

Exercises to Do

By Yourself

Strictly speaking, this is not something of mine – but it is really great to do and a lot of fun... So I give you:

Form – What form will your performance take?

So, devising on your own might seem daunting. But it need not be. The key is understanding your limitations and embracing them. You know that:

- You will be alone, or with someone in your house
- You can connect with someone remotely (using your phone or computer)
- It might be hard to reach an audience (you will most likely have to use your phone or computer to reach them)
- You won't have the usual spaces or technical resources you might usually have
- You might have to rely on different kinds of technology (again, phone and computer!)
- You might have to perform in different ways before

But this is actually all really useful stuff. Sometimes in devising, giving yourself some strict limitations is really useful.

So this will be our first “Rule”. I’m going to give us some “rules” to follow. They’re not strict, but they are useful to obey as they can help at first. What’s really fun about rules though, is when you get to break them.

RULE NUMBER 1 – WE WILL ALWAYS USE LIMITATIONS, THEY ARE USEFUL

Exercise 1

Quickly write a list of all the different ways you can think of to perform something. You might start with the obvious things:

- On FaceTime/your phone

But keep thinking, what other things can you send to people?

Can you make a performance for someone only using Emails?

Only using Texts/WhatsApps?

Remember your limitations and embrace them, see them as not only a challenge but a way to think *differently* about the ways you can perform

Have a look back at your list, is there a particular way of performing that jumps out at you?

Starting Points – Where to begin?

Okay, so you've got a list of "Form" you piece might take. Now let's think about a starting point, something to begin making our work with, or from.

Traditionally when devising we might use an existing story (a book for instance – like the National Theatre Jane Eyre

Often time we need to think, or discover, what our starting point might be for a piece of work. The beauty of devising is then taking that thing, and changing it. You're on your own now, so no one can tell you what to do. So let's make this our second rule

RULE 2 – TAKE SOMETHING YOU LOVE, THEN CHANGE IT

Verbatim

This is where you use actual people's words (usually taken from interviews) to make your piece. It often involves actors performing the characters that are talking, imitating the way they speak and having the real person's words onstage.

Companies such as [LUNG](#) and artists such as Alecky Blythe make a lot of work like this.

Here's a great video about Verbatim Theatre from The National Theatre with Alecky Blythe - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ui3k1wT2yeM>

And another one which is a rough guide to making verbatim work - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-a0qNEhCly4>

So, ask yourself

- Is there a story, a historical event that happened that you are interested in?

In order to devise something alone, you might need

EXERCISE 2A) – VERBATIM FUN WITH A PARTNER!

Okay so you won't be alone for this. Get someone in your house, or someone on your phone or Skype to do this. This is just to have a bit of fun practicing some Verbatim techniques.

1. Arrange to Skype someone! Catch-up with you mate, it'll be really nice.
2. Write 20 Questions for your Partner. They can be about anything, or a specific subject (for instance, you might want to make a Verbatim piece about what people are doing in Isolation - so ask 20 questions about that).
3. Record your answers, either using Skype, or on paper if you can
4. Observe your partner as closely as possible, Do they gesture why they talk? Do they have any particular mannerisms? Do they have a particular accent?
5. Now, edit your partner's responses to create a short monologue
6. Perform this monologue to camera- see if you can be as accurate as possible with your partner
7. Now, Now, *still using your partner's original words*, see if you can change it up. Remember the 2nd rule - take something you like and change it. Can you set their words to music like Alecky Blythe did for *London Road* turning Verbatim Interviews into a musical...
8. What other ways can you "re-perform" your partners words?

Exercise 2B) – FINDING YOUR STORY

1. Write a list of all the historical events, periods, moments in history you can think of.
2. Pick 3 you are most interested in
 - a. Can you find anything about them online? On Wikipedia?
 - b. Can you find any videos on YouTube – any interviews?
3. Start collecting interviews, recordings, encyclopedia pages – anything to do with your
4. Once you've got a good list – narrow your selection down to just 1 subject.

See if you can find more information, interviews – are there any songs about your event?
Any famous films? Any books?

Your starting to get all your materials together.

You've now got some YouTube interviews, some Encyclopaedia entries, some songs, maybe a film.

Instead of the 20 Questions you had with your Skype partner – see if you can start creating a script using all of these materials.

- What character's are there?
- Can you set the words to any music?
- Are there famous interviews you can re-enact?
- Are there any famous clips you can re-edit?

HOW CAN YOU TAKE YOUR CHOSEN THING AND CHANGE IT?

Maybe you'll chop up the words to make something new?

Maybe you'll edit the interviews so they are more broken up and abstract?

Now start thinking about FORM again.

HOW ARE YOU GOING TO PERFORM YOUR PIECE?

- Record it on your phone? Film it on your computer?
- Maybe you'll just create a script – that's okay too
- Maybe you'll do the performance solely as a recording.

See if you can create a short piece using interviews, texts from newspapers/encyclopaedias, YouTube footage. Can you re-tell a story from history and give light to something new?

“Something Well Know” – Like Verbatim, But Not

Can you take something well known, a film or a book you like, and distort it? Essentially, where Verbatim use “real life” things, this focuses on fictional things and re-making them.

So yes, this is a bit like Verbatim, but where Verbatim use *the exact words* people spoke – this is about being more free.

MASSIVE OWL (what a name eh?) are a company based in Bristol. For their show Castle Rock they re-mixed the film Stand By Me. Have a look at their trailer and pictures here

<https://www.massiveowltheatre.com/performance#/castlerock/>

They took clips from the film, songs, characters, scenes and thought about how they can chop them up, re-imagine them and make them something new.

Using the same techniques as Exercise 2B, can you take a film you like, a book, a song – anything – and start to re-imagine it?

Can you perform a film in your bedroom using just what is around you in your house?

- How do you translate a big budget film into your bedroom?
- Can you make it something entirely new?

Can you re-edit a film so it tells a different story? Can you perform a book?

The next exercise might help you take something

EXERCISE 3 – COLLISIONS

So, you’ve chosen the thing you want to adapt.

Perhaps it is a classic novel like Jane Eyre which will be Live Streamed by the National Theatre for 7 days from 9th April

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9KPE6uXhFEU>

Now we’re going to do the exercise Collisions which I’ve done in the video for you. And here I’m going to introduce our third and final rule:

RULE 3 – NOTHING IS WRONG SO NO EDITING... UNTIL THE VERY END

PART A - PREP STAGE FOR COLLISIONS

1. COLLATION

Once you have your starting point (a book, a film or poem etc.) set a timer for 5 minutes, or 10 if you feel fancy and write down anything that comes into your head.

REMEMEBR – Nothing is Wrong! No Editing!

Write it all down, it's all good stuff. Some starting points to think of might be:

Key ideas, major moments in the film/book, characters, places, significant objects – anything!

2. FREE WRITING / AUTOMATIC WRITING

(THIS IS OPTIONAL, BUT ALSO *REALLY* USEFUL FOR GENERATING SOME TEXT IN THE ROOM)

Free-writing or Automatic writing is an exercise where you write non-stop for a set amount of time on a subject. **YOU MUST NOT STOP WRITING!** You allow all sorts of thoughts and connections to come into your head and you write it all down. The result is a stream-of-conscious monologue about the subject matter you have chosen. So:

- From your big mind-map/list you have just made select 5 key words/palces/characters/whatever you wish to explore in writing.
- Set a timer for 1 / 2 minutes, when you are ready pick the first of your words and write non-stop about the word.
- Repeat this for each word you have. You can write for longer if you want.

You should now have 4/5 monologues made up of abstract text. Keep these safe!

OPTIONAL – you can if you want create some more scripts by copying 3 of your favourite lines from each monologue t create a 6th monologue made up of bits from all of them. Don't discard your originals though.

3. CHARACTER PROFILES

(AGAIN, OPTIONAL BUT CAN HELP FLESH OUT SOME CHARACTERS YOU CAN PLAY WITH IN DEVISING)

- Character Profiles - from the words collated in the mind-map/list or just the main characters in your book/film there could be several 'characters' listed.
 - o Pick a character - if working from an original text then the characters will already exist so write a fact-file/profile for them so everyone has some key things to work with for each character.
 - Write their: Name, Age, What family the have, Where they were born, Who their friends are – anything, any category you can think of, anything you want!

Now have some fun with them and fill in some stuff we maybe don't know about them:

- o Write their favourite childhood place, the place they feel scared, 3 secrets they have no one knows, what their favourite food is, their favourite drink - anything
- o Alternatively if working from an original text then the characters will already exist so write a fact-file/profile for them so everyone has some key things to work with for each character.

4. CHARACTER DUOLOGUES

Using the character profiles you have just made, we're going to write some duologues (a conversation just between 2 people).

1. Pick 2 characters you have made profiles for.
 - a. Write a 10 line duologue between the 2 of them in a place that exists in the book/film
 - b. You can do this as many times as you want, with any number of characters
2. Pick 1 character now
 - a. Write a 10 line duologue between them and a stranger but set it in:
 - i. The place they are scared
 - ii. The place they feel safest
 - b. Again, do this as many times as you like and choose different combinations of things and people

You should now have a load of duologues and character profiles, so we can begin the exercise properly

PART B - COLLISIONS, THE EXERCISE

You should now have:

The original book/film/poem

The mind-map/list from part 1

A series of pieces of free writing

Some duologues and some character profiles

COLUMNS

On a large piece of paper draw up 4 columns.

- **Column A** is TEXT – here write a list of all the pieces of text you have, if there are a lot – just pick 5 of your favourite things you have written from the free-writing and duologues
- **Column B** is CHARACTER – here write and number a list of all the characters they can think of, think laterally – a character can be someone that is inferred i.e. if reference is made to the news on TV one character might be the TV anchor, even if we never really meet/have met them.
- **Column C** is OBJECT - draw up and number list of *objects* from your list or mind-map
- **Column D** is FORM – this is from your list we did at the very very beginning of this document. It's basically all the different ways you could perform your piece.
- Now, number each item in each column. For instance if you have 5 pieces of writing in Column A then label the 1-5.
- Now pick a random number from each column, for example:
 - o A – 5
 - o B – 3
 - o C – 7
 - o D – 1
- Now check back to see what number relates to what in each column – you should, for the most part, all be left with different Texts, Characters, Objects and Form. For example it might look like:

A (TEXT) = 5 = Freewriting

B (CHARACTER) = 3 = One of the main characters TV Weather Reporter

C (OBJECT) = 4 = the murder weapon used in the book/film

D (FORM) = Recording the performance as a voice note on your phone

- Now give yourselves 20 minutes to make a piece of performance using these selections.

REMEMBER!

RULE 1 – The Limitations are Useful!

RULE 2 – Change the thing you like!

RULE 3 – Noting is Wrong! Don't Edit!

- A final polished piece is not the aim - it is to explore how the exercise can 'collide' different elements and ideas in new ways so one can generate and devise material quickly and in a number of different ways.
- If you feel you can't fully realise your idea (i.e. you need more performers than is possible, more space, more objects) then don't worry – try and realise as much of it as possible, it's never wasted time as you might discover
 - o Remember the CHARACTER does not have to be physically present/the focus but could be talked about/ talked to
 - o The OBJECT does not necessarily have to be represented but could be the lens through which the performance takes place i.e. if the object is a phone could the performance take place *using* a phone.
 - o The TEXT can be cut-up, stripped down, reduced, re-used - anything!

You don't **have** to use all 4 elements you have been given - but do try.

NOW TRY AND RECORD / DOCUMENT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.

ONCE YOU HAVE DONE THIS,
REPEAT THE COLLISIONS AS MANY TIMES AS YOU WANT.

SLOWLY YOU WILL START TO BUILD A SERIES OF SMALL SCENES/PIECES THAT
YOU CAN BUILD INTO A FULL-LENGTH SHOW.

NOW YOU CAN START TO EDIT

- What is working? What isn't working?
- What do you like?
- Do you want to use some of your Collisions and also simply some of your text?
- Start thinking about **STRUCTURE** and the order stuff comes
 - o **Start ordering your piece using the collisions you have, some of the text, some of the original book or film.**
 - o **Can you create 20 minutes of material?**
 - o **How can you share that?**

RULE 4 – HAVE FUN

Some other really great exercises to do on your own, or with someone you know/live with:

Eve Leigh's - Workshop for a Digital Body

<https://twitter.com/EevLee/status/1238084790693306369>

Eve Leigh is a playwright and theatre-maker, her work has been on at the Royal Court, The Bush, The Royal Exchange, Manchester and many other venues across the UK.

Here she has provided a workshop all from her Twitter account.

She's written a list of instructions with things to write, watch, listen and make. If you want to do something different this is a really exciting and inspiring hour or two.

Best of all, once you've done it – do it again but this time use videos or things to listen to that you like? Or even better, copy and paste it and swap her videos and songs for some of your own!

LIVE WITH SOMEONE ELSE?

CHECK SOME OF THESE OUT:

RASH DASH – Devising Movement

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47QhuLMLDL8>

Rash Dash are a company that make really exciting work with movement. Here they give you some exercises to try (safely) with someone at home!

SpyMonkey – Devising with Comedy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-QltaSa4I>

Clowns and idiot extraordinaire's SpyMonkey give you some useful things to try at home. We all need a little laugh now and then...

Frantic Assembly – Devising and Story Telling with Your Body

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BC9uJrY9Bh8>

Frantic Assembly give us some exercises to try at home. Check it out

Trestle Theatre

<https://twitter.com/trestletheatre/status/1241343144412811266?s=20>

Trestle are the UK's leading Mask company – they have some daily challenges to look at and keep you active. Check out some of their tasks here

Exercises to Do

Online / Shared With People Outside Your House

Alone, Standing

This again is thinking about 'performance' as something that you can do *to* someone, or make *them* the subject of a performance.

What is "Alone, Standing?" Essentially - you create a piece of work for them to listen to alone and act out/think about themselves. They do this in their own house, alone, standing (or sitting, or walking...)

It might sound strange, but it can be really poignant and interesting what can be explored- especially if you and a few people share each other's and respond. New ideas and things can be played with. Can you perhaps start a round robin where a group of you pass round different recordings in a sequence – like a chain letter but with these recordings?

It has 2 stages. First of all is about your finding something to write about/thinking about yourself. The second stage is then translating and recording that for another person and giving it to them.

SIMPLE VERSION

STAGE 1

- Pick a space in your house you want to make your piece in. Any room will do, but bear in mind – the person listening will need to be in their equivalent room at their house.
- You are going to spend 5 minutes writing a series of provocations or questions you want the listener to think about. Try and do this thematically, or following a chain of thought. Some examples you could use might be:
 - o History – Invite the listener to think about the History of their room: perhaps spend the time asking them questions about the history of that room, who has been there in their lifetime and who has been there before? What things has this room seen? What things have happened in there? Who has stood where they stand? Perhaps also share the things that have happened in your room?
 - o The Outside – provocations about what the listener can see outside their window vs what you can see. Can you make a space where you and the listener share the view from your window?
 - o Experience – perhaps you will partake in an action or activity (dancing, breathing, meditation) in your room that you can guide the listener through

STAGE 2

Think of this as a gift for someone else, it should be something to enjoy – even if it is poignant, it should be seen as an opportunity to gift someone a chance to reflect on things, or take some time out from their day in a fun and/or interesting way

- Using your mobile phone (most have an application that allows you to record a Voice Note) record your short script, list of questions or provocations, thoughts – whatever it may be.
- Listen back to it – is it clear? Are there any interruptions or issues?
- If all is well, send your piece on to someone alongside any **relevant instructions** you want to give them:
 - o Is there a specific place it is made for/they are meant to be?
 - o Do they need headphones or can they just play it off their phone? (It can be really nice intimate to listen via headphones, but on a speaker can also give a different quality)

MORE COMPLEX / ABSTRACT VERSION

Similar in principle, but this time you can be more abstract, creative and imaginative with your subject matter.

STAGE 1 – STARTING WITH YOU

A) Freewriting/Automatic Writing

You can write about anything you want, but do it by hand on a scrap piece of paper.

Set a timer for 5 minutes and just let yourself write.

Stuck for inspiration? Here are some ideas:

- To your fav song: put your favourite song on, or one you really like and just let yourself write to it. Maybe it's about the song, maybe it's inspired by it, maybe it's about memories you have about that song.
- About what your memories of this room are, is there something special about this room? Maybe it's totally banal? Maybe it holds a lot of memories?
- About your favourite place you can't visit currently – imagine you are not in your room at all, but somewhere else. Write about that place – it's sounds, it's smells, what you can see, hear, touch, taste. Maybe it's a forest, maybe it's Hillsborough or Bramall Lane, maybe it's a friend or relatives house...
- About an imagined place that is definitely not where you are now, maybe it's not even real – a space station orbiting the earth, a deep-sea submarine discovering luminous fish, a planet from a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...

B) From your freewriting

Now we will reflect and respond to our own writing. So grab a second piece of paper and note down anything you want from your writing.

Some thoughts and notes might be:

- What have you written? By that I mean – have you written a list? A series of memories? A set of instructions? Just a random stream of consciousness? Nothing is right or wrong, it's just good to have a look back and see what you've done!
- Pick some words that really resonate with you
- Are there any particular phrases that jump out?
- Are there any connections you have made to things *outside* of your freewriting – other books, music, films, anything...

C) Write a List of Invitations, Instructions or Provocations for Someone

This is where we begin to start thinking about bringing someone else into the process and making a piece of performance *for* someone else.

From both the freewriting (Section A) list of observations (Section B) get a third piece of paper and begin to write down some instructions/provocations for someone else

- Write a list of instructions of things someone can do standing, sitting or lying in their room. They do not have to be related to your free-writing, but can be if you wish.
 - o These should be simple and clear, easy to follow
 - o Perhaps they are nice and simple, perhaps they are things to imagine, perhaps they are things to think about, or simple actions they can do?
 - o Perhaps they dance to your favourite song?
 - o Perhaps invite them to take some nice deep breaths

- Perhaps what you wrote was something poignant, or recollecting some memories you have had about your room or space?
 - o Invite the other person to take some time to dwell on some thoughts you've had?

STAGE 2 – MAKING IT INTO A PERFORMANCE FOR SOMEONE TO DO

There are lots of options for you to choose from, all of them can lead to wonderful pieces of performance.

A-B-C / C-A-B STRUCTURE

Take a short snippet from Section A, B and C that work cohesively. Then repeat. You should have something that looks a bit like:

- A- Freewriting
- B- Responses to that
- C- Instructions
- A- Freewriting
- B- Responses to that
- C- Instructions
- Etc. etc

CHOP IT ALL UP

- Chop up your freewriting, your response to your free writing and your instructions.
- Shuffle them about and then randomly re-assemble them into a script
 - o What have you found when you read it back? Does it make sense? Does it set off new ideas?
- Does it work? If not, make any edits you need to get it flowing logically, or perhaps enjoy the chaos.

FIND YOUR OWN SCRIPT

Alternatively you can just assemble your free-writing, reflections, instructions into anything you want. The point being you have deliberately made something that uses a few different styles and jumping off points.

RECORD & SEND

As with before: record your piece, listen back, check it is okay and send it on with any relevant instructions you have.