

Here is a terrific article about dramaturgy from the perspective of several UK practitioners. It was published on the www.ideastap.com website, which is an excellent source of arts opportunities in the UK.

Dramaturgy: The lowdown
by Jo Caird

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If you've ever found yourself gazing at a dramaturg's credit in a theatre programme and wondering what exactly the role entails, you're not alone: dramaturgy is one of the least understood of the theatrical professions. Here we talk to experts from the Royal Court (pictured) and Soho Theatre to bring you the lowdown...

Dramaturgical work is a fundamental part of the directing process in British theatre.

Chris Campbell, Literary Manager at the [Royal Court Theatre](#), defines it as “the explication of the text and working with the writer to make it work in the best way possible”. As Katalin Trencsényi, a freelance dramaturg and president of the [Dramaturgs' Network](#), explains, “there are no productions without dramaturgy. But there may well be productions without a dramaturg”.

What an experienced dramaturg might bring to the table, adding to the talent pool of the rest of the creative team, she says, is “sensibility, practical knowledge of theatre and strong intellectual ability”. It's no coincidence that so many of the dramaturgs working today came into the profession by indirect routes, such as through directing, writing and acting, and that a large proportion of them perform other roles in the business alongside the work they do as dramaturgs.

Sarah Dickenson, Senior Reader at [Soho Theatre](#), has worked as a dramaturg on a wide range of different productions, from new writing to dance. She stresses that “dramaturgy is always situational”, in that the role of the dramaturg on any given project depends on the specifics of the work and the different skills of the people involved. For her, the heart of the process is “exploring what will make a piece of work successful theatrically”.

That process may occur as a way of preparing a piece of writing for production, long before it has been picked up by a creative team, or it may happen as part of bringing that work to the stage. Either way, in the case of a piece of work by a living writer, Campbell believes that “the dramaturg's key skill is being able to talk to writers without annoying them too much, without making them abandon their play, without confusing them to the point where they can't continue to write it because they're being pulled in all sorts of directions”.

Duška Radosavljević, a freelance dramaturg and lecturer in drama at the University of Kent, identifies that very often the dramaturg can be at his or her most effective when engaging as an outsider to the rehearsal process. She explains that after initial pre-production meetings with the creative team, she might only come into rehearsal on a couple of occasions.

“The dramaturg’s role is of someone who understands intimately what’s going on in the process but at the same time isn’t immersed in the process to the same extent as the other makers of the piece. So they can retain that position of being on the outside, which can be a source of constructive criticism. At the same time the dramaturg can be the first audience member in the process and therefore represent the perspective of the audience before the audience is allowed into the piece.”

When it comes to the kinds of theatre that might benefit from the input of a dramaturg, it is generally acknowledged that certain genres, such as devised work and dance, tend to give dramaturgs greater opportunity for wider ranging creative involvement, looking after a show’s overarching narrative, for example.

That said, our experts agree that there’s no fixed rule as to what works and what doesn’t. “I don’t want to prescribe dramaturgy for every company, director or choreographer”, says Trencsényi, “that would be wrong. Because there are companies and directors who feel they could benefit from the work and they are the ones that should work with dramaturgs. It’s as simple as that”.

[Find out more about the Dramaturgs’ Network](#), an organisation committed to developing dramaturgy and supporting practitioners’ development.