

Unit 19: Principles of Acting

Unit code:	K/502/5395
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

In this unit learners will study the key principles of acting. These will be explored mainly through practical workshops, tutor-led rehearsals and performances to a live audience.

● Unit introduction

Acting is a mixture of techniques and art. Actors need to connect mastery of their technique with an imaginative and creative approach to their work. Understanding the essential principles of acting is the springboard from which successful performances are launched. Actors need time and space to study and explore the processes and skills required to develop their craft. This unit has the necessary practical focus that professional actors use and will provide many opportunities to consider a range of techniques that can help the actor to characterise a performance both physically and vocally. Learners will also discover how to interpret and realise text and how to communicate this text effectively to an audience.

In this unit learners will study key principles of acting using a range of techniques. Learners will explore these principles both theoretically and practically and use the skills and techniques to develop characterisation and rehearse material for performance. The unit will also enable learners to evaluate their rehearsal and performance processes and to consider the relative success of different acting styles in communicating with an audience.

Learners will apply exercises and techniques in a range of vocational contexts. The role of the actor is a broad one and requires the ability to interpret text and apply acting techniques in a focused and creative manner while developing work for performance. Learners will be encouraged to consider how these skills fit the purpose for which they are used and how actors employ different methods of characterisation – vocal and movement techniques, for instance – whilst they are developing work and rehearsing.

Learners should take part in a series of practical workshops. They should rehearse and give at least two performances before an invited audience, to last for between 10 and 20 minutes each.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Understand how to interpret and realise text
- 2 Be able to use acting and rehearsal techniques to develop a performance
- 3 Be able to perform as an actor.

Unit content

1 Understand how to interpret and realise text

Research and analysis: social and historical background; psychological insight; interpretation; other eg identification, uniting, comparison, editing

Styles and approaches: eg naturalism and realism, expressionism, epic, physical theatre, Greek, choral and ensemble, melodrama, grotesque, farce, acting in voice drama, theatre of cruelty, theatre of the absurd

Preparation and improvisation: observation; background and research; imitation; exploration; identification; sensation; feeling; emotional truth; concentration; focus

Skills and techniques: movement; voice; gesture; emotional range and investment; interaction and responsiveness; use of space; use of time; use of weight; dynamics; inner and outer characteristics, physicalisation

2 Be able to use acting and rehearsal techniques to develop a performance

Influences and key practitioners: eg Stanislavski, Brecht, Berkoff, Artaud, Brook, Fo, Pinter, Grotowski, Craig

Personal management: time management; physical preparation; mental preparation; use of actor's log; costume and props; healthy and safe working practices; concentration and discipline; trust and cooperation; responsibilities

Listening and response: taking direction; creative flexibility and generosity; use of rehearsal exercises and technique; group interaction, responding positively to feedback

Growth and development: experiment and risk; engagement with the role; character decisions; extension and refinement; memorising; sustained spontaneity

3 Be able to perform as an actor

Vocal and physical expression: range and use of instrument; tone; pace; pitch; control; inflection; projection; register; idiosyncrasy; dialect and accent; posture; gesture; tempo-rhythm; energy

Emotional investment: commitment on stage; interaction and response; playing the moment; public solitude; appropriateness and use of emotional range; coherence and consistency of role; character journey

Learners should take part in a series of practical workshops. They should rehearse and give at least two performances before an invited audience, to last for between 10 and 20 minutes each.

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 interpret and realise texts with an appreciation of performance demands [CT]	M1 interpret and realise texts demonstrating a sound appreciation of performance demands	D1 interpret and realise texts demonstrating a thorough appreciation of performance demands
P2 develop material for performance through research, rehearsal and characterisation [IE]	M2 develop material for performance through competent use of research, rehearsal and characterisation	D2 develop material for performance through confident and imaginative use of research, rehearsal and characterisation
P3 perform using vocal and movement skills appropriate to the role [TW]	M3 perform demonstrating good control of vocal and movement skills in a thoughtful interpretation of text and character	D3 perform demonstrating vocal and movement skills in an effective and imaginative manner to physically embody character and interpret text with clarity and intelligence
P4 communicate with an audience.	M4 communicate with an audience with clarity.	D4 communicate with an audience with complete focus and engagement.

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	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

This unit should use practical workshop classes to develop learners' acting techniques. Learners should be introduced to the theories and techniques of at least two of the key practitioners in this area and be given the opportunity to explore these theories in a guided manner. Learners should be encouraged to develop their understanding of these techniques through applying them, in both controlled and independent ways, to their rehearsal and creative processes.

The rehearsals will mostly be tutor-led and directed, although from the early stages learners should be made aware that there is a great deal of individual preparation work that an actor has to undertake outside the rehearsal room. Direction at this level, and for this unit's objectives, is largely about enabling learners to ask the right sort of questions of a text and a character, realising the decisions and the answers in practical ways. Skills in interpretation should also encompass the appropriateness of the performance style for different types of text. Learners should have time in class to work as individuals, but most of the work will be group based. It is often valuable for learners to observe others from the same group rehearsing scenes, thus sharing the ensemble creative process. Opportunities to watch professional performance should also be built into the delivery of this unit and learners should be encouraged to use analysis and discussion to inform their development as performers.

The actor's log should be guided so that it becomes a useful working tool, not just a descriptive diary. In order to maximise the value of the creative log learners should be encouraged to develop their skills in recognising the strengths and weaknesses in their practical work and setting objectives for improvement of skills. Preparatory work, such as the results of off-text improvisations, selected findings from research and biographical sketches of character, should all appear in the log, together with a final reflective evaluation of the performance.

The performances should be to a live audience but not necessarily in a formal theatrical setting; other staff and learners who understand the workshop, or 'in progress', nature of this work may be a more appropriate audience than the general public.

Learners should take part in a series of practical workshops. They should rehearse and give at least two performances before an invited audience, to last for between 10 and 20 minutes each.

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 unit and structure of the programme – whole class.
Preparatory work for Assignments 1 and 2: The actor's tool kit: tutor-led work to develop skills in vocal and movement work and characterisation. Examine acting approaches by contrasting practitioners.
Assignment 1: Small Group Scene – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 Planning work on given/chosen scripts (first genre) – learners: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• attend first read through of scenes, and discuss content/themes/styles• complete profile of each character using full play• present own character to whole group as 'case study'• prepare for first in-character hotseating sessions• participate in hotseating session• review character work and plan for first scene planning rehearsal. Participate in scene 'uniting' exercise in small group. Line-learning and independent character work. Scene rehearsals. Performance of scenes to audience. Post-performance review and evaluation.
Assignment 2: Second Genre – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 Planning work on 'second genre' scripts – learners: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• attend first readthrough of scenes, and discuss content/themes/styles• complete profile of each character using full play• present own character to whole group eg as 'case study', or other method• prepare for first character hotseating (or other character development) session• participate in hotseating (or other character development) session• review character work and plan for first scene planning rehearsal• participate in scene 'uniting' (or other planning technique) in small group. Line-learning and independent character work. Scene rehearsals. Performance of scenes to audience. Post-performance review and evaluation.
Review of module and process.

Assessment

Evidence for this unit will be generated via both practical workshop classes, and rehearsed performance, underpinned by appropriate research and textual analysis. The research and rehearsal phases will be evidenced in part through an actor's process log that will document investigations carried out on character and text and practical activities undertaken in class and individually. Although this log will generally be written, learners should be encouraged to express their creative process in a personal manner. In order to support a range of learners' needs it may be appropriate to consider different methods of generating and gathering the evidence for example video diary, viva voce, discussion groups. Further evidence of learners' working processes and creative contribution will be in the form of documentation, such as minutes of meetings and tutor observation reports. It may also be appropriate to consider the use of video recording to provide evidence at key stages during the rehearsal process for example of formative activity such as character hotseating. Final performances should also be recorded.

To achieve P1 learners must participate cooperatively in activities to explore a text and its context in relation to an acting role. They will demonstrate a rudimentary acknowledgement and appreciation of the text and its context and will be able to consider, at a basic level, the performance demands of their own role. For M1, learners will play a more active role in activities. They will ask questions to extend their understanding of the text and its context and will consider the performance of their role in a more thoughtful manner. To achieve D1 learners will work in class and individually to ensure they gain a more comprehensive understanding of the text and their role. They will consider the context of the text in relation to their role and will also demonstrate a more detailed understanding of the genre of the piece. Performance demands will be fully considered.

Learners achieving P2 will undertake a small amount of research in support of their acting work. This research may, however, lack focus in places. In rehearsal they will work cooperatively but will play a largely passive role when decisions are made. Characterisation will be largely appropriate to the role however characters will tend to be rather two dimensional. For M2, learners will undertake research in a more organised and focussed manner. In rehearsals they will play an active role and will be able to contribute ideas and suggestions that will help to advance the work. They will also respond to direction in an appropriate manner. Characterisation will be approached in a more thoughtful manner. To achieve D2 the learner will work in an effective and positive manner. Learners will approach research creatively and in a disciplined manner and will contribute to rehearsals in a highly positive manner. The learners will respond to direction well and will use feedback from the director in a positive way to improve their work. Distinction learners will also be supportive of others. Characterisation will be approached in a creative and inventive manner.

To achieve P3 learners will use vocal and movement work in a manner that largely 'fits the bill'. There may be flaws in technique in one or both of these areas however these should not be serious enough to detract from the overall performance. For M3, learners will use vocal and movement skills in a more assured manner producing a performance that is technically secure. There will be engagement with the text and the character and the learner will produce an interpretation that works, although it may not necessarily be inspired. To achieve D3 learners must use vocal and movement skills in a totally assured manner. There will be a high level of believability about learners' interpretation of the role and their performance will demonstrate a high level of commitment and focus. The distinction learner does not have to produce a perfect performance but any errors will be few, barely noticeable and recovery will be quick.

To achieve P4 learners must produce work that communicates the essence of the role they are playing to an audience. At this level learners will be able to communicate only the essential characteristics of the role effectively. For M4, learners must demonstrate a higher degree of clarity. The performance will demonstrate a more intelligent interpretation of the role that will hold the audiences attention. To achieve D4 learners must produce a performance that is imaginative and confidently communicates its intentions to the audience.

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, P2, M2, M2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4	Assignment 1: Small Group Scene	Learners work as a performance company in the planning, rehearsal and performance stages of a scene drawn from a given or chosen text or stimulus.	Actor's process log consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • character profile • reflections on process • script showing actor's analysis of units • notes (with actor comments) from artistic director • minutes of meetings, including actions. Tutor observation reports. Recordings of milestone recordings and final performance.
P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, M2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4	Assignment 2: Second Genre	This assignment builds on the progress made through work undertaken in Assignment 1. Learners work as a performance company in the planning, rehearsal and performance stages of a scene drawn from a given or chosen text or stimulus in a contrasting genre.	Actor's process log consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • character profile • reflections on process • script showing actor's analysis of units • notes (with actor comments) from artistic director • minutes of meetings, including actions. Tutor observation reports. Recordings of milestone recordings and final performance.

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	Acting Skills and Techniques	Classical Theatre Performance
	Performing Scripted Plays	Contemporary Theatre Performance
	The Development of Drama	Drama Improvisation
		Applying Acting Styles
		Theatre for Children
		Theatre in Education
		Developing Voice for the Actor
		Voice and the Actor
		Auditions for Actors
		Audio Performance Acting

Essential resources

Learners will require a practical studio space in which to work, and video/DVD equipment will be needed for evidence recording purposes. An appropriate range of texts and supporting research material is required. Learners should have access to the production means to perform work to an audience under 'work in progress' studio conditions, for example appropriate rehearsal props and costumes, although these are needed only insofar as they enable the actor to realise a role to its full potential. The opportunity to see live professional performances, in the style of the work(s) being prepared for performance, is also desirable.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

The opportunity to see live and recorded professional actors' performances in the styles of the work being prepared for performance would greatly enhance learners' understanding of any differences in approach between key practitioners. Centres should develop links with local performance venues. Resident staff with outreach responsibilities, but also visiting artistic and technical experts (such as actors and designers) may be willing to visit and offer insights into creative processes. 'Talkback' sessions – when audience members are allowed to quiz director and actors in a post-show informal discussion – can also deliver creative insights.

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

Benedetti J – *Stanislavski: An Introduction, Fourth Edition* (Methuen, 2008) ISBN 9781408106839

Boal A – *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Routledge, 2002) ISBN 9780415267083

Elsam P – *Acting Characters: 20 Simple Steps from Rehearsal to Performance* (A & C Black, 2006) ISBN 9780713675863

Fredman R and Reade I – *Essential Guide to Making Theatre* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1996) ISBN 9780340655146

Luckhurst M and Veltman C – *On Acting: Interviews with Actors* (Faber, 2001) ISBN 9780571206568

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

Journal

The Stage

Websites

www.equity.org.uk UK trade union representing creative workers

www.str.org.uk The Society For Theatre Research

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	using research activities to develop material for performance
Creative thinkers	interpreting texts developing characters
Team workers	working as a company to rehearse and perform dramatic work.

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 ...
Reflective learners	considering their own personal development as an actor during the course of the unit
Self-managers	meeting deadlines during the rehearsal process.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	discussing possible interpretations of a piece of text
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	reading texts and other materials during rehearsals and other preparations.