

An introduction to the GCSE Drama devising log: supporting students in creating their written coursework log

GCSE

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GCSE – AQA

Introduction

This scheme of work suggests a simple structure and plan for the devising written unit, directly related to the creation of the piece itself, and focuses on an entirely written devising log. The maximum word count is 2500 with suggested sections of 650 to 800 words each.

It covers:

- ▶ The demands and suggested structure of each of the three sections
- ▶ The process of linking research, development, rehearsal, realisation and evaluation to the devising log
- ▶ Example paragraphs for each section with key indicators highlighted that follow this structure.

Scheme of work, part 1: Starting points and planning the structure

The stimulus material is vital in creating the kind of devised work that will score highly and lead to well-documented devising logs. I avoid issue-based stimuli and choose material from a range of media. I use art-based stimuli to get my students thinking about presenting their work in a more varied way (potential cross-curricular work there!), and also to attempt to include a range of performance styles. My students usually have:

- a) A painting or art project – something without a definite narrative.
- b) A short video clip – music videos are extremely useful. They inspire through images and also make the students consider using sound effects/music.
- c) Single words – ‘Expectations’, ‘Popularity’, ‘Isolation’, etc. These can prove to be excellent starting points for more symbolic work in the early stages of setting up the project. Creating a series of tableaux with music-based transitions on single, challenging words is an excellent way to get students away from naturalism.
- d) Photographs that are open to several interpretations.

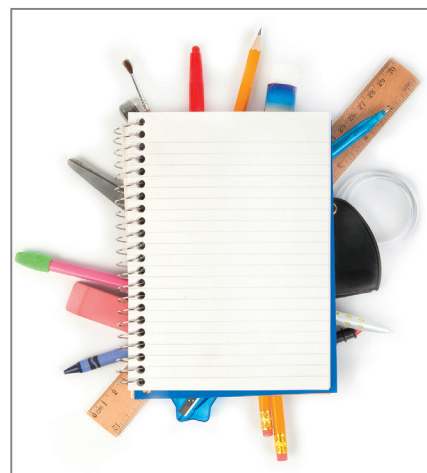
The Devising log is comprised of three sections, each marked out of 20:

- ▶ Section 1: Response to a stimulus
- ▶ Section 2: Development and collaboration
- ▶ Section 3: Analysis and evaluation.

Each section relates to one part of the devising process, so it is sensible for the students to be writing these as they rehearse. Essentially you are dealing with *research, development and rehearsal* and *evaluation of contribution to development of the piece and the final performance*.

It is vital that the log is created alongside the piece itself, so have rigid deadlines for the log to be handed in. Build deadlines around the rehearsal process, so the initial planning and research should take two weeks (4 or 5 lessons). Take in a first draft of Section 1 of the log, then comment and return. The main rehearsal process should take approximately 6 weeks, so take a draft in during week 4. This gives approximately two weeks at the end for polish and refinement. Take a draft of Section 3 in after one week, comment and return. Then make sure the log is handed in complete, with a polished front cover and all the necessary information shortly after the final performance to allow the discussion of audience feedback. Do not leave the whole thing until after the performance.

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Teach the devising unit in three distinct sections:

1. We are researching for Section 1. (Book the computer room for research and typing up the log.) Start each section with a lesson going through the structure for each section.
2. We are now moving into development and rehearsal. (In the studio, but with the occasional lessons back in the computer room to type up the log and find music on YouTube.)
3. Finally, full run, tech and dress and then filmed performance. (In the computer room for two lessons after that to finish the log and print it out.)

Scheme of work, part 2: Section 1 – What to include and in what order?

Section 1 focuses on stimuli and the initial development of ideas. My students are given a piece of A3 paper which has eight boxes drawn on it. This is for the 'storyboard' of their piece, which will have a maximum of eight scenes in it, the aims of which can be summed up in two sentences under each box. This initial experimentation with the stimulus material is directly relevant to the devising process itself. So, at the end of every devising lesson, make sure your students spend the last 10 minutes making notes, individually, on everything they have completed in that lesson and then set themselves targets for the next lesson, e.g.:

- a) What each student will bring to the next lesson: music, props, costume, specific ideas for which of the eight scenes they will be working on next.
- b) How they will plan out their use of time in the next lesson: first 10 minutes, run everything created so far; 5 minutes brainstorming the new ideas group members have brought; 25 minutes creating new material; 10 minutes running everything together and timing their work; 10 minutes writing up notes on work completed and rehearsal techniques used.

It is so important the students don't spend the first part of devising lessons deciding what they are going to actually do. They should arrive with ideas to try.

Turning these experiences into Section 1?

- a) **Paragraph one:** Briefly explain your **response** to each of the stimuli you mention and identify which **one** became your chosen stimulus for your devised piece and **why**. Be enthusiastic. Use the word 'I'.
- b) Choose which **specific stimulus** you are going to focus on. **It can be MORE than one**. What **specific** ideas did your final chosen stimulus(i) give you? Think about what that specific stimulus(i) led you to consider.
- c) **Why did you like it? What possibilities does it offer you at this stage?** This can be the ideas it has sparked in terms of plot or experimentation with different acting styles.

My students were given a naturalistic photograph of two students sitting back to back playing with phones rather than talking, part of the Kabakov's art project entitled 'How One Can Change Oneself' and the music video for Unkle's 'Rabbit in the Headlights'. Example paragraph follows:

Response to stimuli (useful terms highlighted)

*'Our teacher gave us a choice of stimuli. We had a **photograph** of two children back to back but not actually talking as they were obsessed by their phones; the **art project** 'How One Can Change Oneself'; and Jonathan Glazer's **music video** for Unkle's 'Rabbit in the Headlights'. In the end we were inspired by 'Rabbit in the Headlights' and the photograph showing the negative impact of social media. These stimuli led us to the idea of how society can create an image of the perfect individual and impose expectations, which people struggle to follow. The final sequence at the end of the music video highlighted how suspicious society can be of those who refuse to follow rules and how this can lead to extreme reactions by those who feel they are victims of oppression. This led us to examine the idea of a cult, and what happens to those who decide they no longer want to follow their rules and attempt to leave. We felt this idea **had great potential** and would allow us to use theatrical methods to investigate rules and rituals, leaders and misuse of power.'*

Paragraph 2: Now begin to focus on initial **individual research** about chosen ideas and the **group discussions** that followed. Suggested structure:

- ▶ Describe the initial discussion the group had once initial ideas for the piece have been established.

- ▶ Identify the individual research these discussions led to. What were specifically investigated? Where was research done?
- ▶ Explain how that research helped the development of the group discussion afterwards and what final ideas it led to?
- ▶ Finish with a brief section explaining the intended aims of the piece for the audience and a personal aim in the piece.

Example second paragraph

'We initially brainstormed and discussed what the idea of a cult meant to us. We talked about brainwashing and social pressure, and I decided to research famous cults and leaders and examine the methods they used to control their followers. We decided to set our piece in the modern day, so that the methods used would reflect modern technology and social media. I researched online the story of the Branch Davidians cult led by David Koresh and Scientology. I discovered both cults were led by charismatic leaders who alternated between great kindness and moments of extreme cruelty, so that the followers were constantly on edge and unsure of how their leader would behave. Also, the leaders constantly pitted their followers against each other for their affection, giving those currently popular responsibility and power, which could suddenly be taken away. This led to a total dependency on the leader. The leaders of both cults also demanded total devotion and followers had to cut themselves off from family and friends, so they became isolated and saw other cult members as their only family. I watched a documentary about Scientology called 'Going Clear' and researched how cruelly those who left Scientology were treated, with constant surveillance and online lies being put out about them. Every single individual who has left Scientology has been cut off for all those still within it. The Branch Davidians actually used guns, under Koresh's orders, to battle the FBI. This research led us to discuss and develop a piece which aimed to show how a charismatic but self-obsessed individual could create a cult around themselves which, after initially providing a safe haven for those who felt they didn't fit into 'normal' society, eventually became a hell for them to live in and drove them to try to escape.

Through this, our aims were that the audience would recognise the manipulative behaviour of the leader and fear for their followers. It also led me to start developing my character in the piece of the cult leader and show how arrogant and cruel they could be, while at other times charming and inspiring, but ultimately after complete control over people's lives. (Reference in final paragraph to aims for the audience and a personal aim).'

(Word count for Section 1: Two paragraphs and brief summary of aims: 659 words.)

Scheme of work, part 2: Section 2 – development and collaboration

Suggested focus:

- a) Developing and refining initial ideas
- b) Developing and refining ideas in rehearsal (rehearsal techniques used)
- c) Responding to feedback and improving piece
- d) Refining the final performance.

Students should now start to focus on the development and rehearsal process. The best way to do this is for them to:

- ▶ Identify a specific scene/moment/character development in the piece which was directly inspired by research mentioned in Section 1
- ▶ Explain the context of that scene and the aims they had in rehearsal for it (intended effects for the audience/personal aim as an actor)
- ▶ Explain the problems/challenges faced in the creation of the scene in rehearsal and the initial feedback they received (peer group or teacher)
- ▶ Explain the **rehearsal methods** used to improve and refine the work in light of that feedback - what did they specifically do to make the section better in terms of the stated aims?
- ▶ How did that help the final piece to become more effective – cite specific examples.

Example Section 2 paragraphs (terms in brackets used to highlight use of planning structure)

'My character Julius, the would-be cult leader, started in rehearsals as someone who was always loud and dominating, and would stride around the stage full of energy to appear as a leader. This was most clear in the opening scene when we introduced him trying to draw a crowd while street performing (**context**). However, a problem was that it wasn't convincing that people would follow him, as he was too overbearing (**problem established**), so I worked on how to make him more subtle and manipulative instead, just like real cult leaders. I improvised (**rehearsal technique**) slowing my speech and became more comforting, reassuring other characters with hugs and smiles. In rehearsal I created **a role on the wall** for Julius (**rehearsal technique**) and filled it with ideas such as 'looking for weak spots,' 'smiles and eye contact' and 'isolating others' to give me ideas for development. This more tactful, manipulative approach helped my character become more convincing and naturalistic in style, and I improvised the line 'It's not your fault you're alone' which I used often in the opening scenes to make me seem understanding and supportive and my group said this was much more believable and persuasive (**feedback to changes made**).

'One central scene (**second example from rehearsals**) was when we aimed to reveal the hidden agenda behind the leader's motives and how he wanted to dominate his followers (**context**). Initially we experimented with monologues and direct audience address so they could reveal their changing views about my character, with me experimenting with walking in slow motion around them, so as I got close they would go into the praying ritual we had improvised to show their fear of me. However, this made the scene static and repetitive (**challenge**), so we experimented with a physical theatre approach inspired by a Frantic Assembly workshop. The followers would start their monologues and get louder and more desperate as they delivered them. I would then suddenly run next to them, turn my head to make eye contact and experiment with a 'squeeze duet,' attempting to move them out of position and lift them up, showing how I was manipulating them by using physical theatre. This (**rehearsal technique**) gave the sequences much more energy, and we experimented with repetitive music to give the movement pace and moments of synchronisation to emphasise the notion of being a unified group. This really refined the sequence and the feedback we received from our class said that the central character was much clearer now in terms of the methods he used to control his followers and undermine their resistance (**feedback to changes**).

'I also multi-rolled during the piece as a father of one of the characters trapped in the cult, Mr Vincent (**example three – personal moment related to acting**). My character had a very important scene when I was attempting to convince my daughter to leave the cult when I accidentally bumped into them one afternoon (**context**). Our aim for this scene was to create a naturalistic, heart-wrenching moment as I failed to convince them to leave, making the audience sympathise with me and my daughter in the cult (**intended effects**). The initial problem during rehearsals was that the scene started at a very high emotional level with me begging and pleading for Jenna, played by Alice, to leave (**problem identified**). Teacher feedback suggested that by starting at that level, Jenna would immediately run away frightened, so I hot seated (**rehearsal technique**) the character of Jenna, and asked her questions focussing on what drove her to the cult. Through improvisation (**rehearsal technique**) we built a detailed character background, one key element being her relationship with her parents and their high expectations. Therefore, when improvising our meeting post feedback, I instead now began very calmly, with an open stance, arms wide and smiling at her, rather than rushing straight towards her, but occasionally experimenting with clenching my fists to show how I was struggling to control my real feelings (**development and refinement based on feedback used in performance**). My starting line became 'We just want to know you are safe and happy' which attempted to put her at ease, rather than just shouting at her and trying to drag her away. New feedback commented on how convincing the emotion was in the scene, and how it made Jenna's feelings of sadness and regret clearer to the audience as well. This successful use of naturalistic acting also made our final piece (**reference to final piece development**) more varied in terms of tone and pace, as it contrasted well with the moments of physical theatre.'

(Word count: 767 words for Section 2.)

Scheme of work, part 3: Section 3 – analysis and evaluation

In this section students need to cover:

1. How far they developed their **theatrical skills in the final piece**
2. What they, in terms of their nominated skill, brought to the piece (the **benefits** of having them in the performance) and the ways in which they helped shape the final eventual outcome of the piece
3. The overall impact they had as an **individual**.

This is the reflection section, so they are looking back over their contribution.

Suggested structure for Section 3

- ▶ Focus on three **key moments** from the final performance. One paragraph each. Cover a range of **successful** individual and group contributions.
- ▶ Explain the context and aim of each moment.
- ▶ Explain what you did as an actor in each moment: acting style, quotes, vocal skills, physical skills, movement skills and changes to stage position. Reaction to other actors onstage. Interaction with the audience?
- ▶ Evaluate how successful the key moment was. Refer to feedback from your audience and peers. How do they know it was a successful moment?
- ▶ Include a final concluding paragraph which evaluates how successful the overall piece was in achieving its intended aims. This can include reference to themes or meaning/message of the piece.

Example paragraph covering individual contribution for Section 3 (key terms highlighted in brackets)

'One of my most successful (**immediate evaluation**) scenes during our final performance was the scene where the house where our cult lived caught fire (**context and fact the scene was successful stated**). My aim here was to create sympathy and fear for my character as he was trapped in the house and the cult. I feel I was very successful here when I deliberately used a combination of naturalistic acting and physical theatre to convey my character's terror and also build a sense of panic onstage through synchronised movement to music and sound effects. As the fire sound effect got louder, my facial expression changed from confused to terror, my eyes wide in horror. My stance stiffened and my body language closed as I wrapped my arms around myself to protect myself (**physical skills**). On the line 'Upstairs, head for the roof' (**quote from the piece**) my voice cracked with fear and I shouted the line, my tone really frightened now. I began to run around the whole stage, grabbing the other actors and pulling them up, as we all began to cough and wheeze from the smoke. I then switched into slow motion (**change of style**) and we synchronised our breathing sounds to mark the moment (**rehearsal technique use in performance**) for the audience. This was successful as the slow motion movements were exactly in time with the rhythm of the music, 'Firestarter'. The aggressive music really contrasted with the slow motion creating a very powerful impact on stage, a technique used by Frantic Assembly (**reference back to development in Section 2**). At the end of this sequence I realised that I could not save everyone, and began to scream and cry in a naturalistic way, collapsing centre stage (**stage position**) and saying 'I'm sorry, I'm so sorry.' This was one of my favourite scenes and afterwards audience members told me how convincing my emotions were and how the movement to the music had really made the scene much more powerful (**feedback and evaluation**).'