The cast list is not a surprise party.

MADE FOR THEATER TEACHERS



THE DIRECTOR'S GUIDE TO

Auditioning & Casting

Twelve chapters on auditions and casting, from the first flyer to the day after the list.

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Read Chapters 1 and 2 first. After that, read what you need, when you need it.

Before the First Flyer

Somewhere in your building is a student who has never told anyone they want this. They've practiced in a bathroom mirror. They've read the flyer twice and put it back. And one afternoon, for reasons they couldn't explain to anyone at home, they're going to walk into your room, say their name in a voice slightly higher than usual, and try.

That's what an audition is. Under the forms and the folding chairs, it's a kid deciding to be seen. Very few things in a school day ask for that much courage, and you get to run the room where it happens.

It's also a logistics event with the emotional stakes of a royal succession, run by one teacher, after a full day, with a broken stapler. Parents will have opinions. Your best tenor will have a dentist appointment. Someone will cry, and on a good day it won't be you.

So this Guide does two things. It gives you a process you can run and explain, with the forms already written and the math already done. And it tries to keep you company, because this job is lonely in October and everybody forgets to say so.

> **The cast list is not a surprise party. Nobody should find out how it works by walking into it.**

Read Chapters 1 and 2 first. They take about 25 minutes, and they prevent most of the emails you'd otherwise answer at 10 p.m. After that, read what you need, when you need it. Nobody reads a Guide cover to cover in tech week. We've met you.

What this kit will and won't do

It'll help you run a clear, consistent process. It won't guarantee fairness, because people do that part. It won't end complaints, because humans remain in the building. It doesn't replace your school's policies or legal advice. Wherever a rule depends on your state or district, you'll see a VERIFY LOCALLY box telling you who to ask. Medical, emergency-contact and media-release forms are left out on purpose. Use your district's.

Meet Westbrook

Our running example is Westbrook High School, which doesn't exist, presenting *Lanterns at Low Tide*, which doesn't exist either, directed by Dana Okafor, who is doing her best. Every student here is invented. Westbrook's numbers are illustrations, never benchmarks.

Three IDs worth learning

ID	Looks like	What it is
Audition ID	A017	One student, one production. Goes on the card and the score sheets, so the panel sees a number first.
Role ID	R03	One role or ensemble track.
Evaluator ID	EV2	One panel member.

The Whole Thing on One Page

If you have four minutes and bus duty, this is the kit.

Step	What you do	Open this
Plan	Pick dates, count roles, choose your criteria	Planning Workbook
Announce	Flyers, announcements, parent letter	Audition Flyers; Announcements and Parent Letter
Register	Forms and conflict calendars go out and come back	Student Packet; Conflict Calendar
Assign IDs	Give every student an Audition ID	Audition Room Kit (Sign-In Sheet); Run of Show
Audition	Run the room, on time, kindly	Audition Room Kit; Run of Show
Evaluate	Score alone, from what you saw	Panel Packet; Casting Matrix
Callback	Ask the questions you still have	Cast List and Emails (Callback List); Panel Packet (Callback Notes)
Decide	Humans decide. The matrix only helps	Casting Matrix
Announce	Post the list, send the emails, open crew	Cast List and Emails
Confirm	Collect acceptance forms	Cast List and Emails
Follow up	The conversations that make you a teacher	After the List

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CHAPTER

Plan Backward from Opening Night

Auditions start with a calendar. So does most of the drama, if you skip this chapter.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- The six-week calendar
- Do the cast math
- Open, invited or class-based



GRAB THESE

Planning Workbook, pages 2 to 5
Audition Flyers
Announcements and Parent Letter
Conflict Calendar

Audition trouble almost never starts at the audition. It starts when the form goes out late, the callback lands on the winter concert, or the list goes up on a Friday and you leave for a wedding in Ohio. A six-week plan fixes most of that. It takes about 30 minutes to draft, and you do it once.

The six-week calendar

Six weeks is the span from your first planning step to your first rehearsal. Count backward from that rehearsal, never forward from today. Forward from today is how Week 3 becomes the week of the state band festival.

Week	What happens	Open this
6 before first rehearsal	Clear dates with your administrator. Book the room, panel and accompanist. Confirm your license.	Workbook pp. 2-3
5	Write the role breakdown and criteria. Get the casting statement reviewed.	Workbook pp. 4-7
4	Announce. Flyers, morning announcements, parent letter. Forms and conflict calendars go out.	Flyers; Announcements; Student Packet
3	Offer an information session if you can. Pull your sides, clear them with your license, and post them.	Audition Room Kit
2	Forms due. Assign Audition IDs. Build the run of show. Train the panel.	Run of Show; Panel Packet
1	Auditions, callbacks, the decision meeting.	Audition Room Kit; Casting Matrix
0	Cast list, emails, acceptance forms, crew sign-up, first rehearsal.	Cast List and Emails

Do the cast math

Do this before you announce. It changes how you run the room and what you promise students.

1. Count your speaking roles, then your ensemble capacity. Include the size your stage and your sanity can bear.
2. Estimate turnout from your last two shows. No history? Take last year's theater class enrollment and add a quarter for the curious. That's a planning guess. Adjust it after year one.
3. Divide turnout by places. If turnout is under your places, you have a recruiting problem. If it's three or more times your places, you have a communication problem, and families need to hear early that not everyone will be cast.

4 Name your crew and ensemble options in the first announcement, not after the list goes up. Crew named in your first announcement is an invitation. Crew first mentioned on list day sounds like a consolation prize, and teenagers can smell those.

Number	Westbrook	Meaning
Principal roles	5	Fixed by the script
Ensemble places	12	Fixed by the stage and the costume rack
All places	17	5 + 12
Expected turnout	25	Last year 21, plus a recruiting push
Turnout ÷ places	1.5	About two of every three students auditioning will be on stage

A ratio of 1.5 tells Dana that a third of the students who audition won't be cast. That sentence goes, in kinder words, into her parent letter. It also tells her one panel in one session will do. Run the numbers again the week forms come in. If 25 becomes 40, you have time to add a panel. If 25 becomes 12, you have time to walk the halls and find the kid who was funny in English class.

Open, invited or class-based

Type	Best when	Watch for
Open	The default for school shows. Anyone eligible may audition.	Takes the most time. Needs real recruiting.
Invited	A competition piece or small touring group, with a stated reason.	Can look like favoritism. Publish how students get invited.
Class-based	The show is part of a course, and every student gets a role.	Say so before enrollment. You still need criteria for who plays what.

Your rehearsal calendar lives on the Setup tab of the Conflict Calendar. Enter it once, print it for the Student Packet, and every conflict question afterward has one answer.

When the calendar is three weeks and a prayer

It happens. Keep four things and let the rest shrink: criteria written in advance, a second adult, a conflict calendar, and a promised date for the list. The information session can become a morning announcement. Callbacks can become the last half hour of auditions. Those four are the load-bearing walls.

Announce what students need to decide

Your first announcement answers five things: what's the show, when are auditions, what do I have to do, what if I've never done this, and how much of my life will this take. If a student can't answer all five after reading your flyer, rewrite the flyer.

AT WESTBROOK HIGH

Dana has 5 principal roles, an ensemble of 12, and an opening on March 4. Her first rehearsal is January 19, but she wants the list up before winter break, so she counts back from the list date and starts planning November 9. Last year 21 students auditioned. She plans for 25, one open audition, one 2-hour session, and a callback the next day.

How this goes sideways

- Setting audition dates before checking the school calendar. Concerts, testing and away games will find you.
- Keeping rehearsal dates secret until after casting. Students can't list conflicts against dates they've never seen.
- Promising a place to everyone, then discovering your stage holds 20.

Middle school and high school

Middle school	High school
Build in an extra week. Families need more notice, and first-timers need someone to explain what an audition is. Class-based casting is often the kindest structure.	Check the sports, music and testing calendars. Juniors and seniors have the most outside conflicts, and they will expect the list on their phones.

YOUR MOVE

Open the Workbook to page 3. Write your first rehearsal date in the last row and fill in the calendar upward through page 2. Take it to your administrator before you announce anything.

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CHAPTER

The Fair Casting Process

Fair doesn't mean everyone gets what they want. It means you can describe what happened out loud, in daylight, to anyone.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- Set criteria in advance
- Prepare the panel
- Have a second adult



GRAB THESE

Panel Packet: rubrics, score sheet, Fair Casting Checklist
Casting Matrix: Setup and Recusals tabs
Planning Workbook, pages 6 and 7

This process will not make every family happy. Nothing will. Nobody in history has posted a cast list and received only thank-you notes. What it will do is make your decisions easy to explain, because you did the thinking before the feelings arrived. If your principal asks how you cast a show, you want a four-sentence answer, and you want all four sentences to be true.

> **If you've already cast the show in your head, the audition is theater of the wrong kind.**

Set criteria in advance

Write down what you're looking for before anyone reads a line. Use the rubric in the Panel Packet as it stands or change it, then stop changing it the moment the first student walks in. Share it with students. Nobody should learn what counted from the cast list.

Weights are a choice. For a comedy, you might weigh listening more heavily. Decide that ahead of time and enter it in the Casting Matrix. If your format can't show a criterion, such as listening to a partner in a solo read, add a partner read or set its weight to 0 before auditions. Changing weights after you've seen the scores is the fastest way to lose your own trust in the process, and you're the only one in the room who'll know.

Prepare the panel

1. Hand out the rubric at least a week ahead.
2. Meet for 20 minutes. Watch a public sample, or have a colleague read a side. Everyone scores it alone.
3. Compare scores and talk through any gap of two points. This is calibration, and it's the most useful 20 minutes in the whole process.
4. Agree on the rules: score alone, write evidence, no discussion until the session ends.

SAY THIS, OR SOMETHING LIKE IT

"Thanks for doing this. Here are the rules for today. We score alone, from what we see. If you didn't see something, leave it blank. Write a short note for any 1 or 4. We don't talk about students between auditions, in the hall or at lunch. If there's a student you have a personal connection to, tell me now and you'll step back from scoring them. Scores help us think. People make the decision. Everything on these sheets stays here."

Have a second adult

Keep at least two adults in the room with students. A second pair of eyes catches what you miss, and it protects students and you. Small program? Ask a colleague, a music teacher or a trusted retiree. They don't need a theater background. They need the rubric and the nerve to say, "I didn't see that."

VERIFY LOCALLY

Your school may have rules on adults working with students, including screening of volunteers. Ask your administrator before you invite anyone from outside the building.

Conflicts of interest

List them before auditions. The usual suspects are your own children, relatives, students you teach privately, and close family friends. Ask every panelist the same question: "Is there any student here you have a personal stake in?"

- The panelist declares it in writing and leaves that student's scores blank.
- List it on the Recusals tab of the Casting Matrix, which then expects one fewer evaluator for that student.
- The panelist leaves the room while that student is discussed for a role. Another adult leads.
- If the conflict is yours, name a panelist to lead that decision.

Keep useful notes

Write notes you'd be comfortable reading aloud in the principal's office, because one day you might. Write what you saw, not what you think of the student. "Lost focus twice during partner read" holds up. "Not a serious kid" does not. Store score sheets where your school says, for as long as it says.

VERIFY LOCALLY

Student records rules differ by state and district. Ask your administrator how long to keep audition notes and who may see them.

What fairness does not require

- The same size of role for everyone. A cast is made of different jobs.
- Ignoring the whole show. Casting a family, a duo or an ensemble is legitimate.
- Explaining every decision to every family. You need a process you can describe.
- A perfect panel. You need a panel that notices when it disagrees.

Things that quietly undo a good process

A rubric can't protect you from a director who decided in October. Write down your assumptions before auditions, then go looking for students who prove you wrong. Most directors have a story about the freshman nobody expected, and it's usually the best story they have.

The other quiet problem is the room. A panel that laughs at one student's joke and sits like a parole board for the next is telling both of them something. Agree to be warm and even with everyone. Save the snacks for the break.

When someone asks how you cast the show

Practice this until it's easy: "We set the criteria in advance and shared them. At least two adults scored every student separately. Anyone with a close connection stepped back. We used those notes to discuss each role against what the show needs, and then we made a decision."

AT WESTBROOK HIGH

The panel is Dana (EV1), choir director Luis Ferreira (EV2) and English teacher Renee Nair (EV3). Mr. Ferreira gives Sofia Eriksen private voice lessons, so he recuses from her scores. The matrix shows Sofia as complete with two evaluators. Nobody has to have an awkward conversation in a parking lot.

How this goes sideways

- Writing criteria after auditions. It looks like justification because it is.
- Discussing a student between auditions. One strong opinion can reshape a whole panel.
- Letting scores stand in for judgment. A rubric supports a decision. It doesn't make one.
- Treating a blank as a zero. A blank means nobody saw it.

Middle school and high school

Middle school	High school
Use three or four criteria in plain words, and consider a student-friendly version.	Share the full rubric. Students can handle it, and many will read it more closely than your panel. A student stage manager is great. A student scorer is never a good idea.

YOUR MOVE

Fill in the Panel and Criteria Planner on Workbook page 6, then print the Fair Casting Checklist from the Panel Packet. It takes about 20 minutes the first time.

PLANNING WORKBOOK

Before You Start



This is your production's planning record. Write in it, and use pencil. The Director's Guide explains the thinking. This book holds your decisions.

Production: _____

School: _____

Director: _____

Opening night: _____

First rehearsal: _____

Page	Worksheet	Guide chapter
2-3	Audition calendar	1
4-5	Role breakdown	1, 9
6	Panel and criteria planner	2
7	Casting statement and who to ask	3, 12
8	Room and staffing plan	4
9	Audition day timing	4
10	Callback plan	5
11	Show-specific rules and notes	8, 10
12	Post-audition debrief	All

Keep this book with your production records. Don't leave it where students can read it.

SECTION 1

Audition Calendar

Start on page 3 with your first rehearsal, then work up. Guide Chapter 1.

Weeks before	Task	Date	Done
6	Dates cleared with administrator		
6	Room, panel and accompanist booked		
6	License checked: copying sides, casting, changes		
5	Role breakdown written (pp. 4-5)		
5	Criteria and weights set (p. 6)		
5	Casting statement reviewed (p. 7)		
4	Flyers and announcements out		
4	Parent letter home		
4	Forms and conflict calendars out		
3	Information session		
3	Sides pulled, cleared with license, posted		
2	Forms due; Audition IDs assigned		
2	Run of show built		
2	Panel trained on rubric		

SECTION 1

Audition Calendar, continued

Week of	Task	Date and time	Done
Audition	Auditions		
Audition	Scores entered		
Audition	Callback list posted		
Audition	Callbacks		
Audition	Decision meeting		
List	Administrator told before posting		
List	Cast list posted		
List	Emails sent		
List	Crew sign-up open		
List	Acceptance deadline		
Start	First rehearsal		

Cast math

Speaking roles: _____ **Ensemble places:** _____

Crew places: _____ **Expected turnout:** _____

Expected turnout ÷ all places = _____ . Type of audition: ☐ Open ☐ Invited ☐ Class-based

SECTION 2

Role Breakdown

One row per role. Give each a Role ID (R01, R02…) and use it in the Casting Matrix. **Age read** means the character's age as written and how the role plays on stage. It is a note about the role. It is never a rating of a student's looks or maturity.

Role ID	Role	Size (lead, supporting, featured, ensemble)	Vocal range	Dance	Age read	What this role most needs