

# TOEFL Listening Lesson 26

**Setting:** Theater Class – Professor leading a discussion with several students about stage direction in Shakespearean plays.

## Questions

**1. What is the main topic of the discussion?**

- A) The history of Shakespeare's writing career
- B) How stage direction influences Shakespearean productions
- C) The differences between Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies
- D) How to memorize lines in Shakespearean plays

**2. What does the professor suggest about why Shakespeare included few stage directions?**

- A) Shakespeare wanted actors to improvise freely.
- B) Shakespeare's plays were originally written without performance in mind.
- C) The performance conventions were already well understood by actors.
- D) Shakespeare expected directors to add directions later.

**3. According to the discussion, what challenge do actors face when performing Shakespeare's plays?**

- A) Speaking in modern English
- B) Creating blocking without detailed guidance

- C) Writing their own stage directions
- D) Choosing which lines to skip during performance

**4. Why does the professor mention a modern production of *Hamlet* using lighting effects for the ghost?**

- A) To explain that Shakespeare disliked using costumes
- B) To show how directors creatively interpret the text
- C) To criticize modern interpretations
- D) To argue that Shakespeare's plays should not be changed

**5. Why are directors particularly creative when staging Shakespeare's plays, according to the discussion?**

- A) Because Shakespeare's plays are very short and simple
- B) Because Shakespeare provided drawings for scenery but no dialogue
- C) Because directors want to offer a fresh perspective on familiar works
- D) Because Shakespeare demanded strict adherence to historical realism

## Script

### **Professor:**

Good afternoon, everyone. Today we're going to explore the role of stage direction in Shakespeare's plays. Now, as you all know, Shakespeare's original scripts contain very little in terms of explicit stage directions. Why do you think that is?

### **Female Student:**

Maybe because in Shakespeare's time, the actors already knew how scenes were typically staged? Like, they didn't need it written out?

### **Professor:**

Exactly. Performances were often directed by the actors themselves or by a company manager, and the conventions were well understood. So, modern directors have to make a lot of interpretive choices. Can anyone give an example from a production you've seen or read?

### **Male Student:**

I remember in one version of *Macbeth* I watched, the witches were portrayed almost like ghostly children instead of old hags. The stage direction had them crawling around Macbeth during his speeches. It made the scenes much creepier.

### **Professor:**

Interesting! So, that was an interpretive choice based largely on how the director wanted to influence the audience's feeling. Anyone else?

### **Female Student 2:**

In a version of *Hamlet* I read about, they staged the ghost of King

Hamlet using modern lighting effects—like, flickering spotlights instead of having an actor in costume. It made the ghost feel more otherworldly but less "person-like."

**Professor:**

Good observation. Since Shakespeare doesn't specify how the ghost should appear, directors have freedom to invent. Now, why do you think directors are so creative when working with Shakespeare's texts compared to, say, modern plays?

**Male Student 2:**

Maybe because there's so much room for interpretation? Shakespeare wrote the words, but left the rest pretty open.

**Professor:**

Right. Also, because the plays have been performed so often, directors are under pressure to make their productions feel fresh or offer a new perspective. Let's take a specific example: *Romeo and Juliet*. If you were directing the famous balcony scene, how would you stage it differently to make it stand out?

**Female Student 3:**

Maybe instead of a literal balcony, I'd have Juliet standing on a staircase and Romeo at the bottom. It would feel more casual, like they were sneaking around indoors.

**Professor:**

That's creative. And you're thinking about space and intimacy, which are key to the scene's emotional tone. Now, when directors change

traditional staging, how can that impact the audience's understanding of a scene?

**Female Student:**

It could make the emotions feel more real or more distant depending on how it's done. Like, a traditional balcony feels very romantic, but a stairwell might feel more secretive or dangerous.

**Professor:**

Excellent point. Changing the physical relationship between characters can suggest different emotional dynamics. Finally, let's touch on the practical side: given how little Shakespeare wrote about movement and scenery, what's one challenge that actors face in staging his plays?

**Male Student:**

Figuring out their blocking—where they move and when—without much guidance?

**Professor:**

Exactly. Without detailed stage directions, actors have to really dig into the language and subtext to decide when to move, react, or interact with props. And this demands a strong collaboration between the actors and the director.

Alright, great discussion today, everyone. For next time, try to find one more example of unusual staging in a Shakespeare production and be ready to share how you think it changed the audience's experience.

## Answers

**1. What is the main topic of the discussion?**

**Correct Answer:** B) How stage direction influences Shakespearean productions

**2. What does the professor suggest about why Shakespeare included few stage directions?**

**Correct Answer:** C) The performance conventions were already well understood by actors.

**3. According to the discussion, what challenge do actors face when performing Shakespeare's plays?**

**Correct Answer:** B) Creating blocking without detailed guidance

**4. Why does the professor mention a modern production of *Hamlet* using lighting effects for the ghost?**

**Correct Answer:** B) To show how directors creatively interpret the text

**5. Why are directors particularly creative when staging Shakespeare's plays, according to the discussion?**

**Correct Answer:** C) Because directors want to offer a fresh perspective on familiar works