

Appendix S: Policies and Procedures Template for the Safe Use of Stage Firearms and Edged Weapons in Theatrical Productions

Summary of Action

Insert information specific to any production for the use of stage approved firearms is inserted here.

Prefatory Statement

The use of weapons in a theatrical setting is as old as the theatre. Weapons intensify the danger and drama of the action in any live theatrical production. What is most important to remember is that the violence portrayed by the use of any weapon is not real. Violence toward another person in a dramatic situation is as fictitious as the demonstration of love, anger, fear or hatred. The situation is not real, the emotions are not real, the violence is not real.

What is also important to remember and note is that legitimate weapons that are approved for use in a live stage production are not real, either. Approved, acceptable fire arms for stage productions are not and never should be real weapons that can fire actual bullets or blanks as used in movie productions. In the same way, approved edged weapons such as knives and swords must be stage combat worthy and never have sharp edges or points.

Having made it clear that neither the violence, nor the weapons should ever be *real* in a live theatrical production, this does not mean that stage weapons are not dangerous. The following policies and procedures are to insure the proper, safe and effective use of weapons in live theatrical productions at East Texas Baptist University.

Definitions

The term “weapon” is used to refer to any stage prop (gun, edged weapon, or object) that is used in a dramatic situation for one character to cause violence to another character. Any proposed weapon must be inspected and approved by a Technical faculty staff before it is used for rehearsal or performance.

A “firearm” is any weapon, real or simulated, that appears capable of firing a lethal projectile. This includes actual modern or vintage gun powder rifles and pistols, air propelled projectile rifles and pistols, blank firing rifles and pistols, and/or non-firing replicas. To be clear, any and all guns, real or simulated, are to be treated with respect and safe behavior.

Blank Shell or Round— Ammunition for use in a simulated firearm that contains powder, a primer and a paper wadding, or the open end is crimped, to contain the powder.

Spent Shell—Blank shell that has had the primer activated, the powder consumed and the bullet or wadding expelled. Usually, the projectile end of a Spent Shell will appear empty, and the primer end will be dimpled, either at the center or on the edge of the rim.

An “edged weapon” is any short or long knife, sword, razor, or axe made from steel or other durable metal.

Student Orientation

These are general rules for all firearms, on the stage or in life. After the orientation, violation of these rules will be recorded in the rehearsal/production reports and students could be dismissed for an evening or from the show completely, as decided by the director and faculty.

- All firearms, whether non-functional reproductions or blank-firing adaptations of real guns, must be treated as though they were actual live-firing weapons.
- Never point any firearm at any person, including yourself, unless specifically choreographed to do so.
- Do not look down the muzzle of a firearm.
- Blank rounds are very loud and can cause hearing damage.
- Blank rounds still discharge smoke and particles that can cause injury.
- Avoid dry-firing any firearm. This means do not pull the trigger and let the action fall.
- Do NOT engage in horseplay with any weapons.
- Avoid dropping any firearm.
- Anyone involved in the production has the right (and obligation) to halt any action they believe to be unsafe in the course of rehearsal, tech or performance.

- The brandishing of these weapons in public may be perceived as a threat to law enforcement officers. This will get you killed.
- Never place your finger on the trigger until you are ready to shoot. Until then, keep your finger to the side of the trigger.
- Always maintain a distance of at least 20 feet between the muzzle of the firearm and any object or person being fired upon. If, for staging reasons, you must fire at an actor, cheat the action by aiming slightly off to one side so that no one is in the line of fire.

Safety Protocols

The following will also be covered in orientation. These are rules specific to the use of firearms in a live theatrical setting.

- Once all firearms and blank ammunition have been received, the faculty and staff will make an appointment with campus security to inspect all weapons for safety and condition. Once the weapons and blank ammunition have been approved, the faculty and staff will not make substitutions or alterations to the items being used.
- If it is not your prop, LEAVE IT ALONE! Only those who are designated to work with the weapons should be handling them.
- No weapon should ever be set on a prop table or left unattended in a dressing room.
- No handling or discharging of a firearm except in a training situation or when actually involved in a rehearsal or performance.
- No actor or crew member shall touch or handle any weapon unless assigned to do so.
- One member of the faculty or staff will be in charge of all weapons, to secure them between scenes and to take care of them for the course of the show. This person will be trained in all aspects of weapon maintenance, and be particularly alert for signs of damage to the weapon.
- Anyone involved in the production has the right (and obligation) to halt any action they believe to be unsafe in the course of rehearsal, tech or performance.
- All weapons must be treated as though they were actual weapons.
- Never point any weapon at any person, including yourself, unless specifically choreographed to do so.
- Do not hold edged weapons by the blade.
- Do NOT engage in horseplay with any weapons.
- Avoid dropping any weapon.
- The brandishing of these weapons in public may be perceived as a threat to law enforcement officers.
- Always be aware of your surroundings. Edged weapons extend to radius of your reach, increasing the opportunity to injure someone.

Storage and Transportation Procedures

Long Term Storage

- During the interims when firearms are not used in shows, these weapons will be stored in a locked container in the School of Communication and Performing Arts Office supply closet. Keys for the closet are held by the Dean, Office Administrative Secretary and the Technical Director. Keys for the locked gun container will be held by the department chair and the technical theatre faculty member.
- Blank ammunition will be stored in a separate, secured location from the weapons.
- Swords and other edged weapons will be secured in the technical faculty member's office.

Short Term Storage

- When productions require the use of replicas or blank-firing firearms, the locked firearms container will be moved to the office of the technical theatre faculty. In that office, it will be locked in a steel file cabinet. During these times, the faculty member's office will remain locked at all times. The only times the firearms will be accessed is when an assigned member of the stage management team and a faculty or staff member retrieve the weapons for rehearsal or performance.
- Blank ammunition will be stored in a secure location in the Technical Director's office during the rehearsal and performance period.
- Swords and other edged weapons will be locked in the fabric/storage closet between productions.

Transportation of Stage Weapons

- Firearms will be transported in a generic, locked case that is not indicative of the contents.

- Swords and other edged weapons will be carried in plain view in a non-threatening manner so as not to cause alarm in bystanders.
- The shortest route from the place of storage to the back stage/performance area will be calculated and followed without variation before and immediately after each rehearsal or performance.
- Before rehearsals or performances, the assigned stage management member and appropriate Theatre Arts faculty/staff member will remove the locked container from the secured file cabinet and carry the container to the Technical Director's office. At that time, the weapons will be inspected for damage and to ensure that they are not loaded. Both the assigned member of stage management and the faculty or staff member must be present for the inspection.
- After rehearsals or performances, the assigned stage management member and appropriate Theatre Arts faculty or staff member will inspect the weapons for damage and to insure they are unloaded, then return them to the locked container. Both the assigned member of stage management and the Theatre Arts faculty or staff member must be present for the inspection. They will then carry the locked container containing the firearms to the Theatre Arts faculty member's office and lock it in the file cabinet.

Rehearsal and Performance Procedures

Prior to the start of technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals and performances, the Theatre Arts faculty and staff will deliver to the administration, campus security, and facilities a schedule of specific times and locations where blank rounds will be fired as part of rehearsals or performances. Theatre Arts Faculty and staff will also alert occupants of neighboring spaces and post signage that simulated gunfire may be heard.

Loading the firearm

1. After the weapons have been transported to the Technical Director's office, the assigned member of stage management will count out the specific number of blanks needed for the blank pistol.
2. He or she will then observe as the Theatre Arts faculty or staff member loads the blanks into the gun.
3. After the gun is loaded, the member of stage management will inspect and confirm that the gun is properly loaded.
4. Any other actor or crew member is allowed to observe this process.
5. The gun will then be secured in the locked container until it is needed during the rehearsal or performance.

Firing the weapon during performance

1. There is one cue to fire the gun twice during this performance.
2. At intermission, the Stage Manager will alert the Theatre Arts faculty/staff member who will remove the firearm from locked storage.
3. The gun will be placed on the prop table under supervision of the Deck Manager.
4. The gun will be fired as cued during the show. The gun will be carried by a specified student character until the end of the scene.
5. After curtain call, the gun will be secured and returned to the Technical Director's office until after the rehearsal or performance is completed.

Unloading the firearm

1. After the rehearsal or performance concludes, the Theatre Arts faculty/staff member will unload the blank firing pistol.
2. The Theatre Arts faculty /staff member will then call out how many blank rounds were discharged, based on the empty rounds they find in the weapon.
3. The assigned member of stage management will confirm the number of spent rounds and record that number in the rehearsal/performance report.
4. Unused rounds will be returned to the blank ammunition container.
5. The Theatre Arts faculty/staff member will inspect all non-firing and blank-firing weapons for damage.
6. The stage management member will then confirm the Theatre Arts faculty/staff member's observations and record them in the rehearsal/performance report.
7. The all weapons will then be returned to the locked case and transported back the faculty office.

For edged weapons

1. The approved faculty or staff member will inspect weapons for damage.
2. With the Stage Manager, the Theatre Arts faculty or staff member will move the weapons to the appropriate prop table or deliver the weapons to the assigned cast member.

3. After the show, the Theatre Arts faculty or staff member will collect weapons from the prop table or assigned cast member.
4. Before storing, the weapon will be cleaned and inspected for damage.
5. All weapons will be secure until the next performance.

Front of House and Audience Procedures

- All members of house management and Box Office will be notified of the use of simulated gunfire during the production.
- The following methods will be used to alert audience members to the use of blank ammunition and simulated gunfire:
 1. verbal warnings from both Box Office and house management crew members
 2. Signage posted in the lobby, Box Office area, and around the entrance to the theatre.
 3. In the printed program for the production.