



DIRECTING ACTORS

Directing is like being the captain of a ship - you guide your actors to bring the story to life!

Learn how to give clear, effective direction to actors (your classmates) and experiment with different directing styles for theatre or student films.

<https://dofilm.co.nz/how-to/classic-mistakes-when-directing-actors/>

or... Scan me!

*Print the activity pages at the end of this document and enjoy the rest on screen!

What you'll need:

- Short script excerpts (1-2 minutes long, or use the one provided)
- Open space for performing
- Optional: simple props or costume pieces





GOOD DIRECTING HELPS ACTORS UNDERSTAND THEIR CHARACTERS AND PERFORM THEIR BEST. BY PRACTICING DIRECTING, YOU'LL:

- IMPROVE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS
- LEARN TO EXPRESS YOUR CREATIVE VISION CLEARLY
- UNDERSTAND HOW DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS AFFECT A PERFORMANCE
- GAIN CONFIDENCE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES
- DEVELOP A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACTOR-DIRECTOR RELATIONSHIP

PART ONE: SCRIPT PREP (5 MINUTES)

Divide into small groups. Each group gets a short script excerpt (or use the one at the end of this document). Read through it together and discuss:

- What's happening in the scene?
- Who are the characters?
- What's the mood or emotion of the scene?

PART TWO: DIRECTOR'S VISION (5 MINUTES)

Choose a director for the first round. The director takes a few minutes to think about:

- How do you want the scene to feel?
- What are the most important moments?
- How might the characters move or speak?

PART THREE: LIGHTS, CAMERA, DIRECT! (20 MINUTES)

Time to direct! The director guides their classmates in performing the scene. Try different types of direction:

- Emotional: "Act like you're really excited about this news!"
- Physical: "Try walking slower and hunching your shoulders a bit."
- Motivational: "Your character really wants to impress their friend here."
- Technical: "Pause for a moment after this line for dramatic effect."

Always be clear about why you're giving a particular direction. Actors need to understand the reason their character would do the thing you're asking of them. And if the reason is for technical reasons related to the camera, sound etc, they need to think about how they can make sense of the direction from a character perspective.

You can test out your own directions. But remember: Be clear, be kind, and be open to your actors' ideas too!

PART FOUR: REFLECT AND ROTATE (10 MINUTES)

After the scene, discuss as a group:

- Actors: How did the direction help you understand your character?
- Director: What was challenging about giving direction?
- Everyone: How did the performance change with different directions?

Rotate roles and repeat steps 2-4 if time allows, giving others a chance to direct.

DISCUSSION TIME

Come back together as a class and share your experiences. Keep practicing, and soon you'll be yelling "Action!" and "Cut!" like a pro!

- **WHAT TYPE OF DIRECTION DID YOU FIND MOST HELPFUL AS AN ACTOR?**
- **AS A DIRECTOR, HOW DID YOU DECIDE WHAT DIRECTIONS TO GIVE?**
- **DID ANYONE TRY A REALLY CREATIVE OR UNUSUAL DIRECTION? HOW DID IT GO?**
- **HOW MIGHT THESE DIRECTING SKILLS HELP IN OTHER AREAS OF FILMMAKING OR DAILY LIFE?**
- **WHAT WAS THE FUNNIEST OR MOST SURPRISING MOMENT IN YOUR DIRECTING EXPERIENCE?**

EXTRA RESOURCES

- Book: "Directing Actors: Creating Memorable Performances for Film and Television" by Judith Weston
- Book: "Film Directing Fundamentals: See Your Film Before Shooting" by Nicholas T. Proferes
- Book: "On Directing Film" by David Mamet
- Article: "[How to direct actors to get the best possible performance](#)" by Videomaker (available on videomaker.com)
- Article: "[How to Direct Actors: 7 Tips for First-Time Directors](#)" by StudioBinder (available on studiobinder.com)
- Article: "[How to Direct Actors: Tips for Working With Actors as a Director](#)" by Masterclass (available on Masterclass.com)

Remember, great directing is about clear communication and teamwork. The best directors bring out the creativity in their actors while guiding them towards a shared vision.

SCRIPT OPTION FOR THIS ACTIVITY

"THE GREAT SANDWICH SWAP"

CHARACTERS:

JAMIE: A STUDENT WITH AN UNUSUAL LUNCH

CASEY: JAMIE'S PUZZLED FRIEND

SETTING:

SCHOOL CAFETERIA

(JAMIE sits down at a table, pulling out a very large, odd-looking sandwich while CASEY approaches with their own lunch tray.)

CASEY: (sitting down, staring at Jamie's sandwich) Whoa, what is that monstrosity?

JAMIE: (proudly) It's my super-deluxe triple-decker surprise sandwich!

CASEY: (leaning in to inspect) Is that... is that a pickle sticking out the side?

JAMIE: Yep! And there's peanut butter, jalapeños, marshmallows, and leftover spaghetti in there too!

CASEY: (looking horrified) That's not a sandwich, that's a crime against food!

JAMIE: (defensively) Hey, don't knock it till you've tried it. It's a flavor explosion!

CASEY: More like a flavor catastrophe. How do you even fit that in your mouth?

JAMIE: (demonstrating) Like this! (Attempts to take a huge bite, struggles comically)

CASEY: (laughing) You look like a python trying to eat an elephant!

(**JAMIE:** (mouth full, mumbling) It'sh delishush, I shwear!

CASEY: (sarcastically) Oh yeah, it looks amazing. Want to trade for my boring old turkey sandwich?

JAMIE: (swallows hard) Really? You'd trade?

CASEY: (realizing the mistake) Wait, no! I was joking!

JAMIE: (quickly swaps sandwiches) Too late! No take-backs! (Takes a big bite of Casey's sandwich) Mmmm, turkey!

CASEY: (staring at the monster sandwich, sighs) I guess I'll be the one with the flavor explosion today...

(CASEY reluctantly picks up the sandwich as JAMIE grins triumphantly)