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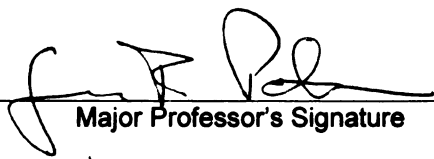
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A PRACTICAL COURSE IN DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

By

Daniel Roth

A THESIS

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Theatre

2008

ABSTRACT

A PRACTICAL COURSE IN DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

By

Daniel Roth

The lack of a guide to teaching a practical course in documentary theatre has left university instructors with a difficult task when attempting to design a course on their own. Although more literature has been created and unearthed in recent years, including the publishing of several important works on the history and semiotics of documentary theatre, as well as many play scripts, the question of how to assemble a documentary play remains difficult to answer. The purpose of this guide is to assist the instructor in creating and facilitating a practical university course in documentary theatre.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been successfully completed without the assistance of the following persons: Kirk Domer, Rob Roznowski and Dr. Georg Schuttler of Michigan State University; Dr. Mary Pratt Cooney and Dr. Linda Roth of Wayne State University.

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INTRODUCTION

The lack of a guide to teaching a practical course in documentary theatre has left university instructors with a difficult task when attempting to design a course on their own. Although more literature has been created and unearthed in recent years, including the publishing of several important works on the history and semiotics of documentary theatre, as well as many play scripts, the question of how to assemble a documentary play remains difficult to answer. The purpose of this guide is to assist the instructor in creating and facilitating a practical university course in documentary theatre.

Though the number of documentary plays produced has increased in past decades, there is currently little published to guide the instructor of documentary theatre. This could be so for several reasons. First, documentary theatre plays have been created and staged in far less number than traditional dramas, leaving less need for a guide, though the numbers are now growing. Documentary theatre's close connection to themes of political and social unrest also saddles it with an air of controversy. With topics as challenging and varied as riots in Los Angeles and women's first-hand perspectives on their private parts, documentary theatre has the ability to reflect social problems and create controversy in a society that often remains silent on pressing issues. In addition, the subject material for many of the great documentary plays is so provincial that they remain tied to one theatre company or location and remain of little interest to other theatres. An example of this is Gillette Elvgren and Attilio Favorini's excellent play about Pittsburgh, Steel/City¹, which finds little interest in reproduction while remaining an important work of the

documentary theatre. The academic study of documentary theatre has recently become a topic of interest for many scholars, and as this evolves, more published texts about the topic may come.

The design of this course will differ from the traditional organization of classes in the theatre curriculum given its goal of creating a new play within the structure of a university class. This course will involve providing instruction and practice in acting, writing and directing and will also address elements of journalism and history. The class created from this guide will give the student practical experience in documentary theatre production and will result in every student having experience in creating a documentary theatre performance for the public. Since this process has many components, grading can be based on the student's participation in each section, as well as on their contribution to the collaboration and their creativity; thus a student's final performance can serve as a final examination.

The logistics and planning for a course as large in scope as this can seem daunting, but the experience of engaging students in the community can yield a highly rewarding experience for each person involved. Throughout the process of gathering information, editing, writing and gearing up for performance, the project will continually evolve into something which truly can reflect the current mood and emotions of a local area. This project can easily excite students towards the prospect of creating theatre on their own terms, a theatre that closely reflects the world they live in. An important notion to keep in mind throughout the process of creating a documentary theatre play is that as much



archival information should be saved as possible in order to document and preserve the history and stories collected for the community and great world.

In addition to the instructor and the students of this course, there will also be the need for technical personnel to help with the final production. Requesting assistance from a technical director, technical theatre student or theatre manager for this production early on will help when the time comes to put up the new play later in the semester. A technical director or theatre manager will also be able to help procure resources and people in order to make the fully-realized version of this production happen. Engaging such professionals early on will prevent the surprise of such a request later, also making sure that possible allocations of budget and instruments are made for the final production.

This guide provides a systematic format to follow in designing and implementing a course on documentary theatre. With a good topic, a handful of students, and fair amount of theatrical expertise, an instructor without previous specific documentary theatre experience can facilitate the creation a product of which the instructor, students, and community can be proud.

CHAPTER ONE

“The whole play gives an accurate but emotive picture of life... It is propaganda of a kind, but propaganda that works not by bullying and terrorizing but by evoking sympathy and understanding.”²

-Peter Cheeseman, *The Fight for Shelton Bar*

Throughout its history, documentary theatre has been known by many names. What we now know as documentary theatre has been shaped by the artists and technicians who have created it. Like most art, documentary theatre has come to being through the need for its type of expression, only being defined later by its records and creative principles. This chapter will give a working definition for documentary theatre and reasoning for its place in our creative culture, as well as its place in the university.

What is Documentary Theatre?

Documentary theatre is a form of theatre whose texts are created from interviews, news reports and other “factual” reference material. Also called community-based theatre, theatre of fact, or theatre of testimony, some trace the origins of this genre to the Greek epic poets’ recanting of the great battles of their time. The major recent advancements in the form came during the early twentieth century in Germany with such artists as Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator, and in America within the Federal Theatre Project. “It was Piscator, more than any other playwright or stage director, who took current events and

made them come face-to-face with the public in the most direct of manners, using primary source documentation.”³ These theatre directors and playwrights wanted to find a way to hold a theatrical mirror to the real world in order to show people the horrible truths of their times. Documentary theatre served as this mirror.

The restriction that is placed on the scripts for documentary theatre creates a unique challenge in comparison to the traditional forms of theatre where a script is written under the author’s aegis. Documentary theatre has in its foundations a commitment to accuracy in its sources, as they are to be delivered and received as primary and factual, which leads its writers to have more in common with the journalist than the playwright at times. Certain aspects of traditional playwriting, such as plot, conflict, character, and dialogue certainly do apply, however, and should be upheld and not forgotten in this process; this also includes dramatic structure and style.

At once, documentary theatre can be both included in the dramatic canon and dismissed by it. Documentary theatre qualifies as drama because of its essence as a play to be performed. Documentary plays relate to Aristotelian concepts of drama by following similar purposes, these being to entertain and to educate⁴. Finally, the use of dramatic structure and style is often undistinguishable between the two.

The problem with categorizing documentary theatre solely with all other forms of theatre lies in its lack of adherence to staunch principles regarding the difference between fiction and non-fiction. In his definitive book on the subject, *Documentary Theatre in the*

*United States*⁵, Richard Dawson forms a unity of three attributes for documentary theatre, in order to help classify them while excluding those that are not documentary theatre.

These attributes, or principles, are as follows:

- The Principle of Factual Authenticity- Keeping a strict adherence to the truth.
- The Unity of Primary Sources- Using first hand, primary information, regarding the event or topic.
- The Unity of Piscatorian Stage Devices- Using media from the outside world (i.e. newspapers, photographs, radio broadcasts) in creating the world of the play.

Dawson goes on to explain this categorization:

“Each of these unities in some combination, I believe, provides a test for attributes of documentary theatre. Also, an analysis of these unities helps to locate a play within the genre itself. As in Neoclassicism where an ideal was selected on the basis of particular constituencies, so too in the New Realism of documentary theatre does there exist common elements, connecting links, that represent an ideal. By revealing these unities of composition not only can the patterns of history in the content, form, and stagecraft be identified, but also can the level of expectation in the fame called documentary theatre be raised because the rules that govern it are made clear.”

In other words, Dawson signifies the difference of documentary theatre from traditional theatre by its adherence to truthful retellings, the primacy of the play’s textual sources and the use of actual media from society. Thus, by judging each piece by how much it uses these conventions, the types of documentary theatre can be classified by comparison. A play that uses interview transcripts as its text adheres directly to the second principle but may be less accurate in retelling the facts of certain events and may not use media or

records at all. A play that draws its text from courtroom proceedings adheres mostly to the third principle, but also draws directly from primary sources and remains truthful to the record of the trial. Dawson's great gift to the documentary theatre is giving it some definition, separating it from the canon, and celebrating its parts.

Why Produce Documentary Theatre: "An Active and Immediate Theatre"

The subtitle of this section comes from a conversation I had with Mary Pratt Cooney of Wayne State University about what options there are for documentary theatre in a university setting. She very passionately stated, "The most important thing for theatre now is to have an active and immediate theatre,"⁶ and throughout the conversation we both became convinced that documentary theatre could create theatre with the audience, rather than for them. Taking issues and stories from the audience themselves would create a sense of active engagement that the audience could take with them and use to reflect on their life and/or work. In Peter Brook's The Empty Space, the process of creating an active audience is described with passionate sentiment. He states, "If the actor can catch the spectator's interest, thus lower his defenses and then coax the spectator to an unexpected position or an awareness of a clash of opposing beliefs, of absolute contradictions, the audience becomes more active."⁷ This audience awakening often happens when the mirror is held in front of them like in documentary theatre; they see themselves in contrast and compliment with their community and become more connected.

This fantastic mission, to create an active and immediate theatre, has inspired the creation of documentary theatre for many of its practitioners. The writer and director Edwin Piscator experimented in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century, designing techniques in order to express political views and descent. Piscator explains his theatre's guiding principles as such, "Its purpose should be to teach us-of human relation, human behavior, human capacities."⁸ His *Total Theatre* used multiple medias, including music, film, and visual arts, to create an invasive and challenging experience for his audience. Film clips and images from the local culture all supported his scripts, the words for which had been taken from real life, in court trials and newspapers. He used the immediate reality of his society in his productions to affect his fellow Germans, foster discussion, and inspire change.

Documentary Theatre in the University

Piscator is an example of someone who could not work solely within the traditional forms of theatre. His need for expression took him outside of already-established mediums and pushed him to create a new method, a new way. The student who studies this form of theatre can benefit from it in many of the same ways. As often is the case, it is hard for a young actor to take ownership of the role of a Shakespearean king or upper-west-side art collector. Documentary theatre often puts the actor in touch with their character face-to-face through the words and sounds of the real life subject. This allows the actor to use the immediate reality in how he or she will embody this persona. A practical class in

documentary theatre will expand students' ability to create and invigorate the connection they have with their art by personalizing it and giving their character, an often-abstract concept, a face. This connection can also apply to the instructor, the theatre department, and the university as a whole.

By creating a play that reflects the local community, the university theatre can justify its existence as a place for advancing thought and not just a source of entertainment. The process of creating a documentary play will, in most cases, breach the gap between the university and its surrounding community. Depending on the topic chosen and the availability of external and internal support, documentary theatre's way of reaching out and engaging the community can create the basis for grants and secondary sources of funding. Creating a new documentary play, unless it is about the theatre itself, is always a multidisciplinary process, creating communication between often-divided groups within the university and the outside world. A play about the effect of cancer in the community would involve the theatre department, hospitals, medical schools, psychologists, patients, families and community groups for example, creating communication where there has been little of its type. Through this unique form of creating communication, the students, the community, and the university all stand to gain greatly.

The resulting research and records from taking part in this process can also be archived and used by future researchers, creating a deeper emotional understanding of topics that often appear as cold facts of written record. A proper plan for assessment, including

surveying the students and audiences involved in this process, can help to recognize what has been accomplished by the work done during this process.

CHAPTER TWO

Preproduction:

The preproduction section of this guide will provide a description of the necessary work to be done by the teacher to prepare for the class, as well as work that will be done in class with the students in order to prepare them for task of making a documentary play. Selecting a topic for the class and forging community contacts in reference to that topic should be done prior to the students' first day, as this will eliminate the possibility of not having the right topic or enough contacts for each student. Reading documentary plays and performing exercises which push the boundaries of the student's definitions of theatre will create the proper prior experience for the student to begin working in the documentary form.

Select a Topic

"There are moments in history when a particular event brings various ideologies and beliefs prevailing in culture into sharp focus. By paying attention in moments like this to people's words, one is able to hear the way the prevailing ideas affect not only individual lives but also the culture at large"⁹

- Moises Kaufman, *The Laramie Project*

Most important in beginning this process is selecting a topic that will keep you and your students interested for the length of the semester. The topic selected should be broad

enough to encompass several points of view or opinions, involving many people in the community. There are many questions to think about while brainstorming. A good place to start is, “What is an important issue in my area?” A Hawaiian university student will not be interested in the impacts of automobile manufacturing on the economy, as likewise a Michigan student wouldn’t be as invested in the premature deaths of local surfers. Start by reading local newspapers and saving clippings of stories that have direct ties to the community. In addition, a potential resource for finding a hot topic is to go out and talk to people or community groups from the area. Questions about the biggest events in the area or the area’s biggest scandals will undoubtedly get a local talking for more time than needed. The most important element in choosing a topic is making sure that it be relevant in the future, as this will be a semester-long project, and will perhaps be used for years to come.

Here a list of sample of topics which can be applied to many communities of various locations:

- The AIDS Crisis
- Gun Control
- Violence in Schools
- Nature Conservation
- Local Landmarks and History
- War’s Local Impact
- The Importance of Voting

Once the topic has been selected the instructor can begin to research significant organizations and persons within the community that will be used as subject material for the production. The best way to go about this is to contact local groups and associations which have a connection to the topic. These include unions, community activism groups, and other representational authorities. The university is probably well connected in some manner with the topic through various departments. Start a conversation with librarians and professors in areas related to the topic. If possible try to involve other departments in the project; this will be furthering their research as well.

The Big Who

The “Big Who” is, “Who should be asked for interviews?” There is no simple answer to this question because each scenario will be different, and therefore require a different choice. Finding enough people to interview can be difficult, and that is why finding them early, or at least finding connections for the students to follow up on, is important. Here are some questions to get the ball rolling on finding the “Big Who”:

- Who stands to benefit from this subject/event?
- Who stands to lose from it?
- Who are the people currently discussing it?
- Who manages the assets associated to it? (i.e., land, wealth, information)
- Who represents the players? (Government Agency, Unions, Chamber of Commerce)

- Where did this start?

Once the instructor has had time to research these questions, he or she can determine whom to contact in order to find a person related to the issue. The total number of contacts should be at least one and one-half times the number of students in the class, as some contacts may be difficult to reconnect with or be unavailable at the time of need. This research and outreach will be done mostly independently by the instructor, though it can be enhanced from consultation from peers as to where to look.

By making a list of certain “angles” or positions on issues relating to the topic, the instructor can find groups or people related to them. An example of this is as follows:

Issue: *Nature Conservation*

Angles: *River pollution, landfills, clean air, endangered animal populations, what the land was like in the past, what can be done to help.*

Contact Possibilities: *Environmental groups, federal and state employees, scientists, nature conservation site managers, representatives from companies that affect the area*

Issue: *War’s local impact*

Angles: *Veterans and local heroes, manufacturing changes, wartime writing, adverse perspectives, families affected*

Contact Possibilities: *Veterans associations, local historians, families of veterans, current military, federal representatives, veteran's hospitals, anti-war groups, weapons manufacturers*

The choice of topic should remain broad in order to leave the student with the ability to make choices regarding the specific angle to investigate. Upon presentation of this topic to the class, ask students what feelings are evoked on the subject. Discussions between the instructor and class about why the particular topic of the play was selected will help to get the students' minds on the right track from the beginning. Students may feel limited by the lack of freedom in choosing the overall topic and it may be necessary explain the work the instructor has done to establish contacts within the area. Making clear that the students will be in control of the focus of their particular performance pieces and that they will have to work with their fellow students to make a cohesive production can help to make their role in the overall program more understandable and appealing.

Assignment for the Students: Media Dragnet

Early on, ask the students to start collecting imagery and articles in connection with the chosen topic. An early assignment of assembling two digital images and two articles or quotations per week is very manageable, and can create a great wealth of information from which to reference and create. This collection can be used in stage projections and

set design later, as well as for transitional sequences within the play itself to create context for the individual pieces.

Theory and Experimentation for the Students:

This practical class in documentary theatre will be comprised of two parts in order for the students to gain both knowledge and experience. The first of these two sections will focus on bridging the gap from the student's previous theatre education to the unique demands and forms of the documentary theatre. The second section of the course will focus on the creation of a full-length documentary theatre performance. A thirteen-week semester format is the basis for this guide, though many of its elements can be adapted to fit different schedules.

Through assigned readings of popular documentary theatre plays, such as *The Laramie Project*¹⁰ and *Fires in the Mirror*¹¹, the student will be able to begin to see the results of research and work that is similar to what they will be doing throughout the class. There are several forms of documentary theatre. These forms have come about because of the nature of resources belonging to the producing person or company. A variety of readings in the area of documentary theatre will give the student a good perspective on the scope of documentary theatre, ranging from plays taken directly from courtroom transcripts to the recantation of single person interviews.

This guide focuses on the monologue-based documentary play. This format will give the student a task that is both accessible and executable in the period of a semester.

There have been many monologue-based documentary plays published in the past three decades. Through reading an array of these plays, the student will appreciate the differing role of the performer in this type of work in contrast to the performer's role in traditional plays. There are also excellent video records available for a good number of these plays, and viewing them will help the student see how these plays were executed. Examples of the plays and their playwrights are as follows:

Anna Deavere Smith: *Twilight: Los Angeles*¹², *Fires in the Mirror*, *House Arrest*¹³

Emily Mann: *Execution of Justice*¹⁴, *Greensboro*¹⁵

Claudio Sheerer: *Blown Sideways Through Life*¹⁶

As students begin to feel more informed with the many forms of documentary theatre they can begin to experiment creatively. By engaging in several theatrical exercises, students can actively begin to see their role in the theatre expand beyond that of the traditional actor with a script. The exercises that follow can be used in coordination with discussion of the reading assignments and final play, to begin to build a repertoire of each actor's interest and particular talents.

Exercise 1: Interview a Friend

Set up a short interview with a friend about his or her history. Use the list of questions below and record the interview with a tape recorder to save a record of exactly what was said throughout the interview. This exercise can be used to help begin to get comfortable with the role of the interviewer. Pay attention to what types of questions provide the most useful answers and which get only one-word responses. Begin to look at the subject as a character who will be imitated in the future. Create a system for remembering gestures, accents and overall physical appearance.

Exercise 1 Questions:

Where were you born?

What is your favorite memory from childhood?

Describe the house that you grew up in.

Did you enjoy school as a while growing up?

When did you first realize you were not a kid anymore?

How do you think that you are the same now as you were as child?

Do you look forward to growing older?

Where do you think you will be in 5 years?

Once the interview is completed, write down (transcribe) what was said verbatim throughout the interview. This may seem tedious, but it is important to begin to listen for the exact words the subject says, so that one does not misquote or paraphrase him or her.

Use this transcript as the script for a scene in class, editing for dramatic relevance. The student interviewer will switch roles with a fellow student: they will become the interviewer, and the original interviewer will become the interviewee (the friend). If possible, have the interviewee watch you in order to recognize when you are acting more like him or her than yourself.

Exercise 2: Physical Only Interview

A. Have each student study a single late night interview show's interview of a guest for their physical actions only, disregarding the voice. An example can be found on an online video hosting site so the student can prepare on their own time. Have each perform their impression of the interviewee. Use this exercise to discuss the idea of interpretation. What gestures were similar through the performances? What good came from certain person's interpretation?

B. Have each student watch a different late night interview show and present silent scenes reenacting what takes place.. Have other students try and guess which celebrity they are impersonating.

Exercise 3: Interview a Professional

Arrange an interview with a person in an interesting profession. This could be a lawyer, mayor, police officer, team coach, etc. Use your skills as a journalist to find an interesting story from their career. Watch how their posture changes when the interviewee becomes interested in the story they are telling. Do they become more animated? Does their voice change pitch? Pay close attention, as these details will become the character traits which move your performance from the mundane to the extraordinary.

On to Production:

Having now defined and examined the documentary form, read some of its modern texts, and practically experimented in the form, the instructor and students can embark on the process of making their own documentary play. As the class continues, each student will be responsible for creating his or her own performance piece, as well as helping others in the class create theirs.

CHAPTER THREE

Production:

The next section of this guide will examine a new method of creating documentary theatre. This method may serve to ease the pressures of such a large undertaking and will simplify the process of creating this play. The roles that each student will play will give him or her a wide array of experiences, all of which are integral to the creation of a documentary play. Since time and resources differ from university to university, the instructor will need to use his or her judgment in the specifics of each of the elements. The following exercises and assignments can be augmented and appended relative to the needs of the class and any circumstantial requirements.

There is Method to the Madness

“I look at art as a method, just as science is a method. Science and art are methods for examining 'what is'. Science uses the 'scientific method' which is an extremely well defined method, on which much has been written, and most scientists agree on exactly what is meant, by 'scientific method'. Art, at the moment, does not have any widely accepted 'artistic method.’”¹⁷

Robert C Wittig, *ebsqart.com*

Everyone thought this was a great idea! The class will make valuable connections within our community, expand our theatre department’s reach and give the students a wonderful,

fulfilling experience! There is a small budget, the technical director is on board and there is a date on the department's calendar that says, "Documentary Class Production," and now it is all on the instructor. This is a nerve-racking moment; this instructor has chosen not to stay within the safety of traditional theatre teaching, scene study, and Elizabethan history, but to venture out into the unknown.

Some thoughts may now be going through an instructor's head such as: *This is too big of a project! What am I going to teach these students? Have I prepared enough?* Some of this worry is justified; the redeeming quality is that this nervous energy will propel the instructor through the difficult process he or she faces ahead. In undertaking this commitment to create a new play by a certain date, the instructor has thrown him or herself into an expansive task that is always undefined at the beginning, which is the beauty and the challenge of it.

Included in the appendix of this book is a timeline for the instructor, which will help access progress through the process. Keeping an eye on this or a self-created timeline will help the instructor see where he or she is in relation to what is left to accomplish in order to create a play. Of course, each class will vary depending on scheduling, class size, holiday breaks, and other commitments, but there will be certain amounts of time needed to complete assignments, assemble technical elements, and learn lines. A particular time to note to the students early on is the final performance date and any technical rehearsal dates associated with it where they will have to meet outside of class time. Due to the nature of the performance-based class, students will be mandated to put

in long days during these periods, which could include ten to twenty hours of time outside of class during the final week.

Choosing to execute this process with your students will assure a healthy and productive class by holding you to a specific set of tasks with room for creativity. The amount of passion with which the class is motivated to investigate their subject, contact the members associated with it, and dig up interesting and important details will help to keep morale always pushing forward--uncovering further information, discovering more truths. The previous exercises, discussions, and readings can help to foster this passion.

Method for the Students: Five Roles

In order for the class to create an original documentary theatre production, every member of the class will have to perform each of five roles. This guide will help distill this process into manageable sections and tasks for each student. From beginning to end, the sections will help define responsibilities and duties for the student, giving each the chance to apply his or her particular strengths and interests to the personal process and creations. The instructor's job throughout this process will be to guide the students, review submitted materials, and keep the class and production on schedule.

The production section for the student will be broken up into these five roles: the journalist, the editor, the writer, the director, and the actor. Though more duties may fall within the realm of each section, these five titles will give the student the idea of the

mindset they should be working in as the semester progresses. The order of the sections relates to how the production will form throughout the semester. It is important that the student understand this complex set of circumstances as the class begins so that each is adequately equipped to juggle several duties every week.

ROLE ONE: JOURNALIST

This first role will give the student the opportunity to embody the role of a journalist.

The exercises in the earlier chapters involving interviewing parents and friends help the student shake off the nerves of setting up and executing an interview. To step from the safe place of interviewing someone they know to interviewing a stranger will be a bit uncomfortable for shy students, but reducing that apprehension is part of what this class teaches. Setting up deadlines can motivate the student to act quickly and break their personal boundaries.

If possible, a journalist or journalism professor can be asked to come to the class and help students in regards to bettering their interviewing techniques. Bringing a professional from the journalism field into your classroom will give the students a person to voice their concerns to about staging an interview and determining questions to ask. Journalists are often familiar with local issues and personalities as well, so it will be beneficial on many fronts to speak with them early on.

In addition, there are several websites which feature helpful lessons on journalism techniques.

Journalism Web Sites:

Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Journalism Tutorial

<http://stringers.media.mit.edu/journalism.htm>

-This website takes the student through the full journalistic process from coming up with an idea to writing the story. Condensed into one-minute tutorials, this is a fun website to check out.

Handbook of Independent Journalism

<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/index.htm>

-This website, provided by the U.S. government, provides a good run-down of journalistic techniques. With categories such as research, sources, and interviews, much information for this role can be found there.

Contacting the Interviewee

Owing to work done in the preproduction section of this process, the instructor may now make use of the collected contact details for persons relating to the topic which they researched prior to the semester's beginning. These contacts, varied in nature, should be disseminated to the students in order for them to research the contacts' connections to the topic.

The students should contact the possible interviewees, introduce themselves, and establish a rapport. Once a contact is made, the student should schedule an interview at a location convenient to the subject. Though it might be taxing on the student's transportation, going to the interviewee's workplace or home often provides a better context for the interview. Going to the workplace will give the student background into

the environment this person works in on a day-to-day basis. Interviewing at their home can also give important clues as to who the person is and what is important to them.

It is important for students to be as available as possible to the interviewee, as scheduling time for a professional is often more expensive than for a student. Since students might not be entirely familiar with phone etiquette, they should be reminded to stay open to adapt to the schedules and proclivities of their interviewee, as they may be working with this person for secondary or further interviews and want to create a copasetic and friendly relationship. Most likely this person will want to have his or her story told and will be more than willing to take time to help a student artist. If a second interview is needed, and establishing a good rapport during the first interview will provide a good basis for asking for a second meeting.

After establishing a time to meet their subject, the student should begin to immerse him or herself in practicing the duties of a journalist in order to grow more comfortable in the upcoming interview. A short primer in the basics of journalism can improve the student's confidence in conducting the interview, creating better material afterward.

Journalism 101

The most important facet of journalism for the students begin to get familiar with is called the “5 W’s of Journalism”¹⁸. These are: Who, What, Why, Where, and When. These rules apply to the students because using them can guarantee that the questions

asked will provide the information necessary to tell the subject's story honestly and completely.

Though the processes for a journalist and a documentary theatre creator are quite similar, some special concerns must be thought about as to theatricality and performance. Using journalism's "5 W's" to serve the documentary theatre purpose asks for a somewhat special adaptation. Asking these adapted questions will help young writers and authors to think about setting, character, character arcs, plot structure, and other dramatic elements. Though this adaptation can go through many variations, an example of how to use the 5 W's follows:

Why: Why is this story important for this topic? Why does the subject think these events happened the way they did?

Who: Who is this person? How does location affect their character, personality? Who are the people that are important to this person's story?

Where: Where does the story happen? What influence do these locations have on the way this person behaves?

What: What has changed in this person from the start of their story to the end?

When: What is the "period" during which these events happened? Did people dress differently or speak differently at this time? How much time passes throughout the telling of this story?

The question of “How?” is often added to the list of “5 W’s”. This is in most cases in reference to the question, “How did this happen?” It is good for the documentary theatre student to ask, “How am I going to perform this?” and “How am I going to bring myself to this character?” “How” translates into the action, and is very valuable to keep in mind.

Special Note about Equipment

Depending on resources, there are several ways to notate and record interviews. In a perfect world, instructors would be able to give each of your students a High Definition camera and unlimited film, but because of budget and resource limitations, feasibility will be a factor.

Audio and video recordings present both limitations and possibilities. It is best to try to have as thorough as a recording as possible using the best resources available. Audio recordings on cassette tape can be played back through a tape player, if desired, during performance for easy sound enhancement. Digital recorders are now widely available and many come with software which will help in the sound editing process. Though the digital recording does create a better copy of the interview material, the technical requirements also limit the use of this technology.

Video recordings are currently being made using a number of formats. The resources of the department or university will likely influence the choice of format. Using video

recordings can open your production up to added production elements using projectors and slides; these technical elements can be time consuming and will require a technician who is skilled at integrating video with performance.

What Questions are Good Questions?

Without experience as a journalist, it is hard to know what questions are going to produce the most useful answers during an interview. Bearing in mind of the end goal(s) of the interview can help interviewers think of what questions to ask. Since the focus of these interviews will be to gather testimonies and stories regarding the selected subject, the interviewer will need to maintain a healthy balance of anecdotal and factual information in order to have a well-founded source. The major pitfall of over-planning the questions for the interview is that your subject may give you their best material spontaneously. The student's practice with family and professionals during the exercises in the first section of the course should have led most of them to this conclusion.

Here are three ways to guide your formation of questions:

- Let research be your guide.
- Have more questions than you will need.
- Phrase the questions to inspire long answers, not 'yes' or 'no'.

It is important to introduce the idea that the interviewer's duty is not to control the interview but to provoke the subject to talk, then to listen to the subject, and finally adapt their questions so that the subject will be as explicit as possible about what they are most knowledgeable. In most cases, the longer the interview goes, the better the information gained.

In the end, the purpose of the interview is not solely to gather information, but to create a performance piece with emotions and opinions, something that is performable and will be interesting to an audience. Questions that can provoke the type of response needed to generate this type of performance piece can be crafted in a direct way. Some sample general sample questions to produce a chronologically-formed beginning, middle and end format are:

- When did you become active in this field?
- How did you first become involved with this subject?
- What provoked you to become more involved?
- What happened during the process that changed your opinions?
- Describe your best day involved with it.
- Describe your worst day involved.
- How do you think this could have ended better?
- Looking back, how do you feel about the issue now?
- How would you have changed the outcome?

Interviewing Behaviors to Instill

Connecting on a personal level with the subject will help to give the transcript a personal touch, one that can be edited and acted out later. The most basic, yet most important, elements in interviewing are to be on time, to be prepared and to be thankful to the interviewee. If the interviewer has made a good impression from the initial contact setting up the interview, the interviewee should be ready and willing to talk at the chosen time. Letting the interviewee be on his or her own ground can help him or her feel comfortable while giving the interviewer possible setting information about the character. If recording the interview, always make sure the interviewee is aware and okay with being recorded. There is sometimes a fine line between opinions about a policy or person and a condemnation, so making sure that the interviewee knows the statements said are being recorded and that what is said will be used is important in order to avoid controversy. Included in the appendix of this guide is a sample release form that the interviewee must sign in order for their words to be used; this will protect you from most legal issues after the interview. If there is any question as to if your students are lacking protection, the university legal representatives can be contacted.

Beginning an interview by having the subject say and spell their name will insure proper reproduction afterwards, as well as give the interviewer something with which to judge the sound levels of the equipment. After this, the interviewer can start the interview process with easy questions or “softballs” to warm up the interviewee. These questions could be about where he or she was raised, what hobbies they enjoy and what their

favorite restaurant is in town. Warming up the subject will relax them and get them comfortable to with speaking candidly. Letting the subject talk is an important and is sometimes forgotten about in the process. If the interviewer waits an extra moment before cutting in with their next question, often the subject will fill the pause with extra, even better information, as this usually leads to their personal opinion of what they just spoke of.

Finding someone to interview, scheduling, and other logistics can often be the hardest parts of the journalistic role, as these are things which cannot be practiced in class. Practicing interviewing can give the student much-needed confidence once they find themselves in the actual situation.

ROLE TWO: EDITOR

The Watchful Eye

The purpose of the “editor” role is to create enough credible material to make a successful performance piece. This role will keep the students committed and responsible for their own work throughout the process. The editor role serves as an intermediary for the journalist and writer roles, being used by the journalist as a transcriber and as a fact checker, and used by the writer as supplier of script material and accurate information. Because the same student is performing all of these roles, it is good to make clear which role is being performed at which time.

The editor’s first duty is to transcribe the words collected through the earlier interviews. This must be transcribed verbatim as to assure clarity and honesty. The transcripts should retain both the interviewer’s questions and the subject’s answers, in order to remember what prompted each answer and retain awareness of context. The transcript copy will serve as the bulk of the writer’s material and as the actor’s script and therefore it is important to write exactly what is said, including abbreviated words, slang and jargon. These colloquial parts of speech are often what dictate a character’s idiosyncrasies in monologues of this kind. Trying to write the dialogue as you hear it, with pauses, stutters and breaths, will save the writer and actor from having to reference the original tape and will allow them to make different interpretations. Underlining the words stressed in each sentence allows the writer to see the intonation of each line so they can edit accordingly.

The transcript either should mark out where each breath is with a symbol like (breath) or should start a new line with each breath consistently, as breathing patterns also has much to do with character.

Here are some examples of a transcribed interview that keeps the slang and idiosyncrasies intact:

Back in the day when, uh, when I first started
There weren't, uh, no people like me workin dere
Everybody else was farmers (breath), they hadn't been in the city before-
So I, well, I did my best to get along (breath), but things were tense.

Editorial Review

After creating a transcript, the student should then review the material and note important themes that are discussed during the interview. The writer will be looking to make a dramatic piece from this material; the editor's job is to suggest to the writer what is important to the character and to the play. However, again, the same student will be performing both of these roles, but a separation between editor and writer roles will insure a thoughtful process.

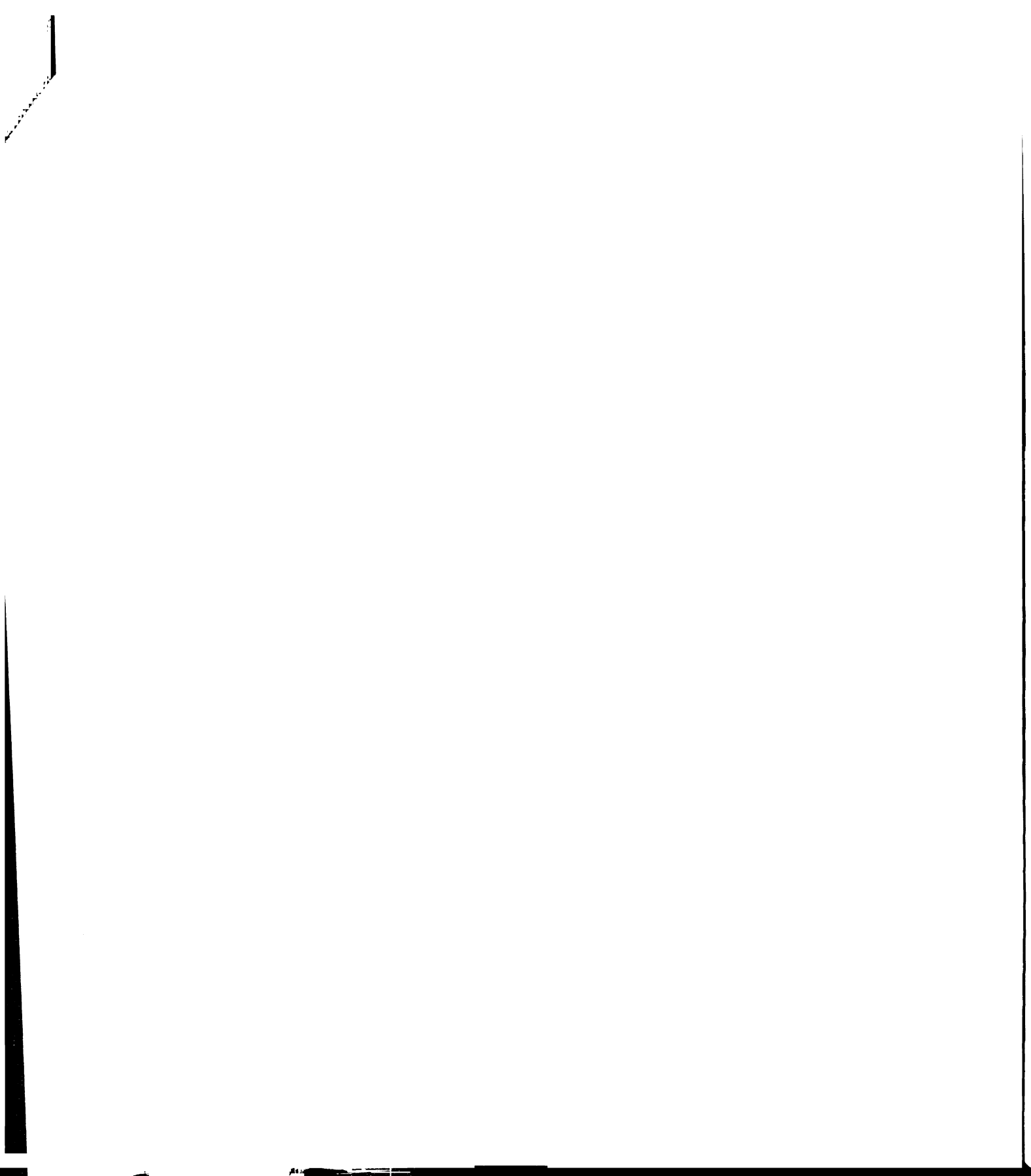
Determining the quality of the interview material is difficult. Many times upon leaving an interview, a journalist can feel as if he or she has much more than they will need, only

to begin work and realize they have nothing of substance. The opposite is also possible, when the journalist's expectations are not fulfilled but another story surfaces and changes their entire perspective on the piece or topic.

It is possible that the first interview will not provide enough material for a good monologue. This happens quite often and requires that a second interview take place. This is a good thing; a second interview is the best way to assure a thorough piece and should be encouraged where possible. Using information gathered from the first interview to create questions for the second will create more in-depth answers and a more personal retelling of events.

Editor to Writer Transition

Having now a rough transcript which has been reviewed thoroughly, the student can begin the work of writing his or her piece for performance. The role of editor will be referenced several times over, as the journalist role has revisited in order to research more information and hold a second interview. The editor role will exist within the writer's segment by making sure the writer remains honest to the original interview and keeps the story in line with what was told. The writer will use the skills and knowledge gained by editing and transcribing the original interview to instill in their piece the mood of the original interview.



ROLE THREE: PLAYWRIGHT

“You, not a professional journalist, photographer, or folklorist from outside the community, are the best person to tell the story of how your community was moved to action. No one is more qualified for this task than those who work tirelessly, every day, to make their piece of the world a better place to live.”¹⁹

-Putting Documentary Work to Work

The writer’s role in the documentary theatre process is a lesson in two parts. The first is a general playwriting lesson. The second is a specific treatment of this lesson to the area of documentary theatre. Although there has been a great effort in this guide to define the separation between traditional playwriting and writing for documentary theatre, the role of the writer, like that of the actor, at times transcends this difference. The process of writing a piece for performance involves similar concepts and practice in either situation. Some of the students of this course may have previous playwriting education; this may serve as a refresher for them. Those that have not had any playwriting instruction will benefit greatly by learning and practicing writing plot and characters.

The focus of this course will be monologue-based documentary theatre. This focus will help the student make more character specific acting choices and create a thorough character through writing and revising their own performance piece. The following

discussion of style and structure in theatre will use this monologue form to examine several principles of playwriting and drama.

Dramatic Structure and Tips

The most common dramatic structure, and the one that we will follow in this process, is the narrative, or climactic, structure. The narrative structure is most common in Western literature and is most notable for its beginning, middle and end structure. The beginning of a play most often holds two principles within its section, the exposition and an inciting incident that presents a problem for one or more of the characters to overcome. The middle of a narrative structured play features the hero or protagonist forming his or her plans and method of achieving victory over the problem that has been placed in his or her way. Finally, the ending has two parts: the climax, which is usually the result of a conflict between the protagonist and the obstacle, and the resolution, where the climax's effect is seen and felt. This play structure maintains that something happens which leads another event to happen in a chain of events towards an ending. This structure is often associated with Freytag's triangle that works to explain plot through a "unity of action"²⁰.

Two books for supplemental reading about breaking down and building up dramatic structure are:

- *Creating Your Own Monologue*, by Glenn Alterman²¹
- *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, by Lagos Egri²²

Dramatic Structure Exercises:

Dramatic Structure Exercise 1: Retell Your Favorite

Each student is required to create a monologue retelling the plot of his or her favorite movie or play. This monologue should include the three acts of dramatic structure and be told by the main character in the piece, in order to see a sample of the emotions of the character as they traveled through the story. By discussing what elements worked the best for telling a certain story, the students can begin to apply these dramatic techniques to their own monologues.

Dramatic Structure Exercise 2: Detective's Rundown

Each student researches a certain criminal case that has multiple news stories covering its proceedings. The student then must write two monologues, one from the perspective of the perpetrator and another from the perspective of the victim. These monologues will aim to tell a story from opposing viewpoints while keeping the integrity of the facts given in the news reports. The student will then turn in the news articles and the monologues for grading.

Getting Down To It:

The writing process for this production accomplishes the most when it focuses less on the writer at home trying to imagine what would be best, and more on a collaborative process involving discussion followed by several drafts and rewrites. Once the students have

edited down the initial transcripts into those parts they feel will fit the monologues, they can bring these cuttings to class and begin constructing their pieces. This requires a strict set of due dates which the students will have to follow in order to stay on the course timeline. By answering the following questions, they can begin to transform their rough cuttings into a speech worthy of performance.

Questions to ask of your material:

- What is most important to your character?
- How does your character feel about the subject?
- Where is the beginning, middle and end of the subject's involvement?
- What is the most climactic moment for the issue? For the subject?
- What surprises you about the subject's testimony?

Having each student answers these or similar questions will result in many variations on the same issue, providing the class the opportunity to see how different sides of a story evolve from each person interviewed. Students may feel protective of their material, as they generated through their hard work, but the more input the student can receive from his or her peers, the better each will benefit from the drafting process. Using the discussed and distilled rough interview material, the student can then form this material into a speech using the rules of dramatic structure already discussed.

Collaborate:

In order to assure a well-drafted piece, the student should work directly with a partner student now will assist the student throughout the creative process, directing them and assisting them in the later stages as well. This partner should, during the writing phase, read each draft of the student's monologue and listen to the student read it aloud. This review will then lead into questions that will probe to see if the student is on track and how the piece can be improved.

Establishing a good working relationship with this partner will assure that the student remains on track during the writing process and is creating something that sounds good to the listener. Throughout the rewriting phase, the students will bring their piece to class in order to compare and contrast their work with other students. By looking at the direction each other's pieces are taking, the student can then begin to get a feel for how he or she can link the pieces together for a performance.

Reminder: Journalist and Editor led to Writer

Once a piece is written and performance time gets nearer and nearer, it is easy to lose track of where the work came from. The student should be constantly reminding himself about the source material, often listening or watching it again in order to pick up certain defining idiosyncrasies. Remembering the editor's task of keeping the piece accurate to what was first recorded is vital to making a successful and honest piece.

Special Note for the Instructor:

At the end of the playwright section of the course, the instructor will be able to see what type of pieces have come from the interviews and previous research done. Allowing the students freedom to construct a show from their collaborations while maintaining an overview for clarity, structure, and equal work/stage time will become the instructor's responsibility here. Letting the students work together as a larger piece is important, as it will give them equity in the final project they will take ownership and want a better product. As in any class or student project, there will exist differing levels of commitment and experience interplaying in the process. Recognizing these differences and giving special consideration for those who have less experience will need to be an important focus of the instructor. Those students who have a great amount of experience in theatre can take leadership roles in the remainder of the process.

ROLE 4: DIRECTOR

The focus of the class can now turn from research and writing to producing a performance worthy of the students' material. The partner groups the students began working in in the editor's section will now continue working together in the staging of the scene. Each partner will now serve as director to the writer's scene, as the writer will act in his or her own work.

Combining the variety of pieces that have been generated by different students into a cohesive production is a creative challenge for any instructor. Again, because this is a class production, it is important to assess what the instructor's goal will be with the production in order to not be overcome with a desire to have an overly grand production or one that misses the trees for the forest. The first half of this chapter will focus on the individual pieces, while the second half will focus on combining these pieces into a long-form play.

A New Discussion:

At this time, it is possible to have an idea about what directions the show can take. By examining the texts of the monologues, the participants can extract opposing points of view and differing perspectives about the topic that was selected early in the process. This discussion can lead to a further conversation about how the overall show can bring

together the pieces that have been formulated by the individual students, thus making a cohesive statement about the topic.

This conversation can revolve around what to title the piece, as a title can reflect or illuminate the overall mood or theme of a play. Using the title as a center-point in the discussion will provoke the students to explain their perception of what the play is about. As each student has now learned specific knowledge from certain perspectives, the discussion can become quite lively as each student defends his or her piece's place in the overall theme of the play. The instructor may need to guide the students toward a word or a phrase that will unite the pieces through the abstract rather than try to find one title that suits each piece's needs.

The Partner's Direction:

The writing partner from the previous section's work will now serve as the director of writer's scene, as that author becomes the actor in his or her own work. There are several elements to discuss with students at this point in order to give them enough knowledge to create an interesting scene for the audience. The instructor will serve during this phase as assistant director to these scenes by reviewing them and coaching the scenes to greater success.

The majority of theatre students will have an idea of how to stage a scene, making sure the audience can see and what the best ways are for actors to get their points across.

Variety in the staging, using the space in several ways, creates something that is visually interesting. The use of props and of other actors is important to encourage in the staging of these pieces, creativity in their usage presenting its own reward as a successful performance.

Basic Staging Advice for the Student Directors:

The first hurdle to overcome in creating interesting staging for these monologues is to get the scripts out of their original context. The tendency is often for the actor to assume that since the interview was done sitting down that it will be performed in the same fashion. Though some pieces can remain seated, it should be instilled in the students directly that the purpose of putting these monologues on stage is not to recreate the interview exactly but to bring the monologue into a new light. This can be done through several variations and is only truly limited by the artist's creativity. Several examples of staging concepts are as follows:

- Talking to a class of young students
- Giving a speech to the citizens of the US
- Talking with your grandson
- Applying for government assistance
- Being interviewed on a national comedy talk show
- Speaking on the telephone
- Making a sale

Taking liberties with the location and context of the monologue will inspire renewed passion for the scene in a performance context. Letting each student create their own circumstances will give them the ability to build upon a world of their own creation. These circumstances can build on the student's perception of issues addressed during the script, in order to illuminate important points or perhaps create irony within the scene.

Depending on the concept for the scene, the use of props, other actors, and blocking will all be subject to context. As assistant director, the instructor can place scenes on the stage in differing locations and inspire unique movements and blocking throughout the rehearsals. This encouragement may become more specific as the class starts moving towards performance, as the instructor is the most familiar with the show in its entirety.

Helping the Actor Create:

The focus of this course is not on how good an actor a student is, but how well he or she tells the story as a whole. The job of the actor in documentary theatre has more to do with the delivery of information than emotion in some cases. An impassioned performance is desired for the audience's interest, but overly dramatic scenes, unless called for by the material, are not what is entirely sought. Scenes that avoid sentiment in order to move the audience with important information can be just as effective as emotionally vibrant scenes.

During the transcription process of the editor's role, the student marked out different verbal cues based on how the subject had spoken during the interview. The new context will benefit from this earlier work by giving a sense of truth-in-character to the speech and personality of the character. Maintaining a proper balance of both theatrical context and interview subject authenticity provides an interesting opportunity for actors of all training levels. The ideas of imitation and interpretation should be balanced in order to present a truthful treatment of the subject's words and emotions.

The character's motivation in the scene should follow both the scenario and from the original impetus for telling the story. Some actors might feel limited by having to recite something that was originally spoken in a relaxed and non-dramatic way. In order to give the actor more to work with, his or her partner can help by developing a conflict and motivation that brings more energy to the scene. Here are some sample questions to ask of the actor about his or her character in order to inspire a more vibrant performance:

- Who or what is the opposition?
- What will it or did it take to overcome your obstacles?
- What will be the greatest part of your achieving your goal?
- What more can you do to get your goal accomplished?

Giving the actor a context and the right questions to think about will help to set a sound foundation and create energy within the scene. Since the two partners will be working on

their respective pieces together, rehearsal time can be accomplished outside of class with ease.

The Opening, the Closing and the Transitions:

One of the major rules of thumb for making an impact on an audience is to open and close the show with a unique moment. For this production an introduction piece, or show opener, should be created in order to get the audience prepared for what they are about to see. In the same vein, creating a closing piece which reflects what the audience has just seen will help them understand and put together the show in their minds. These two pieces of the play can be done simply or lavishly depending on what the show and the class demands. Here are some ideas for these segments, as well as the transitions between pieces, that may inspire some ideas:

- **Use media-** Use the video and sound recordings from the interviews to give the audience a sense the people whose stories they will be seeing. This can be done by showing only the record of their names or using snippets of their pieces. Continuing this device between the scenes can help lend continuity to the people and topics which are being shown. Cutting together a montage of what the subjects said about an ending or the future can help create a cap to the piece as well. This option requires extra technical help, but not any large further demand on the class besides marking time codes or what sections of their interviews they would suggest to be used.

- **Monologue Previews-** In this version each student will create previews or “trailers” for their pieces. These can be said under unique lighting or in stylized movement patterns in order to give the audience a taste of what is to come. The pieces might use the beginning sections of interviews where the subjects state their names and where they are from, etc. These can be integrated with recordings or other media to create interesting stage pictures. The transitions in this case may only be black outs with music or manipulated recordings of the original interviews. Often times a poignant ending piece can be created by piecing together quotes from opposing viewpoints in contrast to each other.
- **Piscatorian Introduction-** Using techniques drawn from Piscator’s “Total Theatre,” news clips, photographs and other information can be used to inform the audience on the subject prior to the initial monologues.

These types of fashioned pieces are not a necessity for the performance to be successful; a simple blackout between scenes will many times support great monologues by not interfering with their raw power--words have power. The audience’s experience should be kept in mind. Having a fellow instructor or a graduate student watch a dress rehearsal and give feedback can help illuminate any unforeseen problems before the production gets too far along to drastically change.

Sets and Props

In order to fill out the visual elements of the performance, like any other play, settings and props will be needed. This is where the Piscatorian elements discussed in the

introduction can play a role in creating theatrical devices. The pictures and news stories brought in by the students during the research phase can now be used as backdrops through projections or collages of printed-out materials. Owing to the nature of the performance being set in many locations, one general backdrop can often be used. Many of these decisions can be aided by the technical help or the student who has signed up to do scenic design.

Giving the students input into what the design of the stage provides another opportunity for hands-on experience in the creation of a new play. A class day can be set aside at least five weeks before the production in order to discuss each piece with the scenic designer. Just as the play has developed to become variations on a central selected theme, so too can the settings revolve around this by using a selection of thematic items from around the community. An excellent way to provide authentic objects and photographs is to ask those who have been interviewed for these with a promise of a speedy return and special thanks in the program. Any authentic donated items will usually be appreciated by the set designer as well.

Ultimately:

Ultimately, each student will have a revised and staged piece at this time. The order of the monologues has been determined and each has been inspired by a unique context for performance. The transitions have been blocked and discussed, as have the opening and

closing segments. Before moving to the performance space there are a few housekeeping elements to remember:

- Check in with the interviewees- Each student should be in contact with the interviewees to invite them to the performance. Doing this will help get a fuller audience for the show and will help the interviewees feel like they were part of something that helped them express themselves
- Legalize it- Make sure that all of the release forms have been collected and are held in a safe place in order to protect each of the individuals and organizations involved.
- Assess each student- Have each student write a short essay regarding his or her role in the upcoming production and reviewing his or her work thus far. This will insure a more cohesive knowledge of the show.

Publicity Notice:

In order to maximize the benefit of this production for the community, publicity should be created for the production. Giving a poster and postcards to organizations with relevance to the subject of the play will help to procure a special audience, one that is directly interested in the material. Traditional methods of theatre publicity can be applied as well depending on the size of the theatre and the number of productions. Often, a full house for one or two nights of production can found by advertising directly to those

persons who would be interested in the subject, minimizing the budget and footwork that would have to be done in traditional marketing campaigns.

ROLE FIVE: ACTOR-MANAGER

Entering the final weeks before the performance, the duties of the students can begin to focus more on creating a solid performance of the play they have now constructed. Once again, the experience of certain students can be used in assisting less experienced students in the practice of working in the theatre. The duties of the fifth role can be divided in to two sections, first the duties of a stage-manager need to be taken on and then the student must return to his or her role as an actor in this production.

Actor-Manager Assessment Assignment:

As the performance approaches, it is time for students to reflect upon achievements and failures within their experience. Assigning the students to write an essay describing his or her participation, what has been learned and what skills have been gained, will help the student recognize the value of their work in the course. This paper and the performance can serve as the final examination for the students.

Stage Managing

Each student in the production should now be involved in at least two scenes, one which they wrote and act in, and one they have directed. Adding to this a third duty, that of the

stage manager for one scene, will help each student become more connected to the overall production, as well as with the overall business of theatre.

The stage manager should be responsible for making sure the scene is ready to be performed during each rehearsal period. This involves checking properties and sets before the show's beginning, as well as before the individual scene begins. The stage manager will also keep track of sound and lighting cues, blocking and lines for the scene, assuring that the rehearsed and planned piece is what is being performed when it is moved from rehearsal room to performance space.

If possible, having an external experienced stage management student join the production during the last weeks can help the instructor with this task. This can apply to the areas of sound design, lighting and costumes as well. At any theatre school there are often many apprentice or young designers eager to work with new productions.

Describing all of a theatre's logistical operations is not the purpose of this guide. The instructor can engage with students as much or as little is practical in the services of ushers, box office staff, publicity managers and house managers will bring about varying levels of decorum and professionalism. Given that this is both a class presentation and a community outreach project, admission can also be forgone in order to entice an audience.

Acting in Performance:

“Mimicry is not character. Character lives in the obvious gap between the real person and my attempt to seem like them. I try to close the gap between us, but I applaud the gap between us. I am willing to display my own *unlikeness*.”²³

-Anna Deveare Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*

All students should have a piece that has been rehearsed thoroughly by this point. Their roles as actors can now focus on how they can create interest and drama within the theme of the entire production. The instructor can begin to give acting notes as to how this blending can be accomplished better, but since these pieces have been created mostly in class with each, many similarities most likely exist already.

The creation of the student’s character on stage should be constructed by three factors: the interviewee, the student’s interpretation, and the situation that has been created for the given circumstances of the piece. Maintaining a healthy balance between these three focuses is a difficult task for the actor that will take time and work to accomplish well.

As the play becomes more developed, the actors will begin giving more to their respective pieces. This will involve heightened emotions and increased levels of vulnerability that will require sensitivity from every student in class. The respect, trust, and focus needed among the actors can be created by group warm-ups both physical and mental before the performance or rehearsals.

Break A Leg!

The process of creating this production can involve quite a bit of stress and tension, but the creation of a play that connects with and reflects the community it is in the midst of can be a very rewarding experience. Observing the interviewees as they see themselves reincarnated can be a positive experience as well, as most of them have not had the opportunity to be involved in something of this type previously. Having a “talk back” session with the interviewees and/or local leaders after the performance can inspire informed conversation after the performance and lead to further connection between university and community.

Though the performance is over there is still a need for documentation and assessment in order to gather the true lessons learned and to evaluate the students’ growth. The next section of this guide will cover how to assess the accomplishments of the process and how to preserve the materials collected for use by future dramatists and historians.

CHAPTER FOUR

Post-Production

Throughout the creative process of making a documentary play, a large amount of research material is created and used. These records and collections can be beneficial far beyond the use of this play and are worthy of preservation in some fashion in order to be accessed later by like-minded historians or artists. The work that was necessary to accomplish the creation of this play can be saved for future projects about the same topic simply by preserving the materials already in hand.

The most important resource to save regarding the production are the original audio, video, and transcripts obtained from interviews. Working with a librarian at the university can alleviate the specific demands of posterity and will help in the encoding and organizing of the material in order for it to be recovered later. Many libraries that focus on specific topics will jump at the chance to obtain first-hand opinion and information from people directly involved with their subject.

Oral history is a growing field with many non-profit organizations such as libraries and state institutions actively seeking to help preserve just this type of record. The oral historian is a wonderful resource to consult during the creative process as well; their perspective can suit the documentary theatre cause.

The Script Itself

The question of what to do with the script created by the class is a challenging question.

If the script is exceptionally noteworthy, it could be moved along the traditional publishing route, with the university permitting. This action would also take the cooperation of the students although, because this is a university class project, the ownership would reside with the university. Listing all of the students' names and moving all profits to the university can help alleviate many issues dealing with the publishing of a cast created script. In all cases, the university legal department should be consulted.

With or without taking actions to publish the script, it should be copyrighted and bound copies should be made and kept at the university. At the least, these copies can serve as a great record of a large accomplishment, at most, this play can be produced in the future in a university or professional theatre. The choice of topic, number of actor roles and proficiency of writing will all have influence on the chances of reproduction, but having the script available for reading will honor the work done and the stories contained within. To best preserve the production's entirety, a video recording can be made and placed with the preservation copy.

Assessing Success

The achievements of a project such as this are not easily judged. By looking at the production from several points of view, it will be seen that success comes in many forms. Though the goal of the class, creating a documentary theatre production, was achieved, the process itself can be probed for further benefit. When the course is done a second time, these assessments can be used to enrich the course's benefits to all involved.

- **The Instructor:** As proctor and producer, the instructor is in the position to judge the final project's success. This judgment is aided by the instructor's detailed knowledge of each student and of the trials and tribulations that the project went through. In the end, the director is able to find how the production met expectations and why any elements did not.
- **The Students:** The students' gains from this experience can be judged through several methods. The first method is through the writing and assessment paper mentioned in **Actor-Manager** section. Second, the students can be surveyed or tested on their knowledge of the form of documentary theatre and of the subject of the play at the beginning and ending of the semester. Comparing these results can give a good perspective on the student benefit from the course.
- **Peer Review:** These colleagues can address the theatrical achievements as well as the quality of the information presented with the production.
- **Contributors and Interviewees:** The outside contributors to the production can be asked to fill out survey questions pertaining to how they felt the subject was

represented. Their opinions as to how authentic and accurate the information given is to the subject can be used to judge the relevance of the play.

Using the opinions and thoughts of those connected to the play in order to assess its effect is important in maintaining the class's academic purpose. A class centered on practical production can often lose focus on the academic benefits being derived from the process of production. However, a class in documentary theatre can benefit the theatre student in ways far beyond just practical skills in the theatre. A student of a class such as this has a thorough experience in not just playmaking but also in the meaning of theatre, as he or she actively seeks out that which needs to be expressed through theatre.

APPENDICES

Timeline for the Instructor

<p>Pre-class:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Read: <u>Documentary Theatre in the United States</u>, by Richard Dawson- Acquire time in theatre for technical rehearsals and production night(s)- Speak with technical director regarding needs- Order assigned readings
<p>5 Weeks Before class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Choose topic and research
<p>4 Weeks Before Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Continue research by engaging members of community- Contact groups in relation to topic- Begin acquiring possible interviewee contacts
<p>3 Weeks Before Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Continue research on topic- Continue acquiring interviewee contacts
<p>2 Weeks Before Class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Finalize a list of possible interviewees, more than number of students in the class.

-Revise timeline and syllabus

1 Week Before Class

-Make final preparations and organize.

-Rest

Week 1: Class A

Introduction	Give students an explanation of the course objectives
Introduction	Give a brief synopsis of documentary theatre
Assign	Read Play 1 (Instructor's choice)

Week 1: Class B

Discuss and Quiz	Play Reading 1
Discuss	Opinions and angles on topic for play
Assign and Explain	Preproduction Exercise 1: Interview a Friend. Interview to be done before next class.

Week 2: Class A

Discuss and Assist	Exercise 1 Interview Process
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	and Transcription/Scripting Process
Discuss	Brainstorm ideas regarding play topic
Assign and Explain	Media Dragnet
Assign	Play Reading 2
Week 2: Class B	
Discuss and Quiz	Play Reading 2
Discuss	Brainstorm ideas regarding play topic
Discuss	Media Dragnet Examples
Rehearse	Exercise 1 Scenes
Assign and Explain	Find Contact for Exercise 3: Interview a Professional
Week 3: Class A	
Perform and Discuss	Exercise 1 Scenes
Discuss	Contacts for Exercise 3
Assign	Preproduction Exercise 2: Physical Only Interview

Week 3: Class B

Perform and Discuss	Remaining Exercise 1 Scenes
Discuss	Exercise 1 Process
Discuss	Media Dragnet Examples

Week 4: Class B

Rehearse	Exercise 3
Assign and Explain	Interviewees assigned to students, contact information given

Week 5: Class A

Perform and Discuss	Exercise 3
Assign and Explain	Role 1: The Journalist
Assign	Schedule Interview

Week 5: Class B

Lecture	Bring in Journalism Instructor, Journalist or have in depth Journalism lesson
Discuss	Questions for Interview
Discuss	Media Dragnet

Week 6: Class A

Prepare and Discuss	Interview Techniques and Prepared Questions
Discuss	Transcription Process
Discuss	Media Dragnet

Week 6: Class B

Discuss	Interview Status
Discuss	Brainstorm about Topic
Assign	Transcription

Week 7: Class A

Discuss	Transcription Process
Assign and Explain	Role 2: The Editor
Discuss	Media Dragnet

Week 7: Class B

Discuss	Transcripts Due
Editorial Review	Assess if the transcript has given enough information, if not schedule 2 nd interview.
Discuss	Dramatic structure
Assign and Explain	Playwright Exercise 1: Retell

	Your Favorite or Exercise 2: Detective Rundown
Week 8: Class A	
Assign and Explain	Role 3: The Playwright
Perform	Playwright exercise
Discuss	Media Dragnet
Week 8: Class B	
Read and Discuss	Edited and written scenes
Form	Partner pairs and work in pairs to continue editing
Week 9: Class A	
Assign and Explain	Role 4: The Director
Discuss	Remaining process
Rehearse	Partner groups create circumstances for scene and block.
Week 9: Class B	
Rehearse	Partner groups

Discuss	Media dragnet: begin to assess quality of images and stories in relation to theme.
Week 10: Class A	
Rehearsal and Discuss	Scenes off-book and performed in front of class and designers
Discuss	Technical elements with designers and technicians
Week 10: Class B	
Rehearsal	Decide order of monologues for production
Publicize	Students to publicize the show to community and interviewees
Week 11: Class A	
Rehearsal	Rehearse in scenes in order
Assign and Explain	Role 5: The Actor-Manager: assign stage managers to partner groups
Discuss	Remaining weeks of class and performance duties

Week 11: Class B

Rehearsal	Rehearse Opening, Closing and Transitional Sequences
Publicize	Students must contact interviewees and expressly invite them and their organizations to the performance

Week 12: Class A

Rehearsal	First Full Run
Designer Preview	Invite designers to watch the run and speak with the students about the realized production

Week 12: Class B

Rehearsal	Second full run.
Prepare	Props and sets for the technical rehearsal

Technical Rehearsal Over Week End

Week 13: Class A

Rehearsal	Full run with technical elements
Assign and Explain	Actor-Manager assessment assignment

Week 13: Class B

Rehearsal	Dress Rehearsal
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Performance On Weekend

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Signature: _____

(Parent or guardian must sign here if subject is under 18 years old.)

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