# A Guide to Devising at GCSE

## Contents

# 1. What is devising?

Devising is a group collaboration in response to a stimulus leading to the creation of an original performance.

Devising in drama demands inventiveness, an understanding of the rules of structuring a piece of theatre and a readiness to collaborate with others. There is no restriction on the chosen style of the devised piece; however, the teacher should ensure that the style provides all group members with the opportunity to access the marking criteria. The teacher can select any stimulus (for this specification this this should not be a play text), or any combination of stimuli: an image, a text (such as a poem, story or piece of non-fiction), an object or a piece of music, for example. From here the possibilities are endless. Groups must work collaboratively to generate the devised performance and to challenge each other to develop creative ways of using voice, movement and space.

The form and content of the devised work may reflect the group's awareness of their chosen social, historical, political and cultural context. Consequently, the students' experiences of live productions, workshops and research will be crucial to their creative successes. A successful devised performance reflects a disciplined attitude towards editing and structuring that allows the intentions of the group's creative piece to be clearly communicated to an audience. With this component students will be aiming to mirror professional work in practice as closely as possible, they will use their portfolio to record their creating process as they progress just as would happen in a professional rehearsal room.

Devising must not be seen as separate from the other experiences on the GCSE course. Students should be encouraged to realise that every activity and experience can impact upon devised work. For example, they may be intrigued by a character in a play they have seen or interested in a piece of music played during a lesson; an exercise used to study a text could be adapted to explore ideas. There are many possible starting points for devising, which some students will be able to identify and develop into a successful performance. However, many students need support and direction to be able to achieve high standards in both performance and portfolio. The aim of this guide is to propose a clear direction in devising; however, it is in no way prescriptive.

# 2. Choosing a stimulus

The GCSE Drama specification says:

Teachers should choose between 1–3 pieces of stimuli and these may be one or a combination of the following:

- textual, for example a novel, poem, story, letter or factual material (for this specification play texts are not permitted)
- visual, for example a painting, photograph, film or artefact
- aural, for example a piece of music, a soundscape or a recording
- abstract, for example a word, a theme or a mood.

The choice of stimulus is for you to decide. It is important that the chosen stimulus captures and maintains the interest of the group for the duration of the devised project. The devising component is worth 40% of the GCSE course and as part of the project, students should have time to create and

develop ideas, as well as time for rehearsals, performance and completion of the portfolio. It is recommended that you start looking at stimuli within the personal realm of the students and gradually expand the search until appropriate stimuli are found.
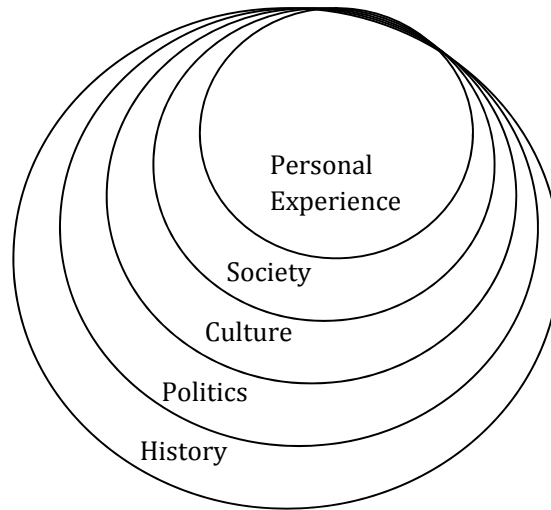


The choice of stimulus could be the first step of devising for students, and involving them in this choice encourages their engagement throughout the process. Alternatively, you can use a teacher-chosen stimulus if you feel this may give students a more successful start. However, it is important that students can demonstrate in their portfolio how the stimulus inspired their ideas for the final performance.

## Possible stimuli:

*Personal experience:*
- Stream of consciousness biography
- Five best life experiences
- Five worst life experiences
- An object from home that is significant

*Society:*
- Stories in local newspapers/on websites
- Issues that are pertinent to the local community
- Photographs of locations in the town
- Descriptions of places that make them feel scared
- A particular audience/group of people

*Culture:*
- Short/feature films
- Documentaries
- Music
- Lyrics
- Poetry
- Novels
- Children's books
- Art – paintings, photography, installations

*Political:*

- Accounts of people affected by different political systems
- Revolutionary ideas
- Responses to the question 'What is politics?'
- Political figures
- Definition of left-wing/right-wing

*History:*

- Historical events
- Historical figures
- Family histories
- Theatre history

Once the stimulus has been decided, the first part of the process should be a 'free for all' discussion and the recording of initial responses. It would be a good idea for notes to be recorded in a written or audio/visual format, to support the development of the portfolio.

# 3. Researching the stimulus

At this stage in the process it is crucial for students to take ownership of the material they are developing. They must come to understand that if the material is exciting and interesting for them then it is more likely to engage their audience. This will only be achieved when research and practical exploration run concurrently.

Students sometimes find research frustrating, as a quick look on a search engine does not necessarily reap instant rewards. Support with and modelling of the research process is therefore essential for this stage of devising at GCSE level. In particular, students need to develop the skill of making connections between their research material and the piece they are devising. Encourage them to think about their ideas constantly, imagining the possibilities and being adventurous in creating possible storylines. The benefits of thinking time can be overlooked, so encourage students to utilise any spare moment to wonder and imagine the possibilities of their devised work. The group dynamic is a real strength of this type of work. Teachers should harness the different thinking styles of their students and encourage them to explore every avenue.

There are various sources when carrying out research:

- Internet
- Library
- Departments and teachers within the school
- Art and photography books
- Music
- News – print, television, internet
- Theatre programmes/images/recordings.

These could be used by all members of the group or given as individual, independent research avenues, for students to share research findings later.

The research process does not need to be over complicated. The students simply take the words and ideas identified during the initial response to the

stimulus and begin finding connections within these different avenues. Every connection is valid and should be recorded.

It is essential to keep records of the research, so it can be shared and fed back to other group members and form part of a student's final portfolio. Students will find individual folders or notebooks extremely useful when selecting the significant moments of development to be included in their portfolios. Students may also want to have a shared computer file where they can keep music recordings, video footage and images gathered.

The research stage requires time at the start of the project before practical explorations begins. The practical work can begin as soon as substantial ideas have been developed, but research should remain an on-going element throughout the process, as it will help to keep students' work fresh and detailed.

# 4. Establishing aims and objectives

There is need for early identification of aims and objectives, as they provide parameters for practical exploration. They can be established once research of the stimulus is underway. These initial aims and objectives will be heavily reliant on the stimulus, although additional aims can be added once style and form has been decided. The reality of devising is that the aims and objectives of a piece can grow and develop during the process; such changes must be embraced and can be discussed in the portfolio.

The following questions can provide a good starting point when determining the aims and objectives:

- Why does this stimulus interest you?
- What are your initial thoughts on how to develop your ideas from your stimulus?
- How do you want people to react to your piece?

Students' responses to these questions can be formulated into shared aims and objectives. Below is a selection of verbs that could be used to start appropriate statements.

*We aim to...*

| define | chart | debate | propose |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| find | demonstrate | distinguish | reinforce |
| identify | dramatise | examine | argue |
| reproduce | inform | relate | assess |
| convert | instruct | express | critique |
| explain | prepare | provoke | evaluate |
| report | compare | initiate | defend |
| justify | prove | support | criticise |

The number of aims and objectives should be limited to between one and three statements, to allow for clarity and focus. These can then be written down and displayed in the rehearsal space, to ensure students refer to them during research and practical exploration and development. The aims and

objectives can then be adapted and developed, but it is important that they don't wholly change without a reason that can be justified and communicated in the portfolio. In addition to aims and objectives, establishing a working title can provide direction for the group.

Up until this point the devising process has been free and limitless. This will inevitably lead to differences and disagreements. Whilst this may be frustrating for students, it must be acknowledged as a vital part of the creative process. Students should be open to being challenged by their peers and be able to justify their thoughts and ideas in response. The teacher must be careful to ensure that nothing is discarded in these early stages, but rather to encourage experimentation. However, successful devising ultimately requires some ideas to be chosen over others. It must be clear that it is not only ideas that will receive marks but also *how* individuals respond to and develop the ideas of others.

# 5. Practical exploration

There will be significant overlap between practical exploration and the research of the stimulus, and it is worth getting the students to practically experiment with research material as soon as possible. The students must not feel limited by the idea that because they are doing practical work it is the final performance. Devising companies generate a huge amount of material, way beyond what we see in the finished product. If the students feel that everything they do practically is intended for the final performance their progress will be restricted. Furthermore, the more effective the practical exploration phase, the easier it will be to record the development of the piece in the portfolio.

Keeping video recordings of the practical exploration work is one way that many devising companies keep this stage free from 'final performance anxiety'. Getting students used to the process of recording and watching themselves perform will liberate them from any embarrassment that can detract from the identification of quality ideas.

Some of the possible areas of practical exploration and ideas for their application are described below. These should appeal to the full range of abilities, making this stage accessible and challenging. Note that this should not be taken as a definitive list and you will also need to develop your own original ideas.

- Improvisation
- Tableaux
- Movement and physical sequences
- Developing a role and characterisation

## 5.1 Improvisation

Improvisation will be the foundation for all practical exploration, and establishing a shared way of working during the course is vital. Improvisation provides a way of getting ideas on their feet with little discussion. Students should prepare for these exercises by selecting something from their research of the stimulus as a starting point or as something that must be included in the improvisation.

The core principles of improvisation for devising are:

- The starting point must be rooted in research findings, such as:
    - an image
    - a line of text
    - an object
    - a scenario
    - a piece of music.
- Students should commit fully to the improvisation and aim for the highest standard of performance throughout.
- One improvisation can lead to another, or you could introduce a new 'rule' and repeat a previous improvisation.
- Improvisation is a collaborative exercise. Avoid stopping each other when you are working.
- Successful improvisations should trigger ideas for characters, scenarios, specific lines or movement, etc.
- Take risks.
- Keep the stakes high.

Here are some approaches to changing an improvisation:

### Status

The development of subtle conflicts within a scene begins with characters knowing their status. Allocating status to a character using numbers 1–10 will give improvisations a power dynamic. Encourage students to support the status they perceive in the other characters. Once students have become accustomed to clear status boundaries, encourage them to actively change their status, as happens in the subtle interactions of 'real life'. Introducing rules on eye contact and spatial behaviour (proxemics) can support the clarity and communication of status.

### Genre

For some groups that seem to drift towards one of the dominant genres, for example comedy or tragedy, get them to play the opposite genre. This reversal can create much interest and introduce complexity that later informs stylistic choices.

### Space

Taking an improvisation and increasing or decreasing the playing space can intensify relationships and lead to interesting discoveries. This could then lead to students researching locations that are of an appropriate size for the characters.

### Pace

Changing the pace of an improvised scene can challenge the students to free themselves of too much thought. It can also get them to consider the detail of an interaction. This should be a shift in the speed of action and/or verbal delivery rather than purely movement.

## Quality of movement

Identifying instinctive choices and playing the opposite can often be rewarding in discovering something new. Consider:

- Pace – from fast to slow
- Direction – up/down, side to side, backwards/forwards
- Size – from big to small
- Control – from stable to unstable
- Orientation - choice of where the body is facing.

In addition here are some approaches that include using the techniques of a practitioner to change an improvisation. It is not necessary as part of this GCSE course to use the work of a practitioner in your practical exploration and devising work. However these approaches can be useful should you want to use include the work of practitioners as part of your improvisation.

## Actions/objectives

Use transitive verbs, denoting actions that affect someone, as the starting point for actions and objectives. For example, antagonises, persuades and distances. This is also known as Actioning, as popularised by the theatre director Max Stafford-Clark. This skill is at the root of a lot of theatre making, and whilst challenging is well worth the time. This can be particularly useful if an improvisation lacks direction or high stakes.

## Emotions

These can be explored on their own or in conjunction with actions. Both actions and emotions should be created physically. Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions can be an excellent visual aid, as it shows increases in the intensity of emotion, how emotions combine and the opposite emotions. Students could identify their character's emotion and then increase or decrease the intensity, find a more subtle mixture of emotions or even experiment with playing the opposite emotion.

## Silence

Dialogue in improvisation can often be forced and simply used to describe and explain, leading to a lack of depth of content that impacts on the range of performance skills that can be explored. Additional silence here is not to be filled with gestural mime but rather 'naturalistic' absence of speech. Enforcing thirty seconds of silence at the start of an improvisation can lead to an emotional depth, especially when students are also encouraged to explore variations of levels and spatial behaviour (proxemics). This exercise works equally well with an improvisation that must end in thirty seconds of silence. Furthermore, students could choose a point in a repeated improvisation to share a silence.

These methods of changing improvisations can be mixed to suit a group. Despite being free and playful, the improvisation stage of development should be disciplined. A spirit of experimentation and repetition will lead to material that can be selected for the final performance, but it will take time. Approaching improvisation in a structured way will allow the development of ideas to be more easily recorded and used for the final portfolio.

A great way to avoid selecting and discarding ideas before they have been explored in improvisation is what Augusto Boal called 'Silence on Set – Action!' This could be used as an effective start to a lesson during the improvisation stage. Allocate a period of time during which any idea proposed by a member of the group has to be tried without discussion. The person with the idea briefly gives an outline and then shouts 'Silence on Set – Action!' The validity of the student's idea must be immediately tested in action to its conclusion; nothing can be rejected.

## 5.2 Tableaux

A tableau is an excellent entry point to the practical exploration of research material. This can form a regular part of lessons during the explorative stage and should trigger ideas for improvisations. For example, a student could present an artefact from their research, whether an image, article or story, etc. This could then lead to a discussion of the artefact's themes and qualities, which can be summarised in a list of five or so themes and qualities. The group must then create a tableau that symbolically or literally captures these themes and qualities. This approach leads to an interpretation of the original artefact that opens avenues for further exploration.

Tableaux can lead to stage compositions that can be the beginnings of scenes. Keeping photographic records of all tableaux created will help with further exploration, the development of the final performance and the creation of the portfolio.

## 5.3 Movement and physical sequences

Movement and physical sequences in devised work are either literal or symbolic and serve different purposes. Final choices about style and form come later in the whole process of devising, so it is worth giving time to the exploration of both literal and symbolic movement. There is, of course, a blurring between the two, but dividing movement in such a way can act as a useful starting point.

**Literal**

You can develop movement and physical sequences by selecting an element from the research that has clearly identifiable gestures. This could be, for example, courtroom procedure, the security at an airport or a morning routine, etc. Once a repeatable sequence of gestures has been created, the group can experiment with changing the meaning by testing different variables. For instance, what happens if you change or exaggerate:

- pace
- size
- the portrayal as realistic or caricature
- the number in the group doing the gestures in synchronisation.

The discoveries will hopefully lead to links and connections with the students' initial ideas in response to the stimulus and research. This can provide movement sequences that establish location and tone in the final performance.

'Actor as object' sequences, where the performers use their bodies to represent an object, can also be used to create clear locations. The students can identify objects that are significant in their research and attempt to re-create them. The objects that a human interacts with provides a sense of

relationship between a character and their surroundings: creating the objects imagined in a particular person's home or workplace can be the most revealing. The key to successful 'actor as object' sequences is the creation of the details rather than attempting a representation of the whole. Furthermore, objects do not need to remain for long; instead the actor can transition from one object to another. Allowing room for the audience's imagination is crucial and can often feel rewarding for a viewer.

### Symbolic

This style of physical movement sequence can be used alongside more 'traditional' dramatic forms. It is particularly useful at the explorative stage, as it can offer fresh perspective and alternative points of view. It can be used as a response to an element of improvisation, tableaux, a research artefact or the original stimulus.

Many artists that use this style of movement like to create the movements before adding context and meaning. For example, if a group created a slow movement sequence that saw them move from one side of the space to the other without determining any meaning, they would then choose a context in which to frame this movement; dialogue or narration about refugees would impart the movement with very different meaning to the same movement placed in the context of soldiers.

Symbolic movements can be created by developing sequences of interactions between pairs or as a group. There should be an emphasis on connection of bodies as well as the different possible aspects of movement, such as speed, weight and direction. Encourage students to be adventurous with their choices and in the way they try variations. The exercises of Frantic Assembly can be particularly useful for this type of exploration. These physical sequences can work in a final devised performance as triggers for interesting transitions or spotlighting and reinforcing relationships between characters.

## 5.4 Developing a role and characterisation

Individual and group work on character is vital for effective devising, whether you end up being a single character or playing multiple roles. All students will be marked separately for their devised performance and therefore each individual should aim to create and develop effective characters. The teacher should oversee a sense of balance within the piece, so that all students are given an opportunity to access all the marks.

Character exploration exercises allow the group and the individuals within it to actively develop characters in enough detail to access all the marks. Not all characters explored will make it into the final performance, but the more detailed the characters that are developed, the more opportunities there will be for interesting relationships. A good way of determining whether a character has been fully explored is to establish their given circumstances; for instance:

1   Who am I?
2   Where am I?
3   When is it?
4   Where have I just come from?
5   What do I want? (Objectives)
6   How will I get what I want?

These questions can be fully answered at the end of character work, in order to record the group's discoveries. If any of these questions are left unanswered then more character exploration will be needed.

## Hot-seating

This is a great way to get the students immersed in their potential characters. It is also a collective method of developing detailed characters that will facilitate the whole group's understanding in performance. The basic hot-seating method is:

- One person remains in role throughout a series of questions asked by the other members of the group. The commitment to remaining in role and thinking as the character is crucial. This requires some preparation time to ensure success.

- The people asking the questions are integral to the success of hot-seating. While asking closed questions can clarify facts, it is open questions that allow for the development of detail through effective improvisation.

- Questions that build on from previous responses provide the person in the hot-seat with opportunities to grow a coherent character.


The following questions can be used as an effective starting point for hot-seating.

1    What do you like about yourself?
2    What don't you like about yourself?
3    What is your greatest fear?
4    What is the trait in others that you dislike?
5    What is your greatest regret?
6    What is your idea of perfect happiness?
7    What would most improve the quality of your life?
8    How would you like to be remembered?


You could also try the following variations on hot-seating:

- hot-seat multiple characters together
- raise the stakes of the questioning by setting it up as an interrogation
- swap characters and get students to question their 'own' character
- pause improvisations and get other characters to hot-seat one of the characters while everyone remains in role. (This is an adaptation of Boal's Forum Theatre.)

## Scales and masks

Jacques Lecoq used scales and masks frequently in his teaching at École internationale de théâtre. Both can be used to impose variation and develop clarity of character. A particularly useful scale is Lecoq's Seven Levels of Tension:

1   Lifeless/jellyfish/comatose

2   Carefree/dreamy/laidback

3   Neutral/no story or objective/no emotion

4   Alert/curious/ready

5   Uncertain/suspense/reactive

6   Passionate/inflamed/fervent

7   Despairing/constricted/petrified

Give students one of the levels at a time while they are moving around the space and ask them to discover the level of tension physically. This technique can be used throughout the course and needs to be fully understood and experienced before being used to explore characters in devising. The levels of tension can be used to determine a character's dominant level. Once the level of tension is determined through physical exploration, the posture, mannerisms and body language of a character can be transformed. Placing these characters into improvisations can illuminate physical details that can be honed for performance. Furthermore, exploring the relationship between tensions can trigger ideas for scenes.

Scales can be used freely when devising and can be used in a similar way to a volume control by the teacher or a member of the group, to explore variations. Seven is a good maximum as it gives a clear mid-point with enough subtly of variation.

Potential scales (from 1–7) include:

- aggression scale
- control scale
- honesty scale
- warmth scale
- happiness scale
- irritability scale.

These scales are just a few possibilities that can be imposed on character explorations.

If students struggle to make clear differences in their physical characterisation, neutral masks can be used to prevent inhibitions. Mask work is grounded in particular 'rules':

- Always put on and remove the mask facing away from the audience.
- Don't touch the mask when wearing it.
- Never move or talk with your 'normal' self, whilst in the mask.

Neutral masks can be used for individual exploration or within group improvisations. Having one character in a neutral mask whilst the others speak and interact as normal without masks could serve to highlight and exaggerate physical characteristics.

The masks of Commedia dell'Arte or Trestle masks could be applied to characters discovered in research or used for improvisations. Using these character masks provides students with a starting point for physical performances that could then inform future improvisations or scenes for the final performance.

**Documenting character**

**Audio/visual:** The use of video to document characters and relationships provides a record of the students' physical and intellectual choices. These can provide quick reference points for recreating these characters at a later stage.

**Role on the wall:** Developing on-going character collages can be an exceptional way for research and practice to meet. These collages can be ever-present in the devising space, and images and text can be added throughout the process. There should be a sense of the character's perspective of themselves (inner characteristics) and a sense of how other characters perceive them (outer characteristics).

# 6. Discovering genre, style and form

In drama, genre is similarities in content and structure leading to recognisable features for an audience.

The style and form is how the content and structure are presented.

| Genre | Style and form |
| --- | --- |
| Tragedy | Mask |
| Comedy | Mime |
| Tragi-comedy | Promenade |
| Farce | Naturalism |
| Documentary theatre | Symbolism |
| Morality play | Agitprop |
| Melodrama | Grand Guignol |
| Episodic drama | Site-specific theatre |
| | Verbatim theatre |
| | Physical theatre |

The work needs to develop out of the stimulus and the research before fixing the genre, style and form. If the explorative and research phases are done fully then students will be able to identify outcomes and patterns that determine genre, style and form. In devised theatre this will almost always lead to a mixture of different genres, styles and forms.

Students should look at the work they have created in order to determine genre, style and form. This is where the use of carefully organised video footage of explorative work, as well as detailed notes, can aid the search for patterns.

Below are some questions to help students identify features in their work.

## Genre

### Tragedy

- Is the work serious in terms of tone and subject matter?
- Does the work make you feel a mixture of pity and fear?
- Does it feature someone's fall from power/influence?
- Is there a sense of cause and effect in your work?
- Does your work deal with weighty issues?
- Do events happen over a set period of time (around 24 hours)?

### Comedy

- Is the work funny?
- Do you see there being a happy ending?
- Do irony, sarcasm and wit feature in your work?
- Is the work satirical – that is, does it make fun of the behaviour or immorality of others?

### Tragi-comedy

- Does your work contain elements of both tragedy and comedy?

### Farce

- Does your work contain elements of slapstick?
- Is there an emphasis on comic plot over character?
- Does lots of your work closely link together to lead to an outrageous comic climax?
- Do the situations you have created seem comically unlikely?

### Documentary theatre

- Is your work about real people?
- Does your work place importance on knowledge and fact over plot and character?
- Does your work use pre-existing non-fiction texts?
- Is there an issue that ties your work together?
- Does your work promote a response from the audience? (*See Verbatim theatre on page 16.*)

### Morality play

- Is your work allegorical or symbolic, i.e. does it include characters and/or themes that represent something else?
- Are the characters you have created easily categorised into virtues (faith, hope, charity, justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude) or vices (pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, lust)?
- Is there a 'main' character in your work that represents every human being?

### Melodrama

- Does you work sensationalise events?
- Are the characters emotionally exaggerated?
- Does your work follow conventions?
- Is there a sense of poetic justice, a fair distribution of reward and punishment for behaviour?

### Episodic theatre

- Does your work contain many separate events connected by theme, place or character?
- Have you created many short scenes that take place across a large amount of time?
- Does your work contain lots of mini-plots?
- Is there a mixture of serious and comic scenes?

## Style and form

### Mask

- Is physical action and character reinforced by masks as the primary form of communicating mood/emotion to an audience?

### Mime

- Is there an absence of spoken language?
- Is there an emphasis on exaggerated gesture, facial expression, spatial behaviour (proxemics), levels and body language?

### Promenade

- Does your work need to guide the audience through a series of performance spaces for them to experience the production?

### Naturalism

- Is your work realistic?
- Is there a focus on human behaviour?
- Are the character thoughts and actions influenced by their setting and situation?
- Do the conflicts in the work lead to life-changing significance?
- Is there an emphasis on everyday speech and movement?

### Symbolism

- Is your work fantastical or mythological?
- Is mood and atmosphere central to the communication of meaning?
- Is there a clear sense of connection between the images and ideas in your work but a lack of precise meaning?

### Agitprop

- Does your work challenge your audience?
- Are the persuasive techniques of propaganda common in your work?
- Is there an overt political message in your work?
- Are slogans important in your work?

### Site-specific theatre

- Does your work respond directly to the space in which it is being performed?
- Is the performance space an important 'character' in the work?

### Verbatim theatre

- Are the words used in your work only taken from real life stories? (*See Documentary Theatre on page 14.*)

### Grand Guignol

- Are the conventions of horror used to terrify your audience?

### Physical theatre

- Is physicality and movement used to compliment more naturalistic/realistic scenes?

Identifying the style and form appropriate to the students' work will not always be easy. If there are features of many different styles and forms, it is an exciting opportunity for them to create something new and wholly appropriate to the content. Equally, it may be that a particular style and form stands out, and that by focussing in on it the work benefits from depth and clarity of communication. Students should be adventurous, but whatever choices they make they must be allowed the opportunity to access all the marks.

# 7. Developing structure

The process of structuring work is closely linked to choosing genre, style and form. As with the exploration phase, it is best to get groups on their feet and moving rather than sat down in discussions. Encourage groups to test sequences of material and discover how one moment can impact on another when juxtaposed in performance.

The basic principles that should apply to all choices are:

- a strong and engaging opening
- detailed development of character, theme or idea
- an ending that reinforces the ideas of the whole performance.

This could be all that the students need to piece the work together. However, students should be encouraged to explore different structures and how they impact on the material's meaning.

It can be useful to introduce this phase of devising as being similar to the work of a film editor: it is the film editor's responsibility to take the material

shot by the director and cinematographer and translate it into a finished film. In this way the students should discover through-lines and connections in the work generated in the practical exploration phase. Complicité approach this phase by returning to recordings of material and notes and writing each moment created on to a small card. A sentence summary and a reference to the location of the recording or notes is sufficient. They then physically lay out the cards in a sequence, with some cards laid side-by-side to indicate the combination of two moments into a single event. This could be done by all individuals in the group and then the different versions of the material tested in performance. Again, nothing should be dismissed without experimentation. The group can then decide on a final sequence that is ready for rehearsal. Keeping photographic and video evidence, as well as notes of this experience, will benefit the development of the portfolio.

Potential narrative options to help guide students are described below.

## Classic narrative — *Aristotle*

- One action logically and convincingly triggers the next action.
- There is a shift from one extreme to another, i.e. from misery to happiness or happiness to misery.
- There is a discovery that moves the protagonist from ignorance to knowledge.

## Standard narrative — *Freytag*
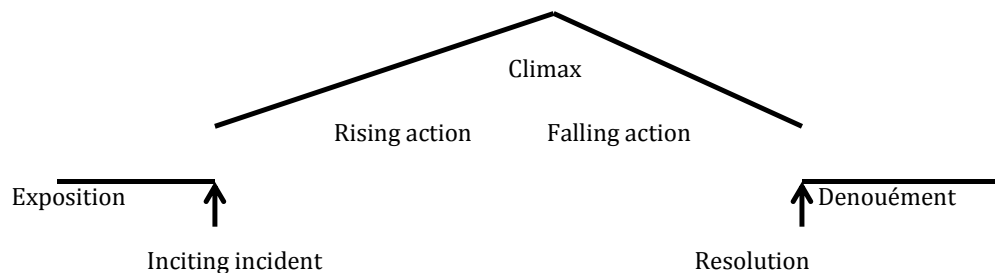


1   Exposition = Setting the scene
2   Inciting incident = Event that triggers action
3   Rising action = Building excitement/tension
4   Climax = The most significant and exciting event
5   Falling action = Events that happen because of the climax
6   Resolution = The character understands
7   Denouément = Clarity of events/theme

**Episodic narrative — *Brecht***

- A story is presented in fragments to represent how the storyteller perceives events, and not how they actually happened.
- The choice of order is determined by theme instead of time.
- The characters are representational.
- Ideas must be taken from reality and the imagination.
- Individual episodes must hold their own individual meaning.
- Contradictions between individual episodes must remain and not be reordered, to make it easier for the audience. This is more like real life.
- Together the episodes will stimulate a wealth of ideas.
- There is no belief that one word or action leads to another. Nothing must be included that is simply a functional component part that leads to a neat ending.

These different theoretical ideas should be explored practically and they can be used to solve problems or guide the selection of material. Inevitably there will be a variety of different narratives and no one choice is correct. The chosen narrative structure should aid in the clarity of communication with the audience, whether communication of story, plot, theme or idea.

# 8. Refining the performance

Whatever choices have been made about content, style, form and structure, it is important to give enough time to refining the performance. This is the phase when students work on sharpening the practical skills of their fully formed performance.

The original aims and objectives should be used as a guide for honing the vocal, movement and spatial choices.

Creating a script of a performance can be extremely useful for focusing students on their performance and what they are trying to communicate to an audience. As an addition to a script you could use a video recording of the most recent performances.

The students must consider how their voice and movement choices support their aims and objectives, as well as how they establish character, place, theme or idea. Complex meaning and subsequent tension and drama arises when voice and movement choices contrast with the meaning of words spoken or established norms. Students must make careful decisions here and always contemplate playing the opposite.

**Vocal skills**

- **Articulation —** emphasis on consonants or vowels
- **Pitch —** continuum of high to low quality
- **Pace —** continuum of fast to slow delivery
- **Pause —** choice of breaks in speech and their length
- **Tone —** choice of the mood or emotion of delivery
- **Inflection —** choice of stress or emphasis
- **Volume —** continuum of loud to quiet

**Movement skills**

- **Pace** – continuum of fast to slow
- **Direction** – up/down, side to side, backwards/forwards
- **Size** – continuum of big to small
- **Control** – continuum of stable to unstable
- **Orientation** – choice of where the body is facing


**Non-verbal communication**

- Spatial behaviour (proxemics)
- Facial expression
- Gesture
- Posture
- Touch and bodily contact


It would be time-consuming to go through each moment and make systematic decisions about voice, movement and non-verbal communication. Mostly these decisions will be made intuitively, and a fuller exploration of students' range and variations can take place earlier in the course. However, the above lists can act as a troubleshooting guide if there is a moment that is not working.

Dialogue can be refined most easily through the paring down of the amount of speech. Leaving things for the audience to decode can be more rewarding than being told everything. If there are issues with clunky dialogue then ask the students to speak in as few words as possible, overlap lines and leave pregnant pauses.


# 9. Rehearsing the performance

Time must be given to repeating the final performance. This should be focused on honing the performance, rather than making major changes to the piece.

Use this time to integrate technical elements. Adding sound, music and lighting should only be done if it supports the work of the performers. Some candidates will be assessed on their design contribution instead of performance and these candidates must fully engage with the devising process and ensure that their contribution compliments the ideas of the performance candidates. If there is no design candidate the performance candidates do not have to focus on adding technical elements to the detriment of their marked performance.

Here is a list of areas that can be focussed on in rehearsal:

- **Clarity** – make sure decisions of content, style and character are clear for the audience.
- **Energy** – engage fully with each moment of the performance and be precise.
- **Pace** – the pace of the performance must reflect what and how you want to communicate with your audience.

# 10. Previewing the performance

The final stage of the devising process is the preview. This should be held a week before the final assessed performance, with the aim of establishing audience response, leaving time to make any appropriate changes. Using a brief questionnaire can be extremely useful; it needs to ask specific questions about moments in relation to the communication of the aims and objectives. These responses will complement the 'sense' and 'feeling' the performers have during the performance and will lead to a period of final adjustments or strengthening in preparation for the final performance itself.

# Suggested reading

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