

Mime Guidance

Mime *n* the theatrical technique of suggesting action, character or emotion without words, using only gesture, expression and movement;
vb to use only gesture and movement to act out a play or role.

Why is mime important?

Mime is important because it is an effective way of encouraging students to develop their acting skills in terms of body language (posture, movements, gestures, etc.) and for them to gain a greater awareness of its importance as a form of communication. In the exams, it tests candidates' ability to produce a performance which demonstrates a thoughtful interpretation, use of body and space, a sense of spontaneity and conscious awareness of audience.

In grades 1 and 2 for Speech and Drama and Acting (solo)) the mime task's emphasis is on storytelling and encourages candidates to create an imaginary world clearly, communicate feeling and thought physically (with the whole body not just the face), and to tell a simple story.

In Grade 3 Speech and Drama and Acting, the prepared mime encourages candidates to approach the communication of narrative, characterisation and subtext/thought process physically, with the intention that a more physical approach to the use of text becomes part of their work in this and later grades. At this grade, examiners are looking to see a higher standard (than that presented at Grades 1 and 2) in terms of mime technique, the main object is to assess whether the candidate has understood narrative, character and subtext fully enough to communicate it without words.

MIME IN PRACTICE

The following information on mime provides an overview of the terms involved with an explanation on their meaning - appropriate for teachers working at Foundation Level.

| Term | Explanation |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Objective/Subjective Mime | <p>These aspects of mime were identified by Etienne Decroux (the father of modern French mime) when creating what he called Corporeal Mime. i.e. the use of the whole of the body (not just the face, hands and arms) to create a mime world and the character living in that world.</p> <p>Objective Mime: illusions of objects and place. This includes the creation of weight, size, space.</p> <p>Subjective Mime: this term covers the expression of feeling, thought and motivation, again with the whole body not just the face, hands and arms.</p> |
| Illusion Mime | <p>While a knowledge of some mime techniques, such as fixed point (see below) will help candidates create a more solid mimed world, they are not marked on the accuracy of their technique but on the believability of the world they create and their ability to inhabit it fully. Therefore, illusions (e.g. walking the dog, pushing a heavy object) should only be used to support the narrative. The belief of the creator in their mime world will generally compensate for a lack of specific mime illusion techniques. Some teachers may not necessarily know the techniques that help to make an invisible object appear solid to the audience, however, the way to solve that is to work initially with the actual object, assessing how the body reacts to weight, size and texture.</p> |
| Inhabiting the world of mime | <p>Objects should be created in order to communicate thought or feeling and to support the character and narrative. The mime element of the grade exams is not about demonstrating mime technique in making imaginary objects. There is no purpose in creating a door in a mime unless it offers an opportunity to the performer to communicate something about the character, their feelings and situation to the audience; for example, what the character feels about what is on the other side of the door prior to and when opening it. One character might hesitate and then open the door very slowly, peering round it, while another character might also hesitate but then make the decision, open the door fast and step into the room firmly.</p> |
| Stillness and Silence | <p>Stillness: mime can be said to be stillness interspersed with movement, rather than the other way round. Less is often more, with moments of inhabited stillness developing and communicating feeling and thought to the audience.</p> <p>Silence: does mime always have to be silent? Generally, yes. But sound may be used if it supports the narrative but not if it replaces words. For example, if the narrative is about the need to remove a wasp, then making the sound of the wasp would support the narrative.</p> <p>In the context of the Grade exams, particularly at Grade 3, words should not be spoken or mouthed silently.</p> |
| Fixed point mime | <p>This technique is the basis of most illusions in mime. It is a very simple idea that requires practice to make it look simple. The performer locates a point with their body, and then keeps it motionless in space. While the mime 'trick' of creating a glass wall is rarely useful in telling a story, it is nonetheless a good and fun way of teaching fixed point, which gives young performers a real sense of achievement.</p> |
| Isolation/undulation: | <p>Decroux stated that the day he said "head without neck" he found his whole system. In Corporeal Mime the body is divided into its component parts to achieve greater accuracy in communication and development of feeling, thought and action as well as the accuracy of illusion mime. This technique can also be seen in robotic movement and in some exponents of street dance (see this example on youtube). The undulation then strings those isolated movements together in a flowing movement.</p> |

SOME MIME TECHNIQUES TO TRY

Illusion mime

Example 1: the door. Very often a door is opened/closed and completely changes shape in the process. Practice with a real door. The teacher might add weight to the door from the other side so that the performer has to adjust their physicality. Then make the same movements without the door.

Example 2: a heavy box (avoid the stereotype of the stripy-topped mime wearing a French beret lifting a heavy box, with his shoulders up by his ears). Lift a heavy box and note that the shoulders are pulled down to a greater or lesser degree depending on the weight of the box. Be aware of how the body adjusts to the unexpected weight of the box. Bear in mind that in mime it is often necessary to exaggerate the actions and conditions of real life to a degree in order for the audience to understand what is being shown.

Fixed point teaching exercise

The performer places either hand flat and firmly in front of them. Another student could hold their hand at a small distance away to mark the point. The performer could then try moving sideways and forwards and backwards to see what they have to do to make the hand stay in the same place (practice on a real wall to start with). Then they could add the second hand at some distance creating two fixed points, either side of the body. Holding both hands still, move the body as far as it can go, left or right, without losing the fixed points (practice on a real wall). Readjust the hands one after the other to meet the new body position with two more fixed points, leading with the hand on the side the performer is going towards, and moving the body etc.

A similar exercise can be done with an imaginary table top to practice fixed point in a different plane. This can be developed further still, by working with a partner, pulling against a fixed point, which could, for example, become a locked door.

Illusion mime teaching exercise

Mime illusion games in groups, such as passing the mimed object (this could be a ball, a cricket bat, a cup of tea) as part of the regular warm up can help make mime a natural part of the acting process for the students.

Students stand in a circle and pass the object round.

This could then be developed by:

- Asking each person to use the object before passing it on
- Asking each person to accept the object, remodel it into something else, use it and then pass it on
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Performers should be able to use mimed props in the same way as they use real ones responding to the object and using it to tell the audience something about the character and their state of mind or emotion, and so developing the narrative.

Isolation mime

Example of **isolation**: the performer is standing looking straight ahead. They see something a little odd. The head inclines to one side questioning what has been seen. An inclination of the neck carries the head further over, increasing the sense of questioning. An inclination of the chest exaggerates that and is further exaggerated by an inclination of the waist. Each movement arises from thought process and a response to the unseen object or circumstance. The pace/dynamic at which each movement is done builds the illusion and communicates thought, feeling and character.

Example of **undulation**: this might be seen in creating an image of the sea, the illusion of flying or swimming or being pulled along by a dog.

EXPECTATIONS IN GRADED EXAMS

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Grade 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a simple storyline • Begin to use Subjective Mime – i.e. communication of thoughts and feelings through use of the whole body • Begin to use Objective Mime (illusion) in creating the world of the mime • demonstrate some sense of spontaneity and engagement in the world of the mime. |
| Grade 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create a simple and clear storyline • demonstrate some sustained use of Subjective Mime – i.e. communication of thoughts and feelings through use of the whole body to convey mood and atmosphere. • make some accurate use of Objective Mime (illusion) in creating the world of the mime • demonstrate a spontaneity and engagement in the world of the mime. |
| Grade 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate evidence of a physical exploration and understanding of an aspect of the original story/speech/poem e.g. the narrative, subtext, atmosphere on which the mime is based • demonstrate some sense of spontaneity, of being 'in the moment', with thought process and inner monologue guiding the mime and being shared with the audience. • Show evidence of appropriate technical skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability to make some use of objective mime i.e. e.g. solid illusions, effective use of space. - ability to make some use of subjective mime e.g. communication of thought, feeling, mood and atmosphere, through the use of the whole body; - ability to inhabit the mime world effectively and creatively. |

SOME EXAMPLES OF MIME PERFORMANCES

(Please note – the following are teaching examples and demonstrate the standard required, however candidates should not use these scenes for their exam, but are encouraged to create their own original scenes.)

Grades 1 and 2: Example Mime – *Mr Nosey*

The Mr Men characters (see [Trinity Anthology](#) Foundation Stories) offer good ideas for mime pieces that will be character led with plenty of opportunity to create the world of the mime: for example, this Mr Nosey story.

Mr Nosey

Mr Nosey liked to know about everything that was going on.

He was always poking his nose into other people's business.

Mr Nosey was the sort of a person who, if they came upon a locked door, couldn't resist looking through the keyhole to see why the door had been locked.

Mr Nosey was the sort of a person who, if he found an opened letter addressed to somebody else, would simply have to open it to find out what was inside.

Mr Nosey was the sort of a person who, if he was sitting reading his paper on a train, would much rather read the paper of the person sitting next to him.

Naturally, as you might well imagine, Mr Nosey was not very popular.

People did not like the way which Mr Nosey would peek and pry into their affairs.

They did not like it at all, but did it stop Mr Nosey peeking and prying?

It did not!

(Roger Hargreaves 1935 – 1988)

The stimulus of letter reading and looking at someone else's newspaper is then used as the starting point for the mime performance.

Characterisation

A mime scene should have a clear character and a developed narrative. In creating the character think physically. Imagine that there is an eye on the end of the nose and that the character is looking with that. The performer can imagine that their nose is longer than it is. Then extend the idea of the nose to make the whole of the spine part of the nose as if the performer is wearing a big, flexible mask of a nose that covers everything up to the top of the legs. The spine must stay flexible in this so that, like a snake, it follows the lead of the end of the nose.

Stillness: Moments of stillness allow the character to think and to feel, sharing that with the audience through the stillness. They should come throughout the mime, particularly at moments where the narrative develops.

The Scene:

N.B. although the character is referred to as 'he' here Nosey can be either gender

Nosey enters (He is always led by his nose), carrying a mime bag and with a pair of mime binoculars hanging round his neck. He sees a bench and sits down on it (some performers might like to do a mime sit but this is not necessary since it is hard to sustain. A chair is fine. Two or three chairs would indicate a bench and would give more room for the character to extend the movement from the nose).

Nosey looks around. He puts the bag on the floor and takes up the binoculars. He looks up and down and all around. He may see one or two things that interest. When Nosey sees something interesting he lifts his eyes away from the binoculars and looks with the end of its nose, reacting to what he sees, before going back to the binoculars.

Then he stops. Someone is coming towards the bench and then sits down (the audience can't see this other person, but part of the mime is to make the other person appear real to the audience by the performer's reactions to what they see the other person doing). Nosey smiles at the other person. The person gets out a letter or perhaps a book. Nosey resists for a moment but then can't help himself, he leans over to read it but can't quite see it – realizes that the other person has noticed him. He tries a second time. Gets caught again. Every time he gets caught he pretends that he's doing something else. Third time he uses his binoculars and starts to read the letter. As he gets interested he gets closer and closer... (the performer must know what is in the letter/book so that they can react to it. Now he can see the content of the letter better and the audience should see his reaction to it. Now it is what is in the letter that draws Nosey forward to keep reading not just the need to be nosey. The more exciting, shocking, funny or sad it is the better. The performer should write this letter and be able to read it in their mind. That is called the Interior Dramatic Monologue (IDM) and brings life, intention (or motivation) and thought process to the character in mime.)

(From this point on what happens depends on what is in the letter!)

Nosey might, for example, see something very sad. He begins to cry, then to sob. A tear drops on the letter.

Alternatively, Nosey might see something really funny, begin to smile, the smile turning to a giggle, the giggle to a laugh, the laugh to a guffaw and the guffaw to uncontrollable laughter.

At some point he reacts strongly to something he has read (laugh, surprise etc)

Suddenly (and that can be done quickly or slowly) he realizes the other person has seen him. He stops. He looks up at the other person through the binoculars – (they look huge! He reacts).

He lowers his binoculars quickly and the other person immediately punches him in the nose and walks off leaving Mr Nosey reeling and feeling to see if his nose is still intact.

Grade 1: Example Mime – Making a pancake (Speech and Drama/Individual Acting Skills)

It is important that the candidate establishes a believable character as well as doing the activity in this scene. For instance, in the scene below the character has been told that they mustn't do any cooking on their own. They could also establish that they are rather greedy in the way they make and eat the first pancake.

In creating the kitchen, cupboards could be at two levels – e.g. above the head and on the floor level - to raise the level of difficulty if the candidate can do that believably. It would make the mime more detailed if they don't know exactly where everything is and have to search for an item e.g. the whisk or the pan.

*The level of difficulty should be adjusted to suit the age and ability of the candidate. It is better to do a simple mime well than a complex one badly.
N.B. although the character is referred to as 'he', the role can, of course, be either gender.*

The Scene:

The character opens a mimed kitchen door very carefully, looking around to check there is no-one in the kitchen before coming in. He closes the door very quietly behind him and then listens for a moment to make sure that no-one has heard him. ***(This establishes the dramatic context. Every now and then throughout the mime he should stop as if hearing something, or as if he is checking if he can hear something.)***

The character then sets up all the things needed to make a pancake. Bowl, whisk, pan, oil etc – some could come from different places on the work top or in cupboards.

He makes the pancake mix ***(it would be easier and quicker if he makes it from a pancake mix in a packet rather than fresh ingredients!)*** He turns on the hob and pours some of the mix into the pan. Cook it, tip it out and take a bite out of it (maybe putting some sugar on before he does). He is very happy so he makes a second. This time he decides to toss the pancake and, of course, it gets stuck on the ceiling. He is looking at this in dismay when the kitchen door opens. He has been caught.....

Grade 2: Example Mime - The substitute's bench (*Speech and Drama/Individual Acting Skills*)

The Scene:

The footballer gets the football boots on. She does some warming up looking very keen. Then she sits on the substitutes' bench.

We see the game through the eyes of the football substitute. As she isn't called she drifts off to sleep and into a dream of being the captain of a team in the Cup Final. It's penalties time and the captain must get the last one to win. She shows the tension. Wipes face on sleeve. Checks shoelaces. Pulls up socks. Picks up the ball, wipes it off on her shirt. Places it. Moves it slightly. Looks at the goal. Runs up, shoots and scores. Big celebration and then the scene crossfades into being in line with the other players. The cup is handed to her and she lifts it up. She makes a silent shout of "Yeeees!" which turns into a huge yawn and she wakes up finding herself standing with her arms up in the air.

She looks around and there is no one left. The game has finished while she was asleep. She starts to walk off slowly. She stops and looks back at the pitch longingly and then exits.

This is a nice variation on a football match scenario. N.B. although the character is referred to as 'she', the role can, of course, be either gender.

In Grades 1 and 2 it is frequently a good idea to create a mime from an activity that the candidate has done before, if possible quite a lot. In the following piece the insertion of a dream sequence offers the opportunity to develop the story. This could equally well be done by introducing some problem or disaster.

The mime offers the opportunity to show feelings and thoughts in some detail in two different situations (watching a game and taking part in a game) and to do some simple illusion mime using clothing and objects such as the ball and the cup. The dream section offers the opportunity to show a development of the character.

1.1. Expectations for Grade 3 (*Speech and Drama*)

Take careful note of the Attainment Descriptors and Learning Outcomes that refer to performance and physicality are relevant here. Some are reflected below. Others are specific to Mime.

- create a simple and clear storyline
- demonstrate some sustained use of Subjective Mime – i.e. communication of thoughts and feelings through use of the whole body to convey mood and atmosphere.
- make some accurate use of Objective Mime (illusion) in creating the world of the mime
- demonstrate a spontaneity and engagement in the world of the mime.

Grade 3 – Example Mime (Speech and Drama)

The Tempest

This is a response to Ariel's speech to Prospero (The Tempest Act I Scene ii, "All hail, great master! Grave sir, hail!") in which he describes how he created the Tempest and terrified the passengers on the boat. Since Ferdinand is mentioned in the speech the scene is created from his point of view.

It is important in this scene that the movement of the sea is always seen through the whole body of the actor.

This role can be played by a male or female candidate.

(in the scene the audience can't see Ariel, but part of the mime is to make the character appear real to the audience by the performer's reactions).

The Scene:

The tempest is at its height and Ferdinand almost falls on stage as if the ship has suddenly lurched off the top of a high wave. He grabs hold of the mast and hangs on. His movement indicates how rough the sea is. He looks ahead of him. The rain and seawater are blowing into his face. Ferdinand makes a decision and letting go of the mast is thrown towards the steering wheel of the ship. He grabs it, trying to bring the ship round and head into the waves rather than staying side on. He fights against the tempest and is having some success bringing the wheel round. **To make this work the actor would need to use 'fixed point' (see guidance) to keep the wheel in the same place as he holds onto it while being thrown away from it by the movement of the sea in the tempest.**

Above him Ferdinand hears Ariel shriek and looks around him wildly. He hears sounds from every part, showing each clearly with his head movement led by the ear being drawn to each sound.

We see Ferdinand duck as Ariel dive bombs him. He tries to hit the 'demons' away while still trying to hold onto the ship.

The ship lurches and throws him to the floor, breaking his grip on the wheel, where he is covered with seawater. He gasps for breath. He scrambles to his feet as Ariel attacks again, swaying in the storm and pulling out his sword from its scabbard. He hits out at things that he can see around and above him.

But suddenly his sword is knocked out of his hand by something in the air. We see it leave his hand and he watches it go up in the air and fall, following its progress with his head. It falls out of reach. **This could be done in slow motion to heighten the moment and offer a contrasting dynamic.**

Ferdinand is attacked again from all sides. He runs to the side of the ship, climbs onto the ship's rail and does the start of the movement that would be a dive into the sea, freezing it at point that he looks as if he is diving and is still just in balance.