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# Writing a Play, The Art and Craft of Making Theatre

COURSE DESIGNATOR LNDN 3221W

LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION English

NUMBER OF CREDITS 3

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

*Writing A Play: The Art and Craft of Making Theatre* will introduce the student to the variety of skills required to write a stage play. Beginning with a range of stimuli from their experience of London—people, places, events and ideas—students will develop their ideas into fully-fledged one-act plays. Focusing on a toolbox approach, and carefully considering the various elements of dialogue, characterization, structure and themes, the course will culminate in the presentation of a reading of each writer's play at CAPA's studio facility: The Street. Each play will be read by a group of professional actors.

## INSTRUCTOR

Michael Punter

Email: [michaelpunter981@binternet.com](mailto:michaelpunter981@binternet.com)

Background: Director of Theatre Education at CAPA, Lecturer in Playwriting at Royal Holloway College, University of London and Playwright (NT, Paines Plough, Hampstead Theatre)

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

To familiarize the student with the range of skills required to write and present successful drama; to offer the opportunity to explore, discuss and present new dramatic work in a supportive environment; to enable the student to give and receive feedback on dramatic work in a useful way; to approach a range of texts and assignments with confidence.

By the end of the course, students will have developed an idea derived from their London experience into a one-act play. They will have met with industry professionals and received considered and practical feedback on their work. Students will have had the opportunity to see their work in a rehearsed reading in CAPA's studio space.

Students should demonstrate: creativity and originality, use of a range of skills, sensitivity in the giving of feedback, responsibility & accountability, independence & interdependence, goal orientation, self-confidence, resilience, appreciation of differences.

## METHODOLOGY

The class will comprise of a series of discussions, play readings, workshops and feedback sessions, with the aim of developing the student's aptitude for dramatic writing. Students will be expected to produce work based on various stimuli and to share their thoughts in discussion. Guest practitioners will offer constructive views and advice on students' work.

## MYEDUCATION: OUT-OF-CLASS ACTIVITIES

During regularly scheduled classroom meetings, there will be opportunities to meet professionals in the field, and to attend a piece of new writing at a London theatre. Outside of regular class meetings, students will be expected to analytically explore London as the setting of their plays. Such explorations may come in the form of participation in scheduled and guided MyEducation activities, or in the form of independent field studies. These co-curricular investigations will formulate the foundations of, and the settings for, the one-act plays composed throughout this course.

## REQUIRED READING AND RESOURCES

Aristotle. *Poetics* (Penguin)

Ayckbourn, A. *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (Palgrave)

Barker, H. *Arguments For A Theatre* (Manchester University Press)

Neipris, J. *To Be A Playwright* (Routledge)

There will be a set text each week, usually a group of scenes from a well-known play. These scenes will be provided in class, or made available online to students.

**Course Materials and Lab Fee** There will be at least one visit to a play in London, and an additional tour. Students will be notified in advance, and every effort will be made to keep costs down without compromising the quality of the experience.

## GRADING

### CAPA PROGRAM AND INSTRUCTOR POLICY

The faculty expects from its students a high level of responsibility and academic honesty. Because the value of an academic course depends upon the absolute integrity of the work done by the student, it is imperative that a student demonstrate a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work and class behavior. This means to gain full attendance you must attend all classes, you must not be late (unless with a valid reason) and you must be respectful of the professor and of other students by not talking/whispering in class when others are talking or presenting. Persistent lateness or lack of attention in class, i.e., reading materials other than the work assigned, may result in a low or zero grade for participation, and possible referral to the CAO. **No electronic equipment will be used in class**, including laptops, phones, ipods, cell phones, etc, unless you have written permission from the Chief Academic Officer prior to the course. If you are caught using any electronic equipment, you may receive a zero grade for participation.

Plagiarism will be dealt with very seriously, and will be referred to the Chief Academic Officer in London. You may receive an F for the course. If all work is not submitted by the end of the program, you will receive an F for the course.

### CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE

Participation is a vital part of your grade: CAPA has a mandatory attendance policy. Students are also expected to participate actively and critically in class discussions, and the participation portion of the class will be graded accordingly. Students must read assignments BEFORE the class, and come in on time. If you need to miss class for medical reasons or for a family emergency, please let CAPA and your instructor know in advance of meetings, so plans can be made accordingly – you will need to provide evidence of the reason for your absence. Students are responsible for making up any missed assignments. Extensions will not be granted for students with unexcused absences.

### CRITERIA FOR GRADING AND GRADING STANDARDS

Grading Rubric		
A	93+	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A- B+ B	90-92 87-89 83-86	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B- C+ C	80-82 77-79 73-76	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C- D+ D	70-72 67-69 60-66	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
F	<59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

### GRADING FOR ASSIGNMENTS

Classroom attendance and participation in discussions and activities	30%
A proposal document for a play and research	35%

methodology	
A short play of 20 minutes duration. This may be self-contained, or the first act of a proposed larger project. If the latter, then it is expected that the student will submit a page-long outline of the work's suggested development. All plays must reflect all of the tools within the toolbox that we will build throughout the semester. Furthermore, they all must be set within one specific part of London (modern or historical), which is of the student's own election, and must be reflective of independent field research carried out in preparation of writing the play (min. <b>4000 words</b> , draft reworked, following workshop)	50%
Overall grade	100%

## SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Course Topics	
Week 1	<p><b>WHAT IS A PLAY?</b></p> <p>In this first class, we'll share our experiences of theatre and draw up guidelines for the kinds of play we would like to see – which are the kinds of plays we should set out to write! I'll also introduce the 'toolbox' approach to playwriting.</p> <p>Reading: <i>Oedipus Rex</i> by Sophocles, <i>The Crafty Art of Playmaking</i> by Alan Ayckbourn</p>
Week 2	<p><b>GETTING CREATIVE</b></p> <p>Here, we'll look out how we generate workable dramatic ideas. How do we know if the topic we've chosen is viable? To help us, we'll use the work of Aristotle to determine the sustainability of ideas over the long term. We'll also take part in some simple creative exercises and consider our inspiration for the semester: London!</p> <p>Reading: <i>Philoctetes</i> by Sophocles, <i>The Woman in Black</i> by Stephen Mallatratt/Susan Hill</p>
Week 3	<p><b>SHOWING VERSUS TELLING</b></p> <p>Western Theatre demonstrates a shift from storytelling to the drama of showing. What are the differences, and how do we ensure our work is active and involving for audiences? We'll also generate potential ideas derived from our London-themed list including: people, places, events and encounters.</p> <p>Reading: <i>Clybourne Park</i> by Bruce Norris, <i>Blasted</i> by Sarah Kane</p>
Week 4	<p><b>TIMES AND PLACES</b></p> <p>Plays are combinations of timeframe and location. Here, we'll look at two variations upon this idea and discover the strengths of our choices. This will ensure that, when we write, we maximize the possibilities. Each student should work on a page outline for their play's potential development along with a research plan.</p> <p>In this class, we'll consider our analysis of timeframe and location, looking at two further variations upon the idea, and considering the strengths of these models for telling our stories.</p>

	<p>We'll also share our outlines and research plans in this class.</p> <p>Reading: <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> by William Shakespeare, <i>Enron</i> by Lucy Prebble, or possibly also <i>King Lear</i> by William Shakespeare</p>
Week 5	<p><b>ACTIONS AND EVENTS</b></p> <p>How does dramatic structure work in practice? It's actually a balance of actions and events. Here, we'll consider how they work and combine, and look at dramatic actions and their processes. The play outline and research methodology are due in this class!</p> <p>In this class, we'll also look at how spare use of resources can create the most effective types of drama, and analyze how events in a play can best be staged.</p> <p>Reading: <i>Glengarry Glenn Ross</i> by David Mamet, and possibly also <i>The Caretaker</i> by Harold Pinter</p>
Week 6	<p><b>CHARACTERS</b></p> <p>How do we create memorable and vivid stage characters? This question will take us back to Aristotle, and then forward to one of the finest recent British playwrights.</p> <p>Reading: <i>Stoning Mary</i> by Debbie Tucker Green</p>
Week 7	<p><b>DIALOGUE</b></p> <p>Once we've established characters, we must ensure we find and develop their respective voices. We'll undertake some exercises in class to improve our dialogue and ensure voices are sufficiently differentiated and convincing.</p> <p>Text: <i>The Cherry Orchard</i> by Anton Chekhov</p>
Week 8	<p><b>SUBTEXT</b></p> <p>According to the Russian director Stanislavsky, it's the reason we go to the theatre. We can read the text at home, we go to the theatre for Subtext. But how do we create it, and how does it relate to the work of both actors and audiences?</p> <p>Text: <i>A Doll's House</i> by Henrik Ibsen</p>
Week 9-11	<p><b>BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER</b></p> <p>Here, we'll look at how the qualities of great drama combine to create a gripping and involving spectacle. We'll re-investigate Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> in a modern translation and consider how it all comes together.</p> <p>Assigned readings for these three meetings, will be the drafts of student works. Students should prepare the final draft of their short play in advance of week nine's meeting. All student work will be reviewed over the course of these three writing workshops.</p>
Week 12	<p><b>REHEARSAL</b></p> <p>In this class, we'll read our drafts of plays together, giving constructive feedback in advance of the presentation in our final week. Scripts will then be passed to a group of professional actors in advance of the final reading.</p>

Week 13

## **PRESENTATION**

In our final session, we will present our plays in The Street studio to an invited audience and special guests from the writing industry in London. You should submit the final draft of your play in this week, with a brief outline of development (if it is the first act of a larger work).

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Regular attendance and punctuality are mandatory in order to earn full marks. The final grade will take into consideration preparation required for class (i.e. readings) and participation in class discussions. If you miss any meetings without an excused absence from the on-site director, your final grade will be dropped accordingly. In the case of absences, it is the student's responsibility to find out what information was given in class including any announcements made.

## **UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

### **SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY**

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

### **STUDENT CONDUCT**

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct and student needs. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.