THE 12 DRAMATIC ELEMENTS

CONTRAST
Without the careful use of contrast a performance is boring and lacks tension. An obvious example of contrast is a sad scene followed by a happy one. Contrast can be created by manipulating the drama to create a change in setting, use of space or rhythm. The pace of scenes can also be create strong contrast.

CONFLICT
Conflict is a struggle within a character and/or between characters. Conflict may be between a character and some obstacle. Conflict on stage can be verbal, physical or non-verbal (psychological).

CLIMAX
The moment of highest dramatic tension in a performance when things change, or reach a crisis point, and may lead to a resolution. The climax will often (but not always) occur towards the end of a performance. There can be more than one climax however this is uncommon.

TIMING
Timing in performance refers to dramatic timing of movements and gestures. Timing can be manipulated to create contrast in a scene or simply to demonstrate robotic, stylised and non-naturalistic movements. Rhythm and pace are affected by timing.

TENSION
Tension is very similar to conflict. However tension refers to the development of suspense in a performance. As the audience anticipates certain outcomes in the plot, the tension builds. Tension is closely linked with timing.
RHYTHM
Rhythm refers to the timing and pace of the drama. It also means the beat or tempo of a performance. As a rule, rhythm should never be the same throughout the drama, regardless of its length. Rhythm can follow an emotional state of one or more character or the atmosphere of the performance at particular moments.

MOOD
Mood is the feeling or tone of a performance. It is often created through a combination of several dramatic and stagecraft elements working in harmony with each other. The mood of a performance is closely linked with everyday feelings such as pity, anger, desire or frustration. Mood in drama can be created via sound, lighting, movement, setting, rhythm, contrast, conflict and more.

LANGUAGE
The use of language in a performance can be verbal or non-verbal. Language is the spoken text. It is the written script realised in performance. While normally spoken by the actor, language can also be chanted or sung. It can also be deliberately nonsensical (gibberish) for dramatic effect. The choice of language in performance is crucial as it communicates the story of the drama to the audience.

SOUND
Sound is useful in creating atmosphere or mood. Actors and their bodies can construct effective sound in performance. Small props can also create sound effects that can be used live during a show. Other uses of sound involve the implementation of technology, such as instrumental recordings and sound effects on CDs and iPods (although this use of sound is technically a stagecraft element not a dramatic element).
SPACE
Space refers to the effective use of available space in a performance. Different levels of space are utilised by the performer, such as sitting, bending overs, lying down or crawling. Of course, using the space around you can mean downstage and upstage or walking in or on a set and includes considering where the audience will sit. In order to use space effectively, movement becomes an important factor. Use of space also implies clearly communicating to the audience where the action is taking place. This may include any changes in location that may occur in the performance (particularly if there is minimal or no set used).

SYMBOL
Symbol is something that suggests something else. Actors may use a prop symbolically or may make a symbolic gesture with their body or voice. Props can be very symbolic (e.g. a rose symbolises love; a cross symbolises religion, etc.,) Symbols can also be found in the use of colour (purple symbolises royalty, red with anger or desire, black with evil or white with innocence and purity.) The most sophisticated use of symbol occurs with the application or gesture or movement. A particular gesture performance by a character early in a performance can be repeated later and have different meaning. Used only once a gesture can be a powerful symbol. Of course all of the above examples can be combined for a better effect.

FOCUS
Focus is often used interchangeably with the terms concentration and engagement, assisting the performer in the portrayal of believable characters. This also implies memorisation of lines, movements and gestures. Focus requires the channelling (focusing) of all the performers energies into achieving the given goals or objectives of a character in a scene (otherwise known as ‘wants’).

**Focus, space, tension and timing are dramatic elements that are essential to every performance.**