

16 REHEARSAL ROOM GUIDELINES

These guidelines aim to support staff who are leading activity to ensure all Public Acts rehearsal rooms are well held and inclusive spaces. Based on our past learning, they are always evolving.

OUR CORE PRINCIPLES

We ask that everyone in our rooms tries to be:

- **Open** (to each other, to new ideas and opinions)
- **Generous** (we look after each other, with patience and kindness)
- **Brave** (we try new things, push ourselves within safe limits)

In addition, as staff working on the project we aspire to:

- Bring joy!
- Make every participant feel **welcome, necessary, and powerful**
- **Assume** nothing, except that everyone is a VIP, and everyone is an **expert** in their own experience
- **Never underestimate!**
- Create a space where we can all be our **best** selves, recognising that this means something different for everyone
- **Look after ourselves** and look out for each other, understanding that a supported team makes for a supported community.

OUR REHEARSALS

INTERACTING WITH THE COMMUNITY

- Always define people as individuals, rather than according to the organisations through which

they were originally recruited. Know everyone's name and pronunciation, gender pronouns and relevant history with Public Acts. Make frequent use of people's names and take the time to help the group learn each other's names

- Understand the history, values and mission statements of all community partner organisations you will be working with
- Promote a culture of care: everyone is equally important to this process
- Ask for consent when making physical contact with people. Each person's boundaries are different and may be informed by their personal experiences or cultural and/or religious practices
- Be mindful of how your own experiences and bias can influence your interactions. Always be aware of the power and privilege you hold as a member of staff and consider how you might use that to support the group
- Check in with company members regularly to ensure they are supported and use their insights to inform next steps, as they are the experts of their own experiences
- Take advantage of opportunities to nurture positive working relationships with people. Active and consistent engagement is essential to the success of the project and building trust with participants
- Talk to Public Acts staff about your experiences with individual community members, to ensure their expertise and history with the project can help inform positive outcomes.

TIME, SCHEDULING AND LOGISTICS

- Start on time, end on time. Starting and ending on time demonstrates that we honour people's time and commitment and encourages them to honour ours
- Maintain a feeling of calm, even when the pressure is on, so that people don't feel panicked, stressed, or anxious within rehearsals
- Give a brief summary of the plan at the start of each session so that people can feel involved and in control e.g. *Today we're working on piecing together the opening and then we're going to learn the final song*
- Use people when they're called to rehearse, to ensure people feel that their time is being valued. Unless in the context of a stagger through, try and avoid having anyone sitting around for long periods of time not working
- Have a Public Acts staff member present in every rehearsal room where community members are present: this is essential for everyone's safety and wellbeing
- Know each Public Acts staff member's role and who to direct questions to so that you can advise and signpost community members as necessary
- Model best practices to keep the room focused - limit personal use of technology and mobile phones, wear appropriate clothing
- Understand the welfare support that is offered to staff and to company members, for your own benefit and to signpost others when needed.

LEARNING & DELIVERY

- Familiarise yourself with the access needs of the group and plan bespoke delivery of all material as necessary
- Be aware of different learning and communication styles, access requirements, body types, and levels of experience and confidence. Remind everyone that there is no single way of interpreting the material and

celebrate the fact that there are as many different ways of doing something as there are people in the room

- Emphasise adaptation and demonstrate options when teaching material e.g. when teaching a choreographic sequence offer a chair-based version as well as a standing version, giving this equal time and value in the delivery, so that people can see how they can adapt it for their own body. Adaptation and interpretation should never be seen as an 'add on', 'after thought' or 'second best', but given equal weight and teaching time
- Create an environment that gives space for questions, as well as modelling & anticipating questions which people may feel exposed asking
- Make instructions accessible for everyone: use clear, concise language. Plan and rehearse ahead of delivery, particularly when communicating complex ideas or story beats, to ensure you are as economical with your words and as clear as possible
- Be aware that many people won't have an in-depth understanding of theatre terminology or processes. Communicate in an inclusive way and explain initialisms and acronyms
- Maintain a collaborative, as opposed to a competitive, environment
- Be attentive to the room at all times, noting when people are struggling and responding accordingly. Create controlled opportunities for questions e.g. *The Movement Associates are going to come round for the next ten minutes to answer any questions*
- Break it down without watering it down: provide step-by-step instructions to make them achievable for everyone. Be mindful of tone, speed, and language, remembering that we often speak much faster than we realise
- Offer support around line learning, including our 'tips' sheets, creating clear learning milestones, and opportunities for people to run lines either with other company members or staff

- Ensure that only one person gives instructions at a time and keep 'lead' voices to a minimum. Use a microphone to ensure everyone can hear and be heard without needing to strain. Ask for quiet, but avoid 'shh'-ing the company, or using other approaches which could be conceived of as patronising
- Be mindful of who is positioned at the front of the stage and how to rotate this: our ambition is to provide everyone the opportunity to feel central to the art
- Practise patience when offering new information. Repeat the most important instructions at the start and the end of whatever you're saying
- Be conscious that dividing up the room by perceived identities (e.g. gender, experience or age) can expose our own assumptions.
- Work to use language, analogies and metaphors that humanise and uplift:
 - Use gender-neutral words to address groups e.g. 'everyone', 'friends', 'team', as opposed to 'ladies and gents'
 - Avoid using racialised language
 - Keep your communication free of violent idioms or phrases i.e. 'whip into shape', 'you killed it!'
 - Avoid using ableist language e.g. 'crazy', 'insane', 'lame'
- Use inclusive language e.g. 'come to your working level' rather than, 'stand up if you can'
- Be specific with your praise, to allow people to know and take ownership over what they have achieved. Be honest about where we need to keep improving
- If inviting feedback from the group, ask specific questions and control the flow of voices. Give people the chance to share their ideas in a pair before opening up a whole group discussion (e.g. *'turn to the person next to you and share two things you enjoyed about today'*) – this allows everyone to have formed and voiced an opinion, even if they don't then share it with everyone.

LANGUAGE

- Be thoughtful of your language and the power it holds. The words and expressions we use reveal our beliefs and assumptions about the world. They can have a far greater impact on others than we intend
- Aspire to speak to and about everyone with the greatest respect and kindness possible
- Public Acts uses the language that people use to describe themselves. We do not impose labels, generalisations or perceived identities on individuals (e.g. 'at-risk', 'marginalised', 'inner-city', 'disadvantaged')
- Refer to the community company using theatre-based language e.g. 'company', 'cast'
- NB As staff and artists we do not use the term 'family' to refer to our community, as that word holds different meanings for different people. However, we do not edit community members who choose to do so
- Each role should be spoken about with dignity and importance. Celebrate and remind the company that the community ensemble is the beating heart of a Public Acts show

START AND END OF SESSIONS

- Invite everyone in the rehearsal room to participate in the warm-up, including team members or visitors, to allow a sense of everyone being in this together, and to prevent the feeling of being 'observed'
- Warm-up should create space for people to shake off their day and bring themselves into the room, allowing us as one united company to focus on the positive things we are about to experience together
- There should be a moment for company notices at the start and end of sessions as appropriate. These should be kept to a minimum, and should always involve community members where possible (happy birthdays, sharing of good news and so on.) Hold a closing moment at the end of each session which allows people to centre themselves and feel connected and proud of what we have all achieved together.