

The most important question: “What is happening in the scene?” Until you answer this, you can’t answer why, how, who etc.

Curiosity. This is the watchword for making sense of a scene. Try not to make assumptions, and catch yourself filling in details that are not on the page. When in doubt, ask a question before settling on an answer. See how long you can stay in “question” before you can test (not settle on) an answer. Then -

Make specific and personal choices. This is the secret for making a story feel alive and therefore compelling to watch.

The 5 Ws of all our first English Lit classes show up here, but on fire. Who, What, When, Where, Why and How?

1) Who?

- a) Who is in the scene?
- b) Describe them, based on what you know or can figure out from the scene (be careful of assumptions too early)
- c) Who are they to each other?

2) What

- a) Literally, what is happening in the scene?
- b) This is often the biggest pitfall - just describe the action taking place, do not collapse your interpretations or feelings about what’s happening into it.
- c) Hint: it’s usually pretty short and simple ie “2 friends are having a conversation about their summer plans” a “2 spouses are

arguing about their relationship, when their child walks into the room.”

### 3) Why

Never take anything for granted. No one shows up to do a “scene” in their real life. We only speak when we have something to say, for a reason.

*Ask questions relentlessly until you have a real answer that satisfies you.*

Play that toddler game “Why?” about every detail of the story or script.

*Why* are these people talking?

*Why* to each other?

*Why* now?

*Why* here?

*Why* do they keep talking?

*Why* doesn't it end after every line?

*What* justifies (demands, really) that it continue?

4) Where are they? Really answer that, with the same specificity you did for your favorite scenes earlier. These are just on paper now, but the ones you listed were once too. Someone had to make them real.

5) When are they? same questions.

### Tools/Frames to help you unlock answers

Look at each line (of dialogue, of stage direction) and decide what you think will happen next. Don't peek. Really think and justify your decision. Then see how close you were - make corrections to your assumptions with whatever new information you now have from the next line.

Put yourself in the situation- how would you feel as each of the characters in the scene? What would you be thinking, feeling, wanting? Where are you coming from? How do you feel about the other people in the scene? How does your body feel - are you full, hot, sweaty, tired, bored, scared?

*Take all of this and then* - what would I then **do**? And **how** would I do it?

Everything we learn about someone is through an action they take, and how that action is performed.

- People don't "show" us they're scared, they feel scared and it shows up in their behavior.
- A person can take out the garbage, but how they do it may tell us quite clearly how they feel about it.

Who is not in this scene but is affected by it?

When in doubt, make a choice. This is a constant process of learning and revision and the only wrong choice is not to make a choice. Making a choice that is "strong but wrong" is better than no choice at all.