



LESSON

3

Writing Original Monologues

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Use analysis in developing a character.
- ◆ Write a monologue revealing the innermost thoughts of an original character.
- ◆ Perform a monologue using vocal and physical characterization.
- ◆ Perform a monologue using appropriate staging techniques.

Warm Up



Do you ever express your thoughts aloud, even when no one is around to listen? Think about some of the advantages and disadvantages of talking to yourself.

monologue

a long speech spoken by one person, revealing personal thoughts and feelings.

soliloquy

a monologue usually delivered while the character is alone onstage, thinking aloud.

analyze

to study carefully or examine critically.

Playwrights sometimes use monologues to help the audience understand the thoughts and emotions of a character. A **monologue** in dramatic literature is a long speech spoken by one character, usually revealing the character's personal thoughts and feelings. The use of the monologue in drama dates back to the ancient Greeks. A monologue can be delivered with or without other characters on the stage.

A **soliloquy** is a monologue in which a character is thinking aloud, usually alone onstage. The soliloquy is used throughout the plays of William Shakespeare. Hamlet's famous "to be or not to be" speech is a good example.

Performing an original monologue gives the theatre student an excellent opportunity to **analyze** a particular character, studying it carefully and critically, and then to share the character at a particular moment in time with the audience. Writing an original monologue is a good first step in the playwriting process.

There are many reasons for writing an original monologue. Some students really enjoy the writing process and look forward to using that skill in theatre class. Writing for theatre allows us to share our personal thoughts and feelings, to make statements about our beliefs or needs, and to explore another dimension of theatre—the craft of the playwright.

In her workshop Playmaking and Playwriting, Lou-Ida Marsh suggests six ideas leading to a monologue, a scene, or a play:

1. things we have done or not done in our own lives
2. people we have met, known, loved, hated, feared, or respected
3. ageless stories or myths, perhaps told from a new viewpoint
4. group interaction and artistic collaboration
5. ideas for resolving various conflicts
6. a puzzlement (something we don't understand)

Any of these six ideas could be developed into a dynamic monologue. Which one would you choose?

There are no set rules in playwriting, but some established principles work best. It is important for the audience to know the five Ws (who, what, when, where, and why) as early as possible in the scene or play. The same holds true for your original monologue. Your audience should be able to answer the following questions as soon as possible:



Lily Tomlin became famous for her comedy monologues as Edith Ann and Ernestine when she appeared on the TV comedy revue *Laugh In*. She still performs monologues before sold-out audiences today.

ACTION

Teaching Suggestion: If video equipment is available, you may want to have students videotape a dress rehearsal for the monologues. After viewing the playbacks, students should write a self-evaluation, recording changes they will make before the performance.

Writing the Monologue

Now that you have completed your character analysis, you can begin to write the thoughts that your character might want to say aloud. Write these thoughts (the monologue) in the **first person**—as if you are the person to whom this story is happening.

Your teacher may want to give you a time limit or word limit for your first monologue. Most beginning students find that they are comfortable memorizing and performing 2 to 3 minutes of speech, or about 200 to 400 words.

Rehearsing and Presenting the Monologue

Prepare for your presentation by memorizing the material you have written. Tape-record your rehearsals and listen carefully to the playback. Are you presenting the character in the way you intended? Hearing a friend read your monologue aloud can sometimes help you with phrasing and emphasis.

When it is your turn to share your monologue, walk to the performance area or to the stage as yourself. If you have planned introductory remarks, they should be delivered as yourself. Pause after the introduction, allowing yourself enough time to physically and mentally take on your characterization. The first words of the monologue should immediately create a picture of your character for your audience. Imagine your character in the setting that you pictured as you wrote the monologue.

If your character is speaking to someone else onstage, also picture that person in your mind. Situate this “listener” downstage, or in front of you, so that you are facing the audience. Once the imaginary listener is placed on the stage, your glances at this character tell the audience a lot about the scene. If the imaginary listener is an adult and the character you are portraying is a child, you would look upward. If the imaginary listener is seated in a chair, you would direct your attention to the level of the listener’s eyes.

Remain in character throughout the monologue. Stay onstage, clearly visible to the audience, until after you have completed the final sentence. Pause slightly, allowing the audience time to realize that the scene has ended. Then leave the stage as yourself.

1. Performance Time. Practice what you’ve learned in this lesson as you do each of the following activities:

- Perform your original monologue for your class or for an invited audience.
- Rehearse a prepared monologue selected from the Playbook in this text or from a book of monologues. Perform the monologue for the class or for an audience.
- Adapt a cutting from a novel or short story into a monologue. Prepare and present the monologue before the class.