

GCSE Drama

Theatre Roles & Terminology

Section A



COMPONENT 1

UNDERSTANDING DRAMA

SECTION A

THEATRE ROLES AND TERMINOLOGY

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Students must develop knowledge and understanding of:

- ▶ Drama and theatre terminology and how to use it appropriately.
- ▶ Stage positioning.
- ▶ Staging configuration.
- ▶ The roles and responsibilities of theatre practitioners in contemporary theatre practice.

ASSESSMENT FOCUS

AO3: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how drama and theatre is developed and performed.

In Section A, you will be asked multiple choice questions in which you must demonstrate your understanding of how theatre works, such as what various theatre makers do, the different areas of a stage or possible staging configurations.

Roles and responsibilities

Drama is a team effort in which many people contribute to create the final production. When you go to see a play you are, of course, aware of the performers, but you might not think about the efforts of all the other theatre makers who do not appear onstage. For Component 1, Section A, you need to be able to identify theatre roles for a multiple choice question.

The chart below summarises some of the key personnel.

THEATRE MAKER: PLAYWRIGHT

WHAT THEY DO:

Write the script of the play, including the dialogue and stage directions.



THEATRE MAKER: PERFORMER

WHAT THEY DO:

Appear in a production, for example by acting, dancing or singing. They create a performance or assume a role onstage in front of an audience.



THEATRE MAKER: LIGHTING DESIGNER

WHAT THEY DO:

Design the lighting states and effects that will be used in a performance. They understand the technical capabilities of the theatre and create a lighting plot.

THEATRE MAKER: UNDERSTUDY

WHAT THEY DO:

Learn a part, including lines and movements, so they are able to take over a role for someone if needed when there is a planned or unexpected absence.

THEATRE MAKER: SOUND DESIGNER

WHAT THEY DO:

Design the sound required for the performance, which may include music and sound effects. They consider if amplification, such as the use of microphones, is needed, and create a sound plot.



THEATRE MAKER: COSTUME DESIGNER

WHAT THEY DO:

Design what the actors wear onstage. They make sure that costumes are appropriate for the style and period of the piece and ensure the costumes fit the actors.

THEATRE MAKER: SET DESIGNER

WHAT THEY DO:

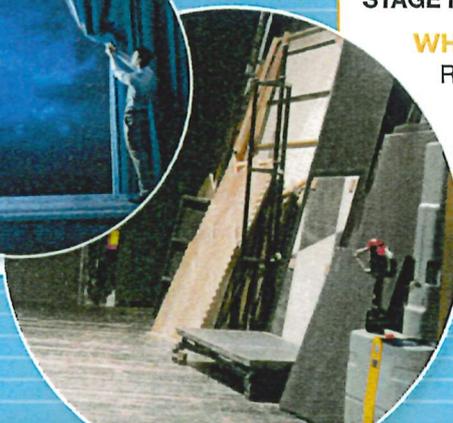
Create the set of the play and the set dressing (objects placed on the stage). They provide sketches and other design materials before overseeing the construction of the set.



THEATRE MAKER: STAGE MANAGER

WHAT THEY DO:

Run the backstage elements of the play and supervising the backstage crew. They organise the rehearsal schedule and keep lists of props and other technical needs. They create a prompt book and call the cues for the performance.



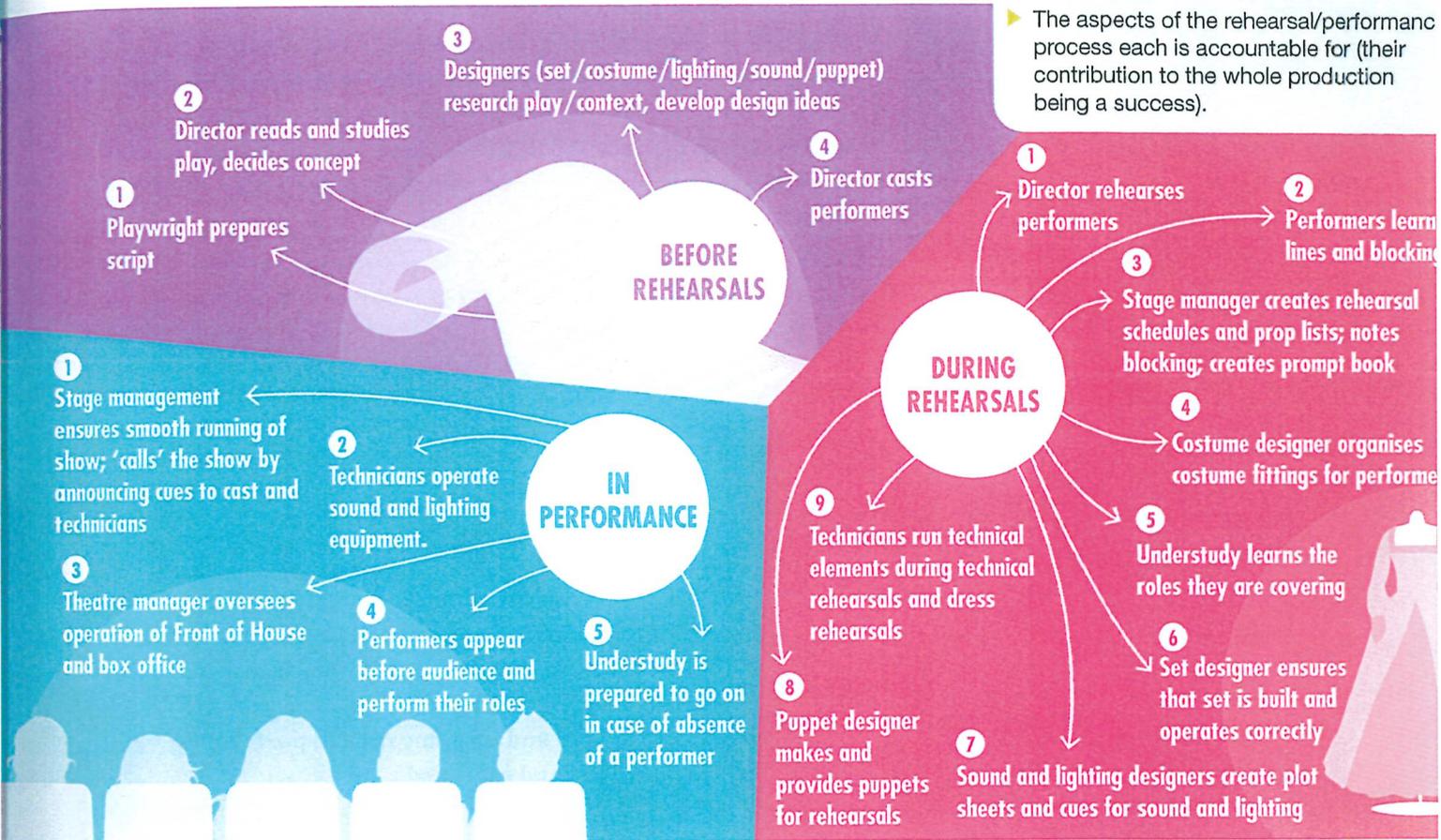
When theatre makers undertake their responsibilities

It is useful to see in context when professional theatre makers undertake their responsibilities and to read what some professional theatre makers do before rehearsals, during rehearsals and during performances.

THE SPECIFICATION SAYS...

Knowledge and understanding should cover

- ▶ The activities each may undertake on a day-to-day basis.
- ▶ The aspects of the rehearsal/performance process each is accountable for (their contribution to the whole production being a success).



THEATRE MAKER: PUPPET DESIGNER

WHAT THEY DO:

Design the puppets for a production, taking into account the style of puppets and how they will be operated.



THEATRE MAKER: TECHNICIAN

WHAT THEY DO:

Operate the technical equipment, such as the lighting and sound boards, during the performance.



TIP

Some productions do not begin with a finished script but are created collaboratively during rehearsals. This is called devising, which you will learn more about in Component 2.

THEATRE MAKER: DIRECTOR

WHAT THEY DO:

Oversee the creative aspects of the production. They develop a 'concept' or central unifying idea for the production. They liaise with designers, rehearse the actors and ensure that all technical elements of the play are ready. They give 'notes' to the actors to help improve their performances and agree the blocking (or movements) of the actors.

THEATRE MAKER: THEATRE MANAGER

WHAT THEY DO:

Run the theatre building, including overseeing the Front of House staff (ushers) and the box office staff who sell tickets.

BOX OFFICE



1

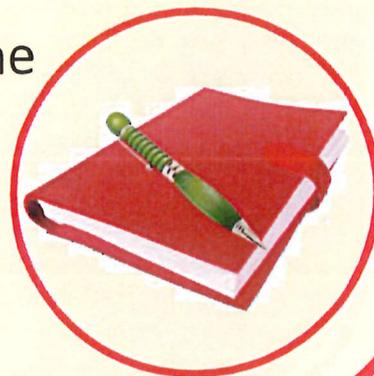


2

Playwright

What they do:

Writing the script of the play, including the dialogue and stage directions.

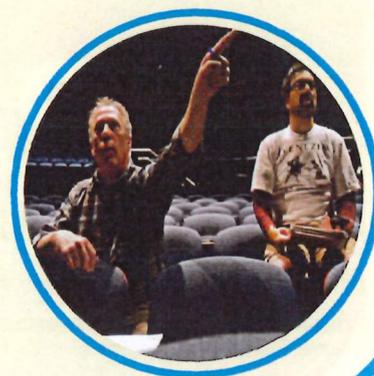


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Director

What they do:

Overseeing the creative aspects of the production. Designing a 'concept' or central unifying idea for the production. Liaising with designers, rehearsing the actors and ensuring that all technical elements of the play are ready. Giving 'notes' to the actors to help improve their performances and agreeing the blocking (or movements) of the actors.

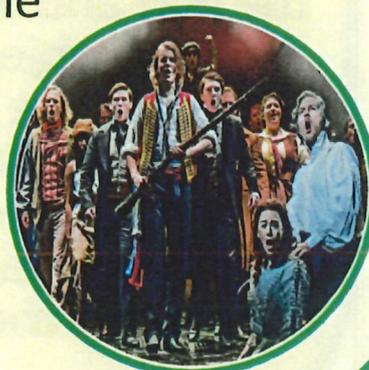


4

Performer

What they do:

Appearing in a production, for example by acting, dancing or singing. Creating a performance or assuming a role on stage in front of an audience.

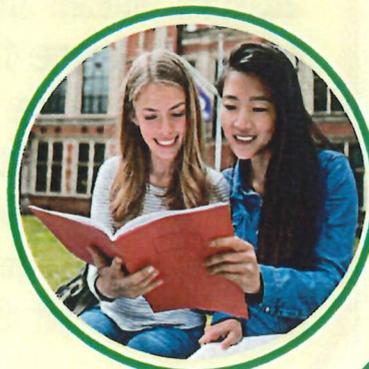


5

Understudy

What they do:

Learning a part, including lines and movements, so they are able to take over a role for someone if needed when there is a planned or unexpected absence.



6

Set Designer

What they do:

Designing the set of the play and the set dressing (objects placed on the stage). Providing sketches and other design materials before overseeing the creation of the set.



7

Costume Designer

What they do:

Designing what the actors wear on stage. Making sure that costumes are appropriate for the style and period of the piece. Ensuring the costumes fit the actors.



8

Lighting Designer

What they do:

Designing the lighting states and effects that will be used in a performance. Understanding the technical capabilities of the theatre and creating a lighting plot.



9

Puppet Designer

What they do:

Designing the puppets for a production, taking into account the style of puppets and how they will be operated.

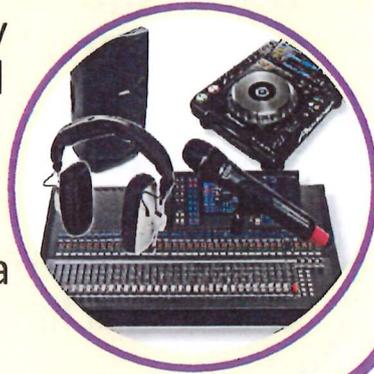


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Sound Designer

What they do:

Designing the sound required for the performance, which may include music and sound effects. Considering if amplification, such as the use of microphones, is needed, and creating a sound plot.

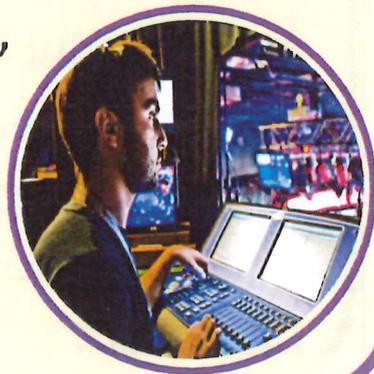


11

Technician

What they do:

Operating the technical equipment, such as the lighting and sound boards, during the performance.



12

Theatre Manager

What they do:

Running the theatre building, including overseeing the Front of House staff (ushers) and the box office staff who sell tickets.



13

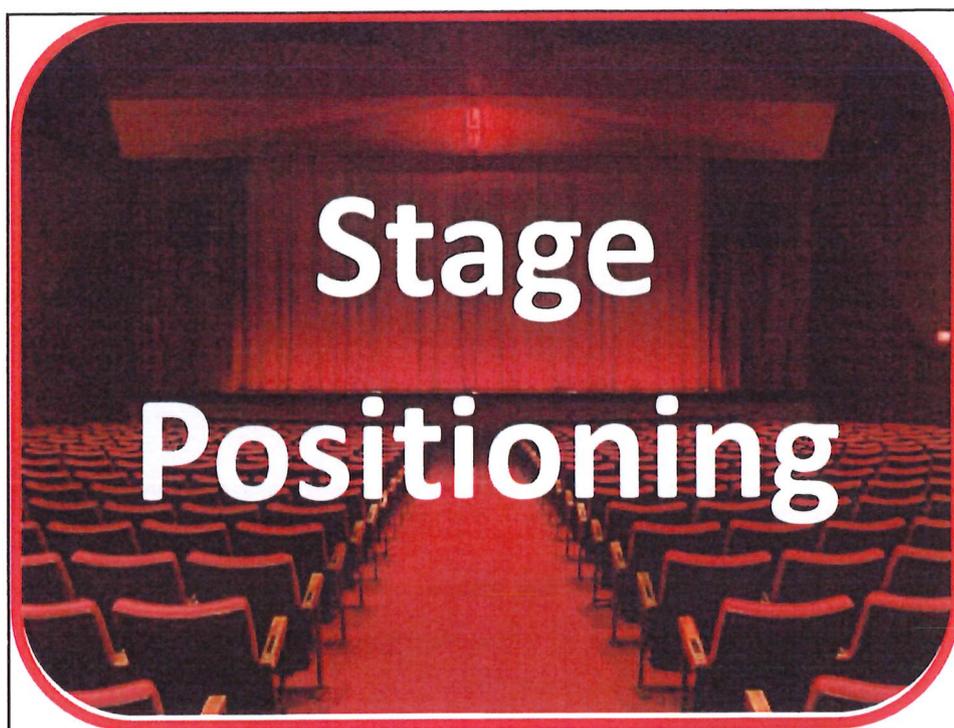
Stage Manager

What they do:

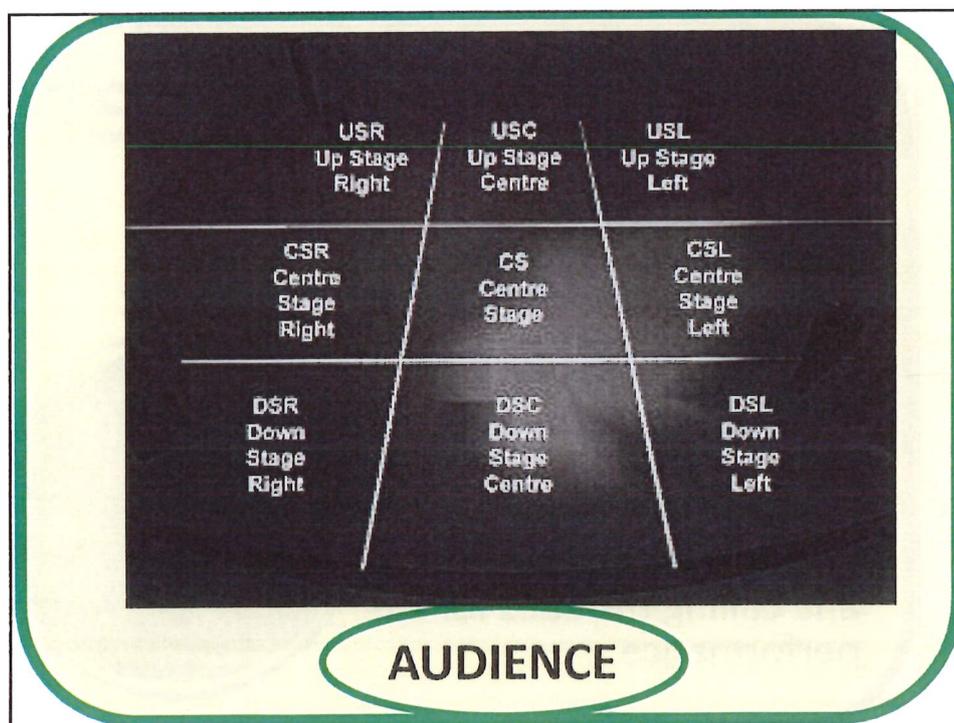
Running the backstage elements of the play and supervising the backstage crew. Organising the rehearsal schedule and keeping lists of props and other technical needs. Creating a prompt book and calling the cues for the performance.



14



15



16



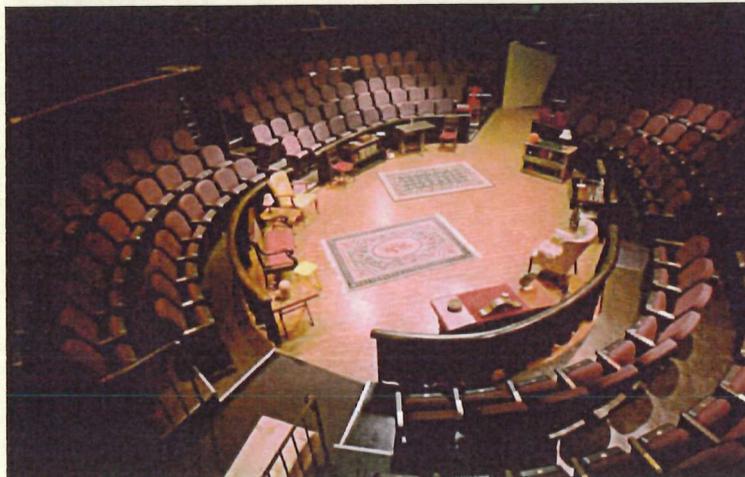
17



Toynbee Theatre style. Traditional. The curtains form the arch shape.
Wings at the side. Audience in front. Area in front of the arch is the "apron".
Advantages? Disadvantages?

18

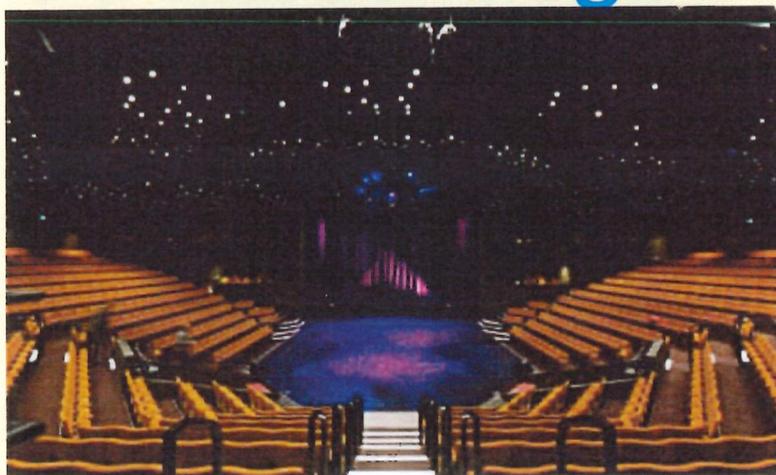
Theatre in the round



Audience are seated around all sides of the stage. May not necessarily be a circle, could be a hexagon, square. As long as the audience sit all around the stage, it's called "theatre in the round". Advantages? Disadvantages?

19

Thrust Stage



Audience are seated around 3 sides of the stage. To remember, it pushes/thrusts out into the audience. One of the oldest types of stage. Advantages? Disadvantages?

20

Traverse



Audience are seated on 2 sides of a long central stage, facing each other.
Advantages? Disadvantages?

21

End On

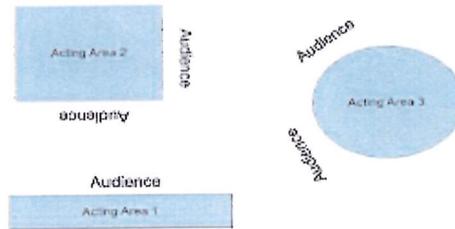


Similar to a proscenium arch, as audience are sat in front, but does not have the "arch"/clear wing areas. Advantages? Disadvantages?

22

Promenade

Promenade



To promenade means "to walk" (the prom at the seaside is the big long stretch of path next to the beach!)

Promenade theatre is when the audience stand or follow the actors through the performance. This may occur in a conventional theatre space or it may be designed for a site specific show when an unconventional space is used for the production. Advantages? Disadvantages?

Who works in a theatre?

A lot of work goes into creating a theatre performance. It takes the work of many different specialised teams to complete all of the tasks required before the actors can even step foot on stage.

The number and range of people who work in a theatre depends upon its size and type. But whatever the scale of the theatre or the production it has always taken a team of people to get there.

Today, theatres can generally be divided into two types: Producing theatres or presenting theatres, but some do both.

Producing theatres have creative teams which develop new productions from existing or new works. This includes directors, musical directors and choreographers, as well as designers of sets, props, costume, lighting and audio-visual media. They might be freelance or based at the venue, with additional specialists being brought on as required. Often these theatres will also have craft departments to make or install the design elements chosen for the production. The performers are usually hired for a specific production although some venues do continue the tradition of having a venue company contracted for a longer period of time.

Presenting theatres, sometimes referred to as 'receiving houses', host visiting companies whose productions have been developed elsewhere and are touring to a number of venues.

Operational Roles

Chief Executive

The chief executive manages the theatre, ensuring everyone is focused on putting on shows, attracting and looking after audiences, and making the theatre a financial and artistic success. They oversee the planning of the theatre's programmes and have overall responsibility for the theatre's finances, staff and the building itself. They report to the theatre's owners or trustees.

Marketing Manager

The marketing manager's role is to promote and sell tickets. To do so, they manage all aspects of the theatre's publicity and advertising material which includes fliers, posters, press adverts, brochures, newsletters, websites and social media. They oversee the content, design, production and distribution of this material. Sometimes, in smaller theatres, this role includes press and public relations.

Development Manager

Not all of a theatre's income will come from ticket sales. Many rely on grants, donations, sponsorship and membership schemes. The development manager creates fundraising strategies, writes grant applications, seeks sponsorship and looks for commercial partnerships. They set up and maintain membership schemes and develop initiatives that encourage people to visit the theatre more frequently. Smaller theatres, unable to employ a permanent development manager, may recruit a temporary fundraiser.

Finance and administration staff

Finance and administration staff ensure the smooth running of the theatre's finances and its business interests. As a business, a theatre has to attract enough income to cover its expenditure. Running a theatre requires careful financial management, as there are many risks. Being able to accurately make assumptions and forecasts about the income from ticket sales, the cost of productions, and the overheads of the theatre is very important. A theatre also needs to prepare financial accounts for its owners or trustees.

Education and outreach staff

Education and outreach staff are the interface between schools and communities and the theatre staff. They often explain the workings of the theatre to pre-booked groups as well as offering varied educational programmes. Some education departments organise productions for youth and school groups, as well as offering placements and work experience opportunities for young people.

Front of house staff

House Manager and Duty Manager

These managers are responsible for the safety of the audience and all front of house staff before, during and after a performance. They monitor audience arrivals and ensure that those who need assistance receive it. They have some operational and fiscal responsibility for the running of the bars, box office and merchandising. They also liaise with the back of house team, giving "clearance" when the audience is sat and the performance may begin.

Box office staff

Box office staff are generally the first point of contact for most audience members. They provide information about upcoming performances and sell tickets. They do this either from the box office at the venue, by phone or online. Some larger theatres also sell their tickets through an external agency.

Ushers and bar staff

These front of house staff are the public face of a theatre, and work during performance times. Ushers or Theatre Hosts greet the audience and direct them to their seats, or to the cloakrooms, toilets and bars. They also sell confectionary, programmes, souvenirs and merchandise, and refreshments in the bar, all important sources of income for a theatre. Front of house staff are trained in health and safety, including the safe and speedy evacuation of the theatre.

Who produces and presents a show?

Other than the performers and artists, a large, highly-skilled team is needed to produce and present a show. Most of the team is never seen by the audience.

Producer

The Producer is responsible for finding the money to finance a show and managing the financial risks. They will also source the performers and the team which will create and put on the show. If a theatre is not producing its own show, then an independent producer or production company will be responsible.

Artistic Director

The Artistic director develops and oversees the implementation of the artistic vision and focus of a production and often the overall programme presented by a theatre. Depending on the size and style of the theatre management this role maybe combined with that of the Chief Executive. The artistic director may also direct individual productions.

Director

The Director may be a permanent member of a theatre's staff or a freelancer hired for an individual show. They may be the theatre's Artistic Director. This person conceives, develops and implements the artistic vision for the specific performance in collaboration with designers from the different departments. This includes collaboration with and directing the cast. The Director may work with an Assistant Director, with a Choreographer, responsible for any dance or movement design, and with a Fight Director, to ensure fight scenes are carefully choreographed, rehearsed and managed.

Designers

These are the key creatives who alongside the Director or create the setting for the production, allowing the audience to believe they are in a different place or time. Sometimes the different designer roles overlap with one another or with technical roles, depending on the size of the production. They are generally freelance roles that are hired for a specific performance although some theatres will recruit for long term positions.

Set Designers design the set and Costume Designers design the costumes for a production. The positions can be combined for smaller productions. In that case the person responsible is known as a Theatre Designer. Set Designers work with the Production Manager, Stage Managers and Carpenters in the workshop to build the set according to a set of plans, working drawings and scale model, and to make sure the props work with the design concept and needs of the performance. Costume Designers work with the Production Manager, Stage Manager and Wardrobe to source and create the costumes. Theatre Designers may do their own construction and sourcing if the company or theatre does not have a workshop or wardrobe.

Lighting Designers create the lighting for a show, contributing to the overall atmosphere of a production and helping to create the impression of different times of day. Sound Designers are responsible for how a production sounds, including creating sound effects and making sure the show sounds as good as it can for the audience.

Stage Management

The Stage Management team is responsible for the organisation of the backstage crews and cast during performances as well as in the rehearsal room. It is often made up of a number of different stage management positions although in smaller productions there may only be one stage manager. Stage Managers are usually associated with a company either as a permanent member of staff or as a freelancer.

The Stage Manager is the most senior member of the Stage Management Team and is responsible for the health and safety of the performers and crew for every performance as well as for ensuring all departments have completed their tasks for the production to be performed during both the rehearsal and performance periods. This includes pre-show checks, particularly safety checks, including at fight or movement rehearsals.

The primary role of the Deputy Stage Manager is to call the show. Following the prompt book (the full script along with the prompts and cues for the performers as well as lighting, sound and scene changes), they talk to the department operators and technicians over a head set to co-ordinate the show. They will also use a public address system to summon the actors from their dressing rooms and to co-ordinate with front of house when the performance is about to start.

Assistant Stage Managers are the most junior members of the team, organising props and assisting with set and costume changes. They may also cover roles such as Dressers and Mechanists. Other duties include preparing the rehearsal room and stage.

Company Manager

The company manager is responsible for all aspects of the staff's welfare, including dealing with pay. They travel with a touring company. They are the most senior member of management backstage during a performance and are the connecting person between performance staff and the producer's office.

Production Manager

The Production Manager is responsible for coordinating all the technical and staging requirements in a production. The Production manager connects the producers with the creative team and holds ultimate fiscal responsibility when reporting to the producer.

Technical Department

This team manages technical aspects of a show covering sound, lighting and AV. This including the safe and effective use of equipment such as lights, projectors, speakers and microphones.

Every venue has a Technical Manager although this role may be combined with operational roles depending on the size of the venue. They are responsible for the up-keep and maintenance of the technical equipment for the venue. They may also act as liaison with visiting companies providing them with technical information including venue plans and safety requirements when using the venue.

Operators are usually technicians who know how to work with the technical equipment such as a lighting board, computer or sound desk to 'plot' the technical cues on and then operate during the show. They usually sit in the control box so that they can see the stage.

Staging department

The staging department is responsible for the setup of the stage and venue before a production moves in. Sometimes it is part of the technical department. Depending on the flexibility of the venue this could include changing the seating or stage configuration.

Flymen and Mechanists

Flymen operate the flying system in venues with this equipment. This may be a counterweight or power-flying system which relieves a significant amount of strain on the technician, but historically, flying systems were operated by teams of men using ropes made of hemp.

Mechanists operate the systems used for moving the set such as revolves, lifts and trucks (any set on wheels).

Orchestra or band

The orchestra or band provides the music for musical theatre, opera, ballet, pantomime and sometimes for theatre. A few theatres still have a resident orchestra, although they may only be needed on a casual basis. Touring productions will create a company orchestra which tours with the production. The orchestra or band can usually be found in the pit or orchestra pit but sometimes may be given a space on the stage from which to perform. TV monitors can be placed stage right and left above the stalls audience so that the cast may see the Musical Director conducting.

BBC Bitesize: Theatre Roles

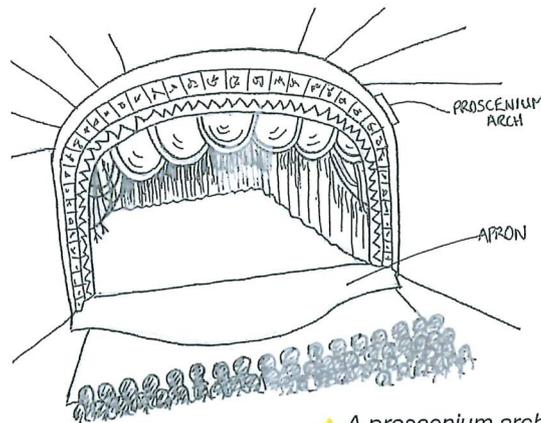
[Director and performers - Theatre roles - AQA - GCSE Drama Revision - AQA - BBC Bitesize](#)

Get Into Theatre – Theatre Careers Website

[Get Into Theatre](#)

Proscenium arch

Proscenium arch is a common form of theatre, popular for larger theatres or opera houses. The proscenium refers to the frame around the stage, which emphasises that the whole audience is seeing the same stage picture. The area in front of the arch is called an **apron**.



▲ A proscenium arch

Advantages:

- ▶ Stage pictures are easy to create as the audience look at the stage from roughly the same angle.
- ▶ Backdrops and large scenery can be used without blocking sightlines.
- ▶ There may be **fly space** and **wing spaces** for storing scenery.
- ▶ The frame around the stage adds to the effect of a fourth wall, giving the effect of a self-contained world.

Disadvantages:

- ▶ Some audience members may feel distant from the stage.
- ▶ The auditorium could seem very formal and rigid.
- ▶ **Audience interaction** may be more difficult.

KEY TERMS:

Apron: the area of the stage nearest the audience, which projects in front of the curtain.

Fly space: area above the stage where scenery may be stored and lowered to the stage.

Wing spaces: areas to the side of the stage. This is the area where actors, unseen by the audience, wait to enter and where props and set pieces may be stored.

Audience interaction: involving the audience in the play, for example by bringing them onstage, going into the audience to speak with them or passing them props to hold.

Box set: a set with three complete walls, often used in naturalistic set designs, for example to create a believable room.

Thrust stage

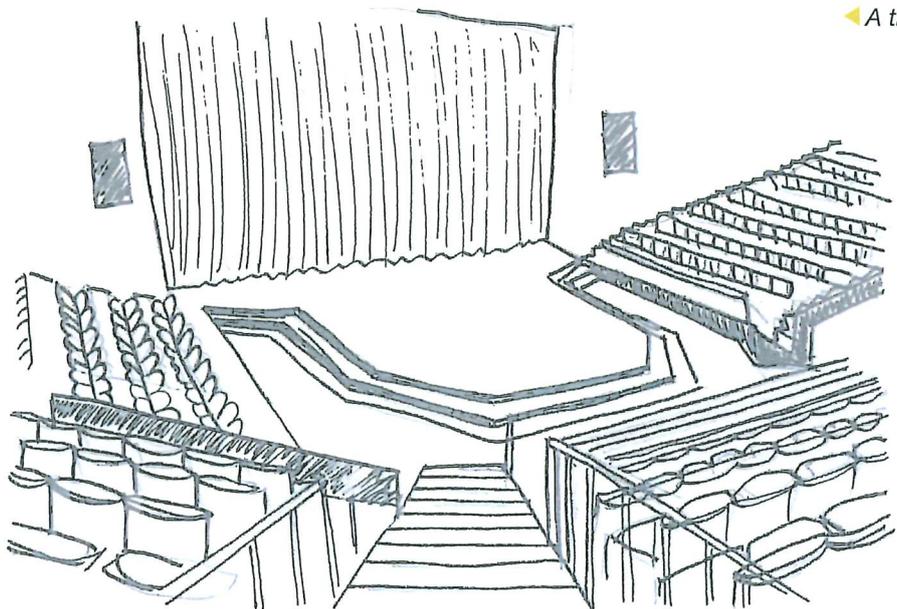
A thrust stage protrudes into the auditorium with the audience on three sides. This is one of the oldest theatre types of stage.

Advantages:

- ▶ Combines some of the advantages of proscenium and theatre in the round stages.
- ▶ As there is no audience on one side of the stage, backdrops, flats and large scenery can be used.
- ▶ The audience may feel closer to the stage as there are three first rows – one on each of the stage's three sides

Disadvantages:

- ▶ Sightlines for those on the extreme sides may be limited or obstructed.
- ▶ The audience on the right and left sides of the auditorium have each other in their view.
- ▶ **Box sets** (where three sides of a room are constructed) cannot be used as this would block views for much of the audience.



◀ A thrust stage

CHALLENGE

Greek amphitheatres, with their audience seated around almost half the curved stage are a type of thrust theatre. Elizabethan theatres are thrust stages and the audience in the lowest level, 'the pit', would stand around three sides of the stage.

Why do you think this has remained such popular type of theatre configuration?

Staging configurations

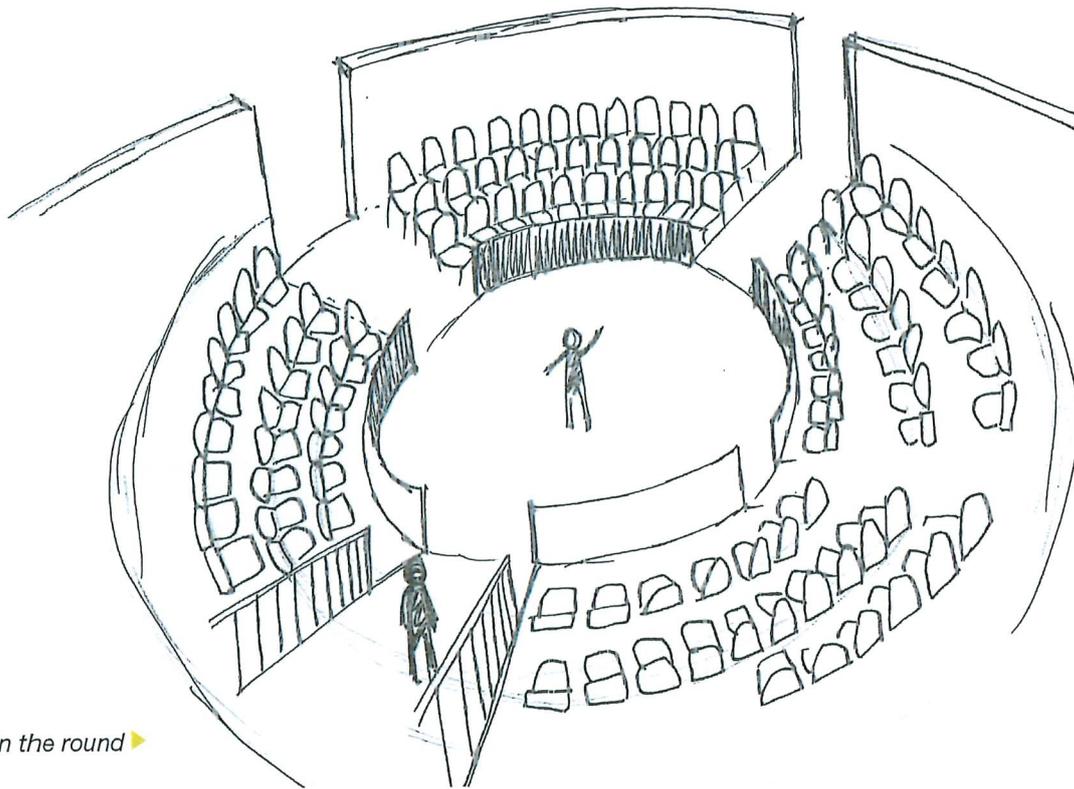
Although the stage positions shown on the previous page are designed for theatres where the audience sits looking straight on at a rectangular stage, as is typical of end on or proscenium stages, there are many other **staging configurations** that influence how the actors perform and what the audience experiences. Below are examples of different types of stages.

KEY TERM:

Staging configuration: the type of stage and audience arrangement.

Theatre in the round

Theatre in the round is a staging configuration when the audience are seated around all sides of the stage.



Theatre in the round ▶

KEY TERMS:

Dynamic: energetic, forceful.

Fourth wall: an imaginary wall between the audience and the actors giving the impression that the actors are unaware they are being observed.

Flat: a piece of scenery mounted on a frame, to represent a wall, for example.

Sightline: the audience's view of the stage.

Advantages:

- ▶ Directors and actors often find this a very **dynamic**, interesting space because the audience is close to the stage as there is an extended first row.
- ▶ The actors enter and exit through the audience, which can make the audience feel more engaged.
- ▶ Unlike spaces such as proscenium theatres, there is no easily achieved 'artificial **fourth wall**' separating the audience from the acting area.

Disadvantages:

- ▶ Designers cannot use backdrops or **flats** that would obscure the view of the audience.
- ▶ Stage furniture has to be chosen carefully so that **sightlines** are not blocked.
- ▶ Actors have to be carefully blocked so that no section of the audience misses important pieces of action or facial expressions for too long.

Traverse

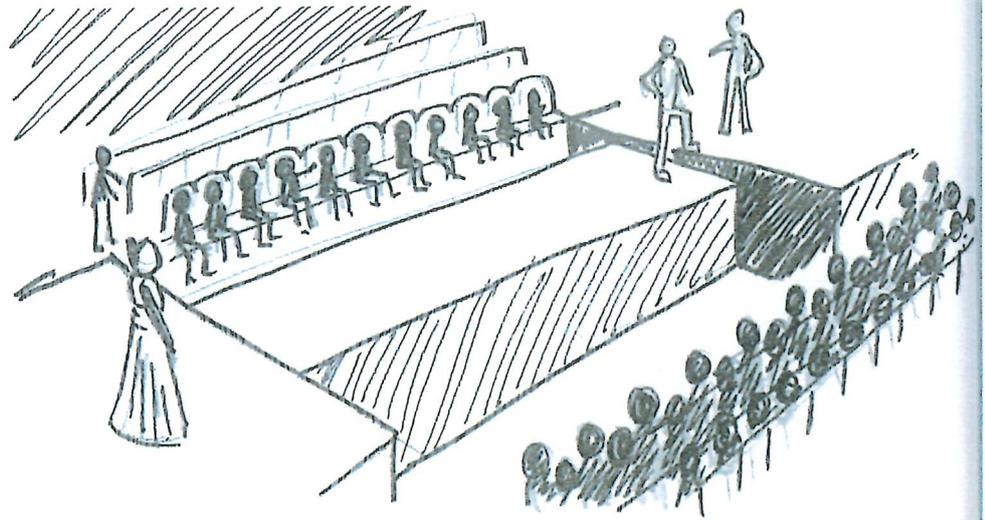
On a traverse stage the acting area is a long, central space with the audience seated on either side facing each other.

Advantages:

- ▶ The audience feel very close to the stage as there are two long, front rows.
- ▶ They can see the reactions of the other side of the audience who are facing them, which can work well for audience interaction.
- ▶ Sometimes, extreme ends of the stage can be used to create extra acting areas.

Disadvantages:

- ▶ Big pieces of scenery, backdrops or set can block sightlines.
- ▶ The acting area is long and thin, which can make some blocking challenging.
- ▶ Actors must be aware of making themselves visible to both sides of the audience.
- ▶ Lighting for traverse stages needs to be arranged carefully to avoid shining lights into the audience's eyes or light spilling onto them unnecessarily.



A traverse stage ▲

End on staging

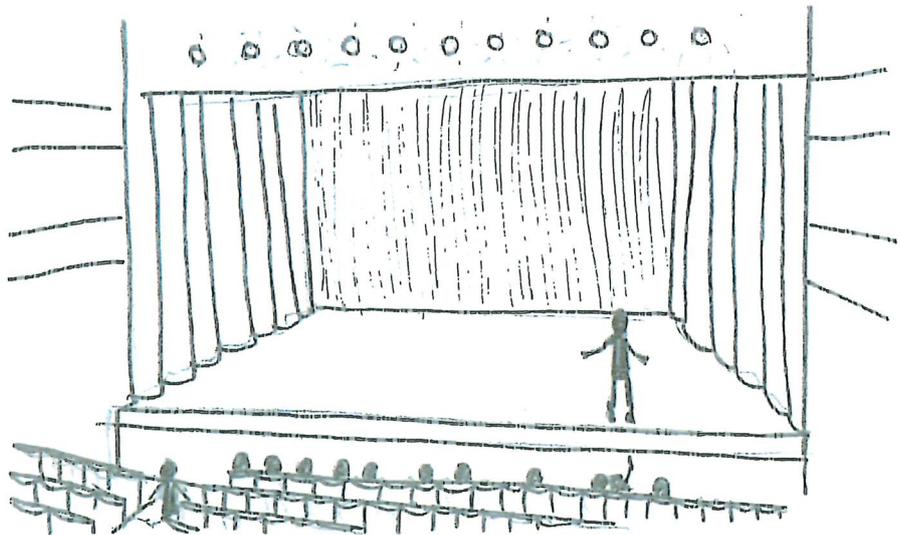
An end on stage is similar to a proscenium stage, as the audience is seated along one end of the stage, directly facing it. It doesn't have the large proscenium frame, however.

Advantages:

- ▶ The audience all have a similar view.
- ▶ Stage pictures are easy to create.
- ▶ Large backdrops or projections may be used.

Disadvantages:

- ▶ Audience members in the back rows may feel distant from the stage.
- ▶ It doesn't have the 'frame' of the proscenium arch theatre, which can enhance some types of staging.
- ▶ It may not have the wing and fly areas typical of proscenium arch theatres.



End on staging ▲

Promenade theatre

To promenade means 'to walk' and promenade theatre is when the audience stand or follow the actors through the performance. This may occur in a conventional theatre space or it may be designed for a **site specific** show when an unconventional space is used for the production.

KEY TERM:

Site specific: a performance in a location, such as a warehouse or park, which is not a conventional theatre. The space has often been adapted to suit the production.



Promenade theatre ▲

Advantages:

- ▶ This is an interactive and exciting type of theatre where the audience may feel very involved.

Disadvantages:

- ▶ The audience may find moving around the space difficult or get tired of standing.
- ▶ Actors or crew need to be skilled at moving the audience around and controlling their focus.
- ▶ There can be health and safety risks.

TASK 2

- a Using the excerpt from *A View from the Bridge* on page 10 or another play that you know well, experiment with staging it for all the different configurations: theatre in the round, end on, thrust, traverse, proscenium and promenade. It is important to agree where entrances/exits will be and where you will place any pieces of set furniture.
- b Discuss what adjustments you had to make for the different spaces, and decide which you think worked best for the style and content of that particular scene.



TIP

Understanding staging configurations will help you with Component 1, Section A, and will also be useful in Component 1, Sections B and C and Components 2 and 3 when analysing or creating set designs.

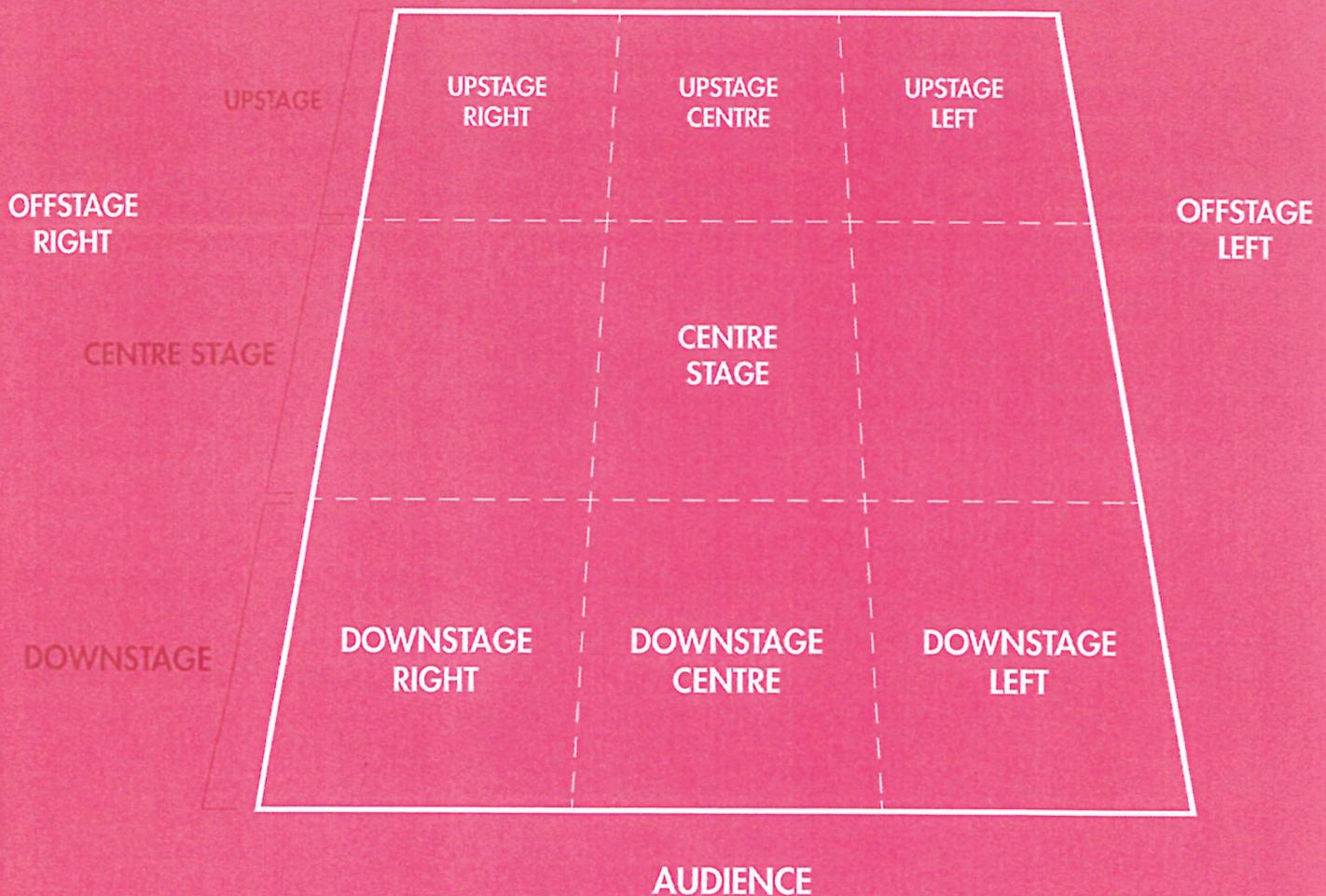
Stage positioning

In order to discuss theatre, you need to be able to explain quickly and simply where you want something to occur. To do this, imagine that the stage (an end on stage in this instance) has been turned into a grid as below:



TIP

To understand if it is 'right' or 'left', imagine you are an actor standing on the centre of the stage facing the audience. Stage right is to your right and stage left is to your left.



TASK 1

Copy the stage positioning diagram for an end on stage, above. Then use it to complete the follow directions:

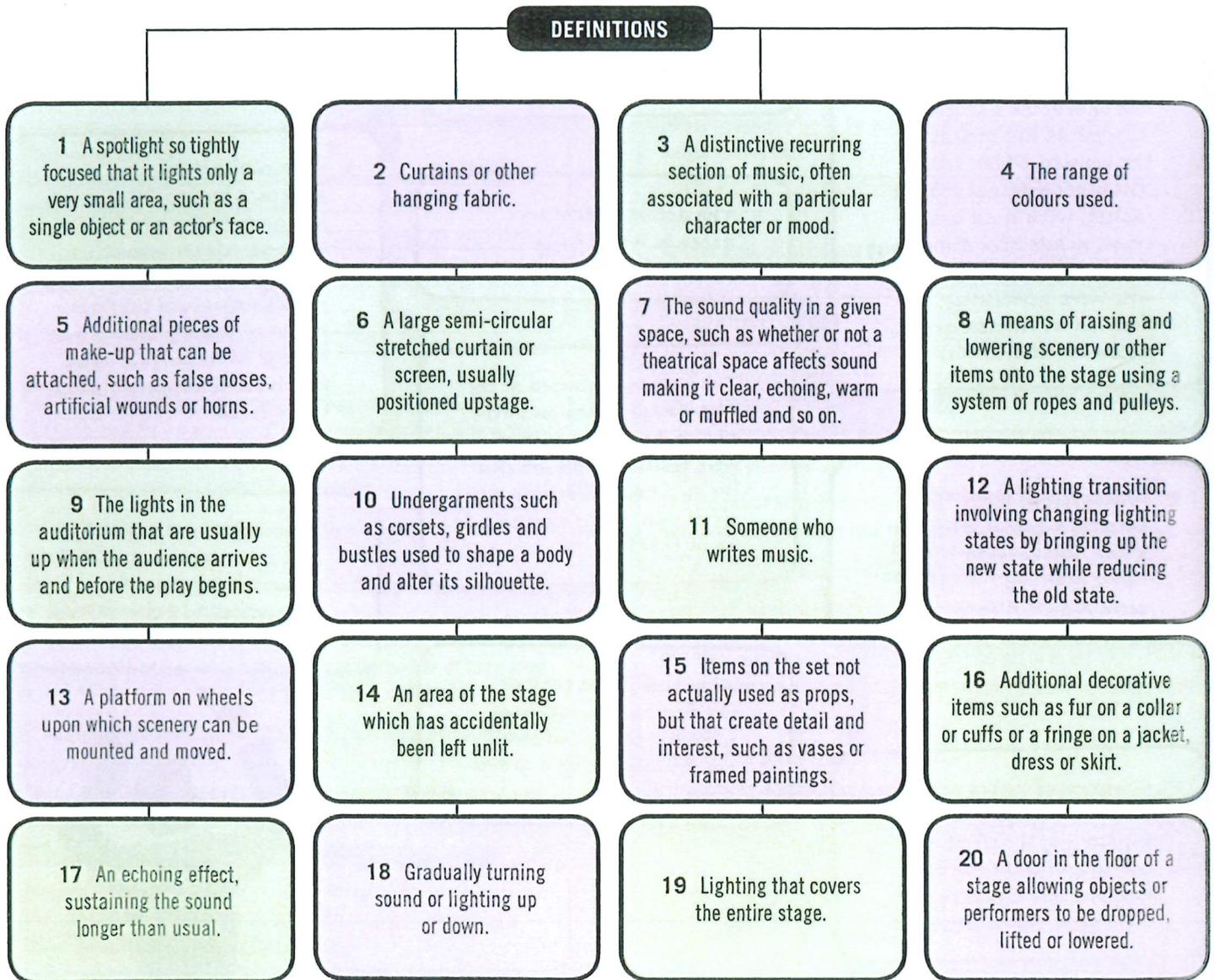
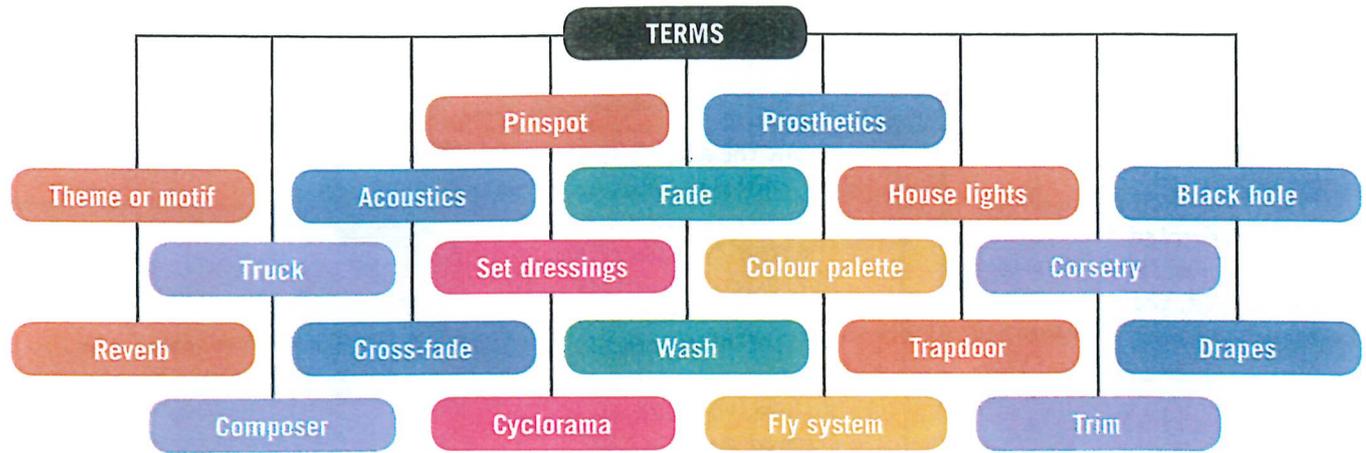
- Mark an X to show where a doorway could be positioned for an entrance upstage left.
- Draw a sofa centre stage.
- Draw a ramp coming from downstage right into the audience.
- Draw a large **projection** screen that will hang upstage centre.

KEY TERM:

Projection: A technique where moving or still images are projected to form a theatrical backdrop.

 TEST YOURSELF C3

Match the correct definition with the technical production term.



PRACTICE QUESTIONS FOR SECTION A

You will answer a number of multiple choice questions.

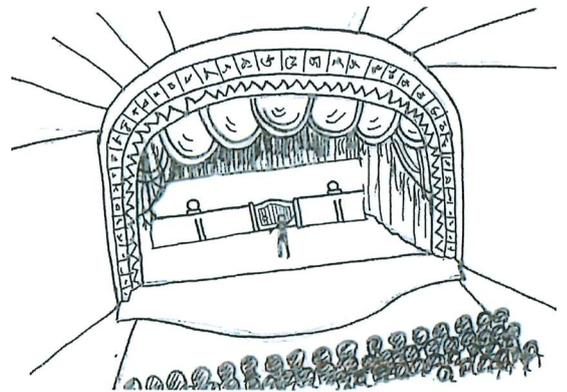
- In professional theatre, who is responsible for operating the technical equipment such as lighting during a performance?
 - The theatre manager
 - The stage manger
 - The technician

[1 mark]
- When performing on a thrust stage which of the following is true?
 - You can only perform centre stage.
 - The audience is positioned along three sides of the stage.
 - The audience is encouraged to walk around during the performance.

[1 mark]
- What type of stage is shown in Figure 1 on the right?
 - Proscenium arch
 - Traverse stage
 - Thrust stage

[1 mark]
- With reference to Figure 1 on the right, in what position is the gate?
 - Upstage left
 - Upstage centre
 - Downstage centre

[1 mark]



▲ Figure 1

Additional practice for Section A

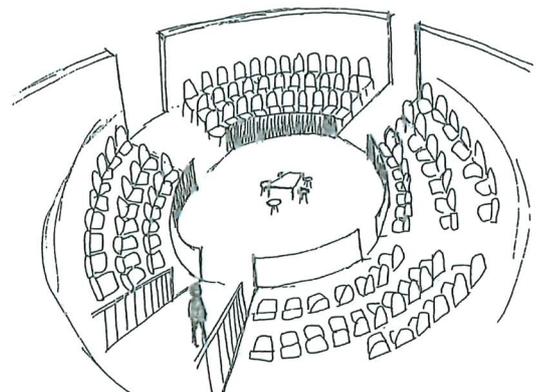
- In the professional theatre, if a performer is unable to perform, who should go on in their place to play the role instead?
 - The stage manager
 - The theatre manager
 - The understudy

[1 mark]
- Which of the following staging configurations is best suited for using large, high pieces of set and backdrops?
 - Proscenium
 - Theatre in the round
 - Traverse

[1 mark]
- What type of stage is shown in Figure 2 on the right?
 - Thrust stage
 - Theatre in the round
 - End on stage

[1 mark]
- With reference to Figure 2 on the right, what stage position is the table in?
 - Centre stage
 - Upstage left
 - Downstage right

[1 mark]



▲ Figure 2



TIP
Check your work for simple errors. One of the most common is to confuse stage left with stage right.

