

THEATRE ROYAL STRATFORD EAST

OFF STAGE

**Performing
Monologues**

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide will help students to prepare, rehearse and perform a monologue.

The exercises have been spilt into the following three categories to help you think about structuring your students' rehearsals.

1

PREPARATION

2

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

3

PERFORMANCE SKILLS

We have created a key that will help you to dip in and out of this resource quickly



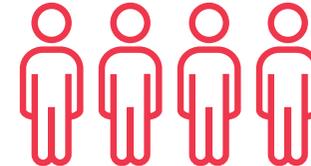
A suggestion for how long this exercise might take. If there are two times, this means that there is an optional extension, reflection or homework task.



Solo exercises



Partner exercises



Group or whole class exercises



Questions to encourage reflective practice that can be logged in students' journals.



A helpful tip for the students



Please begin by watching these two interviews with ***Theatre Royal Stratford East Artistic Director Nadia Fall*** and ***Actor Humera Syed*** who share their top tips and practical ideas for performing monologues. These short films can be shared with students.

You will see quotes with tips and advice from Nadia and Humera's interviews throughout this pack

1

PREPARATION

These tasks will help students to develop an exciting artistic intention and create a clear aim and vision for their monologue. They will find and use information and clues in the text and be encouraged to fill in any gaps with their imagination. This will help them to decide the meaning of their monologue, and what they want the audience to think about and take away from watching their performance.

READING AND REREADING



This exercise will help students find clues in the text to help create their character and understand the context of their monologue.



The first thing that I do is make sure that I've read all of the play that my monologue is in.

Humera Syed – Actor

- Read the full play that your monologue appears in. These are prompts to help you begin to articulate and document your response to the play.

Think about the following questions whilst you are reading:

What is happening?

(What are the key events?)

How is the play making you feel?

What is it reminding you of?

(This might include people, places, songs, movies, colours, smells, tastes...anything that comes into your head as you are reading)

What does it look like?

(What can you see in your head when you are reading?)

What excites you?

What do you not understand?

What questions does it make you ask?

What practically does the play need?

STORYBOARD



This exercise will help students understand the story of their play and where their monologue fits into that story.

- Think about the story of your play. What are the key events that happen? Break the plot down into 6-10 events.
- Give each event a caption or title like a book chapter or TV series episode title.
- Create a visual storyboard for these events. You could create a comic strip, use images from magazines or the internet, create a series of Instagram stories, make a stop motion animation or get some friends to help you create a photograph of each event.

I like to create a timeline of the events that have happened to the character in the play.

Humera Syed – Actor



The following questions are good prompts to get the students thinking further about the story. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals?

What are the main themes of the play?

Is there a dominant emotion for each event?

Is there a reoccurring emotion across these events?

Where does your character feature? If they are not in each moment, what would they be doing at this time?

What does your character think of each event?

How does your character feel about each event?

Where does your monologue come in the story?

Are there any key events that take place before the play starts that are important to the story?

PREVIOUSLY/NEXT TIME ON...



This exercise will help students to think about what's happened to their character before the monologue and what happens as a result. This will build a picture of how the character begins and how they change throughout the piece.

- Imagine that your monologue is an episode in a series, create the previously on... recap of what happened to them in the play before the monologue begins. Work with other members of your class to create the recap.
- Your recap should be no more than 30 seconds long, so what are the key events that you need to communicate.
- Then create the next time on...which can represent what will happen in the story after your monologue. Work with other members of your class to create the recap.



The following questions are good prompts to help students to understand the impact of the events before the monologue on their character, and the journey they will go on during the monologue. They could reflect on these with their group, or write them up for homework in their reflective journals.

What has happened to your character just before the monologue?

Where have they just come from?

How are they feeling?

How do they feel by the end?

Where are they going next?

What do they hope will happen next?

What does happen next?

RETELLING THE STORY



This exercise will help students to consider who the audience are and how this affects the tone of their performance

- Find a partner and have a go at reading them your monologue using one of the following prompts.

You are....

- telling the story to a reception class.
 - giving a YouTube tutorial.
 - giving a university lecture.
 - telling the story as a spooky tale around a campfire.
 - gossiping on the bus with a friend.
 - pitching the story as the plot for a new Hollywood blockbuster.
- Now try a different prompt and read it again.

- Reflect with your partner about:

What changed about the story?

Which version felt the most appropriate for the story?

Which version felt the most inappropriate for the story?

How did your communication change for each version?



KEY WORDS



This exercise will help students to understand the main themes and emotions of their monologue and begin to explore the character's journey and physicality. This is a good exercise to lead the whole class through, getting them to explore their own characters.

- Read through your monologue and underline all the key words that jump out to you. Are there word which capture the emotions of the character? Or share what the character wants, the obstacles they are facing or actions they are taking?
- Write all these words out on a new piece of paper. Can you make any connections between them? How could you represent this on the page?
- Pick three key words that best sum up your monologue. Create a gesture or movement for each of the words. You could show the meaning of the word, or you could physically create the word. For example, if the word was bridge you could create a movement of a draw bridge opening, create a gesture representing connection, or you could do the bridge gymnastic move.

- Once you have your three movements, can you connect them in a sequence so that they flow from one to the other.
- Share these sequences with the rest of your class.



The following questions are good prompts to help students to reflect on this physical work. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals?

What emotions did the words and movements evoke? What might this say about your character?

Were your movements very open or closed? What might this say about your character?

Were the words more positive or negative? What might this say about your character?

2

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

These exercises will help students to create a full picture of their characters, and what they think and feel before, during and after the monologue. Students will understand the journey their character is on and how it fits into the larger picture of the play. Information can be found in the text, and by using their imaginations.

CHARACTER PROFILE



This exercise will help students to create their character and begin to understand what they think and how they behave.

- Set a timer for 10 minutes and try and answer as many of the questions below as possible.

What is your name?

How old are you?

Where were you born?

Where do you live now?

What do you do for a living?

What are your hobbies?

What would your dream day look like?

Where are they the happiest?

What are your biggest fears?

How would people who know you describe you?

How would you describe yourself?

What are you passionate about?

What are you most proud of?

What is your worst habit?

What clubs did you go to at school?

What is your dream job?

What would you like to do before it's too late?

What is your earliest memory?

What is your best memory?

What is your saddest memory?

Do you have a secret?

What advice would you give your younger self?

What do you want to be remembered for?



Tip: Some of the answers to these questions will be in the monologue, some you might find in the rest of the play, and others you will just have to make up based on what knowledge of the character you already have.

- Use the information you've now got to complete at least two of the following tasks.

Create a drawing of your character. This could be a portrait or something more abstract that represents the essence of that character.

Create them a Spotify playlist.

Create their three most-liked Instagram posts.

Imagine their life was a book and write the blurb.

If someone was going to go undercover to impersonate them what would their brief be?

Complete a BuzzFeed quiz as your character.



A fun thing I like to do is make a character playlist, so I think of songs that I think the character might like or that might help me get into that role

Humera Syed - Actor

INVESTIGATOR



This exercise will help students to develop their character by analysing the script for information.

I like to be like an investigator, a detective, so I am really foraging in the language

Nadia Fall – Director

- Use the script to complete this table in as much detail as possible.

QUESTION	CLUE IN TEXT	WHAT DOES THIS TELL ME ABOUT HOW MY CHARACTER MIGHT BE THINKING OR FEELING, OR HOW THEY MIGHT BEHAVE?
Where are they? (Location – how specific can you make this; how familiar a location is it; how do they feel there?)		
When is it? (Time period, season, time of day)		
Why is your character performing a monologue now? Why do they need to talk at length on their own?		

Objective (What does your character want? How do they communicate this? Do they keep this secret or make it obvious?)		
How will they get their objective? (What are their tactics?)		
Obstacles (What is getting in the way of them getting what they want?)		
Who are they talking to?		
Who are they talking about?		
How are they feeling? (Does this change throughout the monologue?)		
How does the monologue start and end? (Can you sum each up in a sentence? What has changed?)		

EMOTIONAL MAPPING



This exercise will help students to understand the emotional journey of their character throughout the monologue and consider how this might be shown in their performance.

- Create an emotional graph for your monologue. Label the Y axis as strength of emotion and the X axis is the duration of the monologue. Use different colours to represent the different emotions felt.
- Now you understand where the emotions are experienced, rewrite your monologue in emojis to represent this emotional journey.

As an actor you can use your physicality to communicate to the audience how you are feeling.

- Split your monologue into three sections and label each one with the overriding emotion.
- Create a physical image to represent each emotion.
- Which is the strongest emotion? How can you show that in your images?



The following questions are good prompts to help students reflect on this physical work. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals.

What do the changes feel like in the body - are there moments you feel more open, closed, vulnerable, confident etc?

Where is there tension in your body?

How can you mirror this emotional journey in the physical and vocal performance of your monologue?

I like to make a graph of the emotions in the monologue. You can start to see the ebbs and flows and this can help to ensure there is variation in your performance when you are the only one on stage.

Humera Syed - Actor

HOT SEATING



This exercise will help students to understand how their character would respond to different scenarios and begin to develop their physical and vocal performance.

- Place a chair in the space. Once you sit on that chair you are in character. Anyone else in the space can then ask you any questions that are going to help you to develop your character and you must answer as your character.
- You should think about what your character would answer and how they might say it. Are they confident in their replies? Are they nervous or worried etc.?
- You might want to ask your partner or group to ask you general questions, or you could focus on questions around a specific theme, or event from the play



Tip: This is a great way to start trying out how to move and talk as your character. Think about how you could vary your voice, facial expression, gestures, posture and physicality.



The following questions are good prompts to help students to reflect on their character development. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals.

Was there anything that surprised you in the questions you were asked or answers you gave?

What did you discover about your character?

Were there any mannerisms, physical or vocal qualities you could bring into your performance?



IMPROVISATION



This exercise will help students to experience what their character might be thinking or feeling in their monologue and understand how this might affect their performance.

- Identify a key theme, emotion or situation that your character finds themselves in within the monologue. You might note, for example, that your character is feeling frustrated.
- Think about a time in your life that you have felt that emotion, or been in that situation. If you've never experienced this before, imagine a scenario in which you would.
- Improvise this moment with some of your classmates. You should play the central character and cast your classmates in the other roles that you need in order to make the scene happen.
- As a group make sure you have agreed on the following details before you start
 - Who is everyone?
 - Where are you?
 - How does the scene start?
 - What is the climax of the scenario is?
 - How does the scene end?
- You should also set a time limit of no more than 2 minutes.



The following questions are good prompts to help students to reflect on their improvisations. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals.

How did you respond to the situation?

How did you feel?

What did you do vocally and physically in the scene?

What was your relationship with the other actors like?

How can these reflections support you to communicate how your character thinks, feels and behaves during the monologue?

I structure improvisations around the themes of the play, so the actor knows the feelings that character's going through.

Nadia Fall – Director

3

PERFORMANCE SKILLS

These exercises will help students to develop the physical and vocal performance of their character. The exercises will help them to think about how they can communicate their intentions clearly to the audience and crucially, establish the relationship between them character and the audience.

INVESTIGATOR IN ACTION



This exercise will help students to develop their performance by looking for the clues the playwright gives in the text.

- Use the following prompts to analyse the text for clues on how to perform your monologue.
- You will be asked to identify language techniques, reflect on what this says about your character, and think about how you can show this in performance through gesture, facial expression, voice, posture and physicality.
- Here are some questions to help you and some performance ideas to start you off:

LANGUAGE TECHNIQUE IN THE SCRIPT	WHAT DOES THIS TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER?	A PHYSICAL OR VOCAL QUALITY YOU COULD USE TO SHOW THIS IN PERFORMANCE.
Positive/negative words	Is it mainly positive, mainly negative or even? What does this tell you about the character?	Can you imagine that the positive words taste delicious and the negative words taste disgusting, what does that do to your performance of them?
Antithesis (opposite words or ideas)	What does this tell you about the character? What are they being pulled between?	Can you use gestures to indicate the two things, or move to different places on stage?
Repetition	Why has the playwright repeated these words? What does it tell us about the character?	How can you make sure each time you say the word you are communicating something new?
People, Places, Things (all nouns and pronouns)	Who and what does your character talk about? Where are these people and places?	Can you map them in the space in relation to you? How can you gesture to these during the performance to make it clear to the audience who and what you are talking about?

PHYSICALITY



This exercise will help students to develop their physical performance. This is a good exercise to lead the whole class through, getting them to explore their own characters.

- Move around the space as yourself.
- Use the following prompts to make decisions about how your character moves and adapt these into your movements as you move around the space.
 - How fast or slow do they move?
 - Do they swing their arms when they walk?
 - How big is their stride?
 - Are they light or heavy footed?
 - Do their feet turn in or out?

Remember storytelling isn't just what happens in the voice, it's also the body.

Nadia Fall – Director

- Do they shuffle their feet, walk heel to toe, or bounce as they walk?
 - What is their posture like? Are their shoulders rounded, or do they stand up tall?
 - Do they lead with a particular body part?
 - Do they take deep or shallow breaths?
 - How strong are they?
 - Do they have a high or low status? How important are they?
 - Do they have any physical ailments or impairments that affect how they move?
 - Where is their eyeline as they move, do they look down, or are they looking around?
 - Do they make eye contact when talking to others?
 - How tactile are they?
 - Do they gesture a lot when they speak?
- Now you have a physicality, pick a partner.
 - Practice walking to meet from opposite sides of the room. How do you interact and introduce yourself?



Tip: If your monologue includes other characters, how can you show that you are changing character, or referring to other people by giving them a different physicality.

MARKING A CHANGE OF THOUGHTS



This exercise will help students to ensure there is variation in their performance by defining the different thoughts,

- Read your script walking around the room.
- You should move in one straight line until you come to a full stop, exclamation mark or question mark. You should pause, turn, and walk off in a different direction.
- Repeat the exercise and add in commands for other punctuation marks. Click every time there is a comma, jump for an exclamation point and touch the floor after a question mark, for example.

You get the feel of the thought changes in your body if you move on the punctuation.

Humera Syed - Actor



The following questions are good prompts to help students reflect on the patterns of the thoughts and what this might tell us about their character. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals.

How often did you stop?

Were there sections where you were walking for a long time?

Were there sections where you changed direction frequently?

What does this tell you about your character? Are they firing off lots of quick thoughts, are they pondering on something for a long time? Does this make them thoughtful, manic, chaotic, contemplative etc?

How can you communicate this to the audience through your physical and vocal performance?

INTENTION AND ACTIONING



This exercise will help students to work out their intentions and support them to vary their performance.

- Take one line of your monologue and decide on one intention. An intention is what your character is trying to do to the other person, for example to brag/confide/impress etc.
- Find a partner and deliver this line to them trying to make them feel that intention in as many different ways as possible.
- Pick a contrasting intention and explore how many different ways you can make your partner feel this.
- Now, sit with your script and think about what intention you would like to explore for each line. What is your character trying to do with each line and thought?
- Before each line, in the margin you should write 'To...' and the chosen intention. We call this 'actioning the script.'
- Now have a go at reading your monologue out loud and see if you can make each intention clear.

Actioning is really helpful. Identifying what your character is trying to get, what do they want in this scene, what are they trying to say.

Humera Syed - Actor



Tip: Knowing what your character wants is key to understanding your monologue. No one speaks on stage unless they are trying to achieve something, all the lines are attempting to have an effect on someone else, for example to calm, to amuse or to persuade etc. We call this 'an intention', and different intentions will look and sound very different. If your intention is to intimidate you could show this in two very different ways. You might decide to raise your voice, have a harsh tone, frown and make your physicality big and domineering. Alternatively, you could stay very quiet, speak with a serious tone and make direct eye contact. Both of these choices have the intention to intimidate.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE?



This exercise will help students to define the role of the audience in a monologue and explore the idea that a monologue is a duologue with the audience.



The following questions are prompts to help students think about the character the audience are playing and how this will affect their performance. They could discuss them with a partner or write them up for homework in their reflective journals.



Tip: Even though you're the only performer in a monologue, you are still in a conversation with the audience. It's important to know who your audience represent.

- Start by reading your monologue and identifying who it is you are talking to. Who or what does the audience represent?
- If a specific person isn't named, think about the type of conversation this is. Is the character confiding in someone or are they addressing more than one person? Then think about the people in that character's life, do they have a best friend, siblings, colleagues etc. Who in their life would they share these words with?

Is the character of the audience someone your character knows well?

How comfortable are you around them?

Are you confident or nervous to talk to them?

Can you look them in the eye or not?

Do they have a higher or lower status to you?

Can you mark a couple of moments in the monologue where you would be able to make this clear to the audience through your use of voice, facial expression, physicality or use of space?

- Find a partner.
- Tell them that you are going to perform your monologue and at any point that can interrupt and say 'no' to challenge or disagree with anything you say.
- You cannot add any words to your monologue, but you should think about how it affects the next thing you say?
- When you get to the end of your monologue, reflect on when they chose to interrupt, how it made you feel and how it affected the performance.
- Try again, and this time instead of 'no', your partner can interrupt saying 'yes' to support or agree with anything you say. You cannot add any words to your monologue, but you should think about how it affects the next thing you say?



- Again, reflect on when they chose to interrupt, how it made you feel and how it affected the performance.
- The next round, they can say either 'yes' or 'no'. You cannot add any words to your monologue, but you should think about how it affects the next thing you say?
- When you get to the end of your monologue, reflect on when they chose to interrupt, whether they said 'yes' or 'no', how it made you feel and how it affected the performance.
- Finally, tell them that they can interrupt and ask you questions or challenge you with any words now. You can now respond in any way you like, before going back into the monologue.
- Reflect on what it feels like to make the monologue a conversation. Were there any moments that helped your performance? How can you imagine these responses whilst you are performing your monologue?

Think of a monologue as a duologue with the audience and leave room for that person, or people, to comment. Not literally, but imagine how they would be and what they are thinking.

Nadia Fall – Director

GET IN TOUCH

We hope that these exercises have been useful to help your students prepare, rehearse and perform their monologues.

*We would love to see the work they have created.
You can share with us via the following platforms.*

Learning & Participation Instagram:  @trse_getinvolved

Stratford East Instagram:  @stratford_east

Stratford East Twitter:  @stratfordeast

Facebook:  Theatre Royal Stratford East

Website: stratfordeast.com

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