



AIM: To investigate the choices made in STC Ed's production of *The Comedy of Errors* around Shakespeare's use of language.



EDITING SHAKESPEARE

Originally written for audiences that expected plays to last for around five hours, Shakespeare's plays are very long if performed in full. Even *The Comedy of Errors*, the shortest of Shakespeare's plays (at just 1,777 lines) is usually considered too long for a modern audience. Therefore the director of STC Ed's production, Charmian Gradwell, edited Shakespeare's original text.

Choose one scene from *The Comedy of Errors* that you recall from seeing the production.

Mark down how much of the comedy of the scene is reliant on the visuals or physicality, and how much of the comedy is found in the dialogue.

Note the occasions where one comic element is useless without the other.

For example, a scene in which somebody says, "You look lovely in that hat," and the other character is wearing a nice hat is completely different from a scene in which the other character is wearing a ridiculous hat, or perhaps not wearing a hat at all!

Distill your scene into its essence.

Write one sentence that encapsulates the purpose of the scene within the play.

Edit the scene as though you are a director attempting to shorten your production.

Pay attention to maintaining the verse structure and rhyming of the play.

Consider what you can delete without altering the plot or diminishing the depth of a character.

Use your markings about physicality versus verbal comedy to assist you replace words with actions.

Prove your instincts correct by playing your scene with and without words

Write down any stage directions that become necessary to maintaining the integrity of the plot.



CONFUSED MESSAGES (homonyms)

William Shakespeare was very careful in the language he chose to put into his plays. He uses a lot of homonyms to add comedy or meaning to a line. Homonyms are often the basis for confusion for some characters because they misunderstand information that is given to them.

Compile a list of at least 15 homonyms (words that sound the same but have different meanings).

Walk around the room in a random trajectory.

Be careful not to run into any other students.

Ask one player to read out some homonyms from your list.

When you hear a word, perform the first action that comes to mind.

For example, if you hear the word sow (sew), you may begin sewing on a sewing machine or with needle and thread, or you may sow some seeds.

Remember, there are no wrong answers! The English language can be confusing if you don't know the context of the words chosen.

Keep portraying an action until the Reader tells you to continue walking.

Sneak a peek at the choices other players made.

Interpret a couple of different words.

Change the pace at which you walk around the room.

Continue as before, by responding to the word the Reader calls out.

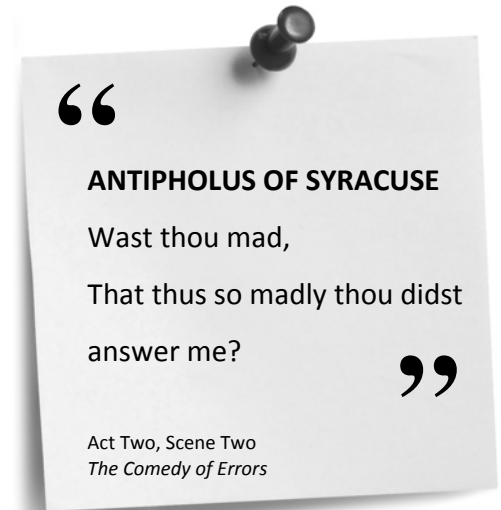
Perform your action at the same pace.

When you start walking again, change your pace again.

Work at extremes of tempo.

Perform an alternative for any word you hear more than once instead of repeating an action.

Consider whether or not the pace at which you were walking affected the choices you made when you heard a word.



Then

Create and present a comic scene in which at least one character's status changes because someone else in the scene has misheard or misunderstood something that has been said.

Use any of the words on your list.

Feel free to think of some more.

Possible scenarios could include: a master and his servant; two employees looking for a promotion; parents and children; relationships with in-laws; a salesperson and a snobby customer.

