

DIRECTING TABLEWORK: *UNLOCKING THE DOOR TO THE ACTOR/  
DIRECTOR RELATIONSHIP & PROCESS*

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## What is Tablework?

Tablework typically describes the period of time spent working on the text as a primary tool. Often, it is used mostly for dramaturgical purposes to define and discuss major issues, themes, character, given circumstances, period, etc. For the purposes of this workshop, we will NOT be referring to that definition. Instead, we will refer to that part of the process as “Table TALK.” It is a necessary part of the process.

Instead, Table WORK, is defined as first person exploration of *connection*, *meaning*, and *specificity* required to embody character and plot actively and truthfully. It is an organically guided process that will nurture impulses and siphon choices to meet the needs of the production and allow blocking, working, and other parts of the process to be the result of such work.

## Vocabulary of Tablework

### Connection:

Describes the relationship of the actors in the moment. The goal is to make sure the actors are actively listening to one another. The actor organically responds to stimuli from another actor, creating behavior, subtext, impulsive emotion, etc. Sanford Meisner describes this as a “Pinch/Ouch relationship.”

### Point of View:

Actor begins to address character by adopting the point of view of the character, usually designated by clues in the script. Sometimes the actor must explore a variety of choices if it is not apparent in the script.

### Meaning:

The emotional crafting and adoption of feeling around issues, relationships, and all things personal required by the text. The adoption of meaning allows the actor to “adopt” the feelings of the character around the major moments, issues, people, items, etc of the play.

### Specificity (Actions and Objectives):

As defined by Constantine Stanislavski, the choices made by the actor to label what the character wants/needs from another character and what the character is doing to the other character, moment to moment, to achieve the objective. These are the “music notes” of the process allowing the choice to be played again and again each night. It is also the major exploration for adjusting a scene or a moment.

## Making it Count

*Thus, it is the combination of organic connection (allowing moments to actually happen each night on the stage in a unique exchange) with the proper meaning and emotion running underneath the text, and the pursuit of objective through action (which is the repeatable part of performance) that define the building blocks of the process that can aid in defining the rest of the rehearsal process, including blocking, working moments, assimilation, transitions and tech.*


Table

Block

Work

## How to Communicate with Actors

*Most directors began as performers, but they forget that the process is one of constant judgment and the actor has no real way to separate criticism of the work from him or her self.*

### Helpful Hints & Phrases:

- Positively reinforce good choices
- Be wrong or allow the actor to make a better choice every rehearsal... publicly
- “Yes, and...” for an adjustment that allows the actor and the director’s adjustment to be “right.”
- Encourage actors to do “big bad acting”

## Question/Answer Technique

**The major paradigm for Tablework is Socratic in nature. By posing questions instead of making statements or suggestions, the director is asking the actor to utilize his/her experience from inside the circumstances to craft and own the choice. The question, itself, in a skilled director’s hand will limit and guide the actor to choices within the scope and vision of the director’s concept.**

Why is this day/night different that all other nights?

(This requires every major scene to stand out in a way that is stage-worthy)

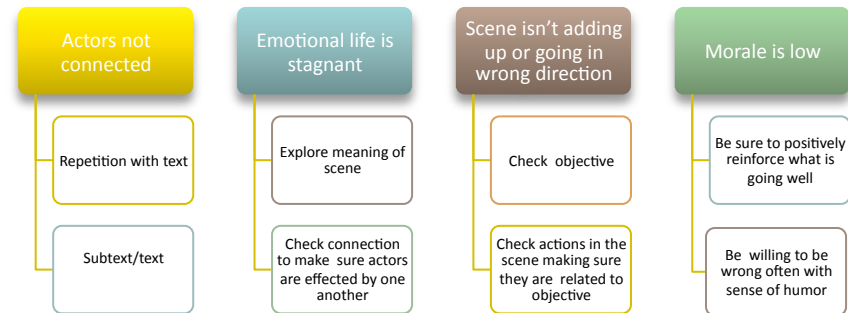
What do you love about X?

(This doesn’t allow the actor not to love X, but then guides the actor craft the specifics).

What do you want from Y?

(This question requires that the crafting of objective inherently have connection).

## Where is the work?



## Summary

Good active, invested, and connected Table Work will result in setting up a mutually collaborative relationship between Actor and Director.

Time set aside in the beginning of the process for Table Work will result in less time being necessary for blocking and working rehearsals, which pays off in the end allowing for more Act runs and full run throughs inside the process and at the end of the process.

Ideally, in most text based narrative plays, you should aim for Table Work to take about 25% of the rehearsal process.

