

ACTION WORDS

An actor can use the following technique to help understand dialogue.

For every sentence, find an "action word" to describe what your character is doing to another character on stage. Words that describe physical actions are best of all. The action word helps you to understand your character's intention. If you decide on a word that describes a physical action – such as punch or kick, see if you can use that physical action in the performance of your line. Use the action word in this sentence format: I <action> you (the character you are talking to).

By "action word", I really mean a "transitive verb". You need to understand a bit of English grammar to get the most out of this acting exercise.

A "verb" is a "doing word": I punch you, I love you, I kiss you. Every complete sentence must have a verb.

A transitive verb is an action word that has a subject (the person or thing doing the action) and a direct object (who the action is done to).

For example:

I (subject) punch (verb) you (direct object).

In this exercise, the direct object must always be the other character who you are talking to.

Most verbs are transitive. An intransitive verb cannot have a direct object. For example:
I thrive in sunshine. I lie down.

You can't use intransitive verbs in this exercise. If you do, then you're talking about yourself and not relating to the other character(s) onstage. In narrative drama, you must always be talking to another character on stage.

Don't repeat words in a scene: find a new action, even just slightly different, for each sentence of dialogue that you say.

Finally, this is only an exercise. There are no correct answers and you might write action words in your script during one rehearsal and change some, many or all of them at the next rehearsal.

I've found it useful but it doesn't matter if you don't.

SOME ACTION WORDS:

PUNCH	ENTERTAIN	DISMISS
KICK	CORRUPT	DELIGHT
DAB	SCOLD	AMAZE
FLICK	TREASURE	STRIP
TEASE	ENVELOP	SMOTHER
SEDUCE	COMMAND	BLOCK
SQUEEZE	STROKE	WOUND
PULL	FREEZE	CUT
PROD	MASSACRE	IGNITE
LIFT	DOMINATE	CRUSH
STEAL	MOTHER	BAFFLE
PROTECT	ENDANGER	SHOCK
SHIELD	SUBJUGATE	CHILL
REJECT	PRICKLE	MOCK
DENY	PUSH	DERIDE
HUMOUR	BECKON	TEMPT
BERATE	CALM	SHATTER
FLIP	COMFORT	PERSUADE
DROP	ENGAGE	UNDERMINE
TRAP	POKE	CASTRATE
SHAVE	REJECT	EMASCULATE
CARESS	PACIFY	CASTIGATE
SMEAR	REBUT	DE-SEX
STRETCH	BLAME	DISSECT
CHALLENGE	BAIT	CHARM
CONFRONT	CAJOLE	NEEDLE
SEDUCE	BELITTLE	EMBRACE
AVOID	ENLIGHTEN	SURPRISE
HUMILIATE	DRAIN	NIGGLE
WARM	EXHAUST	MASSAGE
PATRONIZE	SUFFOCATE	THRILL
FRIGHTEN	OVERWHELM	BAFFLE
SCARE	SOOTHE	EXPOSE
ALIENATE	APPEASE	EMBARRASS
INVITE	RAPE	TITILLATE
INSTRUCT	DECEIVE	INTRIGUE
INSPIRE	REPRIMAND	SHAKE
ELEVATE	UNDRESS	DENY
FLATTER	DEROBE	CORNER
INTIMIDATE	ENCOURAGE	LIGHTEN
UPLIFT	EDUCATE	BREAK
EXCITE	ENTHUSE	ENTHRALL
ENLIVEN	TANTALIZE	ATTACK
ENERGIZE	THREATEN	TAUNT
AMUSE	INTERRUPT	STAB