

THEA 311 (WI): World Drama and Theatre I: Script Analysis—with a Focus on British Plays

Fall 2026

3 Credits/45 Contact Hours

Prerequisites: THEA 101, 221, 222, 240; or consent.

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course provides an introduction to the major techniques and concepts of script analysis and applies them to a broad stylistic and historical spectrum of British plays, many of which were written and/or first produced in London. In a theatre context, script analysis of dramatic texts is less concerned with literary-hermeneutic interpretation than with their analysis and preparation for actual stage productions by actors, directors, designers, and dramaturgs. This course combines two analytical approaches: a) an overview of the formal features of drama (plot, character, idea, dialogue, etc.) and b) an introduction to the major dramatic genres and styles (tragedy, comedy, realism, theatre of the absurd, etc.). Basic analytical tools of script analysis such as action analysis and beat breakdowns will also be explored. The plays covered range from William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Aphra Behn's *The Rover* to Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. We will also take two field trips to theatre performances in London, and I will try to organize post-show talk backs with the involved theatre artists. We will also discuss how these performances represent one of the genres/styles that we are exploring in class. If possible, we will also watch video recordings of London productions of the plays covered in class at the Department of Theatre and Performance of the Victoria and Albert Museum. (The course calendar below is subject to change depending on the theatre schedule in London, which will become available closer to the start of the semester.) In addition, this course is writing intensive and places great emphasis on written expression skills.

DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Students can demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts and terms of script analysis.
2. Students can analyze plays of a wide range of dramatic styles and genres.
3. Students can use writing effectively to communicate the concepts of script analysis.
4. Students can use research resources specific to the field of theatre, in an ethical manner.
5. Students demonstrate critical thinking skills through oral and written means.
6. Students can effectively organize their writing and demonstrate rigorous work ethic.

SAC-SPECIFIC PROGRAM OBJECTIVES:

1. Gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of other cultures and their environments: *in this context, the dramatic tradition of Great Britain, with a particular focus on London.*
2. Develop different perspectives in regard to other nations: *particularly the history and culture of Great Britain.*
3. Develop increased capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints: *through in-class discussions and your oral presentation of journals by other students in class.*
4. Acquire increased respect and tolerance of differences—all contributing to a citizenry better able to succeed in the 21st century: *through encounters and engagement with international students at the University of Roehampton.*

SAC-SPECIFIC COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. Demonstrate awareness of own cultural values and biases and how these impact their ability to work with others: *through in-class discussions and work in group projects.*
2. Demonstrate knowledge of diversity with a focus on the population or topic of interest in the specific Study Abroad program: *understand the diverse range of dramatic styles and genres in the British theatre tradition.*
3. Communicate appropriately and effectively with diverse individuals and groups: *through in-class discussions and group work on creating beat structures for dramatic scenes.*
4. Demonstrate an increased capacity to analyze issues with appreciation for disparate viewpoints: *by the end of the semester, you will be able to analyze the different viewpoints and objectives of dramatists and of the characters in their plays.*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Punctuality and attendance at all classes. There are no unexcused absences. Students who are absent for a period of time for medical or personal reasons should talk to me and be prepared to provide appropriate documentation. After one unexcused class absence your grade will go down by one level (i.e.: a "B+" becomes a "B"). Lateness occurs when a student arrives for class up to 15 minutes later than the scheduled time; arrival after 15 minutes will be counted as an absence; two latenesses equal one absence.
2. Careful reading of all assigned materials, *before* class.
3. Thoughtful and energetic participation in all class discussions.
4. Writing assignments have to be handed in *on time* (no exceptions!).
5. Bring the appropriate readings to class with you.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a serious offence and will be dealt with accordingly. **See the UH Student Conduct Code (<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/studentsuccess/conduct-code/policies/#II>):**

“Plagiarism is [...] an act of academic dishonesty and includes, but is not limited to the use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgement. It also includes the unacknowledged use of AI technology and/or materials prepared by another person or agency available publicly or through a purchase.”

REQUIRED TEXTS:

1. James Thomas. *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers*. 7th edition. New York and London, Routledge, 2023. (Can be purchased online.)
2. All other texts are available as electronic copies on Lamakū or as digital playscripts on Drama Online (through Hamilton Library) or other platforms.

ASSIGNMENTS (all to be submitted as Word or Google Doc files):

1. Journal—Every week you are expected to apply the most recently discussed chapter of James Thomas’s *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers* to that week’s assigned play by answering two end-of-chapter questions. Every Monday you are expected to email your most recent journal entry as a Word file to your instructor or send a notification that your Google Doc journal has been updated. Your **weekly journal submissions** should be in the **450-500 words** range. Please keep in mind that you are not writing this journal primarily for your instructor, but for other yet-to-be-determined students in class! In **Week 5** you will exchange your journal entries collected so far with another student in class. In **Week 6** you will give a **mid-semester presentation** on this student’s journal, in which you focus on its highlights and outstanding traits: insightful and perceptive observations, original and surprising remarks, statements that you strongly agree (or disagree) with, arguments that made you reassess your own opinion, and the overall style, tone, and approach of your partner’s journal. In **Week 11** you will exchange the journal entries that you have written since the mid-semester journal presentations with a different partner in class and give this **final journal presentation** in **Week 12**.

2. Short Paper #1: *Hamlet* as Tragedy—Please write a **2-3 pages paper** (with font size 12 and 1.5 line spacing) in which you discuss Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* as an example of classic tragedy, following David Rush’s definition of this concept. You are expected to submit your paper online in **Week 3**.

3. Analysis #1: Action Analysis of *Noises Off*—Following the instructions provided by James Thomas in the first chapter of his book, you will create an **action analysis** (including seed, theme, sequence of external and internal events, the super-objectives of all characters, through-action, and counter through-action) of Michael Frayn’s *Noises Off*. You are expected to submit the analysis online in **Week 5**.

4. Short Paper #2: *Look Back in Anger* as a Realist Play—Please write a **2-3 pages paper** (with font size 12 and 1.5 line spacing) in which you discuss John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* as an

example of realist drama, following Rush’s elaboration of this concept. You are expected to submit the paper online in **Week 7**.

5. Analysis #2: Beat Breakdown of Act 2, Scene 7 of *Enron*—Please create a **beat breakdown** for Act 2, Scene 7 from Lucy Prebble’s *Enron* (including theme, seed, super-/act/scene objectives of the respective characters, and the beat-by-beat identification of dominant character intentions). You are expected to submit the analysis online in **Week 9**.

6. Short Paper #3: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as Absurdist Drama—Please write a **2-3 pages paper** (with font size 12 and 1.5 line spacing) in which you discuss Tom Stoppard’s *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as an absurdist play, following Rush’s elaboration of this concept. You are expected to submit the paper online in **Week 11**.

7. Final Project—Chose one of the plays discussed in class for this project. Please **identify and list** the seed, theme, through-action, counter through-action, and external and internal events of the play as well as the super-objectives of all of its characters. Please also write a **paper** about the play’s use of given circumstances, background story, characters, ideas, and dialogue. This assignment should be **12 pages** long (with font size 12 and 1.5 line spacing). Please submit the assignment at the beginning of **Week 12**. You will also be expected to give an in-class **presentation** of your final project during that week. Please let your instructor know in **Week 8** which play you will choose for this project.

GRADING CRITERIA:

3 Short Papers (10 points each)	30 points (30%)
2 Analyses (10 points each)	20 points (20%)
Final Project (20 points for list/essay, 5 points for oral presentation)	25 points (20%)
Journals & Journal Presentations	20 points (10%)
Participation in Class	5 points (10%)
TOTAL	100 points (100%)

GRADING SCALE:

97%–100% = A+	77%–79% = C+
93%–96% = A	73%–76% = C
90%–92% = A-	70%–72% = C-
87%–89% = B+	67%–69% = D+
83%–86% = B	60%–66% = D
80%–82% = B-	Below 60% = F

SCHEDULE

WEEK 1

Course Introduction, Character Objectives, Beat Breakdowns

Readings

- David Grote, “What Do the Characters Want?” From *Script Analysis: Reading and Understanding the Playscript for Production* (Wadsworth 1985), 73–100.
- William Ball, “Objectives.” From *A Sense of Direction: Some Observations on the Art of Directing*. (Drama Publishers 1944), 70–92.
- Beat breakdown: First unit of Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts*.

WEEK 2

Tragedy, Formalist Script Analysis, Action Analysis

Readings

- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Folger Shakespeare Library).
- David Rush, “Classic Tragedy.” From *A Student Guide to Play Analysis* (Southern Illinois University Press 2005), 99–112.
- James Thomas, “Preface,” “Introduction,” and “Action Analysis,” xiv–28.

WEEK 3

Comedy, Plot (Given Circumstances)

Readings

- Aphra Behn, *The Rover* (Project Gutenberg).
- Rush, “Classic Comedy.” From *A Student Guide*, 113–139.
- Thomas, “Foundations of the Plot, Given Circumstances,” 29–47.

DUE: Essay #1: *Hamlet* as Tragedy!

WEEK 4

Farce, Plot (Background Story)

Readings

- Michael Frayn, *Noises Off* (Methuen 1982).
- Rush, “Farce.” From *A Student Guide*, 155–171.
- Thomas, “Foundations of the Plot: Background Story,” 48–57.

WEEK 5

Melodrama, Plot (External and Internal Action)

Readings

- George Dibdin Pitt, *The String of Pearls (Sweeney Todd)*. From *The Golden Age of Melodrama: Twelve 19th Century Melodramas*, ed. Michael Kilgarriff (Wolfe 1974).
- Rush, “Melodrama.” From *A Student Guide*, 140–154.

- Thomas, “Plot: External and Internal Action in the Dialogues and Stage Directions,” 58–74.

Exchange Your Journal for Mid-Semester Journal Presentations with Other Student in Class!

DUE: Analysis #1: Action Analysis of *Noises Off*!

WEEK 6

Realist Drama, Plot (Progressions and Structure)

Readings

- John Osborne, *Look Back in Anger* (Criterion Books 1957).
- Rush, “Realism.” From *A Student Guide*, 191–204.
- Thomas, “Plot: Progressions and Structure,” 75–99.

Mid-Semester Journal Presentations

WEEK 7

Symbolist Drama, Character

Readings

- W. B. Yeats, *At the Hawk’s Well*. From *The Collected Plays of W. B. Yeats* (Macmillan 1934).
- Rush, “Symbolism.” From *A Student Guide*, 205–215.
- Thomas, “Character,” 100–118.

DUE: Essay #2: *Look Back in Anger* as a Realist Play!

WEEK 8

Epic Theatre, Idea

Readings

- Lucy Prebble, *Enron* (Methuen 2009).
- Rush, “Epic Theater.” From *A Student Guide*, 242–259.
- Thomas, “Idea,” 119–137.

Inform your instructor of your choice of play for the final project!

WEEK 9

Expressionist Drama, Dialogue

Readings

- Sarah Kane, *Blasted* (Methuen 2002).
- Rush, “Expressionism.” From *A Student Guide*, 216–229.
- Thomas, “Dialogue,” 138–161.

DUE: Analysis #2: Beat Breakdown of Act 2, Scene 7 of *Enron*!

WEEK 10

Absurdist Drama, Tempo/Rhythm, Mood

Readings

- Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Faber and Faber 1967).
- Rush, "Theater of the Absurd." From *A Student Guide*, 230–241.
- Thomas, "Tempo, Rhythm, and Mood," 162–180.

WEEK 11

Postmodern Drama, Style

Readings

- Martin McDonagh, *Pillowman* (Faber and Faber 2003).
- Rush, "Postmodernism." From *A Student Guide*, 260–277.
- Thomas, "Style," 181–201.

DUE: Essay #3: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* as Absurdist Drama!

WEEK 12

DUE: Final Project!

Final Journal Presentations

Oral Presentation of Final Project