

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT – SCRIPT ANALYSIS

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The script is the place to start for character development. Build three dimensional characters every time, regardless of the play!



Details in the Dialogue

Facts: Search your dialogue and the dialogue of the other characters for what facts are known and unchangeable about your character. (e.g. gender, name, family members, religion, job) Emotions or opinions are not facts. If the playwright places a fact about your character in the play, that means it's important to them and it should be important to you.

Concrete Assumptions: These are the pieces of information you can assume about your character based on the elements that are not set in stone: emotions, opinions, the way your character talks, the way others talk about your character. Assumptions will change based on the individual actor.

Most Important: Now that you have the details, determine what's the most important piece of information about your character. What's the core detail? How do you play that detail physically and emotionally? Specific physical and emotional action is what will make your character three-dimensional.

Structure

Many actors ignore the structure of their dialogue – all the things that go into a sentence aside from the content. Content is

king, right? What a character says is more important than how they say it, right?

Wrong, wrong, wrong! The structure of a line of dialogue is a direct line of communication between the playwright and the actor. You can learn so much about your character by how they speak: run on sentences, or monosyllabic? Do they use contractions or is every word said in full? Is there slang? Is the character's vocabulary peppered with 10 letter words? Do they understand those words? How is the character's background reflected in the way they talk? Go through your script and define the structure of your character's dialogue. What does the structure say your character's personality?

The most important aspect of analyzing your character's structure is being aware of change. When does the sentence structure change for your character? Does the character move from run on sentences to all of a sudden speaking one word sentences? Does the character move from the past to the present tense at a certain moment? Does the character repeat words? Is the character hiding a secret? Go through your script and be on the lookout for changes in your character's sentence structure.

Stage Directions

It's been said a million times by directors: Ignore the stage directions! And there's a good reason: you want to focus on the text to build your character. But it's a direction that should be taken with a grain of salt. Sometimes, especially with an absurd or non-traditional piece, the stage directions

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are the only place a playwright can pass on important character information. Keep that in mind when you are gathering details on your character.

Character Profile

What do you do when, especially with an absurd or non-traditional piece, there isn't a lot of information in the dialogue for character-building? What if your character doesn't have a name, or repeats the same word or phrase over and over or is symbolic? How do you build a three-dimensional character in that situation?

Fill in the blanks. It's your job as an actor to fill in the missing pieces of information so that your character is as vivid as possible. Don't use the excuse: 'the playwright didn't tell me so I don't have to do anything.' That's the quickest way to presenting a cardboard cutout of a character.

When you don't have the details, create a character profile.

Name – Even if your character doesn't have a real world name, think of one that would suit the actions of the character – everyone knows what a Brittany or a Tiffany type character is, right? Naming your character will make them more solid.

Age – Be specific. A 13-year-old behaves differently than a 19-year-old.

Family – Who makes up their family? If the character is alone, why? What happened to the family? Be specific.

Living Arrangements – Determine where your character lives and how they live. The 'how' is important: are they messy, a neat freak, do they have to share a space with a dozen others, are they homeless? All these details add flesh and bone to your character.

Fear/Secret – Give your character a fear and a secret. Neither of these have to be tragic or over-dramatic. Human beings are made up of the small details.

A dream job – What would be this character's dream job? What's stopping them from getting it?

Favourite Memory/Least Favourite memory/Childhood memory – we all carry around memories. Some of us are frozen from changing or moving forward with life because of a specific memory. 🍷