

## Writing in Theatre

### SUMMARY – FALL 2010

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#### WHY DO WE WRITE IN THEATRE?

- Writing in theatre is a part of the artistic *process*.
- Like artistic practice, writing in theatre *communicates* a vision, experience, or idea.

#### WHAT MAKES GOOD WRITING IN THEATRE?

- It is aware of its audience
- It is multi-disciplinary
- It is poetic
- It balances the subjective with the objective

#### HOW DO WE GO ABOUT WRITING IN THEATRE?

- Writing in theatre originates in research
- Writing in theatre is similar to the process of rehearsal
- Writing in theatre requires commitment

#### WHAT ABILITIES DO WE NEED TO WRITE EFFECTIVELY IN THEATRE?

- Conduct research
- Unlock and explore the imagination
- Create descriptions of performance, design components, and/or dramatic texts
- Identify, interpret, and analyze
- Create and support a thesis driven argument
- Develop an awareness of differences between conventions and genres of writing
- Deepen ideas to reach new levels of complexity
- Develop self-reflexivity
- Practice revision

## Writing in Theatre

### DETAILS – FALL 2010

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#### WHY DO WE WRITE IN THEATRE?

##### **Writing in theatre is a part of the artistic *process***

- There is continuity between observation, description, analysis, creation, and reflection.
- In theatre we move fluidly between ‘reading’ and ‘writing’, that is, between seeing, recording, interpreting, and re-making what we have created.
- Writing is a way of finding out what you think, what your body thinks. In writing we can develop and deepen those thoughts, and notice changes in them over time.
- Writing can help us reflect on our own artistic process. It is essential, then, to our personal growth as artists.
- Writing is a tool for practical problem-solving – it allows us to propose and evaluate solutions to technical challenges.
- Writing in theatre can serve as a guidepost or map during the rehearsal and production process, and it can document this process for future reference.

##### **Like artistic practice, writing in theatre *communicates* a vision, experience, or idea**

- In writing we communicate ideas, visions, experiences, and observations to others in the service of collaboration.
- When we write we join a conversation in which we explain, defend, or justify those ideas.
- Writing is a step in the technical process of theatre-making, helping collaborators move from concept to execution. It shows us, for example, how a design element will get built and how it will work.
- We can use writing to express an artistic vision to those outside our artistic process (audiences, funding agencies, scholars, other students, etc.).

#### WHAT MAKES GOOD WRITING IN THEATRE?

##### **Writing in theatre is aware of its audience**

- In formal settings, writers need to be responsible for a level of technical accomplishment, precision, and professionalism.
- In informal or process-based writing, exploration and risk-taking may be more important.

##### **Writing in theatre is multi-disciplinary**

- It takes place in verbal, textual, graphic, and embodied media, and moves fluidly between these modalities.

##### **Writing in theatre is poetic**

- It uses language imaginatively to convey ideas, images, and emotional life (using metaphor and vivid imagery, for example).
- It makes ideas resonate more deeply and creates new ideas.
- It utilizes all of the senses and all of the dimensions of our imaginations.
- It has a sense of aliveness, action, and energy.
- It can operate on the level of music, sound, and rhythm.
- It connects the body, the voice, and the imagination.

### Writing in theatre balances the subjective with the objective

- It balances instinctual and analytical, close and distanced perspectives.
- It allows us to make connections and associations between life experiences, readings, research, and artistic creating.
- It originates in feelings, reactions, tastes, visions, responses, or preoccupations that might be highly subjective, but it complicates and/or supports that subjective response with:
  - **Evidence and interpretation** drawn from close reading of a text or detailed observation of a bodily practice
  - **Self-reflexivity** – it reflects on the writer’s social location. Where is the writer’s experience, taste, or response coming from?

## HOW DO WE GO ABOUT WRITING IN THEATRE?

### Writing in theatre originates in research

- The making and understanding of artistic work depends on good research. Though the methods of research may differ, common approaches include:
  - **Textual research** - finding, reading, and analyzing a variety of sources such as play texts, production reviews, design concepts, artist biographies, historical documents, theoretical frameworks, secondary sources, etc.
  - **Observational or practical research** – closely observing, participating in, documenting, and analyzing artistic practices and performances, as well as performances and phenomenon in everyday life.
  - **Organizational research** – gathering data from multiple sources and organizing it into documents that will be easily accessible to collaborators.

### Writing in theatre is similar to the process of rehearsal

- We begin with brainstorming and work through successive drafts, progressively shaping, clarifying, and reaching greater specificity.
  - In the early phases, it is critical that we **explore multiple possibilities** by:
    - Being open to the learning process
    - Unleashing our imaginations
    - Moving beyond what first strikes us or resonates with us
    - Moving beyond preset boundaries and ideas about what is ‘right’
    - Taking risks, trying experiments, and implementing innovations
  - As we move forward, it is important to **clarify and hone** what we have made by:
    - Distilling and refining our ideas, determining what is most important and effective
    - Editing for succinctness, specificity, and good mechanics

### Writing in theatre requires commitment

- It takes time, effort, thought, and investment in the process to achieve success.

## WHAT ABILITIES DO WE NEED TO WRITE EFFECTIVELY IN THEATRE?

### Conduct research

- Recognize the different definitions, values, and processes of research pertinent to different dimensions of our discipline, and develop appropriate research strategies to support your work.
  - For **textual research** it is important to
    - Develop familiarity and comfort with library resources
    - Learn to distinguish between primary and secondary sources
    - Assess the reliability and value of web-based resources
    - Effectively document your sources
  - For **observational or practical research** it is critical to
    - Cultivate the habit of mark-making in verbal or graphic form
      - Develop a practice of recording thoughts, images, and ideas as a response to environment and everyday experience, and as a record of creative process
      - This habitual practice may take the form of free-writing, stream of consciousness writing, doodling, note-taking, sketching, collecting, etc.
  - For **organizational research** we must
    - Collect information and organize it in a user-friendly and efficient manner
    - Anticipate questions that may arise, and be prepared to answer them
- Develop methods of integrating your research into your creative work

### Unlock and explore the imagination

- Go beyond your first instinct, what you think is 'right', and/or what is literal
- Take risks, be willing to make mistakes and get messy
- Keep open and develop multiple options

### Create descriptions of performance, design components, and/or dramatic texts

- Craft detailed, evocative, and closely observed descriptions of others' artistic work as well as your own
- Communicate visual and technical information with precision, clarity, and consistency

### Identify, interpret, and analyze

- Identify parts of texts and productions (such as key moments, turning points, striking images, plot structure, climax, character traits and actions, etc.)
- Recognize how choices/parts come together to form a whole
- Identify artistic choices and speculate about artist's or character's intent
- Recognize the meanings, subtexts, implications, and effects of artistic choices
- Evaluate effectiveness of artistic choices
- Articulate the ways in which structure and content are mutually supportive
- Recognize how structural elements like punctuation, phrasing, tone, rhetorical devices, etc. inform the meaning and the physical delivery of written text
- Translate/paraphrase difficult texts into your own words
- Discern the relationship between a text or production and its artistic, historical, social, political, and philosophical contexts
- As a Stage Manager - Break down a script or a production in order to determine its practical requirements (scene breakdown, space breakdown, props lists, cue sheets, etc.), and anticipate questions and challenges

- As a Designer or Technician - Generate design choices/visual analogs for the language or themes of the play and devise visual formats to convey information
- As an Actor or Director - Craft 'character analysis' or 'world of the play analysis' through a combination of textual evidence and imagination

#### **Create and support a thesis driven argument**

- Clearly conceptualize and articulate a thesis statement
- Utilize topic sentences and clearly outlined structure to direct reader
- Support claims with evidence from the text, production, research

#### **Develop an awareness of differences between conventions and genres of writing**

- These may include program notes, scholarly articles, stage manager's notes, advertising copy, grants, various playwriting conventions, research papers, etc.
- Recognize, practice, and polish writing within specific genres, keeping in mind the audience expectations that come along with each genre
- Become familiar with and utilize discipline-specific and program-specific vocabularies (i.e. general theatre vocabularies, acting, directing, design, technology, stage management vocabularies, etc.)
- Translate these vocabularies for non-specialists
- Translate between visual, verbal, and written formats

#### **Deepen ideas to reach new levels of complexity**

- Address counter-arguments, and incorporate multiple perspectives
- Differentiate between opinion and argument
- Examine historical precedents, other artists' and critics' practices and opinions
- Build density by connecting multiple observations to interpretation
- Ask questions that move from the concrete and grounded to the increasingly complex and critical

#### **Develop self-reflexivity**

- Recognize your social location and the limits of your perspective
- Develop the ability to hold open both subjective and objective perspectives, and to consider perspectives other than your own
- Discern the purpose and stakes of your artistic and scholarly intervention, asking what is needed, what is original, unique, imaginative, and worthy of discussion
- Develop an awareness of your own artistic process, of what kind of work is important to you
- Develop confidence in and ownership of your own voice, and identify tools that you can assist you in this process

#### **Practice revision**

- Practice the stages and processes of revision (i.e. brainstorming, structure mapping, outlining, drafting, talking through your ideas and writing with others, reviewing for structural, argumentative, and language clarity, and for effective usage and grammar, etc.)
- Embrace writing as a process of communication and reflection rather than a product
- Develop an awareness of your own writing process, of your strengths and weaknesses, and identify and utilize resources in order to make your writing more effective
- Cultivate responsiveness to others' input
- Hone clarity, succinctness, and discernment through the revision process

## Writing in Dance

### SUMMARY - Spring 2011

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#### WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WRITING IN DANCE?

- Like dancing, writing in dance is *process-oriented*.
- Like dancing, writing in dance is a way of making meaning, a way of knowing, representing, and articulating the legibility of the body.
- Writing in dance theorizes artistic and social practice within cultural contexts.
- Writing in dance balances the subjective with the objective

#### WHAT ABILITIES DO WE NEED TO WRITE EFFECTIVELY IN DANCE?

- Create detailed, vivid, closely observed descriptions of performances, movements, bodies, images, music, and/or texts
- Interpret
- Conduct scholarly and creative research, and recognize its importance to the making and understanding of choreographic work
- Gather, assess, and apply evidence to substantiate statements and arguments
- Ask questions of performances, sources, and texts
- Build complex arguments and deepen thinking
- Recognize the importance of revision
- Like improvisation; experiment, take risks, and break boundaries
- Develop self-reflexivity
- Express yourself with clarity and technical precision, with an awareness of audience and genres
- Develop confidence in your own voice, processes, and instincts

## **WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WRITING IN DANCE?**

### **Like dancing, writing in dance is *process-oriented*:**

- There is continuity between observation, description, analysis, thought and creation. *Writing is a process of the imagination.*
- Writing is a way of finding out what you think, what your body thinks, and developing and deepening those thoughts.
- In writing we communicate ideas and observations to others in the service of collaboration—writing is joining a conversation, audible or visual sharing.

### **Like dancing, writing in dance:**

- Is a way of making meaning, a way of knowing, representing, and articulating the legibility of the body.
- Is the unfolding or embodiment of an idea, vision, or experience. A way of creating and making, it brings something from within into the world.
- Requires equal parts technical execution, intelligence, mastery of vocabulary, and creativity to attain depth and facility.
- Is a means of crafting and communicating units of thought such as words, sentences, phrases, paragraphs, chapters.
- Is an approach to encouraging reflection and deepening understanding of kinesthetic, anatomical, and spatial awareness. This reflection and understanding can lead to decision making about how, why, and when to utilize certain elements.
- Is aware of its audience and responsible for a level of technical accomplishment, exhibiting professionalism and precision in self-presentation.
- Is similar to the process of rehearsal and technique development, progressively shaping and clarifying, reaching greater specificity and compositional integrity through revision and practice.

### **Writing in dance theorizes artistic and social practice** within cultural contexts.

- Writing brings us to understand the ways in which all the elements of dance come together as an event: the motions of bodies, production elements, genre conventions, for particular audiences, in specific places and settings, in relation to specific histories.

### **Writing in dance balances the subjective with the objective**

- It originates in feelings, reactions, visions, responses, or preoccupations that might be highly subjective, but it complicates that subjective response with:
  - **Evidence and interpretation** drawn from close reading of a text or detailed observation of a bodily practice (What are you seeing/reading? What are you doing? What choices are being made? What choices can be made? And why?)
  - **Self-reflexivity** – it reflects on the writer’s social location. Where is the writer’s experience, taste, or response coming from? What kind of relationships does the experience of performance create or express—and what are the politics of those relationships?

## WHAT ABILITIES DO WE NEED TO WRITE EFFECTIVELY IN DANCE?

- 1) **Create detailed, vivid, closely observed descriptions** of performances, movements, bodies, images, music, and/or texts
  - Includes articulations of your own dance experience and observations of other people and performers
  - Requires attention to many elements including space, time, energy, action, rhythm, frequency, emotion, color, pattern, sound, costume, theme, movement vocabulary
  - Identifies and articulates extraordinary moments or images that rise above the everyday, that are especially striking and inspiring, and that remain with you over time
  - Includes *what* happened but also moves beyond this to detail specifics of *how* and *why*
- 2) **Interpret**
  - Recognize the meanings, affects, and effects that come from the creative choices, choreographies, and movements you have observed, in context
  - Develop skills and criteria for evaluation of observations, understanding what is and is not working and being able to articulate and defend your opinion in a manner that is appropriate for the recipient/class/context
  - Develop a richer, clearer and more immediate sense of the body's design and function, by attuning yourself to and articulating your innate knowledge of the experience of your body, and discerning how body systems work together to create easeful, efficient movement
  - Compare and contrast movements, choreographic structures, artistic choices in production and design; and historical, political, cultural, geographical contexts
- 3) **Conduct scholarly and creative research**, and recognize its importance to the making and understanding of choreographic work
- 4) **Gather, assess, and apply evidence to substantiate statements and arguments**
  - Learn to distinguish, for example, a secondary from a primary source
  - Understand how to analyze and apply description, observation, images, and ethnographic notes as evidence
  - Differentiate between opinion and supported argument
- 5) **Ask questions** of performances, sources, and texts
  - Move from concrete, grounded questions to increasingly complex and critical ones
  - Discern why choices were made and their potential meanings
  - Learn how to provide critical feedback in the form of a question
- 6) **Build complex arguments and deepen thinking** through
  - Articulating and committing to a position in an argument, debate, or discussion
  - Developing and supporting a thesis statement
  - Identifying and articulating the core argument of another scholar or artist, and differentiating it from your own argument
  - Addressing counter-arguments and incorporating multiple perspectives
  - Recognizing the connection between articulating and structuring a written argument, and articulating and structuring a choreographic statement

- Comparing or referencing elements outside of dance (such as music, visual art, architecture, culinary arts) to develop a more interdisciplinary and comprehensive view of the world
- 7) **Recognize the importance of revision**
- Recognize the stages and processes of revision
  - Practice revision
- 8) **Like improvisation; experiment, take risks, and break boundaries**
- Unlock the imagination and the unconscious
  - Work to dislodge creative blocks, rigid habits, and internal editors
  - Move beyond ideas about what is 'right'
  - Learn to make bold choices
  - Develop an openness to new options
- 9) **Develop self-reflexivity**
- About your social location, relationality, and the limits of your own perspective
  - About how you and your work intersects with cultural, philosophical, ethical, political, social, and technological realities
- 10) **Express yourself with clarity and technical precision**, with an awareness of audience and genres
- Utilize organized structure to guide the reader
  - Find and utilize variations in phrase structure to create smooth flow
  - Develop and utilize a nuanced vocabulary
- 11) **Develop confidence in your own voice, processes, and instincts**
- Bring life experience to bear in your dancing and writing
  - Develop a practice of tracking questions, discoveries, difficulties, breakthroughs
  - Receive and constructively apply critical feedback
  - Embrace dancing and writing as processes of communication and reflection rather than as a product
  - Develop awareness of your own artistic and writing process
  - Articulate your own artistic visions, missions, goals with clarity and succinctness (for grant proposals or mission statements)