

Unit 20: Applying Acting Styles

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| Unit code: | T/502/5397 |
| QCF Level 3: | BTEC National |
| Credit value: | 10 |
| Guided learning hours: | 60 |

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is enable learners to develop a range of approaches to acting; they will do this through a study of at least two acting styles drawn from different historical periods, and through planning and producing two contrasting performances of scenes drawn from scripted plays.

● Unit introduction

The development of drama can be seen as an ongoing process through which styles of acting have evolved and altered. Each period throughout history has produced recognisable styles of acting that suit the work of contemporary playwrights and, in turn, communicate meaning to an audience.

Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st century, a great deal of critical analysis and evaluation of the various acting styles has taken place. During the same period a number of important practitioners have emerged, producing a variety of ideas, techniques and even philosophies of acting. These at times contradictory sources represent material from which learners can draw, in developing versatility across a range of acting styles. Each play, each production, will suggest a specific style or styles that the actor must adopt and control with confidence. Certain plays and productions may require a mix of styles: a director may, for example, choose to mix Stanislavski and Brecht performance principles within a single production of a Shakespeare play. The actor must be prepared to join the experiment to ensure that stylistic techniques are applied with equal rigor.

All acting styles require learners to apply key acting skills and knowledge. Free and practised use of voice, speech and movement; insightful approaches to working on text; informed techniques of characterisation; and awareness of the changing nature of effective communication with an audience, all require focus and consideration. Each of these areas must be considered in turn, to ensure that appropriate choices are made – enabling learners to communicate through each chosen acting style with maximum effectiveness.

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 at least 10 minutes each.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Be able to develop characterisation as an actor
- 2 Be able to develop and rehearse material using different acting styles
- 3 Be able to perform as an actor using different acting styles.

Unit content

1 Be able to develop characterisation as an actor

Research and development: assessing function/relevance of characterisation; analysis of text to build a character profile; conducting research to build information about character/role; deconstructing a script eg units/objectives/barriers; communication with director and/or company to develop interpretation of the role; assessing nature of actor/audience relationship

Planning for characterisation: observation; background research; inner life; issues of status/power; imitation; exploration; identification; sensation; emotion; concentration; focus

2 Be able to develop and rehearse material using different acting styles

Acting styles: eg naturalism, realism, expressionism, surrealism, epic, Greek, choral and ensemble, melodrama, commedia dell'arte, Restoration, Pre-Elizabethan, Elizabethan/Jacobean, grotesque, farce, physical or visual theatre, political, theatre of cruelty, theatre of the absurd

Practitioners: eg Alfreds, Artaud, Berkoff, Boal, Brecht, Brook, Michael Chekhov, Fo, Grotowski, LePage, Littlewood, Mamet, McBurney, Meckler, Mnouchkine, Ninagawa, Saint-Denis, Stanislavski, Strasberg

Practice: selected styles; interpretation of text and development of a role; isolating key features of the style; identifying actor/audience dynamics; use of actor's log; rehearsal costume/props

Skills and techniques: use of improvisation; observation; adoption and application of appropriate acting style; experimentation with movement characteristics – tension, height, bodily openness and eye contact; experimentation with voice characteristics – volume, inflection, tone; experimentation with speech characteristics – pace, pausing, accent, diction, and 'special' idiosyncracies; use of gesture and image; emotional range and investment; interaction and responsiveness; use of space, time, weight dynamics; inner and outer characteristics

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

3 Be able to perform as an actor using different acting styles

Acting styles: eg naturalism, realism, expressionism, surrealism, epic, Greek, choral and ensemble, melodrama, Commedia dell'Arte, Restoration, Pre-Elizabethan, Elizabethan/Jacobean, grotesque, farce, physical or visual theatre, political, theatre of cruelty, theatre of the absurd

Physical expression: posture; gesture; use of tension, height, openness, space and eye contact; range and appropriateness of energy

Vocal expression: range and use of instrument; volume; inflection; tone; pace of speech; accent and dialect; diction; vocal idiosyncracies

Investment: commitment on stage; interaction and response; 'playing the moment'; public solitude; direct audience address; use of emotional range; coherence and consistency of role; character journey; relationship with the audience; synthesis of character work and technique

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 develop characterisation as an actor with guidance [CT] | M1 develop characterisation as an actor with skill and a degree of imagination | D1 develop characterisation as an actor with skill, insight and imagination |
| P2 develop and rehearse material using contrasting acting styles with guidance [SM] | M2 develop and rehearse material using two contrasting acting styles responding appropriately to direction and demonstrating a degree of creative autonomy | D2 develop and rehearse material using two contrasting acting styles responding imaginatively to the text and demonstrating complete creative autonomy |
| P3 perform as an actor using contrasting acting styles. [TW, EP] | M3 perform as an actor using contrasting acting styles with skill and a degree of imagination. | D3 perform as an actor using contrasting acting styles with focus, engagement and imagination. |

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 comprise practical workshop classes focusing on developing learners' understanding of a range of acting styles. During these workshops, learners should be introduced to at least two discrete styles of acting. Practical work should be guided and informed by an analysis of the methods of at least one relevant key practitioner in each 'style' area, and learners should be given opportunities to explore each style in a guided manner. Learners should be encouraged to develop their understanding of contrasting acting styles through applying them in 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, via the structure of the classes, 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 sorts of questions of a text and a character, realising the decisions and the answers in practical playing. Skills in interpretation should also encompass a clear consideration of the appropriate acting style for a particular 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 both live and recorded professional performance work from as wide a range of acting styles as possible – including full-costume historic text work, and performance work drawn from other cultures – should be built into the delivery of this unit, and learners should be encouraged to use analysis and discussion to inform their development as actors.

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 this creative log, learners should be encouraged to develop skills in recognising strengths and weaknesses in their own practical work, and in setting objectives for improvement. Preparatory work – such as the results of off-text improvisations, selected findings from research into acting styles, and biographical sketches of character – should all appear in the log, together with a final reflective evaluation of each of the two assessed performances.

Performances should be delivered to a live audience, but not necessarily in a formal and 'fixed' theatrical setting: other staff and learners who understand the work-in-progress nature of this work may be a more appropriate audience than the general public.

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. Explain 'Actor Discipline' aspects of unit, including evidence gathering. Introduce Assignments 1 and 2, 'Acting in a Scene: Style 1' and 'Acting in a Scene: Style 2' |
| Introduce workshop series: Planning for work in contrasting acting styles. Introduce and explore different acting styles using a range of texts. Theatre visit – view non-naturalistic production and attend 'talkback' to assess actors' character and text work. Research role and character planning methods for working within different genres. Group work on non-naturalistic character development, using sample scripts eg half-face mask work, using costume/make-up to create stereotypes, etc. |
| Planning work: both acting styles. Learners: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• attend first readthrough of each scene, and discuss content/themes/styles• complete profile of each character using full play text• present each character as a 'case study' (whole group)• prepare for first in-character hotseating sessions (private warm-up and preparation)• participate in hotseating sessions (whole group)• review character work and complete planning for first scene rehearsals. |
| Assignment 1: Style 1 Scene Work – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 Participate in scene 'uniting' exercise in small group. Line-learning and independent character work. Scene rehearsals, including improvisation work as needed on text, body, voice. Performance of scenes in small groups (whole group attending). Post-performance review and evaluation. |
| Assignment 2: Style 2 Scene Work – P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, D2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 Participate in scene 'uniting' exercise in small group. Line-learning and independent character work. Scene rehearsals, including improvisation work as needed on text, body, voice. Performance of scenes in small groups (whole group attending). 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. Evidence for the research and rehearsal phase will be in the form of an actor's log that will document the investigations, theoretical and experiential, into differences between acting styles. The log should conclude with an evaluation of each of the two assessed performances. Although this log will generally be written, learners should be encouraged to use a range of supporting material and 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 collating the evidence eg video diary, *viva voce*, discussion groups. Further evidence of learners' working processes and creative contribution to the performance will be in the form of documentation, such as minutes of meetings and tutor statements. Supporting tutor statements may be contained either in the feedback given to learners in interim recorded feedback sessions, or through the use of an observation report of learners' work. 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 hot-seating, participation in stylized movement workshops etc.

The unit requires learners to research and have practical evidence of working within at least two contrasting acting styles. Learners will use edited extracts from published play texts, as this unit does not require learners to prepare and perform full-length plays. However, the extracts should each allow for the exploration and realisation of key relevant 'stylistic' features, such as audience interaction, character-based movement, and projection of emotions.

Learning outcome 1 could be evidenced through a range of artefacts that combine to represent learners' investigation of approaches to text and character. Learners' response to two different key practitioners should produce observable differences in content. For example, planning work for a Brechtian project would feature a high degree of image-based preparatory work, with focus on the contrasting personalities of 'the actor' and the fictional character(s); while work on a Shakespearean tragic playtext would focus on character relationships within the story of the play, as well an analysis of verse-speaking technique.

Learning outcome 2 will be evidenced primarily through documentary evidence, including videotaped recording of the learners' successful progress through rehearsal to live performance in front of an audience. The actor's log should incorporate reflections and analysis of own contributions; this will combine with notes (with actor comments) from the artistic director/tutor, and an actor evaluation. Learning outcome 3 should be evidenced by recording of the performances. This evidence could be supplemented by tutor observation reports, peer assessment and/or feedback from the audience.

Learners achieving P1 will have made some effort to explore and develop characters using the techniques introduced to them during tutor led sessions. Development of characters will however have only emerged through considerable advice from the tutor/director with little personal input from learners. Learners achieving M1 will be able to employ skills and techniques in a more creative and responsive way when developing characters, although they may still be reliant on tutor guidance. They will be able to select and use techniques that are appropriate to the role and the acting style being used. Learners achieving D1 will be able to develop characterisation with a high level of originality. They will employ a range of skills and techniques in an assured manner.

For P2, learners will have taken part the development and rehearsal of material working in a cooperative way but tutor input will be needed in order for an outcome to be achieved. For M2, learners will work in a largely imaginative way during rehearsals. They will take direction well and use feedback to improve their performance and extend their understanding of the role and text being tackled. For D2, learners will use development and rehearsal phases in a highly effective manner. They will require only a minimum amount of directorial support but when this is given they will use it to improve their performance work and extend their understanding of the text.

For P3, learners will have performed in a generally competent manner. There will be subtle differences between the characters and the learners will be able to demonstrate contrasts in vocal technique and physical expression. For M3, performances will be competent and learners will demonstrate a confident use of acting skills, vocal and physical expression. For D3, learners will perform with flair and assurance in both acting styles. The chosen characters will allow the learners to demonstrate the depth and quality of their performance skills.

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: Style 1 | <p>This assignment incorporates the planning, rehearsal and performance stages of learners' creative work on a scene drawing on a selected acting style.</p> <p>Strategies may include Character Profiling, dividing up a playtext using units/objectives/barriers, analysing power in relationships, working with masks, etc.</p> | <p>Portfolio of evidence consisting of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • character planning notes • actor's log, including reflections on own style of communication; reflections and analysis of own contributions; and analysis of personal character work • script showing actor's analysis eg of units • notes (with actor comments) from artistic director • minutes of meetings, including actions • tutor observation statements • performance (recorded). |

| Criteria covered | Assignment title | Scenario | Assessment method |
|---|---|--|---|
| P1, M1, D1, P2, M2, M2, P3, M3, D3, P4, M4, D4 | Assignment 2: Small Group Scene (Style 2) | This assignment incorporates the planning, rehearsal and performance stages of learners' creative work on a scene requiring an acting style different from the one used in Assignment 1. Strategies may include character profiling, dividing up a play text using units/objectives/barriers, analysing power in relationships, working with masks etc. | Portfolio of evidence consisting of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • character planning notes • actor's log, including reflections on own style of communication; reflections and analysis of own contributions; and analysis of personal character work • script showing actor's analysis eg of units • notes (with actor comments) from artistic director • minutes of meetings, including actions • tutor observation statements • performance (recorded). |

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 |
| | | Principles of Acting |
| | | Theatre for Children |
| | | Theatre in Education |
| | | Developing Voice for the Actor |
| | | Voice and the Actor |
| | | Auditions for Actors |

Essential resources

Learners are their own resource for this unit. They will require a practical studio space in which to work, and video equipment will be needed for evidence-recording purposes. An appropriate range of texts and supporting research material is required and learners should also have access to the internet for research purposes. Learners should have access to the production means to perform work to an audience under 'work in progress' studio conditions, eg appropriate rehearsal props and costumes, although these are needed only insofar as they enable the actor to realise a role to its full potential.

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 key differences between acting styles. 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 Barton J – *Playing Shakespeare* (Methuen Drama, 2009) ISBN 9780713687736

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

Eddershaw M – *Performing Brecht* (Routledge, 1996) ISBN 9780415080118

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

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

Journal

The Stage

Websites

www.equity.org.uk

UK trade union representing professional performers and creative workers

www.str.org.uk

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 ... |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Creative thinkers | trying out alternative ways of constructing their work eg approaches to creating a character, or improvising to develop onstage relationships, following ideas through to deliver a successful performance adapting their ideas as circumstances change |
| Team workers | taking responsibility for their own role in group rehearsal managing discussions to reach agreements and achieve results |
| Self-managers | seeking out challenges or new responsibilities and showing flexibility when priorities change dealing with competing pressures, including personal and work-related demands responding positively to change, seeking advice and support when needed |
| Effective participators | sustaining work on a role through the various stages of planning, rehearsal, performance and evaluation communicating effectively with an audience maintaining a professional attitude throughout a creative process. |

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 | planning and carrying out research into differences in acting styles carrying out research to develop creative ideas for their own character(s) |
| Creative thinkers | trying out alternative approaches to character development eg hotseating, using masks or costume adapting their ideas as circumstances change |
| Reflective learners | setting goals with success criteria for their production work inviting feedback on their own work and dealing positively with praise, setbacks and criticism evaluating their experiences and learning to inform future progress |
| Team workers | taking responsibility for their own role when working in a group managing discussions to reach agreements and achieve results |
| Self-managers | seeking out challenges or new responsibilities and showing flexibility when priorities change dealing with competing pressures, including personal and work-related demands responding positively to change, seeking advice and support when needed. |

● Functional Skills – Level 2

| Skill | When learners are ... |
|---|---|
| ICT – Find and select information | |
| Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task | exploring, extracting and assessing the relevance of information from websites which contain socially or historically significant ideas, images or text, eg archive information on previous productions, information on costumes worn by historical figures |
| English | |
| Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts | participating in scene rehearsal involving other performers and/or an artistic director participating in production meetings |
| Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions | working on a script as an actor, eg dividing scenes into units conducting creative research, eg text- or web-based information on props and costumes completing a character profile sheet |
| Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively | maintaining a performer's log producing minutes for production meetings. |