

A-LEVEL DRAMA AND THEATRE

Understanding and designing theatre costume

7262

Teaching guide: costume design

Please note: this guide contains references to a number of designers/practitioners, not all of whom are prescribed practitioners for the AQA A-level Drama and Theatre specification. For assessment of, A-level Component 2 and A-level Component 3, students **must** select from the prescribed practitioner list published in the A-level specification.

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Understanding theatre costume

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to costume design, and to give you some ways of approaching and understanding theatre costume. It will suggest some key questions you can consider when you see or create a theatre costume.

What about the character?

The character is the most important starting point for a costume designer. Costume designs must communicate something about the character to the audience. The costume designer should take into account the social, historical and cultural context of the production, as well as the characteristics of the individual roles.

Context will include thinking about the location and era of the production. For a play text, this might mean thinking about when and where the play was written, as well as when and where it is set. The designer will also need to consider the style and genre of the production, as this will have an impact on the sorts of costumes that are needed. Part of the costume designer's role is to ensure that the costumes fit into the style of the production overall and that they convey the interpretation and approach chosen for the specific production.

Characteristics of the role will include thinking about how the character is represented in the play text. Partly, this means the details of the character's biography, for example, their age, social status or profession. However, it also means considering the character's personality and their purpose in the play. Perhaps the character is very rich, but also very miserly: how can a costume represent this? Some characters have a very specific purpose in a play, for example an orphaned child that the audience must feel sorry for might be dressed in ragged, dirty clothes.

Costume designers can start directly from the script or work with actors and directors to develop an idea of each character. A character questionnaire can be a very helpful starting point. Many are available online, for example this list by Dee Cannon: [here](#).

Think about... real vs realism

Remember that, even if a costume looks realistic, it isn't real. Total realism is a way of designing a costume so that it looks as much like real life as possible, but it is still a costume for a character, a series of deliberate choices made by a designer. Even for a contemporary production, an actor is unlikely to be wearing their own everyday clothes in a performance, as the clothing will need to reflect their character's tastes and not their own!

What style is the costume?

Costume designers can work in a range of styles. It is important to be able to identify the style a costume designer is using in order to understand how and why the costume works for a specific production or character. Some examples of styles include:

Realism

Realistic costume designs incorporate elements that are meant to look like real life. Realism can be total or partial. Total realism means a costume looks as close to real life as possible and includes clothes and accessories that mimic what someone might wear in real life. The costumes will reflect the period that the play is set in with historical accuracy. Partial realism incorporates

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realistic elements into a costume that might not be realistic overall, for example using a detailed period skirt and accessories over a plain black leotard.

Symbolism

Symbolist costumes are more interested in communicating an idea to the audience than in representing real life. Symbolism allows the designer to create costumes that they think represents the key themes of the play or key ideas about the characters.

Minimalism

Rather than a full costume, minimalist costumes use accessories or items of clothing to indicate a character to the audience, for example a rich Victorian might

be indicated by just a top hat or a bonnet. The specific identity of the character is determined by the way in which the actor behaves. This process is called **minimal signification**.

Fantasy

Fantasy costume designs allow the designer to create costumes that are not bound by real life. This can give the designer a lot of freedom, but also presents challenges: fantastical designs still need to maintain an internal logic so that the audience can understand and engage with the world of the production and a fantasy costume will have to reflect the characteristics of the role as much as a realistic costume.

Remember: everything's deliberate!

Good costume design is a series of deliberate decisions. Always assume that anything an actor is wearing has been selected for a reason and contributes to the audience's experience.

What decisions has the designer made?

A costume designer's job is to make deliberate decisions about the appearance of the actors on stage. Part of understanding a costume is considering what decisions have been made and what effect they might have on an audience. A costume can be the first information that the audience is given about a character, as many characters will be seen before they speak. Costume designers might make decisions related to:

Shape, for example: the shape of any item of clothing, such as a skirt or jacket; the outline of the actor in the costume; any padding or shaping that needs to be added to give the actor the correct physical shape (for example a **fat suit** or carefully made **pregnancy pad**); the shape of footwear or accessories like hats. Different shapes can have a different effect on the audience or create a different impression of the character: a tailored, sharp cut suit is very different to a flowing, billowy skirt.

Colour, for example: the colours used on items of clothing, jewellery, footwear, accessories, and make-up or masks. Colours on stage have many functions, for example,

they can be used to create an atmosphere or tell an audience about the mood or personality of a character.

Fit, for example: how the clothes hang on the actor's body; which parts of the clothes are loose or tight; how the fit of the costumes reflects a certain era or period. An unseen corset, for example, can be as important as the design of a dress. Costumes do not always fit actors perfectly: a designer can choose to make the costume less well fitting in order to make a point about the character and how he or she chooses to dress.

Texture, for example: the choice of fabric, its weight and thickness; how coarse or smooth it is. Costumes can also be distressed or **broken down** to give the effect of age or damage (for example using a cheese grater). Adding ornamentation (for example, braiding) or even changing colours through dyeing can make a cheaper material feel more luxurious. Different textures create different feelings or moods for costumes, as well as indicating a character's social or personal status.

Remember: ‘read’ a costume

When an audience looks at a costume, they will believe that what they are seeing is important and significant. We say that audiences ‘read’ the costume: they identify important elements to work out things about the characters. When you interpret a costume, you are also reading the characters. Designers make decisions about what they think will ‘read best’ (that is, be most effective and clearest to understand) for an audience.

What about the audience?

Part of understanding a costume design is understanding the effect of the costume on an audience. Useful questions to consider are:

Where are the audience and what can they see?

How close the actors are to the audience can have an effect on the costume design. Audiences in **immersive** performances, for example, might be close enough to touch the costumes, meaning that the designer may need to include a higher level of detail and accuracy.

Audiences at a distance from the stage present a different problem: designers need to make sure that all the important details are visible for the audience members. Details in fabrics or accessories can give the audience important character information, but not if they can’t be seen from the **auditorium**. Costume designers can use **scale** to highlight important aspects of their design, for example

making an important piece of jewellery bigger so that the audience can easily see it.

What sort of experience is the designer creating?

As well as communicating character information, costume designs can also contribute to the production’s mood or atmosphere. Costumes for Lorca’s *Yerma*, for example, could be used to remind the audience that the play is set in rural Spain or to create an atmosphere that reminds the audience of the Andalusian setting through colours such as blue and white, as well as dusty, earthy textures. They could use Google Images to research Andalusia for inspiration. Alternatively, in the production directed by Victor Garcia (1971), the actors wore dark greys and browns, to create a darker mood, highlighting the ritual elements of the play more than the Spanish location. Costumes in this production also had to be very practical, as the actors performed on a giant trampoline. You can see images [here](#).

Think about... masks

Some productions use masks to communicate characters to the audience. Masks are important in certain theatre genres, for example, in commedia dell’arte, some actors wear masks that represent a specific character type such as a doctor or servant. The characters also have a way of walking and moving that works with the mask, as can be seen in this [video](#).

Mask work for actors requires careful rehearsal and masks can cause practical problems including restricting actors’ vision and vocal delivery when full masks are used. The National Theatre’s production *wonder.land* uses masks for fantasy characters such as the White Rabbit.

More information about the production can be found [here](#).

Examples in action

Example 1: Ultz's design for Johnny 'Rooster' Byron

In 2009, Ultz created the set and costume designs for the Royal Court Theatre's production of Jez Butterworth's play *Jerusalem*. Ultz's costume for Johnny 'Rooster' Byron demonstrates how costume choices can communicate character information to the audience. In these photographs, Mark Rylance is playing Johnny.

- The gold chain, rings and bracelets tell the audience about Johnny's taste.
- The sleeveless vest allows the audience to see the actor's arms and reveals the tattoos that are painted on each night. The choice of tattoos – particularly the rooster on his left arm – tells the audience about Johnny's personality. His unique appearance makes him seem confident.
- Stains on the vest remind the audience of Johnny's lifestyle – he doesn't keep his clothes clean. Stains can be dyed into a costume or can result from the action on stage. Notice how Johnny's costume has been **broken down** to look dirty and worn.
- Johnny's quirky hat is slightly too small and doesn't match the rest of his costume. It is worn well back on the actor's head so no shadow falls over his face from the stage light.
- Later in the play, Johnny is beaten up. Fake blood is used to create this effect.
- Wearing a blanket wrapped around his shoulders covers up his confident costume and makes the character seem more vulnerable.
- Johnny's earring can be seen here – perhaps telling the audience he is different to the other adults in the play



©Slaven Vlasic/Stringer/Getty Images

The link to a second image is [here](#).

What does Butterworth say about the character?

The first time that Johnny is seen in the play, Butterworth tells the reader that the character is 'a man of about fifty', that he is 'wiry' and 'weathered' and that 'despite a slight limp, he moves with the balance of a dancer or an animal.' (Butterworth, J., 2009, *Jerusalem*, London: Nick Hern Books, p. 9). Before Johnny enters, the audience have already seen a riotous party and watched two officers from the local county council, Fawcett and Parsons, serve notice on Johnny's caravan. Johnny has impersonated a dog and refused to come out to talk with the officers. All of these events build up an image of Johnny in the audience's minds. Look at how Ultz brings both the playwright's description and the audience's expectations of Johnny to life in his costume. The designer's decisions create a costume that tells the audience about Johnny's lifestyle and personality.

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Example 2: Gregor Samsor in Steven Berkoff's *Metamorphosis*

Links to the images are below:

Gregor's costume: [here](#).

Gregor's costume in use on the set: [here](#).

Steven Berkoff's adaptation of *Metamorphosis* presents a different challenge for the costume designer. These costumes (in the images through the links) are from Berkoff's 1982 production with Mikhail Baryshnikov playing Gregor, a man who wakes up one day to discover he has become a beetle.

- The use of stripes gives an indication of Gregor's job: he is a travelling salesman, wearing a pinstriped suit. The stripes also tie the costume together and echo the bars of the climbing frame that makes up the set. Finally, these add to Gregor's insect-like appearance, almost like extra legs!
- Gregor's shoes must fit with the period feel of his costume, but also be very practical for the actor to climb and move safely about the set.
- Clever details use human accessories to create the impression of an insect, for example, Gregor's glasses give him insect-like eyes.
- Gregor's costume is challenging to design because the character is both a human being and an insect. Berkoff wanted to use the actor's body to communicate the idea of being an insect to the audience. You can read about his aims [here](#).
- The costume choices support the actor in creating the insect, for example, the short trousers look like an insect's segmented legs.
- Through the second link, you can see how a costume can give an actor a physical outline. Gregor's costume contributes to the insect-like shape of his shadow. It also demonstrates the importance of making the costume practical and safe for the performer, an important concern when producing this play.
- Notice how set, lighting and costume work together this in this [image](#).

Reflections

Compare Johnny's costume with Gregor's costume: what does each tell you about the character? What do you think the designers' priorities were in each case?

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Do it yourself

Designs for Antigone and Ismene

The link below shows the costumes designed by Soutra Gilmour for the characters of Antigone and Ismene in Sophocle's play *Antigone*. Consider what the costumes tell you about the two characters. Some questions have been given below to start your discussions.

The link to an image is [here](#).

- What style are the costumes in? How can you tell?
- What era are the costumes?
- What colours has the designer used? What effect does these colours have?
- What textures has the designer used?
- Why do you think the designer might have chosen these shoes for the characters?
- What does the choice of hairstyle add to the costume? Why?
- What do the costumes tell you about the social class of the characters?
- What assumptions do you make about the characters from how they are dressed?
- What do the costumes tell you about the relationship between the two characters, who are in fact sisters? Are they very similar or very different people?
- What audience response would you expect from these designs?

In this image (available through the link above), Antigone is on the left-hand side (in the spotted dress) and Ismene is on the right (in brown). The photograph is of the National Theatre production, directed by Polly Findlay, with Jodie Whittaker playing Antigone and Annabel Scholey playing Ismene.

Designing theatre costume

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to some ways that you can approach designing your own theatre costumes. It will give you some starting points for design, as well as suggesting ways that you can present your designs.

What do I need to do?

A costume designer's role is to create costumes that are interesting, creative and engaging for the audience, as well as being suitable for the characters. These costumes also need to work for the production. You need to be clear about what the production needs - this is called the production '**brief**', and how you will creatively interpret these needs to develop your final designs.

Your **brief** can take different forms: either from a written text or a group devised project. Essentially, the **brief** is an overview of the production project, explaining what it will be about, what ideas are already decided, and what aims you and your fellow theatre makers have.

Try making a mind map of all the things your production needs:

- How many characters are there that need costumes? Remember this may be more than the number of actors if actors are **multi-roling**.
- What do you know about each character?
- Do the costumes need to create a certain mood or atmosphere?
- Are any specific items of costume, accessories or **personal props (props** that are carried by a character) mentioned?

- Are any costume changes needed to represent the passage of time or a change in circumstances?
- Do you need to think about masks, make-up or hair?

Once you have your **brief**, you can use it as a starting point to develop your ideas. As a designer, your role is to bring together the needs of the production with your own creative ideas and experiences. Starting with the needs will ensure that your designs are appropriate, practical and functional. As theatre is a practical art form, it is important to make sure that what you design will function in practice, in performance, and be effective for an audience.

Design tip

Most design projects will present you with a problem or challenge to solve and starting from a problem can be a very effective way to create a design. An example for a costume designer might be a difficult or fast series of costume changes. Designers can solve these problems with clever costume ideas (for example by wearing one costumes over another) or by using **minimal signification** to represent costumes. Quick costume changes should be rehearsed well before a performance to allow time for any alterations!

Remember: health and safety

Theatres can be dangerous places, and health and safety legislation is used in theatre rehearsals and performances to protect cast, crew and audience. Make sure that your designs are safe: consider the potential risks of part of your costumes, make-up or masks and try to find ways to reduce or remove them. Read more at: hse.gov.uk/entertainment/theatre-tv/index.htm

What practicalities should I consider?

Costume design is very practical: a costume designer needs to work with the final performance constantly in mind. A design must always work in practice in a performance. Here are some practical questions to consider when starting your design:

Can the actors move in this?

A beautiful design is useless if the actor cannot move easily and safely during the performance. As a costume designer, you need to be aware of what the actor will need to do during the performance, and design your costume with this in mind. Think about the sort of movements that the actor will carry out: are they running, climbing, dancing? Also think about the set: are there a lot of stairs or levels, for example, where long skirts might get caught?

How will the actors move in this?

As well as practically considering *if* your actors can move, you also need to consider *how* the actors will move. Costume can be very useful for an actor in developing a character, for example wearing a corset changes how an actor stands, sits and walks. This might change how the actor develops

their character, so as a designer, you need to be aware of this and in contact with your actors and director from the early stages of rehearsals.

When will the actors need the costumes?

Although full costumes might not be used until the dress rehearsal, parts of costumes might be needed in rehearsal so that the actor can get used to them. Shoes are a good example: often actors need to rehearse in their shoes to get used to them, especially if they are very high heels!

Is it sturdy enough?

Costumes can undergo some mistreatment on stage, so they need to be strong. Remember that costumes also need to be washed between performances, so make sure that they are sturdy enough to be kept clean.

Is it possible?

All designers also need to be sensible about their resources: consider whether you can achieve your designs within a sensible budget. You should also think about which costumes you can make (for example a dress or skirt) and which should be hired (for example a uniform). Have a look at the website for Angels the Costumiers to see what kind of costumes can be hired: [here](#).

Design tip

You don't have to be able to draw or sew to be a costume designer. Excellent costume designs can be created using techniques such as collage, where you cut and stick images together. If you want to attempt a collage design, remember that you don't need to only use pictures of clothes: you can choose images with different textures and colours and cut these into the right shape for the costume you are designing.

Remember: It's not all about fabric!

Costume designs can be created from many different materials, and not just fabric. Consider what materials might be used to make the costumes you are designing: what textures and effects do you want to achieve? Should the costume make a noise as the actor moves? Strips of paper, cardboard and even duct tape can be used to create stage costumes (see the Stuck at Prom competition for some inspiration [here!](#)). Remember though, if you want to use alternatives to fabric, you must make sure that the costume you create is still practical and, above all, safe for the actor.

Where can I get inspiration?

Research is a very important part of costume design. You can use research to develop your own idea, and to make sure that you understand the location and era of the production you are designing.

Understanding the context

Research is vital in understanding the historical, social and cultural context of your production. Look into the era and location of your production's setting. This is not only useful research for realist productions, but for all design work: you might not want to accurately recreate the era on stage, but you may take elements of shape, colour, texture and fit as inspiration for your final design.

Areas for research might include:

- The style of the era or location itself (for example, popular fashions and hairstyles).
- If your play is set in a real place, what clothes from that place look like (if you can visit it, even better!).

- What things are or were important about daily life for people of different social classes in this era or location.
- What other costume designs have been done for productions of this play.
- What impact you want the costume to have on an audience.

Developing your ideas

As well as contextual research, you should gather materials relating to your own ideas. If you want to include a hat in your design, you could gather pictures of different hats to look at their colour, shape and texture. You can also find artists who have used hats in their work (painters, sculptors and photographers for example) and see if these images inspire your own design. Don't restrict yourself to things you already know: visits to libraries, art galleries or museums can be great sources of inspiration.

Design tip

A mood board is a good way to gather your research together and compare your ideas. Include images that you think are relevant from your contextual and ideas-led research, as well as fabric samples, images of possible items of clothing or accessories, hair styles and make-up, colours and texture samples, or anything else that is relevant to developing your final design.

How can I present my ideas?

Costume designers use different ways to present their ideas and develop their designs. Here are four that you might like to consider when you are preparing designs for your AQA assessments:

Sketches

Sketches of the costume designs are a good starting point for communicating your ideas to other people. Your sketches can show your costume from the front, and from any additional angles (remember that the back of the costume is equally important!). Make it clear what angle the sketch represents by adding a note.

Samples

Many costume designers include samples of fabric or other materials with their designs to help explain how the costumes will look in reality.

Costume models

Some costume designers, like set designers, make small-scale models of their costumes using dolls. This allows the actors and director to see how the costume will look in practice from different angles, and allows the designer to experiment with the materials they are using, testing how they will hang, feel and look in practice.

Costume plots

Before starting work on designs, it can be useful to make a costume plot. This lists all of the characters in the play or production, and notes who they are played by, what costumes they need in each act or scene, and when any costume changes take place. This allows the designer to know exactly how many costumes are needed, and to think about how they will handle any costume changes.

Most designers will use a combination of these methods to present their ideas.

Examples in action

Example 1: Lez Brotherston's designs for *Much Ado about Nothing*

Links to the images are below:

Balthasar's costume: [here](#).

Dogberry's costume: [here](#).

Lez Brotherston's designs for the Royal Shakespeare Company's 2006 production of *Much Ado about Nothing*, directed by Marianne Elliott, demonstrate how a drawing becomes a costume. You can see more photographs and designs from the production [here](#).

- The production was set in Cuba. This setting can be seen in some of Brotherston's decisions, for example, the style of the headpiece.
- Note how Brotherston's drawing indicates the texture of the material for the dress, as well as its shape and the key colours.
- Compare the drawing with the photograph: look at how the design has been realised. Note that the costume isn't an exact copy of the drawing, but it captures the spirit of the design.
- For Dogberry, the constable of the watch, Brotherston has combined military references from different eras.
- The poses used in Brotherston's drawings give some indication of their personalities, linking the costume and the character.

In this production, director Marianne Elliott chose to cast female performers to play both of these characters (usually roles taken by men). What effect might this have on the choice of costumes? What effect do you think the designer wanted the costumes to have on an audience? You can read more about the director's choices [here](#):

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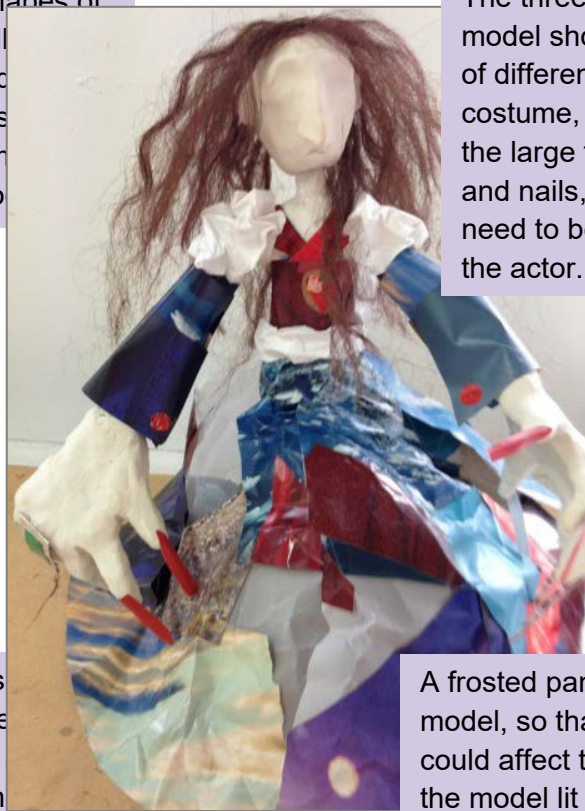
Example 2: A collage design and a costume model

In this example, you can see a collage design and costume model for a fantasy witch character in a fairy tale. Compare the model and collage to see how different ways of presenting your designs communicate different information about your ideas.



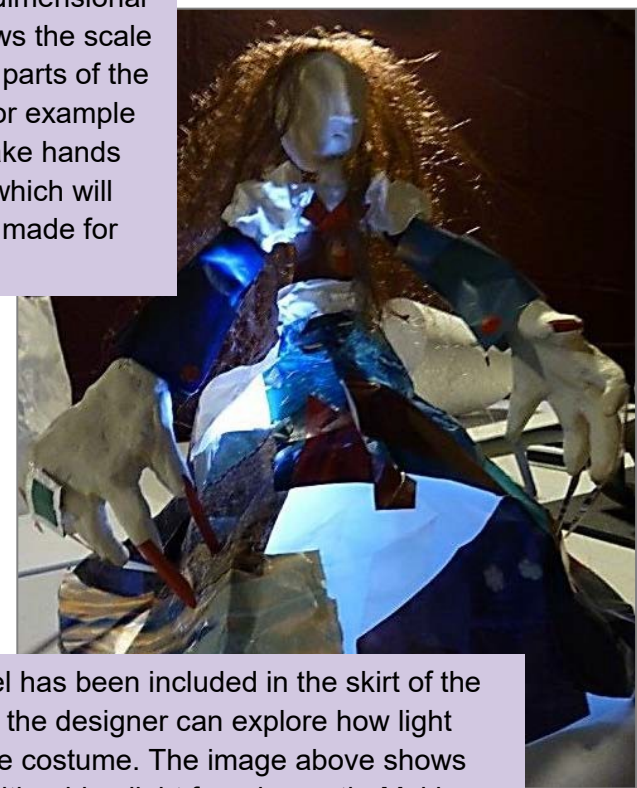
The shapes of the collage echo the shapes of the costume model.

Using paper as a material for the costume creates an interesting texture, but the model shows that the material is very stiff and might make it difficult for the actor to move.



The three-dimensional model shows the scale of different parts of the costume, for example the large fake hands and nails, which will need to be made for the actor.

The collage design shows cutting out pieces of suitable texture together to form in practice in the model.



A frosted panel has been included in the skirt of the model, so that the designer can explore how light could affect the costume. The image above shows the model lit with a blue light from beneath. Making a model allows for this practical exploration.

Working with paper is a difficult skill and costumes made from paper can create problems for actors, for example restricting their movement. If you want to use paper, you will need to plan and prepare well in advance of the performance, and experiment with your materials to see what will and won't work in practice.

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Do it yourself

Creating a costume plot

Creating a costume plot is a good way to understand how your costumes will need to work in practice. This step-by-step guide will help you to create a costume plot for the play or production you are currently working on.

1. Know your play

Start by checking how many acts and scenes there are in your play, how many characters there are and how many actors you are using. Fill these in on a grid like the one opposite.

2. Add who is playing who

Note down which actors are playing which characters. Before you make, hire or buy any costumes, remember you will need to measure your actors!

3. Add the costumes

For each character in each act, note down what they are wearing. Make sure that you also note if a character has more than one costume for an act or scene.

4. Look at the costume changes

Note any costume changes that are needed and work out where these might come. Sometimes, you may have an *interval* when the actors can change costumes, or you may need to schedule a quick change or think of a smart costume solution.

5. Make a list

Make a list of all the costumes that are needed for the production, and what designs you will need to do.

6. Reflect

The purpose of the costume plot is to give you an overview of the production: you should now be able to see any potential problems and begin to think about solutions

Actor/character	Act 1		Act 2
Actor 1 playing character 1 (plays the same character throughout)	Long dress, with coat and gloves (this is straightforward)	Interval	Long dress, with coat and gloves
Actor 2 playing character 2 (plays the same character throughout)	Suit with smart shoes, carrying umbrella		Pyjamas and dressing gown, with old slippers (actor can change in interval)
Actor 3 playing character 3	Evening dress and high heels		n/a (actor is playing other character)
Actor 3 playing character 4	n/a (actor is playing other character)		Nightdress and slippers (actor can change in interval)
Actor 4 playing character 5	Waiter's costume with bow tie. (make bow tie clip-on: quick change)		n/a (actor is playing another character)
Actor 4 playing character 6	Policeman's uniform (this will need a quick change, maybe use the same trousers?)		Policeman's uniform

Component 1 written paper: Section A and B set texts:

Costume design: this page offers brief, specific advice related to the three different aspects of the A-level assessment.

In addition to the brief extracts, refer to the relevant pages of the specification for the full requirements.

‘For plays in **List A**, for the purposes of the exam students must be prepared to adopt the perspective of at least two of the following three roles:

- performer
- designer (lighting, sound, set and costume)
- director.

‘For plays in **List B**, for the purposes of the exam students must be prepared to adopt the perspective of director, performer and designer (lighting, sound, set, costume).’

First, get to know the play in as much detail as possible.

Consider any details given in the stage directions or moments of action which make particular demands on the costume design.

Define the play’s demands

The geographical setting:

For example, Greek costume of the 5th century for *Antigone*.

The historical period:

For example, the Victorian costumes the cast are changing into at the beginning of *Brontë*.

The social class of the characters:

For example, the way convicts are differentiated from their superiors in *Our Country’s Good*.

Research

Before you decide what you want to use in your own design, know what would be accurate to the geographical setting, historical period and the social class of the characters in your play.

Explore books, the internet, photographs, paintings, museums and actual venues: this way you see what commedia costumes originally actually looked like in *The Servant of Two Masters* or how the two acts of *Cloud Nine* would be made to look distinct.

Decide:

Whether your costumes are to be historically accurate, stylised in approach or suggesting a transposition of the play to a different period. Remember that all of these choices need to be justifiable in the play as a whole and the changes need to add to the audience's experience, rather than distract them. How would contrast in character between Amanda Wingfield and her daughter Laura be reflected in their costumes in *The Glass Menagerie*?

Sketches:

Ensure you have addressed every act/scene/requirement of the action. Draw precise, accurate and well labelled sketches which you can use if necessary in the exam to make your ideas clear and convincing. At the beginning of *Much Ado about Nothing* do you wish the men to arrive in military uniforms? Will these still be worn at the wedding?

Effectiveness for an audience:

Consider what effect you wish to create for an audience, by the designs as a whole and at particular moments. Do your designs achieve these aims?

Review:

Assess each decision you have made in relation to the ideas within this whole section on 'Understanding a theatre costume'; how would you explain and, most especially, **justify** these in relation to the character and personality you wish to convey and the impact you wish your costume designs to have **on the audience**?

Component 1 (written paper), Section C: Live theatre production

Students should learn how to:

- articulate their understanding of how the performers/designers/director (as appropriate) communicated meaning to the audience
- consider in detail how aspects of the performance piece contributed to the impact of the production
- assess how aspects of the production contributed to its effectiveness as a piece.

Writing about costume design in a play you have seen.

When discussing a play you have seen, make accurate and confident use of the vocabulary from this document.

Before the exam

- As soon as possible after your visit to the theatre, write notes and make detailed sketches from which you can revise (don't expect to remember everything in several months' time).

In the exam

- **Read the question:** you are not simply being asked to write generally about the design. Identify the focus of the question.

Make it clear what the costume looked like

If the question asks you to describe the basic design of the costume, do so in as much detail as possible.

- Could someone who has not seen the production visualise the costume precisely?

- Consider the design aspects such as the cut, period, shapes, colour, and textures.

Assess the production in relation to the requirement of the question

For example, the question might refer to the way costume reflected characterisation or the effect for an audience.

- **Define** precisely what aspects of the character and effects were created and outline when this happened in the performance.
- Did the costume itself change or were details altered? If so, why and was this effective?
- Did the design help the actor's portrayal of the character?
- Assess the effect of the costume in enhancing the presentation and helping the audience's understanding and appreciation of the play.

Always refer to particular moments

Consult the glossary for key words that you can use when talking or writing about theatre design, and for definitions of important terms.

Any words in ***bold italics*** can be found in the glossary.

Components 2 and 3: practical performance

Students should aim to understand productions in terms of the relevant content listed in

Knowledge and understanding [page 11], and in addition:

- the perceived or stated aims of the production team and their success in achieving them
- the creative collaboration of the performers, the designers, the director and other members of the creative team
- the audience experience and response.

Read all the details for costume designer on page 18.

It is the student's costume **design** that is assessed. Although students are expected to assemble the costume(s) when possible, this will not form part of the assessment.

Candidates may choose to consider make-up and mask as part of the design.

The devised piece must be influenced by the work and methodologies of one prescribed practitioner. See pages 19, 20 and 21 for the list of practitioners.

Where applicable:

- **research**
- **refine**
- be prepared to **apply the influence of your chosen practitioner.**

Create your brief

- In consultation with the rest of the group, define exactly what the practical piece requires.
- Ensure that everyone agrees and that you all have the same overview, concept and intentions.
- Consider the effect your design will have on an audience and whether this is exactly what is required.

Review the practicalities

If you are designing and also choosing to make the costume(s), be realistic about the budget.

Explore different ways of acquiring material: charity shops can be inspiring as well as cheap. Use a variety of fabrics, textures, colours and accessories.

If your costume is to be worn in the practical performance:

- Can your actor achieve all required movements?
- How can you ensure the costume fits the actor well?
- Do your ideas reflect the role your actor is aiming to portray?

Rehearsal dates

- Create a schedule which allows for changes and alteration; there are always unexpected challenges, problems or opportunities.
- Your costume needs to be ready in time for the actor to rehearse and be comfortable in the costume
- Your deadline is not the day of the exam.

Create your design

Now create your mood board or sketches, including examples of fabric, before creating the design itself.

Review the practicalities again

- Does your design work well under the intended lighting?
- Can all items be made, bought or borrowed within your budget?
- Can your actor get onto the stage, move up steps or sit comfortably and appropriately for the character?
- Is the design safe?

Watch rehearsals with an open mind

Your costume is there to serve the production, not to be a *beautiful* drawing which is unrelated to the demands of the performance!

