



Drama

GCSE

Drama

Writing Scripts

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Writing Scripts

Introduction

This topic pack aims to provide teachers with an overview of the place writing scripts has within the OCR GCSE; provide suggestions about how to approach writing with your students and also give advice on what assessment evidence is required.

Scripted work forms an essential part of any drama education. We may ask students to work with existing scripts or to develop their own; however, it is important that students have opportunities to explore a range of examples and approaches, especially when looking at good practice to inform their own work.

To 'script' a scene or a play requires a written documentation of the dialogue and action to be brought to life as intended by the writer; the whole concept of writing can be a daunting or even an off-putting thought for some students who feel they lack these literary skills. So when approaching this with your students remind them that a script is designed to be spoken aloud and that they are able to rehearse the skills needed for script writing through practical exploration and improvisation. During the course of this pack the aim is to explore several ways that the process of writing can be developed from practical origins. In addition the pack will also provide a guide to the key knowledge and understanding that is relevant for preparing students for writing scripts.

Context and Assessment

From Concept to Creation: The Deviser Brief

This requires the candidate to write an additional scene for the script extract or write a script that uses the stimulus item as its inspiration. The script will be set out accordingly to see the conventions of the script writing, with stage directions and any relevant staging notes. The script will need to be rounded off with suitable closure of the scene. It should be a full scene and will be between 6–12 sides of A4. Candidates must write and explain the context of their individual script using the following headings:

- Period it is set in
- Genre
- Suggested performance style
- Any social, cultural and historical connection.

The candidate will make a presentation to the examiner, no longer than 3 minutes in length, explaining and demonstrating their script ideas. This might include: link to the stimulus, overall intention, intended audience, use of performance space and type.

Preparation

Essential knowledge and understanding

In order to fully prepare students with their own script writing, you may wish to consider some information sessions on key knowledge and conventions as well as developing the stylistic range in their knowledge.

Areas you should consider:

- Purpose of script in rehearsal (for actor, for director, for designer)
- Features of a script and their functions
- Traditional layout and recognised conventions
- Range of stylistic and structural approaches.

Purpose of script in rehearsal

The purpose and importance of a script can vary depending on the style or genre you are working within. It can also depend on the approach of the director. However, for students at GCSE we should consider a script as being a support tool for actors, directors and designers. With this in mind, students can anticipate the kind of information they need to place within a script.

For directors:

Information regarding the traffic on stage, or basic blocking;

Insight to characters' given circumstances to support understanding of characterisation and relationships;

Context of the scene (time/place) to help understand the external factors upon the characters.

For actors:

Information on characters – for example age, gender, race, background, relationships;

Emotional or movement indicators to aid performance choices.

For designers:

Context of the scene (time/place) to support decisions on light, set, sound and costume;

Essential props or set to support stylistic choices or to help drive narrative.

For assessment, students may wish to look at how their script would support these roles in rehearsal, alongside the headings given for the 'Deviser Brief' (above).

Features of a script and their functions

The two main features to consider when writing a script are dialogue and stage directions. Students should understand how both elements are equally important and that each have their own functions.

Students should be aware that **stage directions** are there to:

- Direct 'traffic' on stage (entrance and exits)
- Give emotional indications for certain lines
- Provide direction for essential action
- Provide information regarding the semiotics of the scene/play.

Students should be aware that dialogue is there to:

- Provide exposition for an audience (who, where, what, when and why)
- Drive the narrative(s) of the scene/play
- Expose character traits, motivations and relationships
- Expose subtext (a challenge, but a good way to stretch able students).

Suggested supporting tasks:

Stage direction exercise (Duration: 30 mins-1 hour)

Find a short script that uses stage directions effectively to provide vital information about the context and characters in the play.

Split your class in two and ask one half to rehearse the script as it is (with stage directions); ask the other half to rehearse the script but provide them with a version where the stage directions are omitted.

Spotlight performances from each half of the class. Discuss what the context was and the perception of the characters, noting where there are similarities (hopefully amongst the versions with stage directions) and where there are notable differences (potentially versus, and amongst the performances with no stage directions).

This can then lead into a purposeful discussion about the function of stage directions and their importance; it could also link to conversations about playwrights' intentions being demonstrated through a script.

Case study on Chekhov's 'Three Sisters' (Duration: 15 mins - 30 mins)

As a class, read and unpick the information given at the very start of Chekhov's work. What do the stage directions reveal? How does the play set the scene and create the mood between characters before dialogue is spoken? How useful is the information for directors/actors/designers?

JIM: What's it to do with you?

EDDIE: I forgot my dinner money today. And I'm hungry.

(EDDIE grabs JIM's lunch and runs off.)

JIM: Hey you, come back!

(Enter the JANITOR.)

JANITOR: What's wrong, son?

Notice the following features of the **layout** of a play script:

- **Title**
- **Scene:** say where and when the scene is set
- **Characters:** say which characters are in the scene at the start. You should give any information that we need to know about them but keep this brief. This might be their age, occupation or relationship with another character.

Any characters who come into a scene after the start of it should be introduced by '**Enter**'. Use '**Exit**' if the character leaves.

The name of the character who is speaking should be written at the left-hand side of the page (in the margin). It is a good idea to print it in capitals. Then write a colon:

Stage directions should be written in brackets.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/standard/english/lit_form/script/revision/1/

To summarise

- Characters' names written on left followed by a colon
- Include when characters enter or exit the scene
- Stage directions should be written in brackets
- Include essential information at the start of a scene (title- if necessary; where and when the scene is set; who the characters are in the scene).

In many scripts stage directions are written in italics and bracketed within dialogue. This is also allowed formatting for scripts.

Suggested supporting tasks

Converting Prose to Script (Duration: 30 - 45 mins)

Give students a short piece of dialogue as prose, or an extract from a novel that includes speech between characters. Using the above layout instructions ask students to convert the text you have given them into a script.

Turning Improvisation into Script (Duration: 45 mins - 3 hours, depending on length of scene and repetition of exercise)

Asking students to simply sit down and write a script can be daunting. Instead, ask them to rehearse a scene first through improvisation. Ideally they should have an idea of the context and the characters first and use other students to improvise potential dialogue and action.

This process should be recorded using a video camera. After an initial scene has been created, the 'writer/deviser' should watch the scene back and pick out what they liked/didn't like in the actors' improvisation. Following feedback, the scene should be repeated with changes/additions. This process should continue until the writer has a scene they are happy with, or at least a very strong starting point. The final footage can then be used as a plan or draft that the deviser can watch back, bit by bit, and write the script to.

This is a great way to engage students with the script writing process in a practical way, and the process can be repeated again using the first draft of the script until the deviser is happy with both the stage directions and dialogue that has been produced.

Range of stylistic and structural approaches

Much of what has been covered so far applies to more of a **naturalistic** style of play writing; however, much contemporary writing and many examples students may well find themselves do not necessarily follow these patterns. To give students a depth and range when approaching the topic, it may also be beneficial (especially for the more able) to look at more abstract forms of script.

One example you may wish to show students is Paul King's 'Arbeit Macht Frei' from his collection 'Ten GCSE Plays'. This script has a very definite context, very few stage directions but is able to very clearly evoke character and context.

Example extract:

Actor 1: Each moment of life is precious; each precious moment is packed with the hope that there will be more precious moments. You tell yourself that there is always hope until the moments are no more. I lived in a nice house.

Actor 2: We had a car. We went for picnics in the country.

Actor 3: I went to a good school. I was expected to do well.

Actor 4: I had many friends. We laughed and we played.

Actor 5: I was good at sport. I was in the school team.

Actor 6: I was happy. All my family were happy. Then came the war, and with the war came the Nazis.

Actor 1: If we had known the future maybe we could have done something.

Actor 2: We did not know where the journey ended.

Actor 3: We were travellers without a map.

Actor 4: And if we had known, who would have believed us? Who would have thought it possible?

Actor 5: They made us take small steps.

Actor 6: From each step there was no going back.

Source: Arbeit Macht Frei (p55) in Ten GCSE Plays (2001), Cambridge: Pearson Publishing

Suggested supporting tasks

Group Improvisation - Creating Dialogue from a Theme (Duration: 30 mins - 1 hour)

To support a more abstract approach to script writing, ask students to come up with short lines or phrases that could be pieces of dialogue around a theme or an event. For example: A Crash; The 7/7 Bombings; Imprisonment; or even a link to the text you are using within the unit of work.

Ask students to document their contribution on an A4 piece of paper in large writing and line up all of the dialogue across your classroom. The students should then, in turn, read their line. As a class they can go on to move lines to different points in the 'script', as well as cut up lines, join some together with the same voice or cut them out completely where they don't fit.

By the end of the session you should have a script that evokes the themes in the original stimulus, as well as captures the potential for several voices or characters. As with the previous practical exercise, sections of this (or all of it) can be rehearsed as improvisation and videoed; and then the same process of editing and shaping can begin until the script writer is satisfied with the outcome.

Assessment: Evidence and examples

Assessment within the 'Deviser' role (Concept to Creation) will involve students:

- Producing a script to the required length (between 6-12 sides of A4) and making use of the conventions of script writing;
- Writing a supporting document (Working Record) that explains that context of their script in terms of period, genre, style and social/cultural/historical connections (700-1400 words);
- Explaining their decisions and script ideas to the examiner in a presentation no longer than three minutes. This could include how the script links to the stimulus, what their overall

intention or aims are, what the intended audience is and/or how the script would make use of performance space and staging type.



Resource 1

CALIBAN’S CURSE

With all the spirits of the earth,
 With snakes and slugs and spinning spiders,
 I curse Prospero.
 With crawling ants and
 With
 I curse Prospero.

May his mouth speak gibberish,
 May his eyes see
 May his ears hear
 May his tongue taste
 May Prospero’s heart feel
 And his mind think
 I call on the demons and
 To



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