AQA
Realising potential

A-LEVEL DRAMA AND THEATRE

Understanding and designing theatre sets

7262

Teaching guide: set 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 sets

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to some of the different elements of a set design, and to give you some ways of approaching and understand theatre sets. It will suggest some **key questions** you can consider when you see or create a theatre set.

What are the design's 'when' and 'where'?

One useful way to consider how a set design relates to the play text or production is to think about the location and era that the design represents. Set designers need to consider the period and genre of a play, as well as the venue where the performance will take place. They also need to respond to the social, historical and cultural context 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.

Location is the 'where' of the set design: what place does the design represent? For a realist set, this might be a certain room, in a certain house, belonging to a certain character. The designer will try to ensure that the audience understand this by placing specific objects and furniture into the space, as well as creating appropriate ***scenery***. For non-realist sets, the location might be more difficult to decide: for example, the designer might create a location that combines a number of different places. Some designers want to make the audience aware that they are in a theatre, as well as understanding that the action takes place in a specific location. Minimalist or symbolist designs do this particularly well.

Era is the 'when' of the set design: when does the action take place? This might be the era in which the play is set, or another era that the director or designer has chosen for the production. Knowing about the era of the play text allows you to make choices in your design that are appropriate for the production. This doesn't always mean sticking rigidly to one era in your design: sometimes it is useful to deliberately mix eras for a specific effect. However, this must be a deliberate and justified choice by the designer and not a mistake that comes from not knowing the context!

Think about… *real vs realism*

Remember that, even if a stage set looks realistic, it isn't real. Total realism is a way of designing a stage set so that it looks as much like real life as possible, but it is still a stage set, a series of deliberate choices made by a designer. Some performances do use elements of real life, for example, ***site specific*** theatre takes place in a real-life location, often outside of a theatre building. An example is Wild Works Theatre's production of *Wolf's Child* (directed by Bill Mitchell), which took place outside on the Felbrigg Estate in Norfolk. You can find out more about this production here.

What style is the set?

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

Realism

Realist set designs incorporate elements that are meant to look like real life. Realism can be total or partial. Total realism means a set that looks as close to real life as possible and includes ***scenery***, furniture and ***props*** that mimic a real-life setting. The design will reflect the period that the play is set in with historical accuracy. Partial realism incorporates realistic elements into a set that might not be realistic overall, for example using detailed period furniture on a stage constructed of a series of platforms.

Symbolism
Symbolist sets are more interested in communicating an idea to the audience than in representing real life. Symbolism allows the designers to choose an image that they think represents the key themes of the play and to interpret this as a stage set.

Minimalism
Not all set design has to be large-scale. Minimalist sets use pieces of ***stage furniture*** or ***props*** to indicate a setting or location. For example, a table and two chairs could indicate a kitchen, dining room, or even a café. The specific identity of the space is determined by the way in which the actors behave. This process is called ***minimal signification***. There are many small theatre spaces, for example ***black box*** theatres, that are well-suited to minimalism.

Fantasy
Fantasy set designs allow the designer to create a new world for a production. Designers can engage with fantastical locations without the constraints of representing a world that is already known to the audience. However, it is worth remembering that a fantastical design still needs to maintain an internal logic so that the audience can understand and engage with the world of the production.

***Remember**: everything's deliberate!*

Good set design is a series of deliberate decisions. Always assume that anything on stage has been put there for a reason and contributes to the audience's experience.

What decisions has the designer made?

A set designer's job is to make deliberate decisions about what the audience see in the stage space. Part of understanding a stage set is considering what decisions have been made and what effect they might have on an audience. A set can be the first information that the audience is given about a production, as the set is often the first thing that the audience see in the theatre. Set designers might make decisions related to:

Shape: the shape of the stage floor, the shape of any platforms, levels, or pieces of ***scenery*** and the shape of any ***stage furniture***. Different shapes can have a different effect on the audience or create a different atmosphere: lots of smooth curves look and feel very different to lots of jagged, pointed lines.

Colour: the colours used on the stage floor, pieces of ***scenery***, ***stage furniture*** and ***backdrop***. Colours on stage have many functions: they can be used to reflect colours in real life, create an atmosphere or tell an audience about the mood of a place or the personality of a character.

Scale: the size of individual items on stage and the relationship between different objects of different sizes. An audience can be told that an object is very important by making it slightly bigger and 'out of scale' or a strange atmosphere can be created by varying the scale of different parts of the stage.

Texture: the textures of surfaces on the stage (the floor or the walls), as well as the texture of the ***stage furniture***. Texture either comes from the materials used to create the set (wood, metal, fabric) or it can be created using paint effects (for example a painted woodgrain effect). Different textures can give the audience information about the setting of the play (ie heavy velvet curtains hanging at a window can tell the audience that the character who lives here is very wealthy) or can help create an atmosphere on stage (ie shiny metal surfaces can give a set a cold and clinical feeling).

***Remember**: 'read' a stage*

When an audience looks at a stage set, they will believe that what they are seeing is important and significant. We say that audiences 'read' the stage set: they identify important elements of the set and work out what they think these mean. When you interpret a stage set, you are also reading the stage. 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 set design is understanding the effect of the set on an audience. Useful questions to consider are:

Where are the audience?

Different theatre spaces create different relationships between actors and audience:

- ***End-on*** or ***proscenium arch*** theatres create a clear divide between actors and audience.
- ***Thrust*** theatres partly surround the stage with the audience.
- ***Theatres in-the-round*** entirely surround the stage with the audience.
- ***Traverse*** theatres have two blocks of audience facing each other across the stage space.
- ***Promenade*** theatre allows the audience to move freely around the performance space, often guided by the actors.
- ***Immersive*** theatre surrounds the audience with an experience, and they often interact directly with the actors and the space.

Each of these ***configurations*** creates a different relationship between the actors, audience and performance space. For example, ***in-the-round*** or ***thrust*** theatres allow the audience members to see one another and observe each other's reactions.

What sort of experience is the designer creating?

As well as communicating information about the production, the set design can also create an atmosphere for the audience. The set can establish a certain mood on stage. For example, in Vsevolod Meyerhold's 1926 production of *The Government Inspector*, the set consisted of very small platforms where all of the actors crowded together. This created a claustrophobic atmosphere for the audience. You can see photographs of this production here.

***Think about…** set changes*

Many productions need to represent more than one location or era on stage. Some theatre makers believe that ***set changes*** can disrupt the rhythm or pace of a production, so designers may use devices to make scene changes smoother, for example using ***flown scenery*** and ***trucks*** or actors bringing items on or off stage. Designers can also use a ***composite*** set that can represent many different locations without the need for a full ***set change***. Tom Piper's design for Shared Experience's production of *Mermaid* used a set that could represent both a young girl's bedroom and a world under the sea. You can read more about the production here.

Examples in action

Example 1: Paul O'Mahony's design for *Hedda Gabler*:

Paul O'Mahony created the set design for the Abbey Theatre's production of Ibsen's play *Hedda Gabler* in 2015. It is a good example of partial realism, using realistic furniture to indicate the setting. A range of images can be seen here:

paulomahonysetdesign.com/#!portfolio/vstc3=hedda-gabler

The hyperlink to the image is here.

- O'Mahony uses period furniture to indicate the era of Ibsen's play (1890s).
- Repeated rectangular frames indicate the edges of the room: there are frames for doors, windows and ceilings. These straight lines make the space seem very ordered and contrast with the curved edges of the chairs and table.
- O'Mahony has left empty space around the furniture, making the characters seem very isolated.
- The frame over the stage creates a false ceiling, making the space feel enclosed and claustrophobic.
- The use of blue is atmospheric, giving the set a cold feel. This is also seen in the shiny texture of the pale floor.
- The furniture appears high quality, indicating the social status of the characters.

What does Ibsen say about the set?

Here is Ibsen's introduction to Act 1 of *Hedda Gabler*, which gives a detailed outline of the set. O'Mahony has interpreted this, selecting key items from Ibsen's description, including the curtains, high-backed arm chair and oval table. Other items are suggested, but not realistically represented, for example the windows. The audience use their imaginations to 'fill in the gaps' in the design and O'Mahony's set both indicates the era and location of Ibsen's play and reminds the audience that they are in a theatre.

'A spacious, handsome, and tastefully furnished drawing room, decorated in dark colours. In the back, a wide doorway with curtains drawn back, leading into a smaller room decorated in the same style as the drawing room. In the right-hand wall of the front room, a folding door leading out to the hall. In the opposite wall, on the left, a glass door, also with curtains drawn back. Through the panes can be seen part of a verandah outside, and trees covered with autumn foliage. An oval table, with a cover on it, and surrounded by chairs, stands well forward. In front, by the wall on the right, a wide stove of dark porcelain, a high-backed arm-chair, a cushioned foot-rest, and two footstools. A settee, with a small round table in front of it, fills the upper right-hand corner. In front, on the left, a little way from the wall, a sofa. Further back than the glass door, a piano. On either side of the doorway at the back a whatnot with terra-cotta and majolica ornaments. Against the back wall of the inner room a sofa, with a table, and one or two chairs. Over the sofa hangs the portrait of a handsome elderly man in a General's uniform. Over the table a hanging lamp, with an opal glass shade. A number of bouquets are arranged about the drawing-room, in vases and glasses. Others lie upon the tables. The floors in both rooms are covered with thick carpets."

(Text available in the public domain.)

Example 2: Tina Kitzing's design for *Hedda Gabler*:

Compare O'Mahony's design with the set by Tina Kitzing for the Landesbühne theatre in Hannover (1999). A range of images can be found here: kitzing.net/en/index.php?id=theater_2

The hyperlink to the image is here.

- The blue beyond the curtains seems to indicate the sky outside. The contrast between this blue and the warm yellows and reds makes the room seem cosy.
- Kitzing uses natural textures like wood and muslin which give the room a natural, comfortable feel.
- Like O'Mahony's design, the furniture is smart and high quality, indicating the social class of the characters.
- Kitzing has chosen furniture that is not from the period of Ibsen's play (1890s), but from a mixture of eras. This could suggest that the production is set in the modern day (also seen in the actors' costumes). Mixing different eras can also make a play seem relevant to a lot of different times, a way of telling the audience that the play's message is still important and relevant today.
- The wooden platforms seem unstable. This is a deliberate choice by Kitzing to make the set feel like it might collapse at any moment. She believes that this reflects the unstable relationship that Hedda has with her husband, Tesman. You can read about this on Kitzing's website: kitzing.net/en/index.php?id=theater_2.
- The focus of the design is these piled up platforms. These give the actors a number of levels to work on and, in this scene, the raised area isolates Hedda from the other characters.

Reflections

How are O'Mahony's and Kitzing's designs similar? How do the designs communicate different things about Ibsen's play? Which do you find most effective and why?

Do it yourself

Two more designs for *Hedda Gabler*:

Here are links to two more designs for different productions of *Hedda Gabler*. Using the examples above for inspiration, consider the choices that each set designer has made and what effect these choices might have on the audience. Some ideas have been included to get you started.

The links to the images are below:

Hedda Gabler traditional set: here.

Sting and Honey's *Hedda Gabler*: here.

- What style is the set in? How can you tell?
- What colours has the designer used? What effect do these colours have?
- What era is the furniture?
- What does the set tell you about the social class of the characters?
- How closely does the set reflect Ibsen's notes in the play text? What has the designer chosen to include or leave out? Why might this be?
- What textures has the designer used?
- What is the most important part of the set? What catches your attention and why?
- Is the designer using any specific shapes?
- What is the location of the set? Is it inside or outside?
- What atmosphere has the designer created?
- What audience response would you expect from these designs?

Designing theatre sets

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to some ways that you can approach designing your own theatre sets. 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 set designer's role is to create a performance space that is interesting, creative and engaging for the audience. This space also needs 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 design.

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:

- What different locations do you need?
- Are there any atmospheres you need to create?
- Do scenes take place indoors or outdoors?
- Are any specific items of set or furniture mentioned?
- How many entrances and exits are needed?
- What **props** and **set dressing** are required?

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. Sometimes this is a piece of set that is difficult to realise on stage (for example, Lorca's play *Yerma* features a river for a group of washerwomen). Finding solutions to these problems can be a great starting point for your design work and can even determine the style of your whole design. Starting from a problem can be a very effective way to create a design.

***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 design is safe: consider the potential risks of your set 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?

Set design is very different from painting: a theatre set has to work in practice, in a performance. Here are some practical questions to consider when starting your design:

How will the actors get on and off stage?

A beautiful design is useless if the actors cannot easily get on and off the stage. Think about how many entrances and exits you will need and where you will place them. If you are designing a realistic set, think about where any entrances and exits might lead (to another room in the house, perhaps?) and whether these are partially visible. If you are designing a non-realist set, think about how and where the actors need to enter and exit during the performance. Where will the actors go when they aren't on stage? For example, will you need ***wings*** or ***masking***?

Can the actors move around easily and safely?

Complex sets with many levels can be very interesting and effective for the audience, but can the actors easily and safely move between the different levels? Have you made sure that any steps aren't too steep to climb, or that any sloped stage areas (called a ***raked*** stage) aren't too difficult for an actor to walk on?

How much space do the actors need?

Make sure that you have enough room in your design for all the actors in the scene and take into account what the actors will be doing (standing, running or dancing?). Crowded stage spaces can be used to great effect, but only if they are used deliberately. Don't create a space that is too crowded for the actors to move, unless you have very good reason for it!

Where are the audience and how are they seated?

Remember to consider the ***configuration*** of the audience and their ***sightlines***. Each ***configuration*** will have an effect on your designs. For example, ***in-the-round*** spaces mean that furniture cannot be too high, or you will block the audience's view.

Is it possible?

All designers also need to be sensible about their resources: consider whether you can achieve your design within a sensible budget, and whether your ideas are possible in a live performance.

Design tip

Incredible effects can be achieved through using projections as part of your design. Projections allow a designer to create and change a setting very quickly and can be extremely atmospheric. Projections can work with ***gauzes*** (see Understanding lighting design). But remember, projections take a lot of work to produce and need to be created early in the rehearsal process to make sure that they are of a suitably high standard. Look at Headlong's production of *The Nether* for inspiration: headlong.co.uk/work/nether/

Where can I get inspiration?

Research is a very important part of stage design. You can use research to develop your own ideas 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 re-create the era on stage, but you may take elements of shape, colour, texture and scale as inspiration for your final design. Areas for research might include:

- the style of the era or location itself (for example, furniture, home decoration and public places)
- if your play is set in a real place, what that place looks 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 set designs have been done for productions of this play
- what impact you want the set 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 chair in your design, you could gather pictures of different chairs to look at their colour, shape and texture. You can also find artists who have used chairs 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 furniture or ***props***, colours and paint samples, wallpaper swatches as well as anything else that is relevant to developing your final design.

How can I present my ideas?

Set 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 set design are a good starting point for communicating your ideas to other people. Your sketches can be from the perspective of the audience or from another angle, but you should make it clear what angle the sketch represents by adding a note.

Ground plans

Ground plans are drawings of the stage from above that show the location of different parts of the set. These are often drawn ***to scale***, and can be used to decide how much space there is on stage and how different elements of the set will fit together in practice.

White card models

White card models are models of the set made from white card. These show the outlines of the different parts of the set, but do not convey details like colour or texture. The purpose of a white card model is to give an overall impression of the stage space and many designers use these models as a starting point, to try out ideas before making a full model box.

Model boxes

Model boxes are detailed models of the set. Unlike white card models, these include the colours and textures of the design, giving a full impression of how the set should look in performance. Model boxes are usually made ***to scale***, with popular ***scale*** choices being 1:25 (where 1 cm in the model is equal to 25 cm in real life) or 1:50 (where 1 cm in the model is equal to 50 cm in real life).

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

Remember… *sightlines*

In theatre, we use the term ***sightlines*** to mean what the audience can and cannot see. As a set designer, you will want to make sure that your set does not block the audience's ***sightlines*** and prevent them from seeing the actors and following the action. You might also deliberately want to block some things from the audience. For example, you don't want the audience to be able to see into the ***wings***. Make sure that you think about the audience's ***sightlines*** as you are preparing your design. Remember that all audience members have a different view, so you need to think about ***sightlines*** from many different seats.

Examples in action

Example 1: Presenting designs for Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie*:

These links below show two different ways that designs can be presented. Naomi Hodgson's model box shows what the stage will look in three-dimensions. SLG's design sketch gives a front view of the set design for a different production.

The links to the images are below:

Naomi Hodgson's model box: here.

SLG's design sketch: here.

- Hodgson's model makes the angles of the walls very clear and shows how light will contribute to the set design. A model box allows a designer to experiment with light using a torch.
- Having a three-dimensional model lets the designer see some of the practicalities of the design, such as how the actors will be able to enter, exit and move about the space.
- Hodgson's model box shows how the furniture and ***scenery*** are placed on the stage in three-dimensions. You can see the depth of the stage, and which items are further ***upstage*** and ***downstage***.
- SLG's design sketch providing wallpaper samples helps the person viewing the sketch to understand how the design will look in real life.
- SLG's design sketch shows how detailed this design will be.
- Just showing one part of the design in colour draws attention to a specific detail. It is not that the designer only intends for one part of the set to be coloured, but that this emphasises the wallpaper as the most important part of this sketch.

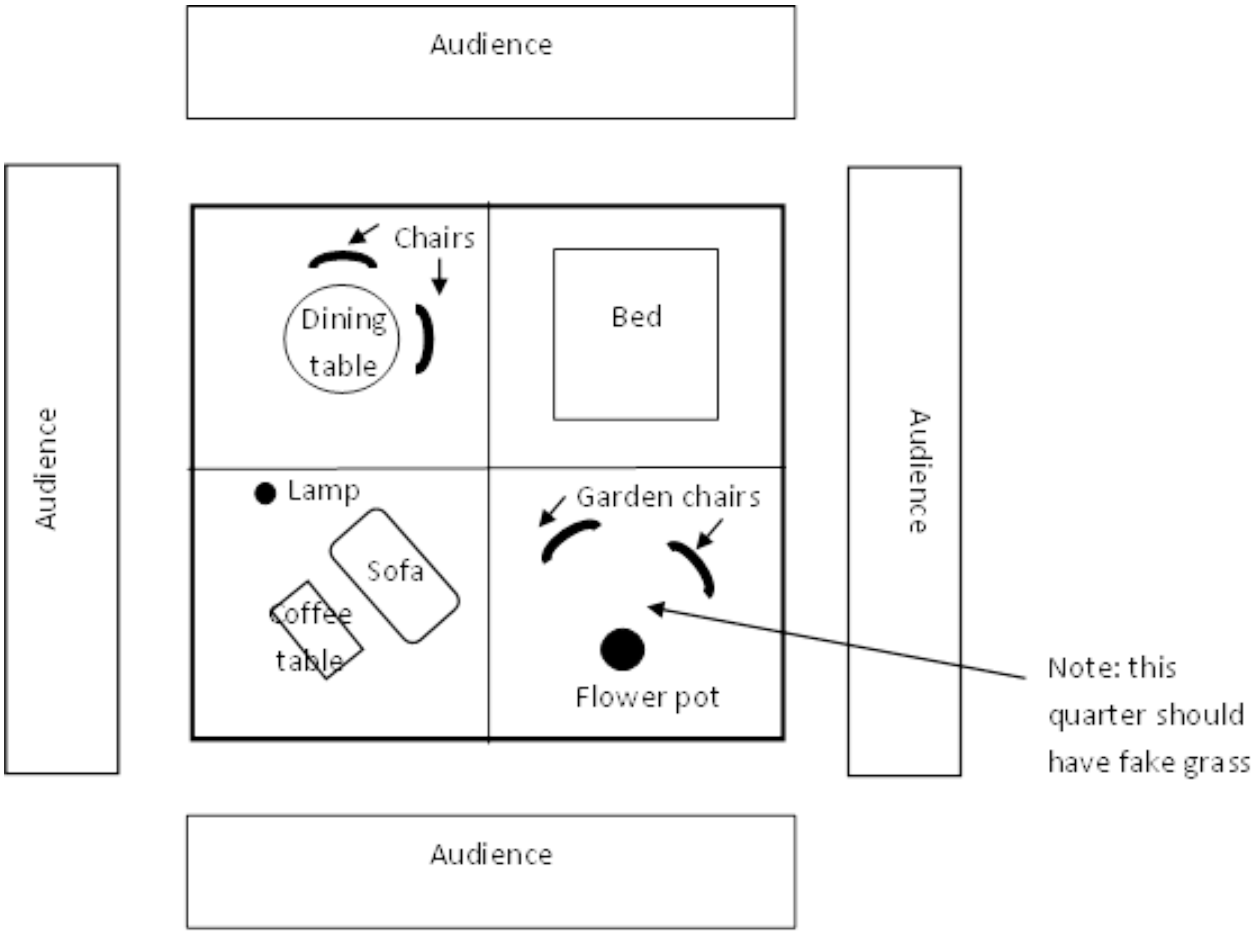
In his opening stage direction, Tennessee Williams says that the set should reflect the fact that scenes in *The Glass Menagerie* take place in someone's memory. How do these designs attempt to do this?

For a different approach to designing Williams' play, look at Headlong's production, which combined a bare stage space with a pool of water (headlong.co.uk/work/the-glass-menagerie/).

Example 2: Using a ground plan

Below is an example of a set ***ground plan***. The ***ground plan*** gives a different perspective on the set design, allowing the designer to show where on stage each object should be placed. Compare the ***ground plan*** to the photograph linked here to see how the final set works in performance.

- Each piece of furniture is marked and labelled, so the plan is easy to understand.
- The position of the audience is significant in this ***ground plan***: it is for a production ***in-the-round***.
- The curved lines show the direction that the chairs should face.
- Notes are used to show anything that cannot be easily drawn on the plan.
- The stage is divided into four sections, so that all audience members can see part of the set. Every audience member has a different angle on the set and a different experience of the production.



Do it yourself

Creating a ground plan:

Creating a ***ground plan*** is a good way to understand how your set design ideas might work in real life and provides a chance to explore where you might place things on stage for the most effective and practical design. This step-by-step guide will help you to create a ***ground plan*** for the set design you are currently working on.

1. Know your space

Look at your performance space. Work out what shape it is and, if you are working ***to scale***, measure it. Draw this outline shape as your starting point for the ***ground plan***.

2. Add your audience

What audience ***configuration*** are you using? Draw the audience onto your plan or make a note if you are working in ***promenade***.

3. Add the main parts of your set

Add any big pieces of ***scenery***, levels, platforms or stairs.

4. Add entrances and exits

Add any entrances and exits, noting what these are like (whether they need doors, for example?)

5. Think about sightlines

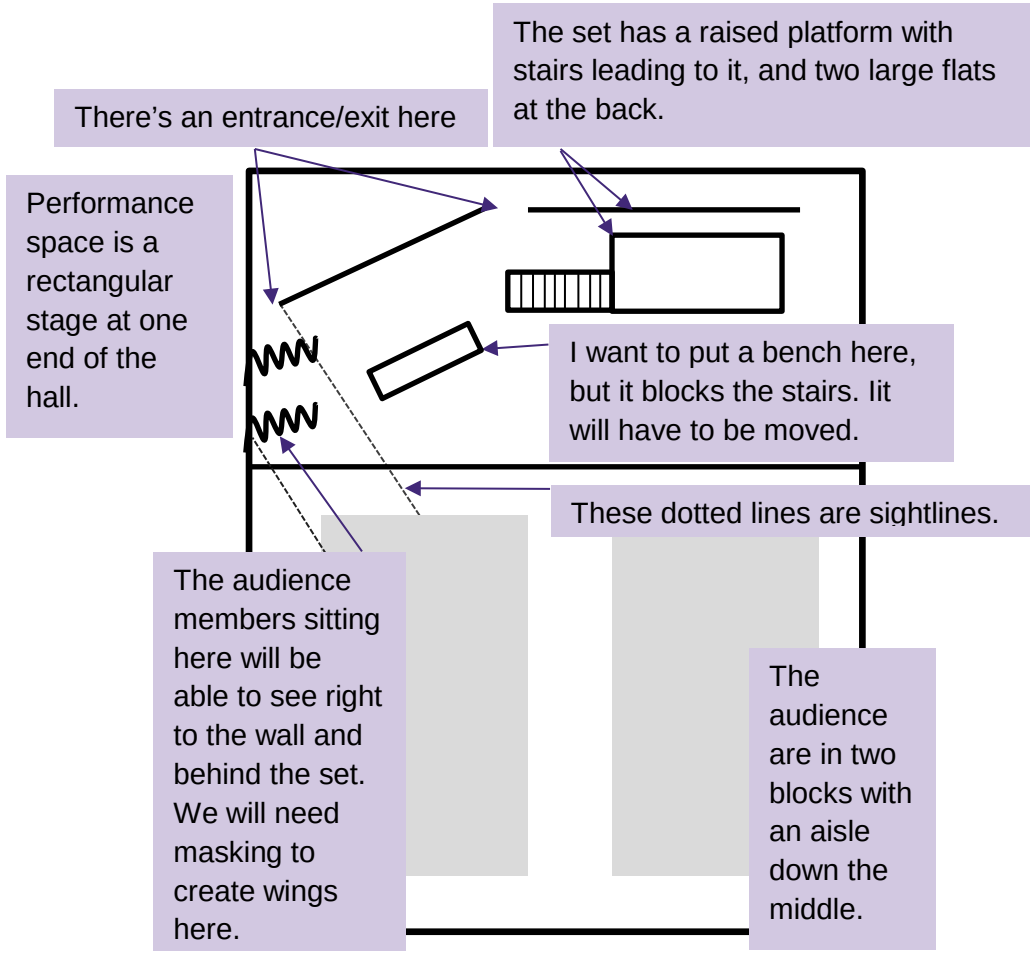
Consider what audience members will be able to see from their seats. Are any parts of the stage likely to be difficult to see? Do you need to add ***masking*** or ***wings*** for the actors to get on or off stage? It can help to add ***sightlines*** to the ***ground plan***.

6. Add any furniture or objects

Mark on furniture or significant ***props***. You might want to use paper cut outs of the furniture first to try different arrangements.

7. Reflect

The purpose of the ***ground plan*** is to help you see possible problems in your design. If something doesn't work, try it a different way.



Component 1 (written paper) section A and B set texts

These pages offer 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 set design.

Define the play's demands:

The geographical setting:

For example, rural Spain in *Yerma.*

The historical period:

For example, 19th century Norway in *Hedda Gabler*

The social class of the characters:

For example, caravan dweller in *Jerusalem*

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 architecture actually looked like in the 5th century Greece of *Antigone* or a police station in 20th century Italy in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (even if you intend to set the production in a different place or period). Remember that one is a tragedy and one a comedy and this will influence your approach when selecting and adapting images.

Decide

What configuration of the stage space would best suit your chosen aims? How would the commedia style of *A Servant of Two Masters* work differently if end-on or in-the-round? You might think about this in theory, but you should also experiment practically with your group. How would the Brechtian qualities of a production of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* best be achieved in a specific configuration?

Sketches

Ensure you have addressed every act, scene or requirement of the action. Draw precise, accurate and well-labelled sketches which you can reproduce if necessary in the exam to make your ideas clear and convincing.

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 document on ‘Understanding a theatre design’; how would you explain and, most especially, **justify** these in relation to the demands of the play and the impact you wish your design 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 set 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 on set.

Before the exam

- As soon as possible after your visit to the theatre, write notes from which you can revise and make detailed sketches of the set design(s).
- 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 set. Identify the focus of the question.

Make it clear what the set looked like:

If the question asks you to describe the set design, do so in as much detail as possible, but remember this is not the whole of your answer.

- Could someone who has not seen the production visualise the set you are discussing precisely?
- Consider the other aspects such as the scale, shapes, colour, textures and period.

Assess the production in relation to the requirements of the question:

For example, the question might refer to the mood/atmosphere or the effect for an audience.

- Define precisely what mood/atmosphere/effect was created and outline when this happened during the performance?
- What impression did you gain at the beginning of the performance?
- Did it change during the performance?
- Was this affected by the actors' *use* of the set?
- Assess the effect of the set 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 set designer on pages 17 and 18.
‘Set designers may choose to include design of props.’

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

Apply the variety of aspects discussed in the whole of this document on ‘Understanding a Theatre Set’.

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.

Review the practicalities

As a designer working within a school or college, you have some specific challenges if you are building the actual set.

- When will you have access to the space, for both the construction and the rehearsals?

- Can your set remain in place after you have constructed/created it, undisturbed?

Consult widely within your centre to avoid double bookings.

Rehearsal dates

- Create a schedule which allows for changes and alteration; there are always unexpected challenges, problems or opportunities.

- Your set needs to be ready for the actors to familiarise themselves with it, to look comfortable in it and to take advantage of the opportunities it provides.

- Your deadline is not the day of the exam.

Create your design

Now start your mood board, sketches, white box model or detailed model, as wells as the set itself.

Review the practicalities again

- Can your design be lit from the existing rig?

- Can all items be built, bought or borrowed within your budget?

- Is there space in the wings for the scenery, movement and actors?

- **Is the design safe**? Have fire regulations been observed?

Watch rehearsals with an open mind

Your set is there to serve the actors, not to be a piece of installation art!