

Introduction to Stage to Page and Back

These activities are adapted from a particular process for creating new plays called 'devised theatre'. When creating new plays through a devising process, theatre companies often set up specific improvisations, which are then recorded either through video, audio or note-taking. These improvisations then form the starting point for a collaborative scriptwriting process. In the language classroom these activities are very useful, not only for getting students to spontaneously use language at the improvisation stage, but also to help develop an awareness of mistakes that they will then correct at the writing stage.

Sometimes shyness or the risk of embarrassment will be an obstacle to students fully engaging in an improvisation. If a student 'freezes', you can coach them from the side, making suggestions about what they could say to move the scene along. Likewise it can be quite useful and empowering to take suggestions from the rest of the class. The most important thing is to encourage students to take risks as well as have fun and then to congratulate them for trying.

As with the Theatre Games, you will need to decide what is the best way to set up the Stage to Page and Back improvisations. Most of these improvisations involve only a couple of students at a time. One option is to choose the most confident students to model the improvisation first. Once the class has watched the improvisation and understands the basic principles, it is possible to divide the class into smaller groups and have everyone working simultaneously.

Each of the Stage to Page and Back improvisation prompts is adapted from the specific language from the *Speaking* page in the corresponding unit. You can extend these functions by adding other common expressions. The idea is that students should try to include as much of the target language as possible in the improvisation, although their success will depend on the way in which the improvisation plays out. If necessary, you could suggest places in the improvisation where they could have used the target language and help them to include it when they move to the writing stage.

Preparing for a class using Stage to Page and Back improvisations

1 Improve it!

Students improvise a short scene based on the improvisation prompts (*Characters* and *Situation*) on the photocopiable handout. Before beginning, it is a good idea to brainstorm with the whole class what might happen to the characters in the scene. It is also very important to review the specific language that they will try to include in their improvisation and

check their pronunciation. Finally, you will need to prepare some way of recording the dialogue so that it can be transcribed in the writing stage (*Write it down!*). If personal mobile phones are not allowed in class, you could use your own mobile phone or some other sort of recording device. Alternatively, choose another student or two to transcribe the dialogue as it happens.

Tip

If students get stuck or the scene is not working well, you can stop the scene and let them begin again. Although you can coach from the side, ideally you should refrain from correcting any language or pronunciation mistakes while the scene is happening.

2 Write it down!

At this stage in the exercise, students listen back to the improvisation and transcribe it. This offers a great opportunity for them to hear themselves speaking and become aware of any language mistakes they have made during the improvisation. The objective of this stage is one of reinforcement and consciousness-raising. Once students have transcribed the scene and corrected the mistakes, they should be encouraged to try to make the scene more interesting by thinking of other things that could happen or might be said. Any new material that they add should be checked for accuracy and corrected if needed.

Tip

There are two ways to do the transcription: let students work together in their individual groups, or encourage them to transcribe the improvisation on the board with the assistance of the whole class. With the first option, circulate and help individual groups with questions or problems they have. With the second option, elicit the corrections from the whole class by first underlining the incorrect parts of the dialogue and then encouraging students to offer suggestions for correction. It can also be useful to get students to write the stage directions of the action in the scene in brackets at the point in the dialogue where the action occurs.

3 Play it out!

Once students have a corrected and improved final draft of their script, give them time to rehearse the scene a couple of times before they play it out for the rest of the class.

Extension

It can be quite a lot of fun for students to try to play the scene in different ways by adding or subtracting different emotions at specific moments. When students say a line in a different way (angry, happy, shy or jealous) they can see how the meaning of the words are transformed.