

PLAY CAFÉ'S GUIDE TO PRODUCING A READING OF YOUR PLAY

Playwright Donald Margulies once said that the first feedback he gets on a new play is hearing it read by actors. Hearing your play read by others in its entirety is a fundamental step in the development process. This guide can help you put together a reading of your play.

1) Decide What Type of Reading

You first need to decide what level of reading is most appropriate: Developmental or Public.

Developmental Readings: Are appropriate when you are in the early stage of developing a play. Typically a developmental reading is not rehearsed, is not open to the public, and the actors are not paid. Because it is not rehearsed, there is no need for a director.

Public readings: Are appropriate when you have a well developed script and need to see it "acted out" and get public feedback in order to make further progress. They are open to the public. They may be announced to the public through Theatre Bay Area magazine and other publications, or done for an invited audience of friends and other playwrights. Typically there is a director, and the actors rehearse the play. Allow 8 hours of rehearsal for a full length play. Usually the actors and director are paid a small stipend, like \$25.

If you decide to use a director, it is best to line up the director first, as he or she may have ideas about casting.

Often the actors sit on stools. This forces the reading to be about the text. But readings can be staged. The actors move on stage with script in hand. There may be props as well as some basic set pieces. (Too many props are confusing and the actors tend to drop their scripts.) Staged readings are rehearsed and need a director.

2) When to start the process:

If you start too early, there is a good chance that you will lose your actors to more permanent acting jobs, like full productions, or any theatre work paying significantly more money. If you begin the production sequence too late you will find yourself running around in frantic circles trying to get everything done in time for performance.

For a developmental (non-public) reading, you should start the process about six weeks before the scheduled performance. For a public reading, if you want to place notices in publications, you should start your planning about nine weeks before the reading. Theatre Bay Area magazine has a one-month lead-time. So if your reading is to be on February 20, in order to get in the February issue, you must submit the reading announcement by January 1st.

3) Finding your actors and director:

You can have a script-in-hand reading of your play with friends in your living room. But if you feel your script is ready to go to the next level, you should consider having a group of trained actors play your characters, and perhaps use a director. Using professionals will bring out the best in your script and provide you with valuable feedback. Equally important, you will begin to develop connections with the local theatre community.

Auditions are not normally held for a reading. The playwright is responsible for casting the readers. A director may have casting ideas.

Online resources:

- Actors Café (online resumes): www.PlayCafe.org/DBMan/
- Theatre Bay Area (online resumes): www.TheatreBayArea.org Then click on "Member." (You do not have to be a member to search resumes.)
- BAANG: Bay Area Actors Network Group e-mail newsgroup)
[Http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BAANG/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BAANG/)

4) Post play discussion

You may find it helpful to hold a post-play discussion with the audience. Usually a moderator, or the director, leads the discussion asking a number of pertinent questions framed by the playwright. The playwright is present but does not participate in the discussion. The playwright should consider preparing an evaluation sheet that audience members can take home (with the playwright's contact information) in case they can't stay for the discussion.

5) Working with a director

If you have director for the reading, the two of you should discuss

- What you hope to get from the reading.
- Staged versus sit-down reading
- How the director likes to work with playwrights. It is important that the director be the only "boss" in rehearsal, and the playwright give feedback to the director privately.

6) Playwright groups that can help

These are writing groups that include readings:

- Playwrights Café (Berkeley) www.PlayCafe.org
- Playwrights Center of San Francisco: www.PlaywrightsCenterSF.org
- Playwrights Lab: http://zspace.org/involvement_artistic.htm

These groups give readings of selected plays:

- Readings at the Magic Theatre.
<http://www.magictheatre.org/pages/readings.shtml>
- Playwrights Foundation holds occasional readings and an annual festival. <http://www.playwrightsfoundation.org/>

7) Finding a space for your reading

- Berkeley Rep Rehearsal Rooms \$65 for four hours:
<http://www.berkeley.org/> • Art of Living Center, Shattuck near Ashby, Berkeley 510 848-3736. Space has a living room feel. \$25/hour
- La Val's Subterranean Restaurant, Euclid near Hearst, Berkeley.
\$10/hour for rehearsal. \$75 per performance. Rental is handled by Impact Theatre. <http://www.ImpactTheatre.com>
- Ashby Stage, Berkeley (Shotgun Players) \$20/hour rehearsal. \$200 per performance includes front-of-house help.
- Dark Room, San Francisco. \$75-\$100 for two hours Thursday or Sunday. Rehearsal is \$20/per hour. <http://www.darkroomssf.com/>
- Cell Space, 2050 Bryant, San Francisco
<http://www.cellspace.org/space/>

8) Chair rental Abbey Party Rents 800 717-7278