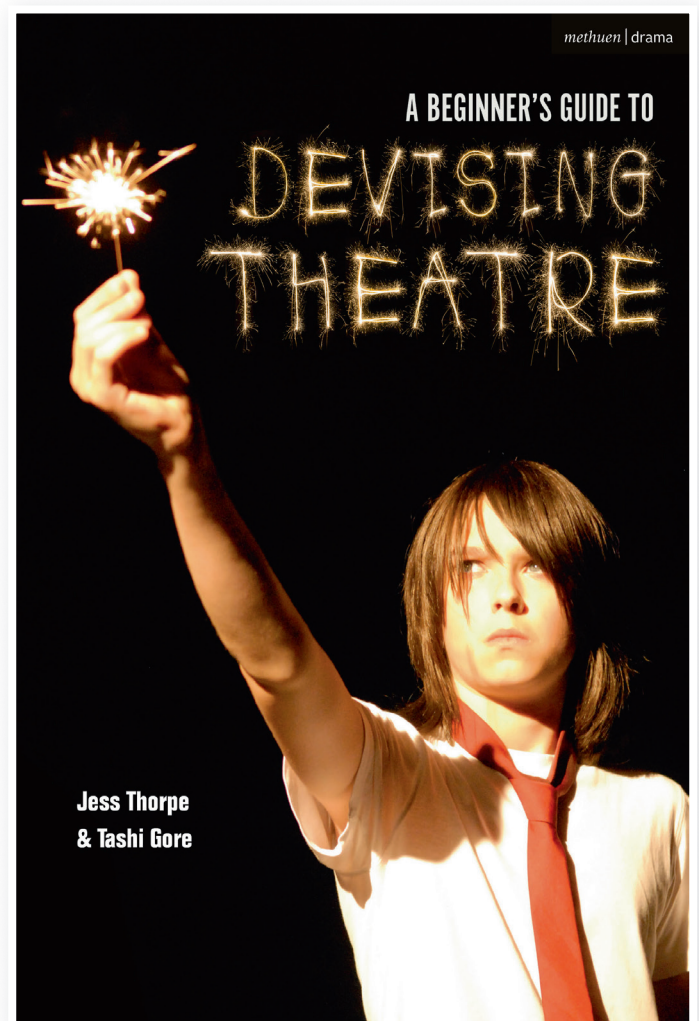


_____ A SIX-SESSION INTRODUCTION TO DEVISING
Making a solo performance

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SESSION 1: STARTING WITH A QUESTION

BOOK EXTRACT

A note about starting with questions not answers

When coming up with a starting point from which to make performance we have always found it most useful to think about starting with questions not answers. To us questions have always felt more democratic; they ask for more than one response, encourage dialogue and consider multiple points of view. Answers are more fixed. More concrete. Answers seem to present a sense that 'this is the way it is'. One view. One version. Definite. With questions we find possibilities where answers close them down. The world (as we have found it) has always been full of questions and it has been our questions that have connected us to others, helped us to share meaning, explore what and who we are. We try to begin making each new performance with a question, or as we have preferred to frame it for ourselves (like many others engaged in learning processes have done before us) as 'an inquiry'.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

IDEA

Pick one of the following inquiry questions as a starting point from which to create your own piece of solo performance. Think about the question that most inspires you; what immediately makes you think? What gives you an initial idea? What feels most relevant to you at this moment in your life? The best theatre always comes from the things we are most interested in.

- What does it feel like to grow up?
- What is my voice as a young person in politics and how can I use it?
- Who do we look up to in society today?

MAKE

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

1. On paper/card

Writing the question in the middle of a large piece of paper 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.

Take time to collage your board and make it as detailed and exciting to look at as you can.

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.

SHARE

Photograph/Upload your ideas board and share with your teacher or with your online classroom. Take it in turns to talk through your ideas and all the things the question has inspired you to think about and research. Take time looking at other boards and leave suggestions for other ideas you might like to contribute.

When we think about creating theatre we so often think about the traditional role of the script and the process of realizing words written by a playwright; a story or sequence already created and given to a director and actors to imagine on stage. However, the process of working with text when devising original theatre can be very different. In this case there is no script and no pre-existing story. We are the authors of this brand new piece of work and it requires our imagination to get it going. We will write the text and it will be up to us to find the words that best express our ideas and communicate exactly what it is that we want to say. There are so many ways to approach the writing of text for performance that the process can sometimes be overwhelming. We have always found it useful to offer groups we work with the choice to channel their ideas through a number of suggested conventions. In our experience this has served to offer an initial inspiration and stimulus that has opened up the creative process and allowed ideas to begin to flow more easily.

A note about using the inquiry question

Before we explore each of these conventions in turn it is important to remember that the best way to frame writing tasks is by using the theme or inquiry question that underpins your show. In this way it might not make sense to lift these ideas straight from the page (which of course you are welcome to do) before you have first considered how they fit within what it is your show is looking to explore. Once you are clear about your starting point it should then be relatively easy to alter and adapt these suggestions to support your own creative process and help generate the kind of material that will deepen and inform the work you are making.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

MAKE

Choose one of the following three ways to approach writing a piece of your own text for performance. Use your ideas board for inspiration and to help you find an idea you'd like to use in your writing.

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 perhaps one of our most loved writing conventions. They are an effective and often beautiful way of getting right to the heart of something really quickly and focusing on a central idea. Lists can be framed in so many ways. 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 people that should not be forgotten.
- 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 best songs about love.
- Write a list of the things your teachers have ever said about you.
- Write a list of significant dates.
- 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

When devising performance it can often be useful to draw upon our own stories or experiences as a way to illustrate or demonstrate a larger idea. 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 also important to remember the need for emotional safety (refer to *a note about emotional safety* at the end of this chapter). 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. Similarly, if you do find you want to share a particular story with your group in the safe and supportive space of your rehearsal room you should feel no obligation to go on to include it in the final performance if it is not something you wish to do.

- 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...

NOTE

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 of you performing the text you wrote and share it with your teacher or class (where appropriate).

SESSION 3 : CREATING MOVEMENT AND CHOREOGRAPHY

BOOK EXTRACT

Exploring movement can be an exciting and empowering way to make material for performance. Working in this way asks us to go beyond words to find new forms of expression; challenging our relationships to our bodies, the bodies of others and the space around us.

Movement is also often not literal and does not pin us down to one meaning or definition in the way that words sometimes do. And so, as we move we find ourselves open to new possibilities and new conversations about what things are and what they could be.

Exploring an idea physically can also help us to unlock it and understand it in a number of different ways. Interpreting a theme or feeling through the body can throw up a whole new set of questions and can help get to the heart of what it is we are trying to say. Using choreography as a tool for exploration and interrogation can help offer a different focus and allow for a deeper level of understanding.

To work with movement is also an excellent way to feel positive, energized and connected to the world around us. So often everyday actions can find us sitting behind a desk or staring at a screen or portable device and so having less need to work with physical action or in contact with others. Our relationship with our bodies has become more and more regularly linked with sport or exercise led by notions of competition and endurance. As a result, we have become less likely to think about how and why we move and the use of our body as a tool for communication and feeling.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

MAKE

Choose one of the following three ways to approach making a piece of movement for your performance. Use your ideas board for inspiration and to help you find an idea you'd like to explore through movement.

1. Gesture

Gestures are central to how we express ourselves as human beings. They are a non-verbal set of tools that we use to make ourselves heard and understood and so often serve as short hand for things we want to illustrate or make happen. Some gestures are specific to individuals or communities and some are more universally understood. Think about the gestures most associated with saying hello or hailing a taxi. What is it that you do if you want to ask a question or signal to a friend from far away? All of these actions are gestures and part of the language we use with each other every-day.

When using gesture in performance we are essentially taking these everyday actions and making them poetic. By playing with compositional tools such as speed, repetition, sequencing and layering them alongside other elements like spoken text or music we are asking them to be considered in different ways and offering them new meanings. It is possible to bring gestures you use or have observed in everyday life into the rehearsal room for use in creative work. It is also possible to make or discover new gestures through play and experimentation with physicality in the space.

Examples of creating movement from gesture:

- Go outside and observe people passing by, recreate six gestures you saw in the everyday.
- Create a series of gestures that you do when you are happy.
- Ask someone to tell you a story, as they are telling it note down all the gestures they make and recreate them.
- Watch a televised event, copy eight gestures that people make.
- Create a series of instructions for doing an every-day task and make a gesture that represents each instruction.

2. Words

Words are part of verbal communication that most of us use every-day. They have meaning attached to them which allows us to share knowledge and understanding with those around us. But what happens when we interpret these words through our bodies? Do we understand them differently? Does it change how we feel? Does the meaning become more complicated? Or even more clear?

Making movement from words can be a helpful way to get to the heart of the thing we are trying to communicate, offering us a way to distil what it might take a whole paragraph of writing to say into one simple action. It is possible to take words from anywhere. They can be action words or feeling words; invite literal interpretation or something altogether more abstract. It really does not matter how or where you choose them from, you can use these words to inspire creative response and playful experimentation.

When making movement from words you might sometimes find that you end up with a string of individual actions. In this case it is up to you to find dynamic and creative ways to link them into a sequence for use in performance. You can find some tips as to how to do this later in this chapter.

Ideas for creating movement from words

- Choose a feeling you are wanting to express (e.g. love/sadness/frustration) and find 5 different words you associate with this feeling. Create a movement for each one.
- Take the word that you would like to see represented in the space (e.g. Support) and find six different ways to represent that physically.
- Find an article about something that you really care about. Highlight ten key words from it that you think best captures the essence of what it is about and make a movement to represent each word.
- Take a poem that you love. Make a movement for each line of it.
- Take a newspaper. Rip 8 unrelated words out of the text at random. Use them to make a movement sequence.
- Write continuously for 5 minutes about something you would like to change about something you love. Read it back and circle eight words. Make a movement for each one.
- Take a famous speech from history. Underline every twelfth word. Assign a physical action to each one. Do not try and be literal. Think of each word as its own movement.

3. From metaphor

It can be hard to explain exactly how we feel about something just by using words. Sometimes there just are not enough words – or just not the right words to describe exactly what we are thinking – and in some cases, it might just be too difficult or emotional to try. On these occasions, we find it can be useful to work with movement and to find a physical action or sequence of actions that illustrates a feeling or expresses an emotion. One good way to think about movement that stands in for something we can't express with words is imagining its value as a metaphor.

Metaphor (NOUN):

a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else.

– *Oxford Dictionary*

For example; you may be exploring the feeling associated with falling in love and choose to play practically with the physical act of falling and what it helps you to communicate. What does this action mean if you keep getting up again and repeating the fall? What happens if you fall once and stay on the floor? Suddenly we can see how simple physical choices offer us a world of metaphorical meaning that is bigger than words and also allows space for the audience to bring their own feelings and interpretation to its meaning on stage.

Examples of creating movement from metaphor

- Create a series of ways to slide from a chair on to the floor (wanting the ground to swallow you up).
- Create a series of movements that push and pull (the give and take of a friendship or relationship).
- Make six movements where you are balancing (a feeling of being on the edge).
- Create an action where you are trying to reach something (striving for something out of reach).

NOTE

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 of you performing your movement piece and share it with your teacher or class (where appropriate).

SESSION 4: CREATING PERFORMANCE IMAGES

BOOK EXTRACT

Exploring the world of performance images is a very exciting tool you can use when making new work and can provide you with a dynamic set of options for expressing your ideas and exploring meaning on stage.

Sometimes it can be hard to put an emotion, feeling or experience into words. Maybe this is because it is difficult to find exactly the right words, or maybe there are just not enough words to capture the essence or gravity of the moment you want to express. When exploring a difficult or personal subject it can be easier to explore how you feel about something by creating a moment of performance or image that shows the audience rather than tells them. This is an action or picture that stands in for a bigger idea. We call this a visual metaphor.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

MAKE

A process for using object and materials to explore an idea or feeling in your work

- Identify the feeling/idea that you would like to express coming from your question.
- Make a list of all the objects and materials you would like to play with.
- Play with each object/material in turn and try to find a way to illustrate/explain your feeling/idea. Watch to see if new meanings also emerge.
- Show them to another person/group. Which of the images that you have created evoke a feeling in them? What does it make them think of to view them?

A note about choosing objects and materials

Think about the quality of each object or material you play with. Try to choose objects/materials that do not just have one function but that hold a quality that invites exploration. Think about objects that attract or repel you - things that have personal meaning - things you see every day - something you are seeing for the first time.

Sample list of objects/materials to explore

- Flowers
- Paper
- Paint
- Sand
- Soil
- Balloons
- Boxes
- Water
- Lipstick
- Flour
- Cotton Wool
- Feathers
- Strawberries (or another fruit)

NOTE

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.

If you are working with messy materials make sure to do this in an appropriate area and that you have all the materials on hand to clean up after yourself.

SHARE

Create a video of you performing your performance image and share it with your teacher or class (where appropriate).

Music is one of the oldest and most powerful forms of creative expression and communication. For as far back as we can remember human beings have used rhythm and song to tell stories and capture emotion. We have used it to pass on memory, tradition and ritual. We use it to relax us, distract us and to make us dance. It underscores the joy and the sorrow in our lives and helps us frame all of the things that we don't have words for. We place it in the centre of the important moments in our lives as well as a background to our everyday.

Music is time and place, history and zeitgeist, celebration and protest. It connects us to the present and the past and to people and things and feelings. In this way it is right at the heart of how we understand who we are and our overall sense of identity as part of the world we live in. For all of these reasons music can be a powerful tool for use in devising theatre as it provides all sorts of possibilities for the construction of meaning and the exploration of feeling on stage.

Thinking about how to use music in your work can sometimes be a bit daunting but it is important to remember that there are many ways to use it that do not require having previous experience or having studied an instrument to grade 8. Here we have listed several tasks that we have used to make material using music and song as well as examples of the various ways we have explored it in the shows that we have made. Music most often falls into one of two categories:

Found or borrowed music

Music that has been taken from a historical source, from a contemporary artist or group or from another culture or tradition. Music that has been recorded or written down by an artist before.

Original music

Music that is composed by a performer or other artists especially for use in the show you are making. This can be used as a creative tool to enhance and support the work in a variety of ways.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

MAKE

Think about the question you are using to make performance. Find a piece of music that helps illustrate or explore your response to that question in some way.

Ideas for choosing music

- A song you always hear on the radio
- A song that reminds you of someone or something
- A song from a recognisable TV programme or film
- A song from the past
- A song that makes you feel something
- A piece of music that really matters
- Music that just makes you want to dance
- Music that really says what you wish you could say

Ways to explore performing the piece of music

- Sing it Acapella
- Play it on a different instrument
- Make a new arrangement of it
- Play the song without the words
- Make an electronic version of it
- Remix it
- Lip-sync to it
- Sing along to it
- Find a traditional song and re imagine it

SHARE

Create a video or sound file of your music and share it with your teacher or class (where appropriate).

SESSION 6: COMPOSITION

BOOK EXTRACT

It can be helpful to think about building non-narrative performance in the same way you might construct a collage. Placing lots of interconnecting ideas side by side so that they have a relationship with each other. Each piece works to deepen our connection to an idea or question, helping us to better understand it from various different points of view and allowing us to reflect on what it means to us.

It might also be useful to think about this stage of composition much like how we might create (or compose) music. This is a process of placing notes in sequence and using various tools such as pace and tempo in order to achieve an overall feeling or emotion. In fact, when making music we worry far less (if at all) about a concrete story or linear set of ideas instead we are happy to consider it more as a form of poetic experience, something that will inspire or move us each individually without us necessarily having to agree on what exactly every moment means.

For us as a company devising theatre works a lot like this. Instead of thinking about characters in a linear story we think more about the different ways that the elements of performance we have created can fit together to form part of a journey for the audience. We become excited about how each new idea we present on stage can influence and inform the overall making of meaning for an audience and how we might imagine new creative possibilities for sharing our ideas.

LEARNING ACTIVITY

MAKE

By now you should have created four separate elements of performance all related to the original question you selected.

1. A piece of original text
2. A piece of movement
3. A performance image
4. Some music

Find a way to compose with these elements in order to make a new solo piece of performance to share with others.

SHARE

Find an audience who will watch your performance. Make a video of you performing it to them and upload it to share with your class/teacher.

REFLECT

Ask your audience how your performance made them think and feel. Record their reflections and use them to help you develop the piece further in future.