

Tackling Shakespeare – How to get Started

- 1.) **Paraphrase.** Know what you are saying. Go through each line in your scene and write the following:
 - a. **Definitive Paraphrase** – line by line using dictionary, editors notes, OED, thesaurus. Get as close to exact meaning as possible.
 - b. **Connotative Paraphrase** – put each line “in your own words.” You can include modern slang, emotional associations, personal connections – but be careful not to stray to far from author’s intent.
 - c. **Germinal Paraphrase** – short sentence or phrase that wraps up the “essence” of the thought (use for longer passages, soliloquies, monologues.)

- 2.) **Scansion.** Use this tool for finding additional meaning in the text, the rhythm (“music”) in the verse, the emotional tone, the important words.
 - a. Mark all punctuation. Especially notice end stops.
 - b. Divide into “feet” (two syllables per “foot”). Mark stressed (/) and unstressed () syllables.
 - c. Mark all alliteration (consonance, assonance, other sound devices as appropriate.)
 - d. Mark all antithesis.
 - e. Choose operatives.

- 3.) **Character Analysis / Given Circumstances.**
 - a. List all the **facts** you find about your character.
 - b. List all the **suppositions** you make about your character based on:
 - what you say about yourself
 - what other characters say about you
 - actions/behaviors
 - missing information that needs to be answered (use the facts as your guide)
 - relationships
 - c. Identify the **Given Circumstances** for the scene (external and internal)
Who – are you talking to? What is the nature of this relationship? Status?
What – what has just happened prior to the scene? What information and/or expectation is your character bringing into the scene? What is at stake?
Where – where does the scene take place? Consider territory, public/private, familiarity, indoor/outdoor.
When – what time is it? how much time do you have? what season is it?
what is the weather like? climate?
How – how are you feeling? Emotional state? Physical state?
 - d. List any **Given Circumstances** (social, political, historical) for the play as a whole which influence your character and the scene you are in.

- 4.) **Central Event**
 - a. From your character’s perspective, what is the central event of this scene? What happens? What decision, discovery or reversal occurs? Who are you at the beginning of the scene? Who are you at the end of the scene? What has changed? What will your character do next?

- 5.) **Objective (Beat Work)**
 - a. Divide the scene into BEATS based on your characters objectives.
 - ✓ What do you (as the character) want from the other person (or persons) in the scene? Be specific – make it tangible, make it interesting. What are the obstacles between you and this goal (or goals)? What tactics do you use to achieve your objective? What is personally at stake? (NOTE – do not share this with your scene partners!)

COMPLETE BY _____