



2026-27 SPOTLIGHT AWARDS

PARTICIPATION HANDBOOK

PART 6 – GIVING AND RECEIVING FEEDBACK

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OUR APPROACH

At the heart of The Spotlight Awards program is the belief that feedback fuels growth. Our adjudication process isn't just about selecting winners - it's about celebrating student achievement, encouraging artistry and strengthening the educational impact of musical theatre in our community.

The Spotlight Awards is designed to be educational, not competitive. Spotlight encourages the development of a growth mindset, helping participants to recognize feedback as an opportunity to hone their ever-evolving skill sets. It is important for ALL participating adults and students to remember that the Spotlight Awards program is educational at its core, designed to provide feedback in all areas, for all participants. **It is expected that each school in the program will join us in fostering a sense of community and collaboration rather than competition.**

Non-Competitive Spirit

No two schools are alike, which is why this program is NOT competitive. You are given feedback based on a storytelling-focused rubric, never in relation to other schools. It is our hope that students and adults involved in the Spotlight Awards will never compare themselves to other participants but instead will choose to celebrate their own individual areas of accomplishment.

School Recognition

Recognitions are abundant throughout this program, acknowledging outstanding work happening in every participating school. Please choose to focus on the positive growth and achievement found without your own program. There is so much to be celebrated. If your school is not nominated this time, please do not view it as a negative reflection on your performance. It is simply impossible to recognize every deserving school simultaneously. We hope you will join us in celebrating your peers, focusing on your own program's unique growth, and uplifting our collective arts community. **Your hard work remains outstanding and deeply valued.**

Determining Nominees

To determine nominations and recipients of each award, the nominee selection panel considers a variety of factors, and looks at all eligible candidates with a fresh perspective by thoroughly reviewing the Adjudicator feedback, rubric-aligned scoring, photos, our commitment to community and inclusion, and mandatory support material. Scores are used as an indicator, with nominations including top scoring schools as well as Judge's Choice selections. Eligibility for awards is at the discretion of the Spotlight Awards administration, which reserves the right to amend rules, overrule adjudicators, or select additional nominees as necessary to maintain a fair process.

*Our program's strength resides in the knowledge that we celebrate each performer and school, allowing everyone to have their moment **in the spotlight**, never dimming another's light. When one school succeeds, it strengthens the entire high school theater community. By sharing artistry, ideas and inspiration we build a region where every student can thrive, on stage, backstage and beyond.*



ENCOURAGING A GROWTH MINDSET

Feedback can be daunting, especially for young performers just starting their journey to the stage. **Giving and receiving feedback is crucial for an actor's growth.** Effective feedback focuses on specific behaviors, not personality, and is delivered with honesty and respect. Receiving feedback well involves active listening, reflection, and a willingness to learn and improve.

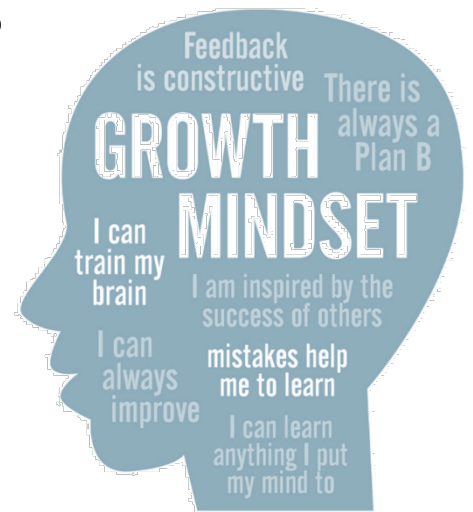
What is a growth mindset?

- The belief that success comes from ongoing personal development, and your skills and abilities can grow through effort, learning and practice. **We are always learning!**
- A focus on development in setbacks - You bounce back, pick yourself up, and try again. A growth mindset embraces challenges and views failure not as evidence of limitations, but as a springboard for growth.
- Focus on continuously improving your skills and abilities, rather than “winning”.
- Open to constructive criticism, realizing it creates growth and the chance to learn, improve and develop skills.

Strategies for Fostering a Growth Mindset in the Classroom

Helping students develop a growth mindset requires deliberate effort from teachers, but many of the methods can be easily integrated into existing practices.

- Set goals. Helping students set incremental, achievable goals demonstrates the attainability of growth and progress.
- Normalize struggle and provide challenges. Struggle is part of the learning process and emphasizing and reinforcing that idea helps students react positively when they feel challenged. Part of developing a growth mindset is teaching students to overcome obstacles.
- Embrace the word “yet”. If someone makes the statement “I’m not a math person,” adding a simple qualifier will signal that a process exists for gaining ability. “You’re not a math person **yet**.”
- Demonstrate mistakes and celebrate corrections. Mistakes should be viewed as learning opportunities. Teachers can model this outlook in reactions to their own mistakes and steps they take to correct a mistake.
- Reward improvement rather than results. When praising someone for a job well done, highlight the **journey** they took rather than an end product. When we recognize the effort and persistence behind a good result, rather than attributing it to innate qualities, our feedback is more meaningful and encourages the recipient to revisit those positive behaviors when faced with their next challenge.
- Celebrate growth. This reinforces the emphasis on effort and process. It also provides opportunities to share valuable learnings. **Celebrate all achievements!**
- Develop cooperative exercises. Working together to solve problems emphasizes process and reinforces the importance of getting help and finding solutions. It also de-emphasizes individual outcomes.
- Don’t oversimplify. “You can do anything!” may feel like harmless encouragement, but if students aren’t put in a position to overcome challenges, they’ll conclude that such statements are empty, and the feedback will lose credibility.



The goal isn't perfection - it's progress, reflection, and a shared love for the art of storytelling.

PREPARING STUDENTS TO RECEIVE FEEDBACK

Giving and receiving feedback are skills that take practice. When giving feedback, students may worry that they will hurt their peers or may simply state if they liked something instead of providing useful feedback. When receiving feedback, students may misinterpret or internalize it and think they're being criticized rather than viewing it as an opportunity to learn and grow. How can you help prepare your students to give and accept feedback to improve and develop skills, as well as gain resilience and confidence?

Feedback is not the same as criticism.

This is difficult for many students to grasp. Feedback is not a personal attack or inherently negative; in fact, it can include praise and compliments as well as advice, suggestions, and observations. There is a difference between feedback (which can be positive or negative but is meant to help students improve) and criticism (which is generally negative). **Receiving feedback does not mean that the student is a bad actor/writer/student/person – it means someone sees potential for improvement and cares enough to help them grow.**

- **Activity to try:** As a class, brainstorm examples of feedback experienced in the past that they thought were criticisms or that they took personally. Examine each piece of feedback and rewrite it to demonstrate how students can frame the comment in a way that helps them improve rather than as a personal attack. For example: "I couldn't understand what you were saying during your monologue" doesn't mean "I'm a terrible actor who nobody can understand." A student can turn that into "Next time I will slow down and enunciate more clearly."

Feedback is necessary for improvement.

Without feedback, students won't know how they are progressing or what they can do to improve in the future. Every job in existence (performing arts-related or otherwise) comes with feedback in various forms, such as auditioning for roles, applying for positions and/or promotions, receiving client testimonials, and getting performance reviews. **Accepting feedback gracefully and being able to apply it and move forward are necessary parts of everyone's growth and development.**

- **Activity to try:** Divide students into pairs to prepare a brief scene – improvisation, mime, tableau, or a scripted short scene. After rehearsal time, combine two pairs together to perform for each other. Ask each group to prepare 2 pieces of feedback, one to give verbally and one to give as written feedback.



Developing self-awareness is a valuable life skill.

Most students are aware of their efforts and when asked will give a fairly honest assessment of their work. Asking students during rehearsals how they thought a run-through went often brings out responses that are on point for what needs to be fixed or adjusted. While you may not agree with given feedback, what is important is the ability to take a step back and be ready to welcome feedback after we self-reflect ourselves. Turn it into a goal for the future, reframing the thought into something tangible "Next time I will..."

- **Activity to try:** Ask students how they think they did. Was the run-through ready for an audience? How could they improve next time? What do you think the group needs to do to make this sequence better?
- In a classroom setting, this can be applied to how an exercise went and could be done together as a class or individually as an exit slip or reflection.

We as educators must take seriously our responsibility to create growth-mindset-friendly environments – where kids feel safe from judgement, where they understand that we believe in their potential to grow, and they know that we are dedicated to collaborating with them on their learning. We are in the business of helping kids thrive, not finding reasons why they can't. – Carol Dweck

TIPS FOR RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Knowing how to take feedback well—and how not to take it personally—is a necessary skill for anyone hoping to make it in the arts industry. Here's what the experts have to say about responding to constructive criticism. Here are some pro-tips adapted from Backstage.com.

Quick Tips

- **Listen Actively:** Pay close attention to the feedback without interrupting or becoming defensive.
- **Take a Deep Breath:** Don't react emotionally. Take time to process the information.
- **Reflect on the Feedback:** Consider how the feedback aligns with your own standards and goals.
- **Ask Clarifying Questions:** If something is unclear, politely ask for more information.
- **Don't Argue:** It's okay to disagree but avoid arguing with the person giving feedback.
- **Focus on Growth:** View feedback as an opportunity to learn and improve.
- **Thank the Person Giving Feedback:** Show appreciation for their time and effort.

Listen, Evaluate, Learn and Grow

- Seek constructive criticism from the right people: Figure out who you trust to tell you the truth.
- Trust your instincts: If you love your website/monologue/headshot/audition outfit, you should honor that. However, if over time, several respected professionals offer the same advice – such as your headshot needs updating, your reel doesn't represent you, etc. - you also need to learn to honor that feedback. Rethink your choices and update your tools if you decide the feedback is warranted and feels good instinctually.
- Put things in perspective: **Everything is an opinion.** And things change: a new headshot, an updated demo, a new outfit or haircut. Remember to do those things because you're developing as a professional and it's your choice to do so, not because someone told you that you'd be a failure if you don't. Put things into perspective and keep going. **Keep developing and polishing your craft and product.**
- Reframe the feedback: When we learn to receive constructive feedback as **helpful rather than hurtful**, only then can we unlock the opportunity to actually use that feedback to become the incredible artists we know deep down we deserve to be. Just know that each time you're given feedback, whether positive or not, you're in a better place to grow and change.
- Listen, evaluate, and learn: **Listen first.** Resist the urge to justify, excuse, or defend yourself. If you're not ready to analyze the critique, analyze it later. Then ask yourself if the criticism applies to you and if the critic is speaking the truth. If the criticism is justified, you have been made aware of something you need to adjust, change, or do. Accept this knowledge.
- Take action: Once you have figured out what action you should take, do it. Write down the steps that will allow you to take the action and get going to improve your craft.



EFFECTIVELY GIVING FEEDBACK

Effective feedback for auditions should be specific, constructive, and delivered with care. It's important to focus on the actor's performance and offer actionable suggestions for improvement, while also acknowledging positive aspects of their audition. Avoid vague comments and focus on specific acting elements.

1) "What worked?"

These should be observable responses.

- *I could hear you clearly.*
- *I liked the interaction and connection with your scene partner.*
- *The emotional peak was powerful.*

2) "What needs work?"

The point here is that **everything needs polish**. Again, this should be mostly observable.

- *Your articulation was unclear.*
- *I wish the confrontation moment with your scene partner had been more "all in," you seemed to hold back.*
- *I wonder what would happen if you tried a more complex emotion than anger.*

General Rules

- Let the artist know that they can accept or ignore the comments. That is their prerogative, but they should not argue; just listen. The only thing that they can verbalize is to ask questions for clarification.
- Avoid giving feedback that isn't constructive:
 - Never use your own artistic impulses for feedback ("I would have...") or compare to other versions ("When I performed as that character..." or "When I saw this on Broadway...").
 - Feedback that only gushes praise (such as friends and family) may be nice to hear, but it will not help you find new strategies to grow.
 - Don't be a critic that is more interested in your own cleverness than in actually helping polish the performance.



Framing Your Feedback

Consider setting up a basic outline of how you want to present the feedback. One idea is to follow this pattern:

I saw... (the observable)

I liked... (the positive)

I wish... (for a change that might improve the performance)

I wonder... (musings on the performance with an eye to improvement)

AWARDS RUBRIC OVERVIEW

In the theater, we tell stories.

The Spotlight Awards adjudicators review the storytelling abilities put to work in each production. We are looking for an authentic tale well told by your production team, ensemble, and individual performers. **Maximizing Resources is as Valuable as Maximum Resources**, and while a comparison of theaters participating in the program will unearth a wide variety of budgets, available equipment, performance spaces and other tangible measurements of resources, it need never impact the **ability to tell a compelling story**.

- ✓ How well does your company understand the story they are telling? How clearly do they relate that story and its themes to the audience?
- ✓ How passionately do your actors embody their characters and express their journey through this story?
- ✓ How do your actors use the performance skills of musical theatre (singing, dancing, and acting) to enhance the story?
- ✓ How collaborative was your company in presenting a unified concept for the audience to engage with?
- ✓ How did you showcase the unique talents and resources of your school and cast to advance the story and concept you created?
- ✓ How creatively did your company transfer the story from page to the stage?
- ✓ How does your storytelling create a memorable experience, emotion and change in your audience?

Adjudicator Rubric Scoring - Each award category available for adjudication has a rubric with detailed descriptions of the scoring. An overarching look at the scoring guidelines is below.

DEVELOPING (1-4)	PROFICIENT (5-9)
- Presented the story practically, so that the events logically transpired but without impact to the characters. At times the effort to improve skills supersedes the story. - All technical elements served the basic requirements outlined in the script, but there is no evidence of collaboration with other areas to present a unified concept. - The musical selection was not appropriate, included harmful content or stereotypes, or did not showcase the school/cast talents and resources and produced few engaging moments.	- Created a layered story with clear, evolving characters through a practical approach with moments of creativity evident. - An attempt was made to present a unified concept with input from all technical and performance components. - The musical selection rarely showcased the school/cast's unique talents and resources, producing some interesting and engaging moments with some obvious missed opportunities.
SKILLED (10-15)	ADVANCED (16-20)
- Strong storytelling with solid, believable characters and a creative approach. - A clear vision of the concept for the production was carried out with some evidence of creative collaborations from technical and performance areas. - The musical selection was appropriate and showcased some of the unique talents of the school's performers and technicians, producing mostly strong elements of musical theater.	- Masterful storytelling with authentic, emotion-driven characters and a meaningful, memorable, and unique approach. - A clear, focused vision of the concept for the production was fully integrated with creative collaboration from each technical and performance area to ensure design consistency and advance nuanced themes. - The musical selection was appropriate and showcased the unique talents of the school's performers and technicians, producing elements of quality musical theater.

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