

Understanding a brief

Performers and designers often need to respond to a given brief for performance. It is important to understand what is required in response to the brief. See also pages 52–53 for a brief in the context of assessment.

Reading a brief

A brief for a workshop performance might include a **context** and **stimulus**. For example:

This
is the
context

You have been asked by your local theatre to contribute to a gala afternoon. As they are celebrating 20 years since they opened, they have set the theme/stimulus for performance as:

This
is the
stimulus

'New beginnings'

They have invited local performance groups to the theatre to show a short piece of work of around 10 to 15 minutes. They suggest that each group should be no more than seven performers and no more than four designers.

Understanding requirements

In response to the theme/stimulus, a brief might require you to:

- select a specific target audience
- work as part of a small group to create a workshop performance
- participate in discussions and practical activities to shape and develop original material and ideas, and rehearse for performance
- present the performance to an invited audience, working well as part of a group to apply performance and design skills and techniques creatively, communicating chosen ideas and creative intentions for the stimulus of 'New beginnings'
- evaluate the performance.

Workshop performance

A **workshop performance** is a simple, stripped-back performance of musical theatre, a play or dance.

- ✓ The performers might work without production elements such as costume, lighting or set. It might be an extract of the full-length version of the work. It is used in the performing arts industry to preview the staging of a new work for an audience and understand their reaction.
- ✓ Performers and designers ask the audience for feedback, and also view footage of the performance to evaluate: Are the intentions and aims clear? Are changes needed for future performances?

Considering responses

Performers and designers may use a list to check against in response to the brief, as the work develops.

- 1 Target audience (e.g. children, elderly, families)
- 2 Performance space (e.g. theatre, studio, hall)
- 3 **Performance** (e.g. acting, dance, musical theatre) or **design** discipline (e.g. costume, make-up, masks, hair; set/props; lighting, sound)
- 4 Performance and design skills and strengths (e.g. individually and as a group)
- 5 Structure of work (e.g. short scenes, continuous piece, showcase)
- 6 Style and genre (e.g. contemporary, tragedy, comedy)
- 7 Creative intentions (e.g. to raise awareness of a topic, to educate, to entertain)
- 8 Planning and managing resources (e.g. for development and in performance)
- 9 Timing (e.g. time to develop and prepare and the running time in performance)
- 10 Number of performers and designers (see the Pearson website for assessment requirements).

Now try this

Consider the stimulus 'New beginnings' and the context in the brief above. Think of an idea in response. Explain how it links to the brief.

The idea might be informed by existing material you have worked with, or newly developed skills.

Responding to stimulus

Responding to a brief and stimulus involves **discussion** and **practical exploration activities**.

Developing ideas

Performers and designers start the creative process by using the **stimulus** in a brief to **generate ideas** for material. When discussing, selecting and rejecting ideas, it is important to:

- work effectively as a member of a group
- respect opinions
- take turns to share your ideas
- make notes for logging and evaluating ideas.

Exploring ideas

Practical activities can be used to explore and generate ideas in response to the brief and stimulus. The skills used will vary, depending on different features:

- **Discipline** – acting, dance, musical theatre, design. Within your discipline you could use improvisation as a quick way to respond to a brief immediately. You could split the group up and improvise, then share your findings with the rest of the group.
- **Form and style** of performance – if you know the style of performance you might use, you could work in pairs to list the stylistic features you might include. Then share these with the rest of your group.



These performers are using movement to explore the stimulus of 'Stronger together or apart'.

starting points (e.g. themes, issues, props, time and place, existing repertoire)

brainstorming

hot seating

improvisation

vocal work

movement techniques

Ways of exploring a stimulus

solo work

small group work

ensemble piece

sketches, drawings/photographs

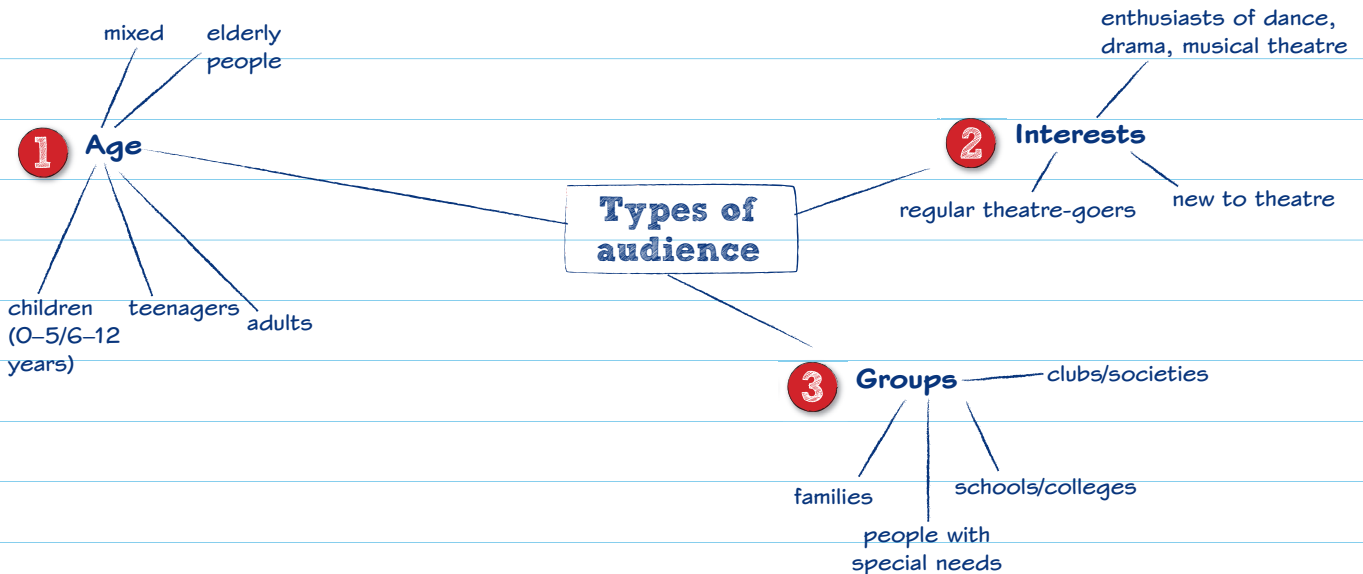
mock-ups and try-outs

Now try this

Using the theme 'Stronger together or apart', choose two practical activities that you could use to explore this theme in a small group. Make notes on how these activities will help to generate ideas about the theme.

Target audience

Performers and designers need to be aware of their **target audience**, both when developing ideas and in performance. There are many ways to define the target audience for a piece of performance work. Here are three examples.



Audience needs

There are different ways to meet the needs of different target audiences.

- Targeting adults or young children involves different language levels, ideas and designs to engage them. The message and narrative for young children needs to be very clear.
- Targeting 'the general public' is a broad audience. Specific and specialist audiences might involve more targeted needs, for example: people with learning difficulties or issues relating to health.

Define the needs of your audience carefully and be aware of any social and cultural issues.



Performances for young audiences tend to be shorter than performances for adults. A young audience may also respond better to visual or auditory stimuli than to dialogue-heavy performances.

Now try this

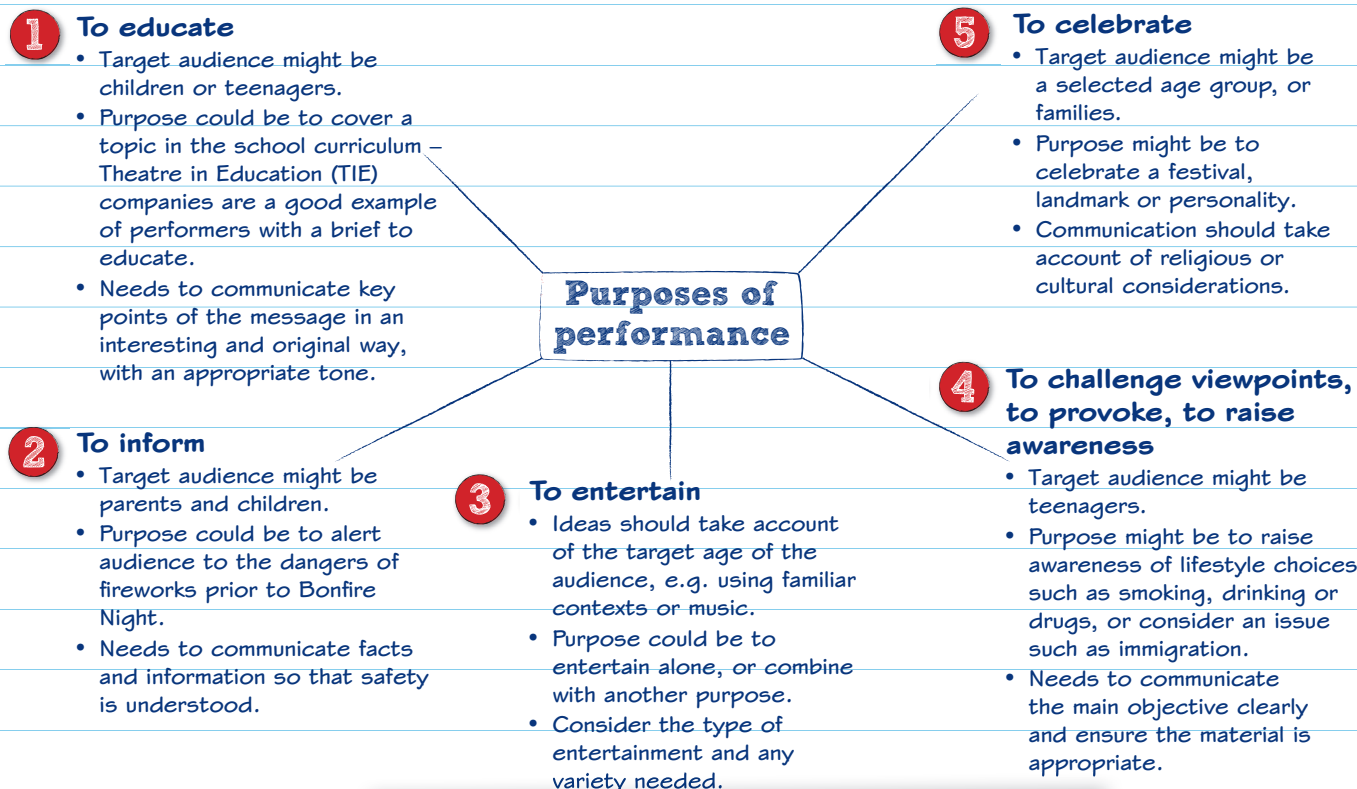
Take 'All of a sudden ...' as your stimulus. Write down three factors to consider when targeting a performance for primary school-aged children.

Consider your target audience and:

- ideas that might appeal to them
- the purpose of your performance
- their needs
- how to keep them engaged.

Audience and purpose

The way that performers and designers target an audience might change, depending on the **purpose** of the performance. Here are **five** examples.



Consider the purpose of a performance. For example, the book musical *South Pacific* integrates song and dance into a story that entertains, while also engaging the audience with a range of emotions and social issues such as race relations.

Now try this

Take 'Time and place' as your stimulus.

- 1 Choose a target audience.
- 2 Choose a purpose.
- 3 Create a spidergram with your main idea in the centre, surrounded by ideas for how you will engage your audience with your chosen purpose.

You might have more than one purpose – for example, to entertain and inform.