

Drama



KING EDWARD VI COLLEGE
STOURBRIDGE



King Edward VI College

**Drama & Theatre
Studies Starter
Pack**

Welcome!

Welcome to the drama department at King Edward's! The aim of this booklet is to introduce you to some aspects of the course and to prepare you for studying with us at A level. You'll find plenty of information about the course in the accompanying handbook and PowerPoint presentation but in this booklet I have put together some work for you to complete. Blue text contains a hyperlink. Just click to be transported to any online resource.

Some of the activities are compulsory whilst others are designed to keep your mind stimulated over the coming weeks and months. It is important not to let your mind go stale. Success in drama requires a sharp analytical mind and a willingness to grapple with big ideas creatively.

I wish you and yours the very best of health and I look forward to meeting you in September. In the meantime, join us on Twitter: @KingEds_Drama.

We are always reflecting on our provision and practice. The information contained in this booklet is accurate as of April 2021 but we reserve the right to make alterations to reading lists, set texts and to the way in which we structure our course. A detailed course review takes place during May of every academic year.

Shaun Passey, drama and theatre studies subject leader

shaun.passey@kedst.ac.uk



Compulsory Work

Preparing for A level: speaking the same language



You will be expected to use key terms when discussing your performance ideas, directing other students, and writing about work you have imagined, created or seen. Some of you will have studied BTEC or GCSE drama and some of you will be new to the subject (but not new to drama and theatre!) We all need to be able to speak the 'same language' and have a shared understanding of theatre vocabulary. The following tasks are designed to introduce some key terminology. You may be familiar with

some or all of these words, in which case this will be a valuable revision exercise. But if you haven't studied drama before, you will need to learn to use these terms accurately and with confidence.

TASK 1: Define the following vocal and physical terms.

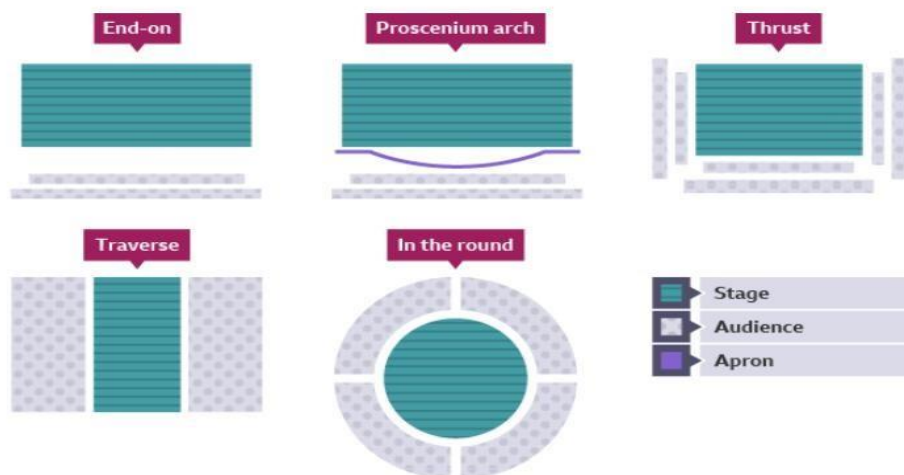
Vocal skill	Definition
Volume	
Pitch	
Tone	
Inflection/ intonation	
Pause	
Pace/tempo	
Accent	
Stress/emphasis	

Physical skill	Definition
Gesture	
Posture	
Stance	
Gait	
Facial expression	
Spatial relationships	
Tableau(x) (x is plural, i.e. more than one tableau)	

You may find the following webpage useful:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zfx947h>

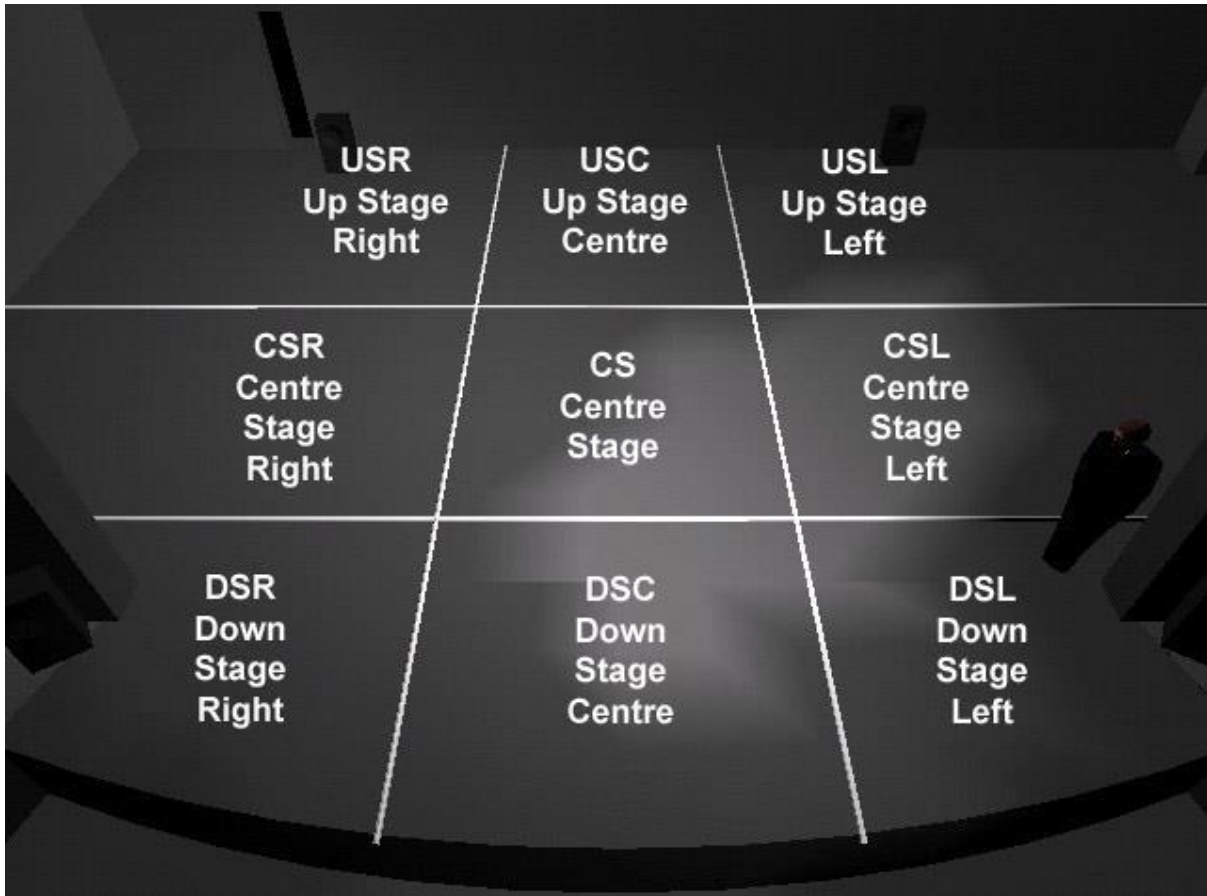
TASK 2: In the 21st century, you may encounter any of the following shapes and configurations of performance space as a member of a theatre audience. Each performance space configures the audience differently and each has its own advantages and practical challenges. Make sure you can identify each configuration and describe some of their advantages or disadvantages. You could consider the following questions: what challenges might each configuration pose to directors and actors? What kind of theatrical experience would each one create for the audience? Which spaces are more immersive and involving for audiences?



You may find the following webpage useful:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zjwp2sg/revision/1>

TASK 3: Throughout the course you will receive plenty of direction but you will also be expected to give direction to your peers. Understanding the various positions on stage is therefore very important. During rehearsals, a director will work with performers to decide where the actors will stand and move to during the scene (a process called **blocking**) and will refer to nine separate positions on stage. Everyone working on a production needs to understand these positions to know where people and objects should be at any time. Make sure you can identify the nine staging positions and their abbreviations.

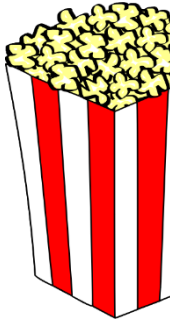


You may find the following webpage useful:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zm2yt39/revision/1>

'The play's the thing': analysing and evaluating a performance

One of the most important qualities we are looking for in a drama student is a genuine passion for theatre. So this next assignment should not come as a disappointment!



TASK 4: Watch a theatre production and write a 1000-word response to the following question:

Write about how one performer used their performance skills to reveal different key aspects of their character at three particular moments in one production that you have seen and assess the effectiveness of these moments.

Here are the steps you should take:

○ Watch a play!

- I would like you to watch one of the RSC productions on Digital Theatre Plus. Both *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth* are available and it is likely you will know one of these plays from your studies in GCSE English literature. Other RSC productions are available if you would prefer to branch out.

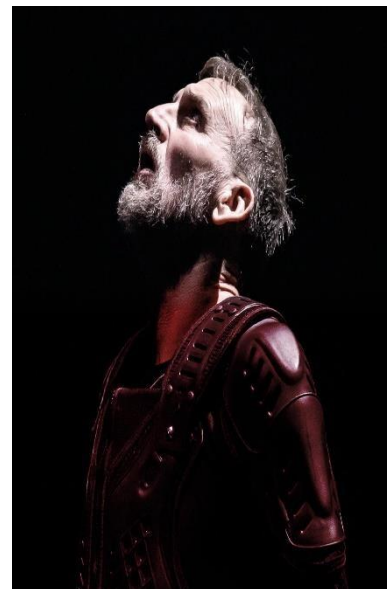
Link: <https://edu.digitaltheatreplus.com>

Log-in details:

Username: digitaltheatre_431

Password: dtcar@2421

○ Write some notes on the production.



- Once you have selected an actor, identify three moments when a key aspect of their character was revealed to the audience. For example, you could choose the moment Romeo falls for Juliet, the moment he kills Tybalt, and his suicide at the end of the play. Practise describing the moments as fully as you can – *vividly* and *precisely*. Jot down your observations and note your personal response. How did you feel/respond in these moments? Watch the moments back as many times as you like until you feel your notes are detailed enough.

Here's a guide to writing and structuring the essay itself:

This exercise does not presume any prior knowledge. Do your best – that's all we ask – and apply what you do know as well as what you learn from this guide. We will look carefully at all essays and use them to organise and plan our teaching. We want to know how best to support you in your written work.

1. Introduction.

In the first person ('I'), tell us: what you watched, the playwright, the director, and the venue. E.g. 'I watched a production of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* directed by Polly Findlay at the RSC, Stratford-upon-Avon.'

Identify the actor you are going to focus on. Tell us who they played and what aspects of the character you are going to discuss.

Aspects of character might include, for example: personality traits; changes in attitude toward other characters; emotions; reactions to events; altered circumstances; or character relationships.

2. Select three key moments when the actor communicated a different aspect of their character.

Here's the suggested structure for *each* of your moments:

- Identify the aspect of the character in an opening sentence. E.g. 'Niamh Cusack captured Lady Macbeth's strong and determined nature.'
- Now put the moment into context. Give me clear details. E.g. 'This was evidenced in her first exchange with Macbeth after he has met the witches. In this scene, she questions Macbeth's masculinity and belittles him in order to convince him to kill the king.'

The underlined sentences clearly tell me enough about what is happening to appreciate the analysis that follows.

- Describe the vocal and physical delivery using appropriate vocal and physical terminology (see the first task in this booklet to help). E.g. 'When she told him to 'look up clear, to alter favour ever is to fear', she lifted Macbeth's chin up harshly and delivered the lines in an angry tone, looking directly into his eyes as if boring into him. His response was interrupted with a snappy 'leave all the rest to me' in a stern and powerful tone as she swished off down the corridor away from him.'

The underlined sentences reveal considerable practical detail. This will be rewarded. Try to quote key lines – words/phrases if not complete sentences – so that you can describe the delivery as precisely as possible. If you turn the subtitles on, you will be able to quote lines fairly accurately.

- Now evaluate. Why was this successful? You should refer to your personal response. E.g. 'This successfully communicated Lady Macbeth's obsession with and ambition for power and influence, which is key part of her characterisation. I was disturbed by the rendition of Lady Macbeth's uncompromising and commanding nature, which made the character's later

mental instability all the more credible. This was a very believable and gripping performance and kept me engaged.'

Notice here that the evaluation is purposeful; it offers a sophisticated justification for the judgement and reveals a confident understanding of the character and what the play demands.

Some tips on writing about performances:

- You must state the name of the character and the name of the actor.
- Do not talk about the character as if they are real – it's the *actor* bringing the character to life we are interested in. You need to describe the actor's choices and how they helped to communicate character:

× **Lady Macbeth** showed her despair through slumped posture, shallow breathing and heavy gait.

Niamh Cusack captured Lady Macbeth's despair through her slumped posture, shallow breathing and heavy gait.

- Never refer to actors by first names only. Full names or surnames, please. E.g. **Niamh Cusack** or **Cusack** but NOT Niamh!
- Always say what the *effect* was. E.g. 'Her choked delivery suggested Lady Macbeth's inability to compose herself'.
- Pepper your answer with acting terminology and be as vivid as you can you in your description of how these techniques were used:
 - ✦ Vocal skills: volume, pitch, pace, pause, emphasis on words, accent, tone
 - ✦ Physical skills: gesture, posture, gait, stance, facial expression, eye contact
 - ✦ Describe these skills precisely. Don't just crowbar them into your essay. Think about what you are trying to describe and imagine you are describing this to someone who has never seen the production. E.g. "Lady Macbeth's inability to compose herself was shown through Cusack's choked vocal delivery. Her pitch was high and trembling whilst the constant pauses demonstrated Lady Macbeth's attempt to fight back the tears.'
 - ✦ Comment on how the actor used his/her voice, body and positioning to communicate character. How were lines delivered? Angrily? Mournfully? Use crisp and descriptive adverbs and adjectives in your review.

3. For the final paragraph, write an overall evaluative conclusion about the actor's performance and its impact on you as a member of the audience.

Format & layout

- Please word process your essay just in case you will need to submit your essay electronically.
- The answer should not exceed 1000 words and should not be under 900 words.
- A word count must be provided at the end of the essay.
- Write your name in the top left hand corner of the page. Write out the title at the top of the page.
- Use a sensible and clear pt 12 font.
- Organise your response clearly and logically into paragraphs.

Deadline

- First lesson week beginning Monday 13th September.

Other Fun Suggestions

Keeping it practical

Here are some suggestions to keep active and to exercise your performance skills.

1. Developing physical skills: Vamos Theatre Company specialises in mask work. With the face covered and the voice silenced, the emphasis is on the body. The physical performance of the actor is important no matter what play you are doing and what style you are working in so why not work through Vamos' [tutorials](#) on mask work and refine your physical expression. Create a mask of your own (a paper plate would do!) and practice to the camera on your phone or in front of the mirror.
2. Give Shakespeare a go! This [site](#) has a number of monologues by Shakespeare you could try. The [following series](#) is an excellent introduction to playing Shakespeare with plenty of practical exercises and demonstrations by notable RSC actors (including some young famous faces!) Hours of expertise here.
3. Make a puppet and learn how to make it come to life! Click [here](#) to find out more. Why not film your puppet and share it with us on Twitter?
4. Learn some warm-up exercises [here](#) and practise them at home.
5. Have a go at some of Kneehigh's creative [tasks](#).

Get lost!

The National Theatre has a YouTube channel with tonnes of informative videos. Why not get lost them [all](#)?

Swot up on your theatre history and theatre movements

YouTube channel [CrashCourse](#) offers bite-size videos on theatre history and important movements in theatre, for example expressionism, epic theatre and absurdism (to name just three). Watch these informative videos and make notes on them.

Preparing for the written paper: read and research your set texts

We study two plays for the written paper. They are *Jerusalem* by Jez Butterworth and *Metamorphosis* by Steven Berkoff. Read these set plays.

Then research each play's historical context, genre, style and themes. Search for reviews of productions to find out more about the plays' themes and to find out how the plays have been staged.

Learn about different theatre practitioners

What is theatre? Different practitioners have different ideas. Spend some time watching and researching their work. Discover the work and practices of some new theatre practitioners you may not have studied at GCSE:

- Kneehigh and Emma Rice
- Theatre de Complicite
- Headlong Theatre
- Steven Berkoff
- Frantic Assembly
- Max Stafford-Clark
- Katie Mitchell
- Marianne Elliott

Each company/practitioner has a website you can explore. What makes each company/practitioner different and special? What ideas do they have about theatre and theatrical experiences? What key features define their work?

Here are some 20th century practitioners who helped to expand our understanding of theatre:

- Bertolt Brecht
- Antonin Artaud

Research these stalwarts. Their influence can be seen in all kinds of theatre we see today.

Brush up on your GCSE knowledge

If you were studying for a GCSE in drama, you might like to brush up on the knowledge and the skills you acquired. You can carry this into your A level studies. The [BBC bitesize website](#) offers useful revision notes on all aspects of the course, including design.

Read, read, read! Useful books and suggested reading Below

are some suggestions to chomp your way through.

- Why not work your way through [these](#) 25 excellent contemporary plays?
- KE specific reading – AQA revision guide – *AQA Drama & Theatre Studies* by Su Fielder and Pat Friday.
- KE specific reading – our set texts: *Jerusalem* by Jez Butterworth and *Metamorphosis* by Steven Berkoff.
- A good book on directing – *The Director's Craft* by Katie Mitchell
- A good book on acting – *An Actor Prepares* by Konstantin Stanislavski
- Two good books by actors about acting – *Being an Actor* by Simon Callow and *The Year of the King* by Antony Sher
- A good practical book on becoming a better actor – *Actioning and how to do it* by Nick Moseley

Checklist

A summary of things to do before September:

- Read this starter pack, the student handbook and the accompanying PowerPoint.
- Complete all four compulsory tasks in this pack to the best of your ability.
- Make a note of what to bring to lessons and make sure you are equipped (p. 5 of the handbook).
- Make sure you know what is expected in terms of homework and after college rehearsals (p. 13 of the handbook).
- Make sure you have made a note about key dates and have read and understood the department's policy on attending long trips during exam terms (p. 15 of the handbook).
- Make sure you have read and understood the department's expectations (pp. 18-19 of the handbook).
- Make sure you have read and understood the important information about attendance and punctuality (p. 21 of the handbook).

