



An ACT-or's Handbook

Being in plays at Albany Civic Theater

111 W. First Avenue, Albany, Oregon 97321
ACT answering machine ... 928-4603

Important phone numbers (write in)

Director
Assistant Director
Stage Manager
Liaison
Volunteer Coordinator.....

Welcome to Albany Civic Theater

... and to the theater community that keeps our community theater alive!

You've just been cast. Congratulations! Right now you may be feeling excited, apprehensive, upbeat, inadequate, ecstatic or some combination thereof. If you've done a lot of shows here, you probably think you know what to expect next. If you haven't — and especially if you're relatively new to acting — you may be wondering what the heck you've gotten yourself into.

This little booklet attempts to pull together some advice, information and expectations to help you begin to feel at home here, and prepare you to become part of an acting ensemble that, with a lot of hard work and a little luck, will have a great time developing a wonderful show. Please read it carefully, even if you think you know what it's all about. It should help you understand how things are done here, and how you fit into the Big Picture. It ought to help you avoid pitfalls that can spoil the fun for everyone. If you have any questions, at any time, don't hesitate to ask your director, stage manager or Board liaison (see the section, below, entitled **The Board Liaison**).

Some of the material you'll find here is borrowed shamelessly from a wonderful book called *An Actor Behaves: From Audition to Performance*, by Tom Markus (Samuel French Trade Paperbacks, 1992, ISBN No. 0-573-69901-1). Although aimed at professional actors, it contains tried-and-true advice that can be useful to actors anywhere.

About our theater

Founded in 1951, ACT has been producing plays ever since, making us one of the four or five oldest theater companies — amateur or professional — in Oregon. Over the years, we have come up with ways of doing things that work great for us, even when they differ from the practices of some other theaters.

We own our facility, and are organized as a not-for-profit corporation in order to manage and maintain it. The theater is guided by a seven-member Board of Directors elected annually by, and accountable to, our paid, administrative members.

The proof of any theater's success is, ultimately, at the box office. Each year we seat nearly 10,000 people in our little shoebox of a theater. Many of our patrons are loyal "regulars" who have been attending shows here for decades; just as many, these days, are newcomers attracted to us by a particular play, or because they know someone who's in a show.

Each season, approximately 300 people take part in our productions, on stage and off. Each season, roughly one-third of those volunteers are new to our theater.

If our regulars — patrons and volunteers alike — are the collective memory of our organization, then the newcomers are the fresh blood that keeps us growing and thriving. It's important to us, as an organization, to provide both of those groups with a consistently enjoyable experience so they will return and remain involved with ACT.

We encourage you to get involved and stay involved in our theater community. Right now, you're probably preoccupied (and rightly so) with this show. But remember that there's life after closing night.

Consider yourself one of the family

Good ways to avoid the post-play blues, and to stay connected with the friends you will make here, are to buy an ACT membership, offer to usher the next show, or volunteer to help with one of the many projects that need to get done on a regular or semi-regular basis, from remodeling to putting up posters or making phone calls.

You can find out more about opportunities to take part in ACT by contacting our Volunteer Coordinator (write in the name and number at the top of this handbook). Let her know what you're interested in doing — or ask her what needs to be done — and she'll put you in touch with the right people.

Your director, meanwhile, can make sure that someone stops by a rehearsal to sell memberships to the cast.

We live on the energy, ideas and hard work of our volunteers. If you think of something that would make this a better theater, feel free to make a suggestion, through your director, liaison or any Board member or manager. Be warned, though: The phrase, "You know what this place really needs ..." is often answered by, "Great idea! You'll take charge of that, right?"

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Being in an ACT show

ACT gives directors wide artistic leeway to submit the plays they wish to direct, to run rehearsals as they see fit, to use their own creative approaches to developing their shows, and to managing the day-to-day production process. Each director may have slightly different expectations for their casts and crews, and yours should let you know early on what you can expect.

Beyond that, though, there are certain things you can expect about working at ACT, no matter what the show. And we have our own expectations of you — how you will behave, what you will contribute and how the rare problems that may arise will be resolved.

The director is the creative engine who drives your show. Behind the director is the Board of Directors, which serves as the show's producer, approving a production budget, laying out general production guidelines, monitoring each show's progress, handling all "front of the house" activities (from publicity to ticket sales to building maintenance) and protecting our theater's physical and human resources.

The Board Liaison

The bridge between the Board and the show is your Board Liaison. This is an ACT veteran, familiar with the way we do things, who is appointed by the Board to serve as a resource for your show, a monitor of its progress and a problem-solver. The Liaison will visit rehearsals regularly to make sure everything is running smoothly. His or her phone number should appear on your cast and crew list. When all is going well, you may hardly notice your Liaison is around. But if problems arise, he or she can and should be a valuable and trusted resource for getting them solved.

If you run into problems of any kind, first try to work them out with the individuals involved, or if that's uncomfortable, ask your director, assistant director or stage manager to help. On the rare occasion when that doesn't work — or if the problem involves the directing staff — then you should feel free to contact your Liaison for assistance. We ask our Liaisons to try to be fair, objective and confidential.

Actors themselves can do much to prevent problems by being responsible, respectful — and forgiving. Do your job with good will, and assume that others are trying to do the same, and chances are you'll have a good time.

Rehearsals

"Some actors don't like to rehearse; they wish only to perform, because what they seek from their work are the rewards their egos receive from public approval. Accordingly, they use rehearsal time as a mock performance, secretly casting the other actors and the director in the role of audience. Such actors don't understand the nature and purpose of the rehearsal process, and their finished work is the weaker for it. A true craftsman enjoys the process through which the results are achieved ... A true actor is one who enjoys performing, yes, but who also enjoys the creative period of rehearsals. If you are truly an actor, your love of rehearsals will guide you to help your fellow actors to build a production that will speak to your audience."

— *An Actor Behaves*

ACT productions typically rehearse for about eight weeks, with a "payoff" of six to 13 performances. Actors who devote their full energy, enthusiasm and creativity to the rehearsal process will have a much more enjoyable and fulfilling experience than those who look at rehearsals as a necessary evil on the way to getting in front of an audience.

At auditions, and probably again at first read-through, your director will have asked you to list any potential schedule conflicts you might have. **Please be as clear and specific about these as possible.** Putting a rehearsal schedule together can be a complicated matter, and the director needs to know exactly when you are and are not available. That includes listing any out-of-town business or vacation trips, finals week if you are a student, and even whether you need time on the weekends to attend church.

Directors are free to schedule rehearsals any day or evening that suits their schedules and those of their cast members, including weekends. Some directors like a Monday-Friday schedule; some prefer Sunday-Thursday or other combinations. In some cases, weekend rehearsals may be scheduled. Your director will let you know his or her rehearsal plans, and will have at least a tentative schedule sometime in the first few days of rehearsals. If you spot a conflict, notify the director immediately.

Evening rehearsals generally start at 7 or 7:30 p.m. (Your director will let you know). Because we know you have real lives, ACT is pretty insistent that **all rehearsals be over no later than 10 p.m.**, at least until the final week or so before opening. If you find yourself consistently staying late, let your liaison know so he or she can talk to the director and correct the situation.

It is your responsibility to arrive on time, ready to work, to every rehearsal for which you are scheduled. If the schedule is not clear, ask questions so you know exactly when you are supposed to be here.

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When a director says a rehearsal starts at 7:30, that means he or she expects to start working then. "Work" may include notes, announcements or warm-ups. You are expected to be on hand and ready to take part in those activities starting at 7:30 sharp. For most of us, that means actually arriving 10 or 15 minutes early to allow time to chat, grab a cup of coffee, put on rehearsal clothes or otherwise get ready to rehearse. Arriving late — or scooting in the door at 7:30 on the dot and then taking five minutes to get ready — is inconsiderate to your fellow actors who are there on time. Nothing can generate more resentment in a cast than having to stand around waiting for one person to show up.

Most directors schedule rehearsals in blocks, where possible, so that only those actors who are actually needed for that night's scenes have to be present. That means that when you are here, your full attention and participation is even more important. You can make the most out of your rehearsal time:

Be prepared. As far as possible, know what scenes you'll be rehearsing that night, and look them over before you arrive. If you need a rehearsal prop or costume piece, try to make sure you have it in hand before your entrance.

Stay focused, even when you are not "on stage." If you're waiting for an entrance, stay close by and listen for your cue. If you're not needed for a particular scene, use the time to work on your lines or character (but make sure the director, assistant or stage manager knows where to find you).

Save your socializing for scheduled breaks, another room, or outdoors where you won't disrupt the scenes being rehearsed. In particular, avoid chitchat with other actors who are waiting for their entrance cues — it can break their concentration.

Bring a pencil and paper to each rehearsal, and be ready to copy down any notes your director may give. If you have questions or suggestions, save them for breaks or the "notes" period after rehearsal, unless your director tells you otherwise.

Stay on schedule, and on task. Write down your blocking/staging as your director gives it to you (but be prepared for changes!) Learn your lines by time the director asks you to — or sooner!

When it comes to the creative work of rehearsing a play, every director does things a little differently — and some directors do things differently for different plays. You'll find some directors at ACT who like to use games, exercises and improvisation to stretch your creative muscles. Some will give you explicit blocking and interpretation notes to guide you through every step of the process. Others follow a looser, more organic approach that allows for a lot of actor input and keeps things changing well into rehearsals.

If you prefer to work a particular way, it would pay to find out how a particular director works before you are cast. By accepting a role, you are in effect telling the director, "I'm willing to try things your way." If "their way" means using techniques you've never tried before, think of it as an opportunity to learn and grow as an actor. Approaching rehearsals with a positive, willing attitude will do a lot to endear you to your director and fellow cast members.

If you find yourself disagreeing strongly with the director's approach, you have three responsible choices:

- Try to work it out, in private, with the director;
- Accept that you have creative differences and go along with what he or she asks anyway; or
- Remove yourself from the show early enough so you can be replaced.

Any other choice — fighting it out to the bitter end, trying to organize a mutiny among your fellow cast members, or expressing your disagreement by pouting, whining or refusing to cooperate — will only earn you a reputation as a difficult person. And people's reputations do follow them around the mid-Valley theater community.

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From long and sometimes painful experience, ACT has developed the following policies regarding drug and alcohol use. They're pretty straightforward. Please read, and heed.

ACT Drug and Alcohol Policies

These policies are designed to protect our image in the community, and our legal responsibilities. Directors will see that the policies are observed at all times.

No illegal substances will be brought into the theater or any theater-sponsored function at any time.

On evenings when we serve alcohol to our patrons, no minors will be allowed on the serving staff. When in doubt, house staff will ask for identification.

When champagne is served to the cast on opening night, minors will not partake.

Actors and production crew will arrive for rehearsals and performances free of the influence of intoxicants, legal or otherwise.

Cast parties at private homes are not considered official theater functions. However, our theater's reputation can be affected by what goes on at them. Hosts should consider their legal liabilities, as well as the possible fallout for the theater, when offering to host a party.

For your safety

ACT is usually such a friendly, at-home place that it's easy to forget that the world can be a dangerous place. In recent years, theater volunteers and patrons have had their cars broken into, and purses and other items have been stolen from the back loading dock — and even the Green Room. More troubling yet, we have heard reports of women and girls (not associated with the theater, fortunately) being assaulted when walking alone at night in the riverfront park behind the theater.

Take care, and take care of each other. When you park behind the theater, make sure to remove valuables from your car and lock the doors. Don't let people — women or men — walk to their cars alone at night, from the theater or from the bar next door. When minors are in a cast, make sure an adult stays with them while they're waiting for their rides. When you're in the theater, keep purses and other valuables in the dressing room, let the props master lock them in the top of the prop cabinet or better yet, leave them at home.

If anything does happen, or if you spot something or someone that looks suspicious, notify your stage manager or director immediately. And don't hesitate for an instant to call 911 and report problems to the police. (For emergency calls, try to remember the theater's address: 111 W. First Avenue. Or just say you're "at Albany Civic Theater, between the bridges on First Ave.")

Rehearsals

At least two (and sometimes three) shows are rehearsing in this building at any given time. Courtesy and respect go a long way toward preventing conflicts and friction between and within shows. Specifically:

At all times:

Treat the theater as though it were a professional workplace. Clean up after yourself (including rinsing coffee cups, recycling pop cans, etc.) at the end of each rehearsal. Keep purses, coats, backpacks and other personal items out of work areas. If trash cans get full, empty them. If you drink the last cup of coffee, make another pot. Do what you can to help keep the space as tidy and unchaotic as possible.

Please stay off the telephone, except to call for rides or deal with emergencies.

Visitors: It is up to your director to decide whether to allow "outsiders" — including your children, parents, spouses, sweethearts or friends — to attend rehearsals. If you have special needs (for instance, if you are a parent who's unable to arrange baby-sitters), let your director know as soon as possible so he or she can figure out how to accommodate you. Do not bring guests to rehearsals without clearing it with the director first. During performances, your friends should know that they will not

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be allowed backstage before the show, although you may arrange to give them a tour after the show is over. When in doubt, ask the director or stage manager.

Every show has one director, and that's plenty. Don't take it on yourself to direct other actors, and don't let them (or crew members, liaisons, well-intentioned friends or family members) direct you. The only exception: Some directors ask their assistants, at times, to take over a rehearsal; in that case, you can assume the assistant is speaking for the director. Most directors are more than happy to listen to your suggestions, at the appropriate time. That time probably isn't in the middle of the scene you're rehearsing. If you have a bright idea, bring it up during a break or before or after rehearsal — and be willing to let go of it if the director says "no."

During the first week or so:

Depending on when your show is cast, you may start rehearsals with a week in the auditorium while another show (already open) is still on stage). If that is the case:

Enter through the auditorium or Green Room doors, depending on your director's preference.

Use the restrooms in the foyer and backstage, and the backstage coffee maker.

Avoid disturbing props, furniture, costumes or anything else belonging to the show currently in production. If you are working on stage, take special care not to disturb their set.

When you are in the front lobby, keep quiet to avoid disturbing the show rehearsing in ACT II.

Be especially careful with any food or beverages you bring into the auditorium. Remove all trash each night.

If you smoke, do so on the back deck, outside.

For the next four to six weeks:

Your show will rehearse in our ACT II rehearsal space, which doubles as the lobby and refreshment area during performances. During this period you should:

Enter through the front door to ACT II.

Use the public restrooms off the lobby and the ACT II coffee maker. Stay out of the backstage area, auditorium and other areas occupied by other shows. (If you drink soda, ask your director if it's OK to use the pop machine in the makeup room).

Return rehearsal props, costume pieces, etc. to their designated storage place at the end of each rehearsal — don't leave them lying around the room.

Lots of activities go on in our theater when your show is not rehearsing — tours, workshops, committee meetings and cleaning. It's important to clean up your space at the end of each evening so it's not a mess if anyone else needs to use it when you're not here.

If you smoke, do so only out of doors, and make sure to let the stage manager or AD know where you are.

While smoking on a break during the run of a show, always wear a smock to cover your costume.

At some point, your director will schedule a photo shoot with one of our volunteer photographers. If we do not have a recent photo of you on file, you need to be there to get one taken for our display and publicity purposes. Actors are allowed to have one new head shot taken per season, if they wish. The photos belong to ACT; if you want a copy, you will need to contact the photographer to make arrangements to buy one. Later on, just before opening, a photographer will come to shoot full-dress production pictures which will be made available to you for purchase. No photography or videotaping is permitted during performances; please let your friends and family know that.

Costumes

Sometime during this period, you will be measured for your costumes, and at some point the costumer may bring in garments for you to try on. Make sure to let the costumer know about any special physical activities you'll be performing in your costumes — fighting, dancing, climbing, reaching, crawling on the floor, or anything else that might affect what you need to wear. If you're going to be dropping to your knees a lot, for instance, let the costumer know so he or she can determine whether your garments can accommodate knee pads. If you need to carry something in your pocket, tell the costumer so she or he can make sure you have pockets!

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Actors can be vain and insecure about what they wear on stage. Trust your costumer, and your director, to make sure that you look “right” for the part — even if what they want you to wear is something you wouldn’t be caught dead in, in real life. If you feel especially self-conscious about a costume, say so — but be prepared to wear it anyway, if that’s what the director and costumer decide is right.

In fact, trust your entire technical crew to do their jobs and do them well. Your director will have chosen them because they have proven track records, or because he or she believes they have potential. They are creative people in their own right, and deserve your respect, cooperation — and thanks.

During the final rehearsal period

Your show will “take stage” three to four weeks before you open. From that point on:

Enter through the Green Room door off the loading dock behind the building.

Use the backstage restroom, coffee maker, etc.

Stay out of Act II, where the next show up will have begun rehearsing.

Maintain absolute quiet in the Green Room while other actors are rehearsing on stage.

Make sure your stage manager (or production assistant) knows where you are at all times. Be available and ready to go on stage when you are called.

Return all costume pieces to hangers in the dressing rooms, and all props to the prop shelf, after each use.

Keep your personal belongings in the dressing rooms. You may hang coats on the small rack near the dressing tables.

If you smoke, do so on the back deck. Again, let the stage manager know where you are.

Your director may permit you to sit in the auditorium and watch scenes you’re not directly involved in. At some point, though, you will be required to remain backstage between your entrances. Don’t crowd around stage entrances to watch what’s going on — you will only get in someone’s way. ACT has audio monitors strategically placed throughout the backstage area (including on the back deck) that should allow you to hear your entrance cues. If you have trouble hearing cues, let the stage manager know.

A note about work parties and retreats

ACT has many accomplished designers, but we don’t have a separate crew of builders, painters and sewers to come in and do all the technical work for us. All actors are expected to take part in weekend work parties to build and decorate sets, finish costumes and props and otherwise get ready for opening. Your director will probably ask you to commit to at least one work party, starting the Sunday that you take stage. Work parties are actually a lot of fun, and you may find that you enjoy the tech work enough to volunteer backstage on a later show.

During work parties, it’s important to **observe safety precautions**. If you don’t know how to operate power tools, don’t volunteer to do that until you’ve been shown how to do so safely. (**Minors are never allowed to use power tools, except possibly drill guns.**) When construction is underway on stage, pay attention so you don’t get something dropped on your head. Learn where we keep first-aid supplies. If you manage to injure yourself even slightly, notify the stage manager immediately.

Just as we want to protect you from harm, we also want to protect our property from damage. ACT has a huge investment in set pieces, curtains, furnishings, props and costumes, and we try to take care of those things so they can be used over and over again. Although a few things are “disposable,” most are not, so please don’t take it on yourself to cut, paint, glue or otherwise alter any of our stock property without getting a clear go-ahead from whoever’s in charge.

Retreat

Most (but not all) ACT directors like to hold a day-long “retreat” on a Saturday or Sunday one or two weeks before the show opens. Retreats are usually a combination of intense acting work, set construction, light rigging, costume fittings and other necessary activities, capped by a pot-luck dinner, a costume parade and what is often the first full run-through of the show. If your director schedules a retreat, you are expected to be there, barring extraordinary circumstances. If you know you have a conflict for retreat, tell your director as soon as possible.

Tickets

Tickets for your show will go on sale to season ticket holders about three weeks before opening, and to the general public a week later. ACT does not provide comp tickets to cast or crew members; if you have friends or relatives coming to see the

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show, you or they will need to purchase tickets from the outlets (Sid Stevens Jewelers in Albany, 928-6140, and Rice's Pharmacy in Corvallis, 752-7779). It is wise to do so well ahead of time — you can never tell when an ACT show is going to sell out (although if it's a musical, you can almost count on it). The closer you get to closing, the harder it can be to get tickets.

Your director may decide to allow friends and relatives to attend your final dress rehearsal, free. This is completely up to each director, so don't assume that it will happen.

Don't plan on asking the director for help with last-minute ticket requests. Your director has no special "pull" at the box office.

A small number of tickets are held back to be sold at the box office each night to patrons who are standing in line at 7:30 (1:45 for matinees). You may arrange to have someone stand in line to buy tickets for you, but there's no guarantee that they'll get them. Please do not bother the box office staff before 7:30 — they are not supposed to sell you tickets ahead of time.

There is one exception: If you have already reserved tickets and wish to pay for them so your friends can pick them up at the box office, you may do so before 7:30 that night, or by sending the money up to the box office with a crew member and a note saying under whose name the tickets are being held.

During performances

(including dress rehearsal week)

Make sure you know your "call," and arrive in time for it.

The stage manager will probably establish a check-in sheet starting final dress week; be sure to initial it when you arrive so he or she knows you are in the building.

Keep your personal belongings in the dressing room. Remember: It's a bad idea to bring valuables or large sums of money to the theater; things sometimes disappear, whether through carelessness or theft. The prop master has a lockable shelf available for wallets, purses, jewelry, keys, etc. But the best bet is to leave them at home.

Before 7:15 (1:45 for matinees), check any on-stage props, effects, etc. to make sure they are where they are supposed to be.

Check your costumes. Notify the costumer or wardrobe mistress immediately of any loose buttons, tears or repairs that need to be made.

Put on your makeup **before** you get into costume. It's smart to bring an old, button-front shirt or bathrobe to wear while applying makeup.

Stay backstage once you are in makeup or costume, and in any case, after 7:15 p.m. (1:45 for matinees).

Be ready to take part in group warm-ups, if your director or stage manager requires them, and in pre-show notes.

Maintain absolute quiet in the green room, and observe the stage manager's instructions about which doors to use to get from the makeup area to the green room.

Respect your fellow actors. Some people need quiet time to get in character. Others like to socialize before the show. Find out what they need, and let them know what you need. In any case, refrain from talking to people who are waiting to make entrances.

Leave others' props, costumes, makeup, etc. alone. If someone places a hat or a prop or a pair of eyeglasses in a particular place, it's probably because they need to be able to grab it quickly to make an entrance.

Observe your director's orders concerning smoking. Smokers must use designated outdoor smoking areas, and should make sure the stage monitors are turned on so they can be ready for entrances. *While smoking on a break during the run of a show, always wear a smock to cover your costume.*

It is traditional at ACT for casts to come up front to ACT II after curtain call to meet and greet our patrons. This is a practice that generates a lot of good will among theater-goers, and we appreciate your taking part. If you are especially uncomfortable about meeting the public, talk to your director — but you may be asked to grit your teeth, smile and put up with it graciously, at least for a few minutes. Don't be surprised if a child walks up and asks for your autograph!

After each performance, hang up your costumes, return props to their designated places, close all makeup containers and clean up your messes before you leave the theater.

A note about pranks ...

We've all heard hilarious stories about on-stage pranks. Laugh at them, but don't add to them. As Tom Markus puts it: "Your job is to act well, not to try to make somebody else act poorly. You owe your audience your best work, and not your

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scorn.” On-stage jokes almost always backfire, and can spoil the performance for cast and audience alike. Save the tricks and gags for the cast party, where everyone can enjoy them together.

When the show closes

Almost every show plans a cast party at a cast or crew member's home after the final performance. When minors are present, it is the responsibility of everyone concerned to make sure they don't drink. If you drink, plan to ride with someone who isn't, or make arrangements to stay the night. Although your attendance at a cast party is not mandatory, it's polite to put in at least a brief appearance to congratulate your fellow actors and crew for a job well done.

No matter how late the party lasts, all cast and crew members are expected to take part in set strike the day after the show closes. Strike must be finished by 2 p.m. so the next show can take stage. Depending on the complexity of your set and what other tasks need to be done, your strike will probably start between 11 a.m. and noon. Please be on time.

Musical cast and orchestra members are expected to return all scores, with all pencil markings erased, at set strike. Those who lose or fail to return scores will be charged to replace them.

Make sure to retrieve all your personal belongings at set strike. If you leave things here, there's a good chance they'll disappear into the prop or costume rooms, never to be seen again — unless it's on stage.

If you haven't already done so, set strike is a good time to buy your ACT membership!

After the show is over

Even after the most strenuous show, many of us go through a touch of post-play depression. Once we catch up on our rest, our families and our jobs, we find ourselves missing the theater and the friends we've made here.

One way around that, of course, is to try out for another show (or volunteer to work on one backstage).

If that's just too much, too soon, consider volunteering to usher and serve refreshments on the next show — you can even organize a group of fellow cast members to get together and work house as a cast reunion.