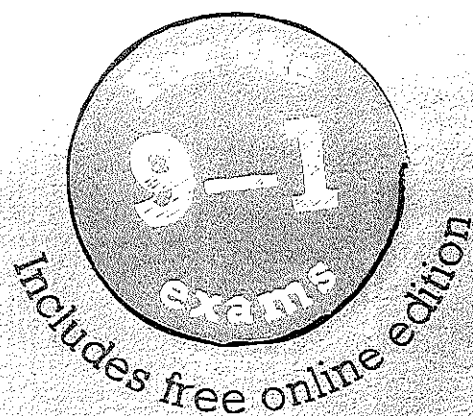


**REVISE EDEXCEL GCSE (9–1)**

**Drama**

# REVISION GUIDE



# The audience

The **audience** is essential to a performance. In the exam you need to show you have considered how the audience will be central to your ideas.

## The relationship between performers and audience

The audience must be at the heart of all productions. A performer, director or designer will always consider the effect they want to have on the audience when making their decisions about, for example, **characterisation, style or costume**. Every moment in a production must **communicate the purpose, message and ideas** to whoever is watching.

By making careful choices – for example, about where a performer is positioned, the speed with which the lighting changes, the use of symbolic props, costume or set, or a specific type of sound effect – it is possible to control how an audience **reacts** or what it **understands**. You can find out more about managing the audience on page 32.

## Considering the audience

When it comes to the audience, there are many things to consider. For example:

- **Director:** Where will the audience members be positioned and how will this affect their perspective on the performance?
- **Performer:** What do I want the audience to feel about the character I am playing?
- **Designer:** What messages will my design ideas give to the audience about specific moments in the play, and how will those ideas enhance the events or emotions of the scene?

A director needs to think about the impact each moment of the production will have on the audience, as well as how those moments will all work together to help the audience understand both the plot and the style of the production.

Turn to page 30 for a reminder about consistency of style and communication with the audience. Turn to page 32 for more on how the audience will be central to the ideas you have as a director.

## Target audience

It is important to identify the target audience for a production. Being clear about who a production is aimed at helps to inform the more detailed decisions about how the piece will be presented.

For example, if the target audience is young people aged between 14 and 25 years, they are likely to have different expectations about a live performance than a middle-class, middle-aged audience. In turn, this may affect production choices, such as the type of music or technology used, or the volume levels of sound effects.

## Selecting a target audience

Decisions about the target audience can be affected by the following factors:

- **Content and material** – The overall narrative of the piece may interest one particular demographic (group of people) more than another.
- **Language** – Swearing may be unacceptable or offensive to some, while technical or very specific vocabulary might appeal to some more than others.
- **Themes/issues** – Different sections of society may be attracted to different themes or issues. Is there anything in the play that indicates who might take an interest?

Consider whether there is a way to reimagine a piece to appeal to a specific demographic.

## Now try this

Select a target audience for your performance text. Explain why you have chosen this particular demographic and outline some of the key features of the piece that you feel will appeal to that audience.

While you may have a specific target audience in mind, remember that the production should be accessible to as many different people as possible.

# Theatrical concepts

When answering exam questions, you will need to demonstrate your understanding of a wide range of theatrical ideas and concepts. Becoming familiar with and understanding these concepts will help you achieve consistency in your answers and will provide a solid foundation from which to develop your ideas.

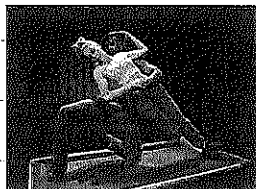
**Genre** – The type or category of play as it was written, such as comedy, historical drama or political satire. See page 28 for more about genre.

The twin masks of Comedy and Tragedy date back to Ancient Greek theatre.



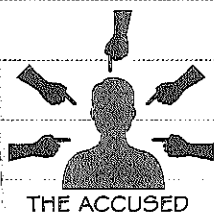
**Style and form** – The way in which a piece of theatre is performed. For example, Frantic Assembly's physical and modern interpretation of *Othello* is very different to a more traditional approach to the play. Turn to page 28 for more about style.

Physical theatre puts the body and movement at the heart of the production.



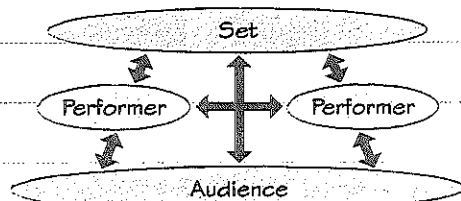
**Social, historical and social context** – Understanding when a play was written and under what circumstances – the context – can provide a huge amount of information about the intentions of the piece. For more about contexts, turn to page 34.

For example, by understanding the political climate in 1950s America and McCarthyism, we can draw strong parallels between those events and the events of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, revealing a powerful subtext to the work.



**Spatial positioning** – This may be between performers, the audience and the set, and is sometimes called **proxemics**. The distance between characters can be a very clear indication of the relationship between them. Equally, having performers and audience sharing the same space can help bring the audience right into the performance. Turn to page 39 for more about spatial positioning.

Spatial positioning helps to shape a production and communicate its message.

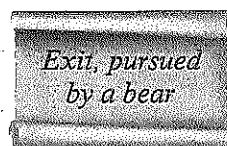


**Structure** – The way in which the play is constructed. This will include the building of tension, climax and anti-climax. It may also refer to how many acts or scenes make up the play.

Act 1: Exposition – building tension → Act 2: Rising action – climax → Act 3: Building tension – climax → Act 4: Rising action – resolution

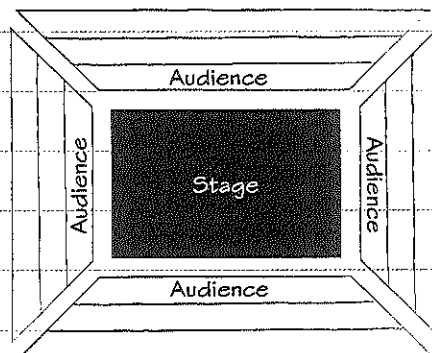
A top-level overview of the structure of *The Crucible*.

**Stage directions** – These are very much part of the play; they give instructions as to what the playwright wants the performer to do physically. They may also indicate a wide range of other important information, such as the time or location of a scene; costume requirements, notes on characterisation or how a line should be said. They should always be considered very carefully.



A famous stage direction from Act 3, Scene 3 of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

**Types of staging** – This describes the different performance spaces available for a theatrical production. Different types of space position the audience in different ways, leading to different audience experiences. You can revise different types of staging on page 29.



Theatre-in-the-round

## New try this

Outline an overall vision for a production of your performance text.

Think about the concepts on this page and the decisions you will make about them in relation to your performance text. How will they help to shape your overall concept?

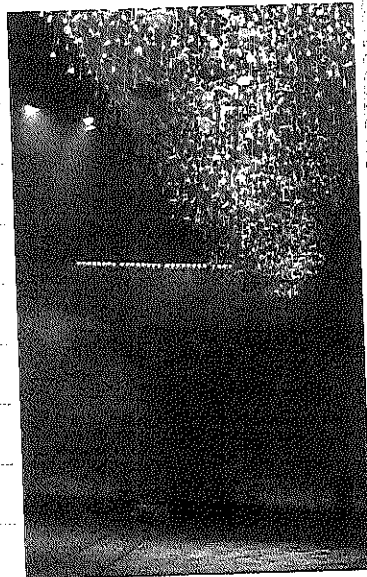
# Conventions and terminology

In the exam you will need to consider how – as a performer, director and designer – you can create impact and meaning for an audience. Theatre conventions are techniques for communicating ideas to those watching a production. When you write about your ideas in the exam, it is important to demonstrate your understanding by using the correct technical vocabulary whenever you can.

## Theatre conventions

As theatre has evolved, different conventions have developed and have often merged together to create a new approach to communicating with an audience. While it is impossible to list all of the contemporary (current) ways in which performers, directors and designers communicate their ideas, some of these techniques include:

- ✓ direct address to the audience
- ✓ symbolic costume and set
- ✓ multimedia (such as music and projection)
- ✓ multi-role (where a performer plays more than one character).



The set for the 2011 National Theatre production of *Frankenstein* combined strong, symbolic elements, such as an array of light bulbs to represent the electricity used to bring the Creature to life.

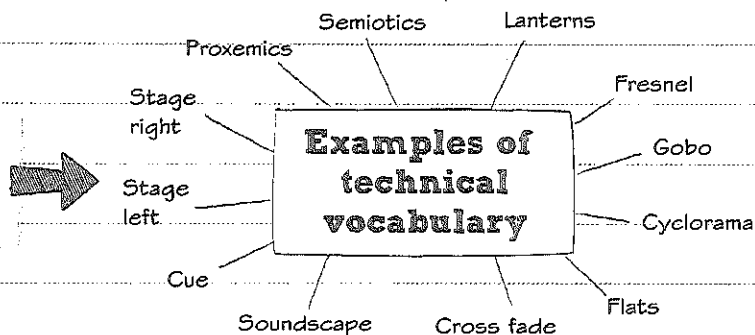
## The importance of technical vocabulary

In the exam you need to use **appropriate technical vocabulary and drama terminology** whenever you can. This will help you to:

- 👍 demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the subject
- 👍 show your understanding of the different roles in theatre
- 👍 express your ideas and communicate your intentions clearly
- 👍 write strong answers.

In this Revision Guide, key drama vocabulary and terminology is often given in **bold**. If you are unsure what a term means, take a moment to find out. Make sure you are ready to use the terms in the exam!

How much of this technical vocabulary do you know? How many other terms can you think of?



## New try this

Look at the examples of technical terms in the spider diagram above. Decide which role – performer, director or designer – each term belongs to. Then write a definition for each term.

**Beware:** some of the terms belong to more than one role! Think carefully about the situations in which each term might be used.

# The performer

A **performer** is an actor, musician, dancer or anyone who is involved in entertaining the audience. It is the performer's task to tell the story of the play, to learn and deliver the text and to portray the characters and intentions of the playwright.

**Performance skills** – The performer uses various skills to communicate with the audience, including **voice, movement, characterisation** and **use of space**.

**Engaging the audience** – Perhaps the most important aspect of being a performer is the relationship with a live theatre audience. This **communication** makes live theatre unique.

**Working with others** – Performers rarely work on their own and even solo shows include a design team or director – so working with others or as part of an **ensemble** is a key aspect of performance.

**Working with the text** – Performers may have to consider an actual text, working with the language of a play and considering the playwright's intentions. The 'text' might also be a stimulus such as a poem, a quotation or an image, particularly in devised theatre. The performer must explore and understand the text in as much depth as possible.

## The role of the performer

**Developing the performance** – A strong performer works continuously on developing their performance. This starts in rehearsals but continues as the live performance work progresses and the performer develops a closer understanding of the play, the playwright's intentions and the director's vision.

**Communicating character** – Performing often requires the interpretation of a particular character, and this can be vital in helping to tell the story of the piece.

**Conveying the interpretation, style and purpose** – Directors (and designers) often have a strong vision for how they want to interpret a play: they will have selected a **style** and have a clear sense of **purpose** and **message**. A performer needs to understand what the director is trying to say and consider how they can help to communicate this vision to the audience.

### The early stages of rehearsal

In the early stages of a production, the performer will work closely with the text (or stimulus if working on a devised piece). A performer will try to understand the text by finding out as much information as possible about the **character** they are playing and the world of the play. This knowledge can be gained from the whole text, including **stage directions** and notes from the playwright.

For example in the opening scene of *An Inspector Calls*, playwright J.B. Priestley uses extensive stage directions to help describe the scene and to help the performers understand and interpret the characters.

In this example of a possible opening stage direction, the performer is given a great deal of information in this opening stage direction. They are told about the age and physical appearance of the character as well as his personality and way of speaking. This information will help the performer to understand and develop the role.

**MARK CORNELL** [is a slight, wiry and highly energetic man in his late thirties. His polite, 'public schoolboy' demeanour and his refined tones contrast with his casual, even scruffy, appearance.]

### Now try this

When a performer approaches a play, what questions will they need to ask in order to develop their character fully? List the questions to ask in the early stages of a production.

Think about points that relate specifically to the character, such as their age, as well as their relationships with others and position within the world of the play.



# Tone and intonation

Controlled use of the **voice** is one of the key skills a performer has at their disposal. Choices about the way a line is spoken will have a significant impact on its **meaning**, as well as the **communication** between performers and the audience.

## The importance of voice

Voice can convey:

- ☒ emotions
- ☒ relationships
- ☒ intentions
- ☒ subtext.

Carefully combining different vocal elements is vital for a successful performance.

The voice can be a powerful way of communicating the **subtext** – that is, the meaning underneath the surface of the text. Performers can use various **vocal techniques** to convey the subtext.

For example, consider the performer playing Viola/Cesario in Act 2, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. In this scene, Viola is in her disguise as Cesario. She is talking to Orsino, Duke of Illyria, with whom she is in love, and who does not know that Cesario is really Viola – a woman.

Orsino asks Cesario about the object of his affections: 'What kind of woman is't?'

Viola/Cesario, unable to reveal openly that it is no woman but rather Orsino that she loves, replies: 'Of your complexion'.

A performer delivering Viola/Cesario's line here will draw on a range of vocal techniques to communicate the subtext of Viola's love for Orsino to the audience.

**Tone** – This describes how the lines are said to convey meaning. For example, a sarcastic tone might mean that while a character says he is pleased to see someone, in fact he is not.

## Vocal skills and the impact of voice

**Intonation** – This describes the rise and fall of the voice to help provide variation and interest. For example, varying intonation will make speech more natural, and help to communicate meaning and keep the audience engaged.

## Using tone

**Tone** is not about what is said but **how** it is said. It is vital for showing meaning and emotion, providing the **context** for each of the words.

For example, during Act 2 of *An Inspector Calls*, Mrs Birling becomes very angry with Inspector Goole. However, as she realises she is partly responsible for Eva's death, she becomes distressed. A clipped, haughty tone when speaking to the inspector would emphasise an attempt to gain the higher status. This could be contrasted with an anxious, upset tone, highlighting her realisation of the terrible consequences of her actions.

## Using intonation

**Intonation** is about the performer making their voice sound interesting and engaging. It is particularly important when delivering long speeches.

For example, in *Twelfth Night*, Duke Orsino opens the play with a speech about his love for Olivia. He speaks the famous line, 'If music be the food of love, play on'. The performer playing this role might start with a soft intonation, rising on the key words 'food of love' and building to a forceful and commanding use of voice to urge the musicians to play.

## Now try this

Choose **one** scene and **one** character from your performance text. Explain how, as a performer, you would use tone to communicate your character's intentions and the meaning of the text at this point.

Give reasons for your ideas and remember to use quotations from the text to support your answer.

# Pause and pitch

The way in which words are spoken can have a particular impact on the audience and can affect the audience's experience when watching a performance.

## Using voice to communicate character

Voice can be very important when developing and communicating a character. Voice can convey a character's:

- age
- background
- emotional state
- status.

Understanding use of voice can help a performer to find a way to convey their character to an audience.

The term **emotional state** describes how a character is feeling at a particular moment in the play. A performer can use vocal skills to portray a character's emotions.

For example, in Act 1, Scene 2 of *DNA*, Leah speaks to Phil. In this **monologue**, Leah's anxiety and sense of frustration builds as Phil fails to respond to her questions. As the scene progresses, Leah's emotional state becomes more intense. A performer might use a high **pitch** to demonstrate this.



**Pause** – Starting and stopping to emphasise a point or provide contrast and variation. For example, a pause in the middle of a sentence might convey nerves about admitting a crime.

### Vocal skills and the impact of voice

**Pitch** – How high or low the voice is. For example, a low pitch might indicate a solemn secret being shared, while a high pitch might convey joy.

## Using pauses

Pauses can add **tension** to a scene and can give **emphasis** to a word or phrase.

For example, in Act 1, Scene 1 of *Government Inspector*, the Mayor of the town gathers many of the important townspeople in a room at his home. He then delivers the unpleasant news that the town is to be visited by a government inspector. The performer playing the Mayor might use pause in his delivery of the news to the anxious town officials to add gravitas (seriousness) to the scene.

## Using pitch

The use of **pitch** can add an extra level of drama to the delivery of a text. Performers who keep pitch on the same level may fail to engage with the audience.

For example, in Act 3 of *The Crucible*, Abigail and the other girls begin to scream that Mary Warren is sending spirits to harm them. The performers playing the characters of Abigail and the other girls need to make use of a high pitch in order to be able to convince the court and the audience of their hysteria. A low pitch would be inappropriate in capturing the emotion of the scene.

## Now try this

Choose one scene and one character from your performance text. Explain how, as a performer, you would use pause and pitch to express the scene successfully. Give clear reasons for each idea.



Remember to look carefully at the **context** of the scene, as this will help you to understand how pause and pitch can be used most effectively.

# Clarity and pace

A performer must make sure that they deliver the text in a way that makes sense to the audience. Using **clarity** and **pace** effectively is an important way of communicating character and meaning.

## Creating character and manipulating meaning

A performer can use the clarity and pace of their vocal delivery to bring their character to life for an audience.

- Each word and each line in a text can be delivered differently, depending on what a performer wants to show about the character or their situation. For example, is the character young, old, ill, enthusiastic, tired, embarrassed, angry, in a hurry? Using the right pace can help to make this clear.
- A skilful performer might vary their approach to clarity too. For example, mumbled speech, like a fast pace, might suggest annoyance.

Try this for yourself. Pick a line in your performance text and try delivering it at different speeds and with varying degrees of clarity. How does this change the way the character comes across?

## In the exam

In Section A (Bringing texts to life) of the exam, you will need to consider the different **elements** of vocal delivery and how you would use this skill in a production of your performance text. Understanding the **effect** of each vocal element will help you to **apply** these skills to your answers on the production of your performance text.



For more about Section A of the exam, turn to pages 84–102.

**Clarity** – This is making sure the audience can hear the words and that their intended meaning is clear. For example, even if a character is scared and cowering, the voice must be clear and the audience able to hear and understand it.

## Vocal skills and the impact of voice

**Pace** – This refers to the rhythm and speed with which words are spoken. For example, a fast pace might indicate excitement, while a slower pace might suggest sadness.

## Using clarity

For a role to be successful, a performer must be **understood**. **Clear diction** is therefore important, but so is **clarity of intention and emotion**. A performer might, for example, deliberately avoid clarity to suggest confusion, drunkenness or injury.

For example, when Adam appears towards the end of Act 3 in *DNA*, he is confused and frightened after his experience. A performer could portray this by stammering and muttering some of the words. While this may reduce some vocal clarity, the emotions expressed will be very clear to the audience.

## Using pace

Stanislavski called pace the **tempo-rhythm** of the character.

The pace used by a performer can paint a vivid picture for the audience of the type of character they are playing, as well as helping to highlight the **meaning** of each word spoken.

For example, in Scene 21 of *Dr Korczak's Example*, the Nazi officer enters Cerniakov's office to issue demands ahead of the deportation from the ghetto. The performer playing the officer might use a fast pace to show the commanding nature of the character and the urgency of the scene.

## Now try this

Choose **one** scene and **one** character from your performance text. Explain how, as a performer, you would use pace and clarity to express your character's intentions. Give clear reasons for each idea.

Start by identifying the intentions of the character in the scene. Then work out how you could convey those intentions.



# Accent and inflection

**Accent** is more relevant to some performance texts than others, though it is always an **aspect of voice** a performer needs to consider. The use of **inflection** can also change the way a voice sounds to the audience.

## Using accent and inflection



When a production involves multi-role, a performer may need to play more than one character. This might involve very different personalities, backgrounds, ages and even genders - and the performer will need to use their voice in very versatile ways. For example, in the 2013 production of Robert and David Goodale's comedy *Perfect Nonsense*, Matthew Macfadyen (here on the left) played the stiff man servant Jeeves opposite Stephen Mangan's excitable Wooster. But Macfadyen also played a number of other roles, including a woman, making use of accent and inflection to provide distinctive characterisation.

**Accent** - This is used to indicate where a character is from, specifically which country or region. It may also help distinguish class and status.

### Vocal skills and the impact of voice

**Inflection** - This refers to the ups and downs of spoken language. For example, inflection can go higher at the end of a sentence to make the outcome sound as though it is a question. This is known as 'upward inflection'.

## Using accent

Accent is very important in helping to show a character's background. A performer's accent can help to convey a great deal about their role.

For example, the performers playing the roles of Mrs Birling and Edna in *An Inspector Calls* will make use of accent to convey their characters' background and status to the audience. J.B. Priestley describes Mrs Birling as socially superior to Mr Birling, which tells the performer that she should be upper class in the way that she speaks (and acts). Edna is described by Priestley as the Birlings' maid, and is likely to be of lower status than the other characters. The performer playing the character of Edna should use an accent that portrays this difference to the audience.

## Using inflection

The use of inflection can alter the way a line is delivered and understood. A performer must therefore pay close attention to their use of inflection when speaking.

For example, in Act 3, Scene 4 of *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio is fooled into wearing cross-gartered yellow stockings. He enters onto the stage moving towards Olivia, as he believes she is in love with him. Olivia is taken aback by Malvolio's strange behaviour and asks, 'Wilt thou go to bed, Malvolio?' The way in which this line is delivered can indicate how Olivia feels towards Malvolio, such as whether she is scared of him, feels anxious by the way he is acting, or is simply bemused by it. In this way, inflection can be used to alter the meaning of the question.

## Now try this

Choose one character from your performance text and explain how **accent** is important to the vocal delivery of that character. Explain clearly why this element of voice is important.

Remember that accent can be used to distinguish status or class.

# Emphasis and volume

Putting **stress** or **emphasis** on certain words affects how dialogue is **communicated**, as does how **loudly** or **quietly** lines are delivered in performance.

## A performer's use of volume

Consider a performer's use of vocals to portray character in performance. By varying volume and emphasis when speaking lines, a performer can better show their character's intentions.

For example, the character of Danforth in Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* might use volume to show that he is the leading judge in the court of the Salem witch trials, suggesting his authority and high status – it is paramount that his voice can be heard. When dealing with Proctor's accusations regarding Abigail's lying, the performer could also make use of a loud voice and emphasis on the text to show Danforth's authority in dealing with the serious nature of Proctor's claims.

When deciding on how to use vocal skills as a performer, consider the level of **projection** required when delivering your character's lines.

As another example, consider the first time we meet Eric Birling in *An Inspector Calls*; the performer playing him might use louder vocals to show he is comfortable with his surroundings, enjoying himself at the meal. Eric's use of voice may alter later on, however, when the Inspector reveals the truths behind the death of Eva Smith. At this point in the play, Eric's voice may become quiet, to show his shame and sadness at what has happened.

**Stress/emphasis** – This is used to place greater importance on specifically chosen words, or to highlight the meaning behind those words. For example, in 'I'm leaving', placing stress on 'I'm' makes it clear who is leaving, whereas stressing 'leaving' puts the emphasis on the action.

### Vocal skills and the impact of voice

**Volume** – This refers to how loud or quiet the voice is. For example, a shout might convey aggression while a whisper might suggest secrecy or fear.

## Using emphasis when delivering text

Putting stress or emphasis on particular words can completely change a sentence. Performing Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be' speech, for example, and putting emphasis on 'To be' or 'not', will change how Hamlet's state of mind is portrayed.

For example, in *Twelfth Night*, when Olivia meets Viola for the first time in Act 1, Scene 5, she is fascinated by the way Viola (dressed as the boy messenger Cesario) speaks to her. This intrigue could be emphasised by the performer playing Olivia by putting stress on the line 'Unless, perchance, you come to me again'. Putting the stress on 'you' allows the performer to communicate to the audience that Olivia is interested in seeing Cesario again, and to suggest that this could be a blossoming relationship.

## Considering volume with voice

It is important to be loud enough in performance, as a modern audience expects to be able to hear each word clearly. As outlined above, volume can also alter the meaning in delivery of the text.

For example, **amplification** is important in the opening of *1984*. At this point the audience can hear a voice but cannot see the performer speaking the lines. If this opening is spoken quietly, the text might come across as sinister or give a sense of mystery. If the performer amplifies their voice, making it very loud, the language may sound angry or aggressive, creating a sense of danger or anticipation. This is just one example of how volume in the use of vocal skills can affect a scene.

### New try this

Find one moment from your performance text where a character or characters might make use of volume or emphasis. Explain your answer.

Your reasons may depend on a change of intention or atmosphere, for example.

# Diction and nuance

Making every spoken word clear is very important, as is the use of **nuance** to add **subtlety** to a performance.

## Using diction

A performer's voice can convey a character's thoughts and feelings to the audience. Their use of voice can also allow the character's **intentions** to be more accurately conveyed, which is essential when staging the relationships within a play.

In your performance text, to what extent are diction, and how a performer speaks a line, important in terms of how a character's feelings or intentions are conveyed to the audience?

The **diction** in the voice (pronouncing each spoken word clearly) allows a performer to be more **responsive** on stage.

For example, in Act 1, Scene 4 of *Blue Stockings*, the character of Tess responds to a lecture by Dr Maudsley, in which he gives an opinion that annoys her. In her response – 'I am not agitated because I am a woman!' – the performer playing Tess would need to use effective diction to convey Tess's disgust and disagreement.

**Diction** – This is **pronouncing** each spoken word clearly. It is important for performers to **articulate** what they are saying so that the audience can understand what is happening on stage. This is sometimes known as how a performer **enunciates** their words.

## Vocal skills and the impact of voice

**Nuance** – This describes the small differences in sound that can alter how a line is spoken to change the meaning or feeling in the text. The use of nuance in vocal skills is often very subtle. Nuance has similarities to how a performer uses intonation and tone. For more on a performer's use of intonation and tone, turn to page 6.

## Where nuance is important

Nuance adds subtlety to a play and can allow the performers to convey a character's true thoughts or feelings to the audience.

For example, in *Twelfth Night*, the tension between Viola (as Cesario) and Duke Orsino becomes greater as the play progresses. At the play's height, in Act 2, Scene 4, the two characters talk about being in love. The performer playing Viola may use nuance in the way she says the line, 'As it might be, perhaps, were I a woman....' Here, a slight difference in **sound** would suggest her true feelings towards the Duke, while at the same time being careful not to overtly announce her love.

## Considering diction

Speaking with a clear voice that can be heard by all of the audience is important. Diction becomes even more essential in certain key moments.

For example, towards the end of the play *Blue Stockings*, in Act 2, Scene 11, when Mrs Welsh enters the scene, she is determined to find out the outcome of the vote. She asks, 'Mr Peck. Is there any news?' The use of diction here is vital, as there must be **clarity** in the way that the line is delivered and the question asked, to show how important the outcome of the vote is to Mrs Welsh in particular.

## Now try this

Choose one key moment from your performance text and explain why nuance and diction would be important to the delivery of the text at this point. State your reasons for each idea clearly.

Compiling a list of key moments is a great way of revising your overall knowledge and understanding of your performance text.

# Facial expression and body language

A performer's use of **physical skills** is central to how they **interpret** and **convey** the message of the text. So it is vital to consider how **facial expression** and **body language** might be used to communicate with the audience.

## A performer's use of facial expression

Facial expression is a powerful way of communicating with the audience. Humans are capable of making 10 000 unique facial expressions with just 43 muscles in the face.

Facial expressions can be grouped into seven basic emotions:

- fear
- anger
- disgust
- sadness
- contempt
- surprise.
- happiness



A performer's facial expression can convey a great deal of information about how their performance character is feeling. This facial expression sums up the first basic emotion of fear very clearly.

**Facial expression** – A performer's facial expression can reveal a character's innermost feelings or thoughts, as well as showing their response to what is happening on stage or to other characters.

### The use of movement and physical skills

**Body language** – This is the way a performer communicates **non-verbally**. Performers can use their body in a wide variety of ways to convey emotional responses. Body language can provide an incredibly powerful and instant way of transmitting information and connecting with the audience. See pages 13–15 for more on different aspects of body language, such as **stance** and **gesture**.

## Where body language might be used

Body language might be used to communicate a message non-verbally to an audience – this might be **subtle** or **overt**.

For example, consider the role of Dr Maudsley in the opening of *Blue Stockings*. Maudsley is stubbornly against the idea of degrees for women. A performer approaching this role may make use of crossed arms and an upright posture, leaning his head forward slightly and perhaps shaking his fist or pointing in an aggressive way. This overt use of body language would highlight Dr Maudsley's stubborn feelings and immovable opinion.

## Where facial expression might be used

Facial expression can be used to add another **layer** to the performance, helping to underline what is being said or suggesting an alternative meaning or **subtext**.

For example, in Act 5, Scene 1 of *Twelfth Night*, when Sebastian and Viola appear on stage together for the first time, the surprised, confused and shocked responses of the other characters can be shown by their facial expressions. For example, when Duke Orsino says 'One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons', the performer playing the character can add to the confusion and the comic style of the piece through the use of facial expression.

## Now try this

Find one moment from your performance text where a character could use facial expression and body language to communicate (overtly or in a subtle way) how they are feeling to the audience or other characters on stage. Explain your answer.



Always consider how the character's use of body language and facial expression conveys how they are feeling at that particular moment, for example, when responding to other characters on stage.

# Gesture and proxemics

A performer's use of **physical skills**, including **gesture** and **proxemics**, is central to how they interpret and convey the message of the text and communicate with the audience.

## A performer's use of gesture

Gestures:

- 👉 can help to sum up how a character feels at any given moment in the production. A character shaking a fist, for example, may convey a great deal to the audience without the need for words
- 👉 can be **socially, culturally or historically** significant. It is important to be aware of this when approaching your performance text.

For example, *The Crucible* is set in a **puritanical society** in which people follow strict religious rules. Therefore a character not showing proper respect to God, such as by turning their back on a priest or court official, would be seen as suspicious and bordering on criminality.

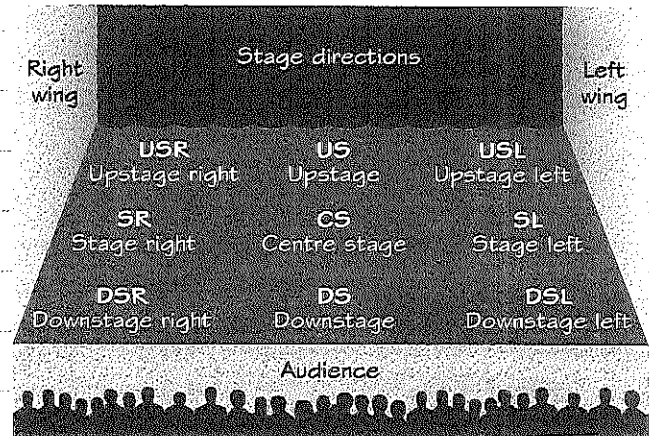
**Gesture** – A gesture is a way of expressing a character's thoughts or emotions and often works together with **body language**. Gestures can reflect an **action** and can be an **instant** way of communicating.

### The use of movement and physical skills

**Proxemics** – This describes how performers use stage space. The use of space can communicate **relationships** between performers and/or between performers and audience members.

## A performer's use of proxemics

Proxemics describes the use of space on stage.



Using a stage diagram and drama terminology can help you to describe where performers are positioned on stage.

## Using gesture for effect

Performers can use gestures as an action to communicate a moment with a text.

For example, in *Blue Stockings*, when Mr Peck enters with the news that the vote went against the female undergraduates, denying them the right to graduate, he takes his hat off and pauses. Mr Peck's use of gesture and his obvious difficulty with breaking the news **foreshadows** the women's disappointment that the vote was lost. The performer playing Mr Peck can make this moment significant through the use of considered gesture.

## The use of proxemics in performance

Proxemics can be used in particular to convey a relationship to the audience. In certain plays a playwright will suggest how they can be used to communicate a situation.

For example, in *An Inspector Calls*, during the early part of Act 1, the Inspector shows a photograph of Eva Smith to Mr Birling. As Eric and Gerald try to see the photograph, the stage directions describe how the Inspector positions himself between those characters and the photograph. The use of space is significant here, adding a sense of mystery and tension, as Eric and Gerald are prevented from looking at the photo.

### Now try this

In your performance text find and explain:

- (a) one key moment where the use of gesture is significant and
- (b) one key moment where proxemics is important in the staging of the scene.

A playwright may help you by suggesting the use of gesture or space. At other times you may identify a moment in your performance text where gesture or space could be used for effect, though this might not necessarily be marked in the script.

# Stance and stillness

**Stillness** and a character's **stance** are two of the ways in which a performer's body language can be used to communicate with the audience.

## A performer's use of stance

Stance can also be described as **posture**. A performer's use of stance can reveal the following about a character:

- Status
- Gender
- Profession
- Age
- Emotional state
- Physical well-being.

For example, at the end of *DNA*, we learn that the character of Adam has endured great suffering, which has affected him physically, emotionally and mentally. To convey this, a performer might show the character of Adam with a bent-over posture and a stance that hints at his disturbed **state of mind**. The performer might hold his body in a tense and rigid way to show how vulnerable he feels at this moment in the play.



A 'hands on hips' posture such as this clearly shows this character's serious state, as well as suiting his uniform/profession.

**Stance** – This describes the way a person stands or the **pose** they adopt. A person's stance is affected by their emotional, environmental and physical experiences. For example, if a person is upset, tired and cold they may look down with arms crossed and held close to the body, and knees slightly bent. This is a non-verbal way in which a performer can communicate their character's situation to the audience.

### The use of movement and physical skills

**Stillness** – This describes a person's lack of movement. A performer may keep still on purpose, for example to convey a character's caution or lack of control over their physical response. For example, a character may stand rooted to the spot because they are afraid or in shock.

## The use of stance to convey character

Stance or posture might be used to communicate a character to an audience.

For example, the performer playing the role of the Policeman in Scene 1 of *Dr Korczak's Example* catches Adzio stealing food from a market stall. The Policeman is angry and asserts his authority over the young character. It will be vital that the performer portraying the Policeman makes effective use of stance to show his character's emotions, status and his profession, as well as his thoughts and feelings towards Adzio.

## Use of stillness in performance

A performer may choose to use stillness as a way of conveying a particular **response**.

For example, in *Blue Stockings*, the character of Dr Maudsley is well respected by the students and he has high status within the university. His entrance into the lecture room during Act 1, Scene 4 could be marked by a use of stillness among the students as they watch on in awe 'as this guru walks towards the front'. The performers' actions here would help to build up the status of Dr Maudsley.

### New try this

List **three** characters from your performance text. Outline how you feel stance could be used to convey these characters at significant moments in the text.

When completing your list of characters, take time to consider why each one would hold a particular stance – you need to be able to justify this in your answer.



# Movement and spatial awareness

**Spatial awareness** and a character's **movement** are two aspects of a performer's physicality that can be used to communicate with the audience.

## A performer's use of movement

Movement is an essential form of expression. It is vital for any performer to consider:

- how they will move
- where they will move
- why they will move.

Movement often follows on from a character's **objectives** or **motivation** in a scene. The performer first needs to decide on the purpose of the movement before deciding on what form it will take.

For example, in Act 2 of *The Crucible*, the character of Elizabeth is told that she has been accused of witchcraft. Her physical movements will express her fear and shock at this revelation.

**Movement** – This connects to **stance**, **stillness**, **facial expression** and **body language**, as movement can encompass all of these elements. The **quality** of a performer's movement can convey a great deal about a particular character.

## The use of movement and physical skills

## The importance of movement

Movement can be significant in certain scenes on stage.

For example, during a very heated discussion in Act 3 of *An Inspector Calls*, Eric realises that his mother, Mrs Birling, had turned Eva Smith away when she went to her for help. Eric becomes very agitated. Here, movement becomes significant: the performer playing Eric needs to make use of physicality as well as voice to clearly communicate his feelings towards his mother at this point.

## Stanislavski's system

Stanislavski's system:

- ✓ refers to an approach to acting that tries to achieve a **naturalistic style**, in that the performers try to recreate a sense of 'real life' on stage
  - ✓ makes movement and physical responses key to the performance. Staging a play in this way requires careful consideration of the reasons behind each movement in order to communicate the performance in as 'real' a way as possible
  - ✓ works well with a play such as *The Crucible*, which is written in great detail by playwright Arthur Miller.
- Turn to page 17 to read about a character's aims and objectives, another part of Stanislavski's system.

**Spatial awareness** – This describes how a performer may use space on stage and what this might reveal about their character's **personality**. Rudolf Laban referred to this as a person's **kinesphere** – namely the 'space around them'. It is linked to **proxemics**, which describes how space is used on stage.

## Using spatial awareness

How a performer uses space around them may convey a strong message to an audience.

For example, in *Twelfth Night* Olivia teases Viola (dressed as Cesario) in their first meeting in Act 1, Scene 5. When Olivia finally reveals herself to Cesario, lifting her veil and speaking the line 'we will draw the curtain and show you the picture', she could move towards Cesario in order to see the response, as well as to tease. The spatial awareness of the performer playing Olivia will need to be well thought out here.

## New try this

Describe two ways you would use movement to convey a particular moment in your performance text. Explain why you would use this type of movement.

Some moments in your performance text will require more significant uses of movement than others. Make sure that you outline clearly where this is the case.

# Personality and purpose

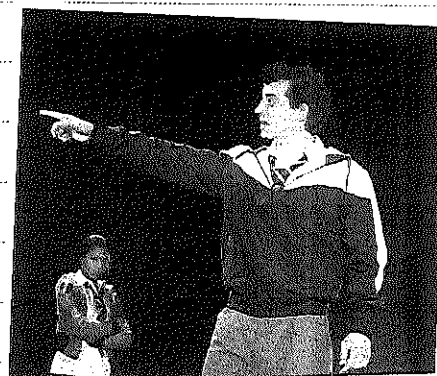
Understanding and interpreting characters is a large part of approaching plays. A performer will consider the character's **personality** and **purpose** in order to understand their role in more depth.

## Bringing character to life

All performers must understand the personality of the character they will act on stage. Personality:

- 👍 determines a character's thoughts, feelings and behaviour
- 👍 can explain what characters say and why.

For example, the character of John Tate in *DNA* has an overbearing personality, which comes across as though he is bullying the others. In Scene 3 he is aggressive and angry, and it is easy to recognise John's place within the group by his behaviour and how the others respond to him. As the group responds to the situation that unfolds, John becomes a leader rather than a follower.



National Theatre performer Jack Gordon's portrayal of the aggressive personality of John Tate, from *DNA*, at the Cottesloe Theatre in 2008.

**Personality** – These are the characteristics or qualities that describe an individual's **distinct** character or way of **behaving**.

### Interpreting character

**Purpose** – A character's purpose in a play often **drives** his or her behaviour; it can explain why they act the way they do. Purpose often connects with **aims and objectives**. Turn to page 17 for more on aims and objectives.

## Understanding a character's purpose

To find out more about how a character acts on stage, it is useful to consider what their purpose in the play might be.

In Gogol's *Government Inspector*, the character of Khlestakov changes his purpose once he becomes aware of the Mayor's mistaken belief that he is in fact the actual inspector. The character becomes focused on carrying on the deception throughout the rest of the play and gaining as many benefits from the 'act' as possible. This is an example of how a character's purpose can change; it also highlights how the purpose of the character can lead the decisions that are made.

## Understanding a character's personality

Considering a character's personality often helps in developing an understanding of their character.

For example, in Miller's *The Crucible*, the character of Proctor is seen as having a proud, strong and stubborn personality. This comes across in many of the earlier scenes in the play, but it becomes more and more relevant as he is imprisoned in court on suspicion of witchcraft. Even up to the final scene, Proctor stays strong and committed to his beliefs. His personality is conveyed clearly in the way the character acts throughout the play, and the performer playing Proctor must understand these qualities to portray the character accurately.

## Now try this

Choose one or two of the lead characters from your performance text. Describe their personality. Find specific examples of how this is shown through their behaviour or what they say.

Remember to look for evidence within the performance text to support your judgement about a character's personality.

# Motives, aims and objectives

When approaching play texts, as well as understanding a character's purpose, a performer needs to consider the **motives**, **aims** and **objectives** of the character they are portraying.

## Understanding a character's motivation

A character's motivation often leads them to move or use actions in a certain way. Motive often explains the reasons behind a character's actions.

For example, in Act 3, Scene 4 of *Twelfth Night*, Malvolio decides to wear cross-gartered yellow stockings and smile wildly at Olivia because he believes this will encourage her to love him. This is the **motive** behind his unusual behaviour.

What other motives may explain behaviour in the performance texts? For example:

- *The Crucible*: character – Abigail; motive for accusations of witchcraft: love for Proctor.
- *Government Inspector*: character – the Mayor; motive for giving loans to Khlestakov: fear of receiving a negative report.

See page 15 to read about using movement to suggest a character's motivations.

**Motives** – The character's deeper motivation and the underlying reason why they act in the way they do. Motives are behind a character's aims and objectives.

## Interpreting character

**Aims and objectives** – A character's aims are their immediate and conscious goals; their objectives describe how they will go about achieving those goals.

Aims and objectives can be seen as the 'stepping stones' to a character achieving their motive. For example, a character may want to be admired for being successful in life, with the aim and objective of impressing at a job interview and being offered a higher status job.

## Aims and objectives in practice

Stanislavski suggested that all humans have aims and objectives that drive them. He asked his performers to work out what their character's aims and objectives were as part of the rehearsal process.

For example, in *An Inspector Calls*, J.B. Priestley describes the entrance of the Inspector, but he allows the performer playing this role to think about the Inspector's aims and objectives. In the opening scene, the character explains that he likes to work methodically to avoid confusion. The performer must decide whether the objective here is to challenge the others in the room, to frighten them, or maybe to make them feel uneasy. Perhaps it is to test their responses. The objective chosen will change how the line is spoken and the portrayal of the Inspector.

## Motive can shape actions

Understanding a character's underlying motive is important for the performer when deciding how they will act in the play.

For example, consider the character of Janusz Korczak, from *Dr Korczak's Example*: what motivated him to be so kind and thoughtful to the children and young people in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942? As we discover in Scene 24, Korczak had an opportunity to be released, but he got on the train with the children to face death at the concentration camp Treblinka. The performer playing Korczak must attempt to understand the motive behind this huge decision if the character is to be performed in a well-rounded, believable way.

## Now try this

Choose one line of dialogue from your performance text and assign different objectives to it. Note how this changes the outcome of the line and the interpretation of the character.



Make sure you choose a line that can be interpreted in different ways.

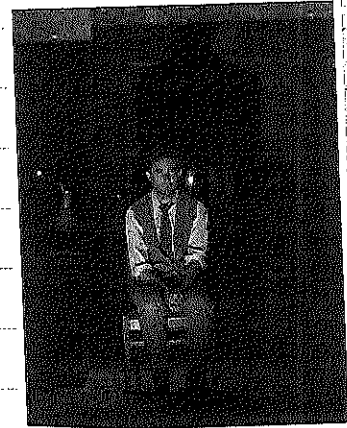
# Development and relationships

When approaching play texts, it is essential for a performer to explore the character's **development** throughout the play, as well as their **relationships** with others.

## Exploring character development

A performer approaching a character in rehearsal needs to consider how that character develops throughout the play. Character development within a play can be achieved by different factors in the action.

For example, consider the character of Winston from *1984*. A performer portraying Winston needs to chart how the different stages of the play affect the development of Winston's character – from his fear of the Thought Police to his falling in love with Julia. The development of Winston's character is central to the plot of *1984* and reflects the intentions of author George Orwell, as well as playwrights Robert Icke and Duncan Macmillan, who adapted Orwell's novel. Without the development of Winston's character, the final betrayal of his love towards the end of the play would not be so powerful.



The performer Sam Crane – seen here in a production at the Playhouse Theatre, London – would have needed to consider how the character of Winston develops.

**Character development** – This outlines how a character develops throughout the 'action of the play'. It can be shown by events during the course of the play or by referring to events that took place before the start of the play's action begins.

## Interpreting character

**Character relationships** – In all of the performance texts, character relationships are important to character development. Performers may also consider a character's relationship with the audience in texts, particularly if the character speaks a soliloquy.

## How and when a character develops

Characters can **evolve** (develop) in texts. It is important that a performer is aware of **when** these changes take place.

For example, the character of Malvolio changes significantly in *Twelfth Night*. For instance, in Act 3, Scene 4, he enters wearing yellow stockings. Malvolio behaves in a very pompous way, full of self-importance for his place in the household. However, by the end of the play Malvolio has been imprisoned and is feeling very sorry for himself. As he leaves the stage he says angrily, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you.'

## Conveying a character's relationships

Once a performer is aware of their character's relationships, the next step is to communicate them to an audience.

For example, in *Blue Stockings* the character of Tess is caught in a dilemma over her passion for learning and her love for Will. Their relationship is central to the development of Tess's character. Her relationship with Will deepens as the play progresses, as he comes to increasingly support the women students' right to graduate. The performer playing Tess needs to show how Tess's relationship with Will deepens, culminating in an emotional scene at the train station towards the end of the play.

## Now try this

Choose **one** character from your performance text and **one** important relationship they have with another character. Explain how this relationship affects the character you are focusing on.

Use quotations from the performance text to support your ideas.

# Research and impact

When understanding and interpreting character, a performer may explore and **research** the **character's past** as well as considering the **impact** of the character on the audience.

## Researching a character's past

It is often useful for a performer approaching playing a character to research the character's past and find out any details or secrets that may help the performer understand the role better. Much like a detective, a performer can investigate and look for **evidence** to build up a clearer understanding of the role.

For example, a performer playing the role of Leah in Dennis Kelly's *DNA* may consider why she talks a lot, often non-stop, especially in scenes with Phil. The performer may question why Leah is so talkative and look for clues that explain why.

## Mitchell's 'private moments'

The director Katie Mitchell spends a great deal of time in the rehearsal process improvising key moments in a character's **backstory**. This way of working involves researching as much detail and information about the play as possible, in order to understand how the character fits into the world of the play. Mitchell calls these **backstory improvisations** 'private moments', and they provide the performer with a unique insight into the character. The improvisations are often influenced by moments from the text or how Mitchell and the performers interpret the character.

**Research** – This is the work a performer does to understand the character they are playing in more depth. This may mean researching the historical time period during which the play is set as well as considering the intentions of the playwright.

## Interpreting character

**Impact on the audience** – Different characters can affect the audience in different ways, for a number of reasons. A performer must consider what the impact of their character's behaviour will be, and how this will be conveyed at different moments in the play. For example, Adam in *DNA* may draw sympathy from the audience at the end of the play when it is discovered that he suffered alone in a forest. As another example, the character of Abigail in *The Crucible* is angry and manipulates the other girls, which may make the audience feel negatively towards her.

## Researching the time period

Understanding the time in which a play is set may affect a performer's understanding of a character.

For example, *An Inspector Calls* is set in 1912, before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. A performer playing any of the characters would need to research the time period carefully, including looking at what was happening socially in the location where the play is set (an industrial city in the North Midlands). This will help them to build a clear picture of the **context** in which the characters act and behave.

## Impact on others

A performer will need to understand how their character can affect the audience and other characters at different moments in the play.

For example, in the play *1984*, the character of O'Brien is a powerful party member with high status in the world of the play. The impact of this can be seen in the way other characters respond to him. During O'Brien's interrogation of Winston – a key moment in the play – the performer portraying O'Brien must consider the impact he wants to have on the other performers as well as on the audience.

## Now try this

Take one character from your performance text. Consider how a performer might use research to build a broader picture of this character. List the areas the performer might research.

Remember to look for clues in the text that suggest what may have happened to the character before the action of the play began.

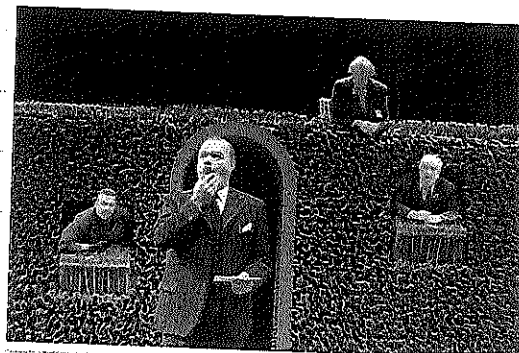
# Still images and asides

A performer may use a number of possible techniques or approaches on stage to enhance a performance. Audience **asides** can be used to communicate important information directly to the audience, and a **still image** can be used to capture an important moment.

## The use of asides

An aside can be used to communicate a line of dialogue with an audience while omitting other characters on stage from hearing. This technique is often used in Shakespearian plays.

For example, *Twelfth Night* has many instances of an aside. The technique is used frequently in Act 2, Scene 5, where Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian hide in a box tree after setting up a trap for the unsuspecting Malvolio with a fake love letter from Olivia. As Malvolio imagines telling Sir Toby what to do, Toby exclaims in an aside 'Shall this fellow live?' This is a secret conversation with the audience and adds to the comedy of the scene, as Malvolio is oblivious to Sir Toby's presence.



Sir Toby's aside in Act 2, Scene 5 of *Twelfth Night* is a perfect example of this technique being used effectively in performance. This was done in the RSC production of *Twelfth Night* in 1997.

**Aside** – A character's moment of discussion with the audience. Aside often works well when one character wishes to **connect** with the audience without wanting the other characters on stage to hear.

## Performance skills

**Still image** – Sometimes known as a **tableau** or a **freeze frame**, this is a moment in time that has been stopped, with the performers still on stage. Still image can be a powerful, visual way of connecting with an audience.

## Use of still image in performance

Still image is a technique that can mark an important moment or engage an audience through the performers' use of physical skills.

For example, in Scene 1 of *The Crucible*, the Reverend Parris kneels at his daughter Betty's bed, praying, after she has been caught dancing in the woods with Abigail and the other girls. The dance itself could be presented as a series of still images as the play begins, helping to paint a picture for the audience of what has caused this response from Parris. This would be a highly visual way of presenting the event to the audience.

Turn to pages 12–15 for more on performers' use of physical skills.

## Where an aside isn't written down

Although many plays use asides, particularly Shakespearian texts, performers may wish to add their own aside into a scene.

For example, David Greig's *Dr Korczak's Example* is written in a stylised way, with the use of dolls and narration to tell the true story to the audience. There are many moments of narration that can be spoken to the audience using **direct address**. For instance, at the beginning of Scene 17, Dr Korczak is onstage with a soldier and says, 'I'm watering my plants'. Though this isn't outlined to be an aside, the performer could speak the line so as to ignore the soldier and connect with the audience.

## Now try this

Choose one key moment from your performance text. Outline how still image could be used to highlight or visually represent this moment to the audience. For example, it could help to explore or respond to what is happening on stage.

The moment doesn't necessarily need to happen 'within' the time of the play itself. It may be that a still image helps to add context to what is happening at that moment in the play. For example, in *Dr Korczak's Example*, the future fate of the orphans could be presented by a still image.



# Monologue and physical theatre

The use of a **monologue** may explain a character's thoughts or feelings. **Physical theatre** can be used to capture a moment using the body in performance.

## Using monologue

A playwright typically uses monologue:

- 👍 to impart information from one character to others on stage
- 👍 as a way of connecting with an audience.

When a character is alone on stage and delivers their thoughts or feelings out loud, this is known as a **soliloquy**. Shakespeare made particular use of soliloquy in his plays.

For example, a good instance of soliloquy in *Twelfth Night* is Viola's famous 'I left no ring with her' speech, at the end of Act 2 Scene 2. This soliloquy cleverly reveals the dilemma that Viola finds herself in, as she begins to realise that Olivia has fallen in love with her as Cesario. The soliloquy is often delivered directly to the audience, so helping to build a connection between character and spectator.

## Modern soliloquys

Soliloquys aren't only used in older, classical plays.

For example, Dennis Kelly makes use of the technique in *DNA*; through the character of Leah. At points throughout the play, the characters of Leah and Phil are left alone on stage. Leah then proceeds to speak her thoughts and feelings aloud, with Phil present but not responding to what she is saying. The performer playing Leah must decide how she will approach the delivery of these monologues – particularly as she receives no feedback from Phil. For example, will she become more exasperated as the monologue continues?

**Physical theatre** – A distinct style of theatre where a performer uses movement and physicality in a visual way to communicate with the audience.

## Performance skills

**Monologue** – A speech that a performer delivers on their own. A monologue can be spoken to other characters on stage or directly to the audience.

## Using physical theatre in performance

Physical theatre can be used at particular moments of a play to communicate with the audience.

For example, in the opening scene of *Government Inspector*, the Mayor gathers important people from the town in his house. There is a sense of fear and anxiety as the Mayor delivers the news of the Government Inspector's arrival. The Mayor also makes reference to 'a premonition I had last night' of seeing 'two black rats', which seems to suggest bad news is on the horizon. The performers could use physical theatre to communicate this moment of ensemble performance and visual imagery to an audience.

## Approaching a monologue in performance

Monologue is an important technique used as a form of communication by the playwright, so a performer needs to consider how they approach monologue carefully.

For example, one of the most prominent monologues from *An Inspector Calls* occurs in Act 3, when Inspector Goole delivers an impassioned speech in response to Mr Birling's untimely offer of money. The Inspector's monologue reflects his (and the playwright's) views on social injustice. The performer delivering this monologue must make use of voice and physical skills, making careful choices about which words and gestures to emphasise, to bring the Inspector's lines to life.

## Now try this

Find one monologue from your performance text or one moment from your performance text where physical theatre could be applied. Outline how you would approach this speech or moment – what would you intend to communicate to your audience, and how?

Be clear about where monologue occurs in your performance text. Try to understand why the playwright has chosen to use this device at that moment in the play.

# Narration and multi-role

**Narration** is one device that helps to tell the story of the play, while the technique of **multi-role** can allow a performer to communicate a number of different characters.

## Using multi-role in performance

Multi-role can:

- 👍 provide an effective way of telling a story with a small company of performers
- 👍 be a device to tell the story, so that the audience can focus on the story's message
- 👍 be achieved through the use of costume and physical and vocal skills
- 👍 be an effective way to engage an audience.

Multi-role can be achieved through various acting techniques or design elements.

## A Brechtian technique

Multi-role is often referred to as a **Brechtian technique**, as it was a key idea of the theatre practitioner Bertolt Brecht. Brecht wanted his audiences to focus on the message of the play rather than becoming too attached to any particular character. Brecht believed that a performer can 'distance' him or herself from a role they are playing by portraying a number of roles to an audience in the same play.

In David Greig's *Dr Korczak's Example*, multi-role is used to focus the audience on the message of the play, which is based on the Nazi ghettoisation of Warsaw. Greig wrote the play for three performers, perhaps looking for a more **non-naturalistic** or **stylised** performance. The audience will be aware that they are watching theatre, so will not become too attached to individual characters. In this way the play becomes more about the theme/message of the play than about the characters' individual stories.

**Multi-role** – When a performer plays various roles on stage in one play. Multi-role can include performers playing different genders and personalities. These changes are often portrayed through an adjustment in the performer's costume, physicality and voice.

## Performance skills

**Narration** – The process of telling a story. It can take many forms, including a character narrating sections of the play, or the playwright using a specified narrator or narrators to carry out a specific role in the play.

## Narration in performance

Narration can take many forms and require particular skills in performance.

For example, the play *1984* opens with a voice that acts as a narrator telling the story of Winston. The performer playing the voice cannot be seen, so the performer's vocal skills are vital here in delivering the words clearly and with the most appropriate tone. This narrative device works well on stage, as *1984* is an adaptation of a novel. The invisible voice returns at the end of the play, and a performer playing this role would need to consider how the delivery changes at this point.

## Multi-role performance

Multi-role demands particular performance skills in order to make the approach work successfully.

For example, in the Young Vic 2011 production of *Government Inspector*, many members of the cast played more than one role. The performer Steven Beard played the roles of Dr Gibner, Waiter and Shopkeeper. This would have required the performer to create three separate characters, with three different approaches to physicality and voice. Playing these different characters also meant the performer had to think carefully about how he developed each role throughout the performance.

## Now try this

Find one moment from your performance text where you feel it would be appropriate to use either narration or multi-role. Outline how you would approach this technique and why it would be useful.

Remember to base your choice on what would work within the context of the play.

# Mime, flashback and flash forward

**Mimed sequences** can help to tell a story of a play, while **flashback** and **flash forward** allow a playwright to change the time period in the same text.

## A performer's use of mime

Mime is a useful technique that requires a performer to **communicate without voice**. Though many of the performance texts are 'naturalistic' in style and form, **mimed sequences** can help develop certain scenes.

For example, in Scene 2 in *Dr Korczak's Example*, Adzio is alone in Dr Korczak's office and is irritated by a fly buzzing around. Adzio becomes more animated as the scene progresses, which could be staged as a **mimed sequence**. If the performer playing Adzio uses mime, he will have to convince the audience that he is trying to swat an actual fly.

Performers such as Steven Berkoff and Jacques Lecoq wanted to make mime a component of body language and communication, rather than just relying on mime to display a gesture. In this sense, mime can be used in every role to enhance the communication of the character, rather than as a separate technique.

The use of mime was made famous by the French 'white-face' mime artist Marcel Marceau, who created 'Bip the Clown' in the 1940s.

**Mimed sequence** – This is a moment in a play that relies solely on the use of **non-verbal communication** such as body language, physicality and facial expressions.

### Performance skills

**Flashback and flash forward** – The use of flashback and flash forward moves the action in a performance backwards or forwards in time.

## Using mimed sequences

Mimed sequences are often given in the text as stage directions. Therefore, rather than being used as a stand-alone technique (such as physical theatre), mime can be incorporated into staging a moment from a text.

For example, there are several mimed sequences in Jessica Swale's *Blue Stockings*. During the men's card game at Trinity College in Act 2, Scene 8, there is also a stage direction that includes moments of mime: 'They take it in turns to put a card down from the three they've picked. It's fast... They get excited...' As there are no lines of dialogue at this point, the performers might mime laughter or gestures, as though the characters are holding a conversation.

## Using flashback and flash forward

Changes in time within a play can be an effective device to help engage an audience. The use of flashback and flash forward can help communicate character background and development.

For example, towards the end of 1984, the character of Winston is threatened with having a cage of rats set on his face. As the scene progresses, he becomes more and more desperate and the scene builds towards a crescendo of tension. Within a quick snapped blackout, the playwright uses a flash forward to take Winston into a café in sunshine after this very dark scene. The performer portraying Winston could show his confusion at the change in scene, as well as his relief that his nightmare is over.

### Now try this

Outline how you could use a mimed sequence to enhance **one** moment from your performance text. Be clear about how the mimed sequence would help to tell the story of the play.



Remember to think about the aims and intentions of the playwright.

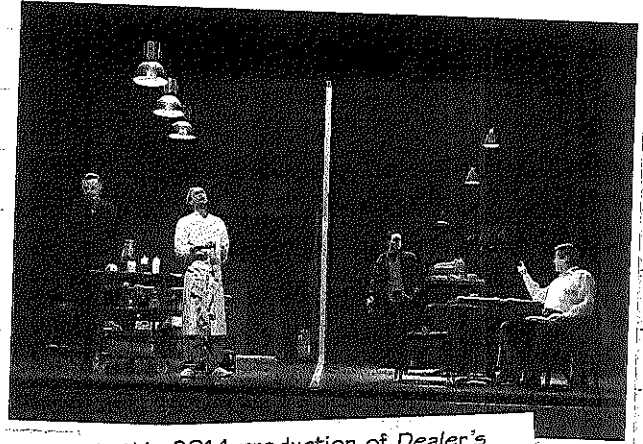
# Symbolism and split scene

The technique of **split scene**, which allows two scenes to be shown at the same time on stage, can be central to a performance, as can the use of **symbolism**.

## Using split scene in performance

Directors and playwrights often favour split scene as it enables two scenes to run alongside each other at the same time. When split scene is used, performers must be focused on their own scene and their part of the stage, as the technique doesn't work if the two 'worlds' overlap.

For example, in Act 3, Scene 4 of *Twelfth Night*, Sir Toby and his friend Fabian persuade Viola and Sir Andrew that each wants to fight the other. This is a set up, so it is important that the performers playing Fabian and Sir Toby are able to have the conversations with Viola and Sir Andrew on the same stage, but separately from each other. Here, split screen is ideal.



In this 2014 production of *Dealer's Choice* at the Royal & Derngate, Northampton, split scene was used to run two separate scenes on stage.

**Split scene** – Also referred to as **cross-cutting**, this is where two scenes are cut between each other on stage at the same time. The idea is very similar to a filmic device that moves between scenes in a seamless way.

## Performance skills

**Symbolism** – Ideas, images or suggestions are used to represent thoughts, emotions or qualities. Symbolism can be obvious at times but can also be fairly complex in performance.

For example, in 1984, *Big Brother* is a symbol of always being watched or monitored by the state.

## Using symbolism on stage

Performers can deepen their understanding of their roles in a play by developing an awareness of the play's symbolism.

For example, in *An Inspector Calls*, J.B. Priestley uses characters as symbols for political ideas: the Inspector is symbolic of Priestley's socialist views (that all wealth should be shared equally), while Mr Birling represents capitalist ideas (that only a few individuals will profit within a free economy).

The symbolism within a play can also be communicated to the audience through the set.

In director Stephen Daldry's original production of *An Inspector Calls*, the Birlings' house physically collapsed on stage, symbolising the characters' lives caving in on them.

## Skills required for split scene

Split scene can work very effectively when staged well. It requires performers to make careful use of the following practical skills:

- **Proxemics:** careful and precise use of space
- **Physical skills:** carefully chosen eye contact, movement and body language.

The performers' skills become even more important with cross-cutting, as one of the scenes will need to stay frozen in a **still image** while the other scene continues.

Remember to think about the aims and intentions of the playwright.

## Now try this

Find one moment in your performance text where you could use either symbolism or split scene to enhance the performance. Explain your choices.

# Caricature and choral speaking

Performers can approach a role by exaggerating the characteristics of that role, creating a **caricature** that is often larger than life. A performance can also be developed through the use of **choral speaking**.

## The use of caricature in performance

A performer using caricature will make use of physical and vocal skills that push their character into becoming a **comic** or **grotesque** version of itself.

For example, in *Government Inspector*, caricature could support a powerful portrayal of the Mayor's character. The Mayor's panic and anxiety could be exaggerated through the performer's use of large gestures and frenetic body language. As the play progresses and the Mayor grows more desperate, the performer could make the Mayor's behaviour more out of the ordinary. The Mayor's voice could become louder and more high pitched, his gestures wild and his facial expressions wide as he tries to 'cover' the shortcomings of the town. His behaviour would become larger than life.

**Caricature** – A performer can decide to use caricature to play a character in an exaggerated way, so creating a character that is a larger-than-life version of the original.

## Performance skills

## When caricature is effective

It is useful to consider how caricature will work in the context of the style of your performance text. Caricature:

- ✓ works particularly well in a **stylised** form of theatre, rather than in **naturalistic** theatre (which is based on the development of 'real' or 'believable' characters)
- ✓ fits well with the performance texts *Government Inspector* and *Dr Korczak's Example*, both of which lend themselves to **non-naturalistic** approaches. *Government Inspector* is often described as a grotesque comedy and *Dr Korczak's Example* includes many **Brechtian** elements such as multi-role, larger-than-life characters and political messages/morals.

**Choral speaking** – This is when more than one person speaks or reads text at the same time. It can **emphasise** or **underline** key moments on stage.

## When character becomes caricature

The use of caricature will suit certain styles of theatre and particular characters.

For example, although the character of Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* may not have been written as a caricature, there are many performers who have approached the role by creating a comic, grotesque version of him. In the production at Shakespeare's Globe in 2012, the performer Stephen Fry achieved this through his use of large gestures and heightened vocal skills. This choice makes sense, as the character of Malvolio acts and behaves in an exaggerated way.

## Using choral speech

The playwright may specify the use of choral speech, or it may be chosen by a director.

For example, in Scene 21 of *Dr Korczak's Example*, a radio announcement delivers the news that 'All Jews must gather at the railway yards tomorrow morning'. This announcement is repeated, which captures the gravity of the situation – as those from the ghetto will be taken to certain death in the concentration camp in the East. The performers or director may use choral speech to emphasise the importance of this news, so making the audience aware that it is much more than a simple news announcement.

## Now try this

Explain where the use of either caricature or choral speech could enhance your performance text. Base your ideas on the context or style of the text as a whole.

Remember: when answering a question such as this, your decision may depend on your own interpretation of your performance text.