

Stage Manager's Production Script

Tutorial: The Stage Manager's Production Script

Part One: Acquiring the Script

By Dr. Arthur Dirks (2012)

The Stage Manager's script probably is the most important document in any stage production. It is the working reference to all of the artistic decisions regarding the activity of the actors on the stage, and it documents all of the artistic choices *as they are made*. It is the official book of intentions and choices, a conductor's score for the multi-dimensional world of the theatrical event.

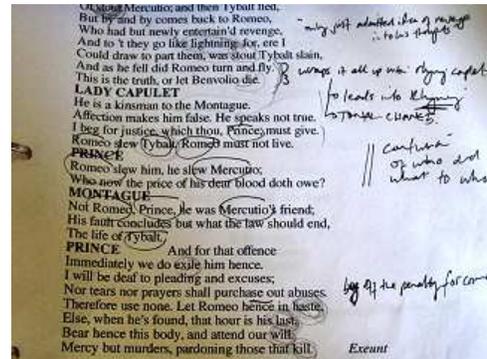
Everybody else can get by with a marked-up copy of the play, but the Stage Manager has unique requirements. The script must be:

- ◇ Complete
- ◇ Highly readable
- ◇ Heavily annotated
- ◇ Show edits and inclusions
- ◇ Quickly referenced

The script book itself also usually has large numbers of other inclusions—calendars, lists, schedules, reports and technical plans, but the core of the book is the stage action and dialogue—and the annotations about them.

In fact, the modern stage manager often creates at least 2 versions of her script: the **blocking script** and the **calling script**. The requirements of the page for each are approximately the same: visible text information and space for notation that can be referenced to the text.

Acting editions and most other printings of plays are in the 5" x 8" common book size—a folded standard page, trimmed and bound. For a century, stage managers cut a script on the binding, and pasted each page into a window in a sheet of typing paper, allowing wide margins around the text for notation. Typically, an additional sheet of paper was inserted between each page for more notes. With the advent of low-cost photocopies, the page was centered on a single sheet, which was bound either on the right or the left, and the additional sheet was eliminated.



In many cases, this works well. The actors, stage manager, and the rest of the production team reference the same page. But if the source is a classic text, a reading version or something other than a standard acting edition, the text is small and often crammed with description. Enlargement for ease of reference reduces the notation space. Sometimes it can be cut-and-pasted into a format useful to the stage manager, but it is rarely ideal.

The stage manager requires a different script.

Part One discusses the process for acquiring a script for the stage manager's use.

Part Two is a tutorial on formatting the script using Microsoft Word 2010.

Acquiring the Script

Applications required:

- ◇ Web browser
- ◇ MS Notepad
- ◇ Optical Character Recognition (OCR—see below)

There are three ways to acquire the script:

- a) Download from online
- b) Scan and convert with OCR
- c) Type it in as a last resort.

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a) Downloading from online.

This site includes authors primarily before about 1920. Other plays may be found on other links.

Start here. Many classic and other public domain texts are available in digital form online. Currently online texts can be found at:

The WWW Virtual Library for Theater and Drama



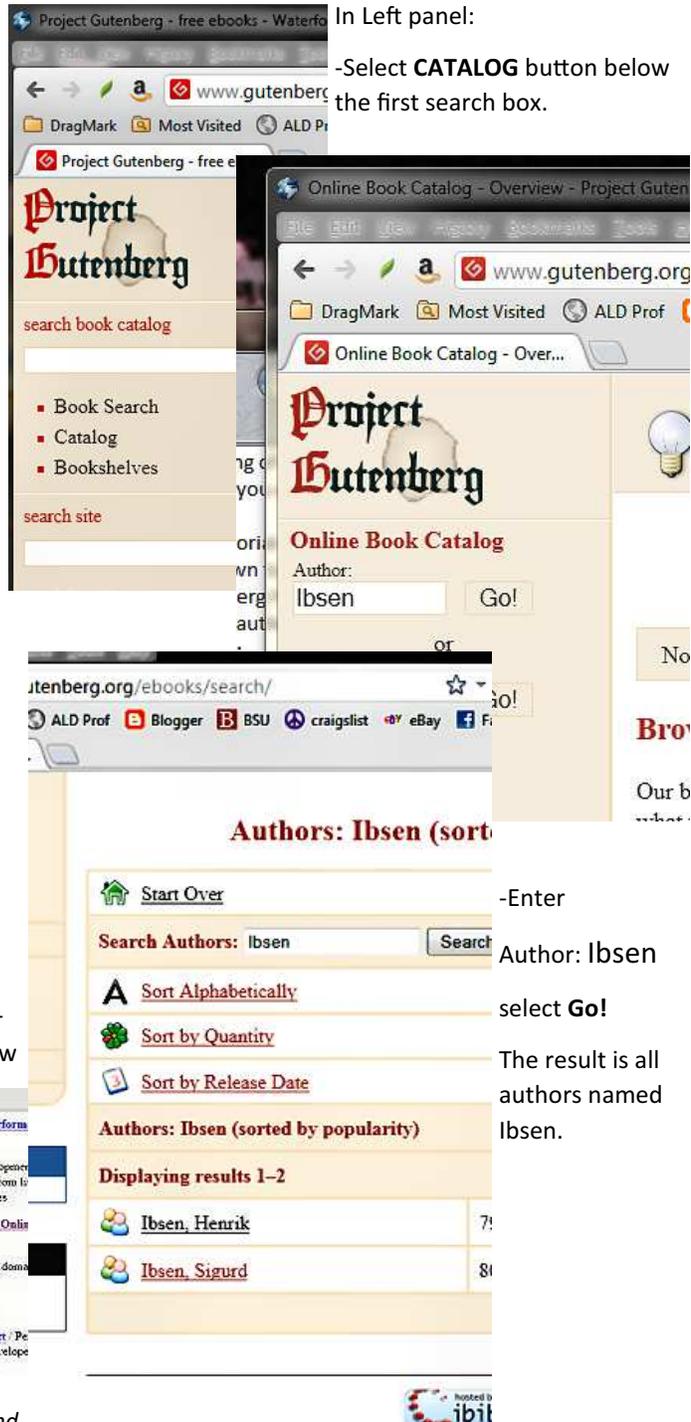
Select *Electronic text archives and plays online*

This is a listing of many sites that host plays in digital form. Many are worth browsing, but a select few are useful if you are looking for a specific play.

◇ For this tutorial, scroll far down to and select:



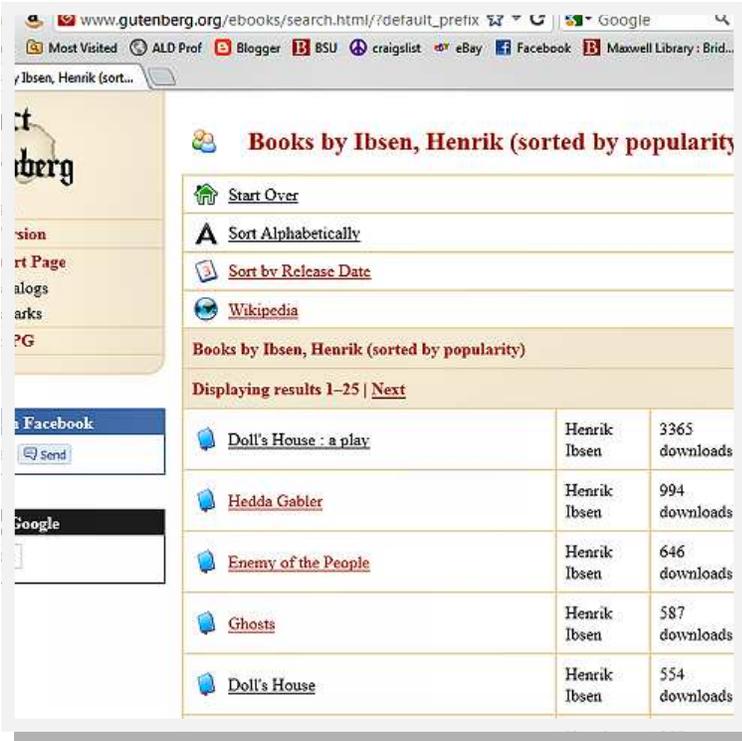
-The Gutenberg Project -- Public Domain Literature and Plays Online (www.gutenberg.org)



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- ◇ Select **Henrik Ibsen**.

This shows a list of books and plays in digital versions online.



- ◇ Select the Download tab:

The result is all of the various versions of that particular text that are available online.



A stage manager may need perhaps two versions: an acting version and one you can format easily for the Stage Manager's Book.

For the *acting script*:

- ◇ Select the **HTML** version. It is a formatted version that is appropriate as an acting script. It can be downloaded, edited for cuts, and printed for distribution. It is not sufficient for the Stage Manager's use.

- ◇ At top select **Sort Alphabetically**

Notice that *Doll's House* appears in more than one version, but one has far more downloads. It is likely that is the most well-known version. With Ibsen and other classic playwrights, some texts also may be in a language other than English.

- ◇ Select the first *Doll's House*.
- ◇ On this screen, select first the **Bibrec** tab. It provides information about the version, and you verify that it is in English.



For the *Stage Manager's script*:

- ◇ Select the **Plain Text UTF-8** version. You want a clean text file with text, capitalization, punctuation, and line returns. You will be completely reformatting the text and any enhancements will interfere with the formatting you will be applying.

You may wish to explore the different versions available under "More files". There may be a preferred translation or variation of the textual content.

The Plain Text format version is displayed on the screen. You must capture this into a plain text file.

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- ◇ Place the cursor anywhere on the page and press **CTRL-A** and **CTRL-C** to copy all of the text to clipboard.

- ◇ Open **Windows Notepad** and paste the clipboard **CTRL-V**. Do

NOT use a formatting application such as MS Word, because you do NOT want to include any meta-data about fonts, formatting or security.

Just :

- text,
- capitalization,
- punctuation and
- line returns.

- ◇ Check to verify that you have captured ALL of the play. It may be necessary to capture a certain quantity—perhaps an Act—at a time.
- ◇ -Save the document in your working folder as **Doll.txt**, and close it.

b) Scan and convert with OCR into plain unformatted text.

If a text version is not readily available in digital form, you will have to “acquire” it. For all *optical character recognition* (OCR) purposes, you must have the clearest undistorted version of the text you can get. A crumpled or folded paper can result in misreadings, like extra carriage returns and random letters. Old photocopies with fading or skewed text and thick books with text wrapping into the fold are problematic. Some page cleanup may be required in image editor after scanning in such cases.



Either

a) scan the document into **.tif** or **.pdf** page files and take them to a computer that has OCR software, or

b) scan directly into the OCR software.

When working from books, awkward formats, fragmented pages or unclear text - always scan to an image first. Use an image application to clean up artifacts and enhance contrast and sharpen the text before applying OCR. It is a time-

consuming additional step, but the tradeoff in time for accurate recognition is always better than typing it out.

Scanners

A scanner is very useful and they are inexpensive. A flatbed scanner is an important tool for design, where working between paper and digital formats is common. As a Stage Manager, you don't need to *own* one for infrequent use—you just need a friend or office that has one, and a usb flash drive.

Some consumer scanners are sold with included OCR software of some sort. The software reads the image and reports the letters of text it recognizes, stopping for unrecognized marks or characters for the user to identify. Some programs then memorize the identification for future use. If the text is clear, it happens in seconds across the whole script, halting only for user input for questionable characters. The work of obtaining editable text from a clear pdf or page image isn't very demanding of OCR software, if preservation of format and text characteristics are not important. For purposes here, formatting is completely discarded.

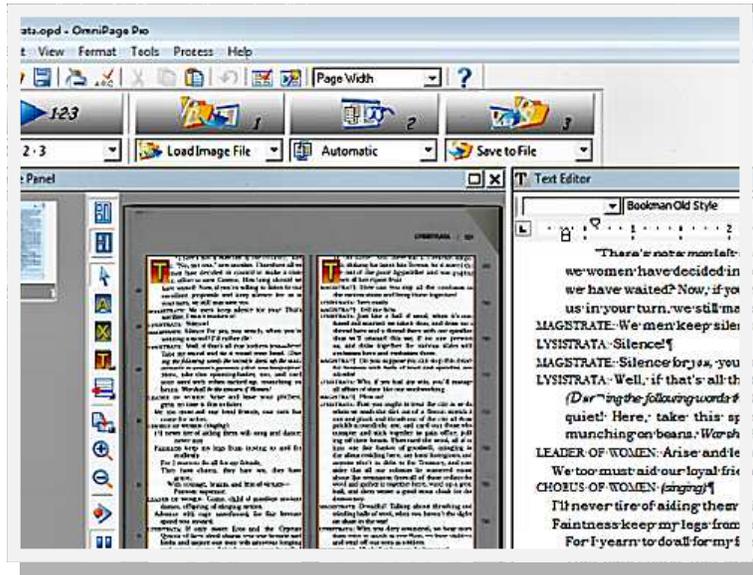
While some scanner owners have an OCR application, more typically the play must be scanned into a **.tif** or **.pdf** file, page by page and the OCR is applied to the files. Any desktop attached to a scanner can create the image file and store it on a flash drive, and you can take it away to apply your own OCR to the file.

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It is worthwhile to own an OCR application, whether or not you own the scanner. Briefly surveying the OCR options available:

- ◇ Nuance **Scansoft Omnipage**, now in version 18, tends to hold the high ground. It is very accurate, memorizes and keeps its own library of character recognitions, exports in several forms, and works quickly. It also has a comprehensive integrated workflow system and runs \$500 full retail, less on auction sites where earlier versions also are available. I have a very old version 14 that continues to work flawlessly for all my needs.
- ◇ **Scansoft Textbridge Pro** is an older application related to Omnipage, but without the automation and workflow tools. It is about \$80 from Nuance, less on auction sites. I used it in the past and it did an acceptable job.
- ◇ **ABBYY FineReader Professional** is \$170, but the *Express Edition* at \$50 retail appears useful for most purposes. I have not used it but it has supporters.
- ◇ **Smartsoft** (www.smartocr.com) offers a version, which I have not tried, for \$100. I have no experience with it, but it looks useful.
- ◇ **SimpleOCR** and Softi Software's **FreeOCR** would not install on my Win7/64bit machine.
- ◇ There also are some online tools of unknown value (by me). You may find them useful.

After performing the OCR, save the document in **.txt** format using **Notepad** as before. This is important—other applications such as MS Word may leave formatting information even when saving in *ascii* or text format. You require a *format-free* script ready for formatting. There is a temptation to make some corrections at this point, but unless they are required to make the file itself coherent, they are best left until after the dialogue formatting process.



The scan order may not have been in script order, and rearranging large blocks is useful at this point, simply because the text is most compact and requires the least scrolling.

Save the final document to your working folder as ***.txt** file. If you are warned that formatting will be lost, accept it.

C) Type it in.

Don't. But, if you must, work in a plain text editor such as Notepad. Do not be distracted by any formatting activity. Some text editors can show the paragraph marks, which is clearer information than just spacing. But no time should be spent on page formatting. The job is to get the text into a file. Only that.

Published script formatting varies, but a 40-line page of text contains over 300 words and a 40-page double-spaced script would have 8000-12,000 words. A 60-word typist might average 5 minutes per page, requiring about 4 hours of typing, plus additional time for special formatting and proofing. The same text can be scanned, recognized, corrected and specially formatted in half the time with less typing skill.