



# FRANTIC ASSEMBLY

ONLINE TEACHERS'  
CPD COURSE

FILM 2



THIS RESOURCE WILL COVER:

- 1.How we approach working with a stimulus and how that can inform your writing tasks
- 2.Different ways that we might generate and select text
- 3.How to select, edit and develop the written material you have generated

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## APPROACHES FOR SELECTING STIMULI

How we might consider stimuli for devising:  
If your theme is X, allow yourself to look around it and consider Y and Z. What is the stimulus from a different perspective?

The potential benefits of collaborative working lies in the variety of perspectives and what they all have to say, at this point in time, on that stimulus. Giving the opportunity to gather everyone's thoughts and ideas is always useful. Generating and selecting text is a great opportunity to collaboratively devise work, at a social distance.

If the stimulus given is closed: e.g. Prison. Then here at Frantic, we might consider areas of thinking that are in opposition to that, in order to enrich the range of our piece:

- Freedom
- Innocence
- Things you might miss if incarcerated
- The time before prison, what those moments of joy might be

## GREGORY CREWDSON IMAGES

We will work from two Gregory Crewdson images throughout this pack, so that you can see how we might work with a given stimulus. Please take a moment to look at these two images:

[Dylan On The Floor](#)

[Six Feet Under](#)



## WITHHOLDING INFORMATION TO OPEN UP OPPORTUNITIES

If we generate some text around these stimuli, we may not share the images with our actors right away. As the teacher, you might similarly consider asking yourself questions about these images first:

- Why are these people here?
- What or who is missing?
- What is the mood of the room?
- What's just been said?
- What is there to say now?
- When was the last time they left the house? What happened a week ago? A month ago?
- This time last year? When was the last time they laughed - like, REALLY laughed
- Where are they? Geographically? Whose home is this? What is home?
- What's their connection to the space/each other?
- Is this how they always behave?
- What's the pattern of their behaviour with each other?
- What other patterns are there in their homes?

## SELECTING QUESTIONS TO USE IN A QUESTIONNAIRE

From these initial questions, you might be able to select some for a questionnaire.

- Tell us about the last time you belly-laughed
- Write down the first line of all of the addresses of the places you've lived
- If you could travel anywhere where would it be and why?
- Home is...
- "Connection": discuss
- When no-one is listening or watching, what would you do?
- Describe a pattern in your home
- Earliest memory?



Now that you have had a little think about the stimulus, you might create a questionnaire to facilitate continuous writing, based loosely on your thoughts arising from this stimulus.

Withholding information can open the provocation up to your students so that their initial reactions to the stimulus can then incorporate some of their own thoughts from a different perspective.

Once they see the stimulus, this could add a new layer. How can you ask the questions in a way that doesn't make the stimulus closed and therefore create similar or predictable answers?

## WHY DO WE DO QUESTIONNAIRES?

It's a creative way to get a multitude of different perspectives on something that you might have already 'end-gamed'. It's about histories - we are not inviting confessions - be aware of how you set this up from a safeguarding perspective and put in clear guidelines of only sharing information your students feel happy with. See **Appendix 1** for **How to Write and Facilitate a Questionnaire**

We have a selection of resources to help you to generate text with your students. \*See **Appendices 2 - 5** for a variety of tasks that we use when devising collaboratively. This can be set up in socially distanced practical spaces as well as classrooms.



## SELECTING AND EXPLORING THE MATERIAL

Editing material is a vital part of developing work. Sometimes it feels heart-breaking to let go of a scene or moment that you love, but if it's to make the piece, as a whole better, it HAS to be done.



## USE THE BUILDING BLOCKS TO LIBERATE STUDENTS TO EDIT THEIR WORK

- Handwriting in the first instance and not worrying about what it might sound like or the 'quality' of the writing.
- Selecting and finding moments of interest to type up. This is non-destructive as you still have all of the hand-written original versions. It allows you the freedom to play, with the knowledge that you can always come back a building block, look at the original text and take it in another direction.
- Taking the time to read over, analyse, digest and critique what has been written is an important part of the selecting process.
- Ask your students to type-up anything that sparks their interest that they don't fully understand and that they want to hear more about. Ask them to go with their gut instinct.
- They may want to combine several written answers, from different students, into a piece of dialogue.

## REMEMBER

What you select might have no reference to your stimulus OR it may have many links to your stimulus: BOTH ARE IMPORTANT. Allow students to read out loud, parts that have been typed up. Hear it from different mouths, different genders, different voices - this offers different insights and is all part of the writing process.

## WORKSHOPPING THE TEXT

The next stage with any writing is to workshop the text. Here are some ideas that you could try, and that we certainly do when collaboratively devising theatre. If any writing seems like it tackles a sensitive subject, check with those writers, that they are happy to share this writing.



## WHAT WE DO WHEN WORKSHOPPING TEXT:

- Explore Changing The Variables: using Presumptions\*\*, challenge how text is performed.
- Play with tenses: how does changing from past to present make it more active?
- Play with pronouns: I, they, we, you, she, he.
- Can you turn a single piece of writing into a piece of dialogue?
- Play with focus: who it's spoken to, spoken to themselves as a monologue?
- Have someone else on stage overhearing it.
- Tell it to a group.
- Say it to one person with a group behind you listening.
- Make it a voicemail that the audience can't hear.
- Play with the scale - is it intimate or public?
- Play with the pace.
- Play with audience perspective - where are we watching and listening from?
- Are you saying it to the back wall (distance) or direct address?
- Or to someone else? To yourself? Is it whispered over a recording?

## ASK YOUR STUDENTS TO MAKE OBSERVATIONS:

What does this do to our understanding of who says it? Who it is spoken to? Is it spoken to themselves as a monologue? The context: See Scott's description of 'Leg of Lamb' in the **Frantic Book of Devising Theatre**. This recipe for preparing becomes quite different.



## \*\*THE PRESUMPTIONS

We refer to the 'presumptions' a lot while making and exploring work. Essentially it is all the current facts we know about our work as it exists. It is all the things we might be taking for granted. For example...

- If a duet has been created - we presume it is a duet, and ONLY a duet.
- If a piece of writing has been written in the first person and past tense, we presume that when someone reads that text that they are talking about themselves and their past experience.



Asking your students to list all the presumptions they have made in the work that they are creating, or, even better, work that they are watching is so useful. It creates critical observers and opens up the possibility to experiment and find new meaning in work.

- A duet could become a group piece, in unison, or a solo. It could become a trio with one person watching, it could be inverted in some way so the feet are up against the wall because one presumption we make all the time is that the floor is the floor!
- The writing in first person could be a letter that is received and read...or not read, a thought that is whispered over monitors into the ears of the audience having changed the pronoun to he or she or they - perhaps the character you see on stage now has no idea that it is being said at all - is it now someone else's thoughts on that character that we experience?

We will do this with stimuli, physical work, textual work, even posters for shows, look at the [Lovesong Resource Pack](#) - Scott talks about how the poster for this was created. Turning the presumption of what was up and what was down on its head, and then all of a sudden it made sense to him!

**We hope that this resource has been useful in giving you an insight into how we approach working with a stimulus.**

Giving you specific, practical tasks to generate and select text, and different ways to explore, edit and develop that written material.

### THE QUESTIONNAIRE

#### **How to write and facilitate a questionnaire:**

- The power of withholding information - decide whether you share what the stimulus is before giving them the questionnaire.
- Not hitting the subject head-on.
- Structure the questions to surprise, inspire, excite, draw-in and disarm the participant. Light / fun subjects are essential to then drop more serious questions.
- Don't write it for yourself - the question needs to be interpreted afresh.
- Write open questions.
- Don't 'end-game': or use leading questions.
- If you know you want a certain answer, write it yourself.
- Questions don't have to be questions. Use titles to write under, unfinished sentences to complete.
- Remember a single answer might not be interesting in isolation, but a collection of people's answers to the same question can be wonderful, so don't be limited by feeling answers may not be valuable.
- Throw in some curveballs that might have nothing to do with the stimulus (or so you think!)

#### **How to answer / facilitate answering:**

- Other than access needs, we suggest writing with a pen - the physical act of getting it down is an important part of the process. It could be recorded/spoken if needed, but at this stage avoid it being typed on tablets of any kind.
- Clarify how each text will be used and who will read it before you start. Students should avoid writing anything they wouldn't want read aloud in the group, but needn't worry about it being public or performable.
- Every question and each page should be clearly numbered. Pop the students' names at the top of each sheet of paper - if there is anything sensitive written you can go back to the author and double check that it's ok to be read aloud.
- Play music while the students write, reading the questions out loud, one at a time. We like to give a practical time limit for answering each question, 10 questions usually takes about 30 minutes to answer.
- Ask students to write 'more to say' if they run out of time and they have more to say on that one. You can go back to them and ask for more later.
- Allow for surprises: don't let people question the question: their angle/interpretation of the question may be unexpected. Read the question out twice and provide no further explanation!
- Students should avoid editing or critiquing their text - just start writing and see what happens.
- Keep writing - if there is nothing coming students can write "I am thinking", or if they get lost halfway through an answer they can repeat the last word they have written, until something else comes.
- Be open and honest, don't feel you have to be interesting or dramatic (end gaming again!).



**Reading and Collating the answers**

- Gather it all together and go through it. You might find some of the separate answers, when put together, make an incredible monologue - one that argues with itself.
- You might find that there's potential for some incredible dialogue about a situation.
- You might find that there is something that triggers you to write and elaborate on to create a whole new passage...or that a character emerges that is a combination of lots of different answers.
- You might find that you have the start of 10 different plays to work with.

**APPENDIX 2**

EVERYTHING ABOUT \_\_\_\_\_ THAT MAKES YOU...

- Angry
- Fearful
- Hopeful
- Ashamed
- Joyful

Another writing task you could try, will enable students to enrich the perspectives and ideas they have around a stimulus:

Simon Stephens says that each play should explore these 5 things within it.

**How to use this with your students:**

How about asking your students to list (or perhaps free-write, within a timeframe) these things about the stimulus, or a perspective on that stimulus?

## APPENDIX 3

### ELLIPSES TASK

#### How to use this with your Students

Based on a subject, stimulus or theme, get participants to invent some unfinished sentences that can inspire multiple answers. For example: based on the pictures above, perhaps some starter questions/sentences we might create could be:

- I've arrived but...
- I want to...
- In the future we will...
- Travelling is...
- Home is...
- My advice to the others is...
- My best mate is so...
- You are so...

In this way the first layer is achievable, accessible and inspiring to engage with. Next, you either set yourself the task of answering each as many ways as you can, or perhaps you email or share them with a collaborator and complete each other's. This helps liberate each other to write, but also, avoids 'endgaming' and allows for new and surprising responses to the original action.

## APPENDIX 4

### I AM HOME...

Take a look at Anna Jordan (*The Unreturning*) in our 'Create With Us' [video](#) for how you could use this writing task.



## APPENDIX 5

### PICK 'N' MIX CHARACTERS

#### Writing characters collaboratively (*This Will All Be Gone*)

We used this to create characters for our show *This Will All Be Gone*. Take a look at the [resource pack](#) as it outlines how it was used.

Below is a summary, with thoughts on how you can make it safe in COVID times of not sharing equipment/paper/pens.

Based on Geoff Ryman's Novel 253, where he splits characters into 4 categories, we have added a 5th category:

1. **Name:** Try not to use names that belong to people you know - it's hard but important to try.
2. **Outward Appearance:** What they look like. Physical characteristics - hair colour, distinguishing marks, tattoos, clothes - this doesn't need to be specific to place or time, so characters could be dressed for any weather or activity - unless that's something that is specific to your devising.
3. **Inside Information:** Something about the character that we wouldn't know just from looking at them. Hidden key facts. Secrets. How they feel. What is their emotional state? Something they have forgotten.
4. **What they are thinking or doing?** This section may feel more present to this moment. What are they doing at that exact moment or what are they about to do? This bit feels like the actual bulk of their story. Try to keep it simple.
5. **What are their senses like?** This shapes how they behave: the colour-blind person jumps the traffic lights in a stolen car. 'Seeing' through the characters senses gives you an inspiring lens to write through as a writer.

#### Ways of gathering this information:

- **Write a whole character each**  
Give a time limit of 3 minutes to write as much as you can under each of the headings. Remember that these are just starting points and they will need to be edited and developed to make them work within the show.
- **Pick 'n' Mix**  
Usually this would be done with one sheet of A4 paper each, that paper would be folded over after each person has written their thoughts on. The sheets would be passed around the circle so you are adding to the last persons description without seeing what they have written. With Covid-19 guidelines we cannot share sheets of paper so this can be adapted with Post-It Notes, stuck to the wall or a large sheet of paper.

**How we might facilitate this**

- Start with a post-it note each and decide whether you are writing about a female/male/other gender character first (everyone does the same gender). Using the five headings to guide us.
- Each person writes a name at the top of their Post-It and goes to stick it on the wall then sits back down.
- Each person now writes outward appearance on another Post-It and goes to stick it under a different post-it to your original Post-it
- Each new category you write does not have to be linked to what you have previously written or to what the person has written in the section before. Take each new heading as a brand new character.
- When all five headings have been written, go to one group of Post-Its and spend a few minutes reading through the character and write on a separate sheet of A4 the character details, editing any bits that don't tie together so well. Don't spend ages doing this as the disjointed nature of these characters may prove to be more interesting. Following this, we read out each new character to the rest of the group.

**Teaching Point:**

Treat it like a game: you are not allowed to return to the same large piece of paper/area on the wall twice. That way you are always contributing to a new character.

We might then repeat the whole task to create a different gendered character.

**Pic n' Mix of ALL the Characters!** You could try to write unconnected sections on lots of separate pieces of paper. 8 names (3 female, 3 male, 2 that aren't gendered names), 8 Inside Information, 8 Outward Appearances, 8 what they are doing or thinking and 8 descriptions of their senses. Then try to match the pieces together to create new characters.

**Next Step**

What would it be like if you embodied those characters and put them in a room together? Others can observe and think creatively. Text and physicality can help each other. It's all exploring the same thing.