

Building a Character

Uta Hagen's Nine Questions

INTRODUCTION

*Uta Hagen held a lot of influence in 20th century American Theatre. She made her Broadway debut in 1938 in Anton Chekov's *The Seagull*. She also acted opposite Marlon Brando in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. She also originated the role of Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?*

*Uta taught for years at the Herbert Berghof studio in New York. She instructed many well-known actors including Jack Lemmon, Matthew Broderick, and Al Pacino. She wrote two books on acting: *Respect for Acting* (1973) and *A Challenge for the Actor* (1991). When it came to the craft and technique of theatre, her career encompassed the four roles of actor, director, teacher, and writer.*

*In *Respect for Acting*, Uta identified 9 questions an actor should ask themselves as they prepare. It's all about being as specific as possible.*

1. Who am I?

(Who is your character? Identify all the details: name/age, physical traits, education, personal opinions, likes, dislikes, fears, ethics, and beliefs.)

2. What time is it?

(The year, the season, the day, the minute. What is the significance of time?)

3. Where am I?

(Identify the country, the city/town, the neighborhood, the building, the room or the specific area of the room.)

4. What surrounds me?

(What is happening in the environment around you? Weather, landscape, people, animate/inanimate objects?)

5. What are the given circumstances?

(Identify events in the past, present, and future. What has happened, what is happening, what is going to happen?)

6. What are my relationships?

(This is more than your relationship to other people. Think about your relationship to objects, characters, and events.)

7. What do I want?

(What do you want immediately? What does the character want overall?)

8. What is in my way?

(What are the obstacles to getting what you want?)

9. What do I do to get what I want?

(What actions do you take (both physically and verbally? What tactics?)

SOURCE INFORMATION

Author: Uta Hagen

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Use the questions above and the 11 that follow to flesh out your character(s). Be as creative and open as you can be. The more "character" you can give to your character(s), the better your performance will be!

1. **What is your character's name? If they are not named, create a name for them.**
2. **Describe what they look like.**
3. **Where do they live? What do they do? Who are they connected to (family, friends, coworkers, enemies) in the world of the selection?**
4. **Describe their personality with at least three descriptive words.**
5. **Assign a cartoon character of pop culture icon to your character.**
For humorous selections, emulating a cartoon character or over the top personality can help you make bigger choices for your character's voice, movement style and actions.

4NG Fanatics

6. What ultimate goal (objective) does your character pursue through the selection?
7. What traits do you feel you as a person share with your character?
8. What parts of your character do you NOT identify with or find very different from yourself?
9. What do you admire about your character?
10. What are your character's strengths?
11. What are your character's weaknesses?

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