



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

School
Of
English.



**Devising Original Theatre:
some advice**

Through Theatre, we engage with the world around us in various ways. We read plays and attempt to understand the complexity of characters and plots within the historical, political and cultural contexts in which they were created. We perform these plays on the stage, either in purpose-built theatre buildings or in found spaces, through the implementation of various professional skills that involve acting, directing, choreographing, producing, managing, designing, etc. Doing this might sound quite ambitious when – at the moment – we live in a world that requires us to stay at home and not engage with people outside our own family. However, theatre can offer ways of engaging with the world around you, in your home and garden, or on your daily walks, which can teach you important skills for any future career you might have in mind. The methods of theatre devising allow you to interact with your environment without the need for a professional theatre setting, and, by using skills like observation, research, selection and editing, creative writing and communication, you can create a piece of theatre that can enrich your relationship with the world around you and others further afield.

This year's School of English competition is inviting you to produce a 5-minute creative piece on the theme of contact and/or distance. You can be as creative as you wish, but think about your work as a way of helping you and us to better understand your idea by exploring various different points of view and allowing us to reflect on what your creative voice is offering to the discussion. **ADVICE:** don't cram too many ideas in your piece; focus on one and explore it thoroughly and creatively!

TO BEGIN: Choose your idea and do initial research

Think about aspects of the theme that most inspire you. The best theatre always comes from the things we are most interested in.

MAKE: Make an ideas board as a response to the question. You can do this one of two ways:

1. On paper

Write the question in the middle of a large piece of paper and surround it with all the things it makes you think of, or research related to it. You can include pictures, articles, images from magazines or printed from online, poems, quotes, parts of films or songs.

2. Using the internet

Gather digital content related to your question. Link to video, film, images, articles that you find interesting or thought provoking. Look for visuals that excite you or ideas that take you in new directions.

CREATE: Use your ideas board for inspiration and to help you find an idea you'd like to use in your writing. For writing your performance text, you can use one or a combination of the following methods:

1. Write a set of instructions

You can write instructions for anything and it is possible for them to be meaningful, poignant or sometimes even funny depending on how you choose to write them.

Examples of generating text from instructions:

- Write a 'how to' for being an adult.
- Write a recipe for disaster/hope/growing up.
- Find a set of instructions for becoming a celebrity.
- Write a series of steps for recovering from heartbreak.
- Write a set of instructions for a journey not yet taken.
- Write a set of instructions for behaving correctly/incorrectly in a given situation.

2. Write a list

Lists are an excellent way on generating performance material and of getting to the heart of the issue you would like to explore. They can be long or short, literal or abstract, numbered or open ended. As a moment of performance or just as a way to generate ideas for further exploration in rehearsal, they are an excellent creative tool and have a poetry all of their own.

Examples of generating text from lists:

- Write a list of all the questions you have for the prime minister.
- Write a list of the times you experienced something for the first time.
- Write a list of apologies.
- Write a list of the best days you ever had.
- Write a list of the worst chat up lines.
- Write a list of the things your teachers have said about you.
- Write a list of places in the world you'd like to go.
- Write a list of things you heard on the news in the last week.
- Write a list of the 5 most important lessons you ever learned.

3. Tell a personal story/share a memory

Sometimes it is easier to create performance text by framing your ideas within a significant personal story or a memory that you can share with your audience. The use of personal material can be a really effective way to find greater meaning and depth in the theme you are looking to explore. As you think about the way something has affected you personally you allow others to think about the impact it may have also had on them or the world around them.

When working with personal material it is important that you feel comfortable with whatever story or memory you contribute as part of a creative process and that it feels appropriate and safe to share with an audience. Remember that personal stories can also be small or everyday things and you are under no pressure to draw upon big events that feel private to you.

- Do you remember when... ?
- When I was 3... When I was 10... When I was 15...
- A place I always loved was...
- A TV programme I always wanted to be in is...
- I think I saw/felt injustice when ...
- When I was a child I wanted to be ...
- A smell of home is...
- A sound of home is...

Remember to develop any idea you use to be relevant to the question you are using to make a performance about. All examples here are aimed to help you as you explore your own ideas.

SHARE: Create a video or audio recording (max. 5 minutes) of you performing the text you wrote and share it with us (for details, see <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/english/school-english-prize>).

If you need more inspiration, watch the performance of 'Heartburn' by performing artist Polarbear:
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K2jdmCuvSc&t=102s>).

AND DON'T FORGET: HAVE FUN.

If you are interested in devising, you can start by reading more about methods and exercises in 'A Beginner's Guide to Devising Theatre' by Jess Thorpe and Tashi Gore, published by Methuen Drama (2019)