

Analyzing a Character

The ultimate aim as an actor is to create a role or character that meets the playwright's intention and that generates audience belief throughout your performance.

An actor's knowledge and observation of people is a valuable ingredient for creating a role – draw from experiences of family, friends, and acquaintances; books you have read; vivid images from your imagination – all contribute to characterization material.

Develop a well-rounded concept of your character's personality – analyze both his internal and external qualities. **Internal qualities** include:

1. Background – Discover things about the character's family, environment, occupation, education, interests, and hobbies
2. Mental Characteristics – Is the character intelligent, clever, dull, slow, average?
3. Spiritual Qualities – What are his ideals? What is his belief, ethical code, religion? What is his attitude toward other people and toward life?
4. Emotional Characteristics – Is he confident, outgoing, happy, poised? What are his likes and dislikes? How does he respond to other people? How is his temperament similar to yours? How is it different?

The answers to these questions should give you a basic idea about your character's personality. Now try to determine his motivational desire with the play or scene. What does your character want? How will he go about getting what he wants? The answers will be found in the dialog, actions, circumstances depicted in the script. Study the script intently to develop the depth of your character.

External qualities of your character apply to the aspects the audience sees and experiences. These outward forms are important because they can communicate inward traits as well. Externals include: Your character's physical appearance, Costume, Facial Makeup, Movement, and Voice.

These facets must be developed carefully to create a true portrayal of your character; one that is consistent and believable. Here is a check-list of external qualities:

1. Posture – Is it slumped, stiff, relaxed, attractive? What does it suggest – timidity, assuredness, awkwardness, grace?
2. Movement and gesture – Does it convey poise, nervousness, weakness, strength? How does your character walk – stride, plod, shuffle, bounce? How does his movement indicate age, health, attitude?
3. Mannerisms – Does he bite his nails, clear his throat, keep his hands in his pockets, chew gum, scratch his head when he is thinking, doodle on paper?
4. Voice – Is it pleasant, high pitched, resonant? Does your character have a twang, a drawl?
5. Dress – Is his appearance neat, casual, sloppy, prim, clean, dirty? Are his clothes in good taste, flashy, fashionable?

Characterization is a demanding job, but don't let it overwhelm your purpose. Utilize the material you have gathered in the most effective way. Choose what best describes your character and go with that. Do not try to cram every quality into the character – he will become muddled and unbelievable to the audience. Your aim should be to produce an uncluttered portrayal of your character so that it communicates with precision and clarity. As a creative artist you must select, combine, and discard what is around the edges. The secret of artistic success is in knowing what to leave out! Economy is the key to success of all great art!