

## **FACILITATING PRODUCTIVE NEWPLAYFEST WORKSHOP COMMUNICATION**

Many times, rules are set to avoid conflict or are aimed at preventing the worst behaviors. Instead, read these as guidelines for bringing the best possible finished play to the publisher by producing the best possible first performance.

### **Guidelines for Producing Theatres**

- Set a time for the workshop far enough out from the performance date to accommodate any changes to the script. A good rule of thumb would be half-way into the rehearsal process.
- Engage an experienced director. Directing for a NewPlayFest play demands the play be blocked in advance of the workshop and they must have a basic knowledge of play construction. The director should be able to collaborate openly. This collaborative process means the director will receive input from the playwright and should have the skill to respond by either acting on it or gracefully explaining why not.
- If possible, arrange for a lunch or dinner with playwright, director, and dramaturg prior to the first workshop rehearsal.

### **Guidelines for Directors**

- The only guideline which is actually a rule is if a request is made of the playwright to change something and the playwright says no, it is up to the director to make it work. Another way to look at it is: the play must be performed as written. For a change to take place, the playwright must rewrite it first.
- In the workshop process,
  - The playwright should be able to view a fully blocked run-through of the show.
  - There should be time set aside for open discussion between actors, director and playwright regarding character or the arc of the story.
    - Character questions may be about motivation, inconsistencies, backstories.
    - Story questions may be about how the plot unfolds, thematic elements or how one scene informs the next.
    - Do set an expectation for the nature of the discussion. Make sure questions are both specifically and positively composed. (Example: “I don’t understand this at all,” is not as meaningful as “When Sally says she has changed her mind, what is it that has happened to ignite that change?”)  
Remember this is a collaborative exercise, not a challenge.
  - There should also be time set aside for closed discussion between director and playwright.
    - This is reserved for commentary the playwright has about pacing, character choices or other observations made about the run-through.
    - It is also for discussion about script changes suggested by the director.

### **Guidelines for Playwrights**

Among other rights, the Dramatists Guild of America provides for the right to attend any rehearsal. Beyond that there are no set expectations for what the playwright can or cannot express, or what the playwright can or cannot expect as a result of offering input. Whereas suggestions aimed at rewriting the play can be fielded by a yes or no response, the playwright’s suggestions aimed at improving the interpretation of the play are more subjective in nature.

- If a request for a rewrite is made, understand it and consider it before turning it down.
- Address suggestions for improvement to the director, not directly to actors.
- Answer direct questions in an open forum with care taken not to usurp the director.
- Understand these are volunteer actors and often volunteer directors who have given freely of their time. They wish to be addressed as artists, so exercise judgment regarding approach.
- Remember the AACT dramaturg is there to help facilitate productive discussion. When in doubt, ask.
- The playwright may offer insights into the play that help with marketing, but do not have say so in final marketing products. Likewise, a playwright may offer suggestions regarding design elements, but this is the purview of the director and the production team.

## Edits

When launching a new play, it is important to remember a) all plays need some editing and b) final editing decisions are always up to the playwright. In theatre we are charged with producing a story that reflects the author's intentions. Rarely is that charge put to the ultimate test, a direct nod from the playwright. Still, the playwright can benefit with input from fellow collaborators like the director and actors as the play evolves.

There are many reasons why a line might be edited: an actor has come up with a better word order that sounds more natural, there is a typo, the line is repetitious, etc. During rehearsal, if a line isn't working, the director may propose an alternative or simply toss it back to the playwright for a clearer rendition.

It is also possible to want change in stage direction. This can be noted on the same document.

The playwright has three options when faced with a proposed edit: "Yes", "No", and "I'll have to hear it first."

### Four stages of production-related editing:

1. Some possible edits can be caught by the director as they explore the script prior to rehearsals.
2. Some edits will arise in the rehearsal process. Remember that each line was written with a specific purpose in mind, so try to discover that purpose and make it work before you propose a change.
3. Some edits will happen during the workshop process and hopefully arise from a give and take between playwright, actors and director. The goal should be to secure all edits two weeks prior to opening out of respect for the actors' process.
4. Some edits will happen as a result of seeing the play in front of an audience. This can be in recognition of the audience getting restless in an overlong scene, a joke that didn't hit, observation of confusion from the audience, or gut feeling. Even though these edits happen after the director's job is complete, it is still wise to run these by him or her because they have had eyes on the big picture.

### Edits During the Workshop

Edits happening collaboratively between actors, director and playwright often come fast and furious. Anything from different word choices to transitional material to a redistribution of lines can occur. Edits can come as a result of reviewing the proposed edits collected prior to the workshop. Edits can come from the playwright watching and listening and deciding to adjust. Edits can arise from any part of the creative process.

- The stage manager or an assistant will use their electronic or hard copy of the script to keep track of the edits and, at the end of the workshop, be prepared to copy it and hand it to the dramaturg. If it is in hard copy alone, the stage manager will keep one copy to notate edits should they arise after the workshop.

### Edits After the Workshop

Sometimes the director will find possible edits after the workshop. Remember all edits must be okayed by the playwright.

- Arrange for a brief conference call with the playwright and dramaturg.
- Have the stage manager keep track of edits on their copy; the dramaturg will do the same.

### Edits After Opening Night

The playwright will see the play in front of an audience and may determine there are more changes to be made. This will be done with the dramaturg.

- At the opening, the stage manager will provide a copy of their fully edited script to the dramaturg.