

# GCSE Drama – glossaries for drama, performance, director and design roles

## Glossary of general Drama terms

Term	Definition
<b>antagonist</b>	the opponent or adversary of the hero or main character of a drama.
<b>blocking</b>	deliberate choices about where the performers stand and how they move on stage to bring an extract to life. Sometimes known as <b>staging</b> , however for the purposes of this component, the term staging will always be used to refer to design elements. See below.
<b>catharsis</b>	emotional release felt by the audience at the end of a tragedy; the audience is set free from the emotional hold of the action, after sharing in the protagonist's troubles.
<b>character</b>	a person portrayed in a play.
<b>chorus</b>	a group of performers who sing, move, or recite in unison/as one.
<b>climax</b>	the point of greatest intensity in a series or progression of events in a play, often forming the turning point of the plot and leading to some kind of resolution.
<b>comedy</b>	a play that treats characters and situations in a humorous way. In Shakespeare's time, a comedy was any play with a happy ending that typically told the story of a likable character's rise to fortune.
<b>comic relief</b>	a break in the tension of a tragedy provided by a comic character, a comic episode, or even a comic line.
<b>conflict</b>	the internal or external struggle between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates dramatic tension.
<b>contrast</b>	dynamic use of opposites, such as movement/stillness, sound/silence, and light/darkness.
<b>dénouement</b>	the moment in a drama when the essential plot point is unravelled or explained.
<b>development</b>	progression of the plot or conflict in a play.
<b>dynamic</b>	the energetic range of or variations within physical movement or the difference between levels of sound.
<b>ensemble</b>	unified effect achieved by all members of the cast working together, rather than a focus on individual performances, also be used to refer to the cast.
<b>exposition</b>	the part of a play that introduces the theme, main characters, and current circumstances.
<b>farce</b>	an extreme form of comedy depending on quick tempo and flawless timing, based on improbable events and farfetched coincidences.
<b>flashback</b>	in a non-linear plot, to go back in time to a previous event; a <i>flash forward</i> would move the action into the future.
<b>form</b>	refers to the shape of each individual section or scene e.g. movement/mime based ensemble scene, duologue, advert, moments of thought-tracking.
<b>fourth wall</b>	the invisible wall of a set through which the audience sees the action of the play.
<b>genre</b>	a French word meaning 'category' or 'type', e.g. comedy, tragedy, docudrama, farce, or melodrama.
<b>irony</b>	an implied discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. When the audience perceives something that a character does not

Term	Definition
	know, that is <i>dramatic irony</i> .
<b>melodrama</b>	a style of play, which originated in the 19th century, relying heavily on sensationalism and sentimentality.
<b>mood</b>	the tone or feeling of the play, often established or enhanced or by production or design elements.
<b>monologue</b>	a long speech made by one performer; a monologue may be delivered alone or in the presence of others.
<b>naturalism</b>	drama which attempts to represent real life on stage; actions tend to be shaped by determinism (societal or environmental forces).
<b>parody</b>	a mocking or satirical imitation of a literary or dramatic work.
<b>plot</b>	the events and sequences of action within a play, sometimes known known as narrative or storyline.
<b>protagonist</b>	the main character or hero in a play or other literary work.
<b>realism</b>	an attempt in theatre to represent everyday life and characters as they are or appear to be.
<b>resolution</b>	how the problem or conflict in a drama is solved or concluded.
<b>role</b>	the character portrayed by a performer in a drama.
<b>satire</b>	a play in which sarcasm, irony, and ridicule are used to expose or attack folly or pretension in society.
<b>scene</b>	a small section or portion of a play.
<b>setting</b>	when and where the action of a play takes place.
<b>stage directions</b>	instructions given by the playwright about how a play should be staged, when actors should make their entrances and exits and how lines should be delivered.
<b>staging</b>	the use of the stage as a design element, considering: choice of stage; positioning of entrances/exits, set items, stage furniture, levels; awareness of audience; creating an appropriate space for performers/audience
<b>style</b>	style relates to the chosen theatrical approach e.g. naturalist, minimalist, Brechtian etc.
<b>stock characters</b>	characters who represent particular personality types or characteristics of human behaviour.
<b>stimulus</b>	an object, image, piece of text, music or video that inspires devised work. (NB: For GCSE NEA purposes this must not be from a play text).
<b>storyline</b>	the <b>plot</b> or sequence of actions within a play.
<b>structure</b>	The arrangement of and relationship between the scenes/acts within a play or piece of devised theatre.
<b>suspense</b>	a feeling of uncertainty as to the outcome, used to build interest and excitement on the part of the audience.
<b>tempo</b>	the relative speed or rate of movement/voice/sound. Can be applied to dramatic contexts such as in 'tempo rhythm'.
<b>tension</b>	anxiety felt by the audience due to a threat to character(s) in the play.
<b>theatre maker</b>	a professional who contributes to a theatrical production such as a performer, director, or designer.
<b>tragedy</b>	a form of drama based on human suffering that invokes in its audience an accompanying catharsis.
<b>turning point:</b>	the climax or high point of a story, when events can go either way.

**Performance glossary**  
**(for performers and directors of performers)**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>acting style</b>	a particular manner of acting that reflects cultural and historical influences.
<b>articulation</b>	the clarity or distinction of speech.
<b>aside</b>	lines spoken by an performer to the audience and not supposed to be overheard by other characters on stage.
<b>blocking</b>	the path formed by the performer's movement on stage, usually determined by the director with assistance from the performer.
<b>characterisation</b>	how a performer uses body, voice, and thought to develop and portray a character.
<b>dialogue</b>	spoken conversation used by two or more characters to express thoughts, feelings, and actions.
<b>focus</b>	in acting, the act of concentrating or staying in character.
<b>gesture</b>	any movement of the performer's head, shoulder, arm, hand, leg, or foot to convey meaning.
<b>improvisation</b>	the spontaneous use of movement and speech to create a character or object in a particular situation; acting done without a script.
<b>inflection</b>	change in pitch or loudness of the voice.
<b>interaction</b>	the action or relationship among two or more characters.
<b>mime</b>	acting without words.
<b>mirroring</b>	copying the movement and/or expression or look of another performer exactly.
<b>motivation</b>	the reason or reasons for a character's behaviour; an incentive or inducement for further action for a character.
<b>movement</b>	stage blocking or the movements of the performers onstage during performance.
<b>pace</b>	the speed of voice or movement are or rate of action.
<b>performance skills</b>	skills used by performers including voice/vocal skills, movement/physical skills, use of space/proxemics and facial expression/ posture/ non-verbal skills.
<b>pitch</b>	the particular level of a voice, instrument or tune.
<b>posture</b>	physical alignment of a performer's body or a physical stance taken by a performer which conveys information about a character.
<b>proxemics</b>	'spatial relationships', between different performers or a performer and elements of the set.
<b>rhythm</b>	measured flow of words or phrases in verse forming patterns of sound. Regularity in time or space of an action, process or feature.
<b>timbre</b>	the distinctive character or quality of a musical or vocal sound apart from its pitch or intensity, such as in a nasal voice quality.
<b>vocal expression</b>	how a performer uses his or her voice to convey character,
<b>voice</b>	the combination of vocal qualities an performer uses such as articulation, phrasing, and pronunciation.

## Costume glossary

(for costume designers, and directors considering costume design)

Term	Definition
<b>accessories</b>	anything carried or worn on top of the basic costume for decorative purposes, e.g. a purse, shawl.
<b>basic block</b>	a pattern which is the starting block for a more detailed pattern based on a particular performer's measurements, and reflecting specifics like historical period.
<b>breaking down</b>	artistic process of aging or distressing a costume. Paint, glue, dye, ripping and tearing can be used in this process.
<b>colour</b>	can be used symbolically to suggest character, emotion, theme
<b>costume</b>	what a performer wears to evoke the appearance of a particular character. Costumes maybe realistic or stylised. They may be 'period' – appropriate to the historical setting of the play – or deliberately modern in look, even when the play is set in a past era, depending on the performance style of the production.
<b>costume plot</b>	a list or chart made by the costume designer showing the characters appearing in each scene, and what they are wearing. This helps track each character's whereabouts throughout the performance.
<b>dresser</b>	crew member who aids with dressing.
<b>dress form</b>	the adjustable torso (male and female) used by costume cutters, dressmakers and tailors for creating garments; useful for: creating shapes from which patterns are made (draping), fitting and detailed in-place sewing.
<b>dress rehearsal</b>	dress full costume/lighting/effects/sound/action rehearsal.
<b>fabric</b>	the material from which the costume is constructed.
<b>fittings</b>	the process of adjusting the costume to the performer's body.
<b>gondola</b>	an enclosed easily transportable costume rail with removable side that enables large shows to manage huge quantities of costumes, wigs etc. easily.
<b>mock-up</b>	a full-scale model of a costume, used as a test-run.
<b>muslin</b>	a simply woven cotton fabric used to make the costume mock-up, also called performery cotton or unbleached cotton.
<b>pancake</b>	water based stage make up, applied with sponge.
<b>personal props</b>	small props that are usually carried in a performer's costume, such as money or a pen.
<b>quick change</b>	a change of costume that needs to happen very quickly, takes place close to the side of the stage. Costume for quick changes may be made using velcro and zips rather than buttons.
<b>seamstress</b>	member of the wardrobe department who operates sewing machines and carries out other sewing tasks.
<b>swatch</b>	a sample of fabric to demonstrate the material to use on a costume or set design, or a sample of lighting gel.
<b>wardrobe</b>	the general name for the costume department, its staff and the accommodation they occupy.

## Lighting glossary

### (for lighting designers and directors considering lighting design)

Term	Definition
<b>baby spot</b>	small spotlight under 500 watts.
<b>backlight</b>	light coming from upstage, behind scenery or performers, to sculpt and separate them from the background.
<b>back projection</b>	a method of projecting images onto a translucent screen from behind. Often used for projected scenery or special effects.
<b>bar</b>	metal tube used for hanging lanterns.
<b>barn-door</b>	a rotatable attachment consisting of two or four metal flaps (hinged) which is fixed to the front of a <b>Fresnel</b> lantern to cut off the beam in a particular direction(s).
<b>bifocal spot</b>	profile lantern with two sets of shutters, one of which produces a hard edge, and one a soft edge. Not necessary in zoom profiles, because this requirement is fulfilled by two lenses.
<b>blackout</b>	a lighting cue where all stage lights go off simultaneously.
<b>board</b>	abb. for 'lighting control board'.
<b>build</b>	increase light levels.
<b>check</b>	decrease light levels.
<b>colour filter</b>	a sheet of plastic usually composed of a coloured resin which creates coloured light on stage. A colour filter is sometimes known as a <b>Gel</b> , after the animal material Gelatine, from which filters were originally made.
<b>colour mixing</b>	combining the effects of two or more lighting gels.
<b>cross-fade</b>	bringing another lighting state up to completely replace the current lighting state. Sometimes abbreviated to Xfade or XF.
<b>cue lights</b>	system of lights used to give 'Cues'.
<b>cue sheet</b>	list of effects.
<b>cyclorama</b>	a fabric drop hung from a curved or segmented batten, or a curved wall at the back of the stage, upon which light can be cast to create effects (cyc for short).
<b>diffusion gel</b>	also called frost – softens light.
<b>downlight</b>	a light from directly above the acting area.
<b>fader</b>	means of controlling lights .
<b>flash</b>	when lights are flashed for effect.
<b>flood</b>	to wash the stage with general lighting. The name given to a basic box-shaped lantern with a simple reflector used to achieve this effect.
<b>focus</b>	The adjustment of lighting/projection equipment and/or the direction in which it is aimed.
<b>follow spot</b>	large profile spotlight with operator.
<b>fresnel</b>	adjustable light giving a diffused light, created by the construction of its lens of 'concentric circles'.
<b>FX</b>	abb. for 'effects'.
<b>gel</b>	coloured lighting film (originally made from gelatine).
<b>gobo</b>	metal slide placed in gate of lantern which throws a pattern.
<b>ground row</b>	floodlight battens placed on stage.
<b>halogen</b>	gas contained in lamps.
<b>heads below</b>	warning shouted if anything is dropped from above.
<b>house lights</b>	the lights that illuminate the auditorium before and after the performance and during intermission, used in some performances e.g. Brechtian 'shared light'.
<b>kill</b>	instruction to stop action or effect.

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>lantern</b>	stage light.
<b>LED</b>	LED stage lighting instruments are stage lighting instruments that use light-emitting diodes (LEDs) as a light source. LED instruments are an alternative to traditional stage lighting instruments which use halogen lamp or high-intensity discharge lamps.
<b>level</b>	intensity of light.
<b>lighting plot</b>	lighting cue description.
<b>light set</b>	a term used to describe a situation where no physical set is used on stage. The 'set' is created entirely by means of lighting.
<b>master</b>	lever/slide which controls all light.
<b>parcan</b>	type of lantern containing a fixed beam par lamp.
<b>profile spot</b>	lantern which can produce hard or soft light.
<b>shutter</b>	device in lantern used to shape beam.
<b>spill</b>	unwanted light on the stage.
<b>spot</b>	abbreviation of spotlight; a bright beam of light projected onto a performance space.
<b>strobe</b>	flashing light.
<b>UV</b>	abbreviation of Ultra Violet.
<b>wash</b>	a general 'fill' of light and colour across the stage.
<b>working lights</b>	lights used by stage crew to aid work.



## Set glossary

(for set designers and directors considering set design)

Term	Definition
<b>act drop</b>	cloth flown in at the end of an act.
<b>back projection</b>	a method of projecting images onto a translucent screen from behind. Often used for projected scenery or special effects.
<b>book flat</b>	a hinged flat.
<b>box set</b>	a set with three walls and a ceiling, leaving the fourth wall open, representing a real room with doors and windows that work.
<b>breaking down</b>	artistic process of aging costume, props or scenery.
<b>cloth</b>	a piece of scenic canvas, painted or plain, which is flown or fixed to hang in a vertical position: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- a <b>backcloth</b> (or backdrop) hangs at the rear of a scene</li><li>- a <b>floorcloth</b> is a painted canvas sheet placed on the stage floor to mark out the acting area, or to achieve a particular effect</li><li>- a <b>frontcloth</b> hangs downstage, often to mask a scene change.</li></ul>
<b>colour</b>	can be used symbolically to suggest mood, emotion, theme or to create a sense of location.
<b>curtains</b>	at front of stage – called tabs.
<b>curtain up/down</b>	beginning and end of performance.
<b>cyclorama</b>	a fabric drop hung from a curved or segmented batten, or a curved wall at the back of the stage, upon which light can be cast to create effects ( <i>cyc</i> for short).
<b>EMU</b>	Electrical Multiple Unit, used to describe stage machinery composed from multiple moving parts.
<b>flat</b>	a wooden frame, usually covered with painted cloth, used to create walls or separations on stage.
<b>flies</b>	area above stage where flown scenery is kept.
<b>gauze</b>	see ' <b>scrim</b> '.
<b>grid</b>	metal frames in flying tower from which flying equipment is held (wooden in very old theatres).
<b>ground-plan</b>	technical drawing of stage.
<b>jack-knife stage</b>	set consisting of one or more wheeled rostra, which are fixed at one corner point, enabling the platform to pivot to reveal a different set/scene or to appear on stage or move offstage.
<b>light set</b>	a term used to describe a situation where no physical set is used on stage. The 'set' is created entirely by means of lighting.
<b>lose</b>	to remove from set.
<b>materials</b>	that the set items are or appear to be composed from eg window panes may be made of Perspex to represent glass, from health and safety considerations.
<b>mask</b>	to hide from audience's sight.
<b>masking</b>	flats/cloths used to mask parts of the set/stage from the audience.
<b>platform</b>	also referred to as a <b>rostrum</b> it is a stationary, flat walking surface for performers, used to provide varying levels, to make a show more visually interesting, to separate areas on stage, and as seating.
<b>practical</b>	a working object onstage, such as a door or window.
<b>pre-set</b>	position of scenery/ stage furniture at start of performance/scene.
<b>platform stage</b>	acting area raised from the floor either in a non-theatre space or in an unusual part of a theatre space.

Term	Definition
<b>revolve</b>	turntable built into the stage floor on which scenery can be set and then driven into view. A partial revolve with a stationary centre section is known as a doughnut revolve.
<b>rostrum</b>	portable platform, usually in the form of a collapsible hinged framework (gate) with a separate top (lid). Plural – <b>rostra</b> .
<b>scenery</b>	the theatrical equipment, such as curtains, flats, backdrops, or platforms, used in a production to create location/environment.
<b>scenic artists</b>	people who paint scenery.
<b>scrim (or gauze)</b>	a drop made of fabric that seems almost opaque when lit from the front but semi-transparent when lit from behind.
<b>set</b>	the physical surroundings, visible to the audience, in which the action of the play takes place.
<b>sightlines</b>	imaginary lines of sight that determine what areas of the stage are visible to the audience from any given seat in the house.
<b>stage crew</b>	employed to move/operate scenery.
<b>staging</b>	the use of the stage as a design element, considering: choice of stage; positioning of entrances/exits, set items, stage furniture, levels; awareness of audience; creating an appropriate space for performers/audience.
<b>strike</b>	to remove object or scenery from stage.
<b>swag</b>	curtains fashioned so they do not hang straight.
<b>tabs</b>	Curtains.
<b>truck</b>	platform with wheels on which a piece of scenery is built to facilitate scene changing – also known as a wagon.
<b>wagon stage</b>	mechanised stage where the scenery is moved into position on large sliding trucks (wagons) as wide as the proscenium opening, from the side/rear of the main stage, allowing complex scene changes to occur almost instantly.



**Sound glossary**  
**(for sound designers and directors of sound design)**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>amp</b>	abbreviation amplifier used to amplify sound.
<b>build</b>	increase sound levels.
<b>channel</b>	connected circuit in sound system.
<b>check</b>	decrease sound levels.
<b>condenser</b>	type of microphone.
<b>cross-fade</b>	bringing another sound state up to replace the current sound state.
<b>diegetic sound</b>	sound heard by characters on stage e.g. music played on a radio on the set.
<b>feedback</b>	when a mic picks up its own signal from a speaker.
<b>float mics</b>	microphones placed along front of stage.
<b>FX</b>	abb. for 'effects'.
<b>level</b>	intensity of sound.
<b>non-diegetic sound</b>	sound NOT heard by the actors and designed to create mood/atmosphere/impact on the audience e.g. emotional underscore.
<b>PA system</b>	the public address system or any sound system.
<b>pan</b>	to move sound from one place to another.
<b>radio mic</b>	personal microphone without power lead.
<b>sound</b>	the effects an audience hears during a performance to communicate character, context, or environment.
<b>sound design</b>	the three categories of sound design, are: 1. <b>functional</b> (e.g. practical sounds such as a gunshot to coincide with an action on stage) 2. <b>atmospheric</b> (i.e. using underscoring that may include music, or a pre-recorded soundscape) 3. <b>incidental</b> where sound can be used to cover moments of transition (e.g. between scenes or to cover scene changes).
<b>sound effects</b>	1) <b>Recorded</b> : often abbreviated to FX. May form an obvious part of the action (train arriving at station) or may be in the background throughout a scene (e.g. birds chirping). 2) <b>Live</b> : gunshots, door slams, and offstage voices (amongst many others) are most effective when done live.
<b>soundscape</b>	sound that runs under a scene, to help establish the world of the play, to immerse the audience in that world and/or to heighten emotion. This can be created using recorded and or live sound.
<b>surround sound</b>	any sound system where sound can appear to be all around the audience is said to be surround sound. Theatre sound systems often use localised speakers near each bank of seating.
<b>volume</b>	the level at which a sound effect or piece of music will be played.

## Props/Stage furniture Glossary

(for designers of props/ stage furniture and directors considering props/ stage furniture)

Term	Definition
<b>block</b>	wooden cuboid box used as stage furniture in non-naturalistic performances.
<b>breaking down</b>	artistic process of aging costume, props or scenery.
<b>colour</b>	can be used symbolically to suggest style/setting/theme.
<b>dressings</b>	adding props (some practical) and/ or furnishings to a stage setting is known as dressing the set.
<b>ground-plan</b>	technical drawing of stage.
<b>hand props</b>	properties such as tools, weapons, or luggage that are carried on stage by an individual performer.
<b>materials</b>	that the stage furniture is or appears to be composed from e.g. a statue made of painted Styrofoam as a practical alternative to stone.
<b>personal props</b>	properties belonging to a specific character and therefore handled by that actor or kept in the actor's costume.
<b>props</b>	abb. for Properties. Furnishings, set dressings, and all items large and small which cannot be classified as scenery, electrics or wardrobe.
<b>prop box/skip</b>	place to store props.
<b>prop table</b>	table situated in wings on which props are placed.
<b>props room</b>	room for construction of props.
<b>platform</b>	also referred to as a <b>riser</b> or <b>rostrum</b> it is a stationary, standard flat walking surface for performers to perform on, used to provide varying levels, to make a show more visually interesting, to separate areas on stage, and/or as seating.
<b>practical</b>	a working object onstage, such as a door or window.
<b>preset</b>	position of scenery/ stage furniture at start of performance/scene.
<b>rostrum</b>	portable platform, usually in the form of a collapsible hinged framework (gate) with a separate top (lid). Plural – <b>rostra</b> .
<b>stage crew</b>	employed to move/operate stage furniture
<b>stage furniture</b>	elements of the production that can be used/moved but cannot be defined as personal props e.g. chair, table, block. Can also be written about to support set design.
<b>strike</b>	to remove object or scenery from stage.
<b>style</b>	the style of stage furniture chosen to enhance the production, e.g. by replicating a specific historical period. Stage furniture design, will often relate to the performance style, e.g. 'slice of life', representational.

**Staging glossary**  
**(for staging designers and directors of staging)**

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>apron</b>	the area between the front curtain and the edge of the stage.
<b>arena stage</b>	type of stage without a frame or arch separating the stage from the auditorium, in which the audience surrounds the stage area.
<b>auditorium</b>	the part of the theatre accommodating the audience during the performance, also known as the 'house'.
<b>black box</b>	a one-room theatre, without a proscenium arch; interior is painted black, including walls, floor, and ceiling, and any drapes are also black.
<b>centre-stage</b>	the centre point on a stage.
<b>down-stage</b>	the front part of the stage, in front of the centre stage area, close to the audience.
<b>entrance</b>	part of the set through which actors can walk onto the stage.
<b>end on</b>	traditional audience seating layout where the audience is looking at the stage from the same direction. This seating layout is that of a Proscenium Arch theatre.
<b>exit</b>	part of the set through which actors can leave the stage.
<b>fourth wall</b>	the invisible wall of a set through which the audience sees the action of the play.
<b>ground-plan</b>	technical drawing of the stage.
<b>promenade</b>	a theatrical production with the expectation that audience members will predominantly walk or move about (rather than sit).
<b>proscenium</b>	a frame or arch separating the stage from the auditorium, creating a picture frame or an imaginary fourth wall through which the audience experienced the illusion of spying on characters.
<b>sightlines</b>	imaginary lines of sight that determine what areas of the stage are visible to the audience from any given seat in the house.
<b>site-specific</b>	any type of theatrical production designed to be performed at a unique, specially adapted location other than a standard theatre.
<b>stage left</b>	the left side of the stage for an actor standing facing the audience.
<b>stage right</b>	the right side of the stage for an actor standing facing the audience.
<b>staging</b>	the use of the stage as a design element, considering: choice of stage; positioning of entrances/exits, set items, stage furniture, levels; awareness of audience; creating an appropriate space for performers/audience.
<b>in-the-round</b>	an acting area or stage that may be viewed from all sides simultaneously.
<b>thrust</b>	a stage that extends into the audience area, with seats on three sides of a peninsula-shaped acting space.
<b>traverse</b>	form of staging where the audience is on either side of the acting area.
<b>up-stage</b>	the back part of the stage, behind the centre stage area, further away from the audience.