

## **Skidmore Theater Department**

### **Departmental Protocols for Rehearsing and Performing Scenes with Violence, Stage Combat and Extreme Physicality**

*(Some language below was created in collaboration with Intimacy Directors International protocols with regards to intimacy)*

This document is designed to promote safety, health and well-being and to promote respect and empowerment for actors in the event that a show or scene contains violence, stage combat and/or extreme physicality that may cause bodily harm. It promotes freedom of expression through processes that respect collaborators' personal boundaries. All collaborators should be able to work in full confidence and that these scenes will only be rehearsed and performed with the ongoing enthusiastic consent of all actors.

All members of the community should be aware that scenes with violence, stage combat and extreme physicality require training and extensive rehearsals to ensure the health and safety of all involved. Even with these protocols and attention to health and safety, there is risk of injury for anyone engaged in these activities.

These protocols apply to all members of the community who may be working in rehearsal and performance - students, faculty, staff, and guest artists - and all members of the community are responsible for upholding these standards.

This is intended to be a living document and will be updated and revised in accordance with continuing best practices.

## **Definitions**

### **Scenes with Violence, Stage Combat or Extreme Physicality**

Scenes with violence are those in which either the plain meaning of the text or the company's interpretation of the text reference violence. Violence can take many forms including verbal abuse and can be textual or non-verbal actions including threats, both physical and non-physical.

Stage combat is any physical confrontation that is scripted or non-verbal or implied that represents physical bodily harm to a person, with or without actual physical contact. This includes both unarmed and armed stage combat (for prop weapons see below). Slapping or shoving also easily can cause bodily harm and are included. Depictions of self-harm or sexual assault are also included in this definition (please see the protocols on performing scenes with sexual intimacy for more information). Productions with scenes containing unarmed or armed stage combat may require a fight captain, fight director or choreographer, depending on the complexity and nature of the scenes. (It is recommended a member of the ensemble be Fight Captain unless faculty has approved that it necessitates the Stage Manager.)

Scenes depicting extreme physicality include those that may be non-violent or not defined as stage combat but still carry physical risk including acrobatics, falls, tumbling, contact improv,

REVISED : 3/31/23

lifting or other aggressive movement. Productions with extreme physicality may require a movement director, fight captain, fight director or choreographer. (It is recommended a member of the ensemble be Fight Captain unless faculty has approved that it necessitates the Stage Manager.)

## **Prop Weapon**

A prop weapon is any instrument used in a violent way towards others and include: firearm (non-firing, rubber and toy), knives, swords, rapiers, daggers, spears, compound or cross bow, slingshots, hand cuffs, shackles, restraints, axe, staff, blade, or any found weapons such as crowbar, baseball bat, frying pan, rock, stick, etc.

All prop weapons must be approved by the Department and will follow protocols requiring storage and usage (see firearm section below).

## **Fight Director or Fight Choreographer**

A trained and/or certified individual who is specialized in training, choreographing or staging armed and unarmed stage combat, violence or physicalized movement, depending on the needs of the production and in consultation with the Director. This person oversees the health and safety of performers in the acts of violence, stage combat and physicality. This person also choreographs the violence, stage combat and physicality in consultation with the Director. No other member of the production team can re-stage, add, edit or revise the choreography directed by the Fight Director/Choreographer.

## **Fight Captain**

The Fight Captain is a designated member of the ensemble who will oversee the combat rehearsals. A Stage Manager is able to fulfill this role if necessary. The Fight Captain is NOT a fight director or choreographer and will not change choreography in any way. A Fight Captain cannot add or replace any unapproved weapons in the fight.

Primary duties would be as needed regarding:

- Daily fight calls
- Understudy/swing fight calls
- Choreography notation
- Injury or incident reports (only if SM)

## **Fight Call**

A fight call is the designated meeting time prior to a rehearsal or performance where performers can rehearse a stage combat sequence. The fight call is conducted by the Fight Captain and occurs on the stage prior to the performance (usually thirty minutes before half hour). Fight call should cover all choreographed sequences and is the time for the performers to recognize any concerns or safety issues which may have arisen from prior performances or with the set or props, or if any physical modifications need to be made (due to injury or other reasons). Fight calls should be run in costume. Every fight sequence must be run through at least twice in a fight call

but can be run three times (one at  $\frac{1}{4}$  speed, one at  $\frac{1}{2}$  speed and one at  $\frac{3}{4}$  speed). Fight calls are never run full speed.

In addition to the Fight Captain, the Stage Manager must also be present at fight calls (unless SM is Fight Captain).

## Prop Weapons

### Skidmore Student Code of Conduct #23

Possession, use, or distribution of explosives, including but not limited to fireworks and ammunition, guns (air, BB, paintball, facsimile weapons and pellet guns, etc.), or other weapons or dangerous objects such as arrows, axes, machetes, nun chucks, throwing stars, or knives having blades in excess of six inches in length (except for culinary knives reasonably necessary for cooking in on-campus residences), including the storage of any item that falls within the category of a weapon in a vehicle parked on College property;

### Use of prop weapons

All prop weapons used in any production (including studio labs) must be approved by the Technical Director and/or Chair prior to rehearsals.

The Technical Director will communicate all prop weapons used in productions to Skidmore Campus Safety and oversee the storage and usage plan to maintain health and safety.

### Prohibited prop weapons

Skidmore Theater Department will not use the following in any of its productions:

- Functional firearms or live ammunition including blanks, caps or any other explosive device. Any and all gunshots must be accomplished through the use of sound effects, either recorded or by a stage device such as a slap-stick.
- No cutting implements will be allowed unless the cutting edges/points have been dulled and rendered incapable of cutting or piercing. No retractable knives or swords will be allowed. All cutting implements must be approved and deemed safe by the Technical Director of the Skidmore Theater Department faculty.
- Any weapon which shoots a projectile such as a bow and arrow or crossbow. All such weapons must be incapable of firing and used for visual effect only.
- Any weapon (including found objects) not approved by the Technical Director.

## **Student Approval Process for Prop Weapons**

No use of prop weapon or staged combat of any kind is allowed, in rehearsal or in performance, without the permission of the Department Chair. Requests for the use of prop weapons or stage combat must be made at least four weeks prior to the first performance date. The Chair will determine whether a proposed stage combat, if approved, may be staged, or if the services of a professional fight director are required. In all cases, no consultant may be hired without the approval of the Chair.

All fights involving armed stage combat (weapon-to-weapon) will require oversight by the Technical Director and will need approval by a faculty advisor.

Student directors are encouraged to propose projects that are able to be staged with the resources available within the Department (therefore not including external consultants such as fight director or weapons experts). A faculty, or a qualified student, may serve as Fight Director or Fight Consultant on a project if this plan has been approved by the Chair in advance and/or during the proposal and approval process. Campus Safety will be notified about any approved uses of prop weapons on productions by the Technical Director.

## **Rental and Borrowing of Prop Weapons**

The department has a small inventory of prop weapons available by request with the permission of the Chair and the Technical Director. Prop Weapons may not be taken out of the JKB Theater building.

The rental, borrowing, or purchase of prop weapons from any source other than the department must be arranged in consultation with the Chair and Technical Director.

## **Storage and Transport of Prop Weapons**

The Stage Manager (or other designated person) will be responsible for the safe and secure storage and transportation of all prop weapons. Only one production crew working on the team should be handling the weapon before usage in the production (either in rehearsal or in performance). Prop weapons must be transported in a locked transport case and must be secured in a locked cabinet or room when not in use.

Actors should never be allowed to play with prop weapons that they are not using in the scene.

Students working on a lab production must give a detailed plan to the faculty advisor and/or Chair and consult with faculty on how they will be storing and transporting their props before rehearsals begin.

Skidmore Campus Safety must be informed about the storage and transportation plan of prop weapons for all productions.

If a student director fails to meet these storage and transportation protocols, the approval of the use of prop weapons in the production will be revoked.

# Protocol for Firearms

## Safety Guidelines

Skidmore Theater Department will follow best practices as defined by Actors Equity Association (AEA) and the Society of American Fight Directors (SAFD).

NO live ammunition or functional firearms will be used in any productions.

Prior to or on the first day of rehearsal, the [AEA safety tips](#) will be posted and/or distributed to actors.

Prior to using a firearm in rehearsal, a designated faculty member (and/or the Fight Director) will review the safety protocols with all members of the production, including understudies and swings (if applicable). At this time, any training needed for using the firearm should be conducted prior to any choreography or staging. This session will also cover modifications and boundaries as needed. During rehearsal, a rehearsal prop (bright plastic version) will be used until technical rehearsal.

Performers should be honest about their firearm usage and qualifications and no performer should be coerced or forced to use the weapon in any way that may compromise their boundaries.

Students will follow these guidelines:

- Treat all firearms as if they are real and loaded.
- Only designated person (such as SM or Fight Director) has access to the firearm when not in rehearsal or performance
- Firearm must be locked away when not in use (securely locked)
- Performers and crew must follow instructions from the designated person and/or Fight Director
- Actors should keep firearm pointed at floor or in holster as necessary
- No one should ever point the firearm at anyone even in jest
  - When performing in a scene, always cheat as much as you can when aiming
- Actors must perform choreography as instructed
- Actors should keep finger off the trigger until ready to aim
- Actors should be aware of how the prop operates – how it is loaded/unloaded, how it fires, vents, etc.
- Never leave firearm unattended
- Never let anyone else borrow the firearm for any reason.
- After rehearsal, return to designated person (SM or Fight Director) to safely secure

# Protocol for Productions

## Pre-Production

Director(s) and Stage Manager(s) identify scenes with violence, stage combat or extreme physicality.

For student-led productions, approval by faculty of all scenes with violence, stage combat or extreme physicality must be applied for prior to audition notices and faculty adjustments must be accepted. All prop weapons which would be used in the scene must also be approved by the Technical Director prior to the first day of rehearsal. *If scenes develop mid-production they must obtain approval of the faculty advisor, in consultation with the Chair prior to full rehearsal of them. No rehearsal with violence, stage combat or extreme physicality is allowed without prior approval!*

Student directors are encouraged to propose projects that are able to be staged with the resources available within the Department (therefore not including external consultants such as fight directors or weapons experts). A faculty, or a qualified student, may serve as Fight Director or Fight Consultant on a project if this plan has been approved by the Chair in advance and/or during the proposal and approval process. Campus Safety will be notified about any approved uses of prop weapons on productions by the Technical Director.

During callback auditions, all actors must be made aware of which roles include violence, stage combat or extreme physicality. This information must be included on the callback form and given to the actors prior to the callback audition.

After casting is complete, the director, playwright (if present), fight director or choreographer/consultant (if any), stage manager, and dramaturg ensure that scenes with violence, stage combat or extreme physicality are noted and discussed. If the production is using prop weapons, a plan of storage and transportation must be presented and approved by the Technical Director.

## Rehearsal

The stage manager and/or director (and choreographer or fight director if there is one) will be the facilitator for all protocols relating to scenes with violence, stage combat or extreme physicality. At the first rehearsal, the stage manager will call the company's attention to these protocols. If firearms are used in the production, the AEA safety tips must be distributed (please see firearms section below).

In the first week of rehearsal and prior to rehearsal of those scenes, the director (in consultation with the fight director or choreographer) and/or the faculty advisor in the case of a student director, will have discussions with the actors who are involved with scenes with violence, stage combat or extreme physicality to discuss actors boundaries and/or physical abilities and limitations and requests relating to those scenes and discuss the approach to creating them.

If the director is a first time director at Skidmore or a student director, a faculty member must be present at the first staging. This faculty member will be decided upon at the discretion of the Artistic Director.

## **Directing/Choreographing Scenes with Violence, Stage Combat or Extreme Physicality**

When a scene with violence, stage combat or extreme physicality is rehearsed, there will be a conversation between the director and actors, in consultation with the playwright (if present), choreographer (if any), stage manager, fight director or choreographer (if needed). If the scene also contains sexual assault, an intimacy director must be used (please refer to our sexual intimacy protocols).

If a degree of improvisation is involved in these scenes, boundaries should be clear before any improvisation begins.

## **Responsibilities of the Actor**

Actors are responsible for acknowledging their own personal boundaries and communicating that information to their scene partner(s) as clearly as possible prior to the start of any rehearsing. The first step is a conversation with the actor's scene partner(s) and then sharing those boundaries with director, intimacy and/or fight director and stage manager. Actors must respect boundaries stated by their scene partner(s) and engage in ongoing discussions of this if necessary. Actors do not need to justify or explain their physical boundaries. This communication may be difficult for some actors who are reticent about stating their physical boundaries. If this is so, seek help from your director or a faculty member.

Do not let yourself be coerced or rushed in this process. You may approach any faculty member, the director, or stage manager, at any time about the sexual content or activity in any scene.

All actors are expected to work within the parameters of the rehearsal protocols set forth in this document.

Before initiating an improvisation that involves consensual touching, scene partners must clarify what physical boundaries are in play and the context of the scene and give their affirmative consent to the touching incorporated into the improvisation. At any point, the actor may say, "Hold" to temporarily suspend the improvisation. It is far better to stop an improvisation than to breach the trust of another actor.

## **Responsibilities of Teachers**

It is the responsibility of the teacher to alert students when they are assigned scene work that may involve any violence, stage combat or extreme physicality. Students may request an alternate

scene or request physical modifications and should be made aware of this option. Such notice may be given in writing, via e-mail, or during an in-person meeting.

There should be no violence, stage combat or extreme physical scenes assigned in any intro classes.

Teachers will honor a student's right to call a hold during a scene. Teachers who have questions with respect to implementation of these protocols should contact the Chair of the department.

Teachers shall respect the physical boundaries of students.

## **Protocols for Actors Rehearsing a Scene for a Class**

Students should never rehearse violence, stage combat or extreme physicality outside of class unsupervised.

### **Best Practices**

Spontaneous changes to staging violence, stage combat or extreme physicality are unacceptable both in rehearsal and performance, unless they fall within previously agreed boundaries. The need for consent trumps spontaneity in every circumstance.

If at any time in rehearsal an actor feels that safety has been compromised or that a mistake in protocol has occurred, the actor may say, "Hold"—this requires any other actor, the director and/or stage manager, or faculty member if it is in a class, to temporarily suspend the action in rehearsal. At that time the actors, director, stage manager and/or faculty member can discuss how the rehearsal may proceed consensually and in a productive manner.

In any situation, it may be necessary for the class or company to take a break, while the faculty member or stage manager and/or director talks with the actors about the scene.

## **Protocol for Reporting Violation or Abuse**

If a boundary is crossed in rehearsal or in a class the first step is for the actor to address it directly with the scene partner(s). In the event any actor feels uncomfortable or unsafe speaking directly to scene partner(s) or speaking up in rehearsal or class, the actor may speak to the stage manager, director or faculty member connected with the production. If an actor feels uncomfortable or unsafe speaking to those directly connected to the production, or if any scene partner, stage manager, director, or teacher is unreceptive to an actor's concerns, they can speak to any other faculty member (including the head of department/ artistic director, the Dean of Students, anyone in the Title IX office or the on campus counseling center).

These conversations can happen at any time privately, either in person or via email. The goal of such communication should address any transgression and to move the conversation back into



the rehearsal hall, so that the actor is fully empowered to give affirmative consent to, or withhold affirmative consent from, the scene partner(s). There shall be no repercussions or punitive action taken against the reporting student for bringing their concerns to any of these parties.

## Protocol for Reporting Injury or Accident

As with any physical activity, there is a risk of injury or incident while engaging in stage combat and extreme physicality. All incidents should be recorded by the Stage Manager in the daily rehearsal or performance report, regardless of being a minor or major accident (minor being cuts, scrapes or bruises not requiring more than basic first-aid).

If the incident was due to a prop weapon, choreography or scenic piece then the Fight Director may need to modify the choreography as needed to ensure future safety.

According to Skidmore College policy, all injuries requiring more than basic first-aid must be reported to the College

(<https://www.skidmore.edu/risk-management/accident-injury-reporting.php>).

**EMPLOYEES** (including student employees; excluding Resident Assistants (RA). Any employee injured in the course of their job duties, must report accidents and injuries to their direct supervisor, and are required to fill out **Employee Injury/Accident Report Form** and submit it to Human Resources.

**NON-EMPLOYEES** Any student, RA, guest, visitor, or employee injured while engaged in an activity outside of their job duties is considered a non-employee. In addition to reporting as indicated below, individuals are required to fill out the **Non-Employee Injury/Accident Report form** and submit it to **Risk Management**.

- Organized activities:
  - Injuries sustained during a Skidmore organized activity should be reported to the activity leader. Examples:
    - Injured during organized social activity – report to event organizer
    - Injured during a class/lab setting – report to Faculty or staff in charge
    - Injured during a college sponsored or academic field trip (off campus) – report to Faculty or staff in charge
    - Injured performing a RA task – report to Campus Safety
    - Injured during SGA Club activity (on or off campus) – report to Leadership Activities staff
    - Injured during private lessons (e.g. riding, crew, sport clinic, fitness program, theater, art, dance, etc.) – report to instructor/coach