

Following are four documents intended to help the NEDC to have better Student Forums at the New England Drama Festival.

The first document, **Hosting Student Forums**, is to help the festival host prepare for the forums.

The second document, **Forum Participant Guidelines**, is intended to be included in the Festival Registration Packet which is delivered by the State Representative to the finalists at the State Festivals. Each director should copy this document and distribute it to the participating students. The director should then review the forum concept with the students so that they will know what to expect and what will be expected of them at the festival.

The third document, **Forum Facilitator Training**, is to be used as a guide for training forum facilitators. This training should be conducted by one or two members of the Council.

The fourth document, **Forum Facilitator Guidelines**, is to be given to the Forum Facilitators prior to their training. Extra copies should be available at the training session and on the day of the festival.

## Hosting Student Forums

Student forums will be held after each block of shows. Room assignments will be explained at the opening of the festival. This information will be posted in the lobby and at the registration desk. A marking on the students name tag will determine forum assignment. The host should have the guest directors divide their students among the forums. This should provide for a better distribution.

### Student Forum Purpose

The purpose of Student Forums at the NEDC Drama Festival is to give students the opportunity to exchange ideas and to ask questions relating to the productions they have just seen. This is intended to be an educational experience for all. Each group will be comprised of students from all production companies.

Each Forum will need a facilitator and a space in which to meet. The number of students in each forum should be from 10 to 20. This number will depend on the total number of students at the festival, the number of spaces available and the number of facilitators. Facilitators need to be trained.

Scheduling concerns: All forum groups need to meet for 20 or 30 minutes sometime before the first show but after the opening ceremonies. All students need to be able to attend this session. The intent of this session is to break the ice with some name games.

## Forum Participant Guidelines

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### Student Forum Purpose

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### Student Forum Expectations

- Make a few notes regarding each show either during or immediately after each production.
- Be prepared to comment on or question some specific aspect of each production.
- This is not a forum for negative criticism. Be sensitive to your fellow thespian's feelings.
- Avoid the "mutual admiration society" where the only things said are glossy, shallow compliments. If compliments are to be given, make them specific.
- Discuss character development.
- Discuss script interpretation.
- Discuss the design choices and implementations of the Set, Lighting & Sound.
- Discuss the rehearsal process.
- Explore the choices made by the production company.

# Forum Facilitator Training

All facilitators should read the **Forum Facilitator Guide Lines** and the **Forum Participant Guidelines** prior the start of the training..

Start the training session with a “name game” or two. The facilitators will need to know how to do this in their own forums.

At the training session a member of the Council should review and reinforce the above mentioned documents.

The training session should be run by one or two Council members and consist of a mock forum. This could be accomplished by watching a few short scenes of 3 to 5 minutes each. The scenes could be performed, live, by the student Facilitators being trained or each person could bring a scene on video tape. The scenes could also come from other sources, however, having the facilitators produce them ensures a personal stake in the matter just like the students in a festival. After watching a few scenes, the group would discuss the work. The discussion of each piece would be facilitated by a different facilitator candidate. Then the effectiveness of the forum and of the facilitator would need to be evaluated by the group and particularly the council members in charge. The council persons running this workshop should have a few plants in the group do some role playing and provide the facilitators experience in dealing with the overly negative or the overly domineering participant.

## Student Forum Facilitator Guide Lines

The purpose of Student Forums at the NEDC Drama Festival is to give students the opportunity to exchange ideas and to ask questions relating to the productions they have just seen. Each group will be comprised of students from all production companies. A marking on the students nametag will determine forum assignment.

The job of the Forum Facilitator is fairly straightforward:

- It is essential that the facilitator establish the right tone from the start to enable constructive, specific comments from everyone.
- Establish a comfortable and easygoing atmosphere. Arranging chairs in a circle with the facilitator just another point on the circle can help relax things or perhaps sit outside the circle.
- Meet with the group of students assigned to you in the room assigned by the host at the start of the festival and after each block of shows.
- At the initial meeting with your group, initiate a “name game” to break the ice and get folks to start to know one and other.
- Attend each performance and make note of a few things to discuss.
- Divide the time spent discussing each show evenly. Hold to that time even if the discussion wants to go longer. If a later show seems to need less discussion, reallocate that time to the show that needed more time.
- Be sensitive to the fact that students from the play that is being discussed will be present at the forum. This provides an excellent opportunity to ask questions. Starting with a question, especially for the tech kids- how did you do that special effect? -helps to break the ice and remind the others they are talking about a given show with cast/crew members amongst them.
- Encourage students to focus on the positive while still allowing them to disagree. Generally, students are very sensitive to this.
- Remind students that at least half of the students at the festival are involved with the technical aspects of their show. Try to balance the discussion to reflect this.
- The facilitator should in no way dominate the forum.
- Don't let a few people dominate the forum.

The primary job of the facilitator is simply to let the discussion unfold. Do not enter into the discussion unless it is necessary to offer some guidance. If there is a lull, suggest an aspect of the show that the group might consider or even present a question your self. Please be aware of group dynamics and try not to let one or two students dominate the discussion. Encourage vocal participation from all students. You might even try having each student offer a question or comment round robin style.

### Some sample questions:

- Describe one of your “breakthrough” rehearsals.
- How did your Designers and/or Tech crews interact with one another during the process?
- What parts of the play do you still struggle with in some way (character, blocking, tech)?
- Character development.
- Costume choices.
- Props choices.