

Unit 15: Variety Performance

Unit code: Y/502/5117

QCF Level 3: BTEC National

Credit value: 10

Guided learning hours: 60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to develop and perform an 'act' or 'turn' as part of a Variety Show. Learners will devise their own material, rehearse it and perform it.

The world of the variety performer is, as the term suggests, wide and varied. Variety refers to any type of performance that an audience may find entertaining. The roots of variety lie in the worlds of music hall, circus, cabaret and vaudeville. Variety performers use a range of skills to develop material that they can present to an audience as an act or 'turn'. Learners will consider the constraints and opportunities presented by different kinds of venues that might include pubs, clubs, cruise ships, holiday camps and street theatre, and media such as radio and television.

The unit enables learners to develop performance techniques appropriate to the work of the variety entertainer and to create an individual repertoire. For instance, through this unit, learners may develop comedy material that could be 'stand up' or for a routine involving other performers. Alternatively, learners could use pre-existing songs or new material to create a song-and-dance act or deploy techniques such as cross-dressing, acrobatics, ventriloquism, impersonation, mime, illusion or clowning as an integral part of a speciality act. Learners may also consider using other elements such as outlandish props and costumes, puppets and digital technology as possible media within a speciality act.

With very few limitations on the form or content of a piece of work, there is tremendous scope in this unit for originality and invention. The very nature of variety lies in the unusual, the different, the bizarre, the alternative and the unconventional. The key for learners is to experiment and test ideas and to find a suitable audience for their own particular brand of entertainment.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know different types of variety performance
- 2 Be able to devise material suitable for a variety act
- 3 Be able to rehearse material for a variety act
- 4 Be able to perform a variety act or turn.

Unit content

1 Know about different types of variety performance

Performance skills: how particular performance skills are used in a variety act eg movement/dance, vocal/singing, visual/design, interaction, improvisation, use of equipment, properties, instruments

Range of work: different types of role eg compere, comedian, magician, juggler, ventriloquist, musician, storyteller, mime artist, singer, clown, children's entertainer, dancer

Venue: awareness of different types of venue for variety work eg cabaret, clubs, theatre, music hall, indoor/outdoor, cruise ships, holiday camps, festivals, broadcast and recorded media

2 Be able to devise material suitable for a variety act

Create: work on ideas and develop into an appropriate format using a range of techniques eg devising, improvising, adaptation of existing material, script writing, research, observation; experimentation; rehearse, appraise, test and modify material

Contexts: recognise the appropriateness and possibilities of material relevant to different contexts eg potential audience, types/functions of venues, formal/informal relationship

Evaluation: test and modify material in response to feedback eg through 'critical friends', discussion groups, focus groups, questionnaires, professional mentor, director, venue manager, booking agent, press/broadcast critics

Constraints: take into consideration any practical constraints eg health and safety, legal (copyright PRS), technical, financial, access, location, resources, timescale

3 Be able to rehearse material for a variety act

Planning: working to a schedule; identifying milestones in the project; setting realistic deadlines; arranging meetings with collaborators; analysing task requirements

Techniques and skills: physical and mental preparation; learning material; making adjustments to performance through the rehearsal process; work on timing, pace, projection, spatial placement, use of props and equipment as appropriate; polishing and refining performance skills

4 Be able to perform a variety act or turn

Perform: use physical and vocal skills as appropriate eg vocal and physical control, effective use of physical and vocal range, use of space, manipulation and control of props and equipment, stage presence; make adjustments to performance as required

Communication: maintaining focus and concentration; vocal and physical projection; communication of mood and emotion; achieving appropriate response from the audience; 'working' the audience where and when appropriate; maintaining energy levels; communication of intended outcomes

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 describe different types of variety acts and venues, with examples [IE]	M1 explain the nature of different types of variety acts and venues, with reference to relevant examples	D1 analyse the nature of different types of variety acts and venues, supported with well-chosen examples
P2 develop ideas and material with support and guidance [CT]	M2 develop ideas and material with minimal support and guidance	D2 develop ideas and material independently
P3 use resources and research to shape the material [IE]	M3 use resources and research to shape the material, with some attention to detail and with some creative insight	D3 use resources and research to develop ideas in a detailed and creative manner
P4 use appropriate skills and techniques to rehearse material for a variety performance, with support and guidance	M4 use appropriate skills and techniques to rehearse material for a variety performance, with minimal support and guidance	D4 use appropriate skills and techniques to rehearse material for a variety performance independently
P5 use performing skills competently to produce a performance that communicates to an audience, with only occasional lapses of concentration.	M5 use performing skills effectively to produce a performance that is focused and engaged with the material and the audience much of the time.	D5 use performing skills confidently and imaginatively to produce a performance that remains focused and engaged with the material and the audience throughout.

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

This unit enables learners to experience a branch of the profession where the principal focus is on entertainment. It is about learners using their performance and creative skills and applying them to develop a variety act of their own making. In the initial stages of delivery, learners can share their experiences of variety work and discuss the kind of acts that they find entertaining and why.

Learners are required to have an understanding of the world of the variety entertainer and this can be gained through the use of recorded material and visits to watch variety artists at work. The use of variety artists as visiting lecturers to talk about their work and to demonstrate examples from it would provide a primary source of evidence for learners.

There should be concern with the writing and development of material and creating an 'act' that would be suitable for the variety circuit. Learners will need to carry out a skills audit to determine the type of act they can work on and who their collaborators are likely to be. For example, an act might consist of a song and dance routine which would need working on in a different way to a comedy duo. Learners will also need to pay due consideration to the potential audience profile they are aiming for and the venue. During this development stage, it is important that learners are encouraged to try out their act on small invited audiences and to use the feedback to refine and modify their material. Learners should record this development stage in a logbook and show how the views of others have been used in evaluating the effectiveness of the material.

Once the material for the act is more or less 'fixed', learners will need to spend a significant amount of time ensuring that all the performance requirements such as lighting, sound, props and costumes are in place. The act itself will require sufficient rehearsal time to ensure that learners have a secure grasp of the material and that it is polished to performance 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 'Variety' as a performing arts genre.

Taking part in lectures, research, discussions and practical workshops.

Watching examples of variety work on DVD.

Skills audit of learners' skills and performance techniques.

Identifying own area of interest and possible application of skills and talent.

Assignment 1: Researching a Variety Act and Venue – P1, M1, D1

Carrying out own research on chosen topic.

Presentation or written project on chosen aspect of 'Variety', illustrating acts and venues.

Assignment 2: Devising A Variety Act – P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3

Developing and devising own material individually or in groups.

Researching background material as required.

Evaluating and revising ideas.

Taking part in improvisation sessions, composing, script writing, trying out ideas and 'fixing' them.

Assignment 3: Rehearsing and Performing a Variety Act – P4, M4, D4, P5, M5, D5

Rehearsing the material, setting, recording and reviewing targets.

Responding to feedback and modifying the 'act' as it develops.

Working with other production elements eg costume, lighting, set.

Taking part in 'run throughs' with other artists.

Perform 'the act' or 'turn' as part of a live variety performance or recorded variety show.

Assessment

There are four elements to the assessment of work for this unit:

- demonstrating underpinning knowledge
- creating suitable material for a variety act
- rehearsing a variety act
- performing a variety act.

Assessment will take the form of judging the evidence of the quality of work that has been developed into a variety act during the creating and rehearsing process, as well as in the final performance(s). A logbook or portfolio of evidence will contain responses and feedback from invited audience members that might include both peers and tutors. Learners may also include draft materials in the form of scripts, treatments, video diaries, observer notes and comments.

Learners are required to show knowledge and understanding of different types of variety performances and venues and this can be captured through a written research project or a visual and aural presentation, or a combination of both. There needs to be evidence of the preparation and rehearsal of the variety act for performance. Learners will be able to record aspects of the rehearsal process in a logbook and this might include DVD extracts of a rehearsal as well as tutor observation reports. The log should also record any decisions made regarding the choice of props, costumes, set, lighting and sound and could include meeting notes with other collaborators.

The final outcome will be judged through the quality of the final performance or performances of the work. Audience and peer feedback can be used to arrive at a judgement as to the quality of the performed work as well as learners' own evaluation of the level of performance achieved. It is good practice for the work to be recorded on DVD for verification purposes; it may also help learners to review the success of their performances.

Learning outcome 1 requires learners to demonstrate their understanding of different types of variety performances and venues, having looked at the historical and cultural context of variety as an art form. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the depth of understanding that is shown. Learners will need to articulate their understanding in written and/or spoken form, so it will be necessary for them to produce some kind of report (which can be written or recorded on DVD, or a combination of the two) that will enable them to talk and/or write about what they have understood about different variety acts. A suitable alternative form of assessment is for each learner to give a presentation comparing at least two variety acts.

For P1, learners will be able to describe variety acts and venues with examples but there will be little justification given which explains how or why they have selected them as examples. There may be some explanation of why the selected acts are important but any conclusions will rely heavily on the sources that have been used for research. There will be little attempt at giving reasons for the choices made or for saying why they have been chosen.

For M1, learners will be able to describe variety acts and venues with examples and give reasons why they have chosen them. There will be some attempt at personal insight and an explanation given as to why the particular artists chosen might be considered important examples. Use of research will not extend far beyond that readily available on the internet and what analysis there is will be superficial.

For D1, learners will carry out research which is detailed and relevant to the variety acts chosen. The acts and venues will be chosen with a clear justification and the research material will be carefully analysed and used in a selective way to inform their learning about the selected aspects of variety performance. Learners achieving distinction will be able to demonstrate a consistently informed approach to their understanding. Distinction level work will be characterised by the use of comparison between acts, a personal response informed by research and knowledge and a sense of curiosity illustrated by the extent and detail of the work. Distinction level learners will be able to communicate their understanding using the appropriate language and terminology confidently and accurately.

Learning outcome 2 requires learners to devise their own material for a variety act. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be apparent through the level of autonomy learners are able to demonstrate in the way they approach the process of creating their 'act' and the extent to which they are able to develop their material effectively. The sources of evidence for this outcome will be through tutor and observation supported by the learners' log containing drafts, sketches, progress reports and copies of research material. The outcome of tutor and/or peer observations needs to be documented as a written or recorded oral report.

For P2 and P3, learners will require careful monitoring and close supervision in order to ensure that the time spent on the process of developing material for their act is used effectively and has some structure to it. Learners will benefit from the tutor asking appropriate questions to help them decide what works and what does not work and the sort of direction the work might take. The presentation of ideas will tend to be somewhat disorganised and the background work will not be that extensive with a reliance on 'first thoughts' rather than an extensive try-out of ideas and approaches.

For M2 and M3, learners will be relatively independent and eager to work on a range of different ideas. The tutor may need to set some targets in order to provide a structure to the development process and help with the review of the work. Learners will be keen to seek tutor feedback and will use this to modify and alter their ideas in pursuit of a piece of work which works well. The log will provide evidence of different ideas having been tried out with some reflection on their workability or need for further development. There will be some evidence of how the ideas have been shaped and examples of the way in which artistic decisions have been made and the reasons behind them.

For D2 and D3, learners will be confident and organised enough to manage with very little input from the tutor. Learners will ask insightful questions of the tutor and will make informed judgements about how to move the work forward. The log will provide ample evidence of a fertile imagination at work and the ability to be playful and inventive with different ideas. There will be evidence of several ideas being tried out through fairly extensive drafts or sketches of ideas. The reasoning behind why ideas have been shaped and used in the way they have will be explained in an informed way.

Learning outcome 3 requires learners to demonstrate their ability to rehearse the material for their variety act so that it is ready to be presented to an audience. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be evident through the tutor's judgment of how well organised learners are in making the most of the rehearsal time. The log and the tutor observation will also demonstrate the extent of 'the distance travelled' by learners during the rehearsal process.

For P4, learners will rehearse the material so that they are familiar enough with it to make it work for an audience. Pass level learners may require some coaxing to use rehearsal time effectively. Rehearsal discipline is such that learners attention span is relatively short and there is not enough focus on the detail.

For M4, learners will be able to focus and concentrate on ensuring that the material is worked through fully and that areas for improvement are identified. Merit learners will make every effort to extend their abilities and skills in order to improve the performance of the material. There will be very few, if any, issues with regard to time management and the organisation of rehearsal time. The material will continue to be worked upon and modified through the rehearsal process and the tutor and peers will be used effectively in order to gain feedback.

For D4, learners will be able to focus fully on the task of ensuring that the appropriate skills are honed to ensure a technically secure performance. The material will be completely internalised so that the performing of it will be done with confidence. Distinction level learners will continue to shape the content and structure of the material in order to fully exploit its creative and artistic possibilities. Learners at distinction level will be fully engaged with the process of making their devised material work with an intended effect in mind. Rehearsals are organised and managed in an efficient and effective way.

Learning outcome 4 requires learners to demonstrate their effectiveness as a performer in a variety act or as 'a turn' in a variety performance. Differentiation between pass, merit and distinction will be evident through the tutor's judgement, audience and peer feedback on the quality of learners' work as a variety performer. The ephemeral nature of performance work means that the evidence has to be a combination of an assessor's response to the live performance usually recorded in note form and a DVD recording of the performance. The kinds of things that an assessor is looking for in a performance may include the following:

Vocal quality: how effective is the performer's use of voice in terms of intonation, diction, projection, characterisation, clarity; for singing: the accuracy of pitch and rhythm, stylistic appropriateness and use of dynamic range?

Movement quality: how effective is the performer's physicality in terms of stance, use of gesture, control (both in stillness and in movement), use of the space, use of props; for dancing: the accuracy of the movements, use of line, rhythmic accuracy, effectiveness as an ensemble dancer (where applicable), fluidity of the movement, positioning of arms, focus?

Communication: how effective is the performer in communicating intentions to the audience in terms of presence, understanding, confidence, appropriateness of style, use of acting techniques, embodiment of the character (where applicable), believability, level of physical and vocal confidence and skill, the ability to 'hold' an audience's attention?

It is recognised that there is much about responding to a performance that is subjective and governed by individual taste but it is possible to be objective about the quality of a performance in relation to its suitability to the material being performed and the level of consistency at which skills and techniques are being deployed.

For P5, learners will produce a performance that is watchable and meets the requirements of the project. There may be some inaccuracies that are difficult to ignore, but this does not detract from the overall performance. A pass level learner will be a competent ensemble player and be able to portray an individual role that communicates the essential characteristics.

For M5, learners will provide a performance which is technically secure in relation to the variety material and that is occasionally inspired and/or inventive. The performance will be consistently watchable and will have memorable elements to it. The performer is fully in control of the variety material and is able to engage confidently with the audience most of the time.

For D5, learners will have an unmistakable confidence in everything they do on stage. There is something undeniably 'watchable' about their performance and they have the ability to communicate their variety material with a complete sense of ease and commitment. Distinction learners' grasp of technique is such that they are able to garnish and imbue their performance work with particular qualities marked out by inventiveness, dexterity and complete concentration. A distinction level performer can still make mistakes but the recovery from them will either hardly be noticed or be handled in a spontaneous way that makes a virtue out of necessity.

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 a Variety Act and Venue	Select a topic eg comedy double acts and carry out own research on chosen topic.	Presentation or written project on chosen aspect of 'Variety', illustrating acts and venues.
P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3	Assignment 2: Devising a Variety Act	Developing and devising own material individually or in groups. Researching background material as required. Evaluating and revising ideas. Taking part in improvisation sessions, composing, script writing, trying out ideas and 'fixing' them.	Portfolio of evidence consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • drafts of material • DVD recordings of 'try-outs' • tutor observation reports.
P4, M4, D4 P5, M5, D5	Assignment 3: Rehearsing and Performing a Variety Act	Rehearsing the material, setting, recording and reviewing targets. Responding to feedback and modifying the 'act' as it develops. Working with other production elements, eg costume, lighting, set. Taking part in 'run throughs' with other artists. Perform 'the act' or 'turn' as part a live variety performance or recorded variety show.	Portfolio of evidence consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rehearsal log • responses to feedback • tutor observation reports. Tutor (s) observation of live performance and recording of performance on DVD.

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
Developing Acting Skills	Acting Skills and Techniques	Performing to an Audience
	Devising Plays	Historical Context of Performance
	Mask Making	Devising Plays
		Stand-up Comic Technique
		Developing Styles in Clowning
		Storytelling as Performance
		Circus Acrobatics
		Circus Trapeze
		Circus Equilibristics
		Circus Manipulation

Essential resources

Beyond adequate rehearsal space and time, learners will require access to an appropriate performance space that can simulate the conditions experienced by variety performers. Learners will require access to materials that will introduce the historical, social and cultural contexts of variety performance.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

To emulate vocational conditions, learners should experience working in an environment that is akin to a variety performance venue. This could include the facilities within the centre being transformed into a cabaret-type performance space. Local cabaret venues or comedy clubs may be prepared to offer a platform for learners to try out their acts.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Jewers S, Carnaghan C and Webster P – *BTEC National Performing Arts Student Book* (Pearson Education, 2010) ISBN 9781846906787

Jewers S, Carnaghan C and Webster P – *BTEC National Teacher Resource Pack* (Pearson Education, 2010) ISBN 9781846906794

Baker R A – *British Music Hall: An Illustrated History* (Sutton Publishing, 2005) ISBN 9780750936859

Dean G – *Step by Step to Stand-up Comedy* (Greenwood Press, 2000) ISBN 9780325001791

Double O – *Getting the Joke: The Art of Stand-up Comedy* (Methuen, 2005) ISBN 9780413774767

Hudd R – *Roy Hudd's Cavalcade of Variety Acts: A Who Was Who of Light Entertainment* (Robson Books, 1998) ISBN 9781861052063

Sankey J – *Zen and the Art of Stand-up Comedy* (Theatre Arts Book, 1998) ISBN 9780878300747

Websites

www.performers.net

The place online for international variety performers to meet, network and share ideas

www.talent.uk.com

Talent, live events, activities and promotions

www.thisisliveart.co.uk

Live Art Development Agency

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	planning and carrying out research about past variety acts, performers and venues researching material for use in their variety act
Creative thinkers	creating and devising material for a variety act.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	researching material about variety acts, performers and venues
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	using the internet as a source of ideas for developing material for own 'act'
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	selecting appropriate material from a range of sources to provide background information or rehearsal material
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	contributing to discussions about ideas for material for the 'act'
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	using a range of written sources to provide contextual background world of the variety performer
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	script writing.