

Research

Use the grid below to check your understanding of the production.

Research notes	
Name of production	
Date of performance	
Name of theatre, or performance space	
Synopsis	
When and where is the play set?	
Main characters and the actors playing them	
Director and designers	
New play or revival of an older play?	
Why do you think it is being staged?	
Key themes	
Critical reaction to the production: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Notable reviews ▶ Any aspect of the production particularly admired or criticised ▶ Has it won awards? ▶ Was there anything controversial about the production? 	
Any key features that have been remarked on that you were particularly looking forward to seeing?	
Your expectations of the performance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Traditional? ▶ Exciting? ▶ Unusual? ▶ Entertaining? ▶ Funny? ▶ Frightening? ▶ Spectacular? 	



TIP

Most exam boards do not allow notes in the exam, so use the grids in this book to help you identify and recall production details **before** the exam.

Note-taking

Use the grid below to organise your notes and ensure that you cover a range of production elements.

Overview of live theatre note-taking		Notes	Impact/effect on you/audience
Production Is it a famous play or a new one?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Title of play ▶ Where it was staged ▶ Staging configuration 		
Performance What was the first impression of a character? How effective were moments of conflict or emotion or the climax of the play?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Key moments (eg, entrances, turning points, climax) ▶ Skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voice • Facial expressions • Gestures • Movement • Characterisation • Use of stage space • Relationships with others 		
Set Add a sketch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Size and shape ▶ Colours and textures ▶ Use of levels ▶ Furnishings ▶ Curtains/backdrops/flats ▶ Projections/multimedia ▶ Set changes/transitions 		
Costumes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Colours ▶ Fabrics ▶ Shape and fit ▶ Period ▶ Changes ▶ Accessories ▶ Make-up 		
Lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Colours ▶ Angles/positioning ▶ Special effects ▶ Transitions (blackouts, fades, and so on) 		
Sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Types of sound ▶ Use of music ▶ Volume/amplification/direction ▶ Live or recorded ▶ Use of mics ▶ Position of speakers ▶ Special sound effects 		
Concept / artistic intentions / meaning / message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What did the theatre makers hope to achieve? ▶ How successful were they? 		



TIP

When taking notes quickly, don't write full sentences. Instead of, for example, 'On his first entrance, he is dressed in blue and grey satin', you could note, '1st entrance: blue/grey satin.'

Drama terminology: acting

In order to write accurately about acting, you need to understand the correct terminology. Below are some useful words to help you describe and analyse what you have seen.

FACIAL EXPRESSION

Appearance of emotions, thoughts or feelings (or lack of them) through facial muscle movement or position of features, such as raised eyebrows, smile, scowl, narrowed eyes, pursed lips, gaping mouth.

VOCAL SKILLS

Techniques involving the voice, including pitch, accent, diction, volume, emphasis and tone.

Also includes: vocal projection, such as breath control and diction, to make the voice carry.

POSTURE

How a character stands, such as upright, hunched or slumped.

CHARACTERISATION

The creation of a role through the performer's understanding and portrayal of the character's background, motivations and importance in the play.

TIMING/PACE

How quickly or slowly something is said or done, including the use of pause.

DELIVERY OF LINES

How lines are said to convey their meaning. This could involve both vocal and physical skills.

USE OF STAGE SPACE

How much or little of the stage is used by the actor or actors; blocking, including use of levels and proximity.

GESTURES

Movements of parts of the body, often hand, arms or head, such as waving, nodding or reaching out.

GAIT

How the character walks: limps, stomps, shuffles, strides, plods.

EYE CONTACT

Looking directly at someone who is looking back.

EMOTIONAL RANGE

The ability to show a character's changing feelings.

INTERACTION WITH OTHERS

The relationships the actors build with each other; rapport between the performers; the proximity and movements between characters.

MOVEMENT

How the actor physically inhabits the character and travels around the stage. In some cases, this can be stylised, such as dance, lifts, or synchronised movement.

STANCE

The way the character stands, such as with feet wide apart or turned in.

Making acting notes on the production you have seen

Use the chart below to make notes on the performance you saw.

Don't try to write about every moment: choose key performance points such as entrances, a conflict or turning point and the play's climax and ending.

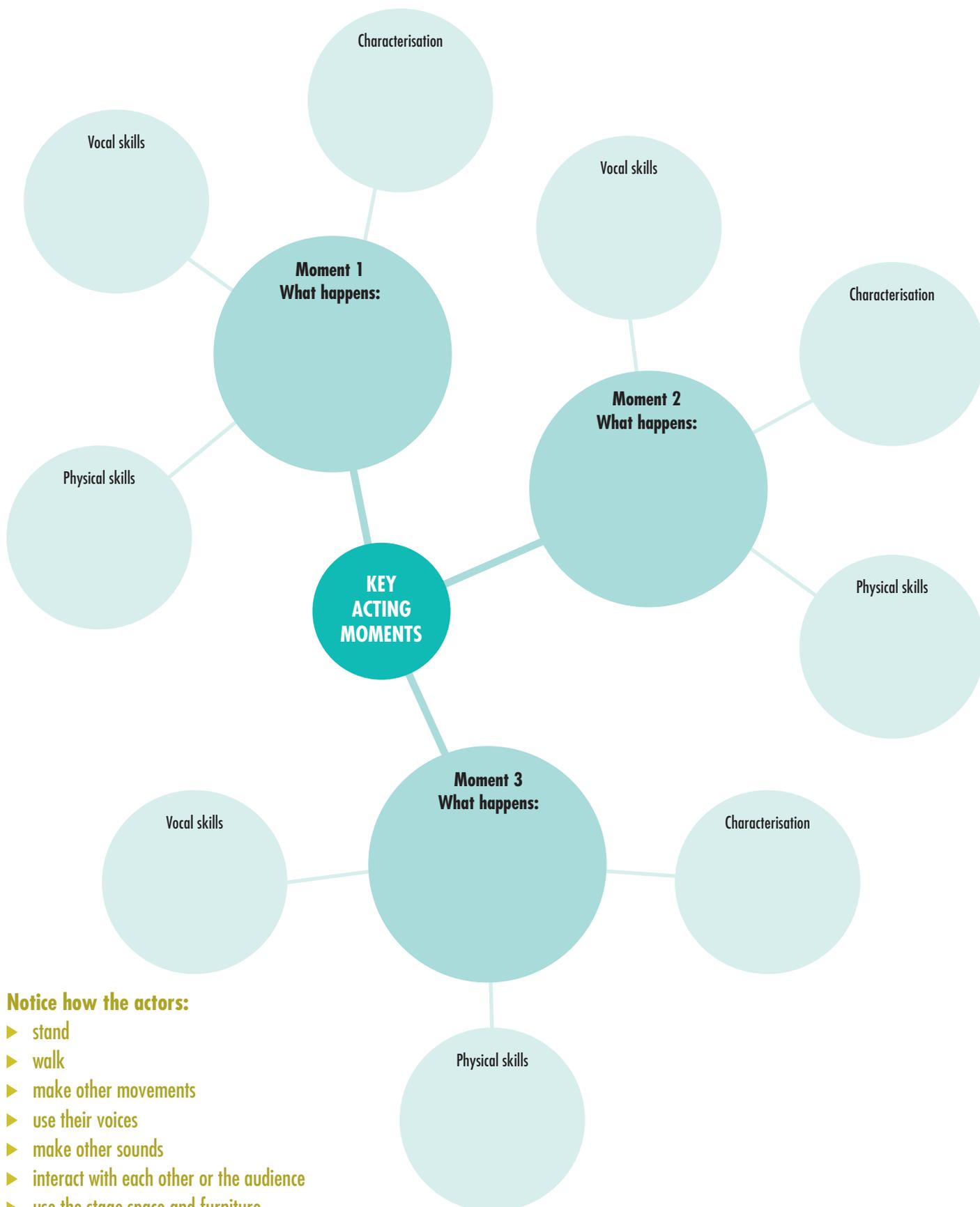

TIP

If you can, find photographs of the production to remind yourself of key elements of the performances.

Acting notes	
Production	
Main actor/s and character/s	
First impressions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ posture ▶ gait ▶ gestures ▶ voice ▶ characterisation ▶ background/context 	
Moments of conflict: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ use of voice ▶ emotional range ▶ movement ▶ proximity 	
Turning points: changes in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ volume ▶ posture ▶ facial expression 	
Delivery of lines (two or three examples): Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ emphasis ▶ tone ▶ pace ▶ pitch 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Final impressions of the character. ▶ How does the audience feel about them? 	

How is the acting shaped throughout the play?

Use this mind map to begin selecting and exploring key moments in the play you have seen.



Notice how the actors:

- ▶ stand
- ▶ walk
- ▶ make other movements
- ▶ use their voices
- ▶ make other sounds
- ▶ interact with each other or the audience
- ▶ use the stage space and furniture
- ▶ handle props.

Performance evaluation

Beyond describing and analysing the performance you must evaluate it, considering whether or not it was effective and successful. This means doing more than just writing that it was 'good' or 'bad' or 'funny' or 'sad.' Think about the following:

Did the performance fulfil its purpose?

For example, if an actor was meant to represent a person of particular circumstances (age, nationality, background), were they successful?

Was the performance technically accomplished?

Did the actor meet the physical and vocal demands of the part?

Did the performance engage and interest the audience?

For example, were there moments that were surprising or moving or exciting?

Did the performance contribute to the mood and atmosphere?

For example, if the role was meant to be comic or frightening, did the performance achieve that?

Did the performance help you to understand the characters?

For example, if the characters were meant to be wealthy or careless, did the actors represent that?

Did the performance support the themes of the play?

For example, if the play was about poverty or injustice, did the performance convey that?

Drama terminology: set

In order to write accurately about set design, you need to understand the correct terminology. Below are some useful words to help you describe and analyse what you have seen.

FLIES

The space above the stage, usually out of view of the audience, used to store or to lower ('fly') items onto the stage.

FLAT

A piece of scenery, often painted, mounted on a tall frame.

PROJECTION

A film or still image projected to form a theatrical backdrop.

FLY SYSTEM

A means of raising and lowering scenery or other items onto the stage using a system of ropes and pulleys. To lower scenery from this area is to 'fly a set in'.

SET DRESSINGS

Items on the set not used as props, but which create detail and interest, such as vases or framed paintings.

PROPS

Moveable items on the stage, including hand props that the actors can carry, including books, cups and phones.

WINGS / WING SPACE

An area to the side of the stage from which actors can enter and from which props, furnishings or scenery can be moved onto the stage.

DRAPES

Curtains or other hanging fabric.

CYCLORAMA

A large semi-circular stretched curtain or screen, usually positioned upstage. It often depicts a background, such as the sky.

FURNISHINGS

Furniture on the set, such as chairs, cushions and tables.

REVOLVE

A large turntable device that can be turned to reveal a different setting.

BACKDROP

A large painted cloth hung, usually at the back of the stage, as part of the scenery.

RAMPS

Sloped pathways which may be used for walking on or for wheeled transportation.

STAIRS

Steps from one level of the set to another. In some productions grand staircases are a design feature.

SCRIMS OR GAUZE

Curtains that might hang loose or be mounted on a frame, which, if lit a certain way, are transparent.

PLATFORM

A raised area on the stage.

BOX SET

A setting of a complete room, often naturalistic, with three walls and a 'missing' fourth wall facing the audience.

TRAPDOOR

A door in the floor or ceiling of a stage allowing objects or performers to be dropped, lifted or lowered.

TRUCK

A platform on wheels upon which scenery can be mounted and moved.

FLOOR COVERINGS

Any covering of the stage floor, such as a wooden effect to appear like floorboards, or linoleum for a kitchen floor.

APRON

An area at the front of proscenium stages which is still visible to the audience when the curtains are closed.

SCAFFOLDING

A large structure, usually of boards and metal poles, which creates different levels on a set.

Making set design notes on the production you have seen

Use the chart below to make notes on the set in the show you saw.

Set design notes		Draw a basic sketch.
Production		
Type of set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Naturalistic? ▶ Minimalist? ▶ Stylised? ▶ Fantasy? ▶ Period? ▶ Contemporary? 	
Size, scale and positioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ How big is the stage space and the scenery? ▶ Where key items are placed on the stage? ▶ Where are entrances and exits? 	
Colours and materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ What are the main colours used? ▶ Are the walls and fabrics plain or patterned? ▶ What is used in the set construction: fabrics, wood, plastic, metal and so on? 	
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Drapes or curtains? ▶ Flats? ▶ Backdrops? ▶ Cyclorama? ▶ Bare wall? 	
Levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Platforms? ▶ Scaffolding? ▶ Ramps? ▶ Stairs? 	
Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Projections? ▶ Multimedia? 	



TIP

If you can, find photographs of the production to remind yourself of key elements of the set.

Set design evaluation

Beyond describing and analysing the set, you must judge whether or not it was effective and successful. This means doing more than just expressing that it was 'good' or 'bad' or 'beautiful' or 'ugly'. Think about:

Did the set fulfil its purpose?

For example, if it was meant to represent a certain period or location, did it do that successfully?

Was the set of a high technical standard?

For example, were set changes achieved efficiently and smoothly? Was the set sturdy enough for the demands put on it? Did it suit the staging configuration and avoid blocking sightlines?

Did the set engage and interest the audience?

For example, was it eye-catching or versatile or clever or believable?

Did the set contribute to the mood and atmosphere?

For example, if the play was comic or frightening, did the set contribute to that?

Did the set help you to understand the characters and their lives?

For example, if the characters were wealthy or poverty-stricken, did the set represent that?

Did the set support the action of the play?

For example, if a character was meant to be hidden, did the set create a believable hiding place? If a character made an important entrance, how did the set allow that?

Did the set support the themes of the play?

For example, if the play was about ambition or injustice, did the set convey that?

Drama terminology: costumes

In order to write accurately about costume design, you need to understand the correct terminology. Below are some useful words to help you describe and analyse what you have seen.

MASKS

Full-face or partial, mime, masque ball, animal.

WIGS

Natural, period or theatrical.

PADDING

Protective padding, character padding (for example to make a character rounder), fashion padding (such as shoulder pads), to give a different silhouette.

NECKLINE/COLLAR

High, low, scooped; v-neck, turtleneck; Peter Pan, Nehru and so on.

FACIAL HAIR

Moustache, sideburns, beards.

JEWELLERY

Earrings, necklace, watch, bracelets, rings, brooches.

HAIR

Colour, length, style.

MAKE-UP

Natural, character, stylised or fantasy.

HEADWEAR

Hat, scarf, crown, headband, ribbon, headpiece, tiara and so on.

NECKWEAR

Ties, scarves, cravats. Wool, silk, polyester, pattern or plain, tied or loose.

DECORATIONS AND TRIM

Sequins, rhinestones and so on; buttons, braid, lace, embroidery, faux fur.

HOSIERY

Tights, stockings, socks; plain or patterned; skin-tone or coloured.

OUTERWEAR

Coats, jackets, capes, shawls, trench coats.

COLOUR-CODING

Using certain colours to convey specific meanings, such as social class or membership of a group.

UNDERGARMENTS

Corsetry (such as bras and girdles), underskirts/petticoats, slips, camisoles, briefs.

COLOUR PALETTE

The range of colours used, such as muted tones, autumn tones, primary colours, black and white; complementary or clashing.

CONDITION

'Distressed' to look worn or old; pressed, clean, soiled, ripped, stained, mended, faded.

FABRICS

Silk, wool, cotton, polyester, chiffon, rubber; print or plain.

SILHOUETTE AND FIT

Tight, loose, oversized, high waisted, drop waist, hourglass and so on.

FOOTWEAR

Brogues, slip-ons, lace-ups, trainers, heels, slippers, boots and so on.

FOOTWEAR EMBELLISHMENTS

Logos, buckles, charms, straps, ribbons.

Making costume notes on the production you have seen

Use the outline and prompts below to make notes on the costumes you saw.

COSTUME SKETCH AND DESIGN NOTES: DETAILS AND TERMINOLOGY

COSTUME TYPES

Naturalistic?
 Stylised?
 Fantasy?
 Period?
 Contemporary?

FIT, SILHOUETTE AND CONDITION

Loose or tight?
 High or low waisted?
 Narrow or wide shoulders?
 Neckline?
 Length?
 Wrinkled or pressed?
 New or old?
 Soiled or clean?

COLOURS, FABRICS AND MATERIALS

What are the main colours used?
 Are the fabrics plain or patterned?
 What textures do the fabrics have?

COSTUME CHANGES

More than one costume?
 How were changes achieved?



HAIR AND MAKE-UP

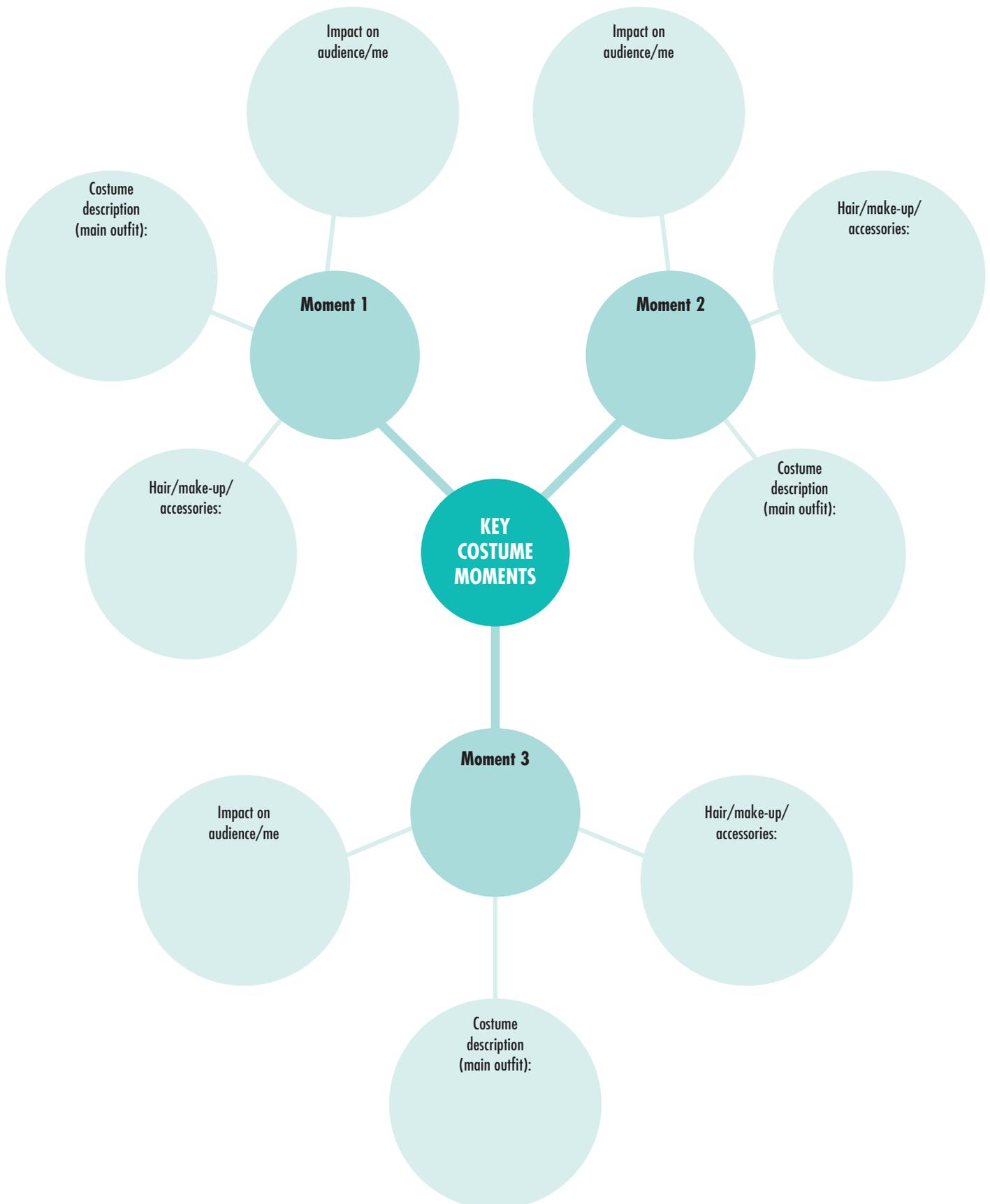
Wigs or natural?
 Long or short?
 Colour?
 Style?
 Natural or exaggerated?
 Any features emphasised?
 Accessories
 Headwear?
 Handbags?
 Shawls, capes or coats?
 Jewellery?

FOOTWEAR

Shoes?
 Sandals?
 Lace-ups?
 Trainers?
 Boots?
 Barefoot?

How are costumes used?

Recall a play you have seen and important ways in which costumes were used. Use the mind map below to begin developing your ideas:



Costume evaluation

Beyond describing and analysing the costumes, you must judge whether or not they were effective and successful. This means doing more than just commenting that they were 'good' or 'bad' or 'beautiful' or 'ugly'. Think about:

Did the costumes fulfil their purposes?

For example, if they were meant to be from a certain period or location, did they achieve that?

Did the costumes help you to understand the characters?

For example, if the characters were wealthy or struggling or young or attention-seeking, did the costumes show that?

Were the costumes of a high technical standard?

For example, could the actors move well in the costumes and were costume changes achieved efficiently?

Did the costumes provide interest for the audience?

For example, were they eye-catching or versatile or clever or highly appropriate?

Did the costumes contribute to mood and atmosphere?

For example, if the play was meant to be comic or frightening, did costumes add to that?

Did the costumes assist the action of the play?

For example, if a character underwent a change or made an important entrance, did the costumes support that?

Did the costumes reflect the themes of the play?

For example, if the play was about poverty or ambition, did the costumes convey that?

Drama terminology: lighting

In order to write accurately about lighting design, you need to understand the correct terminology. Below are some useful words to help you describe and analyse what you have seen.

LIGHTING RIG

The structure that holds the lighting equipment in the theatre.

WASH

Light which covers the whole stage or large area of it.

STROBE

A lighting device that gives short, bright bursts of bright light.

SPOTLIGHT

A lamp that projects a bright light onto an area of stage, usually focusing on a performer.

DIAGONALS

Lights projected down at roughly a 45-degree angle.

GOBO

A metal, glass or plastic cut-out attached to a lantern to project patterns, such as leaves, stars, swirls or waves.

FOLLOW-SPOT

A lamp that produces a bright beam, which can be operated to 'follow' a performer.

DOWNLIGHT OR TOP-LIGHT

Light from directly overhead.

CUE TIMING

The time it takes for a lighting change, for example the counts until a blackout occurs or how long a cross-fade takes.

LIGHTING PLOT

Similar to an architectural plan, to show where the lights will hang. It shows the position, type of lighting fixture and colours of gels.

FILTER OR GEL

A coloured piece of plastic inserted into a case on a lantern to alter the colour of the light.

PYROTECHNICS

Special effects that create dramatic effects, such as fireworks, explosions or flashes.

HOUSE LIGHTS

The lights in the auditorium that are usually on while the audience is being seated and then dimmed when the performance is about to begin.

BLACKOUT

Switching off all stage lights. This can be sudden or gradual.

BACKLIGHTING

Lighting projected from a source upstage. It highlights the outline of actors or scenery and separates them from the background.

LANTERN

A lamp and reflector in a box which produces lighting. There are different types of lantern, such as profile, fresnel and flood.

FADE

Gradually bring up or diminish lights.

FLOOR LIGHTING

Lanterns placed on low stands, often used to cast shadows.

SMOKE, FOG OR HAZE MACHINE

A piece of equipment which uses a gas to produce clouds or mists.

PRACTICAL LIGHTS

Working onstage lights that are used in the set, such as desk lamps, torches or candles.

MOVING LIGHT

Either a lighting fixture moved manually by an operator, or a computer-operated fixture which is moved remotely.

LED LIGHTS

Powerful and colourful lights that don't require gels and are energy efficient.

FOOTLIGHTS

Low lights placed on the downstage edge. Popular in Victorian theatres and sometimes now used to create period lighting effects.

Making lighting notes on the production you have seen

Use the mind map below to make notes on the show you have seen.



TIP

If you can, find photographs of the production to remind yourself of key elements of the lighting.

Lighting evaluation

Beyond describing and analysing the lighting, you must judge whether or not it was effective and successful. This means doing more than just expressing that it was 'good' or 'bad' or 'beautiful' or 'ugly'. Think about:

Did the lighting fulfil its purpose?

Were the actors and set appropriately lit so that they could be seen as intended? Did lighting help to present a location or period? Did cues take place when they should have?

Was the lighting of a high technical standard?

For example, were changes accomplished smoothly? Were blackouts efficient? Did the timing of changes seem correct? Was the lighting effective within the staging configuration?

Did the lighting engage and interest the audience?

For example, was it eye-catching or versatile or highly appropriate?

Did lighting contribute to mood and atmosphere?

For example, if the play was comic or frightening or romantic, did the lighting match that?

Did lighting enhance your understanding of the characters?

Were you able to follow the lead actors? If a character's home or costumes were meant to be luxurious, did the lighting contribute to that?

Did lighting help to convey the action of the play?

For example, if something magical was meant to happen, did the lighting achieve that? If an entrance was important, did the lighting support it?

Did the lighting reinforce the themes of the play?

For example, if the play was about violence, magic, poverty or love, did the lighting convey that?

Drama terminology: sound

In order to write accurately about sound design, you need to understand the correct terminology. Below are some useful words to help you describe and analyse what you have seen and heard.

VOLUME

How loud or soft a sound or voice is.

ACTOR-MUSICIANS

Performers who play musical instruments as part of their acting roles.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Drums, guitars, violins and so on, which might be played by a band, orchestra or actors.

COMPOSER

Someone who writes music. Some productions have a composer to create original music.

SNAP

Turn sound suddenly off or on.

FADE

Gradually turn sound up or down.

SPEAKERS

Means of amplifying and projecting sound. The placement of speakers will influence how the audience experiences the sound.

RECORDED SOUND

Sound that has been recorded specially for playback during the performance or selected from sound effects archives.

CURTAIN-CALL MUSIC

Music played during the curtain call. Sometimes the curtain call is choreographed to a song.

REVERB

An echoing effect, sustaining the sound longer than usual.

SOUND EFFECTS

Special sounds created either live or recorded, such as slamming doors or alarm bells.

SCENE CHANGES OR TRANSITIONS

How music or sound is used during transitions or scene changes, often to establish a new location or change in mood.

MICROPHONES

Devices for converting and amplifying sound, including:
radio mics: portable microphones, often worn, which allow actors and singers to be amplified with no visible means of connection
overheads: microphones hung above the stage to boost the overall sound.

LIVE SOUND

Sound created by the stage management, technicians or actors during the performance.

PRE-SHOW MUSIC

Music played as the audience enters and waits for the performance to begin.

ACOUSTICS

The sound quality of a given space, including how the size and shape of the theatre affects the warmth or clarity of sound.

Making sound design notes on the production you have seen

Use the chart below to make notes on sound in the show you attended.

Sound design notes		
Production		
Type of sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Naturalistic? ▶ Abstract? ▶ Motivated? ▶ Music? 	
How the sound is produced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Live or recorded? ▶ Amplified or not? ▶ On stage or off? ▶ Location of speakers? ▶ Snap or fade on and off? 	<p>If you notice any microphones or speakers, sketch them here.</p>
Quality and nature of sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Loud or soft? ▶ Pleasant or discordant? ▶ Calm or quick? ▶ Natural or treated (for example, reverb or other distortion) 	
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Original or existing? ▶ Style? ▶ Instruments? ▶ Period or contemporary? 	
Effects of music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Do characters react to music? ▶ How does audience react to music? ▶ Is music linked to a character or event? 	
Acoustics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Warm or cold? ▶ Clear or muffled? ▶ Silent surroundings or competing sounds? 	

Sound design evaluation

Beyond describing and analysing the sound, you must judge whether or not it was effective and successful. This means doing more than just expressing that it was 'good' or 'bad' or 'beautiful' or 'dull'. Think about:

Did the sound fulfil its purpose?

For example, if it was meant to represent a certain period or location, did it do that successfully?

Was the sound of a high technical standard?

For example, were volume levels appropriate? Were cues completed on time?

Did the sound engage and interest the audience?

For example, was the music catchy, beautiful, memorable or surprising?

Did sound contribute to mood and atmosphere?

For example, if the play was meant to be comic or frightening, did sound add to that?

Did the sound help you to understand the characters?

For example, was music used to introduce a character or to underscore their speech?

Did sound add to the action of the play?

For example, did it help to establish changes in location, time or mood?

Did the sound design support the themes of the play?

For example, if the play was about love, conflict or childhood, did the sound help to convey that?