

## Duo/Duet Blocking

In Duo there are two styles of blocking. There is the predominate version where contact (both physical and visual) are illegal, and then there is the world of Duet Acting which is in essence a theatrical duet...in a classroom, without props, costume, or set. Although, some leagues allow for Duet Acting to make use of two chairs and a table as well which adds set-like ambiance. Both forms of Duo present their own complications and challenges, neither more difficult than the other--merely distinct. This article will focus on blocking concepts for Duet Acting, so don't avert your eyes and go ahead and directly interact with these tips:

Refer to the script. All answers can be found within the script. Whether explicitly stated or inferred, the script will guide you. If you have a direct playwright there will be stage directions in *italics* within the dialogue. Usually stage direction is added to inform the reader that there was a physical/verbal action that caused a physical/verbal reaction. Often though, you and your Duo partner will have to look at the text and find the levels in order to find the movement (an intense reaction can cause movement). Or, a character will move to go interact with a part of the scenery; if the script says *Harold walks over to admire Richard's sculpture* then that is a cue for you to designate a spot for there to be a sculpture of Richard's. "Setting." You might not have a physical set but do mentally create one. If your Duet is allowed chairs and a table, even better. Create a performance space and treat it as if the real items existed. Planning a set opens up options of places for your characters to move. A "set" design also makes rehearsal easier. Instead of saying "hey, why not try moving to that bare space in the corner" you can now accurately say "hey, why not try moving towards the fireplace." Further, if you do have a table and chairs USE them. Unless specifically stated in the script, or if they are serving as immovable objects, they do not have to remain super-glued in place. If it makes sense to move a chair around then do so.

Motive. All actions/movements have a reason. Duo is not like watching an old-fashioned 3-D experience where actions were done only to use the 3-D feature (how many balls can you have thrown at your face?!). If you or your Duo partner are getting up or sitting down, there best be a reason. Give an action purpose! Movement has motive. When you turn and walk away from someone it is either because you A. are leaving B. have something enormous to

say and it's hard or C. you're mad. If you move just to change scenery the audience can tell and your actions will look odd and fake.

Levels as Indicators. When you analyze your Duo script you will find moments of emotional highs and lows. You will find builds throughout the dialogue that go up and down and have clear lines of heightened emotion. As the text directs you to these highs and lows follow accordingly and create blocking around these peaks and valleys. Dialogue forms its own verbal roller coaster; blocking is the visualization of it. If your Duo is in a state of bliss, then walking towards your partner on an especially moving line would be appropriate. Note, sometimes less is more and not moving, or turning away, can be colder than stomping off. It all depends on the mood the script has build for you and atmosphere you wish to create. Attempt new movements, but realize your blocking must mirror the structure made by the script.

Newton's Third Law of Motion. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This does not necessarily mean as one Duo partner storms away the other must follow.

Sometimes an equal blocking reaction is to stay cemented in place. What this does mean is that Duo partners are to feed off the other's energy. As one person's blocking changes (action) the recipient of that action will react accordingly. Blocking is a give and take. As one moves away the other might follow or distance themselves more based on the circumstances found in the script. React to the physical changes of space you partner has made and in turn act back!

Space. Because this type of Duo can interact take advantage of that! Use your space! If tension is thick distance yourselves as far apart from the other as possible and do not make eye contact. If your Duo is joyous be close, share some eye contact, and perhaps even physically touch your partner. Do not be afraid to make use of every inch of space you are allowed. In fact, if a section of performance area goes unused, while others are overdone, some find it distracting and uninspired blocking.

45° Angles and Eye Contact. You do not want to spend the entire Duo in profile gazing at your partner. Open up to the audience! Unless for a distinct purpose, NEVER close yourself to your audience. Keeping your back to the crowd is a poor choice and should only be done if specified by the Duo OR if you are walking from downstage to upstage. But even then, try to not deliver many words to the wall behind you and adjust your volume for facing away. It is best to keep at a 45° angle. Profile and full-front are okay if not used extravagantly. A 45° angle works best because it allows you to see and interact with your partner without closing up WHILE looking somewhat natural. Now you can interact with your Duo partner, but do not forget the audience. Cheat out (look out onto the 4th wall but not anyone) and deliver some lines out to the crowd. This keeps them in the scene.

Creativity. Blocking can be stale. If all you are doing is sitting in one place when there is no force holding you to that spot people will get bored. Doing the same blocking, such as walking left to right, is ripe for cries of unoriginality and pacing comments. Must you go crazy and

never stop? NO! Actually, avoid over-movement. Go back to your script, go back to running dialogue, and pinpoint moments when the text wants you to move. When do you feel the urgency of motion? Experiment and try various methods to block a patch of script. See which works best for your Duo, and remember that blocking is never done and is always ready for retouching.

Interactive blocking can be demanding in that you must find ways to allow for "real" looking give and take to evolve. Though acting without direct interaction is its own beast, there is something to be said of the connectivity that needs to form with two actors who can look and touch. With such allowance of intimacy it almost becomes required to appear to have chemistry and fully utilize the visual and physical. However, relax and keep in mind the suggestions above and blocking will be less of a struggle and more of a natural process that will transpire with the analysis of the script during practice.