

THEATRICAL WEAPONS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Theatrical productions frequently employ the use of weapons and fighting onstage. This activity is inherently dangerous and potentially injurious and/or deadly to both the acting and technical company as well as the audience members. Many of the terms of use for weapons in our facility are set by state law, and by local law enforcement entities. In many cases, the department may require special procedures to be used, including the use of specially trained professionals.

Failure to follow the policies established in this document may result in serious consequences, including arrest by law enforcement, immediate closing of a performance, termination of student status, or worst of all, serious bodily harm. Knowingly ignoring these rules might also result in personal liability litigation.

Weapons Defined

- The term “weapon” is defined as firearms, swords, knives, clubs, batons, spears or any other object that may be used to fight with, including bow and arrows, cross bows, axes, pitch forks, and other stage props that might be used in stage combat.
- Weapons may be real, prop, blank firing, non-firing, or toy; and made of any material including plastic, metal, wood or resin.
- All weapons which are proposed for use will be inspected by the Production Manager (and Fight Choreographer/Director, if applicable) prior to use.
- See additional definitions at the end of this document for further information/detail.

1. Weapon use during Rehearsal

- No weapon may be used in any rehearsal until designated personnel has trained the actor(s) in its appropriate use. A facsimile prop must be used in place of the actual weapon (ex. wooden sticks for swords, etc.) until the Fight Choreographer or other designated personnel has gained authorization from the Production Manager of the UR International Theatre Program. All weapons used as props shall be incapable of firing a projectile.
- All weapons must remain locked up until rehearsal call time. Stage management will be responsible for locking up all weapons when not in use for rehearsal.
- A Fight Captain will be designated to oversee all rehearsals or warm-ups when the Fight Choreographer or other designated personnel is not present.
- The Fight Captain or other Designated Personnel will be responsible for inspection of all weapons prior to daily use. Any damage shall be reported to the Production Manager and stage management for appropriate repair. Damage may include nicks, burrs, broken parts, missing parts, sharp edges.
- The Fight Choreographer or other designated personnel must be present at any rehearsal where a weapon is used until the actors and fight captain has received sufficient training to work safely without the Fight Choreographer or other designated personnel.
- No actor shall modify any weapon. All modifications shall go through stage management with the Fight Choreographer and Production Manager consulted.
- No actor or crew member shall touch or handle any weapon unless assigned to do so.

2. Weapons use during Performance

- All weapons will remain secured until released by stage management.
- All weapons will be inspected for damage by stage management, Fight Captain, props crew, and actors.
- There will be a fight call onstage prior to opening the house. This call will be run by the Fight Captain and stage management.
- No actor or crew member shall touch or handle any weapon unless assigned to do so.
- When the sound of a firearm is necessary to the action of the performance, starter pistols may be used.

3. Use of weapons by actors: Cutting weapons

- Cutting weapons are defined as swords, knives, axes, spears, arrows, hatchets or any other edged object used as a weapon.
- Do not use a sword as a cane or waking stick.
- Do not duel with anyone unless the fight choreographer has staged it.
- Do not hit any edged weapon against another unless the fight choreographer has staged it and has given instruction concerning which weapon to use.
- All actors are responsible for checking his or her own weapon before use for sharp edges, nicks and dings and broken pieces.
- Any damages must be reported immediately to stage management for proper repair.
- Never point any edged weapon at any person unless specifically choreographed to do so.

4. Use of weapons by actors, Firearms

- A firearm is a weapon such as a rifle, pistol, revolver or gun, from which a shot could be discharged. Firearms may be functional or not.
- Never attempt to load the chambers of a firearm used as a stage prop with real cartridges or anything other than the supplied blanks.
- The loading of a blank into a firearm may only take place only when stage management, the actor who uses weapon and, preferably, a third witness are present.
- Do not modify or disassemble any firearm in any way. Any modification or disassembly may render the gun unsafe for its proper use.
- Pulling the trigger on an empty firearm is called a "dry fire." Do not pull the trigger on any firearm without a blank (either new or used) loaded in the chamber as this ruins the firing pin.
- When firing any firearm, gunpowder and gas will vent. This venting is hot and will contain small particles of gunpowder debris. The weapon must be fired at arm's length from the actor and any other person so that the venting dissipates harmlessly into the air.
- Firing a weapon in close proximity to the hands, face, or other body parts may cause burns, cuts, abrasions and/or hearing loss.
- Never point any firearm at any person unless specifically choreographed to do so.

5. The UR International Theatre Program Production Manager must:

- See separate document entitled *DPS Procedures for Working with Theatrical Firearms and Weapons*.

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- Notify Campus Security of the approximate time and amount of gunfire in upcoming rehearsals and performances.
- Notify Box Office and Front-of-House Management personnel that there is gunfire in the production.
- Notify occupants of neighboring spaces when gunfire will occur in tests, rehearsal and performance.
- Confirm that the appropriate postings and/or announcements of warnings have been made/are in place, so that audiences (etc.) are aware that there will be gunfire in the production.
- Arrange to schedule dedicated rehearsal time for firearms training.
- Instruct all appropriate actors and stage managers in the handling of all weapons and firearms in a timely, safe, and appropriate fashion.
- Prepare and run a “live fire” rehearsal time before tech.
- With armorer or licensed fight director, test to determine assured safe distance for powder and wadding exhaust.
- Acoustically test in the space to determine acceptable volume level. Educate actors, staff and crew as to the benefits of hearing protection and demonstrate methods by which the effects of gunfire on the ears can be minimized.
- Seek inspection by a DPS armorer of any actual, previously uninspected firearm introduced into the production at any point, should this be necessary. This should include any real firearm mechanically altered to accept and fire blank ammunition.
- Teach actors what to do in the event of a jam or misfire.
- Provide a locked container in a secure area for weapon storage, and make sure that separate locked containers for weapons and ammunition are provided to stage management.
- Appoint a designated Firearms Master (from the stage management crew) responsible for issuing, collecting, loading, cleaning, maintaining, storing and inventorying all weapons and ammunition in a production. If a suitable individual is not available, the Production Manager needs to appoint an appropriate Firearms Master.
- Instruct their crew to treat all weapons as if they are loaded.
- Instruct the stage management crew or responsible Firearms Master in all facets of weapons functioning, including jams, troubleshooting, cleaning, storage, and handling.
- Ensure that any real firearms only are altered or adapted by a qualified gunsmith or armorer.
- Ensure that Actors are aware of the rules and regulations listed below.

6. Production Stage Manager must:

- Confirm that the Production Manager has discharged the duties mentioned above.
- Instruct the actors and crew that all weapons be treated as if they are loaded.
- Ensure that no weapon is ever be set on a prop table or in a dressing room, or removed from the theatre for any reason at any time.
- Ensure that all unattended weapons and ammunition are stored in a locked container in a secure area.
- Ensure that weapons and ammunition are stored in separate locked containers.
- Unload all weapons before storage.

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- With Production Manager (and in consultation with the production's director, if appropriate) appoint a designated Firearms Master (from the stage management crew) responsible for issuing, collecting, loading, cleaning, maintaining, storing and inventorying all weapons and ammunition in a production. If a suitable individual is not available, the Production Manager needs to appoint an appropriate Firearms Master.
- A live weapon should only be issued by the Firearms Master to the actor carrying it onstage at the last convenient time before their entrance and collected as soon as the weapon is carried offstage. It should be returned to lockup and unloaded at the first available opportunity.
- Confirm and check that weapons have been cleaned and inspected following every performance.
- Secure dummy duplicate weaponry from the Prop Master for use in any scene in which a live weapon is not necessary and for rehearsals before a live fire test has been conducted.
- Ensure that when a real weapon is necessary but is not fired, it is unloaded or loaded with dummy rounds.
- Ensure that Actors are aware of the following rules and regulations:

Actors must

- Never touch any weapon at any time unless they are the actor handling the weapon and are doing so at the appropriate time during a rehearsal/performance, and then only if they have been trained and authorized to do so.
- At no stage should any weapons be removed or taken outside the rehearsal or performance area unless accompanied by the Prop Master, Fight Director or Armorer, Production Manager, or assigned Weapons Master of the production.
- Treat all weapons as if they are loaded.

Be aware that:

- i. The carrying, handling, or brandishing in public of any object that resembles a real weapon, or is a real weapon, is in violation of the law.
- ii. The brandishing of these weapons in public may be perceived as a threat to law enforcement officers. This perceived threat can lead to serious bodily injury or use of deadly force by law enforcement.
- Never handle or discharge a firearm except in a training situation or when actually involved in a rehearsal or performance.
- Anyone involved in the production has the right (and obligation) to halt any action they believe to be unsafe in the course of rehearsal, tech or performance.
- The actor has the right to witness the loading of the weapon.

Other Definitions

- Powder, or Gun-powder: Any of the several types of explosive powder used to propel bullets or projectiles from firearms.
- Live Shell or Round: Ammunition for use in a firearm that contains powder, a primer and a lead or metal bullet or projectile.
- Blank Shell or Round: As above, but where the bullet or projectile has been replaced with paper wadding, or the open end is crimped, to contain the powder.
- Spent Shell: either a live or blank shell that has had the primer activated, the powder consumed and the bullet or wadding expelled. Usually, the projectile end of a Spent Shell

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will appear empty, and the primer end will be dimpled, either at the center or on the edge of the rim.

- **Dummy Shell:** Prop or substitute shell that is made to look like a Live Shell with a bullet or projectile. There is no actual primer. In place of the powder, metal shot is often loosely placed in the cartridge to rattle in order to distinguish a Dummy Shell from a Live Shell.
- **Live-Firing Firearm:** A firearm capable of receiving and firing a Live Shell.
- **Blank-Firing Firearm:** A firearm that has been manufactured or altered to only receive and/or fire a Blank Shell.
- **Stage, Prop, Reproduction or Facsimile Firearm:** A non-firing “firearm” than can neither receive nor fire any type of Live Shell.
- **Caliber:** Refers to the measurement across the bullet or shell in hundredths (100ths) of an inch.