



Rigging Math Made Simple

By Delbert L. Hall

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The job of an entertainment rigger is to safely suspend objects (scenery, lights, sound equipment, platforms, and even performers) at very specific locations above the ground. The type, size and location of the structural members from which these objects must be suspended vary greatly from venue to venue. Additionally, the size, weight, and location of each object varies from object to object. To ensure that each object is safely suspended at the proper location, math is essential. Sometimes this math is very simple, and sometimes it can be complex. One reason catastrophic failures occur is because the load placed on a structural member or a piece of hardware exceeds the breaking strength of the structural member or piece of hardware. While a structural engineer must determine the strength of the structural members, and the manufacturers determine the strength of the hardware, the rigger is responsible for knowing the forces that will be exerted on each rigging point and piece of hardware. Because the forces placed on each rigging point and piece of hardware are determined not only by the weight of the object (its static load) but also HOW the rigging is done, entertainment riggers must be able to calculate these loads/forces. There are plenty of entertainment riggers who do not know how to do much math - but these are the people doing exactly what they are told to do, and not the ones figuring out what to do and doing the telling. If you want to be a top-notch rigger, you have to know math.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Delbert Hall, Ph.D., is head of the design and technical theatre program in the Division of Theatre and Dance at East Tennessee State University, where he has taught since 1986. Dr. Hall received his Ph.D. from the University of Florida, his MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and his B.S.Ed. from Western Carolina University. He is the U.S. Institute for Theatre Technology - Southeast Region's Outstanding Educator in Theatrical Design and Technology for 2000-2001, and received an Outstanding Achievement Award for special effects rigging from the Kennedy Center for the Arts in 2000. Delbert is the president of D2 Flying Effects, LLC, and has been rigging performer flying effects and aerial dance apparatus for over 30 years. He is an ETCP certified rigger (Theatre) and an ETCP Recognized Trainer. Delbert regularly teaches workshops on rigging and rigging math and is the originator of RigCalc, a rigging calculator app with versions for Android and Apple iOS devices. Delbert also does destructive testing of hardware used in the entertainment industry and fabrics used in aerial dance in order to better understand how these items break and at what loads.

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