

Staging play texts

International Baccalaureate · IB Diploma · Theatre · SL

IB Diploma Programme Theatre SL (first assessment 2024; current guide). The production proposal is shared by SL and HL (30% at SL): choose a published play text not previously studied and formulate a vision for the design and theoretical staging of the ENTIRE play for an audience, presented as a proposal of at most 12 pages with written text not exceeding 4 000 words. This handout teaches reading a play as a THEATRE-MAKER: from text to vision to proposal. The worked examples use an imagined staging of a classic realist text, with all design decisions original.

Must-know for the production proposal:

Family	Content
reading	given circumstances, spine, action units; the world of the play
vision	the director's concept: one governing idea tying every choice
design	set, costume, lighting, sound, space – each serving the concept
audience	who watches, where, and how the staging positions them
proposal	the document: vision, moments, design, justification

Reading the play as a theatre-maker

A play text is not literature on legs: it is a **score** for performance. The theatre-maker's read asks what the play DEMANDS: the GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES (the facts the text fixes – time, place, relations), the **spine** (the single through-line of the protagonist's want), the ACTION UNITS (beats where want meets obstacle and changes), and the WORLD of the play (its rules, its atmosphere, what it costs to live there). Alongside the academic read runs the **embodied** read the guide insists on: standing the key relationships up, walking the space, testing the text aloud: knowledge that resides in the body, the course's founding principle. From the read comes the question the proposal answers: what is THIS production's play about – not the play in general, but this staging's argument, held in one sentence.

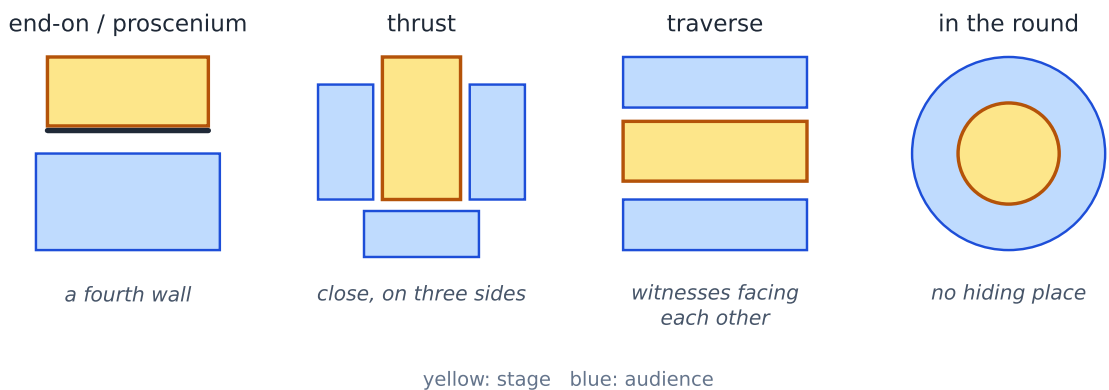
Worked example. In a naturalist family drama the read finds: the given circumstance of a mortgaged house; the spine – the daughter's fight to leave; units that each strip her of an ally; a world where love is currency. One-sentence argument: "this staging shows a family eating its young to keep its house." Every design choice below answers to that sentence.

Vision, design and the audience

The **concept** is one governing idea that ties every choice: not a decorative theme ("loneliness") but a performance argument ("the room shrinks as each daughter leaves"). Test a concept by its yield: how it stages the opening, the turning point and

the ending – a concept that cannot stage the ending is a mood, not a concept. The design areas each serve it: the **set** (the room’s shrinking is built – walls that track in per act); **Costume** (period held but fading – the family dresses in its own past); **Light** (naturalism narrowing to a lamp’s circle – safety shrinking with the space); **Sound** (the house’s own noises rising as people leave); **Space** (end-on and proscenium for the fourth wall, or a traverse for entrapment – the audience as witnesses who cannot intervene).

The **audience** is a design material: where they sit decides what they are (fourth-wall voyeurs, trapped traverse witnesses, promenade ghosts). The moment architecture carries the vision: choose THREE moments to plan in the proposal’s detail – typically the opening image (which states the world in silence), the pivot (where the spine turns), and the final image (which lands the argument) – and let every other choice be inferred from them.



Where the audience sits decides what they are: four stage configurations

Worked example, continued. The opening image: the family eats at a table filling the stage, walls wide. The pivot: the daughter stands; the lamp is the only light; the walls have halved the room. The final image: she is out; the parents face the table in a pool the size of a plate. The concept stages its sentence in three pictures, and the proposal’s reader can SEE the production.

Writing the proposal

The document ($\leq 4\,000$ words, ≤ 12 pages of text and images) is judged on how the vision informs EVERY choice: structure it as (1) the play and its world, briefly – the reader knows the play; (2) the concept, stated in the one sentence and unpacked; (3) the three moments, each with its staging and design; (4) the design areas, each tied to the concept in a line; (5) the audience’s position – literally and thematically. Justify by RETURNING to the concept: a choice unexplained reads as taste; a choice explained from the concept reads as direction. The images serve the text, never decorate it. The classic failures: the literature essay (analysis in direction’s place), the mood board

(pictures, no argument), the concept drop (a sentence never cashed).

Checklist

- The theatre-maker's read: given circumstances, spine, units, the world – plus the embodied read (reading).
- The concept: one performance argument, not a theme; tested against opening, pivot and ending (vision).
- The design areas, each serving the concept and each named: set, costume, light, sound, space (design).
- The audience as material: position decides role – fourth wall, traverse, promenade (audience).
- The document's five-part structure; justification always returning to the concept; images serving text (proposal).
- The worked staging's sentence, three moments and shrinking room understood (worked).

Boundary notes: the proposal is marked on the vision's coherence and its informing of every choice - the examiner must be able to see the production from the page. All worked staging decisions are original.

Worked vision, one sentence. The staging's sentence – “the room shrinks as her choices narrow” – disciplines everything after it: the palette greys scene by scene, the door moves upstage, a chair leaves each act. A choice that serves the sentence stays; a choice that only decorates goes – and the proposal's justification column is exactly that test, choice by choice.