AQA
Realising potential

# A-LEVEL DRAMA AND THEATRE

## Understanding and designing theatre sound

7262

Teaching guide: sound 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 and designing theatre sound

# Understanding theatre sound design

## Introduction

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

## What is the sound design doing?

Sound in theatre goes beyond finding the right sound effects for a production. Sound can be used to establish the time or location of a performance, or to create and enhance mood and atmosphere.

**Time and location** are the 'when' and 'where' of a production. Sound 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. A sound effect of a car or aeroplane will be very different according to the period of the play and the type of vehicle.

**Mood and atmosphere** is the feeling that the production creates for the audience. Sound is very significant in creating mood and atmosphere, and audiences will associate different sounds with different moods. Mood and atmosphere can be created through the use of music or through a soundscape or choice of sound effects. Moods and atmospheres can also be achieved through the alteration of sounds, for example adding reverb or echo.

When you consider a sound design, ask yourself whether the sounds are there to indicate a specific time or location, whether they are creating a specific atmosphere or mood for the audience, or whether they are doing both: sometimes a playwright or director uses a certain location or time deliberately to create a mood or atmosphere, and this could be reflected in the sound design.

***Think about…*** *soundscapes*

Sound is a constant part of our daily lives: it is very, very rare for the world to be absolutely silent. Take a moment to listen to the world around you and try to list all of the sounds you can hear. These sounds make up the soundscape of your life at this moment. Soundscapes can be used effectively in performance to create a location or an atmosphere. For example, a play set in a seaside town might need a soundscape of waves, families playing and seagulls to tell the audience where the action is taking place. Watching a horror film can give you a clear idea of how sound can create atmosphere: creaking doors and sinister music are used not only to tell the audience where the film is set, but also how they should feel about that setting!

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

Good sound 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 style is the sound?

Theatre productions use a range of styles and the sound designer needs to respond to the overall style of the production. It is important to be able to identify the style of a production in order to understand how and why the sound design has been put together. Some examples of styles include:

### Realism

Realist productions incorporate elements that are meant to represent real life. Realism can be total or partial. Total realism means a production that seems as close to real life as possible, so sound designs for these productions need to mimic sound in real life. Partial realism incorporates realistic elements into a production that might not be realistic overall, for example, using a sound design that has some realistic and some non-realistic elements.

### Symbolism

Symbolist productions are more interested in communicating an idea to the audience than in representing real life. Symbolism allows the sound designer to create a design that communicates some of these ideas to an audience, perhaps through deliberately using certain sound effects or music for certain characters or using abstract sounds.

### Minimalism

Not all productions have to be large-scale. Minimalist productions use empty spaces and rely on the actors to create an experience for the audience. In minimalist theatre, sound can be used to create an entire setting, or a location can be changed simply by changing the soundscape.

### Fantasy

Fantasy productions allow the designer to create a new world. For sound designers, this might mean the use of a range of sound effects, music or soundscapes to create a magical atmosphere. 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.

***Think about…*** *music, sound effect or soundscape?*

Sound designers can use a range of different types of sound, including music, sound effects or soundscapes. Music can be used to accompany the action (called ***underscoring***), or can be called for by the play text. It can be created live on stage or ***pre-recorded***. Sound effects are often called for by the play (for example a telephone ringing), but can also create a mood or comment on the action: a comedy might use a certain sound every time a character falls over, for example. Soundscapes either set location or create a mood. Most designers will use a combination of these types of sound to create the design for a performance.

## What decisions has the designer made?

A sound designer's job is to make deliberate decisions about what the audience hear during the performance. Part of understanding a sound design is considering what decisions have been made and what effect they might have on an audience. Sound designers might make decisions related to:

**Sound levels:** how loudly or softly the sound effects or music are played. The choice of volume can create an atmosphere for an audience. For example, the sound of a library is very different to the sound of a nightclub!. Sound played at a very loud volume can have a physical effect on the audience: it is possible to feel very deep or very loud sounds vibrating through the theatre space. But remember, sound ***levels*** must always be set so that the actors can be heard.

**Reverb:** as an effect added to a sound using ***editing software*** or occurring naturally in a performance space. Reverb (or reverberation) occurs when sounds bounce off the surfaces in a space. Even after the original sound has stopped, the reverb can continue. Reverb can sound different in different spaces: imagine the difference between playing loud music in a cathedral and a classroom. Adding reverb to a sound

can help the audience understand the location or atmosphere of a performance.

**Echo:** as an effect added to a sound using ***editing software***. Like reverb, echo occurs when sounds bounce off surfaces. Unlike reverb, which is a blend of different sounds, echoes are specific sounds, for example if you shout your name in a tunnel and hear it repeated back to you. An echo can indicate a specific location, for example an empty cave, or can create a mood for an audience, like the isolation or loneliness of a character.

**Fades:** how the volume of a sound alters. Music, sound effects or soundscapes can be ***faded*** in (gradually made louder) or ***faded*** out (gradually made quieter) during a performance. This might be used as a way to start or stop an effect, or to alter the sound ***level*** in response to the action on stage. Sounds can also be established at a higher volume, ***faded*** to a lower ***level*** when the action begins, and brought back up at the end of a scene, giving the impression that the sound has been played at the same volume throughout.

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

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

### Where are the audience?

Different theatre spaces create different relationships between actors and audience.

For example, theatres can be ***end-on***, ***thrust***, ***in-the-round***, or ***traverse***; performances can also be ***promenade***, ***immersive*** or ***site specific***. Further information on these ***configurations*** can be found in the document on set design and in the glossary.

When you are designing sound or analysing a sound design, you should carefully consider the ***configuration*** of the performance space and what influence this might have. Each ***configuration*** creates a different challenge for the sound designer, who will need to think about where the sounds will be played from, as well as which sounds will be used. Placing ***speakers***, for example, is a very important part of the sound designer's job: perhaps a sound needs to come from a certain part of the stage. For example, a doorbell sound needs a ***speaker*** near a door. Sending a specific sound to a specific ***speaker*** is called ***routing*** the sound.

***Speakers*** can also be placed around the audience to create a ***surround sound*** effect. Theatre practitioner Antonin Artaud used this effect in his production of *The Cenci* (1935). According to Kimberly Jannarone, this was "perhaps the first use of surround sound in the theater[*sic*]" (Jannarone, K. *Artaud and his Doubles*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbour, 2012, p. 168). You can read more about Artaud's use of sound in his book *The Theatre and its Double*.

### What sort of experience is the designer creating?

Some productions choose to use sound to create a specific experience for the audience. This can include using very loud sounds to make the audience feel uncomfortable, or ***routing*** the sound to certain ***speakers***. Sound designer Gareth Fry uses background sounds to create moods for the audience, for example, using a low rumble throughout a production of *The Oresteia* at the National Theatre in 1999. You can read more about the production here.

## Examples in action

### Example 1: Complicite's *The Encounter*

In 2015, theatre company Complicite created *The Encounter*, inspired by Petro Popescu's book *Amazon Beaming*. The production is a solo performance by Complicite's artistic director Simon McBurney, with sound design by Gareth Fry with Pete Malkin.

You can read more about the production here.

In *The Encounter*, the audience wear headphones to hear a combination of live and *pre-recorded* sound. On stage, they can see the technology used to create and replay the sounds, including the microphones which McBurney uses. During the performance, he tells the story of retracing photographer Loren McIntyre's journey into the Amazon Rainforest.

Gareth Fry talks about the experience of designing the sound for the production:

'After 5 years of workshops and experiments Complicite's *The Encounter* has opened Edinburgh's International Festival. The project has taken me further than most – myself, director/performer Simon McBurney, photographer Chloe Courtney and guide Paul Heritage spent 5 days in Brazil in 2014 staying with a community of Mayorunan's, the tribe who feature in the story of Amazon Beaming, which this show is based around – hearing their stories and travelling into the rainforest to record its sounds. Several hundred mosquito bites later, those recordings form the bed of the show.'

'It's all very well having lots of ***binaural*** recordings to play in the show but they mean nothing without headphones to listen to them through. Most shows that use ***binaural*** sound go down the wireless headphones route, but I didn't feel the quality was up to the needs of this show. Further experiments ensued to develop a wired headphone system that could deliver the sound to over 500 people, one that could do weekly touring with a variety of different ***auditoria*** and seats.'



- *The Encounter* makes sound an essential part of the audience's experience by using visual references to the sound design as part of the set.
- See how Fry's research becomes part of the performance. The journey that the show's creators took becomes part of the sound of the show.
- Fry is concerned with the audience's experience: wireless headphones didn't give a good enough sound quality, so he needed to find the wired headphones that would give the best quality of sound.
- *The Encounter* was a touring production: note how Fry thinks about the practicalities of the headphones. They have to be useable in a number of different theatres.
- Fry combines live and ***pre-recorded*** sound as part of *The Encounter*. This means that the sound technicians for the show need to handle different sorts of sounds during a performance. Fry talks about the people involved in running sound for the show here.

***Binaural*** recording is a way of recording that uses 2 microphones and headphones to make the listener feel like the sounds are taking place all around them. Thom Dibdin, in his review of *The Encounter* in The Stage, said that it felt like the show was "transferred from the stage deep into the heads of the audience (literally, or so it feels)." (©TheStage/ThomDibdin).

**What does Fry say about the process of designing the sound?**

Fry notes that *The Encounter* is a devised production and this affects how the sound is designed. He writes:

'While the headphone system requires a lot of preparation, *The Encounter* is also a devised show - the script came out of rehearsals as a process of experimentation and refinement. In fact our press night in Edinburgh marked only the 5th time we'd ever run the show from start to finish. The show is and will remain in constant flux so we can change and refine the story as we go.'



**What challenges do you think a devised show presents for a sound designer?**

Many of the quotations in his section are from Complicite's resource website for *The Encounter*. You can find a lot more information about the show here

You can also see a clip of the show here.

## Example 2: Mic Pool's design for *The 39 Steps*

In 2005, Mic Pool designed the sound for the stage adaptation of Alfred Hitchcock's film *The 39 Steps*, itself an adaptation of John Buchan's novel. Pool went on to win the first Tony Award for Best Sound Design of a Play for his work on the production. You can read more about Pool's work here.

**You can watch the trailer for *The 39 Steps* here.**

As you watch, notice the use of sound effects and music. Try to notice the difference between sound that has been added for the trailer and sound that is part of the production. Even the trailer music is useful though, you can think about why this music has been chosen and what effect it could have on the viewer.

Whilst watching the clip, think about the details of the music. Consider how the music fits to the action. For example, in the sequence with the stabbed body lying across the chair, listen for the trill in the music just before the actor pulls the knife: it feels like this trill is an idea occurring to the character. Listen to the sort of music that has been chosen for the trailer: notice how it suggests the 1930s era of Hitchcock's original film. This indicates the production's setting to the audience.

How the sound effects and the actors interact is particularly important in this production, in which a cast of four actors represent 130 characters in a variety of situations and locations. Watch the car sequence and the use of the horn: the sound effect helps the audience to visualise the car, demonstrating how sound effects can enhance a minimalist production. The effect of the horn is also comic: the audience laugh at the detached steering wheel that seems to make a sound.

***Reflections***

Compare the purpose of sound in *The Encounter* and *The 39 Steps*. How are the different designers using sound to make a creative contribution to the production?

## Do it yourself

### More designs by Fry and Pool

Try to find out more about sound designs by Gareth Fry and Mic Pool. Look on their websites to choose a production, and then search out reviews and clips. Many of their productions tour, so you might also be able to see their work live. Read the sounds very carefully: what do the designers seem to be trying to do?

**Gareth Fry's website can be found here.**

***Some productions you might find interesting include:***

*Black Watch* (National Theatre of Scotland)

*John* (DV8)

*Othello* (Frantic Assembly)

*The Glass Menagerie* (Headlong)

The 2012 Olympics opening ceremony

***Mic Pool's website can be found here:***

micpool.com/

Some productions you might find interesting include:

*Bad Girls: The Musical* (Garrick Theatre)

*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (West Yorkshire Playhouse)

*Shockheaded Peter* (Cultural Industry World Tour, West End)

*The King's Speech* (Wyndham's Theatre)

*The Unexpected Man* (RSC, West End, New York, Los Angeles)

- What sounds are used?
- What music is used?
- How do the music and sound effects fit to the action?
- Do the sounds indicate a particular place or era?
- Do the sounds create a particular mood or atmosphere?
- What audience response would you expect from these designs?
- What ***levels*** are used for each sound? Is there any variation in the ***levels***?
- Can you identify the style of the production? How does this relate to the choice of sounds?
- How does the genre of the production change the sound designer's role? In what ways might it be different to design sound for a musical instead of a play?
- Does the sound have a comic or serious effect on the audience?
- Can you find any reviews of the production that tell you what effect the sound had on an audience to compare to your own opinions?

Gareth Fry is currently working on the sound design for the West End production of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (link here). What sort of demands might this production make on a sound designer? What possible differences can you identify between sound design for film and for theatre?

# Designing theatre sound

## Introduction

The purpose of this section is to introduce you to some ways that you can approach designing your own sound for the theatre. 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 sound designer's role is to create sound effects, music and soundscapes for a performance that are interesting, creative and engaging for the audience. Your design 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:**

- Are there any specific sound effects or music mentioned in the play text?
- What different locations and times do you need?
- Are there any atmospheres you need to create?
- Do scenes take place indoors or outdoors?
- Will you need any live sounds or music?
- Will you need any microphones or similar equipment?
- Do you need any music or sound effects during scene changes?

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 difficult sound effect or atmosphere to create. 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. Sound can also help to solve these sorts of problems: perhaps a soundscape could be used to create a particularly difficult setting or location.

## What practicalities should I consider?

Like all aspects of theatre design, sound design is a practical art form. A sound design has to work in practice, in a performance. Here are some practical questions to consider when starting your design:

### Where is the sound coming from?

The sound designer must choose where to place ***speakers*** and what sounds to ***route*** through them. Think about whether sounds needs to come from a specific place on the stage: if there is a doorbell effect, can you ***route*** it so that it is coming from near the door?

### What challenges and advantages does your space present?

Sounds are different when they are played in different places. Some buildings have very good acoustics, others do not. Your space might create an interesting quality of reverb or echo. Try out your effects in your space before the performance. Remember that adding a set, as well as the presence of an audience, might change some of these natural qualities.

### Is the level of sound correct?

Sounds that are too loud or too quiet can cause problems for your audience. Ensure that the ***levels*** of sound aren't too loud for the audience to bear or the actors to be heard. Of course, you can use very high or low ***levels*** of sound to create a specific mood, but this must be deliberate and not a mistake. Remember that sounds can sound different in empty and full rooms: so set your ***levels*** in similar circumstances to the actual performance!

### What resources do you have available?

Be creative with your resources: a sound design can use expensive equipment and instruments, as well as other everyday items and homemade instruments. Most mobile phones can now record sound clips and ***editing software*** is readily available: you can experiment with these to record your own sound effects.

### 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.

***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 design and try to find ways to reduce or remove them.
Read more at:
hse.gov.uk/entertainment/theatre-tv/index.htm

***Think about…*** *diegetic and non-diegetic sound*

On stage, there is a difference between sound that is part of the world of the play and sound that comes from outside of that world. A key question to consider is whether or not the characters on stage can hear the sound. If they can, it is part of the world of the production and is called ***diegetic*** sound. If the characters cannot hear the sound (for example, ***underscoring*** used to create a mood), it is called ***non-diegetic*** sound.

## Where can I get inspiration?

Research is a very important part of sound 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 recreate the era on stage, but you may take elements to inspire your use of sound ***levels***, reverb, echo and ***fades***, as well as the sort of sounds you select. Areas for research might include:

- the era or location itself (even pictures can help with sound research eg: a picture of a busy street might help you think about the sounds you would hear there)
- if your play is set in a real place, what that place looks and sounds like (if you can visit it, even better!)

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

### Developing your ideas

As well as contextual research, you should gather materials relating to your own ideas. Experimenting with sounds is important: what sounds do you hear every day? How do different pieces of music represent different moods for you? Don't restrict yourself to things you already know: listening to new types of music can be a great source of inspiration.

***Design tip***

A mood board is a good way to gather your research together and compare your ideas. Mood boards do not have to be visual: you could create a sound mood 'board' by gathering clips or music that you might use as a playlist or recording everyday sounds that could inspire a soundscape.

## How can I present my ideas?

Sound 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:

### Sound breakdown

You can produce a sound breakdown to outline all of the sounds used in the production. You can include a lot of detail about the sort of sounds you envisage. For example, what will be included in a soundscape? Which piece of music will you use? Are any effects to be created live by cast or crew? You can also indicate the ***level*** of the sounds.

### Sound cue list

A sound ***cue list*** is a list of all of the sounds in the production in order, with an indication of what the sound is, how it is ***faded*** in and out, what ***level*** it is played at and when in the production it takes place (the line or action that cues the sound).

### Sound ground plan

Sound designers can use ***ground plans*** to indicate where any important pieces of sound equipment will be placed during a performance. This can include ***speakers***, microphones, any instruments you will be using and any other objects that might be used to make a sound.

### CDs or MP3 files

Samples of sounds, as well as the final sounds, can be recorded onto a CD or as MP3 files. This allows you to communicate the final qualities of your sound effects, soundscapes and music to your director and actors, as well as to the examiner. You can use samples of sounds in rehearsal, so that actors get used to the sound effects or music you are using, and you can begin to think about sound ***levels*** whilst you are still rehearsing.
Most designers will use a combination of these methods to present their ideas.

***Think about…*** *equipment*

A sound designer uses a range of equipment to create their design. This can include microphones, ***amplifiers***, software, or musical instruments. The choice of equipment will determine the quality of the sound produced. Microphones and ***amplifiers*** can alter the sound of an actor's voice, as well as making it louder and more audible in the performance space. Sound designers use different software to manipulate sounds and create sound effects or soundscapes. Sound designers can also use musical instruments to create sound for a performance, either live on stage or ***pre-recorded***. These can be conventional musical instruments played by a musician or improvised instruments made by the designer or actors themselves.

## Examples in action

### Example 1: Sound equipment

As a sound designer, it is important to understand your equipment. Here are some examples of different types of microphones and ***speakers*** as well as their possible uses in performances. Remember, though, that you can also get good effects using everyday or improvised equipment, including mobile phones for recording, free ***editing software***, homemade musical instruments, or any object used to make a sound on stage.

### Handheld microphone

Handheld microphones (or hand-mics) are exactly what they say: microphones that can be held in an actor's hand! They can also be placed in a stand to give the actor free hands. Do some research into your hand-mic, particularly find out how closely it should be held to the actor's mouth: if you get this wrong, you either won't be able to hear the actor (too far away) or you'll get odd sounds (too close).

### Wireless microphone

Wireless microphones (sometimes called radio microphones or radio-mics) are microphones that send a radio signal so do not need to be directly connected to the sound system. They can be very small and give an actor freedom to perform without holding a microphone or having any cable attached. Some have a clip to attach to clothing, or are attached to a headset or headband.

### Hanging microphone

These microphones can be hung above the stage, picking up sound from a number of performers at once. They are particularly useful for making sure that large choruses can be heard.

### Active speakers

All ***speakers*** need to be connected to an ***amplifier*** for you to hear sound from them. Active ***speakers*** have an ***amplifier*** built into them, so do not need to be connected to a separate ***amplifier***. You can often plug a microphone directly into an active speaker. Active ***speakers*** need a power source, so they must be near to a mains plug socket.

### Passive speakers

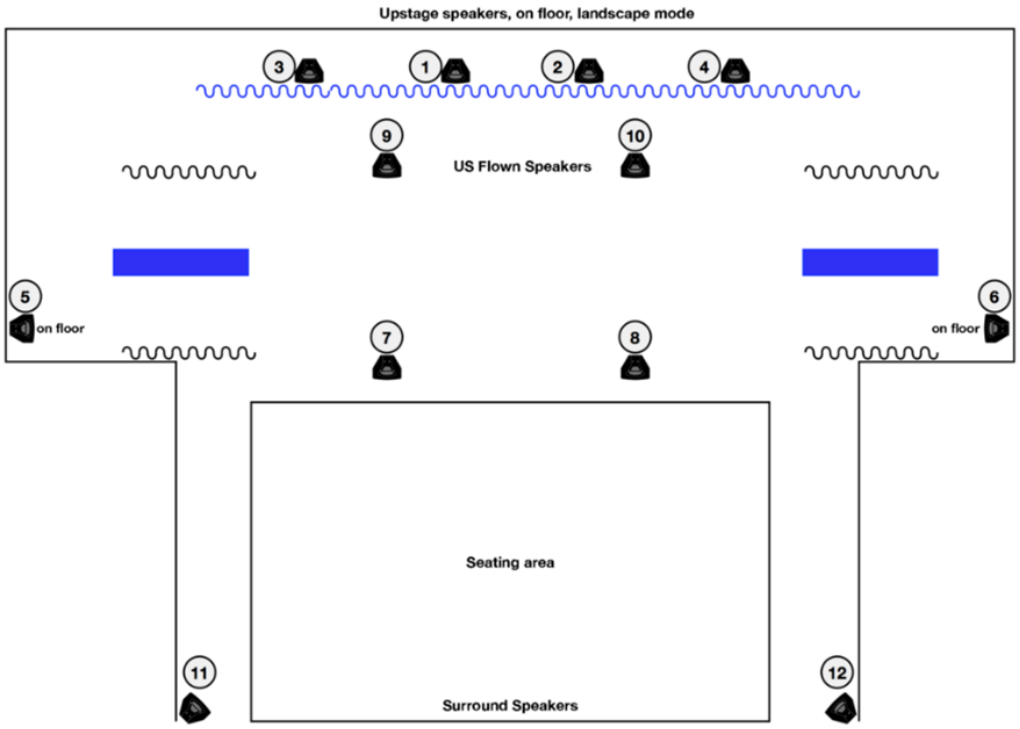
Passive ***speakers*** are ***speakers*** that need to be connected to a separate ***amplifier***. Without an ***amplifier*** connected, you will not hear any sound from these ***speakers***. Passive ***speakers*** do not need to be plugged into a mains socket.

### Sound desk

Sound equipment is controlled through the sound ***desk***. This is where the sound technicians can control the quality, ***level*** and ***fade*** of each sound.

## Example 2: Understanding a sound plan:

Below is an example of a sound plan by Gareth Fry for the production of *The Cat in the Hat* at the National Theatre. The plan is taken from Fry's website, and you can read more about the design here.






- Fry notes the orientation in which the ***speakers*** should be placed – in this case, they are to be in landscape mode.
- Each ***speaker*** is numbered.
- The shapes of the ***speakers*** show the direction in which the ***speaker*** will be facing.
- The plan shows both the stage and where the audience will be seated.
- Each ***speaker*** is marked onto the plan. This tells the person who will ***rig*** the ***speakers*** where in the space each ***speaker*** should be placed. Some ***speakers*** are marked as 'on floor', the others will be hung from ***bars*** over the stage (***flown***).
- Note that two ***speakers*** are behind the audience. Fry calls them ***surround speakers***. These will give Fry the opportunity to create sound that surrounds the audience. You can read more about ***surround sound*** on page 3.

Both Gareth Fry and Mic Pool give support and guidance for students of sound design on their websites. These have a lot of great information for anyone interested in sound. They can be found here:

Gareth Fry: here.

Mic Pool: here.

## Do it yourself

### Creating a sound cue list:

Creating a sound ***cue list*** helps you think about the different sounds you will need for your performance. You will also need to consider what time or location you are working with, and what mood or atmosphere you want to create. This step-by-step guide will help you to create a sound ***cue list*** for a scene from the play you are working on. You could also add the ***level*** for each sound when this has been set.

**1. Know your resources**
Start by thinking about your performance space and the sound equipment available to you. Do you have any other resources you might want to use, for example instruments?

**2. Know the action**
Look closely at the scene you are working on and think about what you need to include. Are there any sound effects or music in the text? Are there any locations you want to indicate, for example through a soundscape?

**3. Know the meaning**
Now look again at the text and identify any key moments or themes. Is there a scene with a specific atmosphere? Does something important change? Could you reflect this through the sounds or ***levels*** of sound used?

**4. Mark the sound cues**
On a grid like the one opposite, mark the points at which the sound effects, music or soundscapes will need to change and fill in the ***cue*** for this to happen.

**5. Mark the sounds**
Add each sound to the grid. Is it a sound effect, music or soundscape? Will you want to add any reverb or echo to the sound? What ***level*** will you use?

**6. Think about fades**
How will you start and stop the sound? Will it ***fade*** or ***cross-fade*** (***fade*** from one sound into the next)? Don't ignore the effectiveness of sudden silence!

**7. Reflect**
The purpose of the ***cue list*** is to give you an overview of your design. You might see a possible problem: if something doesn't work, try it a different way!

| Cue | Sound | Details |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Lights ***fade*** up as MAN 1 enters | Soundscape: garden noises, summer evening<br>*Sound and lighting **cues** can come together, especially at the start or end of a scene.* → | Slow ***fade*** up with lighting to ***level*** 7. Make sure actors can still be heard over sound, so reduce to ***level*** 2. |
| 2. When WOMAN 1 slams the door | Soundscape stops | Cut sound with door slam (do door slam live backstage). |
| 3. When MAN 2 switches on the kitchen light | Sound effect: telephone rings →<br>*This tells you that you will need a phone sound effect track with at least 8 rings.* | Modern landline phone sound. Needs to ring 8 times. ***Level*** 6. |
| 4. When the argument between MAN 1 and WOMAN 1 starts | Music: ***underscoring*** for the argument.<br>***Underscoring** adds atmosphere or mood.* | Slow ***fade*** up during argument: from ***level*** 2 to ***level*** 4. Must be instrumental music (no lyrics). |
| 5. As WOMAN 1 grabs the knife | Music begins to be distorted.<br>*Distorting the music can alter the atmosphere, reflecting the nasty turn that the argument has taken.* | Add reverb to distort the sound of the music. |
| 6. As MAN 2 screams | Music stops during scream. | Quick ***fade*** out to transfer audience's attention onto the scream. |

## 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 sound design.

### Define the play's demands

The geographical setting:

For example, the background sounds in rural Spain for *Yerma*

The historical period:

For example, the appropriate sounds outside which can be heard as doors and windows open in *Accidental Death of an Anarchist.*

The social class of the characters:

For example, the voices heard off stage in the second scene of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle.*

## 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, listen to sound effects, record real-life sounds, experiment. More than one play on the list has the sound of church bells. Bells from a vast cathedral and bells from a small rural church need to be different: a cracked bell will sound very different from a true one. Consider what the difference would be between an appropriate recording for *Jerusalem* and for the distant church bells in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle.*

### Decide:

Whether your sound effects are ambient background sounds within a scene, are sounds to establish mood as a scene begins or are specific sounds of, for example, people knocking on doors. Remember all of the choices and the quality of the sound needs to be defined and justifiable in the play. Your decisions need to add to the audience's experience, not distract them. Sound for a production of *The Servant of Two Masters* could be particularly inventive, exaggerating the movements, trips and blows, and enhancing the *lazzi*.

### Sound design:

Ensure you have addressed every act, scene or requirement of the action. Consider the sound design you intend to use and define the effects in detail. Define the precise moment of the effect and consider how long the effect will last. If music is to be used, consider what effect the choice will have on your audience. Are they likely to know this music or will it be strange to them? Is the sound abstract and atmospheric? What equipment, levels and direction of speakers will best help to create the effect you imagine?

### Effectiveness for an audience:

Consider what effect you wish to create for **an audience**, by the sound design 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 sound design'; how would you explain and, most especially, **justify** these in relation to the setting, the action and the mood/atmosphere you wish to convey and the impact you wish your sound 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 sound 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 references 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 sound. Identify the focus of the question.

### Make it clear what the sound effects were:

If the question asks you to describe the sound effects, do so in as much detail as possible. Could someone who has not attended the production imagine the sound?

Consider the practical aspects such as the sound levels, the source and direction of the sound, the fades and any special effects.

### Assess the production in relation to the requirement of the question:

For example: the question might refer to the way sound created the setting, the mood/atmosphere or the effect for an audience.

**Define** precisely what aspects of the atmosphere and effects were created and when this happened?

Were there moments when the change of sound was deliberately noticeable? What effect did this have for an audience?

Assess the effect of the sound 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 sound designer on page 17

It is the student's sound **design** that is assessed. Although students are expected to operate the sound equipment when possible, this will not form part of the assessment.'

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.

Apply the variety of aspects discussed in the whole of the material in 'Understanding sound design'.

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 sound design will have on an audience and whether this is exactly what is required.

### Review the practicalities:

- Be realistic in your approach to designing your sound. Will what you imagine in your head be possible to create with the equipment you have available?
- Are there special effects you want to create?
- Remember that your actors might want to create the sounds live during the performance. You should still help to facilitate this.
- Will your use of sound levels be appropriate? Underscoring the action must be especially carefully considered. Remember your actors' voices and the lines they are delivering are almost certainly more important than your sound effect and must not be made inaudible.
- Will all the sounds you wish to create be equally effective wherever an audience member is sitting?
- Do your initial ideas reflect the aim and intentions of the group as a whole?

### Rehearsal dates:

- Create a schedule which allows for changes and alteration; there are always unexpected challenges, problems or opportunities.
- Your sound needs to be ready in time for you to hear the actors delivering their lines. As the sound designer you will be part of a demanding and precise technical rehearsal.
- Your deadline is not the day of the exam.

### Create your design

Now create your mood board of ideas, collect recordings and make your own, list equipment to be used (especially amplifiers and microphones) and then go on to create the full sound design.

### Review the practicalities again

- Are all your effects working fluently and in time with the requirements of the group?
- Is all equipment installed, positioned and adjusted correctly?
- **Have all safety regulations been adhered to?**

### Watch rehearsals with an open mind:

Your sound is there to serve the production, not to be imaginative and interesting but unrelated to the demands of the performance!