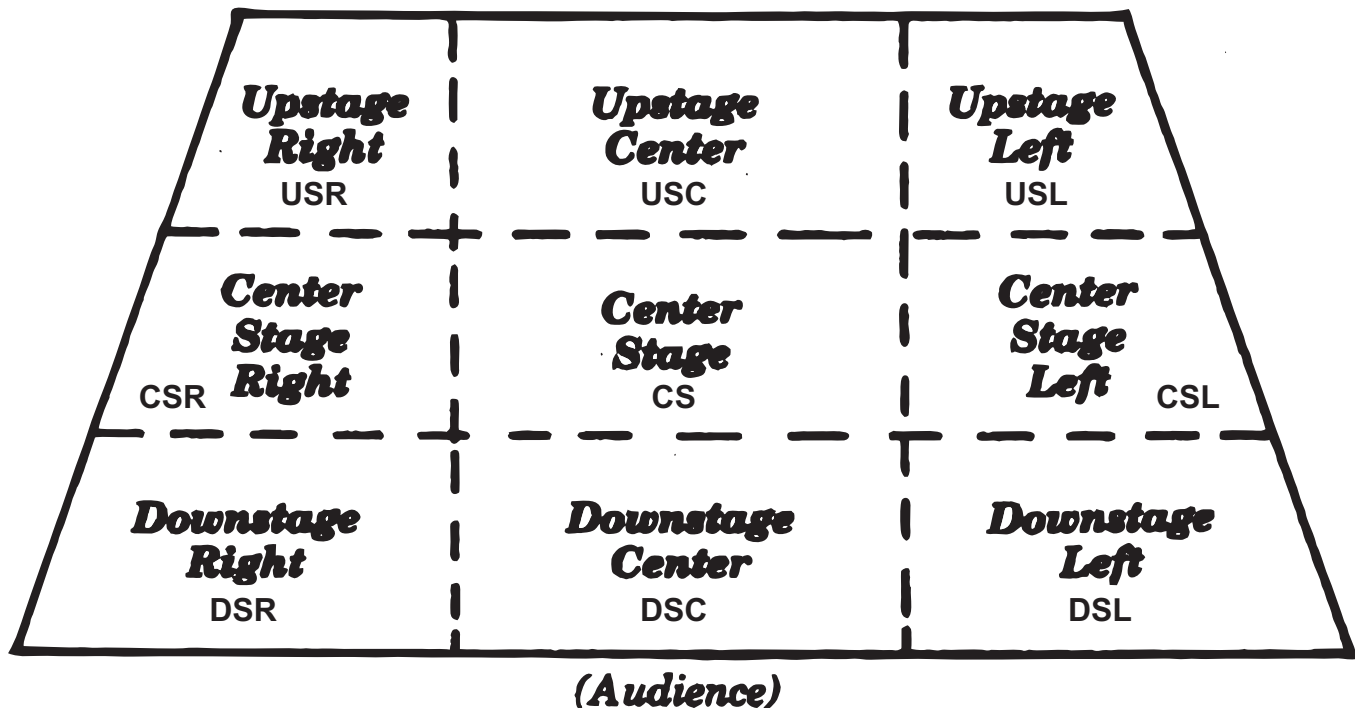


# Following Stage Directions



If you are to handle your body effectively on the stage, you need to learn the skills or techniques of the theater.

As an actor you must practice movement until it becomes natural in appearance to the audience. The fact that you had to learn stage movements should never be obvious to the audience.

In this section, we will discuss stage directions, stage areas, body positioning, and techniques to crossing the stage.

Stage Directions: Always apply to the actor facing the audience.

- Stage Right or SR - the actor's right as he faces the audience
  - Stage Left or SL - the actor's left as he faces the audience
  - Downstage or DS - near to the audience
  - Upstage or US - away from the audience
  - Below - same as Downstage
  - Above - same as Upstage
- (Note: This originated from the old theaters where the stage floor was sloped toward the audience.)

Stage Areas: The acting area on stage is divided into nine (9) locations and directions from playwrights and directors are usually given for those locations. Abbreviations are used regularly.

Generally, the downstage area is stronger than the upstage area, because it is nearer the audience. Stage right is stronger than stage left because the audience is conditioned to look from left to right in reading and carries this habit into all observations. [Audience left being stage right.] Because of the strength of downstage and stage right, important scenes will often be played there.

Other terms commonly used regarding stage areas:

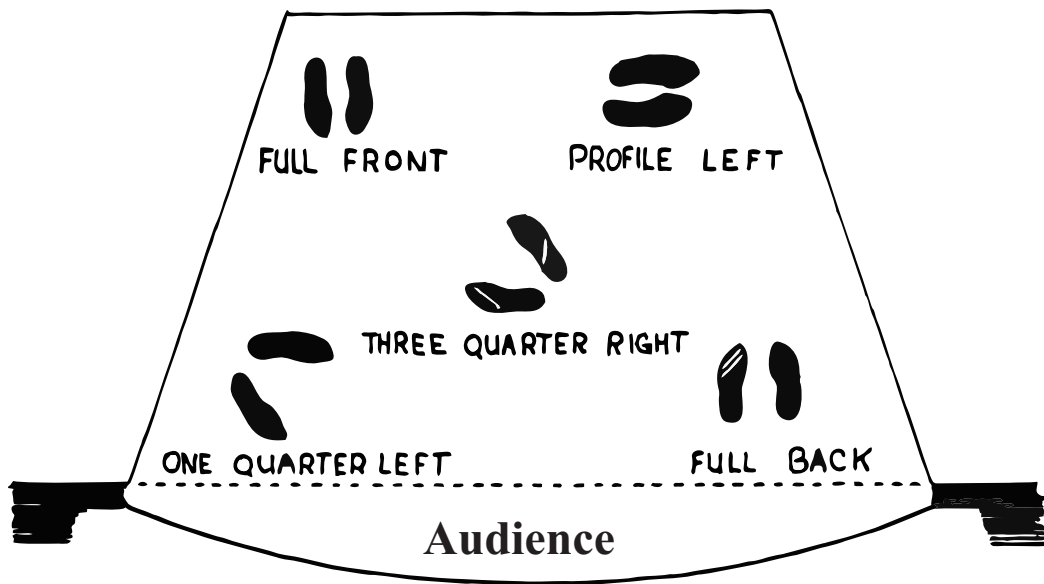
- Onstage - the acting area within the set, visible to the audience.
- Offstage - the parts of the stage not enclosed by the set, not visible to the audience.
- Backstage - the area behind the set.
- Wings - the offstage areas to the right and left of the acting area.
- Outfront - the auditorium where the audience sits; often referred to as the 'house.'

**Body Positions:** apply to the actor as he faces the audience. There are five (5) basic positions.

- One Quarter - the body is a quarter turn away from the audience. This position is most frequently used when two actors 'share' a scene. It places each of their bodies so that the audience can easily see them. Positioning of the actor's feet defines the turn - the upstage foot is parallel to the stage and the downstage foot is turned toward the audience at a 45 degree angle. The upstage shoulder is turned slightly toward stage center.
- Full front - the actor directly faces the audience.
- Profile or Half - two actors face each other with the upstage foot slightly facing center stage. This position is used for intense scenes (quarreling, accusatory).
- Three Quarter - the actor turns away from the audience to see three-quarters of his back; only one-quarter of the actor's face. This position is used for an actor to 'give' a scene (become less important to the flow of the scene), or turn all attention to another actor upstage who 'takes' the scene (become more important to the flow of the scene.)
- Full Back - the actor stands with his back to the audience. This position is used only on special occasions.
- **Notes:**
  - The one quarter, three quarter, and profile positions can be turned toward the right or left.
  - In all positions, the body and head should follow the angle of the feet.

**Stage Crosses:** symbol 'X' - movements from one stage area to another.

- Straight Cross - Generally, the actor takes the shortest, most direct route to his new position.
- Curved Cross - used when the actor must show indecision, casualness, grace, or ease.
- Counter-Cross - actors adjust to each other's cross. If one actor finds himself in the direct line as another, they 'counter' their position by moving a little and then re-adjusting their position after the cross. This keeps the stage balanced for the audience and avoids actors from running into each other during the scene.
- **Notes:**
  - Always begin the cross with the foot nearest the destination. This keeps the body turned toward the audience.
  - If an actor must cross while speaking, walk in front of the other characters.
  - If an actor needs to cross while others are speaking, cross behind these actors.
  - Cross with caution so as not to distract the audience from the other characters - do not 'steal' attention away from the speaker.
  - The moving figure dominates - if two actors cross stage together, the one with more lines should take the upstage position, a short step ahead of the other actor.

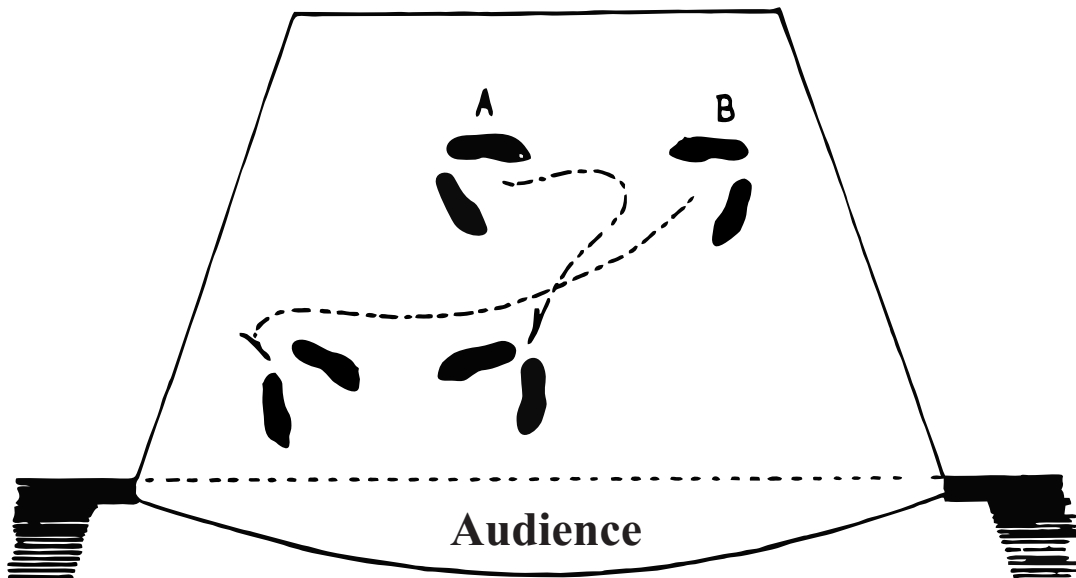


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**Notes:**

1. The one quarter, three quarter, and profile positions can be turned toward the right or left.
2. In all positions, the body and head should follow the angle of the feet.

**In the diagram below:** 'B,' the speaker, crosses right and moves in front of 'A.' When 'B' is directly in front of 'A,' 'A' counters by moving casually in the opposite direction a step or two and by turning toward 'B.' 'A' and 'B' finish their movement at the same time. On his next lines, 'A' drops down to 'B' so that they may share the scene.



**Stage Crosses:** symbol 'X' - movements from one stage area to another.