

Charing Guild of Players

The Prompt

As prompt, you should:

At an early stage

Secure a script and a rehearsal schedule from the director

Attend some rehearsals to familiarise yourself with the cast, the plot, the action and any script changes

Check with the director that a suitable prompt position has been provided for you (an accessible seat, a sufficient view of the stage and a position where your voice can be discreet but audible are all desirable)

Share these notes with the director

Amend the notes if you wish – but better to test them first

In general

Prompt clearly and sufficiently

When prompting, try to limit yourself to giving the line itself: avoid incidental explanations that might confuse a struggling actor

Read slightly ahead, making eye contact as much as possible with the relevant actor

Remember that we put ourselves through this for our own enjoyment as much as that of the audience

Be patient always

As the cast become familiar with their lines

Attend all possible rehearsals from now on

Bring a pencil

Note intentional pauses and timings related to stage business, moves, effects etc

Be ready to accommodate individual actors' preferences as to whether they need help or wish to battle their lines unaided

At a suitable moment discuss any misreadings or doubtful pronunciations

Once the cast are without their books

With the director (and the cast), decide whether to be tolerant of approximations within speeches or to insist on a perfect rendition

Let the cast know how particular you intend to be

From now on act as a line manager: at a suitable moment draw actors' attention to habitual weaknesses, perhaps offering coaching in support

Once the cast are on stage

Move closer to the stage

Bring a torch if stage lighting will be dim

With the director's approval, be ready to tighten up on accuracy during rehearsal

Mark your script to note all prompts given: you will soon have a record of accident black spots for your own benefit, and to mention to the actor(s) concerned

You have a part to play in maintaining the momentum of the performance

If the director halts the action for any reason be ready to suggest a suitable line for a restart

In case of breakdown, decide quickly what line to offer for a restart

In case of missed speeches (or pages), intervene to recall the action to an earlier point

With the director, encourage the cast not to discuss errors or to draw attention to them by apologizing or inventing a clumsy cover-up: better to stay in character, concentrate and press on

Let the director judge whether to be critical of an actor's knowledge of their lines and be ready to offer help to anyone in trouble in that regard

From the first dress-rehearsal to the final performance

Work to the Stage Manager

Ensure that your prompt position is practical (see above) and occupy it

Know where to control any offstage lighting you use to read by

Bring a torch anyway

Try to achieve performance standards

Note the duration of all acts and scenes

In case of breakdown, decide quickly what line to offer for a restart

Make clear to the actors where to go from and avoid having to repeat the prompt

In case of missed speeches (or pages), decide quickly whether to let it go or recall the action

Continue to note any problem passages and decide whether or not to discuss with the relevant actor(s)

Appreciate all that effort and enjoy yourself