



Step 5: Editing, Rewriting & Rehearsing

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This website will give you an insight into the creative challenges faced by Dennis Kelly as writer and Tim Minchin as composer and lyricist when adapting Roald Dahl's novel *Matilda* into a musical.

The RSC invites students to go on the same creative journey as Dennis and Tim, creating a scene or song for a new character who is introduced to us on the first day of term at Crunchem Hall.

We have created a webpage for each of the steps that we feel are essential in creating a good scene or song, they are:

- Create a believable **Character**
- Plan a strong **Plot** - including an **Inspiration Gallery**
- Develop **Music and Lyrics**
- Write the **Dialogue**
- **Rewriting** what has been written and then **Rehearsing it**

To make the most of this resource, we suggest that you work through these pages in this order with your students.

When students have begun to create their scene, they will need to follow the next part of the writing process: editing. As Dennis Kelly explains in the **Rewriting** film, the most important element in writing is rewriting. A writer knows they will always edit and re-write their work so it doesn't matter how bad the first draft is, because it will always get better. This is a very important part of the writing process for students to understand as it will make them stronger and more confident writers. It took four years of writing and re-writing before *Matilda The Musical* had its first performance in Stratford-upon-Avon in 2010; it then went through further rewrites before it opened in the West End two years later. Students can see for themselves how much the script changed and developed by looking at the Wormwood scene in the **Editing Scripts** button on the **Rewriting** page of the website.

The final step is handing the script over to actors to get it up 'on its feet' and further explore what might need developing or changing. We suggest that when scripts have been written and edited, they are then performed in class and the writers watch their scenes and listen to any feedback from other students.

This pack has been designed to work alongside the webpage and to support and enrich students' writing experience in school. Through a selection of practical games and activities, students will gradually build up their experience of the editing process. The resources can also act as stand-alone activities that can be adapted to other forms of writing in your school curriculum.

Using the Editing Resources.

1. Dictionary

A simple quick-fire game that enables students to think deeply about using the right language in context

Sometimes when students try to add new exciting language in their writing they use it incorrectly or out of context. This simple game allows you and your students to explore when words are used appropriately, and to explore shades of meaning.

2. Circle Edit

Encourages students to consider the ways in which different characters might react to a given event

Sometimes students find it difficult to recognise mistakes or misconceptions in their writing simply by reading it. This activity encourages students to tune in to the sound of good grammar. It helps them to recognise when a piece of writing doesn't sound right.

3. Action Punctuation

Students learn about punctuation by experiencing its rhythm and how it makes them feel

When the students have understood how to play this game, they can also use this approach to check their own writing.

4. Creating & Remodelling

Simple hints and suggestions for effective re-drafting

Consider the different ways that teachers can model effective writing.

5. Getting It Up On Its Feet

Starting to act out the scenes

Students rehearse their scene with classmates to see what is or isn't working in their script.

6. Writing Stage Directions

A simple example of how stage directions are used

Drafting & Redrafting

No published writer submits a script or a novel that has not required any changes. Matilda The Musical took six years of drafting and rewriting before it opened in the West End.

These short, fun activities help students to think like a writer and songwriter. Students will learn to listen for mistakes as well as see them.

Dictionary

A simple quick-fire game that enables students to think deeply about using the right language in context

Purpose of activity:

Sometimes when students try new exciting language in their writing they use it incorrectly or out of context. This simple game allows you and your students to explore when words are used appropriately, and to explore shades of meaning.

How it works:

Divide students in two teams. Make sure there's enough room for students to be able to take a step forward and a step back. Explain to the class that good writers and songwriters choose their words carefully. Sometimes four words can be replaced with just one that expresses ideas with deeper clarity.

Read 'dictionary' descriptions to students. Just read out the descriptions of the word's meaning; not the actual word itself. You will ask students to guess what the word is.

To do this effectively as part of the rewriting process, you should pick descriptions for words that have been used incorrectly or inappropriately by your students. For example, sometimes a student might use the word 'petrified' when a character might only be a bit worried, but they have used the word because they think it is powerful and sounds good.

For example, you might use a description for 'anxious' which could be: *'this is a feeling we have when we don't feel quite right about something that has happened or is going to happen'*. There could be a range of responses for this: concern, uncertainty, worry. But in this case, 'petrified' would be too strong. The subtleties in the shades of meaning for synonyms can be explored meaningfully in this game.

When students have listened to the word's description, their challenge is to think of one word each that will fit the description.

Students must wait until you click your fingers; then if they have an idea, they must step forward as fast as they can, ready to give their answer before anyone from another team. If you wish you can give the teams some time to talk so they can discuss possible answers, but it generally works most effectively if you encourage students to think in their heads about possible answers.

The teacher chooses which team is 'first' (it should be the team that steps forward the most quickly, but they often move at exactly the same time so it is up to you to just make sure each team 'has a go'). If more than one student in the team has stepped forward, they each have an opportunity to suggest a word, and for each different but appropriate synonym they get one point. For example, you might use the description: *'this is a feeling someone might have when they are always looking on the dark side of things. They think that bad things always happen to them'*.

Students might have thought a word such as *'negative'*, *'pessimistic'* or *'grumpy'*.

You and the rest of the students are welcome to challenge the choice of vocabulary, so students have to think hard about their word choices to receive points.

Circle Edit

Encourages students to consider the ways in which different characters might react to a given event

Purpose of activity:

Sometimes students find it difficult to recognise mistakes or misconceptions in their writing simply by reading it. This activity encourages students to tune in to the sound of good grammar. It helps them to recognise when a piece of writing doesn't sound right.

This exercise works in exactly the same way as Dictionary, where students are split into two teams standing together in a circle. However this time you explain that when you were a child you took part in a similar writing challenge to complete a scene for a musical. Unfortunately you didn't win, and you want to analyse why.

This time you will be reading out phrases that are grammatically incorrect. This works best if you use examples of mistakes that your students have made in their own writing (because you're claiming it's your work from many years ago, students won't feel embarrassed about having their individual mistakes highlighted). Each team listens waiting for you to click your fingers, then quickly steps forward to identify the problem or correct it.

For example:

Miss Robust:

Before I worked for Miss Trunchbull, I didn't have nothing.

The mistake here is that the student has used a double negative. Students will enjoy correcting 'your' mistakes and will often offer very creative variations. For example, sometimes they will be keen to change the sentence so that it is more descriptive as well as expressing the meaning more clearly.

Miss Robust:

Before I worked for my idol, Miss Trunchbull, I was extremely poor.

To begin with, it is best to keep the game quick-fire and just ask students to give spoken responses. This is because they need to get used to hearing a mistake and understanding when something doesn't sound right - possibly more than if it doesn't look right. However, as the activity develops, it can work well if you introduce pens and paper so students can further explore effective improvements in the writing.

Action Punctuation

Students learn about punctuation by experiencing its rhythm and how it makes them feel

Purpose of activity:

When students have understood how to play this game, they can also use this approach to check their own writing.

How it works:

Ask students to walk around the room, stopping in a particular way according to the choice of punctuation. Use as many or as few punctuation marks as you wish, depending on the age and ability of your students. Allow the students to walk, then call out a type of punctuation. Students respond appropriately:

Full stop	Stop with feet together and hands by sides
Comma	Pause, then carry on walking in the same direction
Exclamation mark	Stop and clap hands
Ellipsis	Take three slow steps and on the last step freeze into a dramatic pose
Semi-colon	Pause and then carry on walking in a different direction
Question mark	Stop and create a questioning gesture e.g. hunched shoulders

Ask questions such as:

We used three question marks in a row. What is the effect of this?

I called out a semicolon followed by three commas and then a full stop. When might a writer punctuate in this way and why?

I called out seven full stops and nothing else. How did this make you feel when you were playing the game?

Students will often respond to this last question by saying ‘a bit bored’ which is exactly what we want them to recognise. If their writing is full of full stops and no other form of punctuation, it will be just as boring.

Once students are used to the actions for stopping and starting, then stop calling out the words for punctuation and replace this with reading out sentences from a play. This time they need to listen for the pauses, decide what the punctuation might be, and respond in the appropriate way. Sometimes there can be more than one possible type of punctuation – this makes the game more interesting and introduces opportunities for discussion.

The final step is for students to take their own writing and walk the punctuation. If they have reached the other end of the classroom and they still haven’t had to stop, it is a clear message that their sentences are too long and do not include enough punctuation!

Drafting & Remodelling

Simple hints and suggestions for effective re-drafting

Purpose:

To consider the different ways that teachers can model effective writing

Students can often be disheartened if they have to rewrite or edit huge chunks of work. So when modelling writing it's useful for teachers to share writing in different stages. So for example, they begin by modelling the writing of the introduction to their scene and students have a go at writing just this part within a given time.

This also means that you don't have a huge amount of writing to mark before the next time you return to it with the class. It gives you the opportunity to identify key misconceptions so students don't continue to make them. These activities can then be used more effectively because you'll already have an insight into the areas where students are experiencing difficulties.

The previous activities encourage students to tune in to the sound of their writing as well as how it looks. The more they are able to recognise when their '*writer's voice*' doesn't sound right, the more accurate their grammar will become. Therefore, it's very useful to encourage your students to read their writing aloud (or the writing of their peers).

Getting It Up On Its Feet

The students start to perform the scripts

Dennis and Tim handed their script and songs over to Matthew Warchus, the director, whose job it was to interpret the musical and make it come to life on stage. At this stage of students' script-writing process it's a good time for them to see and hear other classmates perform their scene.

Divide the class into groups so each group contains the script-writer(s) and the right number of actors for the script.

In a small circle the students being actors choose a part and read the script aloud. After this first reading the writers then assign a role to each of the actors. They read the script again. Are there any lines or words that don't make sense to the actors? Why?

Ask the groups to work out where the audience will be sitting and how the actors should start the scene: are they sitting, standing, does someone walk into the scene? etc. If the play is set in a classroom, where is the board? Where is the door? etc. Do the stage directions help the actors understand where they are and what's happening in the scene?

The group act the scene for the first time. Now the scene has been performed, the writers ask the actors:

- Do the characters seem believable?
- Can they understand what their characters are saying and why they are speaking?
- Does the plot make sense to them?

As they watch the scene, ask the writers to decide if there are any moments in the scene that they'd like to change (if any).

The scene is played again. Explain that this time, at any point during this rehearsal, the writers can call out '**STOP THINK**'. When they do, the actors have to freeze and say what their character is thinking at that moment. If a student doesn't know what their character is thinking, ask: is it because the script isn't clear? And if so, what do they think the character might say instead?

The scene is then performed with the rest of the whole group as an audience. Afterwards, ask the audience for positive feedback and to comment on:

Did the characters seem believable?

Was the plot gripping: did it have a good beginning, middle and end?

Did they want to know what happened next - were they left wanting more?

If they could suggest one thing to develop, what would it be?

Writing Stage Directions

A simple example of how stage directions are used.

On the **Editing** page of the site students will see the layout of a play script. They will see the stage directions Dennis wrote, and this example below will help them to understand how to use them effectively.

Stage directions tell the actors and director about the setting of the scene and about action that happens in it. Here is an example of a stage direction from *Matilda The Musical*:

The Wormwood's living room. Mr. Wormwood is on the phone. Suddenly there is a scream. He panics and turns around. Mrs Wormwood (the source of the scream) stands horrified, staring at Matilda, who sits reading a book.

In this scene, the stage directions tell us:

1. We are in the Wormwoods' living room
2. Mr Wormwood is talking on the phone
3. Mrs Wormwood screams

We know the place or location where the action is happening and the atmosphere is tense.

The scene then carries on with:

Mrs Wormwood:
Harry!

Mr Wormwood:
Hang on.

Mrs Wormwood:
Look at this, she's reading a book. That's not normal for a five year old. I think she might be an idiot.

Notice the stage directions don't tell actors how to speak their lines. It doesn't say:

Mrs Wormwood (screaming at the top of her voice):
Harry!

That's the actor's job. Dennis talks about how the actor playing Miss Trunchbull had a completely different voice to the one he had imagined. The play the writer has in their head is never the one that they will see performed on stage!

Now students know how to create appropriate stage directions and have seen their scenes acted out, they can re draft their scripts until they are ready to be performed.