

# Drama – Stanislavski and Naturalism

## Who is Konstantin Stanislavski?

Stanislavski was a famous Russian theatre practitioner who had a major influence on modern acting and helped change the way actors performed on stage. He believed many actors of his time were boring and lazy, often just pretending or “showing off” instead of truly becoming their characters.

Stanislavski wanted actors to create believable, natural performances so the audience could emotionally connect with the characters and feel what they were feeling.

He developed a system (often called the Stanislavski Method) that helped actors understand their characters deeply – their background, thoughts, feelings, and motivations.

He wanted actors to act truthfully, as if what was happening on stage was real life. Stanislavski encouraged the use of rehearsal techniques, such as, emotion memory, magic if and hot seating.

His ideas are still used today and have influenced naturalistic and realistic acting styles in theatre, film, and television.

## Why is Stanislavski important?

- **Changed Acting Forever:** Before Stanislavski, acting was often exaggerated, fake, and over-the-top. He encouraged actors to act truthfully and naturally, as if they were real people in real situations.
- **Created a New Way to Train Actors:** His ideas became the foundation for modern actor training, used in drama schools and universities all over the world.
- **Inspired Modern Acting Styles:** His work influenced Method Acting (used by famous actors like Robert De Niro and Meryl Streep), and shaped acting in film, TV, and theatre today.
- **Encouraged Emotional Connection:** He showed that when actors truly believe in what they are doing, the audience can emotionally connect to the story and characters.
- **Professionalised Acting:** Stanislavski helped turn acting from a casual performance skill into a serious art form that required research, preparation, and discipline.
- **Influenced Directing and Theatre-Making:** His rehearsal techniques changed how directors work with actors, focusing on character development, objectives, and motivation rather than just blocking and lines.

## Key Terminology



### Naturalism

- A style of acting that looks and feels real and believable, like everyday life.

### Realism

- Similar to naturalism but focuses on showing real human behaviour and emotions on stage.

### Practitioner

- A practitioner is a theatre maker who develops their own ideas, methods, and techniques for creating and performing theatre. They often influence how others perform, rehearse, and think about acting.

### Emotion memory

- When the actor finds a real past experience where they felt a similar emotion demanded by the role they are playing. They then use those feelings to bring their role to life.

### Hot Seating

- An actor sits in the hot-seat and is questioned in role, spontaneously answering questions they may not have considered before. Hot-seating helps an actor become more familiar with their role.

### The Magic If

- The Magic ‘if’ simply involves an actor putting him/herself in the character’s shoes within a certain scenario and asking the question ‘how would I react if this happened to me?’ By asking this simple question, an actor can understand the thoughts and feelings that they need to portray for each scene.

### Mnemonic Device

- A mnemonic device, or memory device, is any learning technique that aids information retention or retrieval (remembering) in the human memory for better understanding. This is a technique that can be used to help an actor when learning lines.

