**ACTING THESIS GUIDELINES**

**Prerequisites:** Script Analysis and casting in a main stage production.

**Suggested Course:** Principles of Acting is not required but is strongly encouraged for this thesis.

**Deadline:** One week prior to the faculty meeting after you are cast.

**Proposal Length:** 5-10 double-spaced pages

**WRITTEN PROPOSAL**

Write and submit a proposal that includes the following components.

1. **TITLE PAGE**
   a. TITLE FOR YOUR THESIS (needs to include more than your name and the role you are playing)
   b. The play title
   c. The playwright
   d. Audition and performance dates
   e. The director
   f. The designers
   g. The marketing/public relations director

In the written proposal, please include the following:

1. State the name of the play and the role you would like to use for your Acting Thesis and request permission to use that role for your thesis.

2. Discuss why you have chosen an Acting Thesis as the culminating project of your study.

3. Describe your development as an actor prior to your thesis work, what you hope to learn about yourself as an actor through the rehearsal process and performance of the role, and in what ways you think this role in particular will help you grow as an actor.

4. Provide a script analysis of the role in relation to the play as a whole. Please include the following:
   a) Articulate your understanding of the central conflict of the play.
   b) Why did the playwright craft *this* world to surround *this* story with these specific character interactions?
c) How did the playwright *design* the setting and the passage of time within the play? Why is this design important?

d) How did the past events the playwright purposefully includes in the text in fact *shape* (1) the values and behaviors of the characters, (2) their superobjectives, and (3) the action within the play.

e) Reflect on / respond to the reciprocal relationship of your character’s VALUES and the VALUES of the Larger Given Circumstances and how this relates to the major dramatic question in the play.

5. Articulate the THREE MOST IMPORTANT GOALS that you have formulated as a key outcome of this thesis project. You are encouraged to number these goals and to end your written proposal by articulating them.

Refer to the questions asked in *After the Production Opens* below to help generate your ideas. Review the script analysis process (see pp. 4-5) if needed. Allowing ample time for rewrites, review your proposal with the Acting Thesis Advisor. The proposal is due in Acting Thesis Advisor-approved form no later than one week prior to the faculty meeting after you are cast.

**AFTER THE PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED**

After your proposal receives faculty approval, the Acting Thesis Advisor will seek your preferences and ask two additional theatre faculty members to serve on your committee, excluding the director of the production.

During rehearsals, keep a comprehensive and detailed rehearsal journal.

You will meet with your thesis advisor on a regular basis, to be determined by you and your advisor, to chart your process, answer any technical questions about the process, and prepare you for your thesis defense.

**AFTER THE PRODUCTION OPENS**

Use your journal notes to write a paper (15-25 double-spaced pages) analyzing your rehearsal and performance process. Copies of the paper are to be distributed to your committee by the Friday following the show’s closing performance. The paper is a means for you to reflect on your performance critically, and for the committee to evaluate it further. The paper may figure prominently in your Thesis Project Defense.

In your paper, feel free to write about whatever arises for you in order of importance, but be sure to touch on the following in any sequence that seems appropriate:

1. PREPARATION
a. Describe your preparation for the role. What outside research did you undertake? What dramaturgical information was useful? How did you prepare physically and vocally?

2. EDUCATION

a. In what way did your work on the role intersect with class work from your course of study here at Villanova?

3. COLLABORATION

a. Describe your work with the director. What did you understand as his/her vision for the play? To what extent were you successful in contributing to the realization of the vision? What were rehearsals like for you? What kind of collaboration were you able to establish with the director? What elements contributed to the success of your work with the director and what were the obstacles, especially your own?

4. GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

a. What were you most afraid of in playing the role? How did you manage your fears? What were the traps of the role? Did you fall into any of them?

b. What were the greatest challenges in rehearsal and performance? How did you attempt to meet the challenges?

c. What new ground, if any, have you broken with the rehearsal and performance of the role? How has working on the role changed you as an actor? Describe a specific turning point or breakthrough you experienced in a rehearsal or performance.

THE ACTING THESIS PROJECT DEFENSE

Arrange a date with Acting Thesis Advisor for your Thesis Project Defense, which should take place no later than two weeks after the closing performance.

Be prepared to speak on some aspect of the process for 10-15 minutes. You may use your paper as a reference point to discuss your experience of the role, but do not read from it. Don’t repeat what is in your paper; feel free to extend outward from what it contains. Be prepared to answer questions from the committee that will arise in response to this presentation and to the work seen in the production.

The Committee votes Pass or Fail at the end of the Thesis Project Defense, but may choose to wait a week before issuing the decision in order for one or more Committee members to write a
response to be issued along with it. A response may also be written even if a Pass or Fail is issued at the conclusion of the Thesis Project Defense.

**SCRIPT ANALYSIS PROPOSAL PREP WORK:**

For your script analysis of the play, please do the following FIRST:

1) A brief but thorough **Time/event line** up to the beginning of the play.

2) **List** the **Immediate Given Circumstances** – Be specific about the Where and When of each scene.

3) Consider all of the **Larger Given Circumstances** categories (Domestic, Social, Economic, Political, and Moral/Ethical). **List** in clear statements (one complex sentence each) the **most dearly held** VALUES of the community or society that surrounds the characters in the play. Be sure they are LARGER Given Circumstances, reflective of the world of the play. **Hint:** Be sure you have a compelling mix of evidence and that you are not only listening to Amanda Wingfield’s view of the world within her apartment or Willy Loman’s recollection of events.

4) Consider all of the **Character Analysis** categories (Domestic, Social, Economic, Political, and Moral/Ethical). **List** in clear statements (one complex sentence each) your character’s **most dearly held** VALUES.
   a) Identify your **Superobjective** in one complex sentence that is an actable/pursuable goal within the play. **TO**
   b) Consider all of the Character Analysis categories (Domestic, Social, Economic, Political, and Moral/Ethical) for **at least two other characters** you interact with in the play (choose well). **List** in clear statements (one complex sentence each) those characters’ **most dearly held** VALUES.
   c) Determine if you are the central energy moving through the play. If you are not, define your relationship with the central character.

5) **Craft a refined Plot structure.**
   a) Identify the **CENTRAL CONFLICT** (look for a conflict in values) in a full statement. Articulate the central conflict between the two opposing forces (central conflict, values, and superobjectives are usually related) in one clear statement that is **ACTION oriented**. Your character may not be involved in this central conflict. You must understand it and your role in it anyway! Within the arc of the central conflict, please identify:
i) **Initiating incident** – be as clear and discerning as possible in order to distinguish the exact moment/event that INITIATES the CENTRAL CONFLICT.

ii) **Rising Action** – Limit: 3.
   1. Identify moments of conflict that HAPPEN ON STAGE (in order!)—these can be small moments -- not all obstacles/moments of conflict are catastrophic. Focus on the skirmishes/ turning points/ events that heighten the stakes and/or tension between the major forces at play.
   2. How does each moment raise the stakes of the central conflict? 1 sentence.

iii) **Climax** – the moment when the central conflict is ended (and, ideally, the MDQ is answered; when the action can no longer go in another direction.

6) Formulate the **Major Dramatic Question** (MDQ) of the play. Hints: This should be phrased as a question, and should be a reflection of YOUR research above and connect directly to the central conflict. Do NOT do outside reading on the theme of the play. Consider these questions first:
   i) What does the title tell us?
   ii) What big ideas interest the playwright?
      1. How are these ideas revealed through the actions of the characters engaged in the central conflict?
   iii) How do the world of the play, the characters, and the relationships relate to the big idea of the play?
   iv) Where is the play/playwright reaching (MDQ) -- toward what vision of society, existence, or the human condition?

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*Rev. Aug. '17 MH*