

Glossary of Theatre Terms

Apron	In a traditional theatre, the part of the stage which projects in front of the curtain.
Backlight	Light coming from behind scenery or actors to sculpt and separate them from their background.
Bar	Horizontal metal tube of scaffolding diameter for hanging lights (pipe in America)
Barndoor	Four-shutter rotatable device which slides into the front runners of fresnel and PC focus spots to shape the beam and reduce stray scatter light.
Battens	Lengths of overhead lighting floods arranged in 3 or 4 circuits for colour mixing.
Beam angle	Angle of the cone of light produced by a spotlight.
Beamlight	Lensless spotlight with parabolic reflector giving intense parallel beam
Board	Contraction of switchboard or dimmerboard. The central control point for the stage lighting.
Boom	Vertical pole, usually of scaffolding diameter, for mounting spotlights.
Boom arm	Bracket for fixing spotlights to a boom.
Build	An increase in light intensity.
Channel	A control circuit, identified by number, from the 'board' to a light.
Channel access	the method (levers, pushes, keyboard, etc) in a memory system by which individual channels are brought under operator control.
Check	Decrease in light intensity.
Colour call	A listing of all the colour filters required in each lighting instrument.
Colour temperature	A method of measuring (in Kelvin units) the spectral content of 'white' light.
Control Surface	Any device such as lever, push, wheel, rocker, mouse, pen, cursor, etc, used as an interface between an operator's fingers and a processing system which activates dimmers or motors controlling lighting instruments.
Cross-fade	Lighting change where some of the channels increase in intensity while other channels decrease.
Cue	The signal that initiates a change of any kind. Lighting cue is a change involving light intensity alterations.
Cyclorama	Plain cloth extending around and above the stage to give a feeling of infinite space.
Dead	(1) The plotted height of a piece of suspended scenery or bar of lights. (2) Discarded items of scenery. Dichroic Colour filters which work by reflecting unwanted parts of the spectrum rather than absorbing them in the manner of traditional filters.
Diffuser	A filter, often called a frost, which softens a light beam, particularly its edge.
Dimmer	Device which controls the amount of electricity passed to a light and therefore the intensity of that light's brightness.
Directional diffuser	A filter which not only softens the beam but spreads it along a chosen axis. Also known as a silk
Director	Has the ultimate responsibility for the interpretation of the script through control of the actors and supporting production team.
Discharge lamps	Special high powered light sources whose use is normally restricted to follow spots and projection because of difficulties in remote dimming by electrical means. includes C.S.I., C.I.D. and H.M.1 lamps.
Downstage	The part of the stage nearest to the audience.
Ellipsoidal	Strictly a type of reflector used in many profile spots but extended in North America to cover all profile spots.
Flood	Simple instrument giving fixed spread of light.
Flys	Area above the stage into which scenery can be lifted out of sight of the audience.
Focusing	Strictly speaking, the adjustment of lights to give a clearly defined image; but usually used to cover the whole process of adjusting the direction and beam of spotlights in which the desired image may be anything but clearly defined.
FOH	All instruments which are 'front of house', i.e. on the audience side of the proscenium.
Follow spot	Spotlight with which an operator follows actors around the stage.
Fresnel spot	Spotlight with soft edges due to fresnel lens which has a stepped moulding on the front and a textured surface on the back.
Frost	A diffuser filter used to soften a light beam.
FUF	Full-up-finish. An increase to bright light over the last couple of bars of a musical number.
Gate	The optical centre of a profile spot where the shutters are positioned and where an iris or gobo can be inserted.
Gauze	Fabric which becomes transparent or solid under appropriate lighting conditions.

Gobo	A mask placed in the gate of a profile spotlight for simple outline projection. Also used, with softened focus, to texture the beam.
Groundrow	A low piece of scenery standing on the stage floor. Also lengths of lighting placed on the stage floor.
Group	A subdivision, temporary or permanent, of the channels in a control system.
Hook clamp	A clamp for fixing an instrument to a horizontal bar, usually of scaffolding diameter.
Houselights	The decorative lighting in the auditorium.
Instrument	A stage lighting unit, such as a spotlight or flood. An American term coming into increasing international use.
Iris	An adjustable circular diaphragm to alter the gate size in a profile spot. Also the muscle operated diaphragm in the human eye which adjusts the eye's aperture to changing light intensities.
Kilowatt	see wattage
Ladder	Framework in the shape of a ladder for hanging side lighting.
Lamps	The light source within an instrument, but sometimes used as an alternative to the word instrument.
Lantern	A lighting unit designed or adapted for stage use. A traditional word now being overtaken by 'instrument'.
Linear flood	A flood using a long thin double-ended halogen lamp, allowing the reflector to be designed for an increased beam spread.
Load	The lights controlled by an individual dimmer and limited by the rating of that dimmer.
Master	A lever or push which overrides (or 'masters') a complete preset, or group within a preset or selected memory.
Memory	Lighting control systems where channel intensities for each cue are filed automatically in an electronic store.
Multiplexing	Passing control instructions, particularly to dimmers or remotely focusable lights, by sending all information in digital format along a single pair of screened wires.
Pan	Horizontal (left/right) movement of an instrument.
Parcan	The simple instrument which holds a par lamp and therefore does not require any optical system of lenses or reflectors.
Par Lamp	A sealed beam lamp with the filament contained within the same glass envelope as an optical system producing a near parallel beam. Patching A sort of central 'telephone exchange' where channels can be connected to dimmers and/or dimmers connected to socket outlets.
P.C. [Plano convex] lens	A lens with one flat surface and one curved surface. This 'PC' lens and the fresnel lens are the alternatives normally used in stage spotlights.
Pipe ends	Spotlights on the ends of lighting bars, cross lighting to model dancer's bodies.
Playback	The part of a memory system where memorised lighting states are recalled to control the light on stage via master levers or pushes.
Practical	Light fitting which is not merely decorative but is wired to light up.
Preset	Anything which is positioned in advance of its being required –such as props placed on the stage before the performance. A control system where each channel has more than one lever to allow intensity levels to be set (i.e. preset) in advance of a cue.
Profile Spot	A spotlight which projects the outline (i.e. the profile) of any chosen shape and with any desired degree of hardness/softness.
Profiled Cue	Lighting change where the rates of increasing and decreasing intensities accelerate or decelerate during the progress of the change.
Rating	The maximum and minimum power in kilowatts that can be controlled by a circuit or dimmer channel.
Record	Plotting a cue state by filing it in the electronic data storage of a memory board.
Resistance dimmer	An older mechanical form of dimmer which reduces the flow of electricity to a light by progressively converting the surplus into heat.
Rigger's control	A remote portable hand-held control unit which allows channels or groups to be switched from the stage for focusing when the control room is unmanned.
(the) round	Form of stage where the auditorium seating surrounds the playing area
Scatter	Low intensity light cast outside the main beam of an instrument.
Scrollers	Colour changer where a roll of filters are taped together and positioned by a very fast motor activated by digital signals from a control system which includes a memory facility.
Shin Busters	Low level lights at stage floor level, used mainly for dance.
Sightlines	Lines drawn on plan and section to indicate limits of audience vision from extreme seats, including side seats, front and back rows, and seats in galleries.

Silks	Diffusion filters which stretch the light in a chosen direction.
Spigot	An adapter screwed to the hanging bolt of an instrument to enable it to be mounted on a floor stand.
Spill	stray or scatter light outside the main beam.
Spotlight	An instrument giving control of the angle of the emerging light beam and therefore of the size of area lit.
Strobe	Device giving a fast series of very short light flashes under which action appears to be frozen.
Theatre-in-the-Round	A form of staging where the audience totally encircle the acting area.
Throw	Distance between a light and the actor or object being lit.
Thrust	Form of stage which projects into the auditorium so that the audience are seated on three sides.
Tilt	Vertical (up/down) movement of an instrument.
Traverse	Form of stage where the audience are seated on either side of the stage (like a tennis court)
Tungsten lamps	Older type of lamps (the stage types are high wattage versions of standard domestic lamps) whose tungsten filaments gradually lose the brightness of their light output.
Tungsten halogen lamps	Newer lamps (now virtually standard in professional theatre) which maintain their initial brightness of light output throughout life.
Upstage	The part of the stage furthest from the audience.
UV	Ultra violet light (from which harmful radiation have been filtered out) used to light specially treated materials which fluoresce in an otherwise blackened stage.
Variable beam profile	Profile spotlight using a type of zoom (q.v.) arrangement where the differential movement of two lens allows wide variations in both beam size and quality.
Wattage	The power of consumption of a lamp, or the maximum available power from a dimmer. A kilowatt is 1,000 watts. Ways The number of channels in a control system.
Zoom	A differential movement of two lenses in an optical system. In a simple zoom, the lenses are moved independently, but in more complex forms a single movement alters the size of the beam while the image remains in constant focus. Used in advanced profile spots and scene projectors.