

Performing theatre theory

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Theatre · HL

IB Diploma Programme Theatre HL (first assessment 2024; current guide). This topic is the HL-ONLY EXTENSION – PERFORMING THEATRE THEORY (90 teaching hours across the course), assessed through the SOLO THEATRE PIECE (35% HL): research a theatre theorist not previously studied, identify an aspect of their theory, and create and present a solo piece (4–7 minutes maximum) demonstrating the practical application of that theory to a theatre piece for an audience – submitted as a report of 2 500 words maximum plus sources, and a continuous unedited video of the whole piece. This handout teaches the theorist-to-practice craft. All worked examples are original.

Must-know for the solo piece:

Family	Content
task	theorist not previously studied; aspect identified; 4–7 min solo; 2 500-word report + sources; continuous video
theory	the theorist's claim, its terms, its context and its controversy
aspect	the ONE aspect selected and translated into a performance principle
application	the principle generating concrete performance choices
evaluation	did the piece demonstrate the theory? evidence from the video

Reading a theorist

A **theatre theorist** is a systematic thinker about performance – a maker of claims about what theatre IS and what it should DO. Reading one for this task means: the **claim** (the theory's central assertion, stated in the theorist's own terms), the **vocabulary** (the technical terms the claim runs on – and their precise meanings), the **CONTEXT** (what theatre the theorist was answering: whose practice, which tradition, what historical moment), the **PRACTICE** (the exercises and productions the theory generated – theory in the body), and the **CRITICS** (the standard objections and the theorist's defence). The choice rule: a theorist whose theory yields **PERFORMABLE** principles – one whose vocabulary becomes stage action. The classic failure: reading the theorist as philosophy (the claim summarised, never staged) – the task is performing theory, not reporting it.

Worked example. A theorist claims that theatre’s truth lives in the performer’s presence, not in representation: vocabulary of presence, encounter, the empty space; context: a commercial theatre of spectacle and psychological realism; practice: exercises that strip the actor to address the audience directly; critics: presence is mystification, the encounter unrepeatable and unevidenced. The ASPECT chosen: the direct address as encounter – the performer meets the audience as themselves, not as a character.

From aspect to application

The **aspect** is one operational slice of the theory, and the craft is TRANSLATION: aspect to performance principle (“the performer always addresses THIS audience, HERE, as themselves”), principle to GENERATIVE RULES (every passage of the piece must be addressed to an individual spectator by sight at least once; no costume; the space shared light – audience and performer visible to each other; the piece’s events happen in the room’s real time, not a play’s fictional time), rules to the PIECE (a 5-minute solo built from the performer’s own material – arriving, choosing a spectator, telling what is true, leaving – where each event tests the principle and its failure is visible). The piece is the theory’s experiment: the report narrates the translation (theorist, aspect, principle, rules, piece) and the video evidences it.

Worked example, continued. The piece: the performer enters, sees, chooses one spectator, and tells them the true reason they chose them; repeats with a second; finally asks the room to choose THEM – the encounter’s symmetry demonstrated, the theory’s claim staged rather than described. The report’s evaluation: the video shows the chosen spectators’ responses (the evidence the critics demand), and owns the limit – presence is indeed unevidenced beyond the recording, which is the theory’s own contested ground.

The report

The **report** (2 500 words max) is the task’s written half, structured as: the theorist and the theory (claim, vocabulary, context – compact); the aspect selected and WHY this aspect (yield, not convenience); the translation (principle, generative rules, the piece’s events); the performance and its evidence (what the video shows of the theory working); the evaluation (did the piece demonstrate the aspect? where did the translation strain? what would be revised). The sources list separates primary (the theorist’s own writings, interviews, recordings of their productions) from secondary. The top band couples theory and practice throughout: no paragraph of summary without a staging consequence, no staging choice without its theoretical warrant.

Checklist

- The task's facts: theorist not previously studied, aspect, 4–7 minute solo, 2 500-word report + sources, continuous unedited video, 35% HL (task).
- The theorist read five ways: claim, vocabulary, context, practice, critics; the choice rule of performable principles (theory).
- The aspect as one operational slice; translation to principle, generative rules and piece events (aspect).
- The piece as the theory's experiment: each event tests the principle; failure visible (application).
- The report's five-part structure; primary and secondary sources; evaluation with video evidence and owned limits (report).
- The worked presence-theorist translation and solo understood (worked).

Boundary notes: the solo piece is marked on the theory's practical application – the video must **SHOW** the aspect, and the report must warrant every choice from the theory. All worked examples are original.