

# Chapter 8

## How to begin devising a script

NCEA Level 3 Drama material covered in this chapter includes information needed to successfully complete Achievement Standard 90609 (Drama 3.3):

- Devise, script and perform drama for solo, duo or trio performance.
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By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- begin devising a script.

Achievement Standard 90609 (Drama 3.3) is assessed internally and requires students to devise, script and perform drama for solo, duo or trio performance.

Devising means that you are going to create a fresh, new piece of drama. It may draw on written or visual texts, real or imagined characters, real or imagined places. Your work may be influenced by the work of other practitioners or by plays that you have seen. It can be a realistic, well-made play or an experimental piece using a variety of conventions.

The standard gives the following suggestions in respect of the format your devised piece may take. Your piece could be:

- a monologue, duologue or three-person presentation
- part of a group performance piece
- a range of role-changed characters performed by one, two, or three people
- a documentary drama
- a character-driven or plot-driven drama
- a dream sequence
- whaikorero or pakiwaitara/story telling.

## Conventions

The devised work could use the following conventions.

- **Structural conventions** – conventions that shape, or the sequence of events; for example, narration, choral work, visual images.
- **Theatrical conventions** – conventions that determine the relationship between the actor, the audience and the off-stage world; for example, performance space, mime, exits/entrances, theatre technologies.
- **Textual conventions** – conventions that record action/intention; for example, textual layout, textual notes/special vocabulary, prose, verse, stage directions, cast lists.

*(NZQA Level 3 Drama)*

There are also many other conventions and techniques that are available to you as you structure your devised piece. These include: still image (tableau); flashback; flashforward; spoken thoughts (thoughts in the head, voice-over) telephone conversations; monologue; soliloquy; episodes. Some techniques will help you prepare your piece and find out more about your role(s); for example 'role on the wall', hot-seating, diary writing, teacher in role.

It is a good idea to improvise scenes in order to explore your ideas. Drawing diagrams of your structure is also helpful in order to get an overview of your piece. *ESA's Year 12 (Level 2) Drama Study Guide* contains plenty of information about improvising, devising and the use of a structure graph to analyse the structure of your piece.

The following definitions may help you understand some of the formats available to you.

## **Whaikorero**

(The following is taken from: <http://www.korero.maori.nz/forlearners/protocols/whaikorero.html>)

'Whaikorero are the formal speeches generally made by men during powhiri (formal welcoming ceremonies) and in social gatherings. Only in some circumstances or in a few tribal areas are women invited to whaikorero.

The whaikorero is an opportunity for the speaker to display his or her mastery of the Maori language and a competent speaker is able to embellish his speech with imagery and metaphor.

The basic format for whaikorero is as follows.

- Tauparapara (ritual chant): a prayer or chant suitable to the reason for the meeting. Its purpose is to invoke the gods' protection and to honour the visitors.
- Mihi ki te whare tupuna (acknowledgement of the ancestral house): paying tribute to the central ancestor and descendants down through the generations until the present.
- Mihi ki a Papatuanuku (acknowledgement of Mother Earth): giving thanks for Mother Earth and all living things.
- Mihi ki te hunga mate (acknowledgement of the dead): paying tribute to the dead who live on in the spirit realm.
- Mihi ki te hunga ora (acknowledgement of the living): giving thanks for our continued existence.
- Te take o te hui (purpose of the meeting): the purpose for which the groups have gathered.
- Waiata (song): an opportunity for the group to lend support to what has been said. The waiata is usually chosen to be appropriate for the occasion and relates to the specific purpose of the hui. The waiata also removes tapu (restrictions).

Protocols determining the order of speakers vary from one iwi (tribe) and hapu (sub-tribe) to another.'

## **Pakiwaitara**

Pakiwaitara are accounts of stories associated with humankind. They tell the stories of hapu and iwi. They are important as they help the living to relate to their ancestors.

## **Monologue**

Drama or speech for one person to perform.

## **Duologues**

Drama for two actors to perform.

## **Documentary drama**

A drama devised from a variety of resources, such as diaries, newspaper reports, oral accounts, etc. These sources document a specific issue. Documentary drama often uses a wide variety of

theatrical conventions; for example, narration, song, direct address to the audience. An example of a documentary drama is *Oh What a Lovely War* by Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop, which is about World War I.

## Character or plot-driven drama

This may be a realistic drama in a linear form, exploring a range of characters in a specific situation, time and place. The plot will unfold; there will be a climax, and possibly a denouement (unravelling of events), and a conclusion.

## Beginning to devise



### Tip

You need to decide whether you are going to work alone or with one or two other students. Do not be pressurised by others. Make the decision that is right for you.

## What is my intention for this piece of drama?

### Impact on the audience

Who is my target audience?

What do I want to communicate to the audience?

What impact do I want to make?

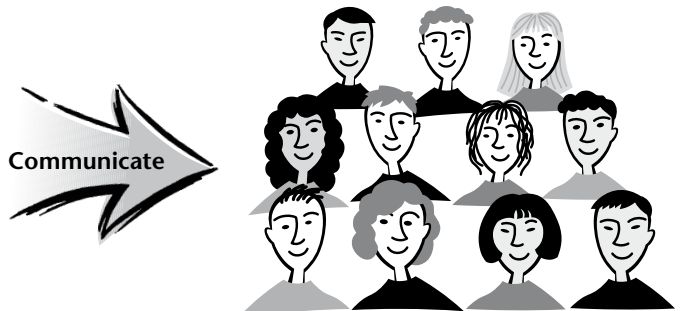
What is my intention with this piece?

What message do I want to send?

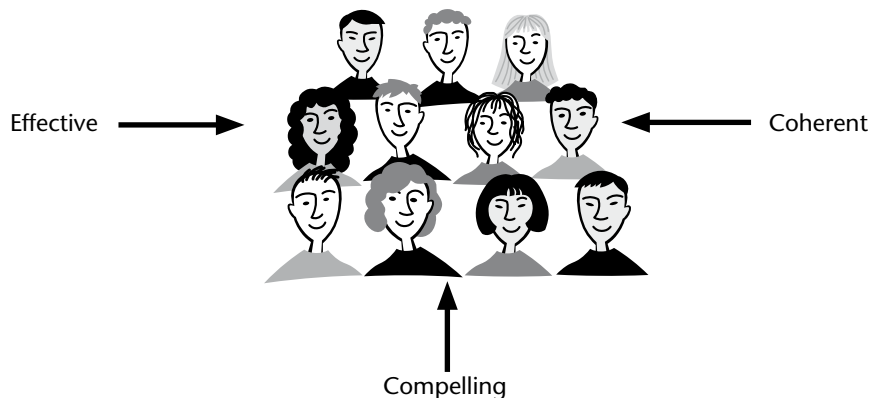
How can I realise my intention? (meaning, purpose, objective, plan, aim)

How do I make my drama **coherent**? (logical, consistent, reasoned, lucid)

How do I make my drama **effective and compelling**?



Your piece of drama may be ultimately for the purpose of your assessment, but it should nevertheless be a valid and worthwhile piece of drama to create and perform.



## What makes drama compelling?

Do a brainstorm or draw a Mind Map® (see Chapter 29) about what makes drama (whether it be on TV, cinema or the stage) exciting and interesting for you to watch. Is it the story? Or is it the characters, the situation, the conventions, the emotions, the mood, the music, etc.?

## Choosing the topic

When you start devising it is important that you choose a topic. You may find a topic immediately lends itself to you for exploration or you may need to brainstorm or Mind Map® ideas. Remember, doing a brainstorm gives you an opportunity to write down all ideas that come to mind, without refusing or judging any of them at this stage. A Mind Map®, as developed by Tony Buzan, is a more creative approach that allows you to make links between ideas.

You may be given a topic by your teacher that is designed to get you to explore a particular local topic or perhaps a topic that is of particular interest to other students of your age. For example, your teacher may ask you to read the following item taken from the *New Zealand Herald* in 2007.

## Task in Action 1: Drink driving

### Driving age looks certain to rise

Mr Dunne told Parliament recent statistics showed young drivers were in particular danger on the roads shortly after they got their restricted (solo driver) licences.

The number of crashes in the first month after gaining a restricted licence compared with the last month on a learner's increased 2.5 times for 18- and 19-year-olds, 4.5 times for 17-year-olds, eight times for 16-year-olds and 10 times for 15-year-olds.

'What that clearly shows is that the younger a driver is when they get a restricted licence, the higher the chance that they will crash,' Mr Dunne said. 'That is the point of this legislation.'

(*New Zealand Herald*, Friday, 19 October 2007)

Your teacher may ask you to carry out some research about the age at which teenagers can drive in New Zealand. You may also be given a poem or some other resource to stimulate your thinking. The following is a well-known poem often cited on websites. The author remains unknown.



### *Death of an Innocent*

I went to a party, Mom,  
I remembered what you said.  
You told me not to drink, Mom,  
So I drank soda instead.

I really felt proud inside, Mom,  
The way you said I would.  
I didn't drink and drive, Mom,  
Even though the others said I should.

I know I did the right thing, Mom,  
I know you are always right.  
Now the party is finally ending, Mom,  
As everyone is driving out of sight.

As I got into my car, Mom,  
I knew I'd get home in one piece.  
Because of the way you raised me,  
So responsible and sweet.

I started to drive away, Mom,  
But as I pulled out into the road,  
The other car didn't see me, Mom,  
And hit me like a load.

As I lay there on the pavement, Mom,  
I hear the policeman say,  
"The other guy is drunk," Mom,  
And now I'm the one who will pay.

I'm lying here dying, Mom...  
I wish you'd get here soon.  
How could this happen to me, Mom?  
My life just burst like a balloon.

There is blood all around me, Mom,  
And most of it is mine.  
I hear the medic say, Mom,  
I'll die in a short time.

I just wanted to tell you, Mom,  
I swear I didn't drink.  
It was the others, Mom.  
The others didn't think.

He was probably at the same party as I.  
The only difference is, he drank  
And I will die.

Why do people drink, Mom?  
It can ruin your whole life.  
I'm feeling sharp pains now.  
Pains just like a knife.

The guy who hit me is walking, Mom,  
And I don't think it's fair.  
I'm lying here dying  
And all he can do is stare.

Tell my brother not to cry, Mom.  
Tell Daddy to be brave.  
And when I go to heaven, Mom,  
Put "Daddy's Girl" on my grave.

Someone should have told him, Mom,  
Not to drink and drive.  
If only they had told him, Mom,  
I would still be alive.

My breath is getting shorter, Mom.  
I'm becoming very scared.  
Please don't cry for me, Mom.  
When I needed you,  
you were always there.

I have one last question, Mom.  
Before I say good bye.  
I didn't drink and drive,  
So why am I the one to die?

The resources will be designed to make you think about a topic. You are allowed to develop your ideas creatively with **one or two** other actors.

Use the **elements** of drama to help you explore some of the possibilities of these resources.

## Other resources

### **One More for the Road: Drink Driving Among Young People in Gore and Dunedin**

by Emma K. Hamilton <http://geovoice.otago.ac.nz/issue001/ehamilton.html>

The following quotations are taken from the above document and could be used to stimulate discussion about the topic.

*Yes – some would say it's an ego thing, the masculine thing. When it gets right down to it a lady's first goal in life is to get a good job, to get a good career and go on and get out there, while a man's first task in life is I want my car and the bigger and the faster the better. (Martin Hepburn, Dunedin Police)*

*It's the male thing to be able to drink copious amounts of alcohol, you know when a woman does it's not looked on as really cool, but when a guy does, it is. (18-year-old male)*

*There's a preoccupation in New Zealand with the idea of rugby, racing and beer, some people try to say different, but you know when I was a young fella, the pressure was on to booze up large. In my group I was the one to get the first car and I was the one who was expected to drive everyone around, and still drink myself. I was just lucky I didn't hurt anyone. (Martin Hepburn, Dunedin Police)*

*See it all has to do with experience and skill. If you're good enough you can hold your drink and drive well. That's what it's all about. Being good enough. (Male, anon.)*

## Useful plays that explore the theme

### **Too Much Punch for Judy by Mark Wheeler**

The play is based on a true incident which happened in 1983 and uses the words of those involved or closely affected.

'A hard-hitting **Documentary Play** telling the true life story of a young girl who kills her sister in a drink/drive related incident. Ten years later she went on to be responsible for another death in a road accident where she was not only drunk but had cannabis in her bloodstream. This is a new, updated script.'

**Source:** <http://www.wheellerplays.co.uk/>

### **Activity 8A: Explore the theme of drunk driving**

Name two or three films and other sources that illustrate the theme of drink driving.

# Devising a documentary drama: thinking about conventions

## Elements of Drama

ROLE	FOCUS
<p>What character possibilities are there in the resource? Am I focusing on a single character or will I need to multi-role? Who is the central character? Will this character challenge me? Are this character's personality, status, and background similar to or different from mine?</p>	<p>What is the focus of my story? Am I going to focus on a central character or is it more important to focus on the themes and explore the issues from several different perspectives? Will I use a narrator to help me focus the story? What framing device will I use to 'frame' the drama? What angle am I going to take on the story? Shall I use a flashback or the context of a news report or expert?</p>
SPACE	TIME
<p>Where will the drama take place? Am I in one location or do I need to show a variety of places? This will influence my choice of conventions. Props may become important to show location. Am I using a set? Will it be minimal, symbolic, or representational?</p>	<p>What time scales shall I use? A well-made play might use a period of only one day, or I may wish to show events that happen over several days, months, and years in a linear structure. This will influence my choice of conventions. Will I use flashbacks or a cyclic structure?</p>
TENSION	SYMBOL
<p>What will be the climax of the drama? What is the moment of highest tension for me? How will I show this? This will affect the structure and the conventions I use. This will also affect choices of technologies such as lighting and music to prepare for the climax or moment of tension. Is there conflict in the piece?</p>	<p>Are there possibilities for symbolism in the piece? Are there any symbolic props or characters? Is the situation symbolic of something else? Will I use colour symbolism? (E.g. Red for passion and death.)</p>
MOOD	ACTION (situation)
<p>What is the mood I intend to create for the piece? For each scene or episode? How will I create this mood? How will I use techniques, conventions and technologies? What affects the mood of the piece – is it the characters or the situation?</p>	<p>What is the main action of the piece? That is, what is happening in the piece? What actions will the characters carry out? Will all action take place on stage or will some action be reported?</p>

### Possible conventions

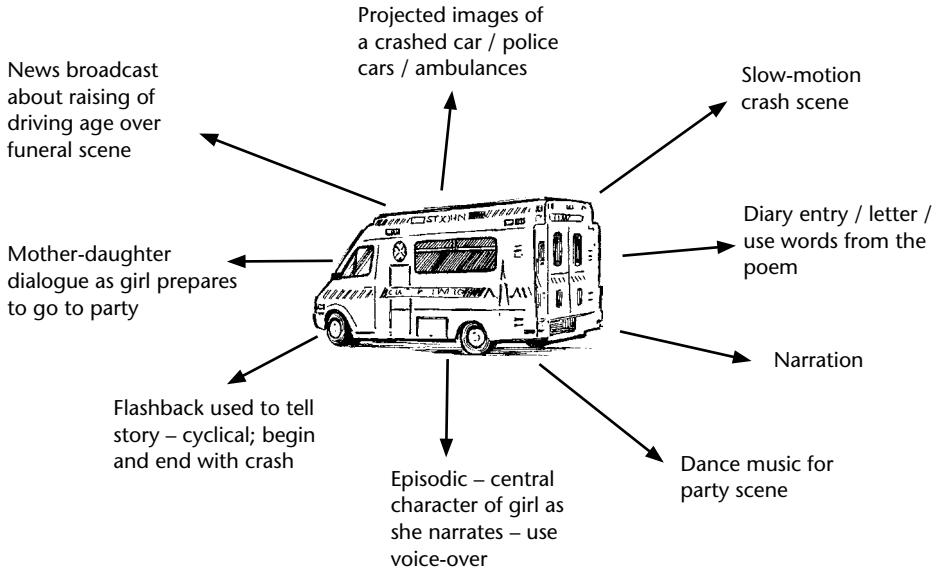


Fig. 8.1 Possible conventions that can be used when devising a script

### Will the play be cyclical or linear in its structure?

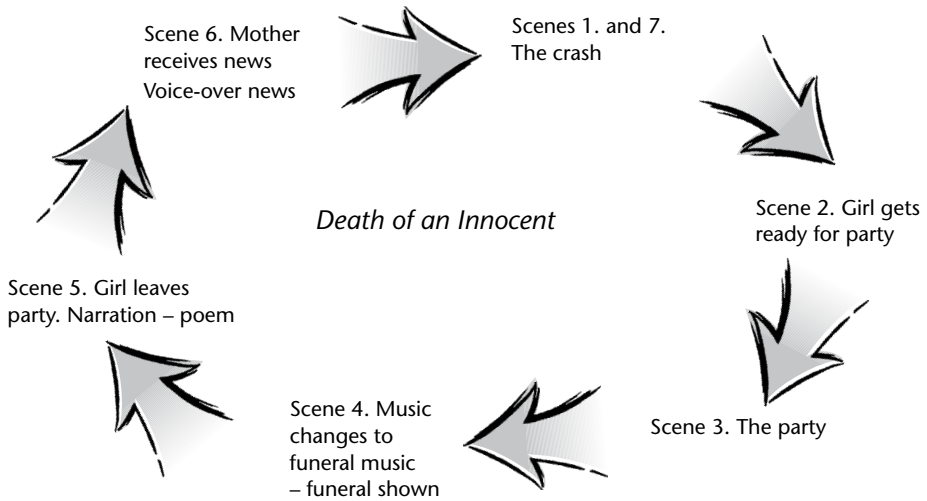


Fig. 8.2 Structuring a devised script

If you are planning a ‘well-made play’ (Eugene Scribe) then using the following template will help you do the planning for it.