

Unit 12: Classical Theatre Performance

Unit code: F/502/5094

QCF Level 3: BTEC National

Credit value: 10

Guided learning hours: 60

● Aim and purpose

This unit develops the techniques required to enable learners to deliver classical play-texts in performance. It deals with the historic background to the texts as well as the structure and style of heightened language.

● Unit introduction

Audiences and performers enjoy experiencing the ideas and performing styles of previous eras, not least for the light that they can throw on our current world. For many professional performers, presenting classical theatre represents one of the greatest challenges to their abilities and creativity. Performers must be flexible in their professional training so that they can meet this demand. In this unit, learners will explore the disciplines that this style of performance requires.

At first sight, changes in time and society may make a classical play seem distant from today's concerns. Modern actors need to explore the background of the classical play to understand its relevance to them. They need to be able to see what it is about, what drove the writer to create it in the way it appears and how best they should interpret it for a modern audience. They need to be able to 'unlock' the language in which the text is written so that they can feel and express it fully. Often actors are expected to carry out preparation alone, before rehearsals start, so that they can make maximum progress when they gather as part of a team to create the performance.

Once rehearsals begin, learners need to be able to contribute fully and to meet their director's requirements. Their individual characterisation has to work with and complement the rest of the interpretation. To achieve this, actors have to be able to bring a range of technical and imaginative skills to bear throughout the creative and rehearsal processes. When the day of the performance arrives, they must be physically and vocally expressive and fully committed to their performance, both emotionally and intellectually.

Learners will be assessed in the performance of two classical texts. Where a performance is a solo speech it should last approximately two minutes. Performance of a scene or extract should last approximately five minutes.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles
- 2 Be able to explore the performance styles of classical texts
- 3 Be able to rehearse creatively and responsibly
- 4 Be able to perform classical texts.

Unit content

1 Understand the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles

Social and historical: subject matter; political; social; economic; religious conditions

Cultural: treatment of themes and issues; the place and function of plays and playwrights; the use of props and costumes; the conventions of movement and expression eg social mannerisms or formalities

2 Be able to explore the performance styles of classical texts

Research and analysis: language and imagery; psychology of the characters; coherent interpretation; identification and consideration of the author's intentions

Styles and approaches: form and structure; heightened language; registers; imagery; rhythm and metre; relationship between sound and meaning

3 Be able to rehearse creatively and responsibly

Listening and responding: taking direction; flexibility; rehearsal techniques and exercises; interacting as a member of a group

Growth and development: creatively experimenting; taking risks in roles; characterisation; physical and vocal elements; refining ideas; learning and memorising texts

Personal management: time management; physical and mental preparation; the working log; rehearsals; costume and equipment; healthy and safe working practices; concentration and self-discipline; individual and group responsibilities; communication with company members

4 Be able to perform classical texts

Physical expression: posture; gesture; tempo-rhythm; dynamics; use of energy; stylistic features demanded by the text

Vocal expression: range and use of the voice in response to text, including tone, control, inflection, projection; register; diction; pace; pitch

Emotional investment: focus; interaction and response; emotional range; coherence and consistency; relationship with the audience

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 discuss the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles [IE]	M1 explain the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles	D1 analyse the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles
P2 use research and analysis to develop performance style of classical roles in rehearsals [SM, IE]	M2 apply skilful responses to research and analysis in rehearsal	D2 apply imaginative, disciplined and skilful responses to research and analysis in rehearsal
P3 develop contrasting classical roles through rehearsal with tutor support [CT, SM, EP, PW]	M3 develop two contrasting classical roles through rehearsal with some tutor support	D3 develop imaginative and creative interpretations of two contrasting classical roles through self-disciplined approaches to rehearsal
P4 perform classical texts using appropriate vocal and movement skills to communicate the role. [EP, TW, SM]	M4 perform classical texts using appropriate vocal and movement skills in a considered way, to communicate the role confidently.	D4 perform classical texts using appropriate vocal and movement skills to communicate the character creatively, inventively and assuredly.

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers CT – creative thinkers	RL – reflective learners TW – team workers	SM – self-managers EP – effective participators
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Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

Although there is an academic aspect to this unit, it must be continually borne in mind that the focus of the work should be on the performance of classical texts. This unit can be supported by work conducted elsewhere particularly in *Developing Voice for the Actor*, *Auditions for Actors* and *Principles of Acting*.

Most learning should take place through practical workshop classes and rehearsals in which knowledge is gained through experience. The rehearsals will be mainly tutor-led and directed; learners should benefit from the group discussion that can be an integral part of a good rehearsal. Rehearsals will develop the individual actor preparation work that learners have undertaken beforehand, outside the rehearsal room.

Such practical classes should be supported by learners' research into the background of classical texts. The contents of this research will vary, depending on the texts involved, but it should cover social, historical, cultural and artistic issues for learning outcome 1. For learning outcome 2, learners should explore the language of each text, the imagery within, the rhythm, and relationship to the play's meaning. Learners should interpret and apply the information they have found and relate it in some depth to the text that is being studied, so that it illuminates their performances. Where learners are working to create the same play in performance, they should be encouraged to share their research discoveries and ideas.

For learning outcome 3, learners will work collaboratively in rehearsals, taking responsibility for individual character and role development. There will be a need to take risks, as ideas are refined and lines are explored and learned. Personal management will be an important feature of the process.

Presentations of extracts or of whole plays for learning outcome 4 should result from workshops and rehearsals. The audiences for such performances could be limited in size, typically to learners' fellow students, or it could be extended to a wider public. Both rehearsals and performances should be recorded so that learners can review, evaluate and develop their abilities.

Tutors should ensure that learners recognise that learning can take place without their necessarily playing the 'star' role in a play or an extract. It is also the tutor's duty to attempt to ensure that learners play roles that will provide sufficient opportunities to meet the grading criteria at an appropriate standard.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to the unit: overview of classical plays. Styles and genres. Brief history of significant classical periods including Ancient Greek/Roman, Elizabethan, Jacobean and Restoration.
Assignment 1: Researching Classical Plays – P1, M1, D1 Learner views video/DVD of chosen text. Analysis and exploration of short scene from chosen text. Research original staging conditions of chosen text. Write and present notes on research. Research performance history of chosen text. Write and present notes on research. Consider themes of chosen text in contemporary context. Write and present notes on themes. Formulate director's concept. Create portfolio of designs for modern production of chosen text.
Assignment 2: Exploring and Rehearsing Classical Roles – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3 Choose performance material (one solo, one duologue). Vocal warm up exercises. Vocal rhythm exercises. Classical vocal exercises (iambics, caesura, upward inflections). Run through solo. Run through duologue. Physicalise text (solo). Physicalise text (duologue). Learn lines (solo). Learn lines (duologue). Analyse text (solo). Rehearse text (solo). Analyse text (duologue). Rehearse text (duologue). Final run though (solo). Final run through (duologue).
Assignment 3: All The World's a Stage – Elizabethan Plays and Performances – P4, M4, D4 Prepare performance space and recording equipment. Perform solo speech. Perform duologue. Clear performance space.

Assessment

For learning outcome 1 evidence could be in the form of a notebook recording the original staging and acting conditions of the chosen plays or in the form of a presentation given to the teaching group and recorded on video or DVD. Conjectural evidence could be offered in the form of example performances and demonstrations of acting technique from the time of the original performance. The use of relevant costume and props should be referred to and this allied to the acting practice of the time.

Learning outcome 2 could be in the form of an actor's log that records the rehearsal and preparation process of the pieces chosen. There should be evidence of the techniques explored for vocal work and creative movement that will support the chosen interpretation (chosen in a contemporary context). Notes concerning characterisation should be included, with particular reference to how this corresponds to, or differs from, the original acting practice of the period in which the play was written.

Evidence for learning outcome 3 will be provided through a recording on video or DVD.

For P1, learners achieving a pass will be able to describe and discuss the original performance conditions of the chosen plays; they will be able to summarise the themes of the plays and provide details of how they might reflect the particular culture and conventions. For P2 and P3, the learner approach to rehearsal and general preparation is adequate enough to create a performance but they will need substantial tutor support in developing understanding of style and development of characters. Learners will have completed personal research into the performance material and will require continual support throughout the rehearsal process. For P4, vocal and movement technique is appropriate for both characters. The control over the language of the text is satisfactory, with the learner using rudimentary vocal and physical expression to present the characters.

For M1, learners will explain how the original staging and themes would have been relevant to their contemporary audience. They will demonstrate how its audience would have received the original staging and understood the characters in the plays. For M2 and M3, the rehearsal and preparation process shows that the learner has researched the language and has developed a positive view of the intended style of the performances. Some tutor support for the development and use of acting techniques will be required to achieve a successful performance. There will have been some effort to improve technique, in particular attempts to improve vocal and movement range. There is a clear attempt to develop characters that are coherent within the context of the plays. For M4, the performances communicate characters well and there is clear evidence that the use of vocal technique and movement techniques supports this.

For D1, learners will demonstrate that they have fully understood how the play was staged and performed to its original audience. They will understand the relevance of the play's social, cultural and political themes to both that audience and one today. For D2 and D3, practical approaches to the rehearsal and development process will have taken on the significance of the play's language, as well as its context. Attempts to master the vocal and movement skills demanded by the interpretation will be exemplary. Character development and interpretation will be supported by the necessary vocal and movement skills and the performance will be executed with absolute confidence. There is a clear understanding of how the character interpretation relates to the necessary vocal techniques demonstrating a sensitive awareness of rhythm, pace and tone. For D4, the performances communicate the intentions of characters and styles with absolute confidence and flair.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, M1, D1	Assignment 1: Researching Classical Plays	Learners choose two classical plays and research the original staging conditions and performance history of two plays.	An illustrated portfolio of research into two classical plays or a presentation of research findings into the history of two classical plays.
P2, M2, D2 P3, M3, D3	Assignment 2: Exploring and Rehearsing Classical Roles	Learners explore and rehearse: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• one speech from a classical play• one duologue from a classical play.	Learner notes on practical approach to exploration and rehearsal of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• a solo speech• a duologue. Tutor observation notes.
P4, M4.D4	Assignment 3: All The World's a Stage: Elizabethan Plays and Performances	Learners perform in a celebration of Elizabethan culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• one monologue• and one duologue from any play by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Middleton or Kyd.	A recorded performance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• one speech from a classical play• one duologue from a classical play.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Performing and Production Arts sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the BTEC Performing and Production Arts suite:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Exploring Acting Skills	The Development of Drama	Developing Voice for the Actor
	Acting Skills and Techniques	Auditions for Actors
		Applying Acting Skills

Essential resources

Centres will need a suitable rehearsal and performance space. There should be resources for research, including a relevant library, and access to the internet would be advantageous. Equipment for video/DVD playback and recording equipment will be useful for rehearsal purposes.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

The advice of a professional actor can prove helpful for gaining understanding of research into character and the rehearsal process.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Barton J – *Playing Shakespeare* (Methuen, 2001) ISBN 9780713687736

Berry C – *Text in Action: A Definitive Guide to Exploring Text in Rehearsal for Actors and Directors* (Virgin, 2001) ISBN 9780753505410

Merlin B – *With the Rogue's Company: 'Henry IV' at the National Theatre* (Oberon Books, 2005) ISBN 9781840025606

Sher A – *Year of the King* (Nick Hern Books, 2004) ISBN 9781854597533

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	explaining the social, historical and cultural background of classical roles identifying and using rehearsal techniques to develop understanding of the language and style of classical roles
Creative thinkers	developing contrasting classical roles through rehearsal
Team workers	developing contrasting classical roles through rehearsal performing a classical text using appropriate vocal and movement skills
Self-managers	developing contrasting classical roles through rehearsal performing a classical text using appropriate vocal and movement skills.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are ...
Independent enquirers	engaging in research related to productions, production history and theatrical equipment/sets
Creative thinkers	engaging in discussing and solving potential production problems, posed by hypothetical or actual situations
Reflective learners	considering their own practice and achievement when directing, or reflecting on the practice and achievement of others
Team workers	acting in roles under the direction of others
Self-managers	sourcing and providing props etc for productions
Effective participants	working towards performances.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Find and select information	
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	using the internet to research classical texts
English	
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	researching historical, social and cultural background of classical texts.