Stage Directions

Stage directions always apply to the actor as he faces the audience:

- **Stage right (R):** The actor’s right as he faces the audience
- **Stage left (L):** The actor’s left as he faces the audience
- **Downstage (D):** Nearest the audience
- **Upstage (U):** Away from the audience

The acting area on stage is generally divided into nine locations. The abbreviations are the same as those for stage directions: “C” means stage center. The following diagram indicates stage areas.

Areas of the stage are named from the actor’s point of view. If you are standing on stage looking out at the audience, stage right will be to your right and stage left to your left. Upstage is towards the back wall and downstage is closest to the audience. This terminology comes from the days when stages were raked, or angled down, towards the audience so that everyone standing on the ground could see (now our theater seating is usually raked instead). The proscenium arch is the vertical frame around the stage.
Stage directions are directions given to the actor(s) by the director. They involve the physical movement of the actors on stage. The actors are supposed to note the directions in their scripts. The Stage Manager is also supposed to write down all stage directions in their master book, known as the "Prompt Book". If there is any disagreement about where an actor is supposed to move, or how, the prompt book is the final word. If the director does not like the movement, or changes his mind, the prompt book is revised.

**Body Positions on stage**

In other words, correct terms for the direction you are facing on the stage.

**The Crusher**

For the body position lesson, assume you are the audience and the actors are on the stage (your computer) facing you. Crusher is in a full "open" position also called "Full Front." This is considered a strong position. Crusher is fully "open" to the audience. He can best be seen and heard by the audience.

To "open" is to face toward the audience. Depending on the intent, this can mean to turn a little bit toward the audience or to face the audience in the "full front" position.
The Bonaputz twins on the right, Jacques and Henry, (Jacques is the snappy dresser) are demonstrating the 1/4 Left and the 1/4 Right positions. These positions are fairly open, and are also strong positions, though not as much as the full front position.

To achieve the 1/4 left or 1/4 right position, just move one of your legs more upstage (toward the back wall) then the other. This forces your body to turn a bit. Which way you turn depends upon which leg you move upstage. Stand up and try it.

When two performers "share" a scene on stage (they are both open to an equal degree), this is generally the position they will take. If they faced full front, like Crusher, and talked to each other while looking straight out to the audience, well that would not look "natural" (Although sometimes, an unnatural look might be the desired effect. Nothing in acting is set in stone.) If they turned and faced each other directly (profile) they would look "natural" but they would not be seen or heard very well by the audience. So when two actors "share" a scene, they will usually assume the 1/4 position.

Although this position does not look totally natural, it is a theatre convention readily accepted by the audience. The trick is to be open enough to still be seen and heard well, but to be turned enough toward the other performer to appear to be looking at each other.

Brit and Melissa, are demonstrating the "Left and Right Profile" positions.

Profile is not a particularly strong position because the audience members in the far left or right of the "house" (the audience area) will only see the back of the performer who is facing away from them. They will also have a harder time hearing and understanding them.

Unless there is some specific dramatic reason you need to be in profile, you should strive for more "open" positions.
Sir Walter and Siegfried are in the 3/4 Left and the 3/4 Right positions.

Generally weak positions that should be avoided. Hardly anyone in the house can see the performers' faces decently (all those fine facial expressions are lost) and the performers are talking upstage into the wings, this makes it hard for the audience to hear all that important and meaningful dialogue.

And finally, Dick and Jane are walking off into the back wall in the "Full Back" position.

This is by far the weakest position. No one can see the performers' faces and their lines are being said to the back wall - which can hear them quite well, however the audience has a much harder time of it. Unless you have a strongly compelling dramatic reason for the back wall to see and hear you, AVOID THIS POSITION.
There are a few more important terms for stage movements that you need to know. A "Cross" is simply moving from one part of the stage to another. The director might say "cross left" or "cross down center right". (see STAGE POSITIONS section) In the script you might see it notated as "X".

A "Counter cross" is a cross a performer takes to adjust for the cross of another actor. The adjustment is made to maintain the visual balance of the scene. A counter cross is also made because a crossing actor may "cover" another actor. (Obstruct the audience's view of the other actor by moving into a position between the other actor and the audience.)

Performers frequently counter cross and it is expected that slight adjustments should be made by the performers without being told. Counter crosses that cover a lot of stage territory would normally be handled as "blocking" and discussed with the director.

We have one other term you should know. This is the dreaded "Upstaging" position.

This is Upstaging another performer. Jacques and Sir Walter are sharing a scene. Each of the performers are of equal importance and focus. They are engaged in a dialogue. Jacques, however, has moved "upstage" from Sir Walter. This upstage movement forces Sir Walter to do one of three things:

1. He can move upstage with Jacques, which takes both of them further away from the audience.
2. He can talk to Jacques while looking out toward the audience, or into the wings, or some other place where Jacques isn't - which will look stupid.
3. He can turn upstage to look at Jacques while they talk. The audience will be able to see and hear Jacques just fine, however, they will no longer be able to see or hear Sir Walter very well -

Do not to upstage anyone.